



Chapter 5: Regional Challenges

This region is facing several environmental and recreational challenges. These challenges were analyzed through extensive research and public input to highlight a range of issues, from very broad to very specific, within the region.

To produce a reasonable number of challenges that aligned with the SMP's regional role and mission of conserving landscape resources to enrich the quality of life and sense of place of the South Mountain Partnership regions, the Steering Committee determined three to five challenges this project would address.

The steering committee identified the five top regional challenges at its April 2023 meeting, which are listed below, along with a crosswalk of analysis to ensure a final list of metrics for each challenge.

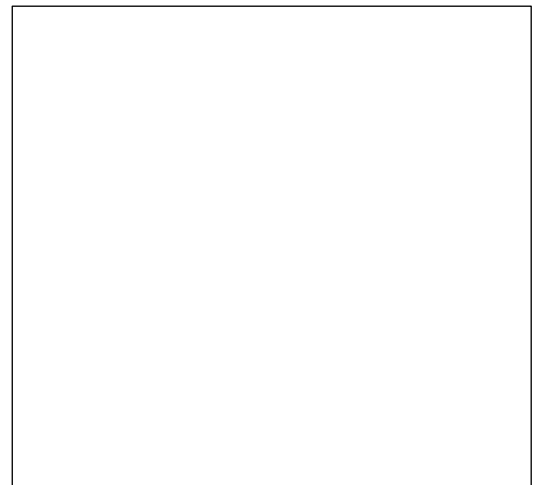
5.1 Sustainable Development

Balancing growth with preservation of resources and quality of life.

For this state of the region report, the report card, and maps, metrics for land permanently preserved from development had been grouped into two categories: preserved land (parks, forests, open space) and preserved farmland. Preserved land metric is positive, up approximately 6% since 2010, in addition to preserved farmland, which is also a positive metric.

The South Mountain region has experienced significant land development in recent years and continues to experience development pressure. Proximity to East Coast Markets, Interstate 81, the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and available land contribute to this pressure. Development proposal data from selected counties in the South Mountain Region indicate the region has strong growth pressures. In Cumberland County, there were 6,000 acres proposed for subdivision or development, while in York County, in that same year, there were over 10,000 acres proposed. Balancing these proposals for development with the need to preserve land creates sustainable development challenges to this landscape.

Development puts a major strain on many of these resources; however, stopping development is not an option for several reasons. The region is growing because it is a desirable place to live and locate a business. State law does not allow local government to stop growth, nor does case law support a growth moratorium. Well-planned growth, with thoughtful consideration of development type, design, and location, in a way that adds to a region's strength, while balancing impacts on natural and recreational resources, is the goal, but it is challenging to achieve.





5.2 Water Quality and Quantity

Including water quality for consumption and habitat, and stormwater management

This challenge is two-fold: water quantity and quality. Water quality is self-descriptive; water quantity refers to both the availability of water and how rainwater and stormwater are managed. Some challenges in stormwater management are related to climate change and increases in extreme precipitation. Extreme precipitation results in negative impacts on water quantity and quality and public health.

In addition, the weather pattern affects both water quality and quantity, and climate change. Severe drought in the South Mountain region, as recently as 1999, has resulted in declared emergencies and water-use restrictions, as well as crop damage. Stormwater is a particularly harmful aspect of flooding because it may contain and transport chemicals such as fertilizers or pesticides. These contaminants represent a significant public health threat if they infiltrate the drinking water supply or swimming areas. Recent intense storms, such as Hurricane Ida, have impacted water quantity and caused significant flooding in the region.

Impaired streams are a key metric for water quality and are also tied to the challenge of sustainable development. The South Mountain region has about 5,000 miles of streams; the PA Department of Environmental Protection has determined that nearly 2,400 miles, about 48% of all streams, are impaired.

5.3 Loss of Resources

Including farmland, forest, history and culture, and habitat

While this challenge is closely linked to the sustainable development challenge, South Mountain Partnership desired to highlight these specific resources in a separate challenge to the landscape. While climate change will impact habitats, farmland, and forests, development will add to the impacts on these resources.

Preserving these resources is a key part of SMP's work, and this project presents an opportunity, and this project presents an opportunity. Some countries have established goals for farmland preservation in the short term, but there has been no analysis to determine adequate amounts of farmland over a long-term period.

Most of these metrics are used as foundations for these recommendations. Two other metrics are also related to this challenge: public open space and the number of historic places. Public open space is publicly accessible, generally parks and forests. The nearly 6,100 above-ground historic places, buildings, structures, and objects that have been surveyed and identified by the State Historic Preservation Office database in the South Mountain region reflect the region's heritage.



5.4 Public Health

Including physical and mental health

Several recently completed Community Health Assessments across the region show that residents' health issues are strongly associated with obesity and topics of lack of physical activity. The recent pandemic has had a particularly significant impact on mental health, and the CHAs cited above also note poor mental health as a concern.

Reflecting the cross-cutting nature of the challenges to the landscape and the recommendations to address those challenges, both physical and mental health can be improved by increased recreation.

In addition, this report acknowledges the impact that climate change has and will continue to have on public health from increasing extreme heat and rain events. Consequently, a number of these recommended actions are focused on mitigating and adapting to climate change's impact on human health.

Two other metrics to measure public health used in this report- extreme heat days and precipitation days- both show increases when comparing the first decade of the 21st century with the second decade, resulting in both metrics receiving a "thumbs down" in the Report Card.

5.5 Recreation

Including location, access, demand/supply, maintenance, and sustainability

While the South Mountain region has many exceptional recreation resources, there are still challenges. This includes the location of those resources and accessing them, connecting them to the community.

Location and access to recreation include equity issues, ensuring that everyone has access to nearby recreation. Sustainability includes environmental concerns related to the use of those resources.

With the Appalachian Trail, Mason-Dixon Trail, and state bicycle routes J, S, JS, a key metric for recreation is miles of trails and bike routes. There has only been a slight increase in mileage since 2013, resulting in a rating of a "thumbs sideways."

The fact that only 33% of the people in the South Mountain landscape are within a 10-minute walk to a trail or park resulted in a "thumbs-down" rating. The second metric revealed nearly 80% of the 4-county population has such proximity, and it received a "thumbs up" since it is well on its way to meeting the 100% goal set by PA DCNR.

