

Monroe County Open Space Plan

*An Action Guide to Preserving
and Enhancing Monroe County's
Green Infrastructure*

FINAL PLAN - ADOPTED JUNE, 2001

Prepared for:
Monroe County Open Space Advisory Board
and Monroe County Commissioners

Prepared by:
BLOSS Associates

With:
The Natural Lands Trust, Toole Recreation Planning,
Strauss & Associates, and Pennsylvania Chapter of the
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

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Jeff Evans, Chairman	Arthur Zulick
Don Miller	Herbert Wile
Darcy Gannon	Pauline Fox
Roger Starr	Thomas O'Keefe
Leigh Kane	Bob Hillman
Barbara Samet	Harvey Johnson
Daryl Eppley	

Monroe County Commissioners – Mario Scavello, Donna M. Asure, James E. Cadue

Monroe County Planning Commission – John Woodling, Director, and Dave Albright, Open Space Coordinator

Monroe County Conservation District – Craig Todd, Director

Monroe County Recreation & Park Commission – Kara Derry, Director

Citizens of Monroe County

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BLOSS Associates:

Gary David Bloss, R.L.A., Project Director

Toole Recreation Planning:

Ann Toole, CLA

Natural Lands Trust:

Ann Hutchinson, AICP

Andy Pitz, R.L.A.

Strauss & Associates:

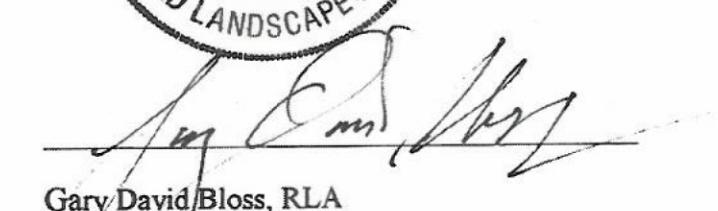
Andy Strauss, AICP

Pennsylvania Chapter of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy:

Tom Sexton

All Photography by: BLOSS Associates




Gary David Bloss, RLA

Pennsylvania Registration No. 1387-E

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Preface

Where we are coming from and where we are going

The adoption of the Monroe 2020 Plan (the County's Comprehensive Plan) in 1999 and the passage of the open space bond referendum in the spring of 1998 were two major milestones that helped establish the framework for protecting, conserving, and enhancing Monroe County's open space. These were the first steps toward realizing and implementing the County's new comprehensive land use policies.

Importance of the Plan

The subsequent formation of the County's Open Space Advisory Board (OSAB) was a follow-up action of the adoption of the Monroe 2020 Plan and the successful passage of an Open Space Bond Issue. The Plan designated a group of Monroe County citizens from a broad range of backgrounds and interests with the task of steering the County's approach toward open space planning.

The OSAB quickly realized the need for a countywide open space plan that would help them steer the initiatives that they were about to oversee and help set priorities for the expenditure of open space funds.

In addition, this plan would need to precede the development of forthcoming open space plans at the municipal level. The plan should identify countywide open space resources and set priorities. It would also provide a departure point to help guide the development of the forthcoming municipal plans in a fashion that would recognize important regional and countywide interests.

The *Monroe County Open Space Plan* meets these needs, and provides a plan of action for the County. It focuses on the regional identification and prioritization of open space using professional expertise and public input. It also identifies and prioritizes the most important and threatened open space areas from a countywide perspective using existing data sets and provides methods to dynamically update these areas at both countywide and municipal levels.

The Planning Process

A four-tier approach to the plan provided the framework for the plan's goals and objectives as discussed in Chapter 1. These four tiers include:

- Identifying the most important and threatened open space areas from a countywide perspective and establishing conservation priorities;

- Demonstrating the application of the “Growing Greener” approach to land planning through putting conservation into local plans and ordinances;
- Providing a needs assessment for County and/or regional parks and recreation and the development of standards and recommendations for managing parks, recreation, and open space in Monroe County; and
- Advancing the greenway and trail system as put forth in the Monroe *Greenway Project Feasibility Study* as a model or demonstration greenway for the County.

Plan Document

The plan is guided by the four-tier approach and is organized in the following manner:

Executive Summary provides a concise summary of the plan’s findings and the actions required to implement the plan.

