NATIONAL PARK SERVICE • U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Foundation Document Overview

Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River

New York, Pennsylvania

Photo by David B. Soete

Contact Information

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Unit Description

The Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River is a national treasure! It is the northernmost segment of the Delaware, and the longest and one of the cleanest rivers in the Eastern United States that remains undammed the length of its mainstem. Congress, in 1978, designated the corridor as the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River, part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and a unit of the national park system to preserve its "outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural...and other similar resource values..." (Upper Delaware Act P.L. 95-625 November 10, 1978).

The designation of Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River begins at the confluence of the East and West Branches of the Delaware River at Hancock, New York, and extends 73.4 miles downstream to Railroad Bridge No. 2, near Mill Rift, Pennsylvania, including within its boundaries 55,575 acres of land for which the National Park Service (NPS) with its cooperating partners has management responsibility.

The NPS currently owns 30.4 acres. The remaining predominantly privately owned land is managed in accordance with Land and Water Use Guidelines (Guidelines), as required by the enabling legislation, and published in the 1986 Final River Management Plan for the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River (River Management Plan). This plan describes how local and state laws and authorities will be used to protect the values of the Upper Delaware.

The Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River management partnership includes 15 municipalities, New York State, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Delaware River Basin Commission, and the NPS. The Upper Delaware Council (UDC), whose membership consists of the aforementioned entities, is responsible for implementing the Upper Delaware River Management Plan and assuring substantial conformance with the Land and Water Use Guidelines. The NPS partners with the Upper Delaware Council, local, county, state, and federal agencies, and community organizations, through collaboration and technical assistance.

The Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River has extraordinary ecological integrity and excellent water quality, providing outstanding habitat for aquatic, riparian, and adjacent terrestrial life. The free-flowing condition of the main stem Upper Delaware maintains connectivity to and from the Atlantic Ocean. This is essential for sea-run migratory species such as the American shad and American eel.

The Upper Delaware River Corridor is known for its outstanding all-season recreational opportunities. Visitors are informed that the majority of the property in the Upper Delaware Corridor is privately owned and that trespass is illegal. Water safety education is also provided at every opportunity.

Currently 13 public accesses ranging from 3 to 20 miles apart along both Pennsylvania and New York shorelines are jointly managed by the NPS and the agencies that own the land. Boat liveries provide additional private river access points. NPS park rangers enforce federal and state regulations on the river and on lands owned, leased, or formally co-managed with other agencies.

The NPS also preserves, maintains, and manages the use of Roebling's Delaware Aqueduct, the oldest existing wire cable suspension bridge in the United States. John A. Roebling, who later designed the Brooklyn Bridge, built the 1848 aqueduct that once carried the Delaware and Hudson Canal over the Delaware River. The aqueduct, a national historic landmark and a national historic civil engineering landmark, underwent adaptive reuse restoration as a one-lane bridge in the 1980s. Portions of the Delaware and Hudson Canal, also a national historic landmark, are located in the river corridor.

Also among the sites managed by the NPS along the Upper Delaware is the home where the prolific author, Zane Grey, wrote his best-selling Riders of the Purple Sage, among other early works. The Zane Grey House, in Lackawaxen, Pennsylvania, is now a museum about Grey's successful career as an American novelist.

Unit Map

From Hancock, NY to Binghamton, NY
43 miles
0
25 Kilometers
0
25 Miles
From Hancock, NY
to Albany, NY
134 miles
N.Y.
Pa.
Delaware
Hancock
North
Kingston
Upper Delaware
Scenic and
Recreational
River
Monticello
N.Y.
Thruway
(toll)
Hudson
River
Honesdale
Carbondale
Narrowsburg
Wurtsboro
Lackawaxen
Hawley
Barryville
Middletown
Newburgh
Pa.
River
Scranton
NE Extension
Pa. Turnpike
(toll)
Milford
Port Jervis
Matamoras
Delaware
Water Gap
National
Recreation
Area
N.Y.
N.J.
From Port Jervis, NY
to New York City, NY
75 miles
Stroudsburg
From Port Jervis, NY
to Philadelphia, PA
140 miles

