

INTRODUCTION

This map is one of a series of 1:50,000-scale county maps in the Greater Pittsburgh region that identify areas with potential slope-stability problems significant to regional development. Intensive interpretation of land-slide photographs (1:24,000 scale) was supplemented by field reconnaissance in the fall of 1975 and the spring of 1976. This map does not show all recent landslides as many are too small to be discernible on the aerial photographs. Furthermore, many slopes not designated as containing older landslides undoubtedly include areas, but the geomorphic evidence for them has been obliterated by erosion or modified by man.

The map is a guide to areas where detailed studies of slope stability would be most vital to the general public. In these areas, site examination and detailed study to determine the degree to which slope instability affects a contemplated land use. The map is not intended to replace detailed geological and engineering studies of specific sites by competent technical personnel.

SOURCES OF DATA

Landslides have been shown on geologic quadrangle maps by Berryhill (1964), Berryhill and Schweinfurth (1964), Berryhill and Swanson (1964), Kent (1967), Roen (1971), Roen and others (1969), Schweinfurth (1967, 1976), Jr., and Swanson and Berryhill (1964). Additional information concerning alluvial portions of Washington County is available in reports by Kent and others (1969), Berryhill and others (1971), Kent (1972), and others (1974).

Earlier products derived from the present investigation include reports by Pomeroy (1976a, b), (1978a, b). For more information regarding landslide map features and diagrams, the reader is urged to refer to the reports of the Washington County reports by Briggs and others (1975) and Pomeroy and Davies (1975).

The soil survey of Washington County U.S. Soil Conservation Service, 1974, b) was also used as a source of data.

The author acknowledges the assistance of members of the Washington County Planning Commission.

GEOLOGY AND SOILS AND THEIR RELATION TO LANDSLIDING

Bedrock in Washington County consists of flat-lying to subhorizontal cyclic sequences of sedimentary rocks of Pennsylvanian and Permian age; these rocks include, from oldest to youngest, the Conemaugh, Monongahela, and Dunkard Groups (figs. 1 and 2). Washington County is an integral part of a recent 1:125,000-scale map of the Greater Pittsburgh region (Wagner and others, 1975).

The term "soil" is used in this report in the engineering sense; it includes material that has resulted from rock weathered in place (residual) as well as weathered material that has moved downslope and accumulated at the base of slopes (colluvium). Most landslides observed in Washington County occur on colluvial or residual non-rock clay to clayey silt soil and in weathered rock derived from mudstone, claystone, and shale of the Dunkard Group. Guessey soils (fig. 3) are also present in the weathered rock. These slopes, with thin beds of limestone and from thicker units of mudstone is particularly prone to sliding and is the major troublesome soil in the county. The upper soil derived from Conemaugh red mudstone (fig. 3) which is so prevalent in adjacent Allegheny and Beaver Counties occurs only in the extreme eastern and northwestern parts of the county.

Non-rock clayey to clayey-silt soils sampled from 38 road cuts in the county indicate a moderate to high plasticity index based on physical-properties tests performed by S. S. Duncan, R. Moore, and R. Kaufman and supervised by S. S. Duncan (USGS). X-ray diffraction techniques conducted by S. Koblak (USGS) and interpreted by J. Hess (USGS) for one red and three gray samples reveal that the clays consist of illite, kaolinite, vermiculite, and interlayered minerals. Although the clay composition of the soils derived from the Conemaugh and Dunkard Groups is similar, the limited data available indicate that the latter have a slightly greater proportion of expandable minerals. Similar clay mineralogical data were obtained from two library soil localities in Washington County by Claborn and others (1976). Data on Atterberg limits and potential volume change for a few mudstone, claystone, and limestone material changes are given in Kent and others (1969) and in Berryhill and others (1971).

An extrapolation of U.S. Soil Conservation Service figures (1974a, b) for soil types and acreage in Washington County reveals that the area distribution of landslide-prone soils (based on a slope of at least 1 percent and a moderate to high shