

# Monroe County

*Pursuing a Vision of “Forever Green”*



*Hemlocks and boulders typical of Monroe County woodlands. Features such as these can be preserved in conservation subdivisions.*

“It is vital to have this planning philosophy to manage growth properly.”

— Theresa Merli, County Commissioner



Natural Lands Trust

Monroe County is unique as the only county in the Commonwealth where, potentially, 17 of its 20 municipalities (including one Borough!) will soon have adopted *Growing Greener: Conservation by Design* ordinances. Because of this, each time a new conservation subdivision is approved, protected acreage increases, a significant fact in Pennsylvania’s second fastest-growing county.

This consistency of results is the product of strong leadership at the County level, both in terms of professional staff and elected officials. This remarkable leadership, which grew from a “Forever Green” vision of the county’s future, created and sustained a very healthy process of engagement with residents and municipalities. It all began with a 1996 decision to make the 2020

Comprehensive Plan update process very different from previous planning, by heavily involving the townships and boroughs for the first time and forming five task forces comprising 100 citizens.

Staff planners believe that this highly participatory approach coupled with unanimous support by the County Commissioners, led to voter approval of the \$25 million Open Space Bond Referendum in 1998, one year before the Comprehensive Plan was completed, and three years before the Open Space Plan was adopted.

In its continued effort, the County proactively encouraged all its municipalities to implement these progressive conservation subdivision ordinances, and partnered with them by using bond funds to underwrite half the costs (up to \$10,000 per community) of hiring consultants to help them do just that. Very wisely, it reserved \$800,000 of the bond monies to fund such essential planning efforts, the rest being targeted to acquisition.

In addition, the County held workshops and sponsored free bus tours of conservation subdivisions in other counties so that local officials could

see these greener developments first-hand. Conducted by Natural Lands Trust (NLT) staff, these tours provided extremely instructive learning experiences for community decision-makers, helping them to better appreciate the multiple benefits offered by this simple design technique.

The County has maintained close connections with NLT over the years, regularly sending development applications to NLT for its review and constructive comment, sometimes extending to site visits and specific design advice to the applicant. On one such occasion, the developer told County staff that the insights he gained by walking around the site with NLT staff really opened his eyes to conservation possibilities he had never seen before. Such design assistance, often a critical element in achieving optimal results, is cost-shared by a grant from the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

With local open space plans and conservation subdivision ordinances in place, the municipalities in Monroe County are well prepared to better manage the development in the rich natural and cultural landscape of the Pocono Mountains.



*Many exceptional value streams provide wildlife habitat and offer scenic recreational areas.*

*Growing Greener: Conservation by Design is a collaborative program of the PA DCNR, the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, Natural Lands Trust, and advisors from state and local agencies. The program helps municipalities use the development process to their advantage to protect interconnected open space networks. Communities that adopt these standards are preserving an average of 62% of land each time a property is developed.*

*For more information, contact:*

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