



The Laurel Highlands Conservation Landscape Initiative

This report was prepared for Lift Johnstown to highlight the Johnstown-area parts of the Laurel Highlands CLI plan.



Laurel Highlands Initiative

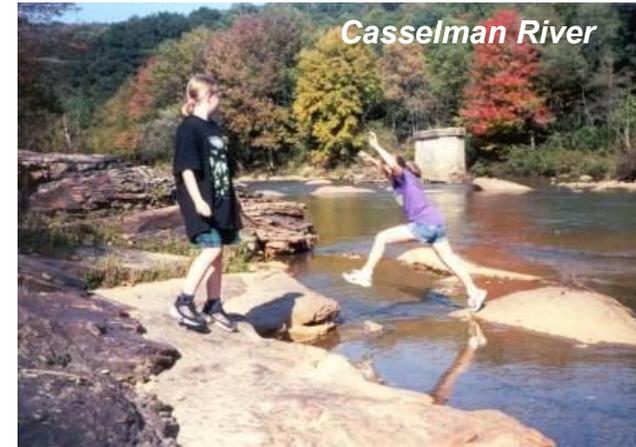
The Vision

Lush forests, steep valleys, rushing streams with waterfalls and picturesque farmland.... Pennsylvania's highest point, two of her three deepest river gorges, three prominent ridges comprising the unique geological province of the Allegheny Mountains.... These things make the Laurel Highlands a special landscape.

The Laurel Highlands has been promoted for 50 years as a visitor destination attracting a wide range of outdoor recreation to Somerset, Westmoreland, Fayette and Cambria counties.



*Cucumber Falls,
Ohiopyle State Park*



The Laurel Highlands Conservation Landscape Initiative seeks to make these natural resources and communities sustainable through recreation and links from the resources to communities. The goal: improve quality of life and attract talented people and new businesses – economic progress. The CLI is led by the state Department of Conservation & Natural Resources and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council. It is a national model for sustaining our most special places.

The vision: by 2015, the unique character of the Laurel Highlands is protected and the region and its communities are recognized as world-class heritage and recreation destinations as well as wonderful places to work and live.

Laurel Highlands Initiative

4 Sub-Landscapes Featured

The Laurel Highlands Conservation Landscape Initiative is focused on four sub-landscapes: the Great Allegheny Passage, the Stonycreek-Quemahoning Initiative, Laurel Ridge and Chestnut Ridge. The Stonycreek and Chestnut Ridge meet at Johnstown.

Laurel Ridge Landscape

The tremendous natural features and recreational opportunities along Laurel Ridge include:

- Seven State Parks, including Ohiopyle, Linn Run, Laurel Hill and Kooser.
- Forbes State Forest.
- Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail stretching 70 miles from near Johnstown to Ohiopyle.
- Powerful Ohiopyle Falls and the Youghiogheny River, know world-wide for its whitewater.
- Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, Powermill Nature Reserve, ski resorts and more.

Significant improvements are planned in the state parks and forests, including a new visitor center at Ohiopyle and re-opening Laurel Mountain State Park's ski area.



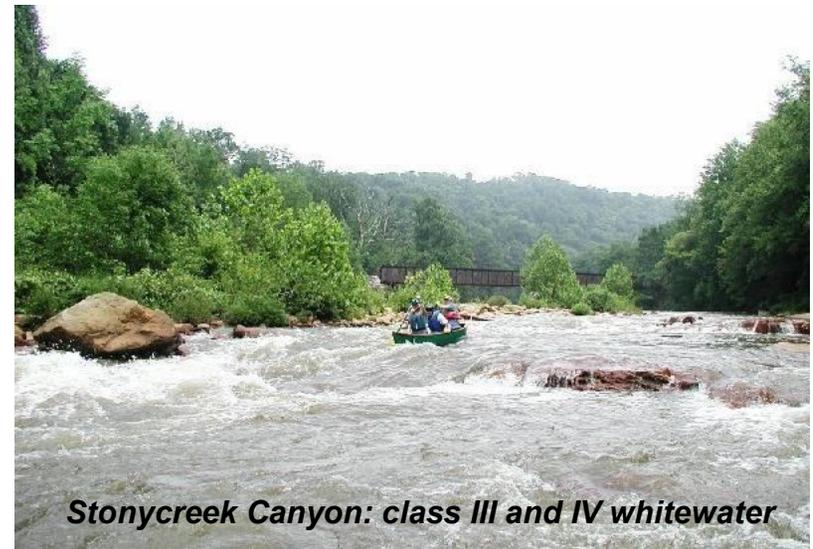
Mountain Laurel, Linn Run State Park

Laurel Highlands Initiative

Stonycreek-Quemahoning Sub-Landscape

Whitewater boating on the Stonycreek River will get a huge boost when a whitewater release valve is installed in Quemahoning Dam in 2010 as part of the Stonycreek-Quemahoning Initiative. Five miles of nearly continuous rapids in Stonycreek Canyon will be “boatable” every other weekend in the summers as water is released from “the Que”.

