

Roxborough Reservoir Stewardship Plan

Philadelphia Parks & Recreation recently received the completed Roxborough Reservoir Stewardship Plan, a master plan for the 35-acre site in Upper Roxborough. Natural Lands Trust (NLT) in Media, PA developed the plan over a 13-month period. They met with community leaders, PPR staff, the Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) and others to gather information. They also held three public meetings in the neighborhood to solicit input and provide feedback. A challenging aspect was that through much of the planning process, PWD was constructing a major stormwater management facility on the site, markedly altering its physical conditions.

The completed plan has three primary components: 1) a site analysis; 2) a public use profile; and 3) recommendations for the site. Recommendations are described for such measures as traffic calming, parking, signage and trails. The recommendations are shown graphically on a concept plan page in the report. NLT also produced a landscape planting plan that guided planting and seeding associated with the PWD's stormwater project. A unique characteristic of this site is the annual toad migration to and from the "wet" basin on the northwest side of the old reservoir.

Roxborough Reservoir became fully operational in 1909. Given the size of the structure, it is difficult to imagine how it was constructed with the rudimentary equipment of that period. Flat Rock Pumping Station was built around the time the reservoir was built. Water from the Schuylkill River was pumped up to the reservoir, where it passed through sand filters and was distributed to the surrounding community by gravity. After 53 years in operation, the facility closed in 1962 and over the next 50 years underwent a slow decline. Vegetation, much of it non-native and invasive, became established on much of the site. During this time, the property was transferred from PWD to Public Properties and, within the last few years, from Public Properties to PPR.

The master plan, initiated by Commissioner DiBerardinis, will guide future upgrades and management of the parcel. The plan also lays the groundwork to apply for grant funding for improvements to the parcel. One half of the plan cost was funded by a grant from the PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources.