

I. INTRODUCTION

The Pine Creek watershed begins in the mountains of Potter and Tioga counties and is characterized by many spring-fed brook trout streams. As it makes its descent toward Lycoming County through the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon, it grows in size and becomes a high quality trout stream, enjoyed by many more than just fishermen.

A few of the activities increasing pressure on the watershed are camping, biking, hiking, trail riding, bird watching, hunting, and an escalation in the number of camps and summer homes. As Americans find more and more leisure time the Pine Creek Valley becomes a Mecca for outdoor enthusiasts of all ages. The increasing popularity of the valley has created many problems which our ancestors never dreamed would occur.

The purpose of this Rivers Conservation Plan is to help protect the very things we find attractive, absorbing and compelling about this area. We feel it is important to understand what this Plan is and what it isn't as well. First and foremost the Plan is a reference and recommendations document. Here, under one cover, you will find much about the watershed; its resources, both natural and human. The land, water, biological, and social aspects of the watershed are cataloged for you. Demographic and economic data can be found. The history of the watershed is covered. And the pages of References alone are good reading. The maps are probably the most eye-catching and information rich; with the advent of GIS (Geographical Information Systems) we are able to "look" at the watershed in new and different ways to organize and present data and information. If you get stuck with an acronym there is a decoder chart on page 110. There are species lists in the appendix for the plants and animals found in the watershed. Contact lists, results from the interview surveys and public meetings document the time and effort we spent in seeking your input, criticisms and dreams. The Management Options located further back in the text will provide some ideas for implementation projects for a wide range of organizations, watershed associations, businesses and governments – municipal, county and state. We include the agencies at the state level because they have provided an overwhelming amount of support for this project: financial, advisory, and as sources of data and information. It is our hope that present and future citizens and public officials will use this plan's information and recommendations to help conserve what so many of us hold dear in the watershed.

The Steering Committee also felt it was important to use this Introduction to dispel several myths about what the plan means; and one way to do that is to outline what the plan isn't. The plan isn't regulatory. The plan does not carry any power to or from government agencies. The plan is not a prescription for what to do in the watershed - it merely points out areas that we felt were worthy of attention - not only the Steering Committee's, but the citizens' of the watershed. And we must be inclusive in this concept of citizen of the watershed. There are those who call the watershed home, from the gateway communities of Jersey Shore, Galeton and Wellsboro, to the interior folk and the wildlife. Then there are many who come here for the absolute quiet, others for the scenery and landscape, others just to soak in the solitude. In addition, the plan was not

meant to stifle our creativity or responsibility for recognizing and acting on some of the most pressing issues in our history. And lastly, the plan cannot restrict our rights as citizens of the Commonwealth to improve our quality of life and the pursuit of happiness.

The history and culture of the Pine Creek Valley is unique in the history of Pennsylvania. The region is rich in natural resources, and the people that settled here were of many diverse ethnic groups. The Swedes came here to log, the Irish came here to build railroads, the Polish came here to mine coal, and the English and Germans to farm. The past was characterized by resource extraction, from the huge white pine that provided lumber to build the nation to the coal that fueled the industrial revolution. The devastation from this extractive economy still lingers in the loss of topsoil and the acid/abandoned mine drainage that pollutes the watershed's streams. Luckily, the double whammy of uncontrolled development has not occurred, due in part to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's farsighted policy of purchasing large tracts of forest land in the early 1900s. Those acquisitions and the "gift of geography" (the mountains that made the region relatively inaccessible) kept development to a minimum. All this is changing fast. The area's proximity to major population centers, coupled with construction of Interstate 99 which will pass through the southern and eastern extremities of the watershed, is bringing increased pressure on the watershed.

