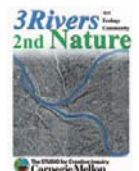




Photo by Rob Plaffman and Lisa Haabestad

The Monongahela River Pool 2

WATERTRAILS



I. Creating the Monongahela Valley Water Trail

What will the future hold? In a democratic society, the future evolves out of our collective desires, well voiced visions, and strategic action.

Before 2010, the Braddock Dam will be raised and the dam at Elizabeth removed, creating a flat-water pool that is 30 miles in length from Braddock to Charleroi, Pennsylvania. The dam provides a range of opportunities. It will enable shipping by allowing barges to decrease their travel time, assuring the life of the valley's remaining industry. It will also provide the area's sportsmen and sportswomen with increased access to an enormous recreational resource. Kayaking, motor boating, fishing, and other watersports are on the rise. Water quality is improving. Fish species, wildlife and forests that were once believed lost from the area for good, are returning. Man acts and nature reacts, recovering over time. The question is, how do you see the future of the region, its waterfront, your neighborhood? What future do you have in mind for your children?

This report was the result of a three day brainstorming session with area leaders, citizens, experts, and recreational advocates. On the following pages you will see some practical and fanciful ideas about the river. You will see innovative approaches to old industrial structures. You will see a depiction of a once barren hillside that is slowly emerging as a vegetated "emerald arc." You will read about the opportunities inherent to creating a water trail, as well as the constraints that are typical of this time.

This report provides ideas, or concepts—the first step towards the development of a water trail. The next step is to work with communities and decision makers to create a design and a funding plan.

II. Dialogue Overview:

Monongahela Valley community members were invited to join a diverse group of regional experts and water trail enthusiasts to explore the relationships between rivers, communities, and the environment through a River Dialogue and Water Trail Conference held at the McKeesport Marina and Palisades on September 14, 2002. This event was hosted by Friends of the Riverfront (FOR), the Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC), and 3 Rivers 2nd Nature (3R2N), with the goal of developing a concept plan for a water trail in the Monongahela Valley. The purpose of this River Dialogue was to educate, stimulate discussion, and promote a water trail that would include small boat launches, boat storage, clearly identified land-water destinations, mooring areas, and appropriate signage.

Morning programming began with an overview of water trail development and the evolving Monongahela Valley ecosystem. 3R2N scientists then led a community sojourn showcasing river organisms, water quality, and geological and botanical river edge conditions. This information was then used to inform and enable discussion about the development of a Monongahela Valley Water Trail during the afternoon dialogue segment. Community participants worked with environmental design and planning experts from partner organizations and outside agencies to create plans for a water trail that would provide access to the Monongahela and Youghiogheny Rivers from the cities of Rankin, Duquesne, McKeesport, Elizabeth, Dravosburg, Glassport, and Clairton.

River Dialogue: Creating the Monongahela Valley Water Trail was sponsored and hosted by 3 Rivers 2nd Nature, a project through the STUDIO for Creative Inquiry at Carnegie Mellon University; Friends of the Riverfront; Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area, a program of the Steel Industry Heritage Corporation; and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council.

Other partners included: City of McKeesport, National Park Service, North American Water Trails, PA Fish & Boat Commission, Sierra Club, US Army Corps of Engineers, Western PA Field Institute, and 3 Rivers Wet Weather Demonstration Project.

Funding for this project was generously provided by the Heinz Endowments and the Pittsburgh Foundation.

Special Acknowledgements (list affiliation):

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www.pecwest.org

3 Rivers 2nd Nature
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<http://3r2n.cfa.cmu.edu>



II. What is a Water Trail?

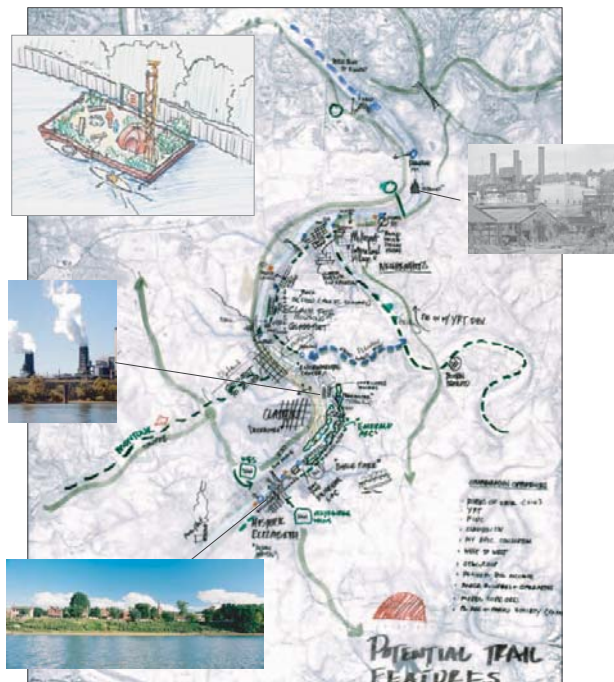
Water trails are similar to bike trails in that they contain access to places of interest, communities and natural places, and are open to all types of users. Water trails are used by boat owners, nature enthusiasts, weekend recreationalists, and tourists. A typical water trail might include small-boat launches, shore access, overnight campsites, boat storage, and interpretive signage highlighting historical, geological and environmental information.

