



Trails, Parkland, and People 2015

IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A HEALTHY MONTGOMERY COUNTY

A report prepared for the Montgomery County Commissioners by
Montgomery County Open Space Board • Montgomery County Parks, Trails, and Historic Sites Advisory Board



IMPLEMENTING THE VISION





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IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A HEALTHY MONTGOMERY COUNTY

A Collaborative Approach

This report is the result of a collaboration between Montgomery County's Open Space Board and Parks, Trails, and Historic Sites Advisory Board. Over the last 18 months, the two boards have reviewed the network of publicly available park, trail, natural, and historic assets in Montgomery County and identified opportunities to expand, enhance, protect, and connect those assets. The recommendations presented in this report are consistent with the goals and actions put forth in Montgomery County's recently adopted Montco 2040 comprehensive plan and are intended to provide the County Commissioners with useful strategies as they consider and prioritize future open space opportunities, expenditures, and programs.



Setting the Stage

Throughout 2014 and the first half of 2015, Montgomery County's Open Space Board and Parks, Trails, and Historic Sites Advisory Board participated quarterly in joint meetings to discuss the mission of each board, identify objectives of mutual interest, and determine how the two boards could collaboratively enhance and promote outdoor opportunities in Montgomery County. This collaborative process gave all board members a greater understanding of the extensive system of county-wide outdoor assets and the ways in which the public uses those assets. The discussions and information shared also clearly highlighted the challenges and rewards of expanding county parks, trails, historic sites, and natural areas while maintaining, improving, and being good stewards of an exceptional network of existing outdoor resources.

During the same time period, **Montco 2040**, Montgomery County's visionary comprehensive plan for the next 25 years, provided the two boards with a broader brush overview of county characteristics and planning objectives and an opportunity to offer information, feedback, and suggestions as the comprehensive planning process took place. Formally adopted in January 2015, the completed plan is structured around three overarching themes - Connected Communities, Sustainable Places, and Vibrant Economy. For each theme, the plan sets forth goals and implementation actions that relate strongly to the missions and objectives of both the Open Space Board and the Parks, Trails, and Historic Sites Advisory Board. The two boards expressed

COUNTY PARK SYSTEM

- More than 6,000 acres
- 9 county parks
- 5 historic sites
- More than 60 miles of trail



their mutual belief that all types of open space are an important feature of life in Montgomery County and their shared interest in promoting implementation of Montco 2040 in order to support parks, recreation, and open space in Montgomery County.

