

Land Use and Growth Management Profile

The Northern Tier Region includes Bradford, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, and Wyoming Counties, and 166 municipal governments. Geographically, the region covers 3,953 square miles and is located in northern Pennsylvania, bordering New York State.

The region branded as the “Endless Mountains” since the settlement of Pennsylvania, includes a predominance of small towns and forested areas. Formerly a glaciated area of the Appalachian Plateaus, the area is primarily underlain with bedrock from the Devonian Age. The North Branch of the Susquehanna River impacts the region’s hydrology and topography and subsequent land use patterns.

A total of 7,682 miles of roadways, representing 6.4 percent of the State’s total highway miles cross the region. Primary highway access includes U.S. Route 15 in the western portion of the region, U.S. Route 220 in the central portion, and I-81 in the east.

Although the Northern Tier’s population growth has been slow (falling behind the State’s growth rate of 3% over the 1990s), it has been steadily gaining population over the last several decades. Regional population has increased by 18 percent since 1960. During the 1990s, all counties in the region had slight population gains.

At 46 persons per square mile, the Northern Tier Region has a relatively low population density. The area’s residents live in small communities spread over large tracts of agricultural land and forests. Historically,

the region’s unemployment rates have been higher than many other Pennsylvania counties.

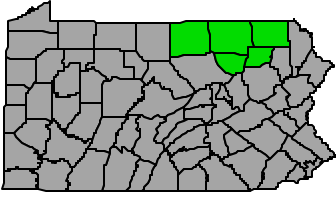
The region’s economy has historically been influenced by the agriculture and timber industries. These industries provided the greatest employment opportunities within the region in the past. Currently, the health services, education services, and paper-allied products industries are the region’s top employers.

Today, businesses outside the region influence the economy as much as those businesses in the region. Five communities outside the Northern Tier Region help to support its economy. These include Elmira and Binghamton, New York to the north; Williamsport to the west; and Scranton/Wilkes-Barre to the southeast. The Northern Tier Regional Planning & Development Commission serves as the central organization to focus the region’s economic and community development efforts.

Key Land Use Trends

Key land use trends for the Northern Tier Region were identified during a focus group held with several of the region’s county planning directors at the Northern Tier Regional Planning & Development Commission in Towanda on February 24, 2004.

- ☑ **Statewide policy designed to preserve open space has resulted in a unique form of regional ‘sprawl.’** Similar to several rural Pennsylvania regions,

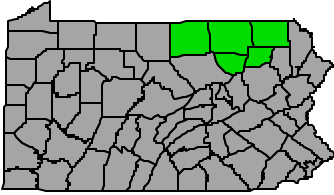


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Clean and Green legislation is having an adverse impact on land use and the economy. The Clean and Green Act (Act 319), signed into law in December 1974, was intended to protect farmers “from being forced to go out of agriculture or sell part of their land, in order to pay unusually high taxes... the landowner as well as his neighbors benefit by having the land kept in agricultural use rather than developed.”¹ The Act has resulted in several adverse impacts that have been experienced throughout the Northern Tier Region. The prime concern is the disparity that results from tax shifting between participating real property owners with lower property tax burdens and non-participating real property owners that are subjected to a higher millage rate to make up for the loss in tax revenues. As equally important is the concern that the Clean and Green program benefits many landowners who are not the benefactors intended by the Act. For example, new homeowners from metropolitan areas outside the region are purchasing enough acreage to qualify for Clean and Green and constructing large homes. This is causing a form of large-lot sprawl throughout many communities in the region. Additionally, new residents expect municipal services comparable to suburban areas; however, sufficient tax base is not always available to pay for the anticipated services. Finally, the Clean and Green Act is parcelizing or fragmenting the region’s forestlands. The Pennsylvania General Assembly’s Joint State Government Commission evaluated the

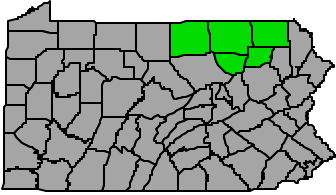
impact of Clean and Green legislation in 1997. The policy issues identified in the analysis were consistent with those identified in the Northern Tier Region, including program eligibility, administration of the Act, and tax impact on landowners and other citizens. Amending the legislation would preserve its original intent and reduce fiscal burdens placed upon rural communities in the Northern Tier.

- ☑ **Municipal fragmentation and an antiquated tax system have resulted in decentralized development.** Local government dependency on real estate taxes results in a disparity that leaves many first generation communities in the region with either stagnant or declining population and the fiscal inability to improve deteriorating conditions. Municipal competition driven by tax revenues forces municipalities to compete against each other for investment, as opposed to pooling resources, in order to remain competitive.
- ☑ **Decentralized development has caused many of the region’s first-generation communities to lose population.** Between 1990 and 2000, the population within the region’s first-generation communities *decreased* by an average of 5.3 percent, but *increased* by an average of 6.0 percent within the second-generation communities (Figure 1). Population in general has been moving away from the region’s traditional employment centers.²