Chapter 1 – Background and Introduction provides an overview of the Monroe 2020 planning process and clarifies the goals and objectives for the open space plan.

Chapter 2 – Needs Assessment evaluates the park, recreation, and open space needs from a countywide perspective.

Chapter 3 – Heritage Resources identifies important open space areas related to natural and cultural resources and provides a methodology for the ongoing identification and evaluation of these resources.

Chapter 4 – Growing Greener sets the stage for putting conservation into local codes and ordinances, highlights the importance of mapping potential conservation lands, and promotes the use of a community audit process for establishing a work plan for change and for implementing conservation design.

Chapter 5 – Open Space, Parks and Recreation provides information on the County’s present open spaces, parks, and modes of recreation, and introduces recommendations for furthering these attributes.

Chapter 6 – Parks and Recreation Partnership provides a framework for the provision of parks, open space, and recreation throughout the County.

Chapter 7 – Greenways identifies features influencing greenways (linear open space) and also identifies potential corridors that can connect the County’s green infrastructure.

Chapter 8 – Open Space Acquisition defines policies and a procedure for Monroe County’s open space program and provides strategic and technical considerations for land assemblage for the County’s demonstration greenway.

Chapter 9 – Action Plan provides a synopsis of the County Open Space Plan and outlines actions required to accomplish it.

APPENDICES – Provide supplemental information.

Appendix A – Executive Summary - Greenway Feasibility Project Study

Appendix B – Natural Areas Inventory Table 1 Update

Appendix C – Natural Treasures Registry Form

Appendix D – Natural Area Criterion Tables

Appendix E – Sample Tables & Hierarchy Diagram for Smart Conservation

Appendix F – Consensus Weighted Overlay Table

Appendix G – Ocean County Sample Application Form

Appendix H – Sample Factor Maps

Appendix I – List of Interviewees

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Executive Summary

This Open Space Plan for Monroe County outlines a vision of a county that is “*Forever Green*”—a county with parks and open space linked by a green infrastructure.

The plan is the natural outgrowth of the adoption of the County Comprehensive Plan (“Monroe 2020”) in 1999 and the passage of the open space bond referendum in the spring of 1998. These two key events set the framework for protecting and enhancing Monroe County’s open space. Following these two events was the formation of the County’s Open Space Advisory Board. This board realized the necessity of a countywide open space plan to guide land use, set priorities for open space funds, and provide municipalities with a consistent countywide vision to aid them in local open space planning.

Twenty years from now, residents of Monroe County and visitors will have access to an abundance of diverse natural areas. Recreation opportunities will be available throughout the County and will be natural resource based. Vital to this vision is a green infrastructure, or “greenways,” that are close to every household and link the vast array of open spaces and parks throughout the County while preserving and interpreting our unique cultural heritage.

What is Open Space and Why is it Important?

Open space is land or water that is predominantly undeveloped and permanently reserved for public or private enjoyment. This can be agricultural lands, stream valleys, ridge tops, lakes, woodlands, meadows, parks and more.

Open space serves many purposes. It provides recreation areas for a wide range of activities such as baseball, skiing, picnicking, soccer, contemplation, wildlife observation, hiking, and biking.

Open space conserves biodiversity and natural resources. Natural areas provide habitat for plants and animals and help purify our air and recharge water by removing pollutants that originate in developed areas.

Open space preserves historic landscapes. Open space preserves scenic quality and community character. Open space preserves agricultural lands.



View of Delaware Water Gap from Big Pocono.

Property values, though dependent on a variety of factors, do generally rise when located close to clean water, attractive landscapes, recreational areas, and parks.

Businesses, especially in the rapidly growing high-tech and service industries, are attracted to areas that provide a high quality of life. This generally means convenient access to natural settings and recreational and cultural opportunities.

With the increasing popularity of recreational pursuits, whether natural or cultural, open space areas benefit travel and tourism businesses.

Open space also contributes to public cost reduction. By conserving open space and discouraging sprawl development, local agencies can reduce the cost of public services such as sewers, trash collection, water, and roads.