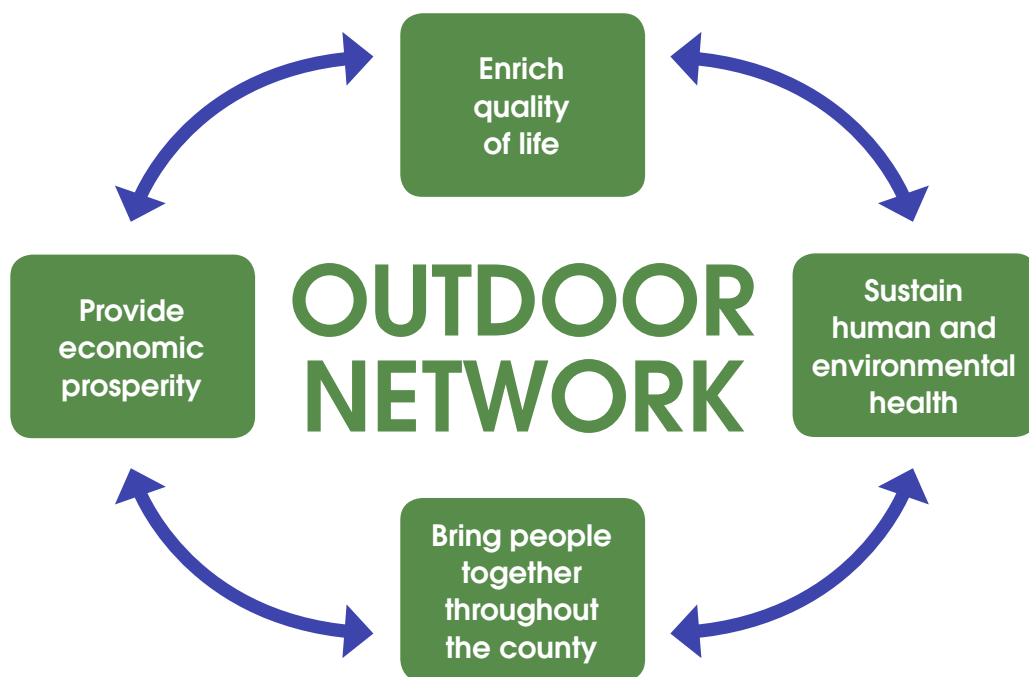
A Shared Purpose

With staff assistance, the boards reviewed the outdoor opportunities currently available to people who live, work, and visit in Montgomery County. They focused particularly on the role which this outdoor network plays to:

- enrich quality of life;
- provide economic prosperity;
- sustain human and environmental health; and
- bring people together throughout the county.

Their review confirmed that people in Montgomery County can choose from an extensive array of interesting outdoor places; that these outdoor places afford a variety of opportunities to enjoy recreation, nature, history, and health and fitness, as well as to gather with family and friends, and to keep connected with each other and their communities; and that the variety of outdoor locations and activities has a strong positive relationship to the quality of life of the people who live here. The review, however, indicated that these outdoor places would be of greater benefit to more people if offered as a more visible, easily accessible, and interconnected system. It also brought to light some local and regional trends that will influence prioritization of future open space opportunities.

The boards' findings provide a useful snapshot of open space in Montgomery County, the people who are served by that open space, and the factors that will increasingly affect open space decisions in Montgomery County.



Montgomery County and its Outdoor Network

A Closer Look

- Montgomery County is a busy and prosperous place.
 - 3rd most populated county in Pennsylvania
 - 816,857 people spread out over 312,000 acres (2014 population)
 - Median household income among top 70 counties nationwide
- A significant portion of Montgomery County is green.
 - Approximately 6,000 acres in county park system
 - 13% of land in county is permanently green
- Montgomery County and its communities have worked hard to keep the county green.
 - \$88M in county open space grants
 - \$37M other public and private dollars leveraged by county grants
 - Dedicated local funding streams now provided in 8 municipalities
- Natural Resources are an important feature of Montgomery County landscapes.
 - County's waterways create 16 distinct watersheds
 - 14 special conservation landscapes identified by 2008 Natural Areas Inventory Update
- Water quality and stream corridor protection are high priorities in Montgomery County:
 - High-quality drinking water depends on clean streams and unpolluted groundwater
 - 1,000 miles of streams and their flood plains make up about 7% of Montco's area
 - Stream protection ordinances or stream buffer requirements in many municipalities

The People that Use It

- Montgomery County is a healthy county.
 - Montco ranked as 2nd healthiest county in PA
 - Montco included in US News and World Report 50 healthiest counties nationwide to raise children
- People in Montgomery County enjoy outdoor recreation.
 - Almost a million yearly visits to the Schuylkill River and Perkiomen Trails
 - 2009 PA DCNR studied showed average Montco household did outdoor activity at least 3 times monthly
- A healthy Montgomery County depends upon getting outdoors for fun and fitness.
 - Regular exercise, eating right, and avoiding health risks reduce likelihood of heart attack
 - Outdoor exercise and fresh air lower stress and foster a healthy lifestyle
 - Health professionals recommend at least an hour of daily exercise
- Outdoor activity and access to parkland are good for the economy as well as for the people.
 - Recent local study shows millions of dollars each year in benefits from protected open space
 - Yearly economic value of outdoor recreation in Montco is \$117.5 Million
 - Montco homes within one mile of protected open space average increase of about \$10,000 in value
 - Open space in Montco provides yearly environmental services valued at \$16.4 Million

Influencing Factors and Current Trends

- Availability of new open space properties:
 - The availability of suitable open space acquisition opportunities has dwindled significantly since the county's 1993 Open Space Program was instituted; large parcels of undeveloped land have become increasingly expensive and in many cases are already reserved for future development.



- Open space as a connector of people and places:
 - *Public parks and other types of open space have increasingly become the gathering places where people meet to stay in touch with each other and their communities.*
- Trails as a wise investment:
 - *Throughout the country, trails are proving to provide the greatest benefit to the most people for the greatest return on investment.*
 - *Trails and open space are significant in revitalizing downtowns and older communities.*
- People's changing schedules and expectations:
 - *People's increasingly busy schedules and easy access to a wide variety of outdoor experiences regionally as well as locally mean that each outdoor experience must be pleasant, interesting, and perceived as worthwhile.*
- Importance of improvements and stewardship:
 - *Convenient, inviting park access, up to date improvements and facilities, and exemplary stewardship will be essential factors in people's satisfaction with the park or trail experience.*
- Increasing competition for funding:
 - *Funding for open space acquisitions, park improvements, and other outdoor projects will remain very limited and very competitive; open space decisions will need to be planned strategically and implemented wisely.*

A Strategy for Making Open Space Decisions

Based upon the findings described above, the two boards agree that the county's future open space budgets should center around:

- strengthening **county focus areas** (existing county parks, historic sites, and natural areas);
- implementing county connectors (the trails which interconnect these focus areas);
- and encouraging **visitors of all ages and interests** to use the outdoor assets for fun, fitness, and friendship.

At the same time, county budget strategies should include the flexibility to evaluate and take advantage of unexpected opportunities. The county and its boards and departments should emphasize **public/private partnerships** as a way of expanding on open space projects and programs, and municipalities should be encouraged to enhance their own open space systems by implementing **local funding strategies**.

Recognizing that the county's open space activities must operate within the framework of available funding and staff resources, the Open Space Board and the Parks, Trails, and Historic Sites Advisory Boards offer the following recommendations for implementation actions that should be put in motion as soon as possible. These recommendations are more fully described on the following pages.

- 1 Continue the current trail-building momentum by strategically prioritizing additional trail segments for implementation as trail projects currently in the pipeline are completed.
- 2 Expand, enhance, protect, and connect the county's parks, historic sites, landmark natural areas, and primary trail and greenway corridors by acting upon opportunities that strengthen their public, environmental, scenic, and recreational benefits.
- 3 Implement the county's "Get Out and Go Montco" initiative in order to promote county open space assets, encourage a fitter, healthier population, and provide places and programs for outdoor recreation, education, and enjoyment.





Visitors enjoy the Pennypack Trail in the Lorimer Park Area.

Continue to implement the county's primary trail network by building on the sections already in place.

- Complete trail projects already prioritized.
- Fill gaps in existing trails.
- Provide trail access in densely populated areas of the county.
- Create regional trail loops by connecting individual primary trails to each other and to other trails that comprise the Circuit network of trails.
- Maintain and update the quality of county trails open for public use.

Provided on the following pages are a summary chart and map describing the overall primary trail network, the funded and unfunded projects already in the pipeline, and the recommended first-priority future trails.



Continue to implement the county's primary trail network
RECOMMENDED TRAIL PRIORITIES

High Priority Trail Projects

| TRAIL | LOCATION | MILES | FUNDING | IMPLEMENTATION STATUS | COST* | GRANT** | POTENTIAL PROJECT PARTNERS |
|--------------------------------|---|-------|----------|---|--------|----------|--|
| Top Tier Circuit Trails | | | | | | | |
| Cross County Trail | Germantown Pike to Erdenheim Farm | 2 | DCNR/TIP | Feasibility Study completed 2013 | \$3.7M | Moderate | Plymouth & Whitemarsh Twp.; PennDOT |
| Pennypack Trail | Byberry Road to County Line | 1 | DCNR | Rail corridor acquired; highway crossings needed | \$0.7M | High | U. Moreland Twp.; PennDOT; Penn-Tammany Greenway |
| Schuylkill River Trail | Pottstown Phase 2; 422 Bridge to Industrial Highway | 0.7 | DCNR | Bridge in progress; grant approval for land acquisition | \$0.4M | High | PennDOT; Pottstown Boro.; L. Pottsgrove Twp. |

Other Current Priority Trail Projects – Funding in Place

| | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|---|--------|---|-------|-----|---|
| Chester Valley Trail | S. Gulph Road to Norristown | 4 | Funded | In design; completing R-O-W acquisition | \$ 9M | N/A | U. Merion Twp.; Bridgeport & Norristown Boros.; PennDOT |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|---|--------|---|-------|-----|---|

Other Current Priority Trail Projects – Funding Needed

| | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|-----|--------|--|--------|----------|---|
| Cross County Trail | Ft. Washington to Willow Grove | 6.5 | Needed | U. Dublin Twp. working on several sections | TBD | Moderate | U. Dublin & U. Moreland Twp. |
| Power Line Trail | Upper Moreland border to Cross County Trail | 1 | Needed | Route feasibility under study | TBD | Moderate | U. Moreland & Horsham Twp.; DVRPC |
| Wissahickon/ Cross County Connector | Erdenheim Farm to Northwestern Avenue | 2 | Needed | Route negotiations in progress | \$1.7M | High | Whitemarsh Twp.; Whitemarsh Foundation; Ft. Washington State Park |

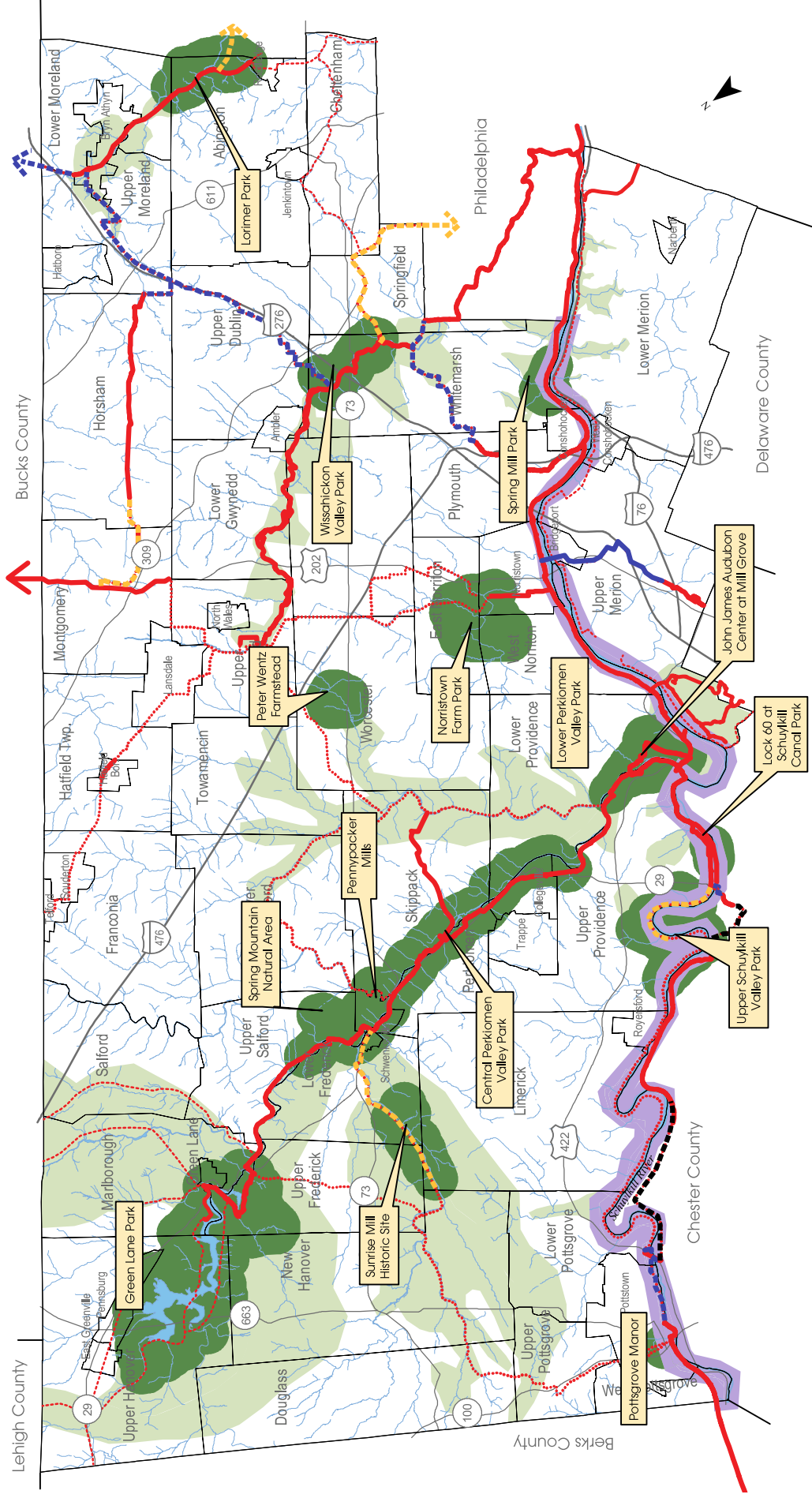
Recommended Future Priority Trails

| TRAIL | LOCATION | MILES | FUNDING | IMPLEMENTATION STATUS | COST* | GRANT** | POTENTIAL PROJECT PARTNERS |
|-----------------------|--|-------|---------|---|--------|---------|--|
| Cresheim Trail | Philadelphia border to Flourtown | 4.5 | Needed | Feasibility Study completed 2009 | TBD | High | Springfield & Cheltenham Twp.; PECO; Friends of Cresheim Trail |
| Pennypack Trail | Lorimer Park to Philadelphia connections | 0.7 | Needed | Informal trail partially in place | \$0.1M | High | Philadelphia Parks; Foxchase Farm; Rockledge Boro.; SEPTA |
| Power Line Trail | Lower State Road to 202 Parkway Trail | 2.7 | Partial | Feasibility Study 2013; short section in progress | \$2.1M | High | Horsham & Montgomery Twp.; PECO; PennDOT |
| Schuylkill East Trail | Lock 60 to Upper Schuylkill Valley Park | 1.7 | Partial | Informal trail in place | \$0.1M | N/A | U. Providence Twp.; Schuylkill Canal Association |
| Sunrise Trail | Schuwenksville to Sunrise Mill | 5.7 | Needed | Feasibility Study 2015; some easements secured | TBD | High | Schuwenksville Boro.; L. & U. Frederick & Limerick Twp.; CPVSD |
| | | 15.3 | | | | | |

*Probable cost for most trails will be determined by actual trail mileage, right of way needed, and the use, or not, of federal funding.

**Grant probability is rated based upon the off-road nature of the trail, the gaps addressed in the "Circuit" trail network, and/or other access to a special trail experience.

TRAIL STATUS AND PRIORITIES





Recommendation 2

OPEN SPACE ACQUISITION AND PRESERVATION



Visitors throng meadows to watch an old-time baseball game at Pennypacker Mills Historic Site.

Concentrate on open space acquisitions that relate strongly to Montgomery County's network of county-owned or managed parks, trails, historic sites, natural areas, and the Schuylkill River.

- Prioritize available funding and grant resources toward the focus areas summarized in the attached chart and accompanying open space priorities map.
