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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## PROJECT BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

In Pennsylvania, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) has a goal of developing a River Conservation Plan for all Pennsylvania streams. While some previous studies have been conducted along certain corridors of the Youghiogheny River and some subwatersheds, Indian Creek, Casselman, and Laurel Hill, the entire Youghiogheny River Watershed had never been completed. In order to fill in the gaps, the Mountain Watershed Association in partnership with Saltlick Township applied to DCNR for funding this massive planning endeavor. To better manage the information in the study region, this new, combined plan will be called, “Youghiogheny River Conservation Plan Part 1: Headwaters to Dunbar Creek.”

Watersheds do not always follow political boundaries. The Youghiogheny River flows through three states and to develop a holistic management plan for the entire river basin, this plan includes Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia. Due to the large project area, this plan was subdivided into management units, by subwatershed for the chapters, instead of the traditional format of resource chapters.

## PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process started with preliminary research, including a public survey for which 104 people participated. An initial public meeting was held via zoom in December of 2020 where community members were given an opportunity to share their concerns about the area as well as what they desire for the area’s future. A second round of informational meetings was then held in June of 2022 at three locations in the study area.

Municipalities were also given an opportunity to share their needs and discuss the watershed’s future. A virtual municipal officials meeting was held and later followed up with a municipal officials’ survey.

Key individuals recommended by the Steering Committee were interviewed for their insight about the watershed present, past and future plans.

The overall input from the community was the driving force behind the development of the River Conservation Plan and its accompanying management recommendations. More specifically, these management recommendations were derived from the issues and concerns that community members shared throughout the planning process. The draft of the plan was made available to the community for additional comments. As part of the community’s review of the draft, the Steering Committee asked community members to help prioritize these management recommendations.

The final “Youghiogheny River Conservation Plan Part 1: Headwaters to Dunbar Creek” was completed December 2023 following a 30-day comment period. Mountain Watershed Association will petition to have the plan identified on the Pennsylvania River Registry. Then all the real work can begin through the implementation of the projects identified in the management recommendations.

## IMPLEMENTATION

While the “Youghiogheny River Conservation Plan Part 1: Headwaters to Dunbar Creek” was developed by the Mountain Watershed Association, they are not the only entity that can utilize this document and apply for funding. The intent of the management guide is to be a tool for anyone in the community to benefit and improve the quality of life in the area. Some of the management recommendations that are included are those that specifically benefit the individual townships or community groups, like local fire departments. Overall, the guide is a community resource and contains valuable information about the region and would be an excellent educational resource for many individuals.

Partnerships are key to the implementation of this and any community plan. Nobody should have to do it alone. Involvement by local and county officials is a critical component, as they tend to make important decisions that affect the overall quality of the region for the residents as well as for the environment. Some initiatives, such as addressing the need for public sewage and public water, begin at the local level. The local officials are the eyes and ears of the people in the community and our ambassadors to a better quality of life.

## WATERSHED SUMMARY

Originating near Eglon, West Virginia the Youghiogheny (Yok-i-gay-nee) River, or Yough (Yok) for short, flows in a northerly direction for approximately 132 miles to where it joins the Monongahela River in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. The name is from a Native American word meaning “a stream flowing in a contrary direction.” The Youghiogheny River Basin is the only river basin in Maryland that does not flow to the Chesapeake Bay.

**TABLE ES-1. MANAGEMENT UNITS**

The Youghiogheny River Watershed encompasses approximately 1,317 square miles. Due to the size of the watershed this plan has been divided into seven management units see Table ES-1 for a breakdown of these units. Breaking the plan into management units provides a more manageable approach for watershed restoration.

<b>Subwatershed</b>	<b>Square Miles</b>	<b>Municipal Units</b>	<b>Estimated Population</b>
Youghiogheny Headwaters	185	10	38,176
Deep Creek	64	7	14,971
Upper Youghiogheny	185	11	22,601
Casselman River	469	35	55,480
Laurel Hill Creek	125	15	28,250
Middle Youghiogheny	164	13	41,098
Indian Creek	125	9	8,114

The top employment sectors in the watershed include Healthcare and Social Assistance, Construction, Manufacturing, Educational Services, Accommodations and Food Service, Retail Trade, and Real Estate, Rental, and Leasing.

**TABLE ES-2. YOUGHIOGHENY RIVER LAND COVER**

Acres	%	Land Cover Class
10,407	1.3%	Open Water
39,387	4.8%	Developed, Open Space
7,970	1.0%	Developed, Low Intensity
4,280	0.5%	Developed, Medium Intensity
1,118	0.1%	Developed, High Intensity
2,981	0.4%	Barren Land
474,555	58.0%	Deciduous Forest
9,429	1.2%	Evergreen Forest
79,320	9.7%	Mixed Forest
5,301	0.6%	Shrub/Scrub
10,105	1.2%	Herbaceous
142,931	17.5%	Hay/Pasture
16,733	2.0%	Cultivated Crops
8,314	1.0%	Woody Wetlands
5,772	0.7%	Emergent Herbaceous Wetlands

The landscape of the watershed is dominated by forest and agricultural lands. When looking at the watershed that is not surprising. There are a multitude of recreational opportunities in the watershed with two state forests, seven state parks, and four all-season resorts. Plus, the region is known for its whitewater rafting and fishing as millions of people come from all around the world to recreate here.

Accommodations for tourists include various hotels, cabins, Airbnb and approximately 46 camping facilities.

There are over 100 trails that provide access to scenic vistas and unique habitats, including several stands of old growth hemlocks, some of the oldest in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia.

The biological resources throughout this region are plentiful due to the 11 Important Bird Areas that have been designated in the region along with the 3 Important Mammal Areas, 86 Natural Heritage Areas, 2 Natural Areas and various nature preserves.

The region’s rich history is well documented with 44 sites being listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