Critical Decisions

It is well known that Monroe County is at a critical juncture. Monroe 2020 and this subsequent Open Space Plan are testament to this realization. The County's population has almost doubled in the last twenty years and is expected to increase by 60% in the next twenty. Citizens have felt the impact of increased population through increased taxes and decreased natural and cultural assets. The very things that make Monroe County an attractive place to live are disappearing. These concerns have prompted efforts to ensure that the County retains its remaining attractiveness while accommodating inevitable growth.

Identifying What We Have

Monroe County is fortunate to have many unique natural and cultural resources. Preserving them, however, is a major challenge. Already some special places have been lost or severely altered, and if action is not taken soon, others may too succumb to the pressures of development. It is obvious to most that these local treasures should be protected. But before this can happen, they need to be identified and evaluated in a way that helps the County and its municipalities to plan for their preservation.



Boardwalk through the Cranberry Bog in Tannersville.

Once identified, these areas will be further evaluated and added to an existing natural areas information database for use in county and municipal planning efforts.

Making objective, consistent decisions on the allocation of resources for land protection is

always a challenge. The inventories and processes, or "tools" described in this plan will give Monroe County



a solid starting point for making the critical decisions that will guide its future. Also, these tools are directly transferable to the municipalities to assist in their open space planning efforts.

How We Can Do It

There is no particular future that is preordained for Monroe County. To a greater extent than many people believe, the future is a matter of choice. A wide range of alternative futures exists, none of which includes "staying the same."

In regions experiencing population growth, such as Monroe County, change is inevitable. The real choice facing Monroe County communities is whether to try to actively shape those internal and external forces which bring change, or to passively accept unplanned, haphazard development patterns and try to cope with the results in the best way possible.

One of the goals of this plan is to give municipalities direction on how to establish local conservation and development goals and how to adopt the land use regulations to meet these goals.

Parks and Recreation

While the primary purpose of the Open Space Plan is to acquire land, it is important to look ahead at how the land, once acquired, will be

used. Part of this vision is the creation of more county and local parks.

Although Monroe County is fortunate to have a national recreation area, three state parks, a state forest, and conservation lands, they do not meet all the needs of local residents. In fact, there is only one county park in Monroe County, and few local parks.

School facilities also have the potential to serve as public parks. Through cooperative efforts, the school districts, the County, and municipalities could cooperate on making the most of school facilities for public service. With school construction and expansion underway, jointly pursuing land acquisition and design of facilities would be an efficient use of tax dollars.



Brodhead Creek, east of Stroudsburg.

With the opportunity to create more parks and recreation opportunities in Monroe County comes the added responsibility of management and operation. Although the Monroe County Recreation and Park Commission has existed for more than 25 years, a new era of responsibility is dawning. In those first 25 years, the emphasis was on programs and services. Now, with the Open Space Plan and the *Growing Greener* program, Monroe County is on the cusp of a parks and recreation explosion, which will focus on partnerships, especially with municipalities and schools.

Linking the Land: Greenways

Standing alone, parks and natural areas are great. But when connected they are even better. One of the missions of this Open Space Plan is to create a framework for developing a connected green infrastructure. Simply put, this means that open spaces will be linked together much like different places are linked by roads. The way to do this is through greenways. Greenways are connecting corridors that help preserve and maintain both the fabric of our natural resource base and the fabric of our communities. They ensure that both human and wildlife interactions can be pursued without the imposition of a scale of development that is more oriented to the automobile.

Acquiring Land

All planning and good ideas will be in vain if the County is unable to acquire land. It is crucial that as Monroe County moves to acquire open space, either by direct county purchase or through municipal or nonprofit partners, it develops several pre-qualified land acquisition or project categories. These categories should include active use recreational lands; passive use recreational lands; critical biological habitat and water quality protection; greenways, trails, and public access points; agricultural preservation; and historic preservation.

These categories permit the County to classify a project according to its intended use. In addition, the categories will allow the County to organize disparate or overlapping project information while minimizing the risk of compartmentalizing or merging individual projects, especially those encompassing large, multiple-use parcels such as greenways.

An overall target for the Monroe County Open Space Plan is to acquire or preserve 4,000 acres of land by 2020 through outright purchase or through use of non-acquisition techniques such as easements or ordinance amendments. This target relates to standards developed for County parkland and preserves, which translates to 20

acres per 1,000 residents based on a projected population of 200,000 by 2020.

So What's the Plan?

