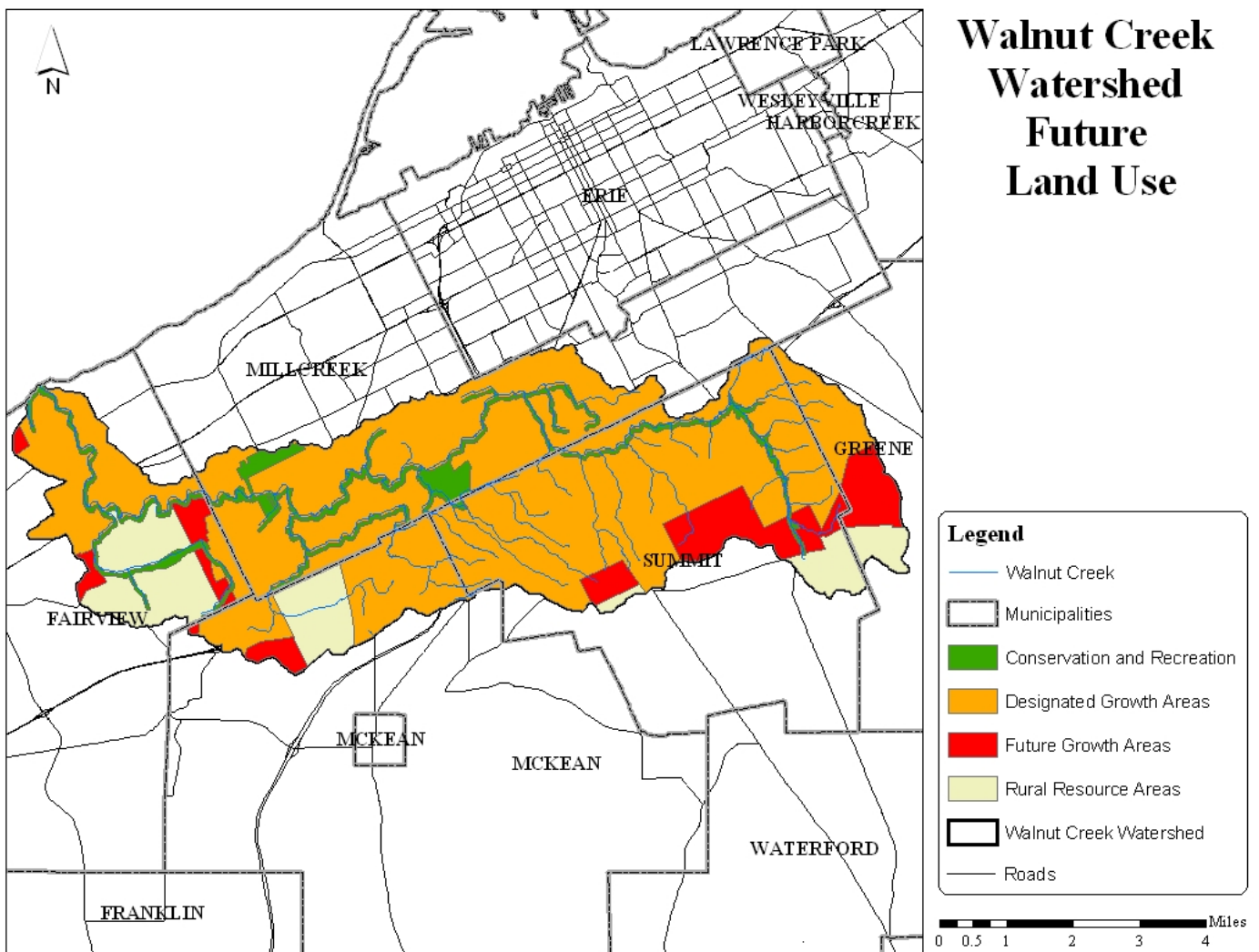


## PART 6—COMMUNITY EFFORTS TOWARDS CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION

### 6.1 Land Use and Planning Activities

#### 6.1.1 Projected Growth Areas in the Walnut Creek Watershed

According to Erie County Department of Planning projections, much of the Walnut Creek watershed is planned for further development in the coming decade. This projection presents a challenge to maintaining the environmental health of the watershed. The figure below identifies areas that are designated for growth in the Walnut Creek watershed (Erie County, 2003). Of important note is the future growth areas located in the headwater sub-basins of the watershed.