Additional amenities often featured on, and which benefit from a water trail, include parks, restaurants, and shops located within adjacent communities. Historically, rivers were the highways of our early explorers, connecting important sites by clear, unobstructed routes. Today, overcrowded roads and renewed interest in recreation are compelling people to rediscover their rivers and streams.

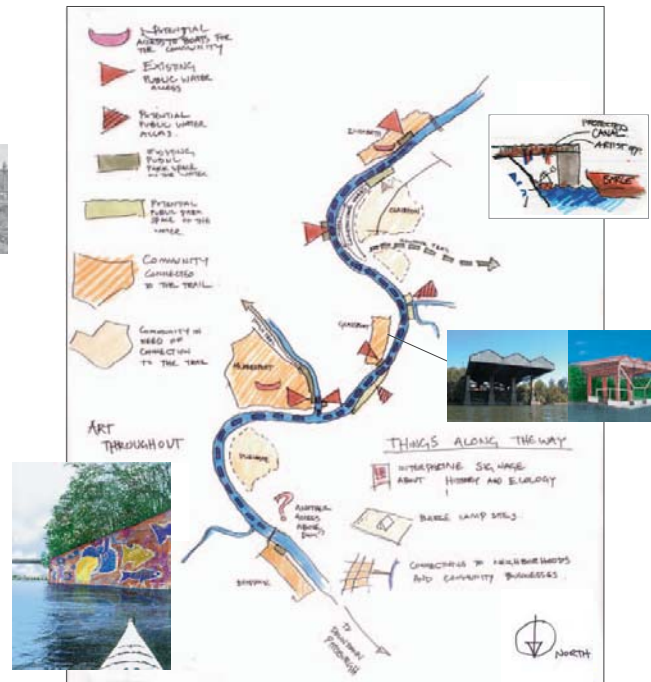
IV. Why Create a Water Trail in the Monongahela Valley?

The September 14, 2002 River Dialogue focused specifically on an eight-mile stretch of the Monongahela River. With a large volume of industrial barge traffic and vertical slag walls, this section of river may be the most challenging in the region for recreational navigation. Never-the-less, it also includes long stretches of lush riverbank where black willow,

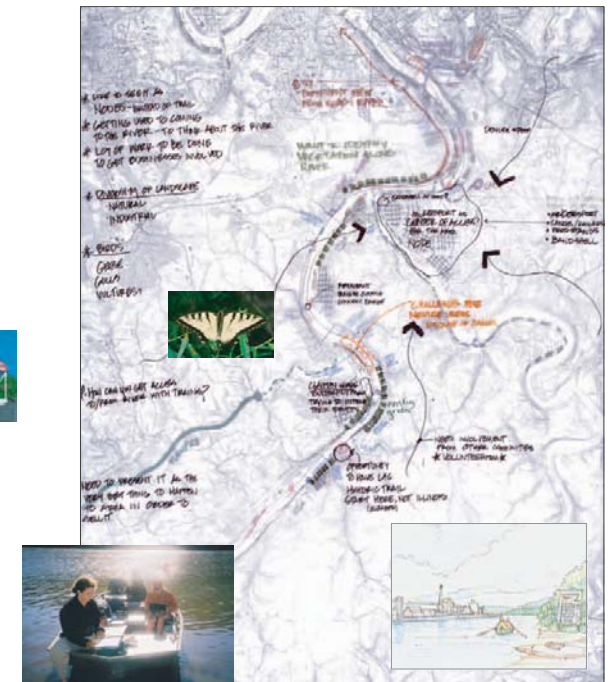
sycamore, alder and silver maple dot the sand, providing the context for campsites that can only be reached by the water. In the future, this section of the Monongahela River could link to a growing upriver effort around Morgantown to create a continuous water trail for the whole length of the river. In the coming years, the dam will be removed from Elizabeth, providing the longest stretch of open water in our region and with it, exciting new opportunities for our river.



