



United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
UPPER DELAWARE SCENIC AND RECREATIONAL RIVER
274 River Road
Beach Lake, Pennsylvania 18405



IN REPLY REFER TO:

To whom it may concern:

The National Park Service (NPS), Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River, would like to express its support for the repair and rehabilitation of the Skinners Falls-Milanville Bridge that will preserve the historic significance and integrity of the bridge while addressing safety concerns and improved access for vehicles and pedestrians.

The Mission of the National Park Service is to preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. In 1978, Congress designated 73.4 miles of the Upper Delaware River as a part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System as a unit of the national park system. The Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River protects, conserves, and enhances the free-flowing character, exceptionally high water quality, and the scenic, recreational, ecological, cultural, and geological values of the Upper Delaware River valley through collaborative partnerships and cooperation with state and local government entities.

The Skinners Falls-Milanville Bridge was completed in 1902 and is an element that supports two of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORV), Cultural and Scenic, for which the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River is worthy of special protection under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. ORVs must be river related or dependent and they must be rare, unique, or exemplary at a comparative regional or national scale.

Recently re-evaluated and listed as a contributing element of the Cultural Resource ORV, the Skinners Falls-Milanville Bridge is an intact example of a two-span steel Baltimore Truss bridge constructed in 1902 by the American Bridge Company over the Delaware River connecting the Skinners Falls (Cochecton, NY) and Milanville, PA communities. Listed on the National Register in 1988 for significance under Criterion C – Engineering (Spero 1988), the bridge is also highlighted as a rare steel truss bridge in the 1992 Multiple Property Documentation Form National Register Listing, *Historic and Architectural Resources of the Upper Delaware Valley, New York and Pennsylvania* (Curtis 1992). The bridge is listed as a Contributing Resource in the “Milanville Historic District” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (Curtis 1993). The Milanville Historic District is significant for its connection to Industry and Architecture under Criteria A and C. According to the report, *A Context for Common Historic Bridge Types* prepared for The National Cooperative Highway Research Program, the Transportation Research Council, and the National Research Council in 2005, Baltimore Truss Bridges are “Significant”; particularly highway bridge examples, which are not common.

The Skinners Falls-Milanville Bridge is the oldest example of an American Bridge Company Baltimore Through Truss Highway Bridge in the United States. Of extant Baltimore Through Truss Bridges in Pennsylvania and New York, the Skinners Falls-Milanville Bridge is the earliest example in the Upper Delaware region, in its original location, with multiple spans that is still in use as a highway bridge. A 2017 PennDOT Metal Truss Bridge Reevaluation states that the Skinners Falls-Milanville Bridge is

INTERIOR REGION 1 • NORTH ATLANTIC-APPALACHIAN

CONNECTICUT, DELAWARE, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, KENTUCKY, MAINE, MARYLAND, MASSACHUSETTS, NEW HAMPSHIRE, NEW JERSEY, NEW YORK, PENNSYLVANIA, RHODE ISLAND, VERMONT, VIRGINIA, WEST VIRGINIA

noteworthy for the following reasons: an uncommon type, early example of type/design in the state, earliest example of type/design in district 4, regionally rare, with multiple spans, exhibits artistic value (lattice railing, highly ornamental and decorative cresting, and bridge plaque), and association with important designer, builder, or engineer.

Retention of this historic bridge not only preserves and supports the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the river valley, but also provides a unique economic opportunity to support heritage tourism in the valley.

As described in *The Upper Delaware River, A Wild and Scenic River Study*, US Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, 1973, the outstandingly remarkable cultural (historic) values for which the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River are worth of protection were described as follows:

“Although it lies just to the west and northwest of the Boston-to-Washington urban corridor, the Upper Delaware River appears untouched by the frenetic pace of the mid-20th century. The Upper Delaware and its riverside communities have managed to retain those qualities and values of earlier times which elsewhere have passed into memory, perishing in the onslaught of industrialization, modernization, urban sprawl, and other similar forces of contemporary life. The counties which form the ...region have remained essentially rural...some of these qualities and values may still be seen as they appeared to earlier eyes. This special quality, this pace of daily life, is easily discernible by comparison with the large cites and suburban overflows of the Eastern Megalopolis.”

Fifty years later, the statement above from 1973 still holds true for the Skinners Falls-Milanville area today.

The area that would become Milanville, Pennsylvania was settled by the Delaware Company in 1754-1755, who purchased land from the Lenape and established the Cushetunk settlement. Beginning in the early 19th century, the logging industry in the area began when Daniel Skinner, of one of the original Delaware Company families, became famous for the first successful timber rafting trip down the Delaware River. According to the National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Milanville Historic District, “Milanville’s Skinner family, owners of the village sawmill, was the most important lumbering/timber rafting family in the valley.” After the construction of the Erie Railroad on the New York side of the river, the Skinner family influence extended from the Milanville side of the river (where Colonel Calvin Skinner is credited with the naming of Milanville) to the New York side, where a switch (turnout) on the railroad was added in 1888 at the request of Milton Skinner. The nearest bridges at the time to reach the railroad being at Cochection, 3 miles north or Narrowsburg, 3 miles south, Milton and his brother, Volney, installed a ferry boat just upriver from the current bridge to get their goods to the railroad switch (and later in 1920 a depot named, Skinners Falls) for market. Eventually the need for a bridge was realized and Milton was instrumental in organizing the Milanville Bridge Company, which contracted the American Bridge Company to construct a bridge beginning in 1901, with completion in 1902. The bridge was designed to limit its width to accommodate only one-way traffic, so as to not compete with the more efficient and existing two-way traffic toll bridges at Cochection and Narrowsburg, the bridge was operated as a toll bridge until 1928, when it was purchased by the Interstate Bridge Commission.¹

¹ *Bridges over the Delaware River: A History of Crossings*, Frank T. Dale, 2003 pages 190-196.

