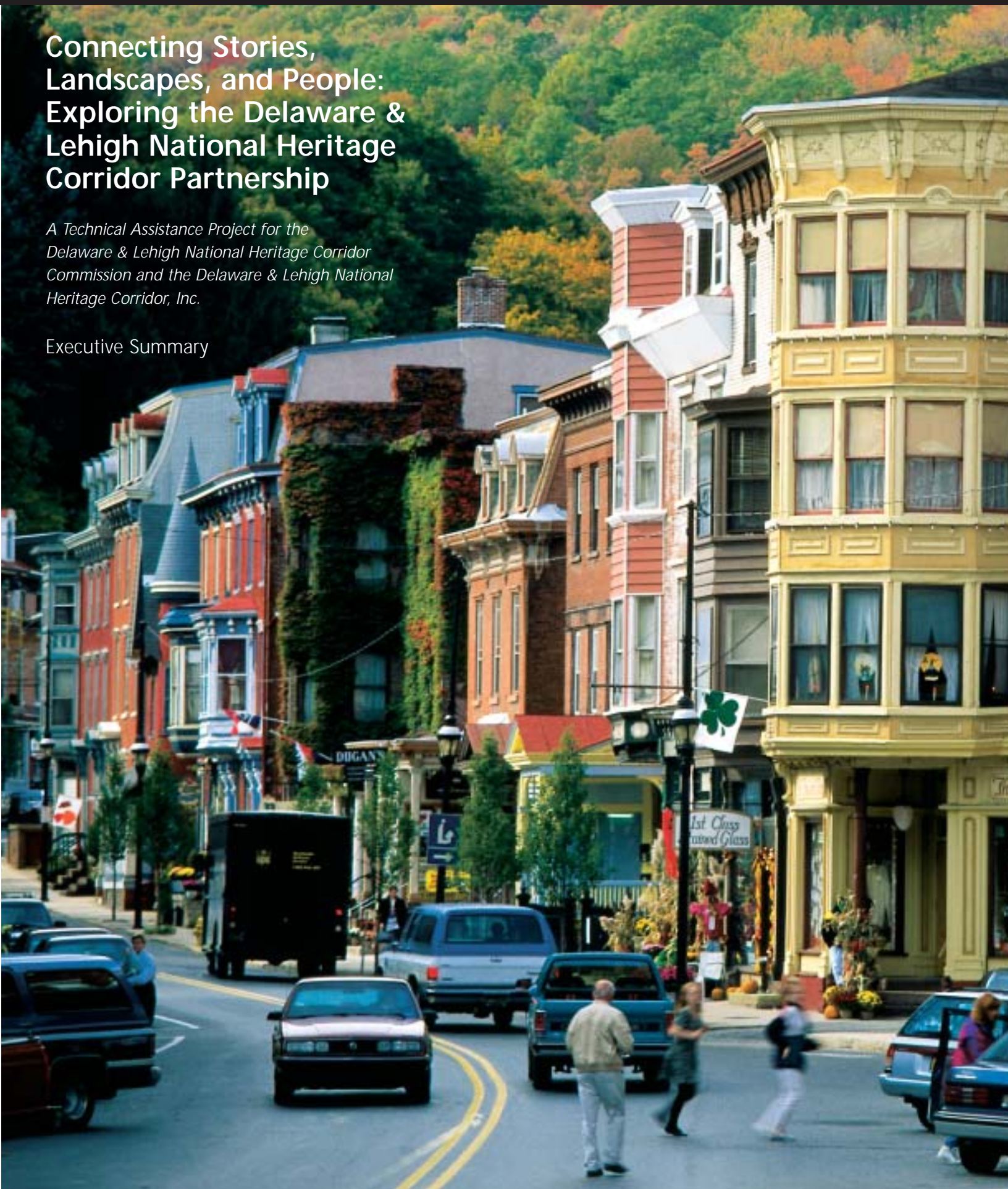




# Connecting Stories, Landscapes, and People: Exploring the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Partnership

*A Technical Assistance Project for the  
Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor  
Commission and the Delaware & Lehigh National  
Heritage Corridor, Inc.*

Executive Summary





This report is the ninth in the Conservation and Stewardship Publication Series produced by the Conservation Study Institute. This series includes a variety of publications designed to provide information on conservation history and current practice for professionals and the public. The series editor is Nora J. Mitchell, director of the Institute.

The Conservation Study Institute was established by the National Park Service in 1998 to enhance leadership in the field of conservation. A partnership with academic, government, and nonprofit organizations, the Institute helps the National Park Service and its partners stay in touch with the evolving field of conservation and to develop more sophisticated partnerships, new tools for community engagement, and new strategies for the 21st century. The Institute is based at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park within the Northeast Region of the National Park Service.

