



Susquehanna Riverlands State Park Master Planning Process Frequently Asked Questions

Updated: March 2024

Susquehanna Riverlands State Park in York County was announced as one of three new parks in the Pennsylvania state park system in September 2022.

As the state's largest land manager and provider of public recreation, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) carries out its mission as trustee under the Pennsylvania Environmental Rights Amendment; Article 1, Section 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution:

The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people.

In addition to the protection of natural resources, DCNR strives to provide access to a breadth of outdoor recreational opportunities to all 13 million Pennsylvanians. Pennsylvania's vision is to ensure enjoyable outdoor recreation that is welcoming to all and accessible in every Pennsylvania community.¹

With a total of 124 state parks and more than 2.2 million acres of state forestland across the Commonwealth, DCNR stewards its lands to meet the dual mission of recreation and conservation.

Park Planning Process

A Pennsylvania state park master plan is a comprehensive set of guidelines intended to balance recreational opportunities with the conservation of natural and cultural resources within the park.

The planning process includes the collection of past and present information related to the lands, including:

- Ecological
- Past and present human uses
- Surrounding land uses
- Other factors that could have an impact on decisions made for the new plan

The process involves opportunities for public input including meetings with interested parties, public surveys, and public educational sessions with the chance to provide feedback on plan concepts.

Once completed a master plan includes proposals for visitor amenities, recreation infrastructure, and ecological and cultural resources protection and interpretation. Sustainable improvements to the park are then implemented as funding and resources allow.

DCNR held an informational meeting on a draft master plan for Susquehanna Riverlands on February 29 in order to inform the public about what the environmental and threatened species analyses showed, how those site assessments have been used to inform the master planning efforts, and show the public some conceptual designs for ecological restoration projects and site improvements and amenities that DCNR is considering.

As part of the public participation process, DCNR conducted a public survey about Susquehanna Riverlands between May and October of 2023. There were 1,673 individuals who responded to an online survey which focused on the character, importance, restoration needs, and potential recreational activities of Susquehanna Riverlands State Park. The public survey was accessible through a QR code on posters at physical locations throughout the park and through a link distributed in DCNR's electronic newsletter and website and promoted on the department's social media channels.

Key takeaways from the public survey:

- Respondents strongly recognized the importance of the park's regional trail connections, ecosystem health, and quality of life within the area
- Respondents highlighted the park's vistas and rock outcrops as evocative, defining features and reported interest in the park having a relaxed atmosphere
- The restoration of water quality, forests, and aquatic habitat were considered critically important by more than 80 percent of respondents
- There was strong interest in walking / hiking, boating, and birdwatching
- More than 75 percent of respondents were interested in some type of overnight accommodation at the park

DCNR and design team members met with five different sets of stakeholder groups representing local public land managers, local government agencies, recreational interests, ecological and resource conservation organizations, and cultural and historical groups in Fall of 2023.

Key concepts discussed during these meetings included:

- Environmental responsibility, protection of the natural resources, and DCNR's stewardship of the land in perpetuity
- The importance of creating connections to water, which may take several forms, including views and vistas and access to/from the water
- Thoughtfully locating and appropriately designing trails for multiple types of use
- Providing experiences for people of all abilities
- Building upon regional connections and adjacent and regional open spaces and public parks

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ):

Q: How can I provide feedback to DCNR on Susquehanna Riverlands State Park?

A: Comments, thoughts and suggestions can be submitted by email to SusquehannaRiverlandssp@pa.gov. Emails may not be responded to individually, but your feedback will be gathered, reviewed, and incorporated into the next phase of the master planning process. We thank you for taking the time to provide feedback to DCNR on this important master planning process.

Q: Where is the funding for park amenities and day-to-day operation of the new park coming from?

A: Initial start-up and infrastructure improvement costs for the three new state parks including Susquehanna Riverlands, Big Elk Creek, and Vosburg Neck, were allocated from Oil and Gas Lease Funds in the Commonwealth's 2022/2023 budget. Current staffing to take care of the park and visitors, as well as operating costs, are secured through DCNR's annual budget.

Q: What staff will be working at the park?

A: To address the required natural resource management needs and proposed park amenities of Susquehanna Riverlands State Park, the following staff have been added or assigned. It should be noted that the Park Manager for Susquehanna Riverlands, as well as the seasonal Park Resource Ranger and Environmental Education Specialist, are not new hires, but rather currently in those positions which have been expanded to cover this new park. The other positions listed would all be newly created.

8 Full Time Staff including:

- 1 - Park Manager
- 1 - Administrative Assistant
- 4 - Maintenance Staff
 - 1 - Maintenance Supervisor
 - 3 - Maintenance Repairmen
- 1 - DCNR Ranger
- 1 - Environmental Education Specialist

9 Seasonal Staff including:

- 1 – Clerical Assistant
- 4 – Semi-Skilled Laborers
- 2 - DCNR Rangers
- 1 - Park Resource Ranger
- 1 – Environmental Education Specialist

Note: This staffing could change in accordance with operational needs at the park once a plan for visitor amenities has been established.

Q: What overnight accommodations are being considered at Susquehanna Riverlands?

A: Based on responses to the public survey about Susquehanna Riverlands State Park, there is a strong interest in expanded overnight opportunities in the area. More than 75 percent of respondents

supported some form of camping at Susquehanna Riverlands State Park. In total, 4 percent of respondents voiced opposition to any form of overnight accommodations on the site. Using this data and the expertise of both DCNR and the contracted design team, there are several options for overnight accommodations that have been presented to the public for consideration. These conceptual plans are located in areas that were deemed best suited for this type of recreation in order to pose a minimal disturbance to the natural landscape and minimal viewshed disruptions to the surrounding community.

