Water Trails 101

PENNSYLVANIA WATER TRAILS

There are currently 29 official water trails in the State of Pennsylvania, each with a local managing organization (Trail Sponsor) to oversee the water trail. The Pennsylvania Environmental Council is the primary manager of the PA Water Trail Program, which is funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and the National Parks Service serve as partners.

Water trails are educational and recreational corridors between specific locations along navigable waterways, and along the trail there can be access points, boat launches, day use sites and overnight use sites. Some of the main components of a water trail include wayfinding signage and mile markers along the corridor, physical and web-based maps of the waterway, and designated access points and boat launches. The Trail Sponsor will work to maintain and create new amenities for water trail users as well as provide free information and educational material to the public about the water trail and watershed, conservation, and water safety. Overall, the main purpose for developing the Water Trail is for increasing stewardship and recreation.



WATER TRAIL BENEFITS

- Recreational: The biggest benefit of a water trail is providing easy access for those who use the waterway for recreation: kayaking, canoeing, fishing, and more. They can utilize the corridor maps, access points and launches, and signage to plan for a fun and successful (multi-) day trip out on the water.
- Safety: An official water trail provides safety to the recreationists as well as the local property owners. Signage, mile markers, and maps allow for waterway recreationists to plan for their day on the water accordingly and use designated access points for their own ease and safety. Water trail hazards, such as dams, are also listed on official maps and on signage to prepare and warn users. Water Trail users can access resources to plan how long their paddling trip will take between mile markers and use the infrastructure amenities along the way, meaning less trespassing onto private property along the waterway.
- Communities: Getting a water trail designated in PA provides the Trail Sponsors with access to additional funds for maintaining the water trails. Local communities can also benefit from enhanced restoration and conservation work to protect the natural resources in additionusers frequenting local eateries and community businesses while recreating.
- Education: An official water trail provides an educational opportunity to teach the public about watershed and environmental conservation and stewardship. Personal watersport, boating, and paddling safety education is another important educational component provided for water trail users.

BRANDYWINE CONSERVANCY

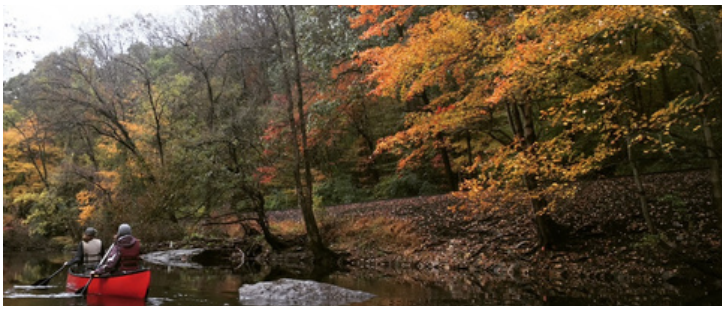
CASE STUDIES

Perkiomen Creek Water Trail

- The Perkiomen Creek Water Trail was Pennsylvania's 29th State-Certified Water Trail in 2022, and it is maintained by the Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy. This trail consists of 18 miles, starting just south of the Green Lane Reservoir and to its confluence with the Schuylkill River, near Oaks. The 20-mile, multi-use Perkiomen Trail parallels the creek for additional recreational opportunities. The Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy has created and updates a Perkiomen Creek Water Trail Map for recreational users and works with municipal partners on installing new boat launches along the water trail.

Schuylkill River Water Trail

- The trail sponsor for the Schuylkill River Water Trail, another PA designated water trail, is Schuylkill River Greenways. The official 137 mile water trail starts in Schuylkill County and ends in Philadelphia at its confluence with the Delaware River, which is part of the Tidal Delaware Water Trail. In 2025, Schuylkill River Greenways conducted an Access Project Priorities Plan to identify boat landings and docks that need to be developed, repaired, or upgraded in order to continue connecting people to the Schuylkill River.



For more information, scan the QR code to find additional resources related to recreation and transportation infrastructure.



RESOURCES

The GIS-based PA Water Trail Map shows all of the water trails and allows for additional filtering depending on the users needs. Water trail hazards, access points, USGS gauges, geographical information, and more is provided on this interactive map. Further information for each water trail can be found on their managing entities website, which is linked on the map.

Use the QR Code to find the PA Water Trail Map.

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