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Local partners sustain stretches of picturesque canal towpath and trail.

# **Connecting Stories, Landscapes, and People: Exploring the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Partnership**

Sustainability Study  
Executive Summary

*A Technical Assistance Project for the  
Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Commission  
and the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, Inc.*

**Conducted by the  
Conservation Study Institute  
Northeast Region  
National Park Service**

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**CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP PUBLICATION NO. 9**

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Nora J. Mitchell, and Jacquelyn L. Tuxill  
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# Contents

- I. Background and Context for the Sustainability Study 4
- II. Accomplishments and Leverage in the D&L Corridor 5
- III. Strengths and Challenges of the D&L Partnership System 8
- IV. Critical Ingredients for Sustaining the D&L Partnership System 11
- V. Options and Opportunities for the Corridor's Future 13
- VI. Closing Thoughts 16



# I. Background and Context for the Sustainability Study

Congress established the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor (Corridor) in 1988 as the nation's third national heritage area.<sup>1</sup> In 1993 the Corridor was also designated a state heritage park. Located in eastern Pennsylvania between Wilkes-Barre and Bristol along 165 miles of rivers, canals, and railroads, the Corridor conserves the historic transportation system—and the stories of the people and communities—that brought anthracite coal from the mines to the markets in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The authorizing legislation also established the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Commission (Commission) to assist state and local authorities in preserving and interpreting the Corridor's historic and cultural resources and in fostering compatible economic development. The Commission's authority is due to expire in November 2007. The national heritage corridor designation is permanent.

In 2005, the Commission initiated the Delaware & Lehigh (D&L) Sustainability Study to evaluate the past 17 years of work and help inform its

decisions regarding the Corridor's future. The Commission asked the National Park Service Conservation Study Institute (Institute) to provide technical assistance by conducting the study, and identified four points that the study should address:

- Evaluate progress toward accomplishing the purposes of the Corridor's authorizing legislation and the strategies set forth in the Corridor's Management Action Plan of 1993.
- Identify additional actions and work needed to protect, enhance, and interpret the Corridor and its nationally significant resources.
- Analyze the National Park Service (NPS) and Pennsylvania Heritage Park Program (PHPP) investments to determine the leverage and impacts of these investments.
- Examine models, options, and opportunities to enhance state and local partnerships and to continue the NPS relationship, including the possibility of a permanent NPS designation or a new framework to support the work of the Corridor initiative.



The towpath and canal remnants make a great outdoor classroom for the study of local history and ecology.

<sup>1</sup> Public Law 100-692.

The Institute’s project team gathered background information from various written sources—including the Corridor management plan, annual reports, and management documents—on the current management framework, the accomplishments and progress of the Corridor partnership, and the structure and operations of the partner network. The team used a variety of participatory techniques, including confidential interviews, meetings, conversations, and focus groups, to engage and gather insights from key individuals. These included commissioners,

board members of the Commission’s nonprofit operating partner Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, Inc. (D&L, Inc.), D&L staff, Corridor partners, individuals who played important roles in the Corridor’s formation, and people with expertise in heritage areas and partnerships. After analyzing information from the different components of the study, the team identified critical ingredients for the future of the Corridor’s partnership system, and options and opportunities for sustaining and enhancing the partnership system.

### National Context for the D&L Sustainability Study

Heritage areas are an important direction in conservation, as demonstrated by the growing interest across the United States. In 2004, with 27 congressionally designated heritage areas and many proposals for additional designations, National Park Service Director Fran Mainella asked the National Park System Advisory Board to examine the future of national heritage areas and their relationship to the National Park Service. The board, composed of 13 citizens with various kinds of expertise and a commitment to the mission of the National Park Service, has the statutory responsibility to advise the NPS director and the secretary of the interior on policy and program matters. After a year of deliberations, the board’s Partnerships Committee reported its findings and recommendations. They recommended, among other things, establishing a legislative foundation for a system of national heritage areas within the National Park Service and instituting a policy requiring a study three years prior to the cessation of federal funding authorization to make recommendations regarding future NPS involvement.<sup>2</sup> The D&L Sustainability Study and a similar study completed a year ago by the Conservation Study Institute for the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission offer a model for how such studies might be conducted.