- Evaluate future open space acquisition and preservation opportunities according to:
 - *the role they play in the county-owned and managed open space system*
 - *their relationship to landscapes prioritized in the 2008 Montgomery County Natural Areas Inventory Update*
 - *their capacity to accommodate appropriate public access, educate visitors about the environment, and inspire outdoor recreation and activity.*
 - *provide more access to open space in densely populated areas of the county.*
- Ensure the ability to respond to unanticipated open space opportunities by monitoring the status of potentially important properties and providing flexibility in the county open space budget.
- Encourage open space projects that address local priorities as well as complement county objectives by providing information, technical support, and in-kind assistance to municipalities, non-profits, and grass roots organizations.



Expand, Enhance, Connect, Protect County Parks, Natural Areas, Trails and Greenways
HIGH PRIORITY ACQUISITION AND PRESERVATION PRIORITIES

| FOCUS AREA | PURPOSE | NAI LANDSCAPE | COUNTY TRAIL | ACREAGE | ESTIMATED VALUE | POTENTIAL PARTNERS |
|---|--|----------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|--|
| Central Perkiomen Valley Park | Expand park; buffer trail | Middle Perkiomen | Perkiomen | 65 | \$1,213,000 | Skipack Twp.; Department of Corrections |
| Green Lane Park | Trail parking and reservoir access | Green Lane Reservoir | Park trails | 0.5 | \$16,000 | Owners; U. Hanover Twp.; U. Perkiomen Valley Chamber |
| Lorimer Park | Expand park; buffer trail | Pennypack | Pennypack | 101 | \$1,895,000 | Abington Twp.; L. Moreland Twp.; Wyncote Audubon; PERT |
| Middle Schuylkill Greenway | Expand greenway and river access | Middle Schuylkill | SRT | 102 | \$6,160,000 | Norristown Boro.; W. Norriton Twp.; Exelon; PECO; Dragonboat Club |
| Peter Wentz Farmstead | Expand park facilities | N/A | N/A | 1 | \$605,000 | Owners; Peter Wentz Farmstead Society |
| Spring Mountain | Expand park and natural resources | Spring Mountain | Perkiomen | 51 | \$215,000 | Upper Salford Twp.; Spring Mountain Adventures |
| Sunrise Mill | Expand park; future trail | Swamp Creek | Sunrise | 40 | \$430,000 | Owners; American Rivers; DEP |
| Upper Schuylkill Greenway | Connect trail; expand river access | Upper Schuylkill | SRT | 85 | \$142,000 | SNHA; Pottstown Boro.; L. Pottsgrove Twp. |
| Flexible Location | Expand park facilities and access in densely populated areas | N/A | N/A | N/A | \$1,000,000 | This funding would be available for projects that have multiple partners |
| ACREAGE AND VALUE HIGH PRIORITY ACQUISITION AND PRESERVATION | | | | 445.5 | \$11,676,000 | |

