

## *Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

**L**uzerne County is located in northeastern Pennsylvania. With boundaries irregularly shaped, it lies south of Wyoming County, west of Lackawanna and Monroe Counties, north of Carbon and Schuylkill Counties, and east of Sullivan and Columbia Counties. The north central and northeast part of the County has a substantial urbanized core extending from the City of Wilkes-Barre. With the exception of the urbanized area surrounding the City of Hazleton in the southern tip of the County, the southeast and northwest areas are sufficiently rural to contain state game land and park land. Luzerne County has 36 townships, 36 boroughs and four cities, for a total of 76 units of local municipal government. The City of Wilkes-Barre is the county seat and is a substantial services and employment center for the County.

Luzerne County's population of 319,250 makes it the 12<sup>th</sup> most populous county in Pennsylvania. According to the 2000 Census, it had an average number of residents per square mile of just over 358 people. The County's land area encompasses almost 891 square miles. Census figures from 1990-2000 show a 2.7 percent population loss, ranking Luzerne County 63<sup>rd</sup> among the 67 counties in terms of population loss/gain.

From 1990 to 2000, the number of housing units in Luzerne County grew by 4.3 percent. The County had a total of 144,686 housing units in 2000. The number of households grew by 1.7 percent, while the household size decreased by 5.3 percent. According to the 2000 Census, 10.8 percent

of County residents were below the poverty line, which approximates the statewide average of 10.9 percent.

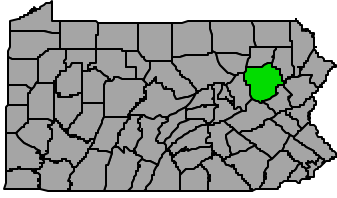
### **Existing Land Use Conditions**

Approximately 90 percent of the County's total land is undeveloped, with about 86.5 percent of this land devoted to forest and agricultural uses.

The Susquehanna River flows through Luzerne County, along the western boundary of the City of Wilkes-Barre, with a portion of the County's waterways draining into the Delaware River watershed. Harvey's Lake, the largest natural lake in Pennsylvania, is located on the county line in the north central part of the County. The Lehigh River flows along the eastern boundary of the County. Luzerne County has experienced devastating floods during periods of major snow melt and rainfall.

Luzerne County has a total of 451 farms and 57,000 acres of agricultural land, ranking it 48<sup>th</sup> in the state. Average annual income per farm is \$40,614, placing Luzerne County in 49<sup>th</sup> position. Easements for agricultural preservation have been purchased for six farms, and a total of 585 acres have been preserved. The total amount invested in agricultural preservation easements is \$928,309, ranking Luzerne in 40<sup>th</sup> position among Pennsylvania counties.

Luzerne County has excellent highway access to many points throughout the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions of the



*Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

country. I-80, I-81, and I-476 run through the County.

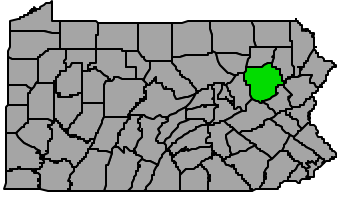
Broadband Internet access is just beginning to be available in Luzerne County. The County courthouse was recently wired with fiber-optic cable for broadband access, and private sector interest has been expressed in wiring the entire downtown.

**Key Land Use Issues**

- ☑ **Luzerne County’s top land use issue is traffic congestion.** The area’s interstates are routinely congested. Business Route 309 and regular State Route 309 also are congested. Transit ridership is low. There is widespread interest in adding passenger rail service, in addition to a desire to improve air service.
- ☑ **Currently, there is little growth occurring in Luzerne County.** This results in very few growth-related development problems. For several decades, the County has been gradually losing population, which remains the trend. Both in terms of cause and effect, the job market has also been shrinking. Luzerne County has a comparatively high percentage of elderly population and an aging housing stock. Housing projects have tended to focus on the needs of the elderly. These circumstances also have produced little demand for utility extensions or capacity expansions.
- ☑ **Combined sewer overflow is a problem in this area.** Excessive outflow

from sewers into the Susquehanna River is caused by a combined single system of sanitary and storm sewers in the Wilkes-Barre area. The present system could generate water quality problems.

- ☑ **There is widespread interest in an inflatable dam project for recreational activities on the Susquehanna River.** However, this project will have to be preceded by solving the combined sewer overflow problem. The installation of independent sewage systems to separate sanitary sewers from storm sewers is a costly undertaking.
- ☑ **Some business investment within the County seems to be occurring on coal-scarred land.** Industrial, residential, commercial and recreational development on coal-scarred land is a positive reuse of areas within the Valley floor, limiting the effects of sprawl spillover into agricultural land.
- ☑ **Because area watersheds were sold some time ago, there is concern that water quality problems could result.** There is growing interest in the re-acquisition of at least some of these watersheds.
- ☑ **County plans and ordinances need to be updated to comply with amendments to the Municipalities Planning Code.**



*Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

**Land Use Planning Activities**

- Multi-county open-space master plan with Lackawanna County**
- Agricultural preservation program administered by a land trust**
- Ongoing municipal zoning and subdivision and land division ordinance revisions and updates with 76 municipal governments**