

Table of Contents

1.0	Executive Summary	1
2.0	Project Background	2
3.0	Project Objectives	3
3.1	Project Team	3
4.0	Project Steps	4
5.0	Site Inventory	6
5.1	Evaluation Method	7
5.2	Criteria for Recommending a Site for Inclusion	8
5.3	Linking Trail Sites	9
5.4	Landowners/ Land Managers Agreement	10
6.0	Tourism Assessment	10
6.1	Objectives	10
6.2	Work Completed During Assessment	11
6.3	Pennsylvania's Tourism Industry	12
6.4	Pennsylvania's Tourism Marketing	13
6.5	Tourism Infrastructure	15
7.0	Workshops and Focus Group Feedback	17
8.0	Challenges and Issues	18
9.0	Recommendations	21
10.0	Conclusions	31
	References	33
	Appendices	
A	Site Nomination Form	34
B	Site Assessment Form	39
C	Landowner/ Land Manager Agreement	47
D	Organizations Contacted During the Tourism Assessment	51
E	Focus Group and Workshop Feedback	52
F	Commercial Caves in Pennsylvania	59
G	Outfitters Serving Outdoor Recreationists and Nature Tourists	60

1.0 Executive Summary

The Pennsylvania Birding and Wildlife Trails Program, spearheaded by Audubon Pennsylvania, is undertaking the creation of a statewide network of driving trails and locations where wildlife and bird watching can be developed, promoted and marketed. The program starts within the Susquehanna River watershed with the Susquehanna River Birding and Wildlife Trail (SRBWT).

The second phase of this trail project and the focus of this study was the identification and assessment of wildlife viewing sites so that a master map and marketing program could be developed. By April 2003, 246 sites had been nominated by people from all walks of life including government agencies, conservation groups, individuals, and tourism businesses.

Site assessments were conducted during April and May by a team of uniquely qualified professionals. The sites were evaluated for their ability to withstand public use, reliability of wildlife viewing opportunities, scenic qualities, use conflicts, accessibility, public safety and level of visitor amenities.

Feedback from the public was solicited on site nominations in a series of focus groups and tourism workshops. Attendees at these events were supportive of sites that had been nominated but indicated that many other opportunities for wildlife watching existed, and indicating the need to incorporate future additions to the SRBWT.

The large majority of sites were found by the site assessors to be acceptable for inclusion in the SRBWT. Those that were not recommended for inclusion at this time were those where concern existed around negative environmental impacts, dangers to the public, lack of accessibility, or limited visitor appeal.

In conjunction with the site assessment process, a comprehensive tourism assessment was done to determine what tourism infrastructure, marketing and tour guides were in place to provide visitor services for trail users. Pennsylvania has a well developed tourism industry with adequate accommodation, restaurants and transportation services across the state. In limited supply are tourism outfitters who provide guided tours to wildlife watchers or communities who cater to wildlife watchers. As well, the state of Pennsylvania suffers from a lack of destination awareness among wildlife viewers. It will be necessary to establish a higher profile with this type of nature tourist if the Trail is to achieve its full potential.

The SRBWT has the advantage of being supported, conceptually and financially, by several government agencies and tourism visitors bureaus. There are also several other initiatives currently underway in Pennsylvania that target outdoor recreationists and nature tourists, for example, the York Lancaster Heritage Region, the Greenways project, and Route 6 heritage itineraries. These provide opportunities for cooperative marketing but increase the risk that consumers will be confused by the multitude of messages

coming from different organizations. A more structured process for these initiatives to communicate especially in conjunction with the state's tourism officials would be beneficial.

Pennsylvania has a long history of hunting on most public lands in the state. Although there is a slight possibility for conflict with this user group, with proper precautions and natural seasonal segmentation of users, it is expected that SRBWT users will be able to enjoy the Trail's wildlife watching opportunities year round with minimal risk and with little chance of disrupting hunters.

Other challenges identified during Phase II of this project were the need for clear directions and maps to trail sites due to Pennsylvania's high road density and strict signage regulations; a requirement for a strong marketing plan for the SRBWT; and changing the out-of-state tourist's perception of Pennsylvania to make it more desirable to wildlife watchers.

