

# Pennsylvania Wilds Conservation Landscape

## Helping revitalize rural PA through sustainable economic development

**VISION:** Leverage the region's tremendous natural and cultural assets to grow a sustainable outdoor recreation economy that helps rural communities diversify their local economies, improve quality of life, inspire stewardship, attract investment, and retain population.

**REGION:** The 13-county Pennsylvania Wilds region is home to the greatest concentration of public lands in the Commonwealth, more than Yellowstone National Park. It has 29 state parks, 8 state forests, 50 state game lands and PA's only National Forest. The region is also home to the largest wild elk herd in the northeast, two National Wild & Scenic Rivers, thousands of miles of land and water trails, and some of the darkest night skies in the country.

### WHAT IS A CONSERVATION LANDSCAPE?

A Conservation Landscape (CL) is a place-based strategy for natural resource stewardship and advocacy in key landscapes across our state where there are strong natural assets and local readiness and support for land conservation, locally-driven planning, and community economic revitalization efforts.



### A TEAM EFFORT

"The collaboration between 13 county governments is a rare and inspiring thing," says Will Hunt, Potter County GIS/Planning Director and member of the PA Wilds Planning Team. "When the county officials signed the PA Wilds Declaration of Principles, they proved that working together and focusing on the greater good of the region is a powerful way of elevating all of our communities. Although there is diverse leadership throughout the region, we all are united in growing the PA Wilds as a premiere outdoor recreation destination."

## OUR GOALS

**Regional Marketing and Branding** – Develop a place-based brand that reflects the region's tremendous public lands, outdoor rec experiences, maker culture, stewardship ethic and rural lifestyle, and operate systems to enable rural businesses and communities to leverage the brand for increased visitation, product development, workforce, stewardship, and more.

**Small Business Development** – Grow rooted local wealth in rural communities by supporting the growth and development of locally-owned enterprises at the heart of the region's outdoor recreation economy through the Wilds Cooperative of PA.

**Regional Planning and Capacity Building** – Engage diverse public and private-sector partners in the CL effort. Build capacity and sustainability by supporting a single nonprofit to house the CL's core programs, services and stakeholder structures for long-term coordination, planning, efficiency and diversified revenue strategies. Engage in regional planning to support CL strategies.

**Recreation Infrastructure** – Inspire, inform and elevate regionally-significant sustainable recreation projects that help connect visitors and residents to the outdoors and move the region's outdoor recreation economy forward.

**Stewardship** – Foster stewardship of the region's tremendous cultural and natural heritage, and rural character and way of life, through collaborative efforts to conserve and restore forests, watersheds, parks, trails and community assets, and inspire in visitors and residents a stewardship ethic and respect of the land through storytelling, education, and modeling best practices.

## PARTNERSHIPS

Hundreds of organizations and businesses participate in the PA Wilds Conservation Landscape.

The PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship is the lead nonprofit for the regional strategy, operating all of the PA Wilds programs and services for communities, and housing critical stakeholder structures, such as the PA Wilds Planning Team, a 50-plus member stakeholder group that was formed in 2006 under a groundbreaking Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement, the largest geographically of its kind in PA, which helps shape and guide the Center's work. The Center works hand-in-hand with DCNR and the Planning Team to coordinate and leverage investment by a wide variety of partners, including three state agencies (DCNR, DCED and the PA Council on the Arts), federal partners, four Economic Development Districts, 13 county governments, hundreds of businesses and business service providers, public lands managers, tourism and heritage professionals, nonprofits, game and fish commissions, county planners and elected officials, conservation organizations and economic developers.



## FAST FACTS

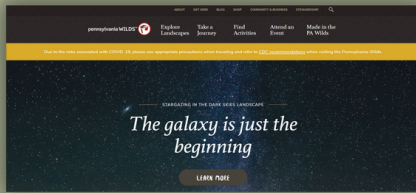
- Counties: Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Clinton, Elk, Forest, Jefferson, Lycoming, McKean, Potter, Tioga, Warren and northern Centre
- One of the state's 11 official tourism regions.
- Region is highly rural; covers a quarter of the Commonwealth but is home to only 4% of the state's population.
- Only one city (Williamsport) with a population over 15,000; home to many other smaller towns and villages.
- Defining geologic characteristic is a High Plateau carved over the centuries by water to form deep valleys and canyons.
- Much of the region's public lands, and many private lands around them, are forested, making the region one of the largest blocks of green between New York City and Chicago and playing a critical role in climate resiliency for the state.
- 16,000 miles of streams and rivers.
- Rich conservation legacy that is woven into brand messaging and experiences.
- Rich lumber heritage and more Civilian Conservation Camps than most states.
- Two Heritage Areas: Lumber Heritage Region and PA Route 6.
- The region is divided into sub-landscapes on pawilds.com that highlight headliner experiences: Dark Skies, Elk Country, Pine Creek Valley, Allegheny National Forest & Surrounds, Cook Forest & the Ancients, and the I-80 Frontier.
- Anchor attractions, such as the Elk Country Visitor Center and Kinzua Bridge Skywalk, help orient visitors to the region and attract hundreds of thousands of visitors annually.
- Has seen double-digit growth in tourism spending over the last decade (2009-2019), supporting many small business startups and expansions, and improving pride of place.
- Tourism is a \$1.85B annual industry (2019 Tourism Economics report).



