

BUSHKILL CREEK WATERSHED

The Bushkill Creek Watershed encompasses 80 square miles of Northampton County, stretching from Blue Mountain to the Delaware River in Easton. Most of the stream and its tributaries are classified as High-Quality Cold Water Fisheries.

Wetlands along the foot of the Blue Mountain provide clean water to the streams and protect them from storm runoff, while providing important wildlife habitat. Most of the upper half of the watershed is located in shale and slate geology, and is dominated by woodlands, agriculture, and low-density residential development. The wooded areas generally follow the streams, forming greenways from the Blue Mountain to Jacobsburg State Park near the center of the watershed. The upper watershed is fed by several streams. Sobers Run, in Bushkill Township, was recently upgraded to a classification as Exceptional Value. The Little Bushkill Creek is fed by two streams draining off Blue Mountain through Wind Gap and Stockertown Boroughs and Plainfield Township.

1 BLUE MOUNTAIN/KITTATINNY RIDGE

The Bushkill Creek Watershed originates on the Blue Mountain, which is known regionally as the Kittatinny Ridge. The ridgeline and forested slopes provide habitat for a number of sensitive plant and animal species of concern. Broken infrequently by roads and utility corridors, the Blue Mountain provides habitat and an essential travel corridor for many species of wildlife. Though timbered several times for fuel and lumber since European colonization, the forested expanse of the mountain has remained relatively undisturbed for over 100 years. The mountainside includes many acres of interior forest, and provides essential habitat for forest-dwelling birds, such as Scarlet Tanagers, Worm-eating Warblers, and Ovenbirds. Much of the Blue Mountain in the Bushkill Creek Watershed includes parts of State Game Lands No. 168 and is open to the public.

2 THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL

This world-renowned public trail lies at the very northern edge of our watershed along the top of Blue Mountain/Kittatinny Ridge. This trail is used by through-hikers, some of whom make the entire 2180-mile trek in one year, as well as day hikers who take much shorter walks. The rocky trail offers stunning views of the surrounding countryside from the numerous side trails to observation points. In this wild place hikers have encountered diverse types of animals such as black bears, bobcats, coyotes, and rattlesnakes. Hikers can access the trail at the Wind Gap trailhead and go into town for services. Wind Gap Borough is designated an Appalachian Trail Community.

3 RISMILLER WOODS

This site provides a vernal pool natural community within about 60 acres of interior forest. It is also of State significance for conservation because it is home to a rare wetland shrub in the heath family. The vernal pools, as well as streams and springs that also occur here, create a diversity of microhabitats that support a wide variety of herbs, ferns, and graminoids and make this area an excellent breeding habitat for amphibians.

4 KNECHTS PONDS

This area includes a vernal pool natural community containing at least 12 pools within about 65 acres of interior forest. Vernal pools are important, as they do not contain fish and provide many species of frogs and salamanders safe places to lay their eggs in the springtime.

5 MOORESTOWN WETLANDS

This area of wetlands, located in Bushkill Township, is an important site for conservation because it is home to several species of rare butterflies. The site includes areas of marsh and shrub swamp, which are fed by groundwater seepage. Red maple, cattail, skunk cabbage, and sedges are common plant species here. Portions of these wetlands are known to support the federally protected Bog Turtle.

6 MORAVIAN SETTLEMENT IN NAZARETH

The Moravian Church is considered to be the oldest surviving Protestant denomination, arising in Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic) in the mid-15th century and predating Martin Luther's Reformation by 60 years. In 1740, following several unsuccessful attempts to establish Moravian missions in the North American colonies, a group of Moravian settlers moved to the Ephrata Tract in Nazareth, drawn by Pennsylvania's reputation for religious tolerance. Two remaining buildings on the property from that period are the Whitfield House, built in 1740-1743, and Gray Cottage, the oldest surviving Moravian structure in North America, built in 1740.

TWO RIVERS GREENWAY AND TRAIL NETWORK

The municipalities in the Bushkill Creek Watershed have placed a high value on preserving natural features, open space, and farmland, while creating parks and trails for outdoor recreation and wellness. Once trail gaps are closed in the Two Rivers Trail system, an interconnected 18-mile trail corridor will connect the City of Easton to the Blue Mountain and the Appalachian Trail. Existing trails include the Karl Stirner Arts Trail, Palmer Township Bike Path, Forks Township Recreation Trail, Stockertown Recreation Trail, Tatamy Trail, Plainfield Township Recreation Trail, and the Bushkill Township Trail.

Jacobeburg Environmental Education Center has an internal trail system that will connect to the regional trail network. The planned Northern Tier Trail will provide the east-west connection at the base of the Blue Mountain with links to the Two Rivers Trail system. Portions of this trail network are designated as belonging to the September 11th National Memorial Trail.

7 LOUISE W. MOORE COUNTY PARK

This 120-acre public park is named in honor of Louise W. Moore, who lived in the park when it was Slate Post Farm. Her husband, Hugh Moore, founder of the Divis Cup Company, donated the land and a trust fund for maintenance to Northampton County. Due to its central location and its recreational amenities of trails, tennis courts, and picnic pavilions, it is the most popular park in Northampton County.

