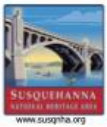


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
SUSQUEHANNA NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA  
MANAGEMENT PLAN  
LANCASTER & YORK COUNTIES, PENNSYLVANIA  
FEBRUARY 2024





**Susquehanna National Heritage Area  
Management Plan  
Inventory of Regional Recreational & Trail Resources**

Layer Data Sources: NPS, PASDA, York County, Chesapeake Bay Program, PA Dept. Conservation & Natural Resources, SGP, WeConservePA, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, PA Fish and Boat Commission, Explore PA Trails  
Sources: Esri, USGS, NOAA

- Susquehanna National Heritage Area
  - Major Rivers, Streams, and Water Features
  - Municipality
  - Railroad
- Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail
  - Other Water Trails
- Regional Multi-Use Trails
  - Conewago Recreation Trail
  - Enola Low Grade Rail Trail
  - Heritage Rail Trail
- Lancaster Junction Recreation Trail
  - Northwest Lancaster County River Trail
  - Warwick to Ephrata Rail Trail
- Regional Hiking Trails
  - Conestoga Trail
  - Horseshoe Trail
  - Mason-Dixon Trail
- Appalachian Trail
  - River Access (fishing and boating)
  - Public Lands



- Pennsylvania Heritage Area Designation

2001

Susquehanna Water Trail Signage & Paddle Guide
- Along the Susquehanna Exhibits

Growing Traditions Website & Guide

Quest for Freedom Programs & Tours

Stories of the Land Heritage Film
- River Towns Heritage Development Strategy

Visions of the Susquehanna Art Collection
- Lancaster & York County Heritage Programs

Hghpoint & Native Lands County Parks

## New Recognition for Lancaster and York Counties – and a New Plan

Lancaster and York counties were officially designated as the Susquehanna National Heritage Area and America’s 55th National Heritage Area on March 12, 2019, when the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act was signed into law in Washington, DC.

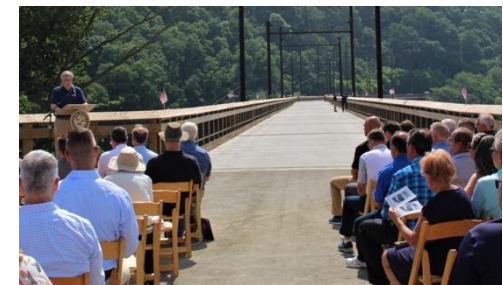
On February 1, 2024, the Director of the National Park Service announced that the proposed Management Plan developed through local leadership under the Dingell bill’s requirements has been accepted. This approval permits up to \$500,000 of federal funding to be used annually to advance the goals and strategies in the new plan.

## The Susquehanna National Heritage Area – a Nationally Important Region

For more than three centuries of American history, Lancaster and York counties have played a key role in the development of the nation’s political, cultural, and economic identity. Their people have advanced the cause of freedom and shared their agricultural bounty and industrial ingenuity with the world. Their town and country landscapes and natural wonders are visited and treasured by people from across the globe.

The Susquehanna River at the heart of this National Heritage Area has served the nation as a major fishery, transportation corridor, power generator, and, most recently, as an outdoor recreation venue. The area’s people, land, and waterways are essential parts of the national story. These qualities exemplify the National Park Service definition of a National Heritage Area.

The Susquehanna National Heritage Area will boost visibility for the Susquehanna River and Lancaster and York counties as a national destination for visitors seeking to enjoy its heritage and opportunities for outdoor recreation. It will also help communities harness the economic power of tourism, create jobs, and improve quality of life for all.



Left: Timeline showing SNHA’s accomplishments since its founding in 2001, presented in its 2021 annual report. Immediately above: SNHA President & CEO Mark Platts speaks at the dedication of the Safe Harbor Trestle of the Enola Low Grade Trail in June 2022 after a \$9 million restoration project by Manor Township, one of eight townships managing the 29.15-mile trail. The deck of the 1,560-foot-long trestle is 125 feet above the Conestoga River. (Top two photos, courtesy Heritage Strategies, LLC; third photo courtesy City of Lancaster; fourth photo by SNHA. Unless otherwise noted, photos are by SNHA.)

## What Is a National Heritage Area?

The National Park Service, which manages the National Heritage Areas program, states that heritage areas are “large, lived-in landscapes” where “historic, cultural, and natural resources combine to form cohesive, nationally important landscapes” that tell “nationally important stories that celebrate our nation’s diverse heritage.”

