

Spring Creek Canyon Nature Reserve

A Reserve for Nature and Scenic Beauty Linking Our Communities

The most extraordinary and ecologically important assemblage of natural landscapes and scenic beauty on Spring Creek is found in the dramatic canyon the stream has carved through the limestone bedrock as it descends from State College toward Bellefonte. Located primarily on lands controlled by the State Correctional Institute at Rockview, between the historic community of Rock and the area just downstream of Fisherman's Paradise, the marvelous Spring Creek Canyon is com-



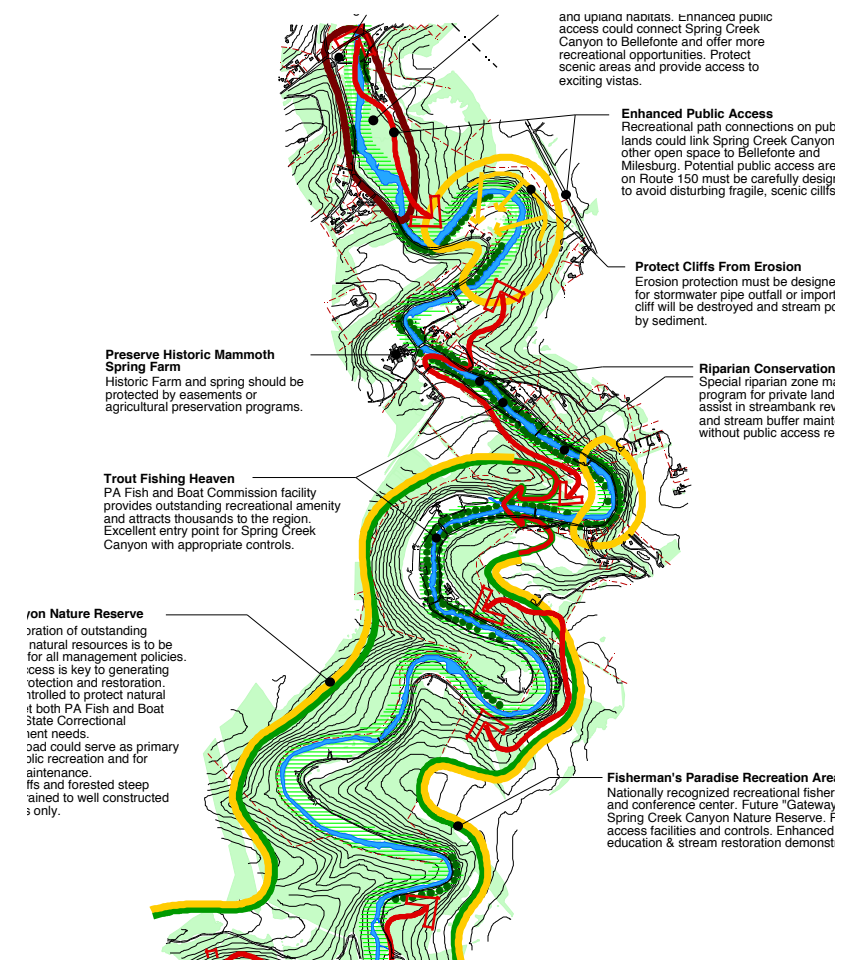
pletely unknown to most residents of our region. Protected since 1925 by the stewardship of the Rockview S.C.I. and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, the Spring Creek Canyon contains large contiguous areas of rare mature native forests; rare and endangered species and natural communities; dramatic two hundred foot high limestone cliffs; historic resources such as the site of Philip Benner's house and iron furnace and the Benner family cemetery, an important local lineage; exceptional trout habitat; wonderful recreational opportunities; and the most beautiful scenic vistas of the twisting, forested canyon in all of Centre County. It is important that the Spring Creek Canyon Reserve be established in order to protect these important resources for future generations, for the contribution they make to the quality of life in the region, and to enhance public access to the canyon under carefully designed conditions which would protect the canyon's ecological systems and respect the operations of the relevant public institutions.