The Pine Creek Watershed Rivers Conservation Plan is the first step in trying to find and identify problems that do, or could in the future, have a negative impact on the watershed. Having a dedicated group of individuals work on this project was truly humbling. One Steering Committee member said, *"Because I was born and raised in the Valley, I truly am in love with Pine Creek. For other parts of Pennsylvania I have admiration, respect and affection, but for Pine Creek it is love and it is hard to analyze love when you are in it. However, I will do my best to seek solutions to whatever problems we find. In all our deliberations we must put the resource first."*

The biodiversity of the watershed is one of incomparable wealth. The watershed has many unique landscapes and natural areas that are home to many species of plants and animals. Here is where northern and southern flora and fauna mix and intermingle. The number of plants and animals in the watershed is unparalleled in Pennsylvania's natural history. Here are raven, bald eagle, river otter, and bobcat. We have many Exceptional Value and Cold Water streams that provide habitat for the only native salmonid, Pennsylvania's state fish, the brook trout, as well as other species of fish. Our forests grow some of the most outstanding hardwoods on the continent. Babe Ruth came here in the off season to purchase white ash for his baseball bats. And, the white pine which once provided masts and spars for ships are starting to come back strong. There are areas of the watershed that have been designated old growth and we may see climax forests in the Pine Creek Valley once again.

People come here now to relieve the stress of their daily lives and immerse themselves in the natural wildness that the area provides. The quality of life in the watershed is superb. Native Americans came here to hunt, and European settlers found this a noble pastime as well. The region was home to writers influenced by the natural beauty and wilderness.

George Washington Sears, pen name Nessmuk, the first “go light” wilderness traveler and poet, wrote from his home in Wellsboro and used the lightest canoe ever built - at less than 10 pounds - the Sary Gamp. E.N. Woodcock lived, hunted and trapped in the headwaters of Pine Creek on the West Branch and wrote 50 Years a Hunter and Trapper. Phillip Tomb, who settled in the southern portion of the watershed, reportedly captured the last elk in the Pine Creek Valley, brought it home alive, and lived to tell about it in Thirty Years a Hunter. “The Ballad of Elmer Jones”, a poem about a mythical hunter who roamed the mountains, speaks to the notion of local traditions and right livelihood. A quote from Nessmuk’s Woodcraft and Camping must have been conjured in the watershed in the mid-eighteen hundreds:

*For brick and mortar breed filth & crime,
With a pulse of evil that throbs and beats.
And men are withered before their prime,
By the curse paved in with lanes and streets.
And lungs are poisoned and shoulders bowed,
In the smoldering reek of mill and mine.
And death stalks in on the struggling crowd,
But he shuns the shadow of oak and pine.*

-- Nessmuk, *Forest Runes*

Standing on the edge of a Grand Canyon overlook, with the warm sun on your face, the smell of drying pine needles in your nostrils, and the only perceptible sounds being that of spring wind blowing in the gorge, the roar of a rain swollen Pine Creek on its dash towards the Chesapeake Bay, and the plaintive calls of a pair of circling acrobatic ravens makes one feel fortunate to still be able to experience an area such as Pine Creek and “Canyon Country.” It must be recognized, however, that such a beautiful region cannot continue to be immune to population pressure and development. If we are to preserve the opportunities for ourselves and future generations to enjoy such moments and experiences we must act now to develop and implement a plan for the region; a plan that recognizes the inevitability of growth and change but will direct and regulate such growth and change so as to minimize their impact on the more sensitive and vulnerable areas of our region.

All life and natural resources are both precious and limited. It is our charge to act responsibly and be good stewards of our environment. We have the obligation to our generation and future generations to plan ahead in a responsible manner. “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” We all cherish the quality of life that the watershed offers; we all appreciate the unhurried atmosphere and pace of rural life; we all are encouraged by this plan to conserve our resources. It is our sincere hope that the Pine Creek Watershed Rivers Conservation Plan and its implementation will ensure that generations to come will be able to cherish, appreciate, conserve and enjoy *Tiadaghton*, (translated from the Algonquin) “*The River of Pines*”.

Members of the Plan Steering Committee