The goals of the Open Space Plan have their origins in the Monroe 2020 Comprehensive Plan. According to the plan, it is important for Monroe County to *“create an open space system with a network of interrelated preserved lands and trails protected through various actions. Land suitable for public access will be acquired through various acquisition strategies. Other lands will be protected through land use controls or other nonacquisition techniques. These nonacquisition controls will be established through a partnership between the County, municipalities, and landowners.”*

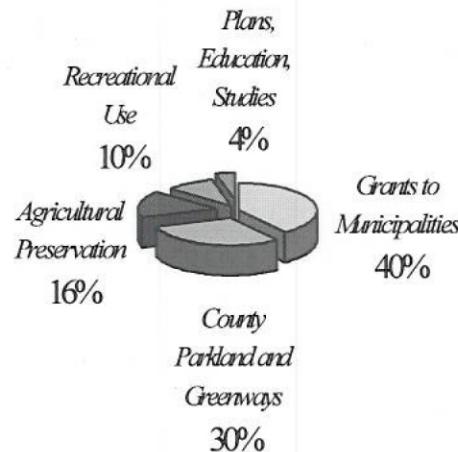
Using this as a foundation, four goals were established for the Open Space Plan:

- 1. Create an open space system by acquiring priority lands with significant natural and cultural resources from a countywide perspective.**
- 2. Utilize the “*Growing Greener*” approach as a nonacquisition technique to help build the open space system by putting conservation into local plans and ordinances.**
- 3. Create a greenway system as a network of interrelated preserved lands and trails with public access where appropriate. Use the Monroe County *Greenway Project Feasibility Study* as a demonstration and model greenway initiative for the County.**
- 4. Acquire the necessary land to create a countywide system of parks and recreation areas.**

With the vision established by the Open Space Advisory Board (OSAB) and these goals, a four-part plan can guide Monroe County's efforts to permanently preserve open space.

County Funding

The allocation of the \$25 million bond issue to protect open space in Monroe County is guided by this plan. Funds are distributed as follows:



While 25 million dollars is a substantial amount of money, it alone will not achieve the vision of this plan.

To make the best use of the 25 million dollar bond issue, it must be leveraged with other funding sources.

Organization and Operation

Monroe County's organization requires a holistic, coordinated approach to implementing this Open Space Plan. Designating responsibilities and providing adequate resources is crucial to moving forward. High priority should be given to organizing the divisions of county government, enhancing partnerships with the municipalities, and collaborating with the private and non-profit sectors.

Three units of Monroe County government would be primarily responsible for the development of the County Open Space System: the Monroe County Planning Commission, the Monroe County Recreation and Park Commission, and the Monroe County

Conservation District. In addition to the Open Space Advisory Board's role, an expanded focus should be established for the Agricultural Land Preservation Board working with the Planning Commission. Also, a network of partnerships related to open space protection needs to be established. The role of the Open Space Advisory Board will be to help guide and monitor this plan on an ongoing basis.

The County should consider partnerships with locally based conservation organizations such as the *Pocono Heritage Lands Trust* to advocate protection of priority natural areas, for outreach and education efforts, and as a landholder.

County and Municipal Planning

This plan recognizes that all of Monroe County's municipalities will be preparing open space plans on a regional basis. Together, these plans and this Open Space Plan will provide for an integrated open space system for the County. Areas where the County and municipalities can cooperate are examined and appropriate roles are recommended.

Marketing and Outreach

Establishing public understanding and awareness of the Open Space Plan is an important part of developing an open space system. Broad support for future efforts needs to be rooted in current planning efforts and the

open space bond issue. Promoting successes will help to garner the support of the citizens for future efforts. Marketing and education are two ways to build this support.

Where Do We Go From Here?

This plan puts forth a vision of a county that, by the year 2020, has maintained and enhanced a park-like setting connected by green infrastructure. Recreation opportunities are distributed throughout the County and are natural resource based. Trails connecting parks and open space are close to every household and help preserve and interpret the County's unique cultural heritage.

While the four-part approach outlined in the plan provides specific recommendations for achieving the vision, ultimately it will require strong commitments and partnerships between all involved parties.

As a component of Monroe 2020, the Open Space Plan provides a way to coordinate open space preservation techniques to meet the County's goals while working with partners.

