

# Protecting Significant Views Along The Circuit:

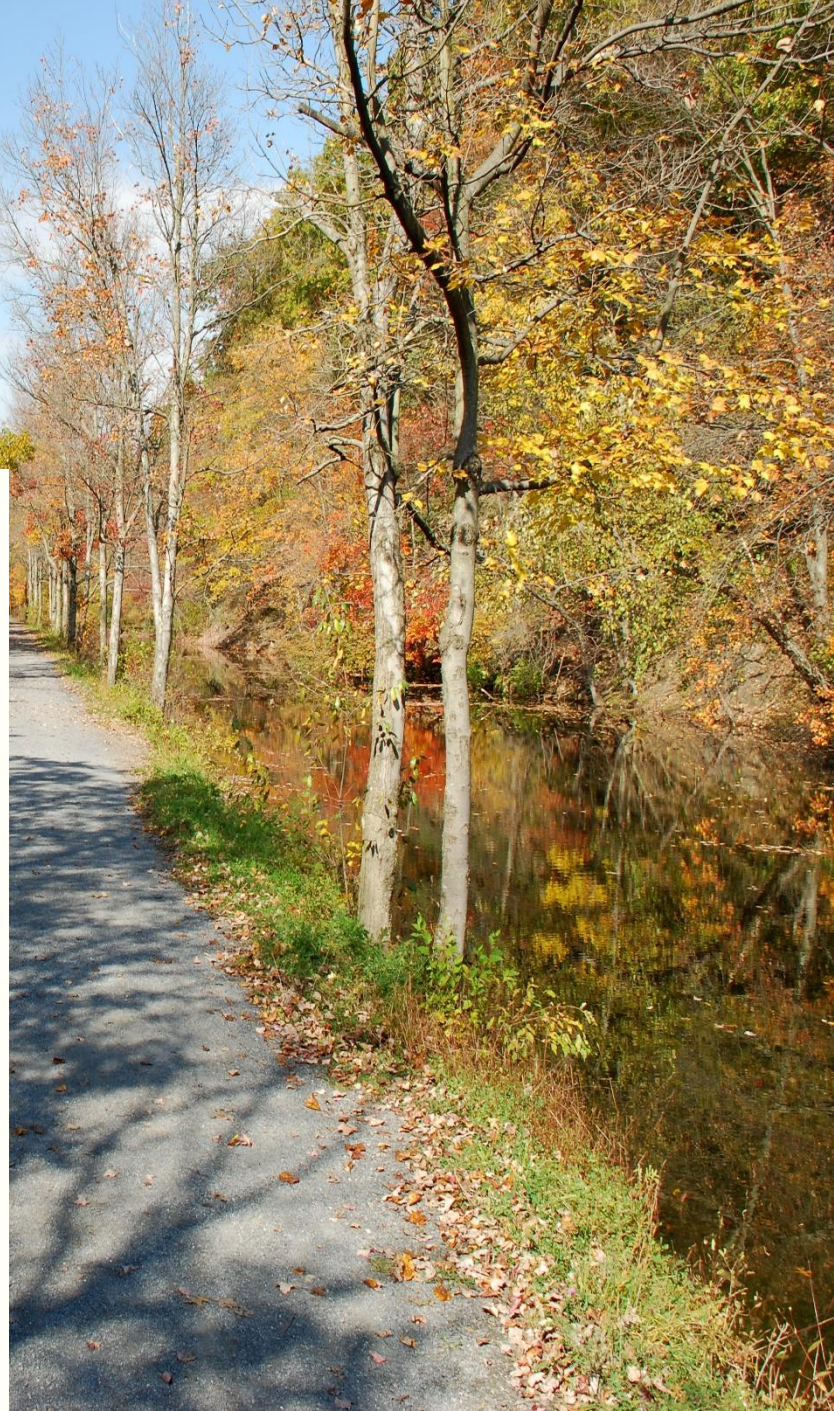
A Visual Assessment of Land  
Conservation Priorities for  
Viewsheds Along The Circuit Trails

## Executive Summary

Prepared by:

**APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN CLUB**

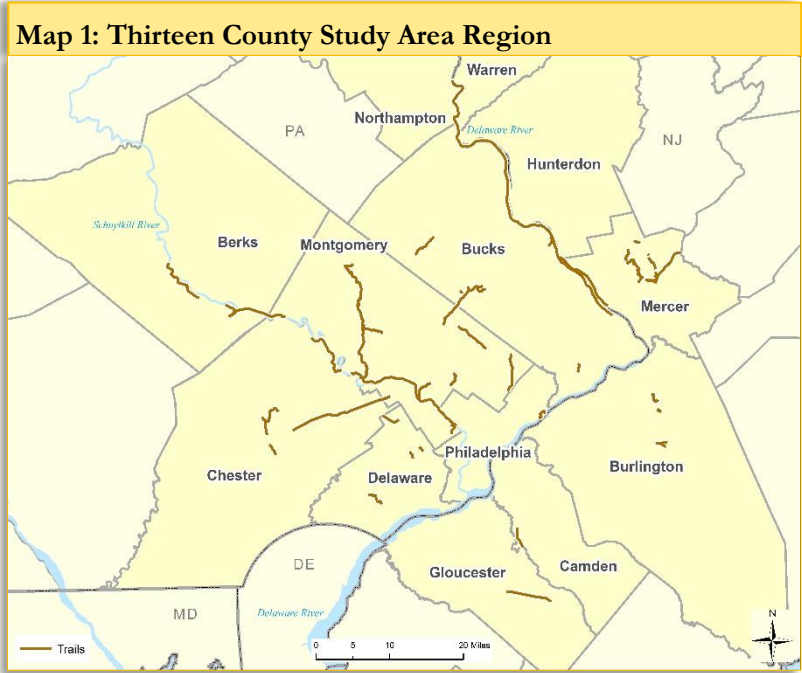
Catherine Poppenwimer  
Patricia McCloskey, AICP  
David Publicover



# Protecting the Value of Trail Views

Open space and trails provide measurable economic, environmental and health benefits to the individuals and communities in which they are found. Views from trails add to this value and increase enjoyment of trails. Open space conservation within trail viewsheds is necessary to protect trail views from development. The main objective of **Protecting Views Along the Circuit** is to identify parcels with significant trail views so that they may be protected for future generations to enjoy.

Protecting Views Along the Circuit studied 30 trails that are part of The Circuit in the federally designated nine-county region of DVRPC, and a small section of southern Berks County. The study viewsheds also reached into portions of Warren and Hunterdon Counties in NJ and Northampton County in PA. Trails were selected in suburban and rural areas with open space that may be vulnerable to land development. Trail stakeholders were engaged in the study to provide input on methodology and individual trail information, including key observation point (KOP) locations. Parcel level data was analyzed using Geographic Information Systems to determine trail viewshed areas and identified parcels were ranked based on visual and scenic resources, KOPs, size and adjacency to existing protected open space.



## Results

The Visual Assessment Study analyzed 226 total miles of trail, over 17,000 acres of viewshed, and 90,000 acres of unprotected parcels in the thirteen county study region. Table 1 provides information about high-scoring parcels which represents the top 5% ranked parcels within the viewsheds of the 30 Circuit Trails studied:

- **Montgomery County**, with 64.6 miles of trails, has the highest number and acreage of high-scoring, unprotected viewshed parcels.
- **Chester County**, with 29 miles of trail, has second highest acreage of high-scoring, unprotected viewshed parcels.

	County	Parcels	Acres	Trail Length
1	Berks	20	871	15.8
2	Bucks	66	667	53.4
3	Chester	48	1,313	29.0
4	Montgomery	139	1,841	64.6
5	Delaware	12	134	6.9
6	Burlington	4	944	5.5
7	Camden	5	24	2.8
8	Gloucester	1	6	6.3
9	Hunterdon	5	250	0.1
10	Mercer	10	937	28.8
11	Northampton	4	165	7.6
12	Philadelphia	54	50	5.1
13	Warren [1]	9	133	NA

[1] Trail viewshed extended into Warren County.

- **Burlington County**, with 5.5 miles of trail, has the third highest acreage of high scoring, unprotected parcels.

Table 2 reveals the top 10 trails studied in terms of acres of highly-ranked, unprotected parcels.

- **Schuylkill River Trail** has the highest acres of high-scoring, unprotected viewshed parcels
- **Lawrence Hopewell Trail** has the second highest acres of high-scoring, unprotected viewshed parcels
- **D&L Trail** has the third highest acres of high-scoring, unprotected viewshed parcels

Trail	Acres	Parcels	Trail Length
Schuylkil River Trail	2,605	143	43.5
Lawrence Hopewell Trail	835	7	12.9
D&L Trail	706	42	47.0
Chester Valley Trail	564	23	14.7
Route 202 Parkway Trail	426	32	8.5
Perkiomen Trail	224	18	20.3
Solebury Route 202 Trail	115	10	1.3
Power Line Trail	108	9	5.0
East Branch Perkiomen Trail	32	4	3.7
Cynwyd Heritage Trail	24	41	1.8

