

State of the Region

South Mountain Landscape

Adams • Cumberland • Franklin • York Counties, PA

REPORT CARD

2023 Report

Name: Our Environment

Address: South Mountain Region, Pennsylvania

Residents in Adams, Cumberland, Franklin, and York Counties...

South Mountain Partnership - the regional conservation leader in preserving and promoting a healthy future for nature, people, businesses, and communities - brings you this very first report card about nature, agriculture & food, history & culture, recreation, and everyone's health. The goal is to motivate all of us to make a positive impact and support the goal of protecting our environment and keeping our communities vibrant and healthy.

While there are plenty of things we have done well, we can improve our care of the things that make this region special. Please look this report card over and promise to help take care of our exceptional surroundings. The next generations are counting on us.



Our Environment and Health in the South Mountain Region: A Report Card

This is the first time a report card for our area has been done. It looks at how healthy our environment is and ways to improve if needed. There are over 400,000 people living on one million acres in this area of Adams, Cumberland, Franklin, and York Counties that we call the South Mountain region. It is the northern terminus of the Blue Ridge Mountains and is an important place with a unique mix of nature, history, farming, and outdoor recreation. The South Mountain Partnership, in collaboration with the planning staff of Adams, Cumberland, Franklin, and York Counties and local experts, made this report. It tells us about trends in five areas: Nature, Agriculture & Food, History & Culture, Outdoor Recreation, and Public Health. We plan to keep monitoring these trends and update this report.

The South Mountain Partnership's goal is to keep our resources safe and have strong communities. We want everyone to feel connected and work together to protect our region with tools like smart growth and sustainable economic development.

Thanks to this report card and the 'State of the Region' project, we now have the information we need to make better informed decisions. By understanding how healthy our area is, we can work together and make our lives and the future better.

Go to southmountainpartnership.org to learn more about joining this group of partners.



Katie Hess, Director,
South Mountain Partnership

THERE IS MORE!

All of the information and measurements from the Report Card are on our website and there are interactive maps and the final report. In that report, there's a plan to help leaders and policymakers deal with the issues in this Report Card. If we work together, we can make sure everyone, including future generations, has a healthy place to live and play.

southmountainpartnership.org



Details about Measurements

NATURE

Streams and Creeks: Clean water is crucial for both wildlife and people's health. Our area is home to the starting points of many streams. Keeping local waters clean helps everyone downstream.

Riparian Buffer: Buffers are protective zones along water that keep the water clean and cool. They offer shade, filter rainwater and stormwater runoff, and stop stream banks from eroding.

Wetlands: Wetlands act like sponges, soaking up rainwater and stormwater, and preventing floods. They are important homes for wildlife.

Preserved Land: Preserved land is a way to make sure wildlife has a safe place to live. It is also great for people who want to enjoy time outside. Plus, it helps to clean rainwater and store it underground.

Forested Land: Forests do a lot! They take in carbon, provide habitat for animals, provide cool shade for streams, keep water clean, and can even be used for sustainable timber sales.

AGRICULTURE & FOOD

Farmland: Farmland in the South Mountain area provides a lot of food, both here and nationally. It's not only important to our economy but also for our culture. The beautiful views are a bonus for our tourism industry and everyday life.

Preserved Farmland: Saving farmland means we will have a place to grow food in the future and space for future generations of farmers.

Orchards: Our orchards support a thriving agricultural industry, and they provide food for many people, even people far beyond our area.

HISTORY & CULTURE

Historic Places: Our region's rich history is seen in the buildings and places around us. They help us connect to our past and contribute to our tourism economy.

RECREATION

Public Open Space: Parks and open spaces are important for fun and for taking care of the environment. They provide outdoor recreation, hunting and fishing opportunities, bring in visitors, and help us with our physical and mental well-being.

Trails & Bike Routes: We have famous trails like the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, and many others for hiking, biking, and water activities. These trails help our physical and mental health and connect our region.

Walking/Driving Proximity to Trails, Parks, and Water Access: Having parks and trails nearby is important because it makes them easier for people to enjoy.