River Dialogue Map 1



River Dialogue Map 2



River Dialogue Map 3

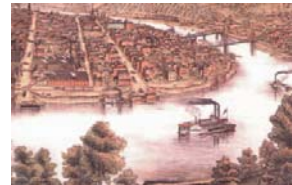
V. Amenities and Access

For over 100 years, the Monongahela River has been used as a means of transport, a source of water and a sewer. The industry that once defined this region is now mostly gone, leaving a legacy of vacant industrial sites, polluted and abused ecosystems, and economically depressed communities. Despite this, the diversity of life in our rivers begins to return, allowing us to see new exciting opportunities for the river and its communities.

The Monongahela Valley Water Trail has the potential to transform the crumbling infrastructure of our abandoned industrial sites into a gateway between our communities and our rivers. The water trail will show off the beauty of our history, current industry and ecology. The trail can aid our economy by creating new recreation and educational opportunities for our region. The potential role for the Monongahela Valley Water Trail in the development of a new, healthier relationship with our river is limitless.



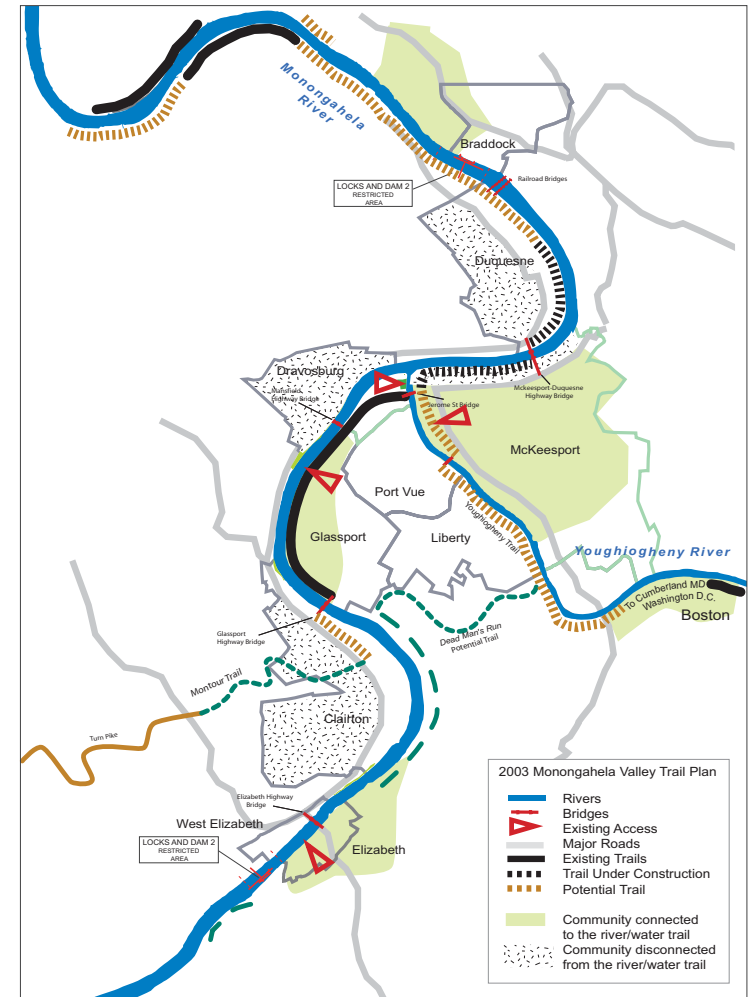
The existing vertical walls will be one of the most difficult issues to overcome in connecting communities with the River Trail.



A view of the City of McKeesport in 1893



Active barges create danger zones for non-motorized boats. The drawing (far left) shows an idea for creating a radio station that would give a caution signal for recreational boaters.



Communities and Land Trails

VI. Water Trail Town and Amenities, a Concept Plan

TOWNS

Duquesne is occupied by large brownfield sites, such as the land formerly occupied by the Duquesne Works of U.S. Steel. Redevelopment and reuse has begun with the combined interests of the Regional Industrial Heritage Corporation, the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development and the city of Duquesne. Despite decades of industrial domination, a fifty-foot waterfall continues to cascade where Thompson Run crosses under Kennywood/North Duquesne Boulevard. In Duquesne, the greatest challenge to river trail development and restoration is the area of very steep banks made of slag, rubble, plate steel and other industrial waste along the former mill site.