Trail viewsheds in more suburban areas typically have a greater number

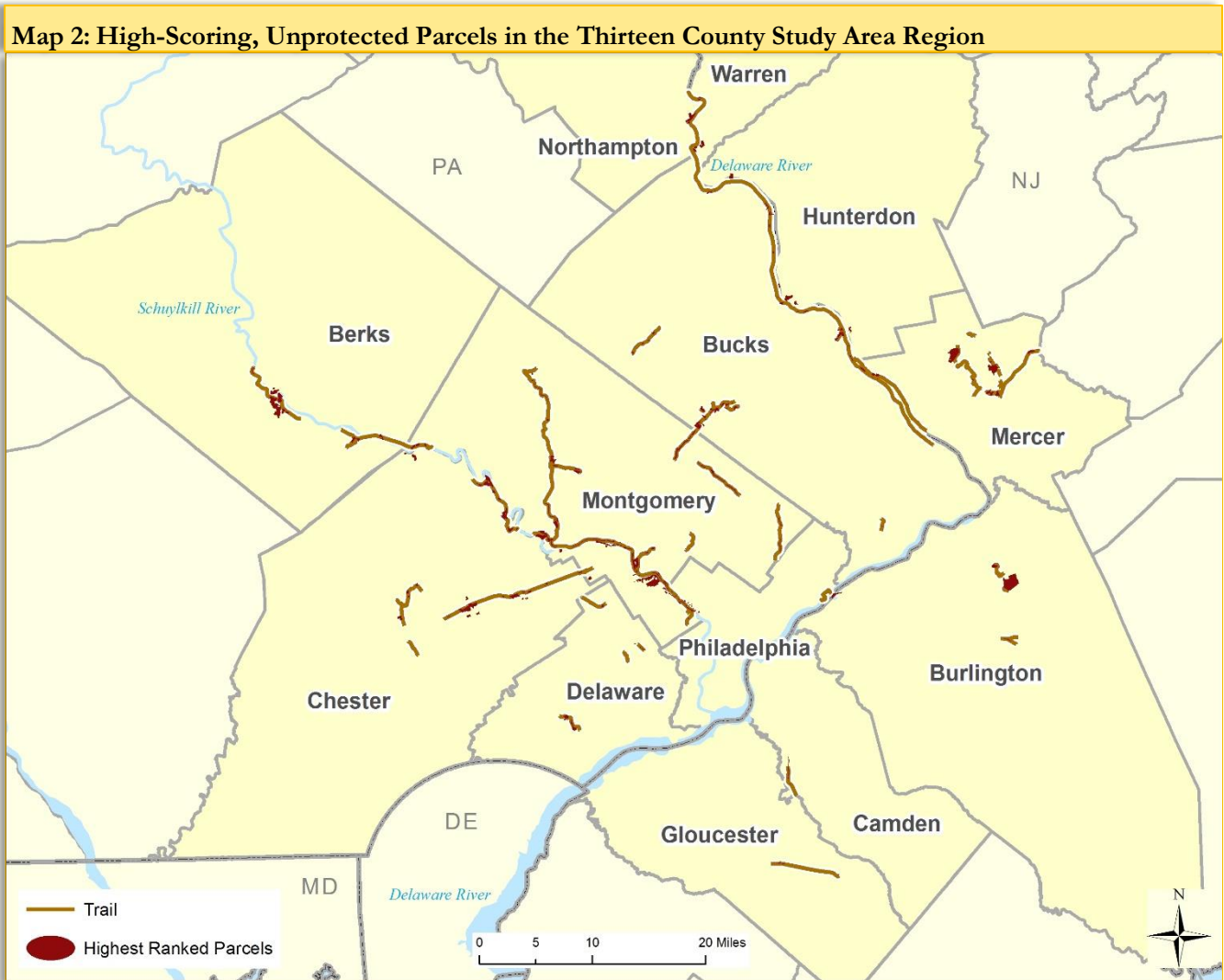
of parcels such as in sections of the Schuylkill River Trail. As trails enter rural, less developed areas, parcel numbers decrease, and the relative size of individual open space parcels generally increase, as can be seen in the viewsheds of the Lawrence Hopewell Trail, D&L Trail and the Chester Valley Trail.<sup>1</sup>

Maps 2 and 3 on the following pages show the areas of highest ranked, unprotected parcels. Map 2 shows the highest ranked, unprotected parcels in the 13 county study region. Map 2 shows that all counties in the study region contain high-scoring, unprotected parcels. However, not every trail included in the study had viewsheds with high-scoring unprotected parcels. Some trails had high-scoring parcels that were protected or had no high-scoring parcels but had many medium or low scoring unprotected parcels in the trail viewshed. The Map 3 on page 4 shows the highest ranked parcels for the top three trails from Table 2, and includes the study analysis of a small section of the D&L Trail as an example.

