

2018 J. Roy Houston Conservation Partnership Award

Malcolm Sias

Westmoreland County Bureau of Parks & Recreation Director

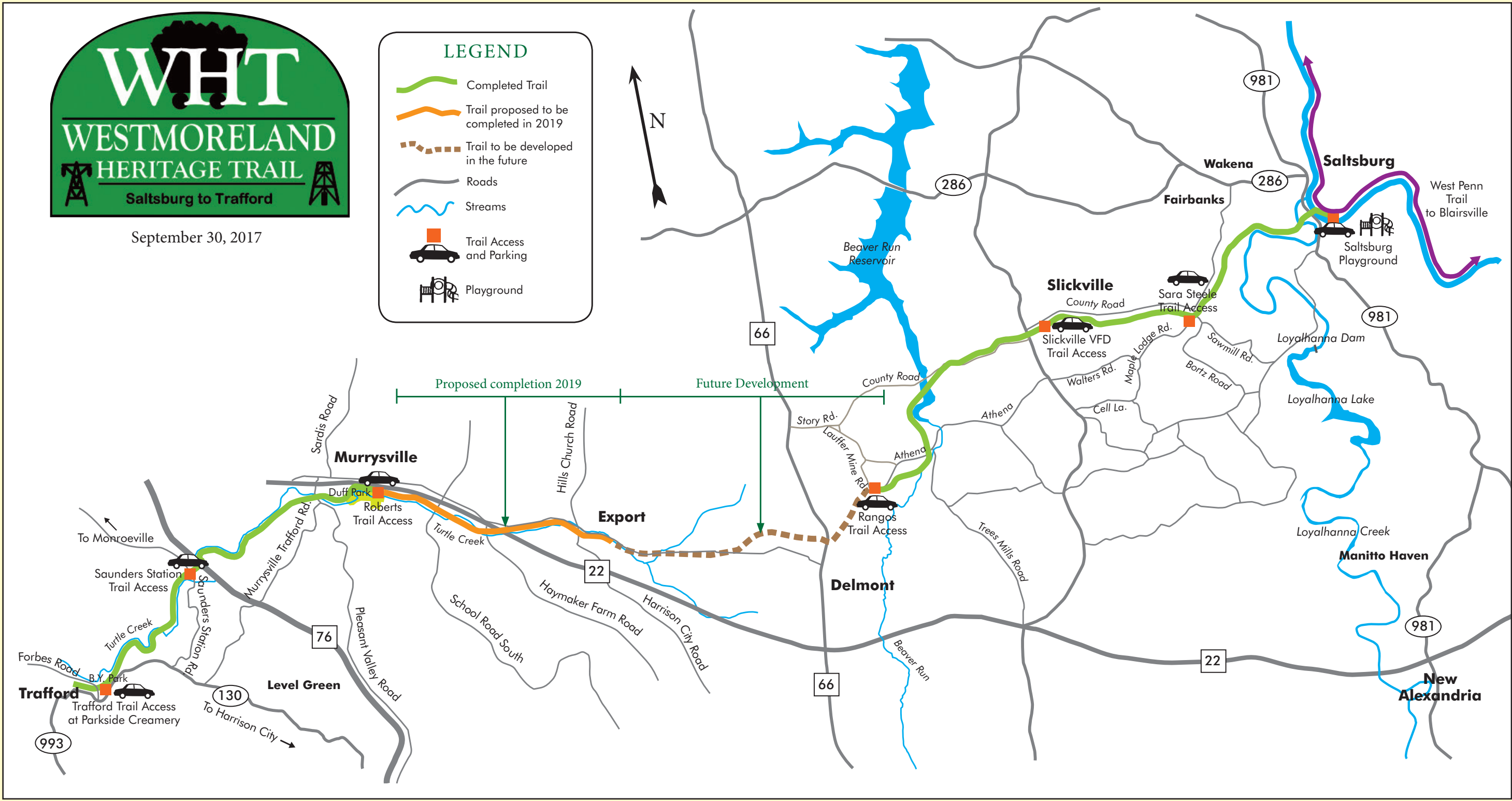


In his 40 years of service to parks and recreation, Malcolm Sias has made a lot of important things happen – from expanding the acreage, amenities, and activities at Westmoreland County’s 10 parks, to convincing Greg Phillips of the conservation benefits of trails.

It was in the late 1980s when Malcolm first got interested in building trails and, between his professional tenure with the Westmoreland County Bureau of Parks and Recreation and his volunteer service to the Regional Trail Corporation, he has since helped to create 43 miles of these popular walking and biking corridors throughout Westmoreland County.



“When Malcolm first started talking about trails they were a relatively new idea, and there were only one or two small ones in all of Westmoreland County,” Phillips said. “Yet, he was so intensely passionate about them that it didn’t take long before he convinced me of their conservation potential, especially as streamside buffers to protect water quality, since many of the trail routes were going to parallel the path of streams.”



The District has been a trail partner ever since. In fact, Malcolm and the District have partnered on every one of the five major trails that have been built in the county.

A recent partnership involved a section of the Westmoreland Heritage Trail in Murrysville where the slopes were especially steep and badly eroding. The partners successfully created a solid base for the trail in this challenging spot and, at the same time, significantly reduced the amount of sediment getting into Turtle Creek.

As Westmoreland County Parks and Recreation director, Malcolm has responsibility for stewarding upwards of 4,000 county-owned acres of parkland,



about 340 of which were added during his tenure, primarily to make already existing parks larger.

But in the mid-1990s, Malcolm was central to an effort that added an entirely new park to the county

system – a unique park that is 100% a conservation measure: the Sewickley Creek Wetlands.

This 26-acre park near New Stanton is a peaceful place to observe birds and wildflowers. And it also is a hard-working conservation practice that continuously manages stormwater, filters pollutants from the water, and helps to prevent flooding downstream.

Malcolm began his college career studying forestry, and so it’s natural that he has been a major force in promoting healthy forests, including one of the largest wooded tracts in Westmoreland County – the 1,275-acre Loyalhanna Gorge.



Malcolm worked with our forester and others to develop a management plan for this very special county park of second-growth timber and unique plant species.

He also put good stewardship practices in place on wooded portions of historic Hanna’s Town and Ann Rudd Saxman Nature Park.

For 32 years, Malcolm and his staff have been a key partner in the District’s annual Envirothon, a competition that has helped some 2,400 high school students develop an appreciation for the natural world.



Westmoreland Conservation District