Clairton is home to the largest coke plant in the U.S. While the plant is an interesting attraction for passing boaters, river trail enthusiasts will also need to be informed about safety hazards due to transport barges as 18,000 tons of coal are delivered daily from both directions on the Monongahela River. Also noteworthy, the confluence of Peter's Creek is directly underneath Clairton Coke Works and the CITE mural (Continuous Improvement to the Environment). Restoring the stream and voluntary elimination of permitted pollutants (significant amounts of ammonia and cyanide according to the latest 2003, EPA NPDES Performance Track website) flowing into the creek, and then the river, would be an ideal goal befitting the mural's claim to "Continuous Improvement to the Environment."

Glassport is named for its major industry at the end of the 1800's. The many abandoned industrial buildings along the river have potential to be renovated and given new life as restaurants, boat rental facilities, community centers and other recreational amenities.

Elizabeth is rich in history; Lewis and Clark, for example, started their journey from Elizabeth in the early 1800's. By the end of the 1800's the town had begun building steamboats, towboats, and barges. Even to this day, stately old houses face the river. Elizabeth is not only the beginning of the Monongahela River Pool Two, but also an aesthetically beautiful gateway to the Monongahela Valley Water Trail. Currently under the Elizabeth Highway Bridge, there is a public access area for small boats. During the River Dialogue, people recommended creating a boat yard museum, free canoe rental facility, and descriptive way-finding signs at this location. Downstream there are a few abandoned industrial barges along the shore that could be turned into grassy barge parks. The long berm between Elizabeth and the Emerald arc could be developed as a trail with beaches after the water level is re-established by the new dam at Braddock.

Braddock is known for the historic battle that took place there in 1755 and for the last functioning steel mill in the Monongahela River Valley, the Edgar Thompson Works. In proximity to the former Westinghouse Works, Turtle Creek runs through this area. The water quality of this creek continues to be negatively affected by urban run off, agricultural nutrients and industrial contamination. The new Braddock dam will raise water levels in the creek, creating access problems below existing bridges; although, the additional depth would increase small boat access if the bridges were raised or removed.

McKeesport was a bustling center for industry in Allegheny County until the 1950's. Currently McKeesport plays an important role in connecting surrounding communities by both land and water. With the establishment of the dam at Braddock, and the removal of the dam at Elizabeth, McKeesport becomes a major hub to access the longest stretch of open river in the region: thirty miles from Braddock to Charleroi. Potential attractions include:

