

Erie to Pittsburgh Trail



GREENWAYS IN THE COMMONWEALTH

The development of greenways throughout the Commonwealth is an extremely important tool in the Department of Conservation and Natural Resource's (DCNR) arsenal to create more livable communities, protect natural resources, showcase cultural resources, and connect people to the outdoors. Throughout every planning process, DCNR has heard a resounding message from Pennsylvanians that greenways and trails are extremely important to the well being of their communities and personal lives. In fact, greenways ranked so high during the public input sessions during the crafting of DCNR's Action Plan, *Shaping a Sustainable Pennsylvania: A Blueprint for Action*, that the final document elevated the importance of greenway connections and building sustainable and attractive communities as one of the four main goals that the Department continues to advance. This desire and sentiment is also echoed in *Pennsylvania's Recreation Plan 2004-2008* that set an ambitious goal of providing a trail within 15 minutes of every Pennsylvania resident!

In 2001, the Commonwealth formalized its work in greenways in the publication *Pennsylvania Greenways: An Action Plan for Creating Connections*. The plan established a vision that calls for Pennsylvania and its partners to develop an outstanding network of greenways across the Commonwealth to create highly valued assets and to enhance the quality of life for all. The statewide network would be composed of various levels of greenways. In 2004, DCNR identified 34 *major* greenway corridors to inform and guide counties developing greenway and open space plans. These corridors are ones that are at least 50 miles, pass through two or more counties, and are recognized in an official planning document. We found no corridors that met the criteria in the far Northwest but have always planned to add new corridors as longer connections are proposed/made. In 2006, DCNR targeted five major greenways for increased statewide resources including staff time and capacity building grant funds and created the "mega-greenway" category. These are greenways of one hundred miles or more, with a completed plan and include the Susquehanna Greenway, Kittatinny Ridge, Pa Highlands, Great Allegheny Passage, and Mainline Canal. Although the challenges are great due to their size and complexities, the benefits for the residents, communities, and the Commonwealth are beyond measure.

The Erie to Pittsburgh Trail has the opportunity to join this elite group of mega-greenways due to its strategic location within the state and the quantity of communities and citizens it has the potential to positively impact and join together.

EMERGING MEGA-GREENWAY

The Erie to Pittsburgh Trail, anchored by two of Pennsylvania's great metropolitan areas, is a major initiative to connect a large segment of Pennsylvania citizens to some of the most spectacular natural resources in the Commonwealth. Born out of the desire to connect local communities to the natural environment and to each other, opportunities abound in this region to connect a myriad of state parks, heritage areas, and natural resources via a land-based trail that will enhance the recreational opportunities in the region.

The concept for the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail has emerged from the local communities and trail organizations. The tremendous success of other community and regional trails built in the western part of the Commonwealth over the years provide good models for the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail. With trails such as the North Shore Trail, Armstrong Trail, Allegheny River Trail, McClintock Trail, Oil Creek Gorge Trail, Ernst Trail, Pymatuning Spillway Trail, and many others, the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail can unify the Western Pennsylvania Trail Network. This potential mega-greenway will enhance the exiting trail system, give it a regional identity, make additional connections, raise the visibility of individual trail projects in the region, and elevate the value of recreational resources in local communities. The branding of the regional trail system and the eventual connection to Pittsburgh and then to Washington, DC will revitalize the local economy and bring more tourist dollars into the region.



DCNR ASSISTANCE

DCNR's role in this effort is to work with local partners to identify the *major greenway* corridors and determine how best to depict these to Pennsylvania's Major Greenway Corridor Map. We will also help facilitate the mega-greenway recognition of the effort to connect Pittsburgh to Erie. In addition, DCNR's role will be to bring financial and technical assistance support to the project and coordinate with other state and federal agencies to leverage additional resources for the implementation of this project. DCNR is committed to advancing trail projects that connect and enhance our core communities. Therefore, DCNR will lend its support and guidance to help the local trail groups and communities develop a shared vision and implement this large landscape initiative.

COMMUNITY CONSERVATION & PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

DCNR provides grant funds to municipalities and non-profits to plan, acquire, and develop greenways and trail projects. Through a competitive grant process, each application is scored based on how well the project meets the mission and goals of the Department and the impact that the project will have on the surrounding communities and its citizens. DCNR is continually working to develop trail opportunities in communities all across the Commonwealth to reconnect the citizens back to the outdoors. Many of the trails that are funded through DCNR are developed by local trail organizations and municipalities to connect people to local attractions such as a waterway, schools, ball fields and parks, community centers, and/or other communities. These connections enhance the quality of life in the region. DCNR will continue to fund these ready-to-go community trails as they help the Commonwealth meet our goal of a trail opportunity within 15 minutes of every Pennsylvanian.

The Erie to Pittsburgh Trail has its roots in the community and regional trails built by dedicated trail organizations and local municipalities. Because of their effort, these local trails have the potential to develop into one of Pennsylvania's premier mega-greenways connecting the two great metropolitan areas of Pittsburgh and Erie. Formally planned mega-greenways have become a very important focal point for the Department. Because mega-greenways projects help the Department achieve the goals of the DCNR Action Plan and Greenway Plan, they receive priority consideration for grant funds and engagement of agency technical assistance resources. For the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail to be elevated to a mega-greenway, it is recommended that the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail undertake a planning initiative to produce a comprehensive plan/unifying vision document that will recommend trail routings, phasing, estimates of probable cost and recommendations for moving the initiative forward. This plan will not only provide a regional vision and a "road map" for the greenway to solidify public support, but it will assist and focus the Department's resources to strategically invest in the region to implement the greenway.

The Department may be able to assist the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail effort through a variety of funding sources which include:

AVAILABLE PLANNING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES

Gap Analysis & Implementation Plan: Assistance is available to support the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail in the form of a planning grant to help formalize routes, recommend a phasing plan, develop cost estimates, and help move the initiative forward. Funding assistance can be provided at a level of up to 50% of the total project cost.

Peer Study: Assistance is available to a ***municipal applicant*** to explore creating a trail alliance to advance the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail initiative. Peer grants are limited to a total project cost of \$11,000, with the Department providing up to \$10,000 of the cost matched by at least \$1,000 cash from the local partner. A successfully completed peer study is a pre-requisite for circuit rider funding.

Technical Assistance: The Department also provides technical assistance and expertise working with other funding entities, The Department has worked on other mega-greenways projects with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, The Department of Community and Economic Development and a variety of foundations. These entities often can bring significant resources to these types of initiatives.

ACQUISITION & DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE FOR TRAIL PROJECTS: The Department has its full complement of funding sources each grant round that are available to assist ready-to-go projects throughout the corridor at any time. Depending on the type of project and submitting organization, the Department can provide up to 80% of the total project cost. DCNR can provide assistance to acquire land or easements for trails and/or trailheads, construct trails, purchase trail maintenance equipment, and to conduct non-routine maintenance. Interested partners should work with DCNR's regional advisors who can guide them through the application process.