The primary reasons that any region achieves recognition as a National Heritage Area are because (1) it already has the heritage resources and experiences, and (2) its existing public and private institutions have done sound work in protecting, developing, and explaining the region’s heritage assets, cultivating constituencies, and contributing to a high quality of life.

Thus, it follows that a National Heritage Area is a place where many local governments and organizations have already financially supported and continue to support resources, projects, and activities that enhance their region. It also follows that there is already local enthusiasm for what the heritage area will work to achieve in terms of story-telling, preservation, and conservation.

Therefore, the Susquehanna National Heritage Area can be defined as a “value-added” effort to make sure that additional benefits flow from greater regional coordination and communications, plus access to resources and recognition through the National Park Service. The program will support the hard work and investment of Susquehanna National Heritage Area partners with enhanced visibility and economic benefits that further partners’ missions.

The Susquehanna National Heritage Area will benefit from enhanced national identity, new National Park Service partnerships, and a share of federal funding appropriated by Congress to support National Heritage Areas in promoting their cultural, natural, and recreational benefits. National Heritage Areas through their connections with the National Park Service are able to raise their visibility with visitors both within and beyond the region.



*Students participating in a stream study during a field trip coordinated by SNHA*



*Photo of business owners participating in “Downtown Clean 15,” courtesy City of York*



*Photo of Lock 12 of the Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal, c. 1836-1855, courtesy Heritage Strategies, LLC*



The Columbia Crossing River Trails Center, built and owned by the Borough of Columbia and managed by the Susquehanna National Heritage Area, is the trailhead for one of the heritage area's many historic regional trails, the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail.



SNHA's Zimmerman Center is the Visitor Contact Station for the National Park Service's Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.



The *Chief Uncas*, flagship of SNHA's River Discovery Tours, launched in 2022.

## SNHA, the Local Coordinating Entity

Each National Heritage Area has a "local coordinating entity" that works with partners to further the mission of the program. The entity here is Susquehanna National Heritage Area, which is the name of both the heritage area and the 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation responsible for its coordination (to be known by its acronym, SNHA). SNHA connects people to the Susquehanna River through programs and facilities:

- SNHA's 18th-century riverfront headquarters at the **Zimmerman Center for Heritage**, south of Wrightsville in York County, which marks one of the key river crossings established long ago by American Indians as they moved around the region and established settlements. The center has been designated by the National Park Service as Pennsylvania's official Visitor Contact Station for the **Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail (CAJO)**, America's first water-based National Historic Trail.
- The **Columbia Crossing River Trails Center** on the Lancaster County side of the river, operated by SNHA on behalf of the Borough of Columbia and a trailhead for a popular 14.2-mile trail.
- **Interpretive programs for the general public and special audiences centered on heritage tours aboard the *Chief Uncas***, a classic 1912 electric-powered wooden vessel, acquired by SNHA in 2021 with private donations.
- In 2008, the **Susquehanna River Water Trail** through this region was designated as a National Recreation Trail by the National Park Service, a significant section of Pennsylvania's longest water trail. This involved coordination with Pennsylvania's Fish and Boat Commission and Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), utility companies, and other partners. The water trail is also encompassed by the National Park Service's **Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network** and CAJO.
- SNHA has also been engaging with communities, organizations, and individuals to promote and enrich the Susquehanna River's special places, towns, and landscapes for years as a partner in the **Susquehanna Riverlands Conservation Landscape**. This is part of a Pennsylvania program to provide state-level support to designated large landscapes with strong natural assets and local readiness and buy-in. Through the Riverlands initiative, SNHA has collaborated with the Lancaster Conservancy, the two county planning commissions, and DCNR to drive strategic investment and actions around sustainability, conservation, community revitalization, and recreational projects.

### **Our Mission**

The mission of SNHA and the Susquehanna National Heritage Area as a whole:

The Susquehanna National Heritage Area connects the people and communities of Lancaster and York Counties to one another and to the nation through stories about this nationally important place. The National Heritage Area welcomes visitors, cultivates partnerships, and nurtures a strong regional identity.

### **Our Vision**

If we do our work well, in the years ahead, SNHA will be able to state that:

The Susquehanna National Heritage Area is regarded across the nation as a place with a unique identity where people and communities cultivate their connections with each other, the landscape, and their history.