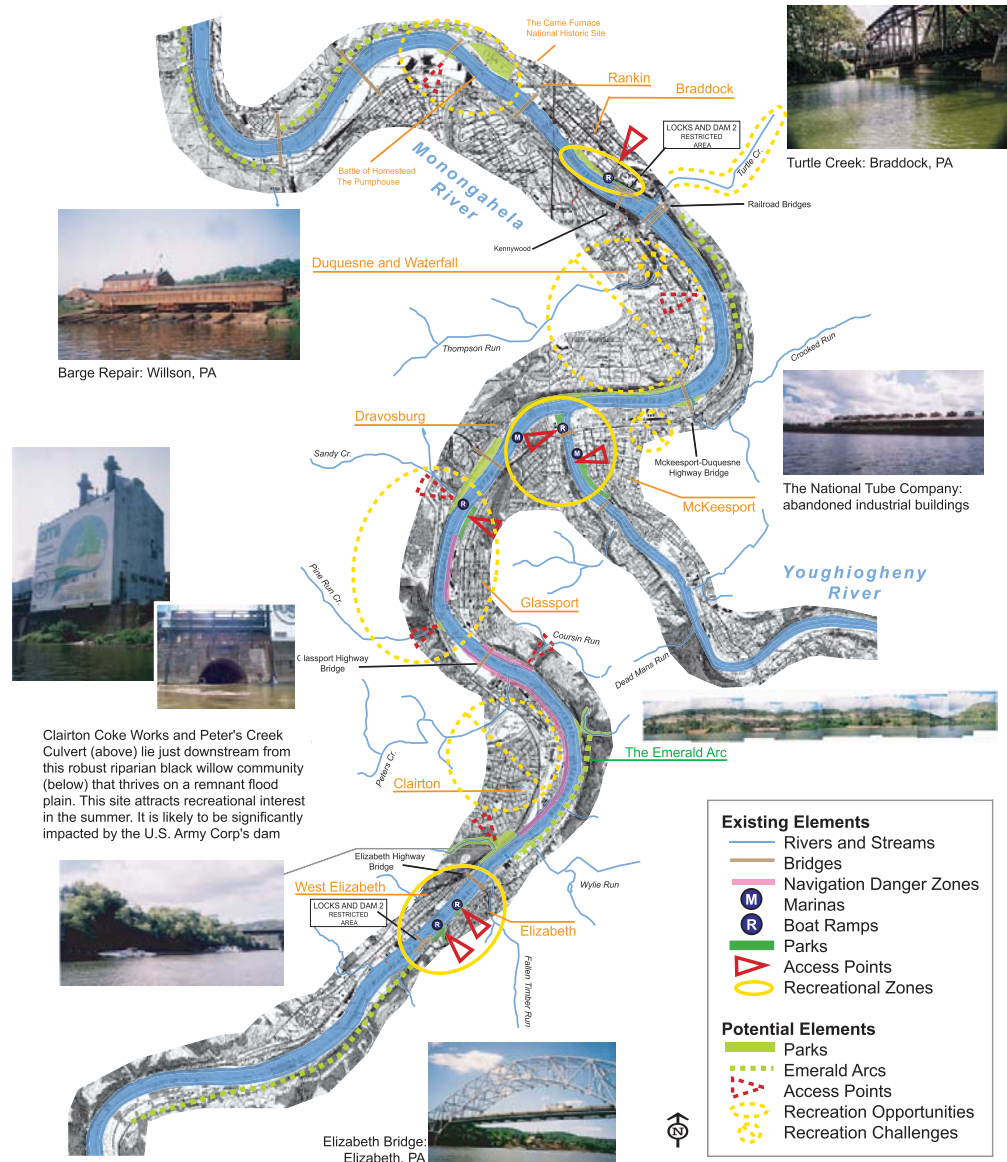
AMENITIES

The Round House once repaired locomotives of the McKeesport Connecting Railroad, which was owned by US Steel and serviced the National Tube Company. This building has the potential to become a railway and train museum and can be seen from the river.

The park adjacent to the Palisades and McKeesport Marina offers recreational and social opportunities. A "Floating RiverCenter" would add an educational elements to the Monongahela Water Trail where visitors could learn about water quality, river organisms, bank conditions and plant life.

The Youghiogheny River Trail runs between McKeesport and Connellsville. A forty-three mile limestone surfaced trail was built along the right-of-way of the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad. Eventually, this trail will become part of a network connecting Pittsburgh and Washington D.C. Designed for bicycling, walking, fishing and canoe access, many consider it to be one of the most beautiful in the country.

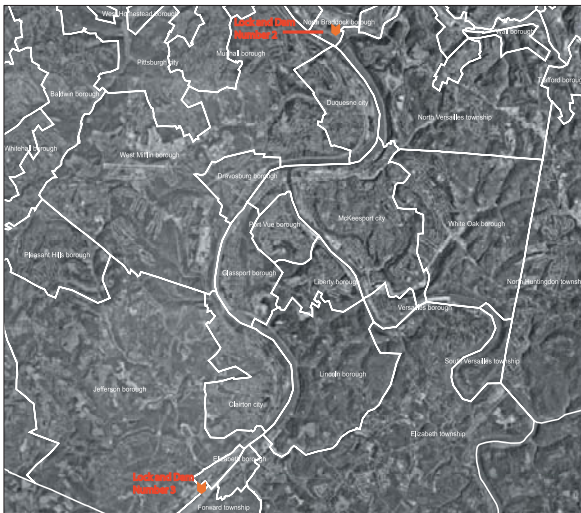
Emerald Arcs: The Monongahela River is cradled in significant valleys, often newly green, on one bank, grey on the other. For example, a sweeping wall of green, three and a half mile long, lies opposite the Clairton Coke Works and is covered by recovering plant communities.



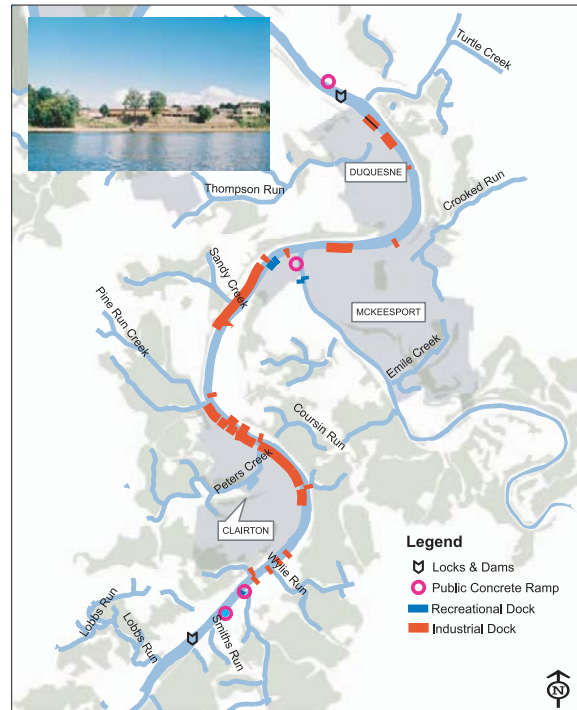
VII. GIS Maps

The question of a Monongahela Valley water trail is alternately enabled and constrained by the post-industrial conditions of the area. This is an area in transition with incredible recreation and economic potential in the future.