All of these important natural, scenic, and historic resources are found right in the geographic center of our growing community - literally a green heart for the Bellefonte - State College metropolitan area. Spring Creek Canyon is also an important open space, reserved from development, which could link the diverse local communities with natural areas and recreational paths. How many contemporary metropolitan areas can boast of such

a dramatic natural canyon and exceptional recreational opportunities at their core? Spring Creek Canyon is among the most important of our assets which enhance the quality of life in the region.

Canyon Gateways and Controlled Public Access

If public access to the Spring Creek Canyon Reserve is to be enhanced it must be with carefully planned conditions and a well designed system of controlled gateways and paths. As the protection of nature is of the highest priority here, access must be subordinate to the integrity of the riparian and aquatic habitats, the fragile cliffs and forested slopes, and the rare and endangered species. Thoughtfully planned paths can steer people away from the most vulnerable areas and provide safe, environmentally non-destructive access to other interesting sites. Controlled gateways exclude unwanted vehicles, orient and inform users, and allow public safety officials to monitor activity and respond to emergencies. In recent years illicit, uncontrolled access, which poses great threats to the environment and to the state institutions, has increased dramatically in the canyon area. This trend which will no doubt increase with the population of our region, spells out the need to legitimize and control public access, in cooperation with both the Rockview S.C.I. and the PA Fish and Boat Commission, in order to protect fragile natural landscapes and ensure public safety.





Fisherman's Paradise, the world renowned trout fishing area maintained by the PA Fish and Boat Commission at the northern end of the Spring Creek Canyon, would be an ideal gateway to the canyon. It contains the facilities to serve the public and control access to the canyon. A well graded gravel road, suitable for recreational use as well as maintenance and public safety vehicles, already exists along Spring Creek from Fisherman's Paradise to upstream from the Fish and Boat Commission's Benner Springs hatchery, a logical southern entrance to the canyon. A few carefully designed paths could link the streamside road to the edge of the cliffs above, where dramatic vistas of the canyon can be seen. These canyon gateways, with controlled access along Spring Creek, would enable the Spring Creek Canyon to serve as an ecological and recreational connection between our communities and allow the public to experience, value, and protect this wonderful resource.



The Route 26 ByPass: Divider on Connecting Parkway

One of the most important issues facing the community regarding Spring Creek Canyon is the design and construction of the Route 26 ByPass, a limited access highway linking the Mount Nittany Expressway to Interstate 80. This much needed transportation improvement project will help to unite our community and spur growth by making travel faster, easier, and safer. But this same highway will also cut across the southern end of the Spring Creek Canyon severing this important resource from its upstream connections and its link to the nearby natural areas in Big Hollow, fragmenting the most critical natural environments of our valley into degraded fractions of their current whole. The highway could also form a barrier to recreational use of Spring Creek Canyon and destroy some of the most beautiful scenery in our region. Finally, where this highway crosses Spring Creek and its tributaries, storm water runoff from the roadway containing contaminated sediments and other chemicals would directly enter the stream. Clearly there are many concerns.

But the highway could have entirely different impacts if it were designed with the concerns for protecting Spring Creek, recreation, and the region's scenic beauty in mind. If the roadway crosses Big Hollow and the Spring Creek Canyon on a high bridge it would minimize disturbance and fragmentation of the fragile riparian



areas, forested slopes, and other natural area. A high bridge would also drain roadway runoff away from the stream valley onto less sensitive upland areas. The bridge itself could be a work of beauty, dramatizing and enhancing the natural grandeur of the canyon. And if this new road were designed to the highest, parkway standards of scenic beauty and environmental responsibility, it could enhance our region aesthetically, link natural areas with right-of-way vegetation of native plant communities, and provide new recreational connections along its right-of-way. The potential difference between these two types of highways would be dramatic. It is up to our community to inform the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation about the value we place on Spring Creek and its Canyon, and urge that public agency to respond to these concerns.