

III. IDENTIFYING ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A. Introduction

The City of Corning as part of the SES River Vision Project Advisory Committee with the assistance of its consultants (STC, HLA and the Friends) has prepared a method and process to encourage community participation in the waterfront visioning process. The process included three public workshops to be conducted as part of the waterfront visioning and consensus-building process. The outreach process identified key individuals, organizations, and entities to be involved and invited. The visioning process and the roles and responsibilities in planning the process, logistics, and the schedule of public meetings, were coordinated via phone conversations and email drafts. All public meetings were publicized in the community through press releases, announcements, e-mailings, posters, and flyers. In addition, the Director of Economic Development and Planning for the City of Corning invited the consultants, to attend the initial focus group meeting for the rehabilitation of the Centerway Bridge, in Corning, NY. The Van Tour, also part of the outreach process, provided an opportunity for the consultants and SES River Advisory Committee members to visit the waterfront areas and identify opportunities for connections within each of the participating communities. A summary of the Van Tour and the first Visioning Workshop follows.

B. Van Tour & Visioning Workshop: Issues & Opportunities

1. VAN TOUR

The best way to get to know a river is to visit it. That’s what the Southeast Steuben River Vision Project participants did on Oct. 8, 2009 during a bus and walking tour of the Chemung and Cohocton Rivers from Big Flats in Chemung County to Painted Post in Steuben County.

The tour provided a firsthand inventory of the river corridor – natural areas, structures, sites, geography, access, development issues and the historic, cultural and economic ties. We saw the waterways’ strengths and weaknesses. *(See Bus Tour map for exact route found in the Appendix.)*

The seventeen tour participants included representatives of the City of Corning, Towns of Erwin and Corning, Villages of Riverside and South Corning, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Southern Tier Central Regional Planning and Development Board and the Friends of the Chemung River Watershed. Chemung County Transit provided free bus transportation. *(See attached list of participants.)* Consultants were able to ask questions and learn about the geography, issues, and stakeholder representatives throughout the project.



Van Tour stop at the River Road launch site, Town of Corning.

The day started with a three-hour tour, led by the Friends of the Chemung River Watershed (“River Friends”), through the southeast portion of the Chemung River Valley.

Under sunny skies, the group met at Bottcher’s Landing in Big Flats, a popular river boat launch and fishing site at 9:00 a.m. The tour started there because the site is adjacent to the border of Chemung and Steuben Counties that the river connects as it flows through three counties and two states. The intent of the Southeast Steuben River Vision project is to expand a similar river development plan developed for Chemung County into Steuben County.

Our first stop was the River Road boat launch in the Town of Corning off River Road (Rt. 44). The long-established site owned and managed by NYSDEC is one of the few boat launches on the south side of the river. It has a gravel parking lot for up to six vehicles, park benches and concrete/wood steps leading down a steep incline to the river’s edge. The site includes a NYSDEC sign and an informational kiosk with a map, other river-related information and carry-in and carry-out trash bags created with funds from the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Program. A dirt ORV trail threads its way along the riverbank through thick underbrush to the north from the launch site.



*View from the levee toward Tuller Fields
in South Corning.*

The tour then proceeded to Tuller Fields in South Corning, a site that includes public baseball fields and the beginning of a proposed ten-mile grass nature trail along the river. The tour discussed mowing the trail and making minor improvements, such as trail signs, as a way to draw more people to the river for recreation and education. The tour also raised legal concerns of whether NYSDEC has authority to allow a trail because of the flood control easements. These issues will need to be addressed as these trails are seen into fruition during the implementation phase described in Chapter V.

Tuller Fields features a grass-covered flood levee maintained by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Since 1942, the DEC has had a perpetual property easement to maintain the levees.

A rutted undeveloped trail runs atop the Tuller Fields levee. A spur levee, near the ball fields, angles to the south. Hikers, cyclists, cross-country skiers and people walking their dogs currently use the levee. It provides a beautiful view of the river and surrounding woods and meadows.