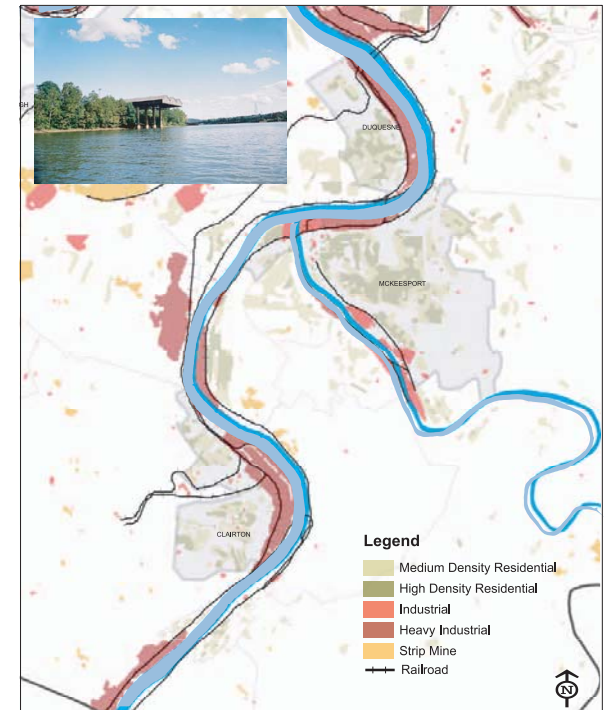
These maps illustrate a number of important issues for a water trail including the impact of barges and their landside infrastructure in relationship to public boat launches and numerous public and private docks. Waterfront land use is a mix of residential, industrial and post-industrial brownfield sites. Vertical walls separate the most populated communities from their rivers. At the same time water quality and native plant communities are improving in ways that wouldn't have been expected even fifteen years ago.