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- ☑ **The region’s aging population could influence future transportation needs.** During the 1990s, the region’s fastest growing age group was 65 and older. Special public transportation needs and pedestrian facilities may be required to address the needs of the aging population.
- ☑ **Throughout the region there is a lack of affordable housing and lack of opportunities to purchase quality housing.** The region has a lack of newer, modern housing stock in the \$80,000 to \$150,000 price range. This type of housing is attractive to the region’s first-time homebuyers. Existing housing that is within the desired price range is older and predominantly located in the region’s first-generation communities (Figure 2). As opposed to lack of affordably priced housing for first-time homebuyers, affordably priced senior housing has been developed in many first-generation communities.
- ☑ **The majority of the region’s new housing has been constructed in second-generation communities.** The number of housing units constructed in second-generation communities increased by an average of 10.5 percent during the 1990s (Figure 2). During the same time, the number of housing units in the first-generation communities decreased by -0.3 percent.
- ☑ **During the 1990s, the region was subject to the conversion of many acres of agricultural land to residential development.** The conversion of agricultural land to 10-acre residential subdivisions is a trend, particularly in Bradford and Wyoming Counties. Funding levels for county agricultural land preservation programs are not sufficient to purchase the number of available development easements in the Northern Tier Region. Therefore, the programs are not as effective as intended in curbing sprawling land development. Agricultural preservation laws should be reviewed for legislative intent and impact.
- ☑ **As the Northern Tier is a rural region, major employment centers are located outside of the region.** With the exception of the region’s largest employer, Procter & Gamble, several employment centers for Northern Tier residents are located outside of the region. Approximately 22,912, or 12 percent of the region’s population, travel outside of the region for work. In Susquehanna County, 52 percent of residents work outside the County. Many Tioga, Bradford, and Susquehanna County residents travel to New York counties for work. The region is beginning to serve as a bedroom community for surrounding regions.
- ☑ **Improved state agency coordination would provide greater consistency with local land use plans.** Collaboration among state agencies is critical to leverage state funding resources in a consistent and effective fashion. The lack of coordination results

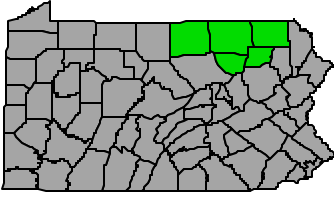


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in state agency decisions that are at odds and confusion at the local level.

including infrastructure from local governments.

- ☑ **Regional infrastructure improvement planning would guide land use patterns and help prevent regional sprawl in the future.** Regional infrastructure improvement planning would not only guide the location of future land uses, it would assist state agencies in ensuring that project funding is consistent with local planning.
- ☑ **To improve the coordination between transportation planning and regional land use decisions, the transportation planning process should be refocused to the PennDOT district level.** Currently, transportation decisions in the Northern Tier Region are made through the designated Local Development District. Coordination between PennDOT's district office and local planning officials is needed to adequately address local and regional land use issues.
- ☑ **A growing trend throughout the region is the conversion of seasonal homes to permanent, year-round residences.** Seasonal or second homes are being converted by urbanites that intend to use them as their permanent retirement residences. The positive benefits of this trend include an increase in the region's population and additional resources to support the local economy. The new permanent residences, however, also require an increased level of services
- ☑ **Selling land rather than selling homes drives the region's real estate market and new residential land use.** Regional real estate brokers tend to buy land for subdivision and sell directly to individual homeowners rather than buying land to parcel for residential subdivisions as is typical in most suburban locations across Pennsylvania. Former Philadelphia and New York area residents are moving to the region to take advantage of the region's excellent quality of life.
- ☑ **Standardized statewide land use mapping to the parcel level is essential to accurately portray land use trends.** Having parcel level mapping and a standardized land use classification system would allow counties to accurately identify land use trends. This would assist in identifying specific land use trends across counties – such as the impact of Clean and Green legislation. Existing National Land Cover Data (NLCD) set mapping cannot identify the parcelized development occurring at the local level.



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FIGURE 1
Northern Tier Region
Population Growth Comparison 1990-2000
 Source: U.S. Census, 1990 & 2000

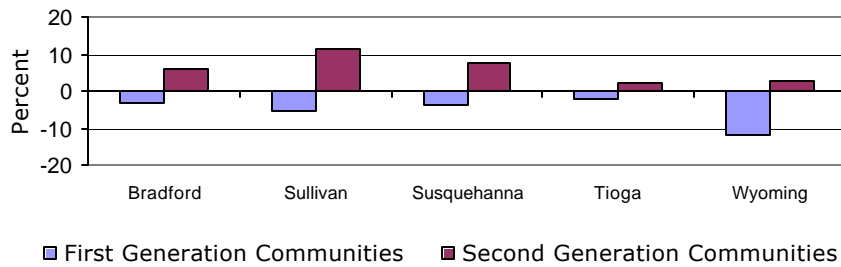
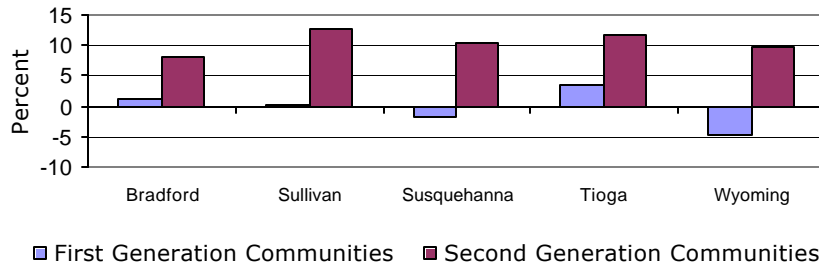


FIGURE 2
Northern Tier Region
Housing Growth Comparison 1990-2000
 Source: U.S. Census, 1990 & 2000



¹ General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Joint State Government Commission, "Clean and Green, Staff Analysis of the Pennsylvania Farmland and Forest Land Assessment Act of 1974." April 1997.

² Northern Tier Regional Planning & Development Commission. "Long Range Transportation Plan 2003 - 2023, Executive Summary", p. 6.