

Land Use and Growth Management Profile

Venango County is bordered by Crawford, Warren, Forest, Clarion, Butler, and Mercer Counties, and is located at the halfway point between the cities of Pittsburgh and Erie. The County's principal highways are S.R. 8, U.S. Route 62, U.S. Route 322, and Interstate 80, a critical east-west transportation link. The County is comprised of 31 municipalities – two cities, nine boroughs, and 20 townships. In 1800, the City of Franklin was declared the county seat. At 675 square miles, the County ranks 33rd among Pennsylvania's 67 counties for land area. In 2000, its population was 57,565, which ranked it 43rd for population. With the exception of a small resurgence in the 1970s, Venango County has experienced consistent population decline since it peaked in 1950 (pop. 65,328). This loss is primarily attributable to out-migration.

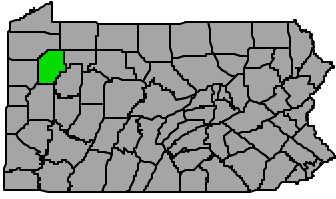
Venango County is perhaps best known as the birthplace of the oil industry. In 1859, Colonel Edward L. Drake drilled the world's first oil well near Titusville. Drake's discovery signaled the beginning of a new industrial era and put Venango County on the world map. In a few short years, the County was transformed from a predominantly subsistence-based economy to an industrial powerhouse. In the aftermath of the Civil War, speculation had reached a fevered pitch and veterans were looking for work. Companies quickly formed to exploit the natural resource, which appeared to be concentrated in low-lying areas along the Oil Creek in northeastern Venango County. The oil

boom launched towns like Oil City, Franklin, and Emlenton, part of Pennsylvania's Oil Heritage Region. Today, oil pumping is conducted on a limited basis in Venango County. The remnants of that era remain in the landscape, supporting a thriving tourist economy.

Existing Land Use Conditions

Venango County has a varied topography characterized by rolling hills and sweeping valleys. It is part of the Appalachian Plateau, a geographic region west of the Appalachian Mountains that began life centuries ago as an inland sea. The County's prehistoric origins provide some explanation for the wealth of oil found in this region. Numerous waterways cut their way through the landscape, producing a fairly rugged terrain that supports a wide variety of outdoor recreation activities. The County's major waterways are the Allegheny River, Oil Creek, and French Creek, all part of the Ohio River basin.

Although the oil industry was significant in Venango County's past, the County still maintains its rural character as reflected in its existing land use. A significant percentage of the County's vacant land is comprised of forests, the majority of which are under private ownership. Although the lumber industry has lost employment over the last decade, forestry remains an important component of the County economy. Agriculture comprises over 71 percent of the total land use in the County. According to the 1997 Census of



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Agriculture, the forestry sector contributes \$7.8 million a year to the local economy.

Key Land Use Issues

- ☑ **Venango County's population has been steadily declining.** Since peaking in 1950 (pop. 65,328) Venango County's population has been on the decline. This loss has been most keenly felt in Franklin, which has lost 25 percent of its resident population since 1960. Oil City lost 35 percent of its population over the same time period. An aging population base and limited employment opportunities have contributed to an out-migration of some of the County's wage earners.
- ☑ **Venango County proactively promotes reforestation.** Since 1920, over 1,000 acres per year have reverted back to forestland.
- ☑ **Venango County is concerned about the integrity of its water supply.** The County has adopted a wellhead protection program and recently completed a countywide water supply plan to identify weaknesses within existing water systems. Some of the County's fastest-growing communities lack properly permitted water systems, threatening public health and safety.
- ☑ **Over half of the County's municipalities lack comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances.** A survey conducted by the Governor's Center for Local Government Services in 2002

revealed that 67 percent of the County's municipalities did not have local zoning; another 58 percent did not have comprehensive plans.

Land Use Planning Activities

- ☑ **Venango County recently updated its comprehensive plan.** Venango County completed its first comprehensive plan in 1967. It was updated in 1977, 1988, and 2003.
- ☑ **Venango County has developed regional partnerships to strengthen solid waste management.** Venango County is working with Forest and Clarion Counties to prepare a tri-county solid waste plan.