
OUTDOOR RECREATION AND TOURISM

Overview

Eco-tourism can be described as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people. It can have the benefit of improving an area's economy while protecting local resources. The Buffalo Creek watershed is one of only two high quality watersheds in Washington County. The existence of extensive public lands and its recent designation as an Important Bird Area suggests the potential for eco-tourism to have a more prominent role in the local economy.

Outdoor recreation opportunities currently available in the watershed include hunting, hiking, fishing, birding, biking, horseback riding, and general nature viewing (Figure 4-1). However, currently, the potential for many of these activities is largely untapped. Few local businesses are taking advantage of the influx of visitors from outside the watershed.

Recreational Opportunities

Hunting

Public hunting opportunities exist both on State Game Lands 232 in Pennsylvania (approximately 4,000 acres) and Castleman Run Wildlife Management Area in West Virginia (486 acres). West Virginia or Pennsylvania state hunting regulations apply. Due to the watershed's variety of habitats, including riparian wetlands, hardwood forests, fields, and brush areas, these hunting areas are abundant with game animals, including deer, wild turkey, pheasant, and duck. The Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) has helped maintain wild game populations on State Game Lands 232 by planting crops such as corn, sweet corn, sorghum, buckwheat, rye, sunflower, millet, wild rice, and oats. Recently, the creation of four wetlands by the PGC has created additional habitat for ducks and non-game species. PGC plans to create two additional wetlands in the near future.

Popular events on State Game Lands 232 include youth turkey, duck, squirrel, and pheasant hunts. These events are held prior to the corresponding regular seasons. The PGC can be contacted for more information.

Fishing

Public fishing opportunities are available on Buffalo Creek, Dutch Fork Creek, Castleman Lake, and formerly on Dutch Fork Lake. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PF&B) maintains trout-stocked sections on Dutch Fork Creek from the previous outlet of the dam to the mouth. PF&B also maintains a Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only section above the former reservoir to Claysville and a trout-stocked section below it. The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources maintains a three-mile trout-stocked section from the Pennsylvania border into West Virginia.

Fishing opportunities are available by permission of many landowners on private lands and throughout State Game Lands 232 and Castleman Run Wildlife Management Area. At one time, Dutch Fork Lake Reservoir was stocked for a variety of species, including trout, and was enormously popular. However, due to safety issues, the reservoir was recently drained and it is unclear when it will be repaired.



A young fisherman at Dutch Fork Reservoir

Before the dam broke, WPC employees visited Dutch Fork Lake Reservoir three times to ask fishermen and fisherwomen about the value of the resource and improvements that could be made to the fishing area. These visits were done in the spring, summer, and winter. A total of 11 groups of people were interviewed, for a total of 30 individuals. It was found that the majority of people fishing in Dutch Fork Lake were not residents of the watershed (Table 4-1). It was not uncommon to find someone who fished in Dutch Fork Lake over 20 times a year (Table 4-2).

When asked about improvements that could be made in the fishing area, responses were consistently similar. Suggestions included improving the littering problem by installing garbage cans or having a group “adopt” the area; improving the road leading to the far side of the lake; and installing portable toilets on both sides of the lake. There were also several suggestions for additional places to purchase bait and tackle. The suggestion of a camping facility nearby was presented. It was also recommended that a small building or pavilion could be erected where non-profit groups could sell bait and food regularly. These are some recommendations that could be considered if a new dam is ever installed. In addition, WPC staff noted that the former Dutch Fork Lake area is in close proximity to Route 70. The recreation area is protected by noise and pollution from several forested tracts of land. Were this forest area to be removed, the appeal of the area would likely decrease.

Table 4-1. Residency of Visitors to Dutch Fork Lake During Recent Surveys

Town of Residency	Number of parties	Total Individuals
West Alexander, PA	2	6
Avella, PA	2	4
Washington, PA	4	11
Burgettstown, PA	1	2
Bentleyville, PA	1	5
Bethany, WV	1	2

Figure 4-2. Frequency of Visits to Dutch Fork Lake by Interviewees

Frequency	Number of Groups
unknown	2
1-2	2
first time	2
>5	1
20-50	2
>50	2

Birding

Interest in nature walking and hiking is gaining popularity in the watershed. Much of this began with the designation of the Buffalo Creek valley as an Important Bird Area (IBA) in 2004, after which the area was adopted by the Three Rivers Birding Club. Much of the IBA is part of State Game Lands 232, and portions on private lands may be visited with the permission of landowners. Popular locations for birding include Green Cove Wetland, Buck Run Wetland, Polecat Hollow area, Colby-Young Road, Narigan Run area, and others. The birding club holds regular outings in the watershed and often draws local residents and members of other nature organizations, such as Westmoreland Bird and Nature Club. A popular event is the Buffalo Creek Winter Bird Count, which was first held on January 3, 2004. The 2005 Bird Count event was held on December 26. Over 20 participants attended each of the counts. For more information about how to get involved in Three Rivers Birding Club outings in the watershed, contact member Larry Helgerman (feedback@3riversbirdingclub.org).

A stop at Green Cove Wetland is popular for short visits. For a longer visit (at least two hours), an option is to take a hike along Buffalo Camp Road, beginning at the Sawhill Covered Bridge (if it can be crossed). Visitors can follow this road, which is currently closed to traffic, taking a detour uphill to Polecat Hollow or traveling it all the way to Buck Run wetland (several miles). It is wise for visitors to keep in mind that most of these areas are part of State Game Lands 232 and to take needed precautions or to avoid visiting during hunting seasons.