### **Overall Principles of the Susquehanna National Heritage Area**

As the foundation for its work, SNHA has long endorsed the following principles:

- Develop authentic interpretation of the Susquehanna River's heritage and history and provide place-based education.
- Encourage preservation and protection of cultural and natural resources.
- Advocate for high quality visitor facilities and services.
- Advance recreational opportunities.
- Foster intergovernmental cooperation and public-private partnerships.
- Promote sustainable economic development.
- Support environmental stewardship.

## **Goals of the Susquehanna National Heritage Area**

Chapters in the Management Plan explain and amplify the following goals:

### *Who We Are: Resources and Identity*

1. Sustain and enhance the sense of place and identity experienced across the entire National Heritage Area. (Chapters 2, 4, and 5)
2. Foster storytelling, learning, and research that enable audiences to enjoy and appreciate the National Heritage Area's history and historic sites, natural resources, and communities. (Chapter 3)
3. Focus on how the Susquehanna River has shaped the natural landscape and humans' response to that landscape. (Chapters 3, 4, and 5)
4. Encourage greater public awareness of the importance of the National Heritage Area's resources and identity. (Chapters 3, 4, and 5)

### *What We Are Working Toward: Benefits*

5. Foster healthy natural resources and healthy human relationships with those resources. (Chapters 4 and 5)
6. Emphasize the importance of the National Heritage Area's resources and identity to its economic vitality and attraction as a unique place to live, work, invest, and visit. (Chapter 5)
7. Make it easy for those moving around the National Heritage Area to find their way and maintain an awareness of the region's resources and identity. (Chapter 5)

### *How We Work Together: Organization and Action*

8. Build the capacity of organizations, communities, and networks to work in concert with the vision, mission, and goals of the National Heritage Area. (Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6)
9. Build a strong and diverse constituency of partnerships and supporters that can act to protect and enhance the National Heritage Area's resources and identity. (Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6)

### **Our Pledge**

Every action taken to develop the Susquehanna National Heritage Area will model sustainability and excellence for SNHA and our partners.



LancasterHistory is in the process of adding a new interpretive destination at the former home of Thaddeus Stevens and Lydia Hamilton Smith, pictured here beside the Lancaster County Convention Center, to serve as the Stevens-Smith Center for History and Democracy. It will include a major interpretive experience about Stevens's life and his involvement as a United States Representative in Abolition and passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments. (Photo by Larry Lefever for LancasterHistory)



Petroglyphs located along the Susquehanna River in the Safe Harbor area.

## Building Appreciation for this Nationally Important Place

Organizing the interpretive experience for residents and visitors has many benefits. Interpretation can encourage visitors to explore more and stay longer, enlarging the economic impact of the Susquehanna National Heritage Area's programs. Through interpretation, National Heritage Areas connect experiences and learning opportunities and craft compelling regional narratives that reinforce regional identity. Among the varied approaches to caring for exceptional regional landscapes found across the United States, National Heritage Areas are distinguished by their emphasis on interpretation. In fact, the practice of interpretation on a landscape scale is rare outside heritage areas, going beyond wayfinding and tourism marketing to make deep connections and reveal new meanings from place to place. It can also convey a deeper understanding of the region's importance and build a strong constituency for the protection of the many resources encompassed by the regional interpretive experience.

The Management Plan delineates three roles for SNHA, "outreach to partners," "interpreter" (providing direct interpretation to many audiences through its programs and facilities), and as "regional storyteller and guide." This last involves increasing SNHA's capacity to produce high-quality, innovative, and technologically adept communications. This capacity can be directed not only toward the regional storytelling function that lies at the heart of this concept, but also toward supporting partners that are pursuing preservation and conservation by fostering their networking and sharing useful information.

## Themes for a Compelling Experience

Four interpretive themes group this region's stories chronologically – beginning with the overarching theme of the Susquehanna River as a geological/geographical/cultural influence within the region (Theme 1), then with the earliest inhabitants (Theme 2). The profound influence of this region on American communities that grew beyond this "first western frontier" is the subject of Theme 3. By the time of the Civil War, this region's unique combination of values, cultural and material wealth, and innovative spirit marked many American communities founded by pioneers from Lancaster and York counties. Major historical events and leaders that arose here across the sweep of time are the subject of Theme 4, each leaving its mark on the nation's history as a whole. "Storylines" (collections of similar topics) reflecting long scholarship and thought for interpreting this region are suggested in the Management Plan to inspire further research and focus.

