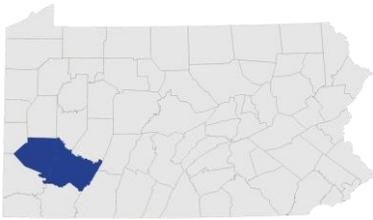


My Story



A Trail Built by Teamwork

Turtle Creek Rail Trail

By Betsy Aiken, Murrysville Trail Alliance

"When on the Trail I feel the stresses of the day go away. I feel appreciation for what trails and greenways mean to people who visit and enjoy them."

I'm invariably surprised by the beauty of the Turtle Creek Greenway. Visitors enjoy the forest along with views of rocky escarpments, the creek, tributaries, and the occasional waterfall, as well as glimpses of architectural relics of days past. With luck, one may spot a wood duck or pileated woodpecker or another of the many birds and animals observed by those who frequent the Greenway.

The Greenway contains the Turtle Creek Trail. Like all rail trails, the Turtle Creek Trail is many things to many people. To naturalists it is a low-impact way to observe a pristine natural area. To families with children it is an excellent destination for wholesome family fun. To history buffs it is a way to explore a long creek corridor that still holds evocative reminders of its history.



Keystone Fund Investment: \$457,000

Total Public/Private Investment: \$3.8 million

To the towns and municipalities along its way, the Turtle Creek Trail is an engine of economic vitality, drawing new residents who value easy access to parks and trails as well as new businesses attracted by patronage from users of the Trail.

To those interested in urban planning, the Trail is a means to strengthen the community centers along its route with smart growth instead of suburban sprawl. And to those devoted to our region (as so many in southwestern Pennsylvania are!), it is a way to build beneficial ties between several distinct towns and municipalities.

To those interested in conservation, the Trail is the anchor of the Turtle Creek Greenway—a far-sighted project to support conservation of a beautiful natural area, protect habitat, and reduce erosion, sedimentation, and

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downstream flooding. The Trail and Greenway span two counties and five municipalities, and the Greenway encompasses several municipal parks and open spaces in otherwise built-up communities. Since completion of a 2011 Turtle Creek Greenway Plan, the area of conserved land within the Greenway has expanded by 197 acres.



For those who have worked towards the creation of a trail and greenway for many years, this project is the realization of a dream that once seemed unattainable in our lifetimes. Incredible teamwork has made this dream a reality, combined with imagination, dedication, perseverance, and generosity in the face of many difficult challenges.

The Turtle Creek Trail is all of those things and more. As a member of the Murrysville Trail Alliance (MTA), I also know the trail as the lateral spine of an envisioned community-wide network of trails. The Murrysville Trail Plan was guided by the goal that 90% of Murrysville residents live within one mile of an existing or planned park, nature preserve, trail, or bicycle/pedestrian-friendly road. The idea of a community network of trails in Murrysville started to take shape decades ago, but it advanced slowly, with discussions about land dedication for trails often challenged by skepticism. The Turtle Creek Trail has given coherence, focus, and momentum to the Plan. In this way the Trail brings even greater potential to help shape the future of its communities.

Finally, the Trail is a demonstration of how many partners can pull together and share knowledge, capabilities, and resources to bring an ambitious vision into being. Resources have included the excellent educational materials and opportunities from DCNR and PALTA.

Funding has been provided by many sources, including the Keystone Fund, private donors, and the scores of people and businesses who have supported parks and trails through the county's annual March for Parks. Other important resources have included the time and talent of volunteers who have raised funds, built bridges, picked up litter, removed invasive species, or contributed to the Trail or Greenway in some other way.

What is perhaps best of all about the Trail and Greenway for me is that my friends and I were able to be a small part of the great team effort that brought this meaningful and lasting enhancement to Murrysville and the other communities along its route.

When on the Trail I feel the stresses of the day go away, reminding me of the practice of *Shinrin-Yoku*, or "forest immersion," developed by Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries as a sustainable, non-extractive way to derive benefit from the country's forests. (Certain forests are destinations promoted for relaxation and rejuvenation, and visitors enjoy real physiological benefits: lowered heart rate, blood pressure, and cortisol levels, as well as boosted immunity.)

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I feel a friendly connection with people I meet, and am amused by the occasional dog accompanying its family for a walk. In addition, I feel appreciation for what the Trail and Greenway mean to people who visit or enjoy them, or otherwise benefit from their presence, and for the remarkable teamwork that brought them into being and continues to expand them.