According to the 2018, National Parks Conservation Association report, *Making Connections: Roots of Prosperity in New York and Pennsylvania's Upper Delaware River Region*, "Traditional industries like timber and wood products manufacturing and agriculture play a small part in the area's [current] economy, yet are essential to its character. They exert a powerful influence on the area's natural beauty and rural feel. Most community and business leaders interviewed for this report believe these traditional backbones of the region's identity will be part of its future."

"Heritage tourism uses assets — historic, cultural and natural resources — that already exist. Rather than creating and building attractions, destinations look to the past for a sustainable future. Indeed, these assets need preservation and often restoration or interpretation, but the foundation for creating a dynamic travel experience lives on in the stories and structures of the past."² Factors that have recently increased interest in American heritage are³:

1. People are taking shorter holidays and vacations – This is particularly true since the 2020 pandemic. According to Colleen Dilenschneider, a leading commentator for cultural organizations on making data-informed decisions, survey data on spring break plans for 2019 compared to 2021 reveals that fewer people plan to travel further than 150 miles from home this year; that most people traveling further than 150 miles plan to do so by personal vehicle; and that over half of those traveling will spend one night or less away from home.⁴
2. The primary motivations of travel have shifted – again, according to Colleen Dilenschneider, the two biggest changes are in the decline in visiting friends and family and the rise in a desire for a change in scenery. It should also be noted that the desire to visit outdoor spaces such as the beach or a park and visiting historic locations and museums is increasing.⁵
3. Authentic places are important to understanding history and culture – In order to value the present, we must understand our past.
4. Tourism can have big economic impacts – In 2019, there were over 215,000 to the Upper Delaware with an economic output of over \$11,000,000 with 88% of visitor spending made by non-local visitors.⁶

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has identified 10 Benefits of Establishing a Local Historic District, which could also be said for investing and protecting current districts, such as the Milanville Historic District, and their contributing resources, i.e. the Skinners Falls-Milanville Bridge:

1. Local districts protect the investments of owners and residents of historic properties.
2. Properties within local historic districts appreciate at rates greater than the local market overall as well as faster than similar, non-designated neighborhoods.
3. Local districts encourage better quality design.
4. Local districts help the environment.
5. Local districts are energy-efficient.
6. Historic districts are a vehicle for education.

² Hargrove, Cheryl M. 2002. Heritage Tourism. Cultural Resource Management. Issue 25-1. Getting Started: How to Succeed in Heritage Tourism. 1993. National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States.

³ Touring Historic Places, A manual for group tour operators and managers of historic and cultural attractions, National Trust of Historic Preservation and the National Tour Association, 1995.

⁴ <https://www.colleendilen.com/2021/03/03/do-people-plan-to-travel-for-spring-break-2021-data/>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ https://www.nps.gov/nature/customcf/NPS_Data_Visualization/docs/NPS_2019_Visitor_Spending_Effects.pdf

7. Historic districts can positively impact the local economy through tourism.
8. Protecting local historic districts can enhance business recruitment potential.
9. Local districts provide social and psychological benefits.
10. Local districts give communities a voice in their future.⁷

Thoughtful and sensitive Investment in Milanville Historic District and National Register listed Skinners Falls-Milanville Bridge preserves an important example of the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River Cultural and Scenic ORVs and provides economic support for the residents and local business owners in this community, which has voiced support for a crossing that meets the needs of the community while preserving their history.

In addition to the historical and scenic importance of the bridge, this river crossing is also vital for connecting emergency service providers to the areas where there are incidents requiring law enforcement and medical services.

The Skinners Falls NYSDEC Access is a heavily-used river access that frequently requires emergency service response to, the closest of which comes from the NPS Milanville, PA office. This river location has the most challenging rapids on the Upper Delaware River, and has been the site of numerous drownings and injuries in the past.

Recreation is another one of the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River's identified Outstandingly Remarkable Values. The Upper Delaware River is known for its outstanding recreational opportunities, activities, and access in proximity to millions of people in America's most densely populated region. It provides high quality, affordable natural recreational experiences, which include boating, swimming, tubing, fishing, hiking, biking, wildlife viewing, birding, and scenic touring, and supports the largest canoe livery industry in the United States. The Skinners Falls Access, beach area, and nearby campground comprise one of the most heavily used locations on the river, and the Skinners Falls/Milanville Bridge is integral to recreation on this part of the river.

I hope this letter assists with identifying the importance of repairing and rehabilitating the Skinners Falls-Milanville Bridge in the Purpose and Need Document, a part of the Federal Highways Planning and Environmental Linages (PEL) process.

Sincerely,

Joseph Salvatore
Superintendent
Upper Delaware Scenic & Recreational River

⁷ <https://savingplaces.org/stories/10-on-tuesday-10-benefits-of-establishing-a-local-historic-district#.YK0lw6hKgps>