

## *Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

Centre County is 1,115 square miles in area, making it the 5<sup>th</sup> largest county in Pennsylvania. Comprised of 36 municipalities – 11 boroughs and 25 townships – this rural community of 135,758 people has grown steadily since its establishment in 1800. Throughout history, settlement has concentrated in the eastern half of the County, which possessed abundant natural resources to support a burgeoning iron industry. The fast-flowing streams powered the mills; the hardwood forests provided charcoal to “fuel” the furnaces; and the fertile limestone valleys provided flux to remove impurities from the ore. Central Pennsylvania’s “gold” led to the establishment of entire communities dedicated to iron production. From 1800 to 1850, Centre County and the neighboring communities of Huntingdon, Blair, and Mifflin Counties were collectively known as the Juniata Iron Region. In fact, Centre County takes its name from the first iron furnace established – Centre Furnace, built in 1791.

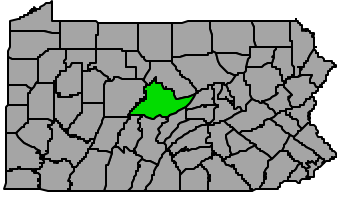
During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Centre County transformed from a tranquil agricultural community into a bustling population center. The county seat of Bellefonte soon became the most prominent town between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg. During the Industrial Age, the town was home to five Pennsylvania Governors. Today, Bellefonte is a vibrant residential community of 6,395 people. The town’s “boom years” are evident in its Victorian-era architecture, but the Borough is no longer the largest community in Centre County. Since World War II, State College Borough has

supplanted Bellefonte as the County’s population and cultural center. To a large degree, Penn State University has contributed to the rapid growth of “Happy Valley.” Founded in the mid-1800s on 200 acres of donated land, the one-time agricultural college has become the most prominent educational institution in the State of Pennsylvania. Today, Penn State students make up nearly two-thirds of the Borough’s population. With 38,420 residents, the Borough is clearly the largest municipality in Centre County.

From 1960 to 2000, Centre County’s population grew by 73 percent. The majority of this growth has been concentrated in the Centre Region, a planning area that encompasses State College Borough and five adjoining townships. This explosive growth can be attributed to the economic impact of Penn State, which has fueled growth in high-tech industries and attracted a highly educated workforce. The balance of the County’s population growth has been concentrated in the suburban townships along State Route 26 and U.S. Route 322.

### **Existing Land Use Conditions**

Located in the geographic center of Pennsylvania, the County is bisected by the Appalachian Mountains into two geomorphic regions: the Allegheny Plateau and the Ridge & Valley Province. The rugged terrain and poor soils of the Allegheny Plateau discouraged development in Centre County’s western half, which remained unsettled throughout most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today, this section



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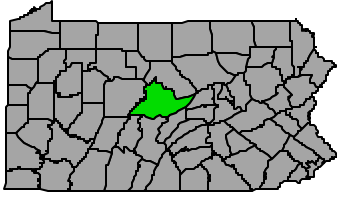
of the County remains relatively undeveloped and is dominated by second-growth woodlands, state parks, and conservation areas.

Centre County remains a predominantly rural community with 70.2 percent of the County's land area forested, while another 22.8 percent is classified as agricultural and open space. Although the acreage being actively farmed has decreased throughout the years, farming remains an important land use in Centre County. Dairy farming is the County's largest agricultural industry, followed by row crops such as corn, wheat, oats, and hay. Although land uses remain primarily rural, a growing percentage of the population is considered urban. In 1990, the U.S. Census found that 43 percent of Centre County's population was classified as "rural." By 2000, that number had dropped to 36 percent.

### Key Land Use Issues

- ☑ **The Centre Region has witnessed substantial commercial and residential development over the last 20 years.** Over the last 20 years, a growing number of residential and commercial developments have moved into the Centre Region. Concerned about maintaining affordable municipal services and preserving their way of life, some communities have initiated planning efforts designed to manage future growth. In the year 2000, the Centre Region established an urban growth boundary (UGB) to concentrate development within areas that are supported by adequate infrastructure.

- ☑ **The extension of Interstate 99 is increasing development pressures in Centre County.** PennDOT has plans to extend Interstate 99 from its current terminus in Blair County to Interstate 80 in State College, PA. This project would provide a four-lane, limited access highway connecting the Pennsylvania Turnpike (I-76) to Interstate 80. The prospect of Interstate 99 has attracted major residential development to the area, particularly around planned interchanges. This in turn has attracted "big box" retailers like Sam's Club and Wal-Mart to the Centre Region. The I-99 Corridor project brought together 23 of the County's municipalities to discuss their future sustainability. *Vision 2020: Living with I-99* provided a venue for discussing issues such as growth management, municipal services, and land use controls.
- ☑ **The completion of Interstate 99 will enhance Central Pennsylvania's connection to larger population centers in Maryland and West Virginia.** Penn State supports designating the 80-mile segment from Bedford to Centre Counties as the "I-99 Technology & Innovation Corridor" to brand the region as a nationally recognized "cluster of innovation." This project is viewed as an opportunity to strengthen the region's competitiveness, particularly in the area of high technology.
- ☑ **Residential development within Centre County's outlying townships has led to conflicts with area farmers.**



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Many family farms are having difficulty maintaining their profitability in today's economy. As a result, a growing number of farmers are selling their land to private developers. As the County's contiguous agricultural parcels have diminished in size, the viability of the industry has diminished as well. As a result, the number of farms in Centre County has decreased and a growing number of farms are becoming part-time operations.

Located in the fastest growing area of the County, the Greenway/Bikeway will extend from the Spring Creek headwaters to Bald Eagle State Park.

### **Land Use Planning Activities**

- Centre County has joined efforts with the Pennsylvania Department of Environment Protection (DEP) and Penn State University to identify source water protection areas.** Once these areas have been identified and mapped, the County will work with affected municipalities to outline protection strategies that will prevent future contamination of public water sources. These strategies will be included in the County's Comprehensive Plan Update.
- Centre County helped to facilitate a watershed-based approach to municipal planning through the formation of the Spring Creek Watershed Commission.** Formed in 1996 to address issues of concern within the Spring Creek Watershed, the Commission has promoted intermunicipal cooperation on other fronts. For instance, the Nittany & Bald Eagle Valley Greenway/Bikeway Plan was an outgrowth of this organization.