Walnut Creek Watershed Land Use/Land Cover

### **6.1.2 Review of County and Municipal Comprehensive Plans**

As part of its Comprehensive Plan, Erie County updated the County Land Use Plan in December 2003. The County Land Use Plan encourages that future land development be managed through local zoning and ordinances to protect public health and, preserve historical, cultural and environmentally sensitive areas. Implementation of the Land Use Plan is accomplished, in part, through State Planning Code and County ordinances. Parts of the plan are nonbinding and left to each municipality to carry out. The full Comprehensive Plan can be found online at: <http://www.eriecountyplanning.org/index.php?page=plans-and-controls>.

Five Erie County municipalities fall within the Walnut Creek watershed, namely: Millcreek Township, Greene Township, McKean Township, Fairview Township and Summit Township. A summary of each of Township's individual Comprehensive Plan is described below.

#### **6.1.2.a Millcreek Township**

Millcreek Township updated its Comprehensive Plan in 2002. The Plan recognizes that much of the land within the township is currently developed, and it is expected that the remaining undeveloped land will be developed before 2010. The township identifies that because so little land is undeveloped, and recognizes that once developed it is difficult to change, the remaining available land should be managed in ways that preserve open space and promote greenways. A new land use designation was utilized in Millcreek Township's Comprehensive Plan called *Rural Residential* that encompasses approximately 3,000 acres in the township. The designation requires that design principals (discussed in the Recreation and Open Space Plan) be employed, which would assure that 50% of the developable land be left as open space in perpetuity. Although low impact design would be used, much of *Rural Residential* lands are located in currently undisturbed areas of the Walnut Creek watershed.

It is encouraging that Millcreek Township has given consideration to the environmental state of the community in its Comprehensive Plan. Methods to sustain development while protecting the environment are described in the plan, such as recommending Conservation Subdivision Design and Conservation Zoning. Also recommended is very little creation of new large-scale commercial retail space and limiting commercial sprawl.

The following descriptions of township Comprehensive Plans are cited from the "Evaluation of Comprehensive Plans" section of the July 2001 *Walnut Creek Watershed Assessment*. Andrew Martin and Associates completed the assessment for Asbury Woods Nature Center and the Millcreek Township School District. The assessment was funded by a DEP Growing Greener grant. The Comprehensive Plans for Greene, McKean, Fairview, and Summit Townships have not been updated since the 2001 assessment.

### **6.1.2.b Greene Township**

*Greene Township's Comprehensive Plan, completed in 1981, is out of date. The future of Greene Township cannot accurately be predicted until Greene completes a more current plan for the future. Only a minor portion of the total Walnut Creek watershed is in Greene Township, but the headwaters of the main stream and several tributaries rise there.*

### **6.1.2.c McKean Township**

*McKean Township's Comprehensive Plan is dated 1997. McKean, primarily a residential community, expresses a concern for maintaining its rural, agriculture-based character. Almost 60% of McKean Township land is vacant, and another 30% is devoted to agriculture. McKean Township's Comprehensive Plan establishes "growth" and "no growth" regions in the township so that uncontrolled growth and development will not alter the "rural flavor" of the area. Unfortunately for the Walnut Creek Watershed, the portion of the watershed that intersects McKean Township lies in the primary area in which McKean plans to encourage growth. The northeast portion of the township through which Walnut Creek passes has already experienced significant subdivision and resultant residential growth, development that McKean wishes to continue and expand. The future zoning of northern McKean Township will be medium-density residential (suburban) with some land remaining rural. Industrial and commercial zones in northwest McKean Township will also increase in size.*

### **6.1.2.d Fairview Township**

*Fairview Township's Comprehensive Plan was completed in 1997. Development in Fairview will affect the western portion of the Walnut Creek watershed. Most of Fairview Township is presently rural, and the township discounts the perception that this rural character is changing rapidly, maintaining that land use has remained much the same over time. Fairview acknowledges that the Millcreek/Erie Urbanized Area is pressuring expansion into Fairview; the township appears to feel that it is its "turn" to receive the development that has proceeded elsewhere in the past. One way in which Fairview wishes to encourage new development is by extending its public water and sewer lines. Its goal is to provide water for the entire township. Although no major commercial development had occurred at the time of this plan, at least two new industrial parks had been proposed for Fairview, accompanied by plans for new access roads, etc., a mile south of the former borough line. The township acknowledges that Fairview Borough, before it merged with Fairview Township, had reached capacity.*

*Only a limited amount of land was left available for development, aside from agricultural land owned by Fairview Evergreen Nurseries. However, Fairview*