**PA WILDS CENTER**  
FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP



## IMPLEMENTATION + ACCOMPLISHMENTS



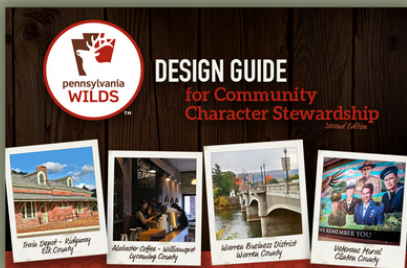
**PAWilds.com** - The region's conservation legacy, outdoor experiences and maker culture are marketed to visitors through pawilds.com and related social media channels. This robust visitor site is supported in part by an annual, recurring grant from Google, reaching hundreds of thousands of unique visitors each year.



**Licensing** - PA Wilds Center has a public-private partnership with DCED to manage the PA Wilds trademark for the public good. This includes operating a licensing program so rural businesses can apply to bring PA Wilds-branded products to market to help them grow and meet visitor demand.



**Conservation Shops** - PA Wilds Center has a public-private partnership with DCNR to operate PA Wilds Conservation Shop gift shops at select state parks. These mission-driven shops focus on selling local products made in the PA Wilds while filling gaps in visitor services, building CL capacity and sustainability, and raising funds for conservation through a charity checkout campaign (100 percent of donations are given to the PA Parks and Forests Foundation for reinvestment in the PA Wilds region). Find the stores, and local makers, online at ShopthePAWilds.com!



**Design Guide** - In 2017, the Planning Team published the Second Edition of the PA Wilds Design Guide for Community Character Stewardship, a voluntary planning document that highlights how rural communities can protect or enhance their unique community character as they grow. Many communities and developers now use the Design Guide, and this foundational document has been used to successfully secure funding for numerous related grant programs for businesses and communities over the years, including signage grants, façade grants, and design assistance grants.



**DCNR-funded rec assets** - Through the CL partnership, and with funding support by DCNR's C2P2 grants and other sources, local communities continue to bring new recreation assets online in the region for the benefit of residents and locals alike.



"Outdoor rec can have this huge multiplier effect, especially for rural areas," says PA Wilds Center CEO Ta Enos. "It is a powerful economic force -- a job and wealth creator like any other industry, but on top of that if done intentionally it can positively impact rural quality of life, resident health and wellness, be a vehicle for engaging youth, help address climate and environmental concerns, build the local tax base, and help major employers in a community attract and retain talent. These are major issues facing rural areas. So by working on outdoor rec, you make progress on all these other pressing challenges that are inextricably intertwined."

## WHAT RESIDENTS SAY

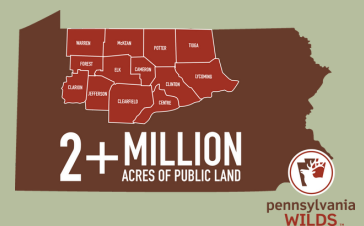
"Our county is thriving with natural resources and beauty. Our biggest challenge, a remote rural area with a low population density, also has the potential to become our biggest strength. In part because of PA Wilds' efforts and being able to sell in the PA Wilds Conservation Shops and Marketplace, we were able to purchase an empty storefront in our hometown and open our second business, the winery."

— Ryan Magaro, Rich Valley Wines and Apiary

## OUR VALUES

*(Excerpted from the PA Wilds Brand Principles)*

"Our core values spring from the soul of our organization. We will adhere and live by these beliefs even if doing so becomes unpopular or costs us commercial opportunity. Our values include: Charm not chain | Stewardship of the land | The joy of exploration and discovery | Cultivating the relationship between people and the environment | Preserving, sharing and creating new stories | Aspiring to excellence in all we do."



## MORE INFORMATION

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