## Theme 1: How the Susquehanna Shapes this Place and its People

**THEME STATEMENT:** The Susquehanna River lies at the heart of a storied natural landscape, a rich watershed that has shaped the lives of modern humans – and vice versa.

The Susquehanna River is the dominant natural feature on the area's landscape and has long played a key role in the region's formation, development, and identity. This is not only a first theme, but the over-arching theme illuminating the role played by the river as human stories unfolded across the region. The mosaic of the landscape reflects events and occurrences of past centuries, revealing the story of human interactions with the land and the river, creeks, and tributaries.

## Theme 2: Native Landscapes

**THEME STATEMENT:** The Susquehanna River corridor has been a remarkable habitat for humans from Paleoindian times onward.

The rich archeological record of the Lower Susquehanna River offers a lens into Native American life and the human response to regional natural systems across millennia. Thousands of years before Europeans came to the area, indigenous peoples used the Susquehanna as a travel route and as a focal point for habitation and subsistence.

## Theme 3: Creating an American Identity

**THEME STATEMENT:** Cultural influences from this region were carried across the nation as it expanded westward, setting patterns for community, family, farms, and place.

The Susquehanna National Heritage Area's distinctive pattern of cultural development was influenced by the physical attributes of the landscape – topography, soils, water, natural resources – combined with a unique settlement history and its subsequent evolution. As a major destination for emigration early in Pennsylvania's founding, Lancaster and York counties are among the earliest locations where many cultures mingled – rather than in port towns or cities. William Penn's policy of tolerance welcomed a wide variety of European groups, particularly English, Welsh, Scots-Irish, and several groups of ethnic Germans. The success of the region's people in farming and manufacturing, building wealth, raising families, and forming communities left a permanent imprint not only on the Susquehanna National Heritage Area but across the nation. Today, the region remains known for its wide variety of cultures, old and new.



Ephrata Cloister (est. 1732), a National Historic Landmark operated as a museum site by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, is among the earliest of religious utopian communities founded across North America. (Photo courtesy Heritage Strategies, LLC)



Collection of Pennsylvania rifles at the Landis Valley Village & Farm Museum, operated by the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission. Early technologies invented and refined in the Susquehanna National Heritage Area were superior adaptations to the needs of the frontier that spread far and wide from Lancaster and York counties. (Photo courtesy Heritage Strategies, LLC)





Replica of York's Revolutionary War-era courthouse, occupied by the Continental Congress for nine months of the war, 1777-78. During this time, the Congress debated and adopted the Articles of Confederation before sending them to the 13 colonies for ratification. The York County History Center operates this interpretive site. (Photo by York County History Center)



## Theme 4: Turning Points

**THEME STATEMENT:** Through critical and unique events in history, the Susquehanna National Heritage Area illustrates the shaping of American culture over time through the choices people make and the lives they lead.

This region saw profound shifts in history, from the colonial era into the 20th century: The establishment of the Mason-Dixon Line in 1767; conduct of the Revolutionary War in York behind the safety of the Susquehanna River for nine months; the shocking destruction of a key bridge at Wrightsville and Columbia during the Civil War; and the York Plan that led industrial production methods for America's success in World War II. Moreover, as the nation wrestled with the practice of chattel slavery as its greatest challenge to its founding concept of freedom, in Lancaster and York counties two major figures of the mid-nineteenth century represented the opposite poles of the national debate, pro-slavery President James Buchanan and ardent Abolitionist Congressman Thaddeus Stevens. Today, the Susquehanna National Heritage Area offers a fully comprehensible landscape and history of leadership relating to Abolition and the Underground Railroad.

## Preserving Nationally Important Resources

Without the high level of preservation, conservation, and community stewardship already visible in the Susquehanna National Heritage Area, this region would not BE a national heritage area! To encourage hundreds of local governments and nonprofit organizations to engage vigorously in preserving nationally important resources, SNHA will use its limited resources strategically and in alliance with key public agencies and community partners. SNHA services for partners will include matching grants, coaching, training, strategic planning, information-sharing, networking, consultation on program design, periodic gatherings, and other activities to engage partners.

## Historic Preservation

SNHA will join in the decades of community and individual efforts to help preserve historic resources by (1) building public awareness of historic resources and their need for preservation through SNHA's own communications and in collaboration with others; (2) supporting local governments; and (3) advocating, acting, or supporting others where appropriate to save endangered historic properties of significance to Susquehanna National Heritage Area's interpretive themes.