*Township contains much open land, which township planners obviously view as a surplus ripe for development. Fairview's plan states that the township has enough of this surplus land to address both economic and environmental concerns: 'the Township contains enough land, absent of protected resources, that can accommodate all anticipated and most unanticipated development for the next twenty years without destroying sensitive environmental features.' The township is projecting new subdivisions already in the works at the time of the plan. Future zoning leaves much land agricultural but establishes big, concentrated centers of commercial and industrial expansion. At the time of this plan, Fairview Township had no comprehensive storm drainage plan, although it had established an ordinance requiring that stormwater be properly managed and controlled in conjunction with new development. Non-residential developments would be required to own and maintain their own stormwater management systems. Fairview Township also had no plan for regulating municipal-type solid waste at the time of this plan which, the township admitted, prompted people to engage in unsafe activities such as burning and/or burying the waste.*

#### **6.1.2.e Summit Township**

*Summit Township completed its Comprehensive Plan in 2000. Summit appears to be trying to establish a delicate balance between the rural nature of the township and what it views as its tremendous potential for growth. Summit is mindful of the topographic features and open space within the township conducive to development; the township places high value on its continued economic growth and development. Therefore, the Comprehensive Plan encourages extensive development in northern Summit, especially the area of the township north of Interstate 90. It also includes plans to build more roads to ease traffic pressure on these new developments. Despite the township's concern for continued economic growth, the plan expresses a concern for environmental preservation within Summit. The township is hoping to preserve large tracts of open land, especially in southern Summit.*

*These areas set aside for agriculture and conservation may be of limited benefit to the Walnut Creek Watershed; however, as much of this land lies outside the watershed. Even though the northern part of Summit contains many areas of projected development, the township has many plans to make this growth environmentally friendly. Among these plans, several are particularly applicable to the future of Walnut Creek. Summit is concerned with updating its stormwater management guidelines for roadway design. It also is examining new design methods to make runoff less of a problem. The township also plans to incorporate stormwater management into its development plans, limiting huge stretches of parking lots and requiring businesses to provide for open spaces within their developments. Summit plans to periodically evaluate its stormwater management facilities. In addition, it will require appropriate stabilization of all stream banks and waterways so as to enhance stormwater and erosion controls.*

*Two critical plans by Summit are to ‘require the establishment of riparian buffer zones around all streams and tributaries to mitigate the impact of stormwater run-off and to promote infiltration into groundwater’ and to ‘re-establish riparian buffers in developed areas of the township (Section II – Strategies for Action, Page II-7).’ Most important for the Walnut Creek Watershed, Summit Township has plans directly related to maintenance and preservation of the watershed’s quality. It plans to ‘preserve the Walnut Creek corridor as an open space linkage an buffer between single-family residential development to the north and nonresidential uses that may locate to the south (Section II, Strategies for Action, Page II-7).’”*

## **6.2 Conservation Efforts**

Due to the diversity of land use in the Walnut Creek Watershed, conservation efforts are not easy to categorize. Undoubtedly, there have been more than a few examples of landowners, large and small, who through their own efforts, have implemented conservation practices to the benefit of the watershed. The ongoing success of the Erie County Conservation District’s programs, like the tree seedling and conservation plant sale, attests to the fact that area residents are supportive and cognizant of ways to improve the local environment.

Millcreek Township has a land acquisition program for public green space. It has recently acquired the Cassidy property, which borders Walnut Creek, to be used as public park.

The Erie County Comprehensive Plan identifies the need to preserve agricultural land. It promotes farmland preservation through the Pennsylvania Purchase of Agricultural Conservations Easements (PACE) program.

The PA Fish and Boat Commission created a program to acquire land and offer easements to property owners for stream access for fishermen.

## **6.3 Environmental Education**

Environmental education and outreach within the watershed is a shared effort involving many groups and many partnerships. The Erie Conservation District has developed several programs over the years focusing on watershed education, nutrient management, and erosion control best management practices to protect the county’s valuable soil and water resources.

Millcreek Schools, through their Asbury Woods educational facility, promote environmental education and good stewardship to our youth. Mercyhurst, Behrend, and Gannon students and staff support and collaborate with the Conservation District and others in expanding the community environmental knowledge base.

The names mentioned above are some of the many individuals and groups conducting valuable environmental education and conservation programs, all of who deserve recognitions. Overall, local conservation and environmental educational efforts illustrate how the synergy of diverse talents, disciplines, and techniques can converge to create results of maximum effectiveness.