



Delaware Canal Vision Study - Principles

As distilled from public comments elicited at the Public Visioning meetings.

It's Our Delaware Canal

The Delaware Canal is inseparable from the Delaware River. From Easton, where water is drawn from the Lehigh River, the 60-mile Canal navigates through the piedmont river valley landscape before turning inland beyond the "Falls" of the Delaware at Morrisville to flow straight across the coastal plain to Bristol.

The Delaware Canal remains a dramatic part of our Delaware River watershed. It continues through our villages and it passes through our scenic forests, fields, and developed areas as a continuous ribbon of blue and green infrastructure that belongs to us all.

After 183 years, our Delaware Canal still unites us as a single Canal community.

In this modern age of technology we are struck by its ingenuity and we wonder why we cannot keep the Delaware Canal watered, functional and looking beautiful? As Vision Study partners we seek to address this challenge.

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) is the steward of the Delaware Canal and is to be commended for their dedication to the Canal. We, as the Canal's "citizen-owners" acknowledge that the tasks to conserve, manage and maintain the Delaware Canal today and for future generations exceed the capabilities of any single state agency.

The stewardship circle is growing and a multi-partner approach has created a new vision for *Our Delaware Canal*.

It's About the Water

It was always about water. The Delaware Canal was created in 1832 as a “water road” in a time when dirt roads were impassible for much of the year. Canal engineers intercepted local streams and water from the Lehigh and Delaware Rivers to flood a “channel.”

Of all the American canals, the Delaware Canal is the only one that remains functional. It demonstrates an early approach to watershed management for commercial and civic purposes. From its' first day of operation, the Delaware Canal's water was a precious resource. It still is.

Today, the public expects the Delaware Canal to be a modern recreation facility that provides habitat and a land and water trail.

However, the financial formula that originally supported the Canal is now reversed. Cargo once paid for the costs to maintain the waterway. Can water now be part of the equation to fund maintenance of today's recreation and conservation assets?

Our challenge is to envision the Delaware Canal as a valuable multi-purpose resource and manage it for public benefit. Does a watered Canal need only be an expense to the state, or can it also help generate revenue to pay for its' upkeep?

And if the water of the Delaware Canal is an essential asset, how do we manage it in the 21st Century?

Conserving Our National Landmark

A National Historic Landmark designation is the highest recognition for an American historic resource and defines its conservation values.

The “Landmark” status of the Delaware Canal, combined with its state ownership, provides protection through multiple agency jurisdictions. Yet, even this level of protection does not guarantee its conservation or vitality. We seek to guard Our Delaware Canal Landmark from negative impacts through an active partnership process with local, state and federal agencies and governments.

One important way to protect the Delaware Canal and ensure its long-term conservation is to acknowledge its civic importance and to make it a focus of a pro-active and robust regional conversation. Policies about appropriate economic development, and quality of life – including the Canal's contributions to: cultural resources; water supply and quality; green infrastructure; recreation; stormwater management; fire protection; natural habitats; land uses; and civic life; need to be developed and implemented. The Delaware Canal began operation as practical environmental infrastructure. It still is.

The 1974 National Landmark nomination states:

“The Delaware Canal retains most of its integrity. It contains water from Easton to Bristol; i.e., throughout most of its original length...Throughout almost all its length the Delaware Canal runs

alongside the Delaware River...its significance illustrat[es]...the canal era... history of transportation in the United States.”

Within the context of the landmark status, water is the historic transportation medium that defines the essence of the Delaware Canal’s historic significance. The capability of the Delaware Canal to be fully-watered demonstrates its continued integrity as a historic waterway system - including its alignment and towpath. Revered historic artifacts, including: the locks, bridges, gates, berms and aqueducts were all designed to manage water. The palette of original construction materials remains central to conservation. Conserving the character of the surrounding historic communities maintains the context of the landmark. Caring about the water informs all aspects of Delaware Canal conservation.