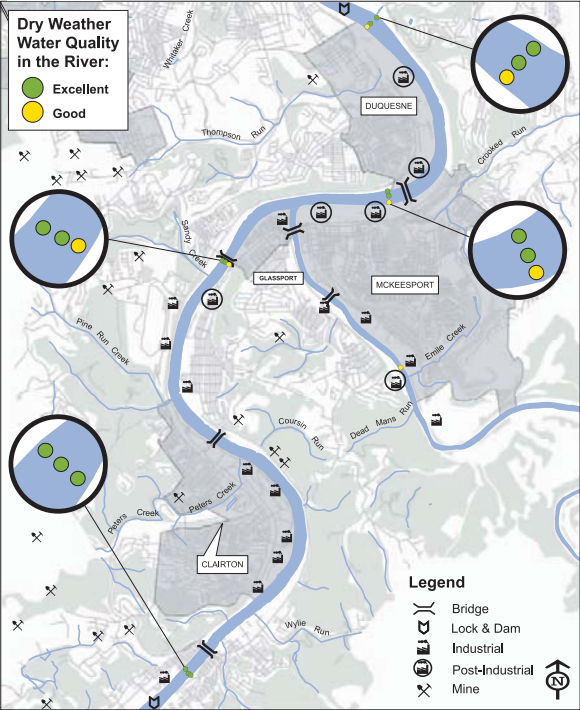
Municipal Boundaries



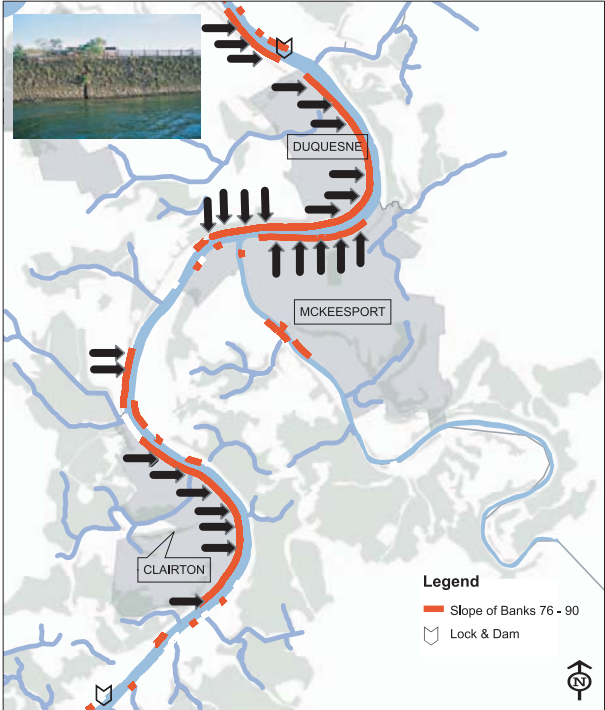
Industrial Barges & Public Ramps



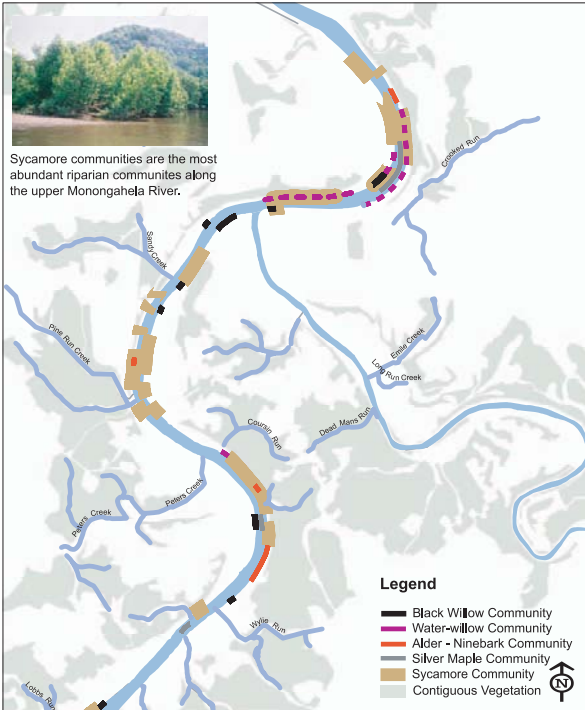
Land Use



Mining, Industry and Water Quality



Vertical Walls Isolating Communities from the River



Native Plant Communities

VIII. Community Voices: Opportunities



"We should use the rivers to connect people and places. Also, we should use them as an environmental teaching tool for children."

~Alan Kancho



"Increased public use could force industry to meet higher environmental standards."

~Maggy Aston



"This is an opportunity to combine the science of industry and history. If people see a stream coming out of a building, do they know what it is?"

~Betsy Flasher



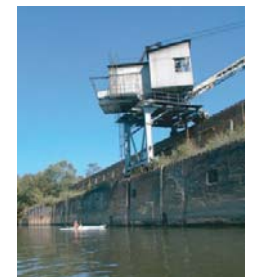
"I am always surprised by improvements in river water quality and recovery of natural ecosystems."

~John Singleton



"Artists need to confront the industrial wasteland as art."

~Maggy Aston



"We can create a tourist industry out of coke plants/steel plants. We can lead tours to explain how they worked, history, etc."

~Alan Kancho



"The experience [of going down the river] was wonderful- that's the way to get people involved."

~Community Member



"Our rivers are regional assets and provide unique recreational resources."

~Kathryn Ross



IX. Community Voices: Challenges



"Mill towns had a connecting factor no matter who you were, and what you did, that was the rhythm of the mill. With the decline of the mills, communities are looking for this unifying factor."

~Bruce



"Our steel industry is like the Roman ruins and to destroy these relics would be destroying the history WE have built."

~Steve



"There are concerns about creating an exclusive zone. Don't replace the industrial barrier with a private property barrier."

~Community Member

"There's a lot of beautiful stuff the river has to offer. The major challenge is to get people here against the impression that the rivers are just dirty."

~Anne Singleton



"Create a land stewardship for the community to 'take back' the river from the industry and pollution."

~Maggy Aston



"Other cities (usually European) have beautiful riverfronts - why not us?"

~Nancy Eddy



"As an individual it is difficult to just get to the rivers to sit on the banks, hang out, get into a boat, go fishing, camp, go swimming, etc. We need human scale access to rivers."

~Donna Issac

Entrance Survey

What kinds of river-related recreational activities do you take part in?

- kayaking / canoeing
- boating / sailing / rafting
- Commercial boat ride / Gateway Clipper
- fishing
- swimming
- camping / picnic
- walking / jogging
- biking
- river front trail use
- birds and wildlife watching
- river clean up
- festivals

What changes have you seen in and along the rivers in the Monongahela Valley?