The park is also an arboretum, with over 150 species of North American, European, and Eurasian trees first planted in the 1970s. Matson's Woods, a seven-acre mature native oak woodland, is designated a member of the National Old-Growth Forest Network. The park is home to an increasing number of innovative environmental practices, including no-mow and pollinator-friendly meadows and wildflower-landscaped drainage swales.

The Northampton County Agroforestry Program began in 2021 with an initial planting of 54 native nut and fruit trees. More species will be added over time, and all trees will be catalogued. By providing a secure long-term location for these important tree crop specimens, they will remain accessible to future generations of farmers and citizens.

"Easton owes its original and continued prosperity... to the water powers of the Bushkill Creek."

— Matthew Henry, 1860

MILLS ON THE BUSHKILL

Early American industries ran on water. Streams like the Bushkill Creek and its tributaries turned water wheels that powered grindstones in flour mills, saws in lumber mills, and bellows in iron furnaces. Along the Bushkill Creek, as early as 1798, there were eleven mills and three tanneries; the stream's power produced iron, firearms, flour, and lumber. Over time, the mills have had a significant impact on the creek beds, as fine sediment accumulated in the mill ponds, leading to present-day pollution as those muddy banks now wear down.

The lower half of the watershed has a decidedly different character, consisting of gently undulating hills underlain by carbonate geology — limestone and dolomite. The many carbonate springs help maintain cool water temperatures throughout the summer, providing an excellent Brown Trout fishery. Schoeneck Creek drains the central western portion of the watershed from the Borough of Nazareth, and a small unnamed tributary follows Route 22 to join the Bushkill in the City of Easton. Agricultural areas in the lower watershed are experiencing rapid commercial, industrial, and residential development, while the southern-most area of the watershed in and around Easton has been suburban, urban, or industrial for over a century. Several large cement rock quarries are located near the center of the watershed in the Nazareth/Stockertown area, and numerous abandoned dams from former water-powered mills are present along the lower stream. Despite the developed landscape, the Bushkill Creek in the lower portion of the watershed supports a Class A Wild Trout Fishery.

THE BUSHKILL MOOSE

While whitetail deer are well known in the area, few people realize that moose once wandered the Bushkill Creek Watershed. One of the largest moose ever recorded was run down by Jacob Heller's dogs near Wind Gap in the late 1700s. Local residents did their best to revive the animal, but it did not survive. It was reported to weigh nearly a ton, and had a rack measuring 78½ inches. Occasional reports of moose sightings continued into the 1800s, but ceased by the end of the 19th century, and the southernmost limit of the species' range is now considered to be the Adirondack Mountains in New York State.

8 GRAND CENTRAL WOODS

The Grand Central Woods, located in Plainfield Township, is a privately-owned 130-acre environmentally sensitive conservation area with a dense canopy of mature hardwoods nearly a century old. The Grand Central Woods serves as habitat to many native tree species, plants, and wildlife, and is a local example of the interconnection between biological diversity and structural complexity in maintaining a mature forest ecosystem.

JAMES HENRY AND STREAMSIDE FORESTS

The Henry family of Northampton County is most famous for the iron and gun-making industries they established in Nazareth, Jacobsburg, Henry's Forge, and Boulton, beginning as early as 1780. In these early American villages the Henrys harnessed waterpower from Bushkill Creek to forge the first bar of iron in Northampton County and to make tens-of-thousands of rifles, muskets, shotguns, and pistols for the fur trade and frontiersmen in the American West, mountain men in the Rockies, US soldiers in the War of 1812, Union soldiers in the Civil War, and hunters and trappers across the country.

Lesser known and celebrated is the early conservation history of James Henry who recognized the need to preserve and protect the natural resources around him. He advocated for reforestation areas that had been stripped by lumber industries. In 1883 at his family homestead on the banks of Bushkill Creek (today's Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center), Henry drafted a bill to encourage the planting of trees along streams. Although the bill never passed, it sowed the seeds of responsible forestry. Twelve years after Henry's bill, Pennsylvania made the first steps toward state-wide forest conservation. Without the efforts of James Henry and others like him, we would not have the beautiful forests that surround us today.

9 JACOBSBURG ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER

The Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center, part of the Commonwealth State Park system, is a true jewel of the Bushkill Creek Watershed. The 1,168-acre Center offers outdoor recreation opportunities and environmental education programs for children, adults, and families. Nearly half the parkland is designated as part of the Jacobsburg National Historic District, the importance of which is found in the early American gun and iron industries of five generations of the William Henry Family. The Jacobsburg Historical Society curates this cultural history and operates the Pennsylvania Longrifle Museum at the Henry Homestead at Boulton.

The Center has 18 miles of walking trails, the Little Bushkill Creek, Sobers Run (an Exceptional Value stream), and one of the last old-growth forests in Pennsylvania. The dramatic slate outcroppings along the stream, vernal pools, native riparian areas, and native wildflower meadows provide a vibrant native plant landscape.



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Sites in both public and private ownership are described on this map and not all have public access; those open to the public are clearly noted. Please respect private property.

11 EASTON BLUFF

Easton Bluff is a northwest-facing, sparsely vegetated limestone cliff located in a highly developed section of the City of Easton. It hosts a group of limestone-loving native plants. Despite significant disturbances over the years and the intrusion of many non-native plant species, this is a diverse ecological community, right in the heart of a city.