Q: What are the options for overnight accommodations for Susquehanna Riverlands State Park?

A: Several overnight accommodation options were presented to the public for feedback, keeping in mind that state park campgrounds are designed to accommodate campers with a range of experience, abilities and equipment. There is no 'one size fits all' campground, and DCNR specializes in creating a memorable experience for campers that allows them to camp in quiet, nature-filled spaces. State Park campgrounds typically consist of sites buffered from each other by either vegetation or wooded areas, each consisting of a tent pad, a fire ring and a picnic table. Some sites have electric, though in the case of Susquehanna Riverlands State Park, there would be no full-service sites with water and sewage in addition to electric because the current infrastructure cannot support this. For the conceptual plans at Susquehanna Riverlands, each campground loop is serviced by one or more shower houses.

In Pennsylvania state parks, a standard campsite (with or without electric) allows five people per site. Group sites, known as Great Gathering sites, allow up to 15 people per site.

The Bureau is continuing to garner public feedback while considering site assessments and recreational needs, to determine the quantity, type, and alignments best suited for overnight accommodations at Susquehanna Riverlands State Park.

Q: How are Pennsylvania state park campgrounds managed?

A: Some rules to enhance the park visitor experience include (but are not limited to):

- A permit for a fee is required to stay on a site. Reservations are recommended.
- Campers are required to abide by quiet hours from 9pm – 8am.
- Fires are permitted in campfire rings only and harvesting of firewood in the park is not permitted.
- Use of alcohol and drugs are prohibited.
- Pets are permitted only in designated areas.
- The maximum continuous stay is 14 days.

Q: How does DCNR protect natural and cultural resources when developing a state park?

A: As the master planning process begins, DCNR completes several analyses to better understand both the physical landscape and the plant and animal species that call that landscape home. The information from both analyses is used to determine the types and locations of ecological site improvements that would be beneficial to the landscape and potential amenities that would enhance the visitor experience or safe access to outdoor recreation.

Landscape analysis: DCNR begins the master planning process with an Existing Condition Analysis to better understand the physical landscape of the park. This analysis covers things such as identifying

floodplains, where buffers are needed for waterways, soil and slope assessments and an analysis of intact plant communities. By doing this very early in the master planning process, DCNR is able to identify the locations of natural heritage areas, protected lands, and high-quality streams.

Species of Concern: To protect threatened or endangered species, DCNR begins by using the [Conversation Explorer tool](#), environmental assessments, and information from other botanists and biologists to evaluate the natural resources involved within a potential project area. With this information, DCNR prepares a Conservation Report that brings all of this information together.

Based on what is found in the Conservation Report, DCNR may use the information to begin a larger Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Index (PNDI) Environmental Review. These reviews are used to screen projects for potential impacts to species, identify conservation or avoidance measures, and next steps with jurisdictional agencies. Jurisdictional agencies may include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Endangered Species Act of 1973), DCNR (Wild Resource Conservation Act), the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Code (Chapter 75), and the Pennsylvania Game Commission (Wildlife Code [Title 34 Ch.21 D.](#)).

Q: What will DCNR do with the paw paw trees on property?

A: The paw paw trees are a unique feature to this area and DCNR intends to both protect and promote them. These trees mean a lot to the local community, and they are an important part of not only the ecology of Susquehanna Riverlands, but also an important connection to cultural and historical uses of the land.

Q: What types of recreational activities is DCNR considering at Susquehanna Riverlands?

A: DCNR is considering an array of potential recreational activities at Susquehanna Riverlands. Any recreational activity will be assessed for feasibility based on several factors including, but not limited to, environmental impact, maintenance requirements, and feedback received from the public survey. Some of the recreational activities being evaluated include boating, equestrian, biking, rock climbing, hunting, disc golf and hiking. This list is not exhaustive and will be amended as DCNR determines what may be viable at the site.

It should be noted that a recommended list of recreational activities for Susquehanna Riverlands will not be completed in the timeframe or the scope of the master planning process for the park. This is the standard process – the master plan will identify areas, based on environmental, cultural/historic, and threatened species studies, where an unspecified type of recreational activity may occur with minimal impact to the landscape, and once feasibility studies are completed for each type of recreational activity, the park and DCNR can determine which ultimately fit the site best.

Q: What is the plan for the structural remnants, ruins and other historic structures on site?

A: The goal for the Iron Masters House at Susquehanna Riverlands is to protect the envelope and overall structural integrity of the building. The Iron Masters House is currently owned by DCNR. There will be a maintenance team on-site to begin repairs to the building envelope in mid-February. The associated sites and ruins are being evaluated by DCNR historic and cultural experts to determine the next steps in their identification and conservation. The structural remnant of the forge is currently in need of several repairs as well, and once those are complete, the hope is that the forge will be transferred from the Conservation Society of York to DCNR as well.

Q: Who needs to approve the final improvement plans put forth by DCNR?

A: Governance of local zoning and building permits does not apply to Commonwealth-owned land, therefore DCNR is working with the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry (L&I) on improvement plans for Susquehanna Riverlands State Park. Historically however, DCNR management practices consider the interest of municipal neighbors, and typically try to conform to local requirements and needs such as setbacks, etc., when possible.

Q: What are the next steps in the master planning process at Susquehanna Riverlands?

A: Several conceptual plans were shown to the public, and feedback on each was requested at a public meeting in February 2024. Currently, the design team is working with DCNR to take that feedback and create the final proposed master plan for Susquehanna Riverlands State Park. This process includes determining trail loops and how they interact with roads, the location of the visitor's center, and more. A public meeting to present the final master plan will be scheduled for Summer 2024. Interested parties will find more information about the next Susquehanna Riverlands public meeting on the DCNR website when available, or via email for those who provided their emails at the February public meeting.