- less industry
- redevelopment of riverfront property (e.g. Homestead, North shore)
- water is cleaner
- river edge is more green
- more nature/wildlife (increase in mayflies, muskrat, beaver, blue heron, seagulls), better access
- nature is coming back
- increased recreational use
- more boats on river (esp. power boats)
- riverside trail development
- increasing awareness/recognition of river as resource
- awareness

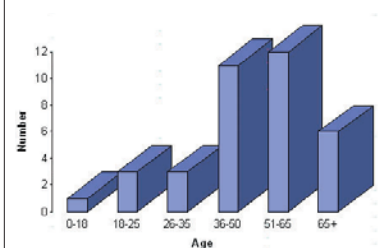
Do you have any ideas about changes that can be made to improve your access to and use of the rivers?

- better street/walking access
- access points with amenities (parking, bathroom, drinking water, "beaches", bathhouse, food)
- informative/interpretive signs (about history, nature)
- more tourist-friendly

Residence of the participants



Age distribution of participants



- maps of river access/points of interest
- better launches for non-power boats
- boat shuttles/taxis (for commuters, tourists, water trail users)
- more riverside parks
- more riverside trail development
- recreational-based businesses near river
- fishing piers
- public boat docking
- wharf at Homestead Waterfront
- connect quality of life issues with economic development
- get communities involved
- clean up riverbanks
- continue working to clean the water
- more parks

How important do you consider it to be to improve the water quality of the Monongahela River?

- water is still dirty
- gray and black water dumping
- run-off from streets
- personal safety/ security of property at access points
- development damaging riverbank/encouraging commercialism
- danger of industrial/barge traffic

What did you specifically like about the event?

- the boat trip (actually seeing banks from river)
- familiarizing self with/getting in touch with river, seeing activity along river, tranquility of river, connecting with place, visualizing possibilities
- the people (variety of people/common purpose, experiencing river with other people, good facilitator/speakers, discussing with others)
- aesthetic context
- felt productive
- participatory planning/design
- well organized
- comprehensive/combo of issues (awareness-recreation-education)

Did anything you learn today surprise you?

- How clean water is (compared to past)
- recovery/diversity of life/nature along rivers
- high proportion of natural riverbanks remaining
- how many other people are interested in improving river/access
- idea of community involvement with rivers
- history (e.g. Lewis and Clark)
- new development along river
- beauty of bridges over river
- future removal of dam

What are some of the opportunities and reason for creating a water trail in the area you toured?

- recreation (ecologically responsible)
- education (experiential, historical, environmental, cultural)
- community involvement/revitalization
- employment
- improve quality of life
- attract business/tourism/people to region (specifically McKeesport)
- promote river as regional asset
- reclaim rivers from industry/pollution for community/people
- integrate river with life in Pittsburgh
- change perceptions/increase awareness of river
- beauty of rivers
- historical/cultural preservation

What are some of the difficulties or barriers that you see in creating a water trail in the area you toured?

- need boat rental
- danger of industrial traffic and fast-moving power boats
- getting sufficient funding
- property rights and liability
- railroad and other industry along river
- poor access
- lack of facilities
- shuttles needed
- pollution/water quality still problem
- riverbank/access site maintenance
- politics/mindset
- bad reputation of river water quality/safety
- erosion of slopes from increased use

DIRECT QUOTES:

"A commuter boat linking Pittsburgh with the upper Monongahela would provide cultural access to rural regions and rural access to city folk."

"Develop waterfront properties that would draw people to the areas without damaging the natural resources or focusing on commercialism"

"Signage - let people know that the river is alive, there are activities to do and a history to learn. Bring it back to life and communicate the role visitors play in making that happen"

"As recently as 2001, I found it essentially impossible to rent a boat anywhere near the Point on the rivers. Looked in phone book and internet and found only one overly-large, overly-expensive boat for rent...no small boats, and no other small craft. How tourist-friendly is this?"

"Bridge walkways over railroad tracks and roads so roads and trains and people can operate together"

"Organize nodes (points of access, with boats for rent and other related services) as well as "trails" on the water"

"[I am] always surprised by improvements in river water quality and recovery of natural ecosystems"

"There are some elegant old houses on the river hillsides - as canoeing and kayaking events develop, they would be ideal Bed and Breakfasts"

OTHER SUGGESTIONS:

Community gardens along river, re-use old concrete for structures/ramps/bank stabilization/walls

EVENT SUGGESTIONS:

smaller groups for discussions, more discussion/less presentation, circular discussion groups, need PA (several people complained they couldn't hear)