A Network of Trails and Connections

In 1831 the Delaware Canal was a remote location. However, it was soon to become a primary transportation and economic corridor that operated for 99 years. As the bicentennial of the Delaware Canal approaches, “networks” of all kinds define our 21st Century life. The Delaware Canal continues to serve as a major “trunk” that connects to a regional web of trails, open spaces, environmental and infrastructure systems, economies, communities, and cultures. It is also a component of The Circuit, a 300 mile bicycle and pedestrian trail network that is poised to become a 750 mile system connecting the Greater Philadelphia area.

The Delaware Canal attracts people from near and far, and brings them into intimate contact with the Delaware River environment that is unique in America.

The waterway and towpath pass through small communities and run through our hallowed Washington’s Crossing Historic Park. From many locations, the Delaware Canal provides vantage points for eagle watching within the state park that runs along the entire eastern side of Pennsylvania. The Delaware Canal intersects with towns, roads, parks, and other trails to serve critical roles in advancing public health; connecting people to history, culture and each other; revealing diverse ecological and geological systems; and opening up economic possibilities for us all.

Stewards of the Canal and River

Segments of the Lower Delaware River (between Easton and Morrisville) are included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers program and the Delaware Canal is specifically identified as a major resource under that designation. The physical and social connections between the Delaware Canal and Delaware River are critical to the long-term health and prosperity of the Canal communities and the entire Delaware Valley region.

Managing the Delaware River as it rises and falls affects the Delaware Canal. Protecting the Delaware River helps to protect the Delaware Canal water supply; its water quality; its physical features; our lifeline roads and public infrastructure within the floodplain, and our nearby private properties.

Investment in the Delaware Canal means wise Delaware River management to protect our public and private assets. Environmental stewardship of the Delaware Canal Landmark and its watershed is essential to sustaining the Lower Delaware National Wild and Scenic River designation.

A Park of Many Users

Today, the Delaware Canal and Towpath are used heavily for recreation and are capable of serving more people. This resource is an integral part of a larger eastern Pennsylvania trail network. Everyone benefits when the park is well-maintained, attractively programmed, and cherished as an inviting place. Non-human species benefit as well since the Delaware Canal also serves as a waterway habitat, migration corridor, and a water source for life.

DCNR supports this Vision Study as a tool to explore the relationships between the Delaware Canal and resources outside limited park boundaries and stretched state budgets. A united vision that is drawn from a wide variety of stakeholder voices will enable partners to comprehensively and systematically address compelling practical issues such as: public access locations; parking; toilets; shelter, refreshments, and information.

Public expectations extend beyond the basic functions of normal park management. As a linear amenity that connects cultural centers, the Delaware Canal and Towpath have evoked suggestions from multiple communities to integrate: tourism, recreation, arts and culture, special events, education, and preserve their character as an irreplaceable natural refuge from the pace of contemporary life.

The Delaware Canal is an iconic symbol of our region's culture.

We're All in this Together

The Delaware Canal is managed by DCNR with its finite share of the state parks budget. However, the Delaware Canal is unique in its structural and operational complexities within the state park system.

In today's world of shrinking public resources, successful public-private partnerships are one way to supplement public budgets and provide critical public benefits. We must welcome and explore new ideas for new or private funding including in-kind resources such as technical assistance from the Army Corps of Engineers. Ultimately, each idea needs to be assessed for its effectiveness, costs, and how it might impact the future of the Delaware Canal.

The visioning process begins a new chapter of strategies for the long-term maintenance and financial sustainability of the Delaware Canal. Continuing transparent public discussions is essential for the next phases of feasibility and master planning. Additional studies may be needed to determine whether and to what extent an idea may be feasible. This approach seeks both near-term improvements and long term partnership solutions.

In the coming months, please continue working with us as this process evolves.

It's Our Delaware Canal.

Contact

Elissa Garofalo

President/Executive Director

Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, Inc.

elissa@delawareandlehigh.org

610-923-3548

www.delawarecanalvision.org