## II. Accomplishments and Leverage in the D&L Corridor

### A. Progress and Accomplishments of the Corridor Partnership

The D&L Management Action Plan of 1993 outlines 175 actions to be addressed by the Corridor partnership. In assessing progress and accomplishments, the project team found that the Corridor partnership has addressed 145 (or 83 percent) of these actions. Geographically, the D&L partnership has spread its efforts evenly across the Corridor. More than half of the 145

actions undertaken are Corridor-wide in scope. Even though implementing Corridor-wide actions is challenging, the D&L partnership has addressed 92 percent of these regional-scale actions in some way. The team rated the 175 actions according to their level of completion<sup>3</sup> and found that 67 of the actions addressed are “ongoing” (e.g., implementing the Corridor-wide interpretive plan will continue indefinitely). More than a third of the actions undertaken

<sup>2</sup> The advisory board’s report, *Charting a Future for the National Heritage Areas*, is currently in publication and will be available at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas> in early summer 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Actions were rated “completed,” “ongoing” (i.e., actions that have no anticipated completion date), “underway” (i.e., actions that have a proposed completion date or product), or “no activity.”

focus on interpretation, of which a third have been completed, and only a few remain to be addressed. Of the 53 conservation actions in the management plan, 5 have been completed and 37 are in various stages of completion.

With most of the 130 current projects initiated since 1999, staff capacity has expanded and responsibilities have changed over time. An analysis of selected programs (see box of program highlights) shows that D&L staffers work in a variety of capacities with partners.

Many projects encourage partners to value their heritage resources as regional economic and recreational amenities with the power to connect residents to their history. Communities that become involved in D&L activities seem to develop a greater awareness of the regional context of local actions and understand how their success contributes to regional well-being. The Commission and D&L, Inc., consistently play an important role in promoting a broad, Corridor-wide vision and keeping individual projects aligned with that vision.

## Highlights of Selected Corridor Projects

**Visually and Graphically Speaking**, a graphic identity and interpretation system, provides design and production guidelines for interpretive panels, directional signs, publications, and brochures. The system establishes a Corridor “look” and helps visitors and residents navigate the region and appreciate the natural, cultural, and historic resources. System components have been implemented in hundreds of locations by D&L staff and partners and incorporated into other projects including the D&L Trail and visitor center exhibits.

The **Corridor Market Towns** program provides technical assistance and mini-grants for visioning, planning, training, façade improvement, and marketing activities to help preserve the character of canal towns that have struggled to sustain economic development efforts. Initiated in 2002 with a \$160,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Downtown Center, this program has led to a net gain of 33 businesses, 279 individual improvement projects, and 137 facade renovation projects in the six pilot communities.

**Two Rivers Landing** in Easton houses the Binney & Smith Crayola Discovery Center, National Canal Museum, and Easton Visitor Center, which interprets the D&L Corridor. Opened in 1996 and now hosting 300,000 visitors annually, this public-private revitalization partnership has boosted Corridor visibility and led to an economic rebirth in Easton. The project cost \$9 million in state, municipal, and private funds, and in its first five years produced a net gain of 43 businesses and 2,000 new full-time jobs locally and doubled canal boat ridership at nearby Hugh Moore Park.

Launched in 2000, the **Municipal Assistance for Conservation** program has granted up to \$5,000 each to six municipalities for consensus-building exercises to help address contentious planning issues related to Corridor conservation and preservation goals. With D&L staff facilitation early on, municipalities have assumed leadership for project implementation, which demonstrates a shift in the staff’s role toward project facilitation and mentoring. The Borough of New Hope, the first grant recipient, transformed a canal-side public works storage area into an ecologically sensitive, user-friendly, award-winning parking lot that links the downtown to the canal, creating an anchor for new trail and interpretation projects.

The 165-mile **D&L Trail**, the physical “spine” of the Corridor, traces the historic transportation routes and connects the region via a network of canals and towpaths, rails-to-trails conversions, spur trails, and a water trail. Project actions have included acquisition and planning of trail segments, technical assistance and grants to partners for wayfinding and interpretive signs, and events to promote the trail and its history. The D&L Trail is now 98 percent publicly accessible, despite the fact that dozens of private and public entities own different portions. Since 1998, the 5,000 Trail Tenders volunteers have contributed 30,000 hours to help maintain the trail.

The **Lehigh Gap Wildlife Refuge** reclamation project, implemented by the Wildlife Information Center, aims to restore a 700-acre Superfund site along the Kittatinny Ridge, a migratory route for raptors and songbirds. D&L staff provided the center with the connections, expertise, and backing for success in land acquisition and funding. D&L staff also led design of the master site plan, which includes education and research; interpretation of the region’s industrial history, environmental degradation, and rebirth; and establishment of a 15-mile trail network with a two-mile spur connection to the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.