Hiking

No marked hiking trails exist in the watershed. However, there are several opportunities for hiking along relatively unused State Game Lands roads. Buffalo Camp Road is an old, approximately two-mile long road extending from the Sawhill Covered Bridge along Route 221 west to the mouth of Buck Run. Along this route, there are several old roads diverting to natural areas, such as Polecat Hollow and the location of a former Boy Scout Camp. In addition, there are several unmarked trails surrounding the former location of Dutch Fork Creek Reservoir in the southern portion of the watershed, which is owned by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. These trails travel through a variety of habitats, including an old pine plantation and hardwoods stands.

A Rails to Trails project proposed along the former Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (National Pike Trail) at the southern end of the watershed has been put on hold until further landowner permissions can be obtained. It is planned that this trail will be open for public recreation and will extend across the southern portion of the watershed, connecting eventually to Washington, D. C.

Biking

The longest "Bicycle PA" route travels through the Buffalo Creek watershed and extends 435 miles to the eastern boundary of Pennsylvania. Route "S" includes special Rails to Trails biking routes as well as areas where there are no specially designed lanes for bicyclists. Currently, a special bicycle lane does not exist throughout the portion including Buffalo Creek watershed, but in the future this route could include a portion of the National Pike Trail (once it is complete). Bicyclists are common in the watershed, often diverting from the "S" route to the area surrounding State Game Lands 232.

Horseback Riding

Horseback riding is popular within the Buffalo Creek watershed. Washington County has one of the highest concentrations of horse farms in Pennsylvania. However, there are currently no public trails available for horseback riding in the watershed. Such a trail would likely be well utilized. There is the potential to allow horseback riding on a section of the National Pike Trail, should it be completed. Many other Rails to Trails areas within Pennsylvania designate a portion for horseback riding.



Bluebells, a vibrant spring flower that can be observed along Buffalo Camp Road in the spring

General Nature Viewing

In addition to bird watching, residents and visitors can view a variety of spring wildflowers, search for salamanders in the watershed's many headwater streams, view an abundance of dragonflies and butterflies, and much more. Places to visit for these activities are similar to those frequented by birders. Butterflies and dragonflies can most often be viewed in the PGC's newly created wetland area. Salamanders and other stream critters can be explored in Buffalo Creek and Buck Run, as well as Polecat Hollow and Narigan Run nature areas within the State Game Lands.

Farmstays/Agricultural Tourism

Within Europe, "farmstays" or agricultural tourism, is a booming industry bringing thousands of dollars or more to local economies. Though this idea is just now catching on the United States, in the future vacations may increasingly be made to rural countrysides, with the opportunity for tourists to appreciate farm life first-hand. The Pennsylvania Farm Vacation Association

maintains a list of farmstay opportunities in Pennsylvania and one of these pioneer farms, Weatherbury Farm, is in Avella, PA—right next to the Buffalo Creek watershed. Visitors to these farms often take advantage of horseback riding, picking vegetables, and other farm activities, as well as hiking, fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing opportunities in the area. Within the Buffalo Creek Watershed, visitors could also take advantage of local festivals such as the Buffalo Creek Watershed Festival and annual Claysville Peach Festival, and visit the many historic sites within the watershed.

Cultural/Historic Opportunities

Because the area's natural resources and ecology is closely linked to its history, an opportunity exists to promote the historic and cultural sites and heritage along with eco-tourism activities. For instance, historic markers can be placed along trails, bike routes, and at natural areas. Likewise, importance of the natural resources can be considered at events and areas that promote history. Better placement of interpretative maps and signs can aid in linking the two. The History Section found earlier in this plan highlights some important events and sites. Washington County's Tourism and Promotion Bureau may be able to promote certain events or sites through its marketing activities or provide other assistance.

Future Needs and Considerations

The lack of public services can be viewed as both positive and negative. Most visitors assert that the lack of chain stores and fast food restaurants is why they like to visit the area. However, visitors are discouraged by the fact that there are no easily accessible public restroom facilities, hotels, grocery stores, or restaurants in the watershed. This results in people spending their money outside of the watershed, and the area receives no economic boost from additional eco-tourism. Though most people would like to see the area retain its rural character, additional businesses that would be compatible with this goal could benefit local communities.

Because of the limited infrastructure, most people are unable to find their way to desired locations without assistance. If BCWA or other local organizations and communities wish to continue efforts to bring eco-tourism to the watershed, these groups may want to consider creating a map and guide to the watershed, with information about places to visit and facilities and businesses that do exist. It may be useful to place a kiosk with information about the watershed at the S-Bridge area or another appropriate location. A formal bird checklist might also be appropriate and could be made using information from

this plan. It would also be prudent to consider the creation of some kind of bathroom facilities on State Game Lands 232, near the S-Bridge parking lot, or in some other location.

Small businesses could potentially improve the economies of local towns in the watershed. These may include bed and breakfasts and small grocery stores or restaurants, which could cater to both visitors and residents. However, it is ultimately up to local communities to make decisions about their futures.

Recommendations

- Obtain a grant or other funding to install public bathroom facilities in the Buffalo Creek watershed.
- Publish a handout on recreational opportunities in the watershed and/or a bird checklist. A kiosk with a map and information about the watershed could be located near the S-Bridge or in another appropriate location.
- Encourage small businesses if they reflect a community's vision for the watershed.
- If Dutch Fork Lake is re-created, support the installation of garbage cans or other garbage cleanup measures and encourage the Fish and Boat Commission to repair the road to the far access and maintain portable toilet facilities on both sides of the lake.
- If Dutch Fork Lake is re-created, encourage the development of small businesses such as bait shops and low-impact campgrounds near the recreation area.
- Utilize the Washington County Tourism Promotion Agency to help promote eco-tourism activities taking place in the Buffalo Creek Watershed.