



**MONTOUR AREA RECREATION COMMISSION  
2020 - 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN**

## NOTE TO READERS

The first draft of the Montour Area Recreation Commission's (MARC) 2020 – 2025 Strategic Plan was created by Bob Stoudt, MARC Director, in November 2019 based upon input received from MARC staff, Board members, volunteers, and partnering organizations.

A draft version of MARC's 2020 – 2025 Strategic Plan was publicly reviewed during MARC's November 25, 2019 regularly scheduled meeting. The draft plan was posted to MARC's website and Facebook page and distributed through hard copies or electronic copies to all known interested parties.

Comments received during the November 25, 2019 through January 23, 2020 timeframe were incorporated into this final draft, prepared for consideration and possible adoption at MARC's regularly scheduled January 27, 2020 meeting.

This document was adopted at MARC's regularly scheduled January 27, 2020 meeting by unanimous vote of MARC's Board.

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## MARC VISION

The Montour Area Recreation Commission will make and promote Montour County, PA as a healthy and desirable place to live, work and play.

## MARC MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Montour Area Recreation Commission shall be to:

1. **(BUILD AND MAINTAIN)** Improve the quality and quantity of outdoor recreational opportunities in and around Montour County, PA
2. **(PARTNER)** Collaborate with volunteers and public and private partners to create, maintain and promote an interconnected network of trails, parks, natural areas and other green spaces
3. **(PROMOTE)** Promote the economic, natural and cultural resources of our community
4. **(FUND)** Create an endowed funding source for the long-term operations of the Montour Area Recreation Commission, the Montour Preserve and the stewardship of Montour County's outdoor recreational resources
5. **(ASSIST)** Serve as a clearinghouse for information, technical and planning assistance related to outdoor recreation in and around Montour County

## MANAGED SITE OBJECTIVES

### HESS RECREATION AREA

#### SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES

- Update trailhead kiosk maps
- Update website
- Update/print brochures
- Prune vegetation along park access road; improve parking capabilities along west shoulder of road
- Repair potholes
- Repair flood-damaged section of Mahoning Flats Trail boardwalk
- Install new permanent parking restriction signage along park access road near restrooms
- Add trail mile marker signage along the Robbins Trail and Old Reading Line Trail
- Repair water fountain at restrooms
- Improve drainage and surfacing of the main parking lot
- Clear culverts along park access road and trails
- Improve drainage along the Robbins Trail
- Remove damaged features and signage in the former bike skills area; move salvaged features to Hopewell Park

#### LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES

- Investigate and implement a permanent fix for the slumped section of the Robbins Trail
- Repair potholes and chip and tar surface the park access road
- Investigate acquisition of the trail corridor from the covered bridge to PA-642
- Improve universal accessibility of the Robbins Trail / Old Reading Line Trail loop and trailheads
- Improve or remove the boardwalk section of the Mahoning Flats Trail, between the wildlife observation blind and the power line
- Add new interpretive / educational signage along trails
- Investigate possible expansion of the skatepark
- In cooperation with the Danville Lady Railers, continue improvements to the softball fields' infrastructure
- Pursue pedestrian / bicycle safety improvements along the Montour Street / Meadow Lane connection between the Robbins Trail and the Old Reading Line Trail to complete the trail loop

## HOPEWELL PARK / DANVILLE BOROUGH FARM

### SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES

- Update trails mapping
- Update trailhead kiosk maps
- Update website
- Update/print brochures
- Prune vegetation along US-11
- Selectively prune vegetation around gazebo and pavilion
- Complete parking lot drainage repairs
- Add gravel / regrade parking area
- Update main park sign
- Repair / regrade bike jumps area
- Repair / regrade pump track
- Repair drainage along the old dump access road
- Support volunteer maintenance of the existing trail system
- Add signage as needed along trail system
- Complete proposed trail connections

### LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES

- Seek a long-term extension of the Memorandum of Understanding with Danville Borough which governs the use of the Danville Borough-owned lands
- Expand parking lot
- Research, design, fund and construct a larger pump track facility, similar to <https://dirtsculpt.com/services-pumptracks>
- Research, design, fund and construct an aerobic exercise / strength / fitness area
- In cooperation with Montour County, Danville Borough and the Danville Area School District, design and construct a trail connection to the Danville Area Primary School / Danville Area High School / Danville Area Community Center campus
- Seek safe pedestrian / bicycle passage across US-11 to the Woodbine Lane corridor

## LEGION ROAD (MONTOUR TOWNSHIP) PARCEL

### **SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES**

- Continue regular mowing and maintenance of the site to allow for North Branch Canal Trail maintenance

### **LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES**

- Continue the good working relationship with Montour Township to allow for continued use of the site

## MONTOUR PRESERVE

### SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES

- Seek watercraft rental / food / fishing equipment / picnic item concessionaires
- Update trailhead and parking lot kiosk maps
- Update website
- Update / print brochures
- Add trail mile marker signage along the Goose Woods Trail and Chilisugi Trail
- Improve drainage and accessibility along the Bluebird Trail
- Continue repairs to flood-damaged culverts
- Repair Heron Cove and Goose Cove picnic area restroom sinks
- Continue removal of dead trees along trails and other areas where they pose a hazard
- Repair the pond / waterfall feature in the visitors' center bird viewing area
- Create new brochures and signage systems for the Goose Woods Trail, Chilisugi Trail and the Wildlife Management Trail
- Rehabilitate the fossil pit information kiosk
- Continue universal accessibility improvements to the fossil pit entrance, Hummingbird Trail and Goose Woods Trail
- Discontinue maintenance of the Alder Swamp Trail and Oak Woods Trail (within the wildlife refuge); refocus efforts on maintenance of access roads to wildlife blinds
- Sealcoat / repaint parking spaces in parking lots
- Install new directional and information signage
- Install new fishing / boating information signage at the boat launch
- Replace picnic area charcoal grills on an as-needed basis
- Replace swings in Goose Cove and Heron Cove picnic areas
- Rehabilitate or remove the visitors' center herb garden
- Rehabilitate or remove the butterfly wall along the Wildlife Management Trail
- Repair / repaint pavilions and restroom in the Goose Cove and Heron Cove picnic areas
- Repair drainage swales in the Goose Cove picnic area
- Rehabilitate picnic area behind visitors' center / environmental education center
- Replace Planet Walk signage along Chilisugi Trail
- In partnership with the Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau, add new amenities to the visitors' center to improve the visitor experience and better promote the Montour / Columbia County region
- In partnership with Geisinger, add new educational resources to the environmental education center and visitors' center to promote wellness and outdoor physical activity



## **LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES**

- Continue universal accessibility improvements to select trails (Goose Woods Trail and Hummingbird Trail) and amenities (visitors' center / environmental education center, fossil pit, sugar shack, fishing access, pavilions)
- Seek funding for a larger, universally accessible boat dock / fishing pier
- Construct improved display / storage cabinets for taxidermy mounts in the environmental education center (probable Eagle Scout or other volunteer project)
- Update educational displays in the visitors' center
- Add new MARC programming and seek additional partners for environmental stewardship and health / wellness educational programming
- Create a secure canoe / kayak storage area for seasonal rental
- Continue to seek the long-term, permanent protection of the site as a publicly-accessible outdoor recreation area

## **NORTH BRANCH CANAL TRAIL**

### **SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES**

- Re-improve and open middle section of trail near the Montour / Columbia County line
- Repair flood-damaged areas in Montour Township, Columbia County
- Reinstall flood-damaged mile marker posts in Montour Township, Columbia County
- Coordinate one or more volunteer work days in the January – April timeframe to mitigate trail hazards and remove trash
- Conduct additional volunteer work days as needed throughout the year
- Install trailhead kiosk at Columbia County end of trail
- Design and install new signage at both trailheads

### **LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES**

- Install interpretive / educational signage
- In partnership with Columbia County, the Columbia County Conservation District, and the Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy, explore options to add new amenities in the Rishel Grove conservation easement
- Install additional benches and picnic tables (probable Eagle Scout or other volunteer project)
- Seek funding to engineer and construct a pedestrian / bicycle connection to Danville Borough along the River Drive / Market Street corridor
- Seek support to fund, engineer and construct trail connections to Catawissa and Bloomsburg in Columbia County

## **NORTH BRANCH CANAL TRAIL TRAILHEAD / RIVER ACCESS PARCEL**

### **SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES**

- Prune / remove dead trees throughout property
- Prune / rehabilitate garden area around main sign
- Prune boat launch area

### **LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES**

- Expand / improve parking if deemed necessary to accommodate demand

## **SPECIAL PROJECT / EVENT OBJECTIVES**

### **DANVILLE / MONTOUR COUNTY PEDESTRIAN / BICYCLE SAFETY**

#### **SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES**

- Continue working to implement recommendations set forth in the 2012 report *Danville Riverfront - A Plan for Creating an Active and Connected Community*, available online at <https://montourrec.com/riverfront-plan/>. The plan proposes to interconnect the greater Danville area with safe walking and biking routes. The plan identifies the route for a riverfront trail system linking the F.Q. Hartman Recreation Area with the Danville Soccer Park and the North Branch Canal Trail. The plan also addresses how to connect the growing Danville Primary School / Danville Area High School / Danville Area Community Center campus with Danville's downtown and residential neighborhoods, as well as connections to the Danville Middle School and the Hess Recreation Area.
- Coordinate with the Danville Business Alliance, Danville Borough, Geisinger and other partners to identify and improve the safest and most logical pedestrian / bicycle connection between Danville's Mill Street commercial district and the Geisinger campus and Geisinger Stewardship Forest
- Assist the Danville Business Alliance with other pedestrian / bicycle safety projects under consideration
- Continue working with SEDA-COG and other regional entities to identify pedestrian / bicycle safety concerns throughout Montour County and seek opportunities to make improvements when possible

#### **LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES**

- Act upon pedestrian / bicycle safety opportunities as they develop and as funding allows
- Continue to advocate for pedestrian / bicycle safety throughout Montour County

### **DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION**

- Establish communication and trust with diverse audiences and promote the active engagement of diverse populations
- Ensure that the park and outdoor recreation opportunities under MARC's management are available to all members of our community, regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, age, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, sexual orientation, or religion

## EDUCATION

- Provide educational opportunities to our community in the fields of natural history, ecology, environmental stewardship, outdoor recreation, health and wellness, and related fields
- Provide such programming through MARC's staff or through the cooperation of partnering organizations and community volunteers
- Strive to make such programming available at little to no cost to program attendees

## EMPLOYER / EMPLOYEE / RESIDENT RECRUITMENT

- In partnership with local employers, municipal leaders, the Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau, Columbia Montour Chamber of Commerce, DRIVE, the Danville Business Alliance, Danville Area School District, and other partners, develop and promote new marketing tools which highlight Montour County's outdoor recreational resources

## GEISINGER STEWARDSHIP FOREST ADJACENT PARCEL

### **SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES**

- Continue working with new landowners to allow limited public access to the site
- Develop an agreement for trail construction and maintenance on the property
- Work with volunteers to design proposed new trails
- Secure permitting, funding and volunteers as needed to construct new trails
- Explore funding options for the possible eventual purchase of the property when it is resold
- Seek conversations with Geisinger regarding the potential for integration with the adjacent Geisinger Stewardship Forest to further promote outdoor physical activity and wellness, as well as employee recruitment
- Continue working with partner agencies (PA DCNR, Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, local foundations, etc.) to explore options for site protection and / or acquisition

### **LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES**

- secure funding for site acquisition
- seek site access from the Sunnybrook Park / Columbia Hill Road area
- develop a larger trail network and add amenities to promote outdoor physical activity, tourism, and interpretation of cultural, historical, and natural history