Whitewater Park is designed for “playboating” in low flows. It attracts kayakers and kids, too! Restrooms and a change house are planned at adjacent Greenhouse Park.



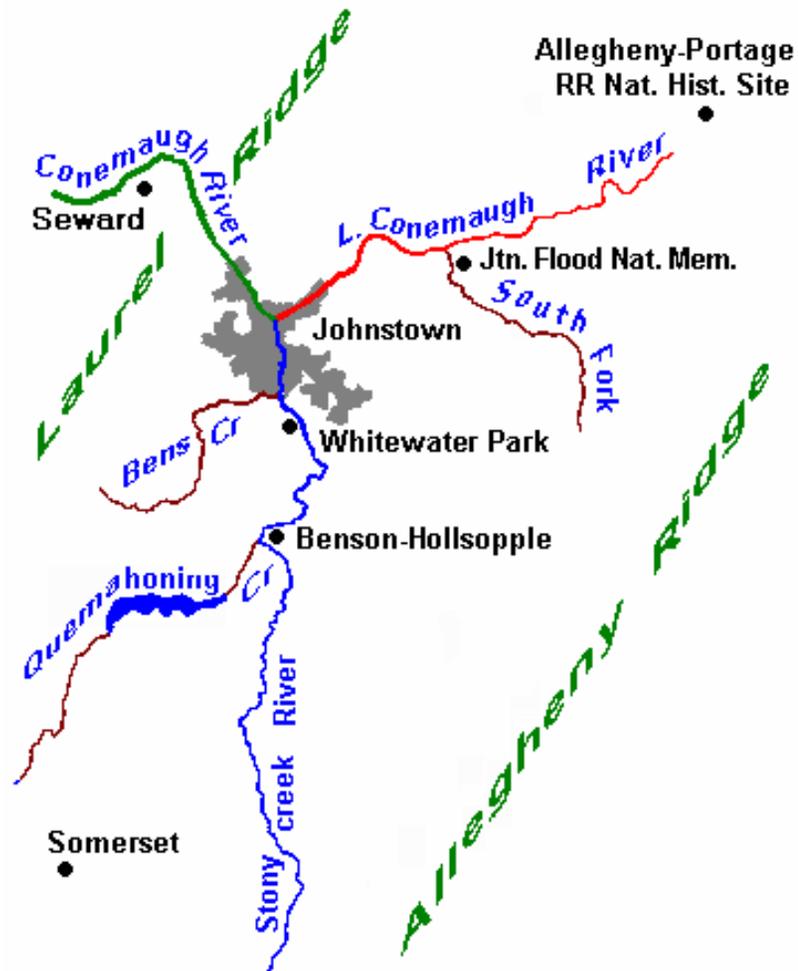
**Whitewater
Park: kids
and kayakers**



The Stonycreek-Quemahoning Initiative also has plans to extend trails into Johnstown, as well as to the Windber area. In addition, SQI plans to develop a campground at Hollsopple.

Previously, SQI restored the Hollsopple Train Station, developed a gateway in Hollsopple and pavilions in Greenhouse Park.

Johnstown Trail Network



Johnstown Trail Hub

The Laurel Highlands CLI is supporting trail development along Johnstown's three rivers and through the City because two CLI sub-landscapes meet at Johnstown, which is seen as a key gateway and hub.

- Path of the Flood Trail on the Little Conemaugh: Rich in History
- Jim Mayer Riverswalk on the Stonycreek: Rich in Recreation
- Conemaugh Gap Trail on the Conemaugh: Rich in Scenery

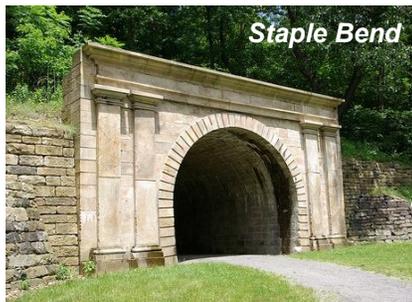
Johnstown's trail hub is a centerpiece of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal Greenway, which was selected as the state's Millennium Trail connecting Harrisburg to Pittsburgh. Such a long, scenic trail with incredible historic and natural features has the potential to be an economic

generator similar to the Great Allegheny Passage, which produced \$40 million in economic impact, according to a 2009 study.

Johnstown Trail Network

Path of the Flood Trail

The Path of the Flood along the route of the 1889 Johnstown Flood is among the nation's most historic trails: not only does it tell the flood story, it also passes through the oldest railroad tunnel in America, Staple Bend Tunnel.