The tour then traveled to Gibson Bridge, just east of Corning, where participants could view a tire-track utility trail that runs unbroken for 7.5 miles along the grassy river plain to Corning West High School in Painted Post. The utility trail is maintained and used by NYSDEC employees to check, maintain and repair the levee system. Public use is currently prohibited.

NYSDEC regional flood protection engineer, Scott Rodabaugh, noted that the NYSDEC supports responsible river and trail development, as long as a trail between the levee and river is at least 30 feet from the base of the levee. This prevents damage to the flood levee by trail users.

The unofficial Conhocton Street boat launch on the Chemung River in Corning was the next stop. The rustic access site offers a dirt slope for boat launching and a peaceful place for fishing. Here the river runs parallel to flood levees and a railroad line. The group discussed building a dual use trail here, with cyclists using the levee trail and joggers and hikers using the lower river plain trail. Improvements are also needed at the launch site itself: an asphalt drive over the levee, a gravel access road, gravel parking and a concrete ramp for trailer and car-top use.



The River Vision Advisory group enjoys a walk on the Centerway Bridge in the City of Corning.

The tour then proceeded to the Pedestrian Bridge (Centerway Bridge) in downtown Corning. The City of Corning is currently using a \$2 million grant to restore the historic Centerway Bridge and create a loop walking trail. Participants walked over the bridge to the city's northside. The area features an existing brick walking-path near the Pedestrian Bridge used regularly by employees of the nearby Corning Inc. headquarters. The proposed ten-mile path passes under Interstate 86 and near neighborhoods, fire departments, schools and athletic fields. The trail features a pedestrian access, off Bridge Street.

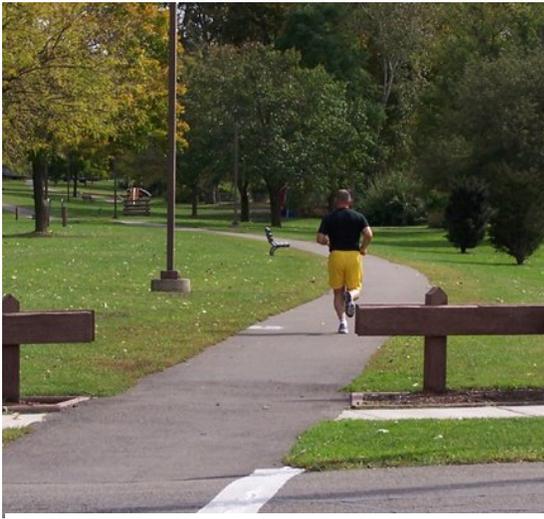
The top of the nearby flood levee features a four foot paved trail that was built in the mid-1980s and runs by William Street Park.

Kinsella Park, on the Cohocton River, near Robert Dann Drive in the Town of Erwin, was the next stop. The popular boat launch is nestled between the park and Interstate - 86. A tire-rutted hard-packed dirt trail runs along the river. The park is the last site on the Cohocton River before it flows into the Chemung River. The site is near athletic fields and offers a



A view of Kinsella Park in the Town of Erwin from the path to the launch site.

pavilion, picnic tables, grills, outhouses and services within one mile. The public can enjoy the playground, explore the nature trail and watch the river from park benches. It is within an easy walk of the Corning Child Care Center and HealthWorks.



A jogger takes advantage of the bike path in the Village of Riverside.

The next stop featured the nearly three-quarter-mile-long bike path in the Village of Riverside and Painted Post. This paved path was built with funds from federal Land and Water Conservation Fund in the 1960's.

The tour ended at William Street Park with a hike over the levee to the river's edge. Participants then boarded the bus and returned to their vehicles at Botcher's Landing.

The bus tour allowed the River Vision participants to become better acquainted, exchange ideas and gain a better understanding of the river and what it offers.

The landscape architectural consultants prepared area maps of the corridor and took notes of what was observed and discussed. The tour participants had the

opportunity to share ideas and voice their concerns about river development. The tour helped improve planning and decision-making for the future of the rivers and the communities.