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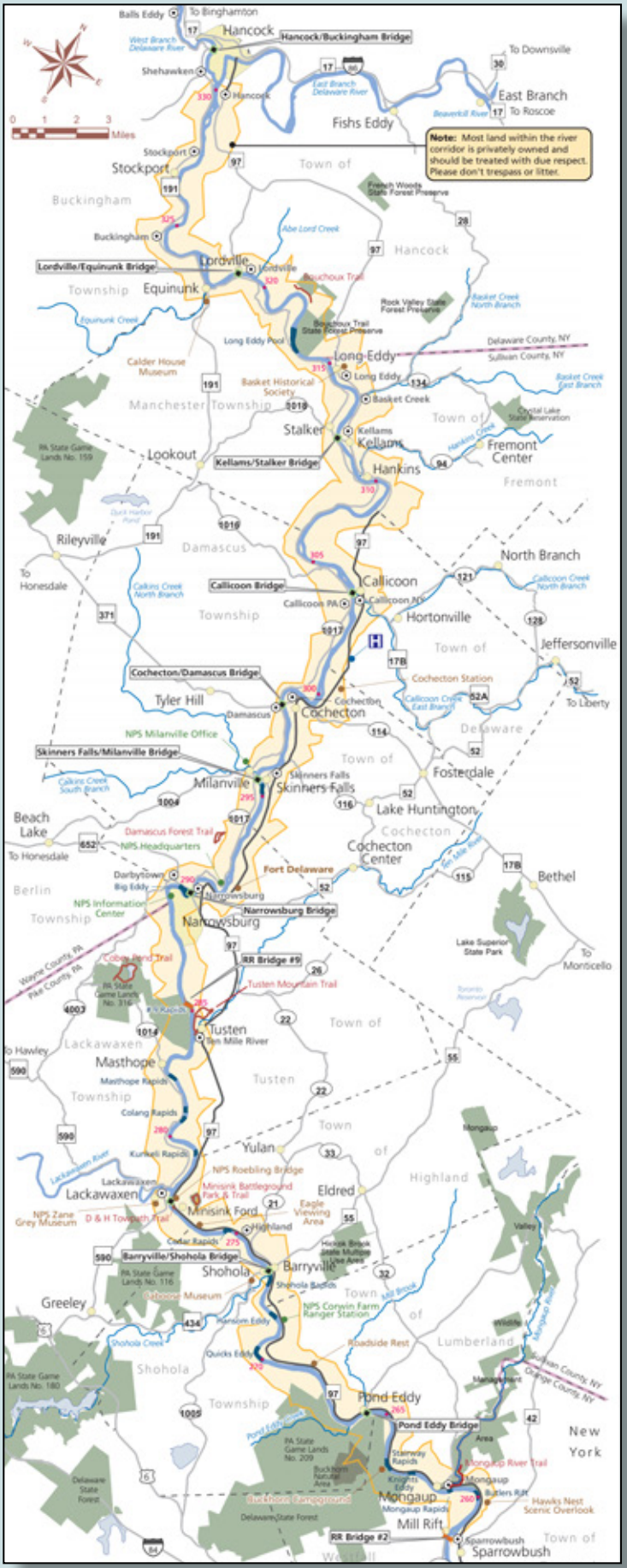
Hancock
Hancock/Buckingham Bridge
Fishs Eddy
East Branch
Note: Most land within the river corridor is privately owned and should be treated with due respect. Please don't trespass or litter.
Stockport
Lordville/Equinunk Bridge
Lordville
Equinunk
Long Eddy
Kellams/Stalker Bridge
Stalker
Kellams
Fremont Center
Lookout
Hankins
Rileyville
Callicoon Bridge
Callicoon
North Branch
Hortonville
Jeffersonville
Cochecton/Damascus Bridge
Tyler Hill
Cochecton
Skinners Falls/Milanville Bridge
Milanville
Skinners Falls
Fosterdale
Lake Huntington
Beach Lake
Cochecton Center
Bethel
Fort Delaware
Narrowsburg Bridge
Narrowsburg
Berlin
Township
Masthope
Yulan
Eldred
Minisink Ford
Barryville/Shohola Bridge
Barryville
Shohola
Greeley
Lumberland
Pond Eddy
Pond Eddy Bridge
Mongaup
Mill Rift
Sparrowbush
New York

Purpose

Photo by David B. Soete

The Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River protects, conserves, and enhances the free-flowing character, exceptionally high water quality, and the scenic, recreational, ecological, cultural, and geological values of the Upper Delaware River valley through collaborative partnerships and cooperation with state and local government entities.

NPS Photo

Significance

Significance statements express why Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River resources and values are important enough to merit designation as a unit of the national park system. These statements are linked to the purpose of Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Statements of significance describe the distinctive nature of the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River and why the area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. They focus on the most important resources and values that will assist in unit planning and management.

- The main stem of the Delaware River, which includes the 73.4-mile-long Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River (as well as two other units of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System), is the only major river in the eastern United States that remains undammed, providing unimpeded flows and ecologic connectivity that support scenic, recreational, ecological, cultural, and geological values.
- The Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River sets the standard for exceptional water quality and healthy riparian ecosystems in the Mid-Atlantic Region.
- Management of the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River is achieved through collaborative partnerships with local, state, and federal governments and local land owners; this is the first such management model in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

photo courtesy of Kathleen Langley

Significance

NPS Photo

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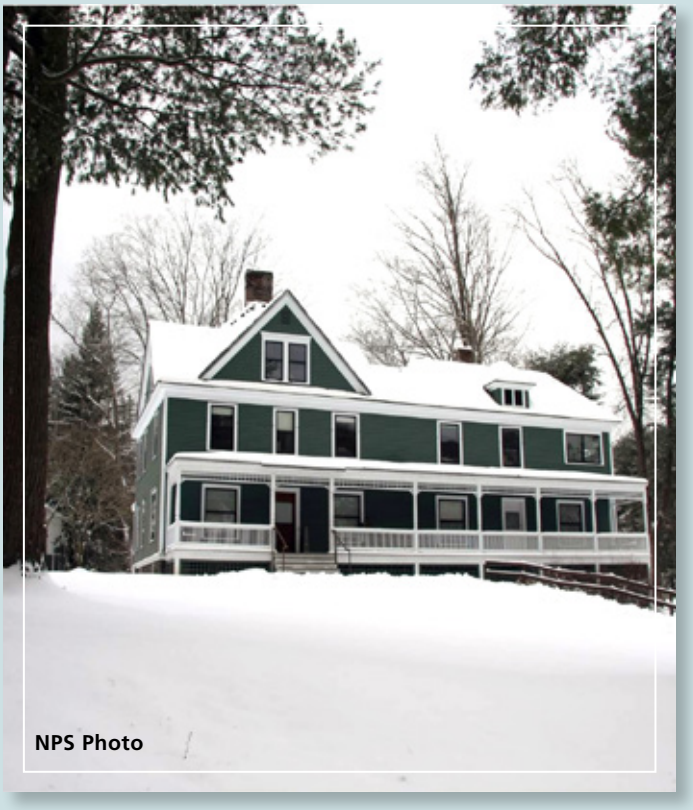
- Picturesque gorges, rock outcroppings, steep forested slopes, gently rolling hills, and pastoral cultural landscapes, farms, and communities contribute to the regionally significant scenic quality of the Upper Delaware River.
- The Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River corridor's pristine resources offer outstanding river recreation in close proximity to the most densely populated region in the United States.
- The Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River exhibits some of the highest ecological integrity found in any of the large rivers of the mid-Atlantic and northeastern states.


NPS Photo

- The entire free-flowing mainstem Delaware River is one of the few rivers in the United States that provides unimpeded access to historic spawning and rearing habitats for sea-run migratory species such as the American shad and American eel.
- North America's oldest existing wire cable suspension structure, Roebling's Delaware Aqueduct carried the Delaware and Hudson Canal over the Delaware River, carrying anthracite coal to the Hudson River. From there the coal was transported to New York City and throughout the East Coast, providing fuel for the American Industrial Revolution.
- The Upper Delaware River Valley preserves a rich cultural heritage including outstanding examples of mid-Atlantic riverside communities that have retained qualities and values of earlier times.
- Zane Grey, "Father of the Western Novel," made his home on the banks of the Upper Delaware River, where he wrote many of his most successful books, including *Riders of the Purple Sage*.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Photo by David B. Soete

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to warrant primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the unit and maintaining its significance.

- **Water Quality:** The Delaware River serves as a regional reference condition river for water quality and biological assessments. The uses that are most dependent on the extraordinarily clean water are water supply that requires little treatment, excellent habitat for thriving aquatic life, and water-based recreation.
- **Free-flowing Condition:** The free-flowing condition of the main stem of the Upper Delaware River maintains connectivity to and from the Atlantic Ocean. Despite slight waterway modifications and several dams on tributary rivers, the Delaware River is the last major undammed river on the Atlantic Coast and provides unimpeded access to historic spawning and rearing habitats for sea-run migratory species.
- **Cultural:** Dating from the Paleo through the Transitional period, more than 430 documented precontact archeological sites record a rich cultural tapestry of riverine occupation of aboriginal people who used the river as a trade route. In addition, remnants of the early settlements along the river help to convey the history of the early subsistence period to the mid-1700s. The river and valley defined the historic transportation routes that were spurred by early 1800s technological development. The first privately owned business in the United States to be capitalized for $1 million, the Delaware and Hudson Canal operated from 1829 to 1898; Roebling's Delaware Aqueduct (a national historic landmark and national historic civil engineering landmark) carried the canal across the Delaware, and now many elements of the canal comprise archeological deposits. A canal-era lock tender's house and barn, the Corwin Farm, still remains along an intact portion of the canal. The Erie Railroad, America's first long line railway, connected New York City with the Great Lakes and brought vacationers from New York and Philadelphia, among other cities. One notable vacationing fisherman, author Zane Grey, established a home on the Delaware in Lackawaxen, Pennsylvania, where he wrote his earliest articles and books, including *Riders of the Purple Sage*. The NPS owns and manages a museum at the Zane Grey House. Throughout the Upper Delaware River corridor, historic bridges, National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)-listed sites and districts, rural communities, and traditional industries such as bluestone quarrying and logging help to further tell the cultural stories of the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River.

Fundamental Resources and Values

NPS Photo

- **Ecological:** As the least-developed section of the last major river on the Atlantic Coast, undammed the entire length of its main stem, the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River sustains some of the highest ecological integrity found in any of the large rivers of this region. Exceptional water quality, resulting from a predominately forested landscape, sustains high-quality fish and aquatic insect assemblages. Excellent in-channel conditions result in an abundance of riffles, runs, and pools, and a diversity of in-stream habitats. These aquatic conditions, combined with superior riparian habitat and coupled with a functioning floodplain, provide great hydrological connectivity, structure, and function. The Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River's ecological value extends beyond this segment of river; it provides regionally important high-quality historic spawning and rearing habitat for sea-run migratory fish, provides inland bald eagle wintering habitat for birds from as far away as the maritime provinces of Canada, and serves as a migratory bird stopover along the Atlantic flyway.

- **Geological:** The Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River is an exceptional example of a deep, narrow river valley cutting across the Small Lakes section of the glaciated portion of the Appalachian Plateau. The overall landscape is a stream-cut landscape modified by stream derangements from glacial deposits burying portions of preglacial valleys. Examples of significant geologic features include sandstone cliffs, barbed tributaries, glacial deposits, glacial outwash terraces, diverse channel morphologies, exposed ancient bedrock, bedrock knobs, cutoff incised meanders, island complexes, gorges, and fossils.

- **Recreational:** River corridor activities include canoeing, kayaking, boating, tubing, rafting, SCUBA diving, snorkeling, swimming, hunting waterfowl, and year-round world class fishing (guided or independent). Other recreational activities include photography, wildlife viewing, birdwatching, picnicking, trapping and hunting for both small and large game, bicycle touring, hiking, and cross-country skiing. Sightseeing opportunities can be found at numerous scenic overlooks. Auto and motorcycle touring and bicycling are popular along the Upper Delaware Scenic Byway (New York State Route 97), which concurrently includes New York State Bicycle Route 17 and connects to Pennsylvania Bicycle Route Y. Camping at primitive and developed commercial campgrounds, fall foliage viewing, antiquing, community festivals, ziplining, sporting activities, geocaching, scientific research, education activities, and ranger-led activities are also popular. Eagle watching is particularly popular in the Lackawaxen area during the winter months.

- **Scenic:** The scenic quality of the Upper Delaware River is characterized by its picturesque gorge, riparian vegetation, steep forested slopes, and gently rolling hills. The agricultural fields and livestock pastures add variety to this tranquil scene, along with rock outcroppings, cliff faces, and exposed unusual sedimentary formations. Charming rural communities' architecture also contributes to the stimulating visual variety of the Upper Delaware.

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are an organizational tool. They provide the conceptual framework for visitor experience planning and programming. Interpretive themes are derived from and capture the essence of a unit's significance, resources, and values. They can help to explain why a story is relevant to people who may be unconnected to an event, time, or place. Themes go beyond a description of an event or process; they reflect the context and effects of those events or processes in order to foster opportunities to experience and consider the meanings, concepts, and values represented by a unit's resources.

While themes are important as a framework to help guide interpretation and management decisions, they are not necessarily intended for public use. They serve to focus and develop visitor experience, services, and programming.

- The Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River is a vital respite in the densely populated mid-Atlantic region, offering opportunities to connect with nature, healthy recreation, spectacular scenic views, and a sense of place.
- The free-flowing Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River harbors an intact riverine ecosystem that illustrates the importance of connectivity for communities of life.
- The undammed Delaware River provides an example of the role of rivers on the landscape as important riverine/marine ecological links, and a reference condition for how other rivers functioned prior to dams.
- The management model of the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River corridor demonstrates that protection of resources is the responsibility of all levels of government and all individuals, working collaboratively.
- The Upper Delaware River region was occupied for thousands of years by Native Americans who were attracted to its fertile land, vegetation, and wildlife. The lush valley, which later promised opportunity to European settlers, has continued to attract residents and visitors throughout the centuries.
- The Upper Delaware River has provided transportation connections to the mid-Atlantic area since the 1700s, allowing residents to transport timber, coal, bluestone, and local products to coastal markets.
- Roebling's Delaware Aqueduct carried the Delaware and Hudson Canal over the Delaware River. The oldest cable suspension structure in the U.S. with its historic elements intact, it is a testament to the engineering genius of John A. Roebling.
- Prolific author Zane Grey, known as "the father of the western novel," was inspired to launch his early writing career on the banks of the Upper Delaware River.

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