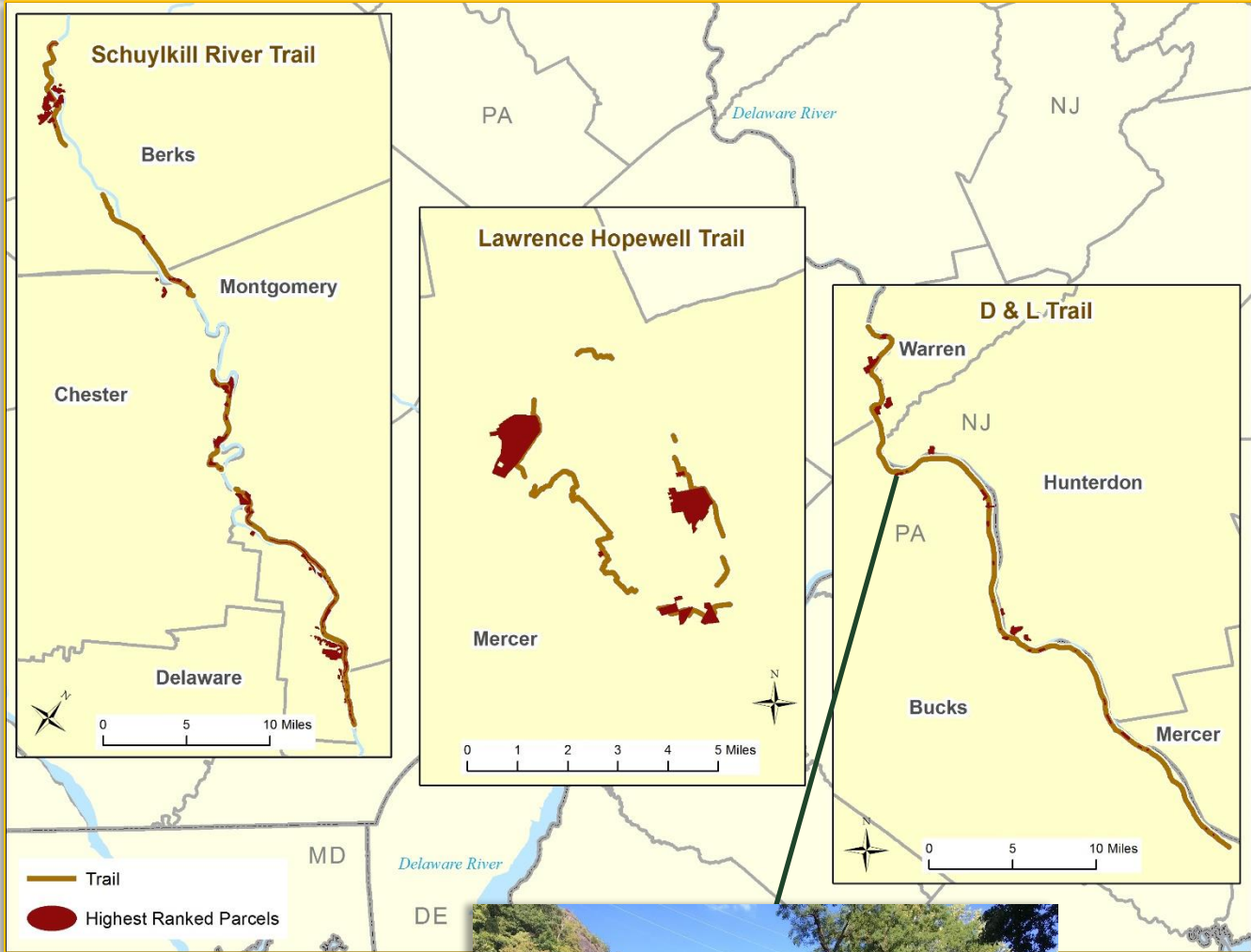
## Next Steps

The results of Protecting Views Along the Circuit will be provided to each county, municipality and conservation group associated with a trail or trails. These findings can be used when assessing areas or parcels that are being considered for conservation or for trail planning. AMC will develop a “Top 10 Most Threatened Views” list using available development trend and zoning data. AMC plans to expand the study to include trails that are not included in The Circuit.

<sup>1</sup> For more detail on individual trails, see the final Visual Assessment Reports at <http://pahighlands.org/conservation/planning-research/final-circuit-trails-visual-assessment-pilot-project-report>.



**Map 3: Top 3 Trails with High-Scoring, Unprotected Parcels in the Study Area Region**



- The view of Nockamixon Cliffs from the D&L Trail is outstanding, and the cliffs are a designated DCNR “Outstanding Geologic Feature of PA.”
- Most of the land at the top the cliffs is owned by DCNR, but some parcels are not protected. This includes a 25 acre parcel that has a medium score according to the study.



View of the Nockamixon Cliffs. Photo: Beth Hare