2. FIRST VISIONING WORKSHOP

The first of three public workshops was publicized and hosted on February 4, 2010 at the Village of Riverside Village Hall to solicit the input of future users in identifying preliminary issues and opportunities. *(A copy of the prepared handout is included in the Appendix together with a press release, poster and sign-in sheet.)* The workshop was attended by a very good cross-section of 23 community members. A slide show was prepared by HLA with images of various regional river trail developments and photos from the Van Tour, and displayed during the sign-in and introductory comments of the workshop to introduce the attendees to the project. The inventory maps were arranged on tables for all to review. The Recreation Map overlaid on aerial photography was enlarged to 1:300 scale and spliced together for display on the wall. This was used throughout the workshop as an easy reference since the aerial photos were incorporated into this map.



Jim Pffiffer, Executive Director, Chemung River Friends speaking at the first visioning workshop.

The workshop was opened with the consultants and attendees identify themselves and briefly explain their interests in the planning process. Then Executive Director of the River Friends, gave his "Why We Love the River" presentation. Haas Landscape Architects followed with a

brief description of the inventory maps and why they are important in the planning of recreational opportunities.

“Why We Love The River”

The Director of the Friends of the Chemung River Watershed offered some words of encouragement to the attendees about how they can and should embrace the river resource that runs through their communities. This speech generated enthusiasm and ownership of the river corridor and its intrinsic values to Chemung valley residents. Also the speech alluded to other projects in neighboring counties that have been undertaken and how this project has an opportunity to link with these neighboring resources.

The visioning was solicited in writing as attendees were given about five minutes to answer the question, “*What I would like to see within the project area*” (handout). A round-robin inquiry followed with dialogue expanding upon each issue or suggestion. The suggestions were tabulated on flip charts for all to see and then were “prioritized” with colored dots to identify the group’s assessment of the top issues. Each participant was given three dots to use as they pleased.

During this workshop surveys were distributed. A total of 22 surveys were returned. The results of this survey are listed below.

Survey: “Your Vision for the River Trails”

1. What I would like to see within the project area:

- Public Access to the River (6)
- Connectivity (10)
- Continuous Trail to Elmira (9)
- S. Corning – Multi Access (4)
- Restroom Facilities (4)
- 10 Mile Trail – SOON! (5)
- Rest Areas/Views (4)
- Educational Opportunity (3)
- Promotions (3)
- Family Walks (3)
- Cultural “Access” (2)
- Trails to Work (2)
- Sailing, Sculling (2)
- Bike to S. Corning (2)
- Picnic Areas/Structures (2)
- Primitive Trails/Links @ River (1)
- Exercise Stations (Seniors) (1)
- More Recreation Areas (1)
- Launch Sites w/Kiosks, History, Culture (1)
- Signage – Directional, Informational (1)
- Trails to School (1)
- Intermodal Opportunities (1)
- Maintenance (1)
- Riverside Education (0)



Jennifer Fais, Principal Planner, STC, discussing maps at one of the three visioning workshop.

- Mixed Trail Surfaces (0)
- Amenities (0)
- Rental Facilities, Pick & Drop Points (0)
- Knotweed Eradication (0)
- Camping (0)
- Trash Bins/Composting (0)
- Bluebird/Birding Trails (0)

(Additional input not tallied during workshop but included on handouts. Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times mentioned on handouts.)

2. **When complete, the recreation trail network will look like this:**

- Clean, well-groomed trails (4)
- Minimal impact on the natural environment (4)
- Informational Signs/Kiosks (4)
- Paved/Stone Dust Paths (4)
- Scenic Areas/Views (3)
- Multi-use Trails (3)
- Paths not all paved (3)
- Wide Paths (3)
- Continuous Trail (3)
- Usable in all 4 seasons (2)
- Away from Traffic (2)
- Access Points (2)
- Composting Restrooms (1)
- Benches (1)
- Parking at appropriate places (1)
- Launch Sites (1)
- Canoeing, Kayaking (1)
- Similar to Catharine Trail and Confluence Park (1)
- Small Business Opportunities (1)

3. **What issue or constraints will affect these improvements?**

(This data was not tallied during workshop. Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times mentioned on handouts.)