## B. Leveraging Public Investments

Since its establishment, the Commission has documented the funding received for Corridor-facilitated projects (see figure 1). Through fiscal year 2005, the total federal investment of \$8.02 million provided through the National Park Service has leveraged nearly 12 times its value in direct funding from other sources. State funding totaling \$6.59 million through the Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program has leveraged more than 14 times its value. As a whole, Pennsylvania state agencies have supplied more than 35 percent of the funding invested in Corridor projects. These figures reflect funding for projects in which the D&L Commission had a direct investment

and/or a leadership role. Not included are state, federal, and other investments in the region in which Corridor management has been integrally involved but has not played a leadership role. For example, the \$9-million Two Rivers Landing project in Easton is included, but related projects (e.g., the Easton public square, adjacent public buildings) totaling \$7 million are not. In addition, the Corridor initiative leverages much more than just funding. Non-financial leverage includes partner in-kind support and staff time, new projects and activities that have been catalyzed by Corridor programs, and significant volunteer time (e.g., the Trail Tenders' contribution of 30,000 volunteer hours since 1998).

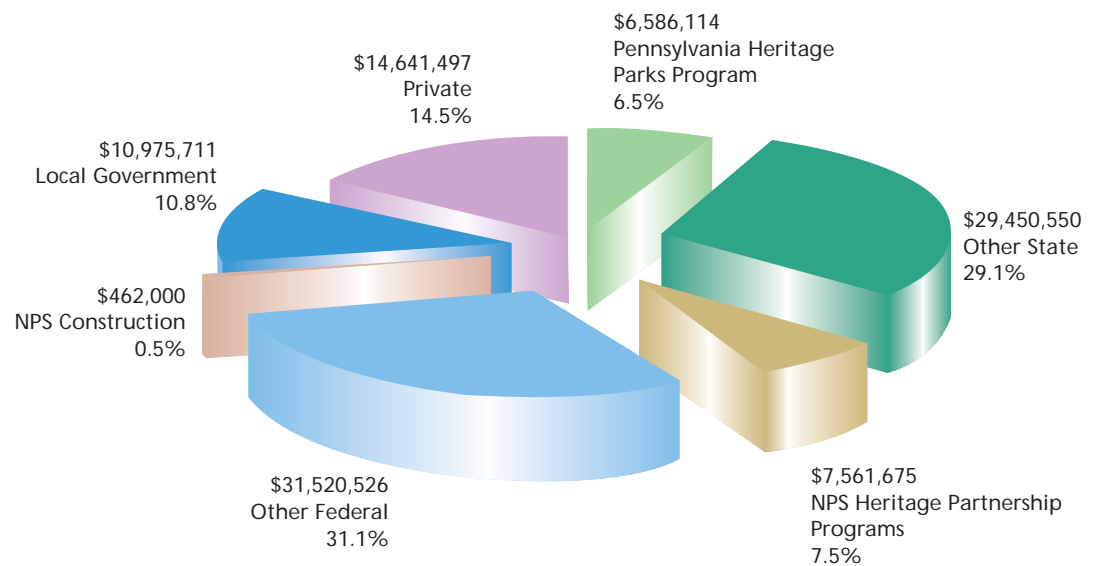
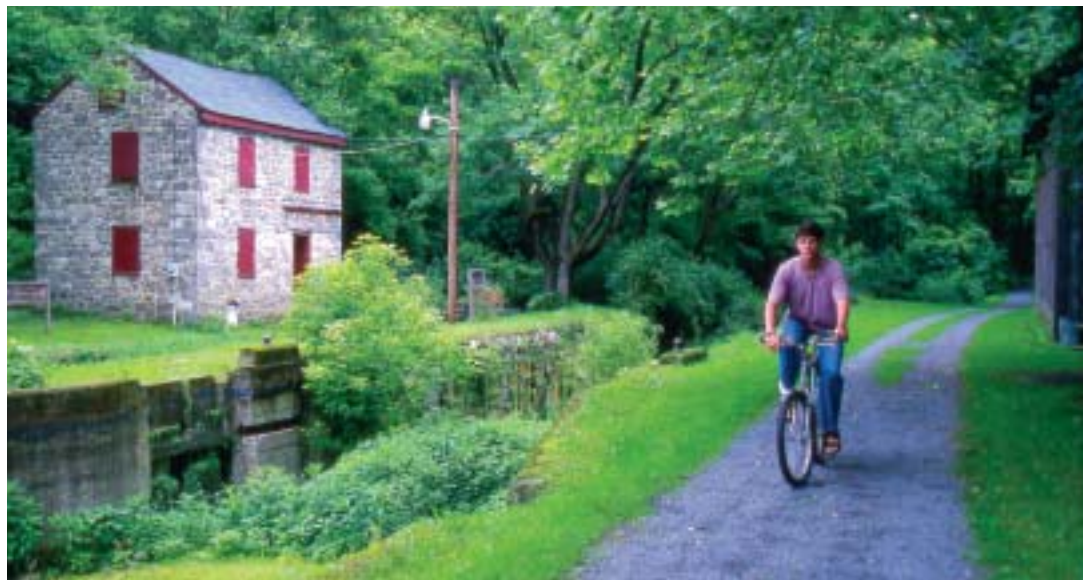