## Natural Resource Conservation

To help safeguard the long-term survival of natural resources and their contribution to the national importance of the Susquehanna National Heritage Area, SNHA will:

- Widen its efforts as a voice for the river and its needs for stewardship.
- Continue its focus on the river corridor through Pennsylvania's Susquehanna Riverlands Conservation Landscape initiative; and
- Support others best placed to lead on conserving farm and natural lands beyond the river corridor and advocating for water quality improvements throughout the watershed that will contribute to cleaner water in the river and Chesapeake Bay.

## Community Sustainability

SNHA has long been a voice and advocate for stewarding the resources, communities, and recreational opportunities of the Susquehanna River corridor and their contributions to the region's economy. Enhancing a community's ability to respond to and adapt to changing conditions – whether environmental, economic, or social – is also a part of the stewardship of long-term community sustainability. With the designation of the region now as a National Heritage Area, SNHA will partner with local agencies, organizations, and community leaders across the region and add its voice to advocate for community sustainability.

## Building the Experience of the National Heritage Area

The Susquehanna National Heritage Area encompasses 1,844 square miles of a rich and complex cultural landscape filled with great stories and sites, many off the beaten path. Visitors especially need guidance to explore the many places to be experienced here, whether they touch on history, cultural traditions, nature, agriculture, recreation, the arts, or even all of these.

The Management Plan identifies specific ways that the Susquehanna National Heritage Area will draw those connections. A section on **cultural heritage tourism** provides a broad view of the business of tourism and the mutual support possible among SNHA, the two county tourism agencies, Discover Lancaster and Explore York, and the many operators of sites working to serve visitors, whether for-profit or nonprofit. A closely related section concerns **scenic roads**, which provide linkages that benefit both residents and visitors as they make their way around the region. SNHA will also work to support **outdoor recreation**, especially trails. Integrating recreation and heritage tourism is a critical tool for the heritage area's support for natural resource protection. A final section on **wayfinding** addresses the challenge of helping visitors navigate the region – in part by relying on the virtual world it is now possible to create through the internet.



*Top photo: A city planner leads a bicycle tour of plantings in Lancaster to retain runoff and beautify neighborhoods, courtesy City of Lancaster. Center photo: Courtesy Friends of Lebanon Cemetery. Bottom photo: The General Cigar Building in Lancaster, adapted for shops, offices, and apartments with the help of the federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentive, courtesy Spanish American Civic Association.*