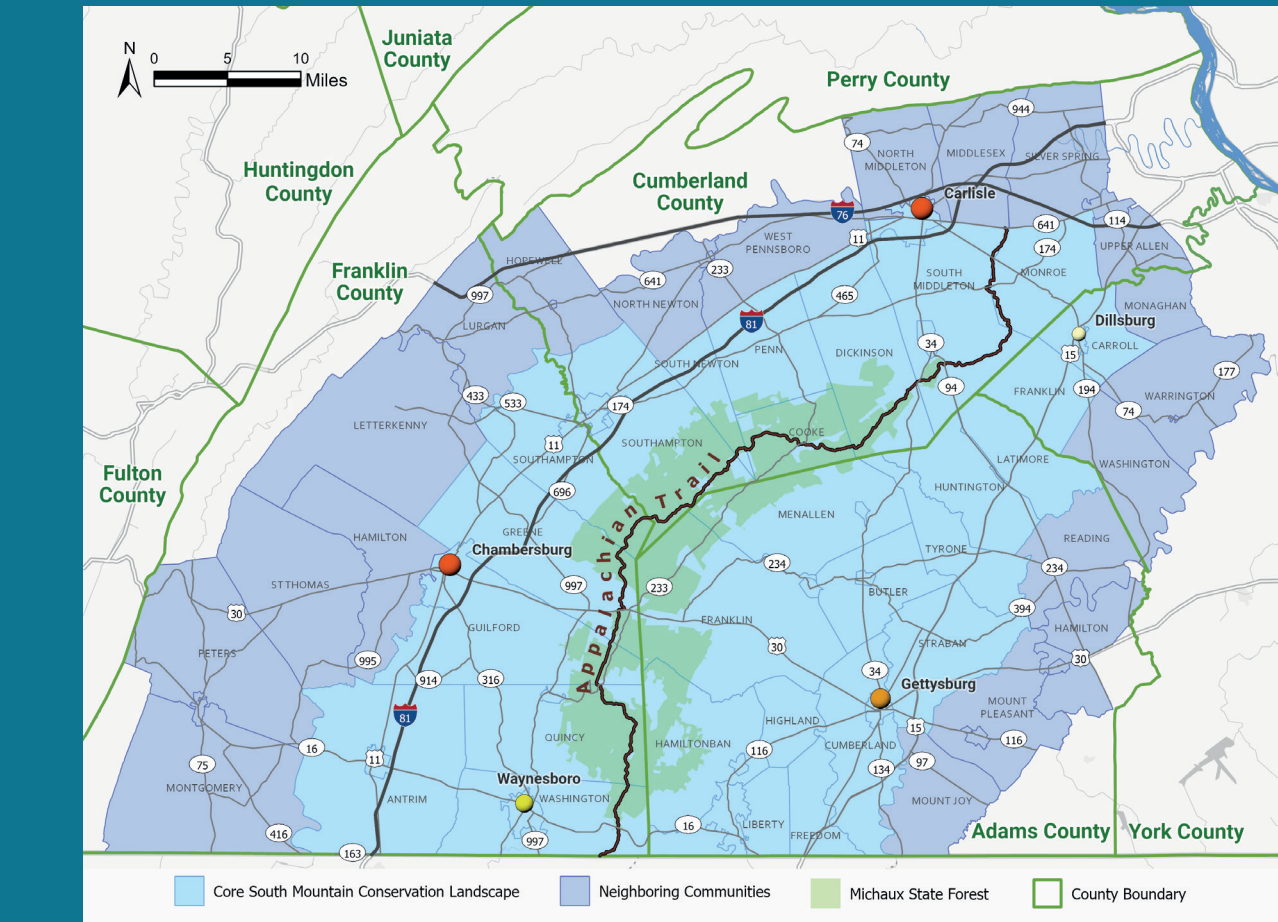
PUBLIC HEALTH

Air Quality: Poor air quality from particulate matter (tiny particles) affects how we live and makes breathing hard. It can cause health problems like respiratory illnesses and lower our quality of life.

Extreme Heat Days: These are days that are hotter than 90 degrees. Our region is getting hotter because of the changing climate, leading to more extremely hot days and contributing to negative health outcomes.

Extreme Rain Days: These are days that see more than 2 inches of rain. The changing climate is bringing more extremely rainy days which cause damage to property and infrastructure, and make water quality worse.

About the South Mountain Partnership



The South Mountain Partnership (SMP) is a team of people, organizations and groups working together to protect and promote farming, nature, history, and outdoor recreation resources in the region and landscape of Adams, Cumberland, Franklin, and York Counties. As part of the PA DCNR's Conservation Landscape program, SMP also works closely with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. The SMP brings together a network of people and groups to protect and promote our land, landscape, and resources and to take steps to keep them healthy and abundant for generations yet to come.

Visit us online!
southmountainpartnership.org

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Free copies of the State of the Region report card can be downloaded using this code.






Summary of Measurements

Using the most recent data available, you can see the state of nature, agriculture & food, history & culture, recreation, and public health. Details about the data are provided on our website.




Each metric is rated in one of three categories:

- **Thumbs Up** (green)
means keep up the good work!
- **Thumbs Sideways** (orange)
means more work needs to be done or more information is needed.
- **Thumbs Down** (red)
means that the region needs to work harder!