The quality of the wildlife watching experience at SRBWT sites will vary greatly by season, for example, some may hold greatest appeal during the spring warbler migration, others notable for sparrow populations in winter. Providing the visitor with information on the best times to visit along with the existence of visitor services and tourism amenities will be important in creating a high level of user satisfaction with the trail.

The development of trail user information will be addressed in Phase III of the SRBWT as the trail map and website are developed. It is expected that these materials will be available in the fall of 2003. An official launch will be held at this time and will coincide with the high number of bird watchers gathering for one of the state's best known wildlife phenomena, the fall hawk migration. Just as Hawk Mountain has become famous the world over for its bird watching opportunities, it is felt that the Susquehanna River Birding and Wildlife Trail will become a flagship nature attraction for the state for years to come.

2.0 Project Background

Pennsylvania is a state with many attractions and a strong economy. As the second state to enter the union, it has a long history of human settlement. This history, along with an expanding economic base, has meant that Pennsylvania's natural areas are under increased stress from human activities. Urban sprawl may be one of the most pressing threats. Pennsylvania's proximity to major industrial areas has resulted in a significant loss of agricultural lands and open spaces. While the state's population remains relatively stable, changing demographics and patterns of development have rapidly decreased agricultural and natural areas. From 1992 – 1997, Pennsylvania lost 1 million acres of cropland, forest and open space, ranking number two in the country in conversion of total acres of land to development. And when population growth is taken into account, Pennsylvania is consuming more land per person than any other state.¹

The Pennsylvania Birding and Wildlife Trails initiative has been created to help people discover and enjoy the wild areas that are still found across much of the state. It is hoped that people who experience the joys of seeing a Great Egret stalking through a marsh or hearing the cardinal's song as day breaks, will come to love Pennsylvania's natural areas and turn that appreciation into conservation support.

As the second phase of the statewide program, the Susquehanna River Birding and Wildlife Trail (SRBWT) will provide quality wildlife viewing experiences by developing a network of premiere birding and wildlife sites accessed from vehicle routes within the Susquehanna River watershed.

The Trail is designed to help build support constituencies for the sites included in it. The Trail is also designed to bring economic benefit to support businesses along its length by encouraging them to provide value added services to trail users.

The project will identify viewing sites currently, or with development, that have the potential to attract wildlife watchers and tourists on a scale that is compatible with the natural environment and community interests.

Community members have been given the opportunity to participate in the preliminary development of a recreation and tourism resource i.e. the wildlife/birding trail. As part of this process, they have also received exposure to the economic and social potential such an attraction can bring to a region.

3.0 Project Objectives

This phase of the Susquehanna River Birding and Wildlife Trail was undertaken to:

- assess natural sites throughout the Susquehanna River watershed in Pennsylvania to determine their suitability for inclusion in a large scale nature-based tourism endeavor
- to assess and develop community support for a birding and wildlife trail
- to create linkages among sites that will provide a logical layout for the trail design
- to generate information for the future development of a trail map and viewing guides

3.1 Project Team

Phase II of the study was completed by Audubon Pennsylvania assisted by a team of outside experts consisting of Bob Garrison, President of Nature Tourism Planning, Carol Patterson, President of Kalahari Management, Bob Barnes, Outreach Director of California Audubon's Kern Valley Preserve; Kelly Bricker, Assistant Professor of

Tourism Studies, West Virginia University, Tina Harding, Doctoral Student, West Virginia University, and Jeremy Garrett, founder of NaTour Communications.

4.0 Project Steps

The study was based on the following components:

1. The establishment of site evaluation criteria.
2. The solicitation of sites.
3. Site assessments.
4. Tourism infrastructure assessment
5. Training of Audubon Pennsylvania staff in assessment methods.
6. Data compilation.
7. Development of site linkages.
8. Focus groups.
9. Community tourism workshops.
10. Presentation of information gathered.

Please note: the balance of this report is proprietary information owned by Pennsylvania Audubon. Inquiries regarding this report should be directed to Ms. Marci Mowery, Director of Education, Pennsylvania Audubon, 100 Wildwood Way, Harrisburg, PA 17110. Phone (717) 213-6880 ext. 16.



1621 13TH STREET, SUITE B · SACRAMENTO · CALIFORNIA 95814 · tel 916-440-0282 · fax 916-442-3190
WWW.NATURETOURISMPANNING.COM