Nine miles of the Path are open, including 2 miles at Staple Bend and 4 miles on public roads. A feasibility study has been funded to look at closing two gaps: a 2/3 mile link from Franklin Borough to the tunnel and a 2-mile gap from South Fork to Johnstown Flood National Memorial.

Jim Mayer Riverswalk Trail

The Stonycreek River corridor features the 1.2-mile Jim Mayer Riverswalk Trail from the City's Moxham neighborhood to Riverside and a 1/2-mile section through Sandyvale Cemetery in the City's Hornerstown neighborhood. Plans are to connect these segments on an abandoned railroad corridor and short on-street connector at Greater Johnstown High School. Four miles of mostly off-street trail can be completed soon. Streets will link to Stonycreek River Park in Kernville and the recently built Tech Park Trail, completing the linkage to Downtown. These trails will be extended to Whitewater Park's fun river features for kids and kayakers.



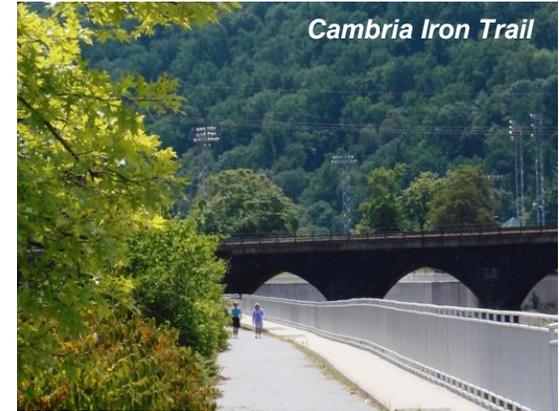
Johnstown Trail Network

Conemaugh River Trails

Johnstown's West End opens to the third-deepest river gorge in Pennsylvania: Conemaugh Gap. A 2009 study concluded that a hiking-biking trail through the Gap is feasible on State Park land.



Plans are to extend the Gap Trail through the City to the 1-mile Cambria Iron Trail adjacent to the historic Stone Arch Bridge (see photo at right) and Cambria Iron Works National Historic Landmark (see photo at left).



Water Trail through City

The Kiski-Conemaugh Water Trail is being updated and desperately needs more access areas. From Whitewater Park, the next official river access is 30 miles downstream. The City has applied for funds to develop a river access area and community park at the Inclined Plane, 7 miles below Whitewater Park.

Conemaugh Valley Conservancy is seeking funds for a Seward access that, with the Inclined Plane ramp, will attract boaters through Conemaugh Gap.



Sustainability

Sustainable Johnstown

The Laurel Highlands CLI is also striving to make communities sustainable. This work is most advanced in tiny Ohiopyle and in Johnstown, the region's largest metro area. The Pennsylvania Environmental Council leading efforts to adopt sustainable practices throughout the Johnstown area.

The most obvious part of this effort is to make the City and adjacent areas walkable and inviting to bicycles, which reduces energy use and makes living more affordable. Affordable local bus service, access to train and regional bus services makes it feasible to live without a car. Such communities also tend to be more healthy because residents get exercise routinely as they go about their daily lives.

The initiative is working to “green” neighborhoods. That means planting trees and other vegetation to help water infiltrate into the ground rather than run off and reduce flooding. The vegetation will also absorb carbon in plants to help offset global warming gases and will help to reduce the “heat island effect” in which urban areas get hotter than rural areas, creating health risks and global warming.



Shown here is an example of how drainage from parking areas and streets can be directed to green, where the water can be absorbed as groundwater rather than run-off into streams. These systems filter pollution and reduce flooding.

Sustainability

Sustainable Johnstown

Alternative energy development is also advocated for the Johnstown area. One proposal of particular interest is to produce geothermal energy from a mine discharge opposite Point Stadium. Other ideas suggested include small or micro-hydroelectric, and small- to moderate-scaled solar projects.

Another aspect of the effort is advocating for new commercial and residential “green” or LEED developments. LEED is Leadership in Energy and Environmental Development. LEED-certified buildings built or planned including the Johnstown Tech Park, CJL Engineering and Art Works and two houses in Kernville. PEC has suggested the community seek LEED for Neighborhood Development, which integrates the principles of smart locations, neighborhood design, and green infrastructure and building.

The initiative is also supporting environmental restoration through re-use of industrial sites call brownfields and restoration of area streams and river, in which abandoned mine drainage (AMD) is a major impact.

U.S. Green Building Council:

“Research has shown that living in a mixed-use environment within walking distance of shops and services results in increased walking and biking, which can improve cardiovascular and respiratory health and reduce the risk of hypertension and obesity. Neighborhoods with decreased car use can also help combat toxic air pollution which can cause asthma and other respiratory illnesses. Inviting streets, neighborhood shops and restaurants, and great public spaces also foster a sense of community, and invite casual interaction among neighbors.”