Chapter 9 of this plan, entitled "Action Plan," provides detailed recommendations for achieving the vision of the Open Space Plan.

View of Cherry Valley

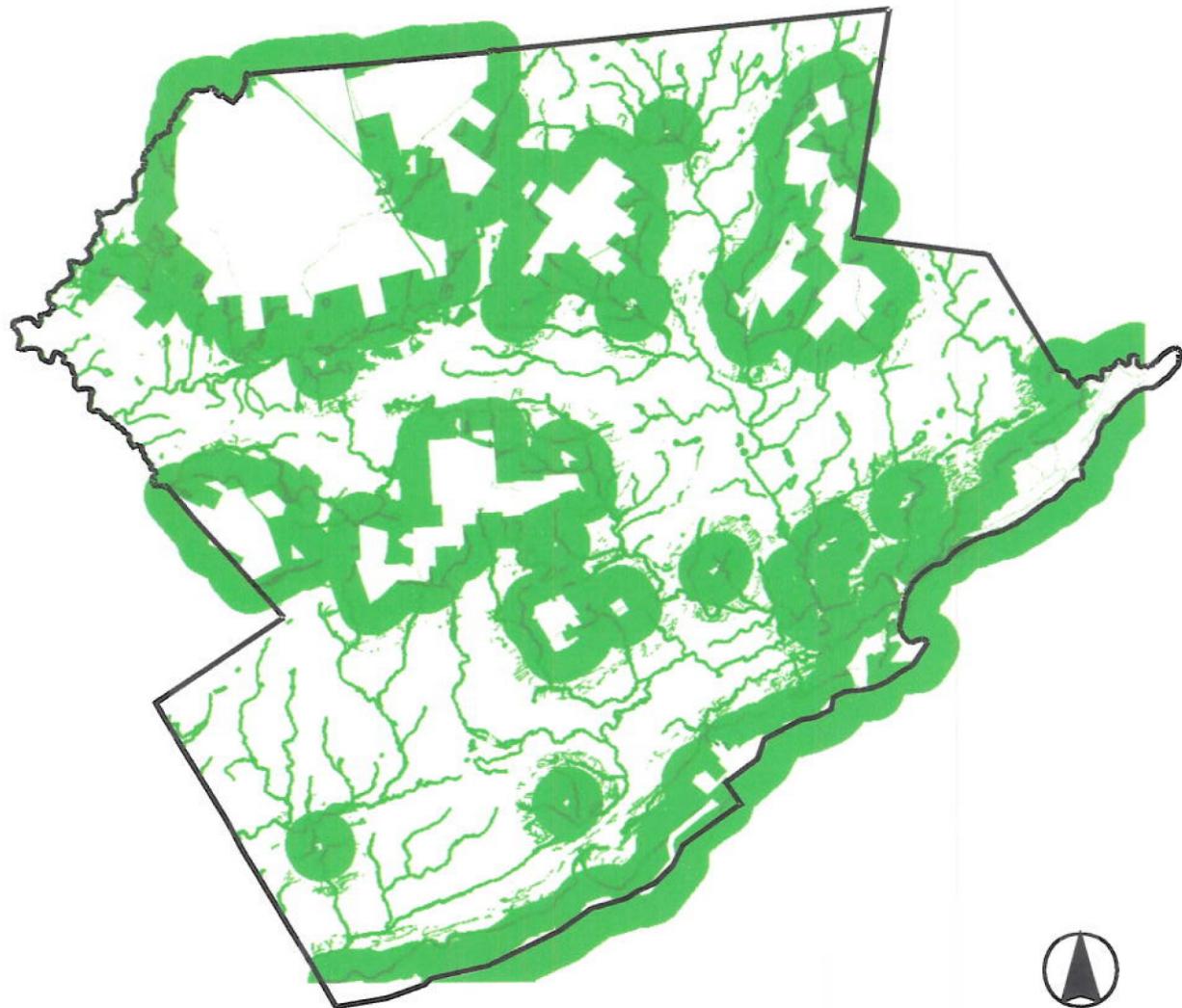


Monroe County Open Space Plan

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County Open Space Plan

Monroe County, Pennsylvania



Sample result from cartographic model as presented in the flow chart of Figure 3.6.