## HEALTH / WELLNESS PROJECTS

- Partner with the Danville Area School District, Danville Health Alliance, Geisinger, Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau, and other entities to provide or facilitate educational opportunities, programming, and special events to promote physical activity, obesity reduction, drug avoidance, unstructured outdoor child play, mental health, social interaction, healthy eating, and other activities designed to encourage health and wellness
- In partnership with Geisinger and other partners, investigate and, when viable, implement programs such as ReadySetFit, Pediatricians Prescribe Play, ParkRx, 10-Minute Walk, and others to help promote health and wellness for children and adults
- Support the Washingtonville Revitalization Committee's community garden project in Washingtonville's DeLong Park
- Facilitate other community garden projects throughout our community
- Prioritize opportunities which serve the dual purpose of promoting tourism in and around Montour County and promoting health and wellness

## IMBA RIDE CENTER

### **SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES**

- Research and, if appropriate, apply for the International Mountain Bicycling Association's (IMBA) Local program (<https://www.imba.com/node/1856>)
- In partnership with the Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau and other possible partners, research the viability of applying for the IMBA Ride Center program (<https://www.imba.com/ride/where-to-ride/ride-centers/apply>)
- Form an initial working group to visit and research existing ride center communities
- Begin working toward resolving any deficiencies identified as part of the IMBA Ride Center application process
- Continue to work with local mountain bikers and supporters to identify opportunities for improvement to existing trail networks and amenities
- Work with local mountain bikers and other partners to identify and prioritize possible new locations for trail easements, lease, or acquisition

### **LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES**

- Prioritize the creation of facilities or amenities needed to achieve IMBA Ride Center status
- Continue working with local mountain bikers to provide stewardship of and guidance for improvements to local trail networks

## MAINTENANCE PRIORITIZATION AND PLANNING

### SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES

- Prioritize anticipated upcoming major maintenance projects for planning and budgeting

### LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES

- Annually set aside budget funding into a dedicated line item for planned and unexpected major maintenance projects
- Require dedicated budgeting for expected maintenance of any proposed new construction

## MARC ENDOWED FUND AND PASS-THROUGH FUNDS

### SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES

- Through local media outlets and MARC's email and social media accounts, promote MARC's newly-created endowed fund and Washingtonville Revitalization Fund at the Central Susquehanna Community Foundation
- Seek conversations with potential major donors
- Seek new individuals willing to serve on MARC's Development Advisory Committee
- Strategize with Washingtonville Borough officials and members of the Washingtonville Revitalization Committee to prioritize fundraising needs and goals
- Recommend the use of MARC's pass-through funds for donors wishing to support specific short-term projects

### LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES

- Strive toward a fund balance of not less than \$1.5 million in MARC's endowed fund to help sustain MARC's ongoing operations
- Consult with Washingtonville Borough officials and members of the Washingtonville Revitalization Committee regarding desired fundraising goals

## MONTOUR VISION

- Reinststitute the semi-annual ‘Montour Vision’ meetings, originally conceived as part of the DCNR Circuit Rider grant program
- Invite attendees to include local municipal leaders, non-profit organizations, interested businesses, and others working on projects of mutual interest in Montour County
- Strive to ensure that as many entities as possible are aware of proposed and ongoing projects in the county and facilitate coordination and cooperation
- Explore opportunities to align these meetings with the existing meetings of the Columbia Montour Chamber of Commerce’s Montour County Taskforce

## NEW SITE ACQUISITIONS

### **SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES**

- Develop a formalized evaluation criteria to prioritize sites for possible acquisition
- In coordination with park and trail user groups, elected officials, and regional organizations, identify and prioritize properties desired for lease, easement, or acquisition for outdoor recreation and natural resource protection
- Begin planning for fundraising

### **LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES**

- When appropriate and when such efforts do not adversely affect MARC’s ability to adequately fund and maintain existing operations, implement fundraising and lease or acquisition efforts
- Secure new locations (through lease agreements, acquisition or other) for outdoor recreational opportunities

## **NORTH BRANCH SUSQUEHANNA RIVER ACCESS AND USE**

### **SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES**

- Maintain and continue to improve existing river access locations, including the Riverside Borough river access, Montgomery Park (Danville Borough) river access, and the North Branch Canal Trail trailhead parking area / river access
- Create and distribute better mapping of river access locations in and around Montour County
- In partnership with the Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau, promote the river's recreational potential
- Assist with the planned 2020 river sojourn event
- Provide logistical and planning support as needed to other river-related special events as might be needed
- Continue to administer and advocate for the River Town program in Danville Borough, in partnership with the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership

### **LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES**

- Continue to seek new opportunities to connect the residents of Danville Borough and Riverside Borough, as well as the surrounding municipalities, with the recreational and fitness opportunities of the river
- Direct or facilitate programs and special events that make use of the river

## **RACES**

### **SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES**

- Continue to conduct the Humdinger Trail Races at the Hopewell Park / Danville Borough Farm
- Bring back the Montour 24 endurance race, relocating to the Montour Preserve
- Bring back the Chilli Challenge at the Montour Preserve
- Seek community partners to co-promote races with other regional special events, further promoting the overall tourism potential
- Assist the Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau and other community partners on an as-needed basis with planning and logistical support for other non-MARC races

### **LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES**

- Bring back or create new races that will serve to attract visitors to Montour County and promote health and wellness, so long as those races can be made profitable or revenue neutral
- Prioritize races at MARC-managed sites to increase site awareness and use, reduce race costs, and minimize required permitting



## TOURISM PROMOTION

### **SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES**

- In partnership with the Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau, complete and distribute new online mapping of all parks, trails and outdoor recreational venues in Montour and Columbia Counties
- In partnership with the Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau, complete and distribute new brochures and related print materials for all parks, trails and outdoor recreational venues in Montour and Columbia Counties
- Create and install new maps and informational signage at all MARC-managed sites and trailhead kiosks to promote the outdoor recreation offerings throughout Montour and Columbia Counties
- Provide logistical, technical, and staff support to the Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau whenever possible to facilitate outdoor recreation related projects

### **LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES**

- Explore and implement tourism and wellness promotion and tracking special projects, such as QR code signage along trails and at select facilities, smartphone apps, etc.
- Prioritize projects which serve the dual purpose of promoting both tourism and health and wellness

## UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY

Universally accessible facilities are designed to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation. They provide equal opportunity not only for persons with disabilities, but a variety of situations, such as a parent pushing a stroller, a person using crutches, or a person with arthritic knees.

### **SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES**

- Continue improvements to the universal accessibility of the Robbins Trail and Old Reading Line Trail and related features at the Hess Recreation Area
- Continue improvements to the universal accessibility of the Goose Woods Trail, Hummingbird Trail, and fossil pit at the Montour Preserve

### **LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES**

- Work toward a fully universally accessible trail loop at the Hess Recreation Area, including the Robbins Trail, Old Reading Line Trail, and portions of Meadow Lane and Montour Street
- Continue to improve the universal accessibility of all MARC-managed facilities whenever renovations or major repairs are required

## WASHINGTONVILLE REVITALIZATION PROJECTS

### SHORT-TERM (2020) OBJECTIVES

- Chillisquaque Creek access points project
  - Secure creek access easements in at least two locations (one in Washingtonville Borough and one downstream)
  - Facilitate / participate in stream litter cleanup and hazard mitigation projects
  - Design, permit and construct hand-carry access points
  - Design and install signage at access points and parking locations
  - Design and install private property signage at locations as requested
- DeLong Park improvements
  - Design, fund and install new park amenities, including swing sets and other features, as determined by Washingtonville Borough
- Bicycling routes mapping
  - Research, map and publish recommended bicycling routes in the Washingtonville / northern Montour County region
- Historical points of interest mapping
  - In conjunction with Washingtonville Borough's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, research, map and publish mapping of historical points of interest in the Washingtonville / northern Montour County region

### LONGER-TERM (2021 – 2025) OBJECTIVES

- Chillisquaque Creek access points project
  - Secure additional creek access easements and install access points and associated signage downstream of Washingtonville Borough
- DeLong Park improvements
  - Design, fund and install additional new park amenities as determined by Washingtonville Borough
- Washingtonville Revitalization
  - Assist Washingtonville Borough with additional revitalization projects in publicly-accessible sites as deemed appropriate