Figure 1: D&L National Heritage Corridor partnership funding, FY 1989 through FY 2005 (totaling \$101,198,073)



Stone locktender's house, mule barn, and path converge in Freemansburg.

### III. Strengths and Challenges of the D&L Partnership System

The strengths of the D&L partnership system are presented below from the perspectives of both Corridor management and partners, followed by a discussion of challenges that integrates the two perspectives. The management perspective draws on meetings and conversations with commissioners, D&L, Inc., board members, and Corridor staff, and two focus group dialogues on management. The partner perspective derives primarily from confidential interviews that were conducted with 30 partners.

#### A. Strengths of the Current System: The Management Perspective

A fundamental strength of the D&L partnership system lies in the breadth of the Corridor mission—integrating conservation, preservation, interpretation, recreation, and economic revitalization, with a community-based focus that emphasizes the importance of the Corridor’s heritage story. This broad mandate, established by Congress in the authorizing legislation, helps to ensure the relevancy of Corridor programs and provides a “big tent” for collaboration and for building partnerships.

Forming D&L, Inc., as a nonprofit operating partner with the Commission has provided the Corridor with the strengths and benefits of both entities. The Commission’s federal standing provides stature, clout, credibility, and leverage, while D&L, Inc., provides flexibility with respect to board composition, additional fundraising capacity, staffing, and longevity without the specter of a sunset. Together the two entities provide more opportunities for the direct involvement of diverse stakeholders in the management structure, and the consistent strength of their memberships has been a factor in the Corridor initiative’s success. In addition, the sustained participation by key individuals (commissioners, board members, and staff) has provided continuity and institutional knowledge, with benefits for partnership building and leveraging.

The connections with the primary state and federal partners—the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and the National Park Service—have provided critical anchors for the Corridor initiative.<sup>4</sup>

Support from the DCNR has been strong and consistent, both in funding and working relationships. Affiliation with the NPS has provided credibility, branding, technical expertise, and capacity for Corridor operations, although NPS support and working relationships have varied over time. Federal and state funds have been especially significant for leveraging other support, both financial and non-financial, and the D&L staff has grown very adept at capitalizing on these leverage opportunities. Indeed, the staff’s ability to navigate this highly complex, dynamic partnership system, and to integrate state and federal initiatives with the needs of other partners, is one of the initiative’s greatest current strengths.

#### B. Strengths of the Current System: The Partner Perspective

Partners recognize that the Corridor’s heritage and story can play an important role in community revitalization, fostering a sense of pride in place and providing the common ground essential to community-based efforts. They appreciate that Corridor staff and programs connect the story with local resources. The Corridor story and activities encourage collaboration by providing an integrated perspective. Because Corridor goals reflect thematic interests, partnerships can transcend governmental sectors and cross political and administrative boundaries. In this way, the concept of heritage creates a platform for engaging people and communities Corridor-wide in ways that directly influence and support local efforts to revitalize the region.

Partners note that working on Corridor projects has broadened their perspectives and their willingness to work in partnerships across multiple interests. This suggests that over time these collaborative relationships may alter the way organizations and community leaders think about the future of the D&L region. Partners also note that the D&L initiative has empowered them to think more boldly. For smaller organizations, it has provided an opportunity to connect their efforts with broader Corridor goals and initiatives. As levels of trust increase, relationships that were initially project-focused

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<sup>4</sup> The Pennsylvania Department of Community Affairs played a similar anchoring role in the Corridor’s formative years prior to the establishment of DCNR in 1995.





Quiet waters flow where industry once churned, enhancing quality of life in the 21st century.

often evolve into long-term strategic connections that integrate local goals into the broader region-wide vision. The overall result is greater alignment of efforts.

Perhaps most importantly, D&L staff help partners make sense of a complex sea of state, federal, nonprofit, and private entities. These study findings suggest that working successfully in dynamic, multi-dimensional partnership environments requires a special kind of organizational culture and leadership philosophy. Partners emphasize that Corridor management creates opportunities for integrating the programs and priorities of key state and federal agencies with municipal and community needs. Management's ability to work between the various levels of government enables communities to play meaningful roles in the partnership system. A major factor in this ability, according to numerous partners, is that the Corridor initiative is not identified with any particular political agenda.