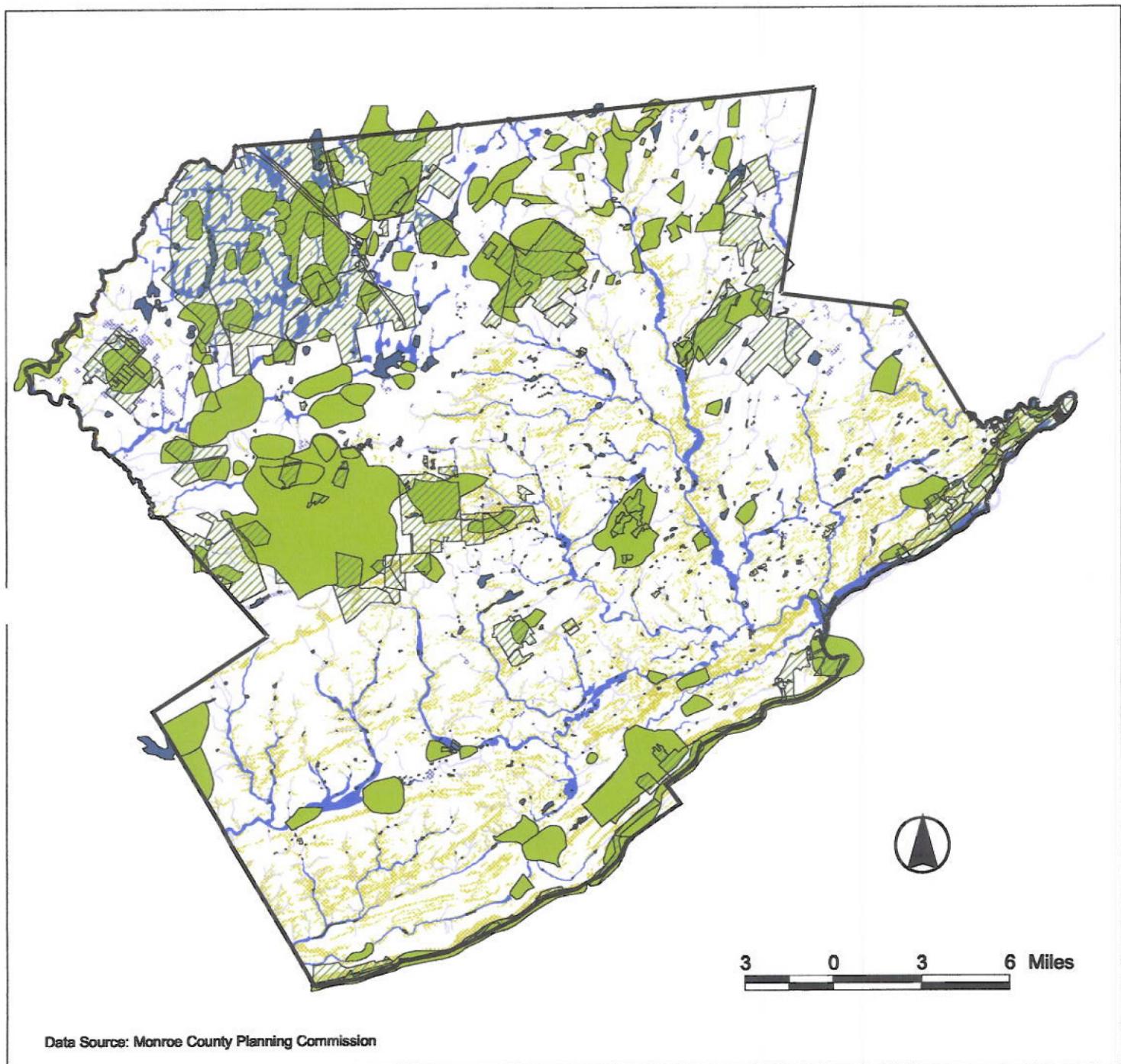
Darkest green areas are most important.

Important Natural Areas

Figure 3.7

County Open Space Plan

Monroe County, Pennsylvania



Map Legend

	Floodplain		Water Bodies		Protected Lands
	Stream Corridor		Natural Areas Inventory Site		
	Wetlands (swampes)		Steep Slopes		

Potential Conservation Lands
Figure 4.2