## Implementing the Management Plan

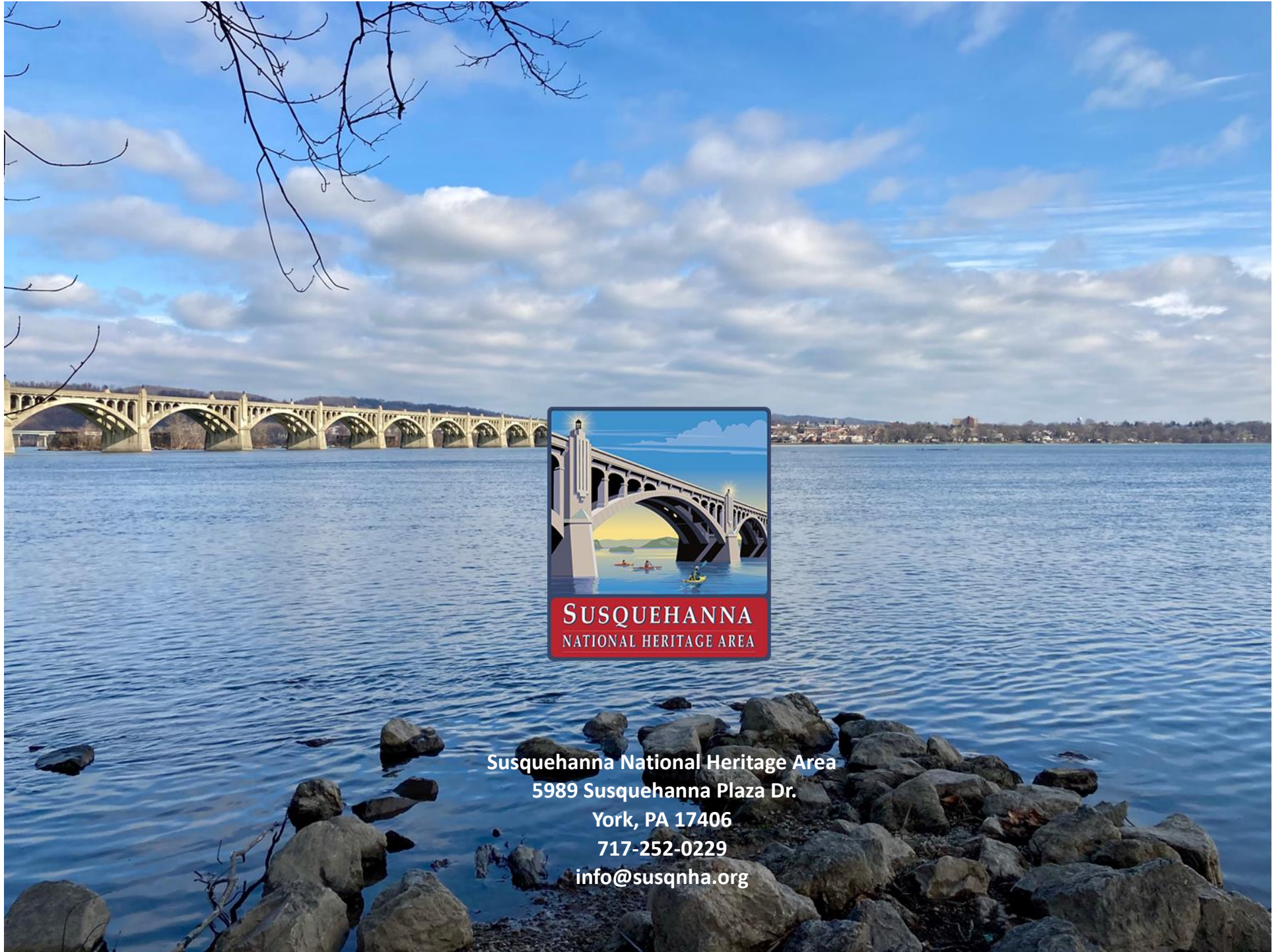
SNHA has a twenty-year track record as a successful nonprofit organization and state-designated heritage area. It also has a respected and experienced Board of Directors and staff team with well-established partnerships and funding commitments already in place. The Management Plan identifies a wide range of future programs that will build on existing initiatives and develop others that are completely new. In this next phase of its organizational growth, SNHA is to be engaged in the following priorities:

- Expanding SNHA's role as an interpreting institution focused on the Susquehanna River, including creating the Susquehanna Discovery Center at the historic Mifflin site outside Wrightsville (pictured below left);
- Providing interpretive context for the entire Susquehanna National Heritage Area through robust communications;
- Becoming an effective partnering institution working to build many kinds of relationships and support partners as they grow;
- Enhancing its role as a local coordinating entity working to address the priorities set in the Management Plan; and
- Securing the funds and other resources needed to implement this plan.

## Leadership

SNHA is committed to fostering diversity among its audiences, contributors, and leaders through programming and other choices, including selecting members of the board. As SNHA consolidates its position and grows its resources, it will establish a heritage area-wide Advisory Council largely or perhaps exclusively composed of regional partners. A key role for the Advisory Council is the design and preliminary execution of a program to award matching grants to partners.

*Top photo: Dr. Joan Maloof, founder and president of the national organization Old Growth Network, leading a celebratory hike through the Lancaster Conservancy's Otter Creek Nature Preserve in York County after it was named to the network in April of 2022; by Kelley Snavely courtesy Lancaster Conservancy. Center photo: Demonstration of a model steam engine to children at the Pennsylvania Railroad Museum, courtesy Heritage Strategies, LLC. Bottom photo: The 87-acre historic Mifflin site outside Wrightsville to be developed by SNHA as the Susquehanna Discovery Center – a central visitor center for the Susquehanna National Heritage Area. The Mifflin House (c. 1800) served as an important station in the Underground Railroad, the clandestine network that provided safe haven and passage for freedom seekers in Central Pennsylvania. Back cover: Veterans Memorial Bridge (1930, 5,183 feet), courtesy Heritage Strategies, LLC. From 2004 through 2014, SNHA led the way in restoring the lighting as originally designed for the bridge, a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.*



**SUSQUEHANNA**  
NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Susquehanna National Heritage Area  
5989 Susquehanna Plaza Dr.  
York, PA 17406  
717-252-0229  
[info@susqha.org](mailto:info@susqha.org)