NATURE

	Streams and Creeks: 2,391 miles of waterways (48%) are impaired.
	Riparian Buffers: 5,630 miles, a slight decrease (-0.02%) from 2013 to 2018.
	Wetlands: 2,240 acres (9%) are preserved.
	Preserved Land: 155,420 acres of non-farm land, an increase of 5.9% from 2010.
	Forested Land: 350,211 acres, a decrease of 0.5% from 2010.




AGRICULTURE & FOOD

	Farmland: 858,124 acres, down 1% from 2007-2017.
	Preserved Farmland: 114,628 acres, up 24% since 2010.
	Orchards: 19,505 acres in the 4-county area, a decrease of about 2% from 2007-2017.




HISTORY & CULTURE

	Historic Places: 6,096 places or objects, up 104% since 2010.
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RECREATION

	Public Open Space: 135,075 acres available for our use.
	Trails & Bike Routes: 1,059 miles, up over 2% from 2013.
	Walking Proximity to Trails & Parks: 133,464 people in South Mountain region (33% of the population) live within a 10-minute walk of a trail or park.
	Driving Proximity to Trails: 775,782 people (80% of 4-county population) live within a 10-minute drive.
	Driving Proximity to Water Access: 435,132 people (45% of 4-county population) live within a 10-minute drive.

PUBLIC HEALTH

	Air Quality: 10 days during 2011-2020 when particulate matter exceeded standards, down from 12 days in the previous decade.
	Extreme Heat Days: 459 days during 2011-2020, up 9% from the 2001-2010 decade.
	Extreme Rain Days: 78 days during 2011-2020, up 129% from 2001-2010 decade.

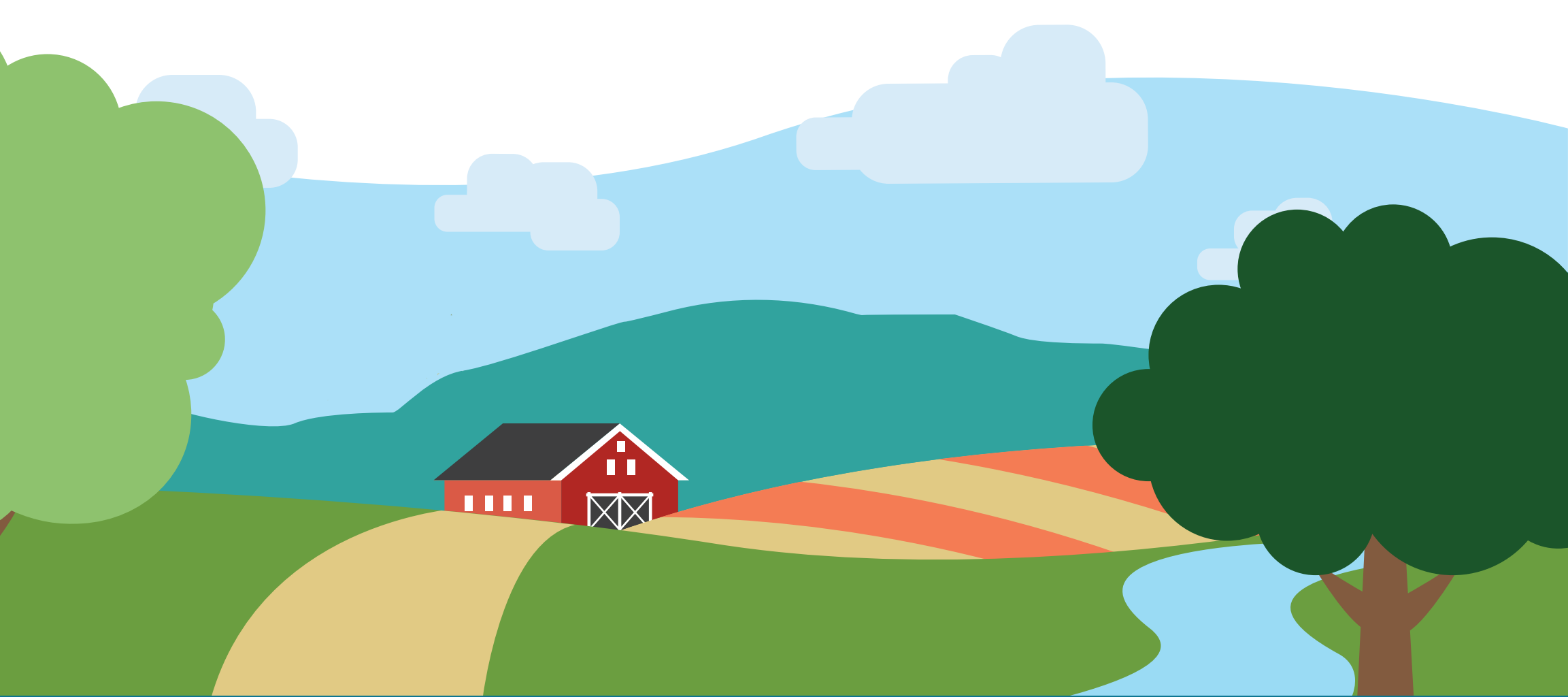
Congratulations, Keep Up the Good Work!



Preserved farmland has grown by 24%. All four counties in the region participate in the PA Department of Agriculture's program to save farmland, along with the help of land trusts. People who own land and want to preserve it can work with these programs and groups to do so. Protecting farmland is important for growing the food we need now and in the future, and for our farming economy.

In addition, more than 155,000 acres of non-farmland have been preserved in the South Mountain region. Permanently preserved land protects open space, forests, historic places, and parks. Municipal, county, state, and national governments, along with groups that protect land (like land trusts), all work together to set aside this land. As our region is under pressure to keep growing and changing, we need to keep protecting land for outdoor recreation. This helps our mental and physical health, lets nature thrive, and helps clean water. These actions maintain a high quality of life, sense of place, and strong communities.

In the 4-county area, almost 80% of people live within a 10-minute drive to a trailhead. The PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) wants everyone to be able to do this. Our region is doing a great job, but as more people move to our region, we will need more trails and trailheads so everyone can enjoy them.



How can you help?

- Continue to support and celebrate your county's farmland preservation program and the land trusts working in your area.
- Consider preserving your property, volunteering your time, or donating money to programs and groups that preserve land.
- Talk to the local leaders in your area and ask them to support more preserved land and construct new trails.



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Needs More Attention or Information!



We need to pay more attention to and learn more about the following metrics. More data and details are likely to be available in future Report Cards.

The number of acres of farmland has gone down. Farmland has been developed in our region; however, we do not have the data to determine how much was in areas planned for future development and how much was outside these areas. We need more details so that we can rate it in the next Report Card.

About 2,240 acres of the over 25,000 acres of wetlands in the South Mountain region have been preserved. Since we don't have old data to compare, this is our baseline, or starting point, for future Report Cards.

Our region is rich in history, but only about 6,100 historic places and objects have been documented. A backlog of information was recently added, causing a big increase in the number of surveyed historic places. This is our baseline for future report cards.

There are over 135,000 acres of public open space in the South Mountain region. This includes state forests, state parks, county and municipal parks, National Park Service land, and other open spaces that are accessible to the public. We don't have old data to compare, so this is our baseline for future Report Cards.

There are 1,059 miles of trails for activities like hiking and biking. While this is an increase, more people are using trails every year, so we need more and better-quality trails.

About 45% of people in the region are within a 10-minute drive of recreational waterway access. We need to plan and create more places where people can safely access water for recreation to meet PA DCNR's goal of 100%.

How can you help?

- Volunteer with a historical society, a park Friends group, or a watershed group.
- Buy products from local farms and farmers.
- Talk to the leaders in your community, ask them to support groups and actions that preserve, protect, and promote these resources.
- Help your community to find funding for farmland, open space preservation, or recreation infrastructure.

GET INVOLVED!



C'mon South Mountain, Let's Do Better Together!



Forested land has decreased by about 1,400 acres. Forests are important for nature, our culture, and outdoor recreation that benefits our mental and physical health. They help balance our changing climate by storing carbon and reducing extreme heat and flooding. Losing forested land decreases property values and impacts our health.

Almost half of the streams in the South Mountain region are impaired. These streams do not meet the PA Department of Environmental Protection water quality standards for supporting fish, drinking water, or playing in the water. Because so many streams start here, clean water is important.

Riparian buffer miles have not increased. These planted areas along streams filter stormwater, keep water cool, and provide habitat for animals, so we seek to extend these areas.

Orchard acreage has decreased by 400 acres in the 4-county area. While the Adams County Fruit Belt remains productive, orchard loss could hurt the economy and culture.

Not many people can easily walk to trails and parks. Only 33% of people can walk to their local park or trail. These places allow for exercising, relaxing, and socializing, so we support PA DCNR's goal of a park within a 10-minute walk for all Pennsylvanians.

We are having more extreme heat days. When we compare the first 10 years of the 2000s to the second 10 years, there are almost 9% more hot days. Extreme heat can trigger a variety of heat-related illnesses, including heat exhaustion, and heat stroke.

We are also having more heavy rain days. In the past 20 years, the number of days with heavy rain has more than doubled. This leads to floods, soil getting washed away downstream, and damage to property and infrastructure like roads.

How can you help?

- Plant trees and shrubs that are native to Pennsylvania and reduce how much lawn you have.
- Plant and maintain riparian buffers, don't mow right up to streams or creeks.
- Consider not using or using less pesticides and fertilizers on your property.
- Ask your community leaders to help create new parks and trails.



GET INVOLVED!