LONGER TERM ACQUISITION AND PRESERVATION PRIORITIES

| FOCUS AREA | PURPOSE | NAT LANDSCAPE | COUNTY TRAIL | ACREAGE | ESTIMATED VALUE | POTENTIAL PARTNERS |
|--|---------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|---------|-----------------|---|
| Norristown Farm Park | Secure and expand park | N/A | Farm Park Center | 720 | donation | State; E. and W. Norriton Twp.; Norristown Boro.; FPPA; Stony Creek Anglers |
| Pennypacker Mills | Expand park | Spring Mountain | Perkiomen | 21 | \$428,000 | Friends of Pennypacker Mills; Perkiomen Twp. |
| Pottsgrove Manor | Expand historic site | Upper Schuylkill | SRT | 4.2 | \$1,278,000 | PennDOT; Pottstown Boro.; Colebrookdale RR; Pottstown Carousel |
| Schuylkill Canal | Expand park | Middle Schuylkill | Schuylkill East | 63.4 | \$1,495,000 | PennDOT; BAMR; U. Providence Twp.; SCA |
| Spring Mill Park | Create trail | Lower Schuylkill | SRT | N/A | donation | Sierra Club; PECO; Whitemarsh Twp. |
| Upper Schuylkill Greenway | Riverfront gap; expand greenway | Middle Schuylkill | Schuylkill East | 68 | \$313,000 | SNHA; U. Providence & Limerick Twps. |
| ACREAGE AND VALUE LONGER-TERM ACQUISITION AND PRESERVATION | | | | 876.6 | \$3,514,000 | |

SUMMARY OF ACQUISITION AND PRESERVATION PRIORITIES

| | | |
|--|---------------|---------------------|
| High Priority Acquisition and Preservation | 445.5 | \$11,676,000 |
| Longer Term Acquisition and Preservation | 876.6 | \$3,514,000 |
| Summary Totals | 1322.1 | \$15,190,000 |

This map illustrates the Schuylkill River watershed, a vital ecosystem in Pennsylvania. The river is shown flowing from the north (top) towards the south (bottom), eventually emptying into the Delaware River. The watershed is divided into several counties: Bucks to the north, Berks to the west, Chester to the south, and Delaware to the east. The map highlights various parks and natural areas, including Green Lane Park, Spring Mountain Natural Area, Wissachickon Valley Park, and Spring Mill Park. It also shows major roads like I-76, I-476, and US-29, and identifies surrounding municipalities such as Pottsville, Reading, and Philadelphia. A north arrow is located in the top right corner.

Recommendation 3

GET OUT AND GO MONTCO



Montgomery County's "Get Out and Go" tent draws visitors at many outdoor events.

Allocate necessary funding and staff to promote the Get Out and Go Montco initiative on an ongoing basis; involve multiple county departments, boards, and other volunteers in sharing the Get Out and Go message.

- Clarify and emphasize the relationship between a healthy population and outdoor activity and exercise.
- Forge partnerships with public and private recreation, conservation, civic, and health organizations to provide meaningful outdoor programs, events, and facilities throughout the county.
- Ensure that county parks, trails, historic sites, and natural areas are accessible, well-publicized, and enjoyable for all ages and interests.
- Coordinate with municipal park and recreation departments to encourage information sharing and inter-municipal cooperation.