### **C. Challenges of the Current System**

The D&L partnership system is complex and dynamic, so it is not surprising to find challenges in the current system that have implications for the future. For example, the Commission's frustrations in dealing with the federal bureaucracy (including cumbersome federal appointment and financial management processes) led it to create D&L, Inc., as a nonprofit operating partner and a potential management back-up or replacement for the Commission. Also, some aspects of working with the NPS and other federal and state agencies have been challenging at times for Corridor participants, and there is a sense of unfulfilled opportunities in some cases. The continuing uncertainty regarding state and federal funding, both of which are critical for operations and project support and for leveraging resources, creates a challenge to the ongoing ability of Corridor management to plan and carry out programs.



Multiple recreational opportunities attract visitors to Hugh Moore Park in Easton.

As Corridor programs grow and evolve there is an ongoing need to build the capacity of partners to help shoulder the workload, and to foster strategic partnerships to avoid duplication of efforts and competition for funding. Another ongoing challenge involves effectively interpreting a complex story on a regional scale. It is critical, both for building public understanding about regional heritage and for maintaining a vibrant partner network, to tell the story in a way that is

compelling, links local resources and communities, and illuminates how local stories connect with the regional story. Corridor size and geography contribute to this challenge, as do the many local jurisdictions. While Corridor management and partners have done a good job of building local understanding and appreciation of the Corridor story, understanding of the breadth and interconnectedness of the regional story is sometimes lacking.



## IV. Critical Ingredients for Sustaining the D&L Partnership System

The project team identified ingredients that are critical to sustaining and enhancing the D&L partnership system through its analysis of the different study components. These ingredients, a diverse array of inputs and processes, interact with and support each other to make possible the Corridor initiative's accomplishments and outcomes. Although most of the critical ingredients are already in place, not all are fully realized (e.g., secure, sustainable funding). The ingredients are divided into four categories: structuring, guiding, and cultivating the partnership system, and time-related considerations.

The critical ingredients for **structuring** the partnership system include the *anchoring state and federal government connections* provided by the DCNR and the NPS. Other state and federal agencies also play vital roles in project implementation. Working in tandem with these agencies is an effective *management entity* that is charged with "stewarding" the Corridor vision. The management entity must have a *strong, diverse composition*, provide *balanced stakeholder representation*, and be perceived as *nonpartisan and even-handed*, possessing *clout and credibility*, and inspiring *respect*. Another key ingredient is the *network of partners* who must have *sufficient capacity to carry out projects and take on leadership roles* over time. Other vital structural ingredients include *secure, stable funding from diverse sources* and the *ability to leverage funds, resources, and ideas*.

Critical to **guiding** the partnership system is a *broad, integrated vision* that provides an overarching framework for broad-based collaboration. Reinforcing the vision is a *management plan* that supports Corridor goals and is relevant to community and stakeholder concerns. The region's *shared heritage* acts as an organizing concept and provides a common platform for project action. Tied to the notion of heritage is the *compelling regional story* that connects local resources, links people and communities, and provides a further basis for collaboration. Also important are *Corridor goals and boundaries that reflect thematic rather than political interests*, which allows the Corridor to be relevant to diverse partners and facilitates bringing the necessary players together. The *vision and leadership*

provided by the Commission, board, and staff help to create a partnership culture that values collaboration. A number of *key leadership characteristics* are also necessary, including creativity and "outside the box" thinking, entrepreneurialism and a willingness to take risks, patience, integrity, and mentoring and collaborative leadership skills.

Vital to **cultivating** the partnership system are collaborative processes that continually enhance and reinvigorate the system. These include *meaningful community engagement*, continually *telling the story* and *promoting the vision* in ways that connect people and communities throughout the Corridor, and *responsiveness to local needs and priorities*. Operating with an *open, inclusive, collaborative approach* is essential. This involves effective listening and communication; sincerity, honesty, respect, patience, and trust; shared responsibility and transparent and flexible operations; and a willingness to try new approaches. Over time, with good collaborative processes, partner organizations redefine their goals and ways of working to achieve *alignment with the Corridor vision and goals*. Finally, a *commitment to learning and to implementing the learning* helps to hone the dynamic partnership system as it evolves.