- Funding/Cost (8)
- Private Landowners' Approvals (8)
- Cooperation (or lack of) among the municipalities (4)
- Public Apathy/Interest (4)
- Right of Way (2)
- Ownership & Maintenance of the Trail (2)
- Natural Gas Drilling – waste & traffic (2)
- Concern for the Floodplain (2)



Participants looking at maps at the one of the three visioning workshop.

- Industrial Areas along the River (2)
- Distance (1)
- Cliffs along the River (1)
- Individual Resistance (1)
- Time (1)
- Parking (1)
- DEC & Army COE Permits (1)
- Cultural Resources (1)
- Frequent Access Points (1)
- No Four-Wheelers (1)
- Point Polluters (1)
- Personal Safety (1)
- River Access along Rte. 352 (1)
- Misconception of Mountain Bikers (1)
- Legal Issues re: use of dikes (1)

C. Summary

A few notable groups or individuals that were represented include: the Finger Lakes Mountain Bike Club, Finger Lakes Trail/Great Eastern Trail, the regional Transportation Metropolitan Planning Organization staffer, an urban planner, and a Fly Fishing Club as well as municipal representatives and the NYSDOT Region 6 Landscape Architect. The workshop provided opportunities for each attendee to state their interest in a comprehensive river trail or greenway system. All the attendees were in favor of a trail system, which incorporated the rivers and were very interested in how the trail could connect areas of Corning to other destinations. Participants were very interested in how they would be able to use the trail for exercise and access to the river for recreation (fishing and boating). Another response that was expressed included how stakeholders and residents could give input into the concept design of the project. Many of the programmatic ideas that were expressed during this part of the workshop were articulated in the “What I would like to see within the project area” portion of the workshop.

Workshop activities were designed to help participants reveal ways in which they use and value their waterfront resources, and the varied relationships between the waterfront resources and the municipality. Participants were encouraged to identify important issues and opportunities, and discuss what they would like to change - if they could.

Some revealing results include their understanding of the legal and financial constraints to the development. Many of the participants have seen or used similar trails and would be supportive of these types of recreation within their communities. They are acutely aware of the natural and cultural resources within the study area and the desire to get connected to the river and other destinations.



First visioning workshop.

In conclusion of the bus tour, visioning workshop discussion and survey results the following is a summary of the recreational sites, potentials and constraints that were gathered:

- The levee section near the YMCA is very close to the River so a footpath at the river's edge faces design issues.
- Areas near Denison Park, Hillside Park, and Kinsella Park - as important access points to be connected.
- The River Road boat launch site needed a future connection to the east. Here, the riverbank narrows and becomes inappropriate for a trail. The River Road shoulder does not offer a safe width either, making a land / water connection may be difficult here.
- A future connection to the Finger Lakes Trail (FLT) system. The Project Manager for The Great Eastern Trail with NY's Finger Lakes Trail, explained that within the coming months a branch of the FLT will be routed through Painted Post and on to the wildlife management area in Erwin. The FLT has 46 miles of trails in Steuben County alone and has linkages to over 500 miles of trails in New York State. The group felt that this could be a very important addition to the trail system, and could connect to the Riverside/Painted Post Bike Trail with few challenges.
- Connections to the proposed Centerway Bridge project. These are more fully described as part of the study being conducted by the City of Corning engineering consultants, Fisher Associates. (*See Chapter IV.*)
- Ten-Mile Rivershore Trail. Some partners of the River Vision project have walked the River from Painted Post to the Town of Corning and have been able to walk on mostly public property for this approximate ten-mile loop. Challenges include evaluating the legal constraints imposed by the flood control easement, acquiring a NYSDEC permit to use flood control lands for the trail, completing a necessary title search of all of the lands to ensure that they are public or easements have been obtained, among others.
- Improvements to the informal Conhocton Street launch site. In the mid-1990's, NYSDEC and the City of Corning had come to an agreement on the ownership of the property paving the way for NYSDEC to construct and maintain an official launch site. However, since that time, state funding has decreased markedly leaving the site's development in question.