**Time-related** considerations are also important, but time operates in a different way from the other essential ingredients. It takes time for a system as complex as the D&L partnership to evolve and mature. It takes time to assemble a strong, sustainable system because partner capacity varies and partner relationships rely upon effective communication and trust, which build over time. With an ambitious agenda, there is of necessity a strategic sequencing to projects, with early projects catalyzing or setting the stage for later projects. As the system matures, there is a need for increasing specialization, technical expertise, and capacity building (of D&L staff and partners) in order to sustain momentum. The relationship between partners and Corridor management can change as partners are able to take on more leadership responsibility, which can further strengthen the system.



Historic suspension bridges link communities and trails.



## V. Options and Opportunities for the Corridor's Future

Based on the analysis of strengths and challenges and the critical ingredients for sustained success, the study team identified options and opportunities for the future. The team is not recommending any specific option or combination of options, but is presenting a range of possibilities for the Commission and D&L, Inc., to consider as they make decisions for the future. First discussed are the management options, which fall into three categories: the management entity; state, county, and municipal government involvement, with leadership by the DCNR; and National Park Service involvement. Together, these categories encompass the primary anchoring connections that are essential to success. Because of their mutual importance, a combination of options from different categories may ultimately best meet the Corridor's needs. A discussion of other options and opportunities follows the sections below on management options.

### A. Management Entity

With the Commission's federal authorization due to expire in 2007, there are five options to consider. The first four options would involve federal legislation, presumably accompanied by reauthorization of federal funding for Corridor operations and programs.

*Option A.1: Reauthorize the Commission as the management entity*, continuing the current operating partnership between the Commission and D&L, Inc. This would sustain the Commission's credibility and clout, D&L, Inc.'s flexibility for revenue generation, and their combined stakeholder representation. However, it would perpetuate the challenges associated with the federal appointments process and having the two organizations operating in parallel.

*Option A.2: Shift to D&L, Inc., only*, authorizing it as the federal management entity to replace the Commission. This would reduce administrative and bureaucratic hurdles and simplify the management structure. At the same time, it would also reduce opportunities for direct stakeholder

representation, and other Corridor nonprofits may view D&L, Inc., as a competitor for funding and programming. Some Corridor participants have expressed concern over loss of stature and clout with this option.<sup>5</sup>

*Option A.3: Shift to D&L, Inc., and create a new legislatively established partnership committee* to replace the Commission. The primary functions of the new body would be to (a) sustain a legislated mechanism for involving key D&L stakeholders, (b) provide sustained federal stature and clout, and (c) advise and support D&L, Inc., as the new management entity. The new federal body would be subject to the federal appointment process, but the impact would be lessened since it would have no management and financial responsibilities.<sup>6</sup>

*Option A.4: Shift to D&L, Inc., and create a new advisory council through administrative action*, which would avoid the difficulties associated with federal commissions and advisory bodies. D&L, Inc., would be authorized as the Corridor's federal management entity, and its board could create the advisory council to provide for broader stakeholder representation.<sup>7</sup>

*Option A.5: Move forward without a federally authorized management entity and dedicated federal funding*, which would leave a substantial void for operations, project support, and leveraging ability. The national heritage corridor designation would remain, and the state's heritage park designation and support would not necessarily change. D&L, Inc., individual organizations, and partner networks would continue working toward Corridor goals, but this option would be a significant setback to the initiative.

### B. State, County, and Municipal Government Involvement, with Leadership by the DCNR

Much of the Corridor initiative's success is due to the substantial involvement and support of state agencies and local governments. The

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<sup>5</sup> If D&L, Inc., is authorized as the management entity, attention should be given to the authorities and requirements to be transferred from the Commission to D&L, Inc. (e.g., the authority to receive and disburse federal funds, and the requirement in the Corridor's original authorizing legislation that federal entities must consult and cooperate with the Commission regarding any activities affecting the purposes of the Corridor).

<sup>6</sup> See previous footnote.

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 5.

DCNR in particular has provided an essential anchoring connection. The two options below would further cement the participation of these key partners and offer opportunities to advance recently announced statewide initiatives, including “Shaping a Sustainable Pennsylvania: DCNR’s Blueprint for Action” and the governor’s “Keystone Principles for Growth, Investment, and Resource Conservation.”

***Option B.1: Establish an intergovernmental partnership agreement for the Corridor***, either through administrative action or state legislation, to identify ongoing roles and responsibilities for state, county, and local government in the Corridor initiative. The DCNR’s responsibility for the Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program and landscape conservation projects statewide and its key anchoring role in the Corridor position it well to lead this option. DCNR leadership would be important to secure the involvement of others and ensure the overall effectiveness of the agreement.<sup>8</sup>

***Option B.2: Establish a formal agreement or compact for management and maintenance of the “spine,”*** identifying responsibilities to be assumed by the state, the counties, and relevant municipalities. This agreement or compact could be authorized in conjunction with a new state designation focused on the spine that would reflect the unique partnership arrangement for ownership and management (for instance, a “state partnership park”).

### **C. National Park Service Involvement**

Many Corridor participants see value in a sustained affiliation with the National Park Service for the credibility, branding, and technical expertise that the NPS can offer, and believe this is justified by the D&L’s national significance as confirmed by its 1988 designation. The first four options below could be achieved administratively, while the fifth would require legislation.

***Option C.1: Use available tools more broadly to convey the NPS affiliation and brand*** and broaden awareness of the Corridor’s connection to the National Park System. National heritage areas can use NPS public information tools to help convey an area’s significance to visitors, heighten local pride, and stimulate increased visitation. Although the D&L initiative has made

some use of these tools, it could use the NPS arrowhead logo on D&L materials, develop a D&L brochure using the well-recognized NPS format, and create more linkages between D&L-specific websites and the NPS heritage area website (<http://www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/>).

***Option C.2: Seek a stronger, more consistent relationship with the NPS Northeast Region***, which has been the D&L initiative’s primary link with the NPS. The existing cooperative agreement between the D&L initiative and the Northeast Region provides a platform for advancing the relationship. Possible additional steps include: (a) regular annual meetings of Corridor and NPS Northeast Region leaders; (b) a sustained annual commitment by the region to provide technical assistance to specified Corridor programs; (c) staff exchanges to foster mutual understanding; (d) establishment of a dedicated NPS “circuit rider” for the Corridor; and (e) collaborative exploration of opportunities to draw on the experience of Corridor participants.

***Option C.3: Seek stronger relationships with nearby NPS units***, which could lead to broader awareness of the Corridor’s NPS connection, and further Corridor goals and the NPS mission.

***Option C.4: Pursue renewed NPS interpretive support***, which could help advance the Corridor initiative by providing (a) greater Corridor-wide interpretive cohesion through assistance to partners associated with the D&L story, and/or (b) an on-the-ground, uniformed NPS interpretive presence in the Corridor.

***Option C.5: Seek congressional authorization of a “special resource study” to explore potential permanent NPS involvement and additional federal designations***, which the NPS would conduct in collaboration with the D&L initiative through an open, participatory, public process. If upon completion of the study a permanent NPS presence or further designation is deemed appropriate and desirable, further legislation would be required. While the study would examine the specifics of potential NPS involvement, the general emphasis would be to explore a partnership approach that may not involve direct NPS ownership and management.

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<sup>8</sup> While this agreement as described is oriented toward state and local participation, it could be expanded to include relevant federal agencies (e.g., NPS, Environmental Protection Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Army Corps of Engineers), which could benefit the Corridor initiative over time.





The Lehigh River flows along the western boundary of Hickory Run State Park.

#### **D. Other Options and Opportunities**

The study team identified a number of other options for Corridor management to consider, related to investment by the management entity, partnerships, operations, and funding and other forms of support. These include undertaking a new strategic plan to help guide future investment of staff and funding, using the Corridor's heritage in a way that binds the Corridor together more effectively, placing greater emphasis on public relations and marketing, and emphasizing the Corridor initiative as a driver in economic and community

revitalization. Options that relate to the partner network include initiating a strategic assessment of Corridor partnerships, building partner capacity, and considering opportunities for increased stakeholder representation and involvement. Options that relate to Corridor management include increasing staff capacity and stakeholder representation and involvement, and exploring new funding opportunities through existing authorities and projects. These and other options are explored in more detail in the full report.

## VI. Closing Thoughts

By effectively using a collaborative, public-private approach to landscape conservation, the D&L initiative has become a model within and outside the region and has contributed to the evolution of heritage area programs at the state and federal levels. The involvement of local leaders and the long-standing commitments by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and federal government have enabled the D&L partnership to mature and prosper. The partnership has built a diverse network of partners and has made considerable progress in addressing the mandate articulated in its management plan, yet considerable work remains. As D&L management deliberates the future of the Corridor, it will need to consider how best to reinforce the partnership system and

employ it most effectively. A key consideration is how to secure the vital anchoring connections provided by the DCNR and the NPS. The ever-changing array of partners and shifts in priorities and relationships will test the strength of the partnership system and challenge D&L management to guide the system with flexibility and creativity. The dynamic nature of the partnership highlights the need for continued organizational learning and adaptive management. In the end, developing a deeper understanding of the D&L partnership's network-based approach is important to the future of this heritage area, and it will also inform the developing practice of conserving lived-in landscapes far beyond the D&L Corridor's boundaries.

*There's no shortage of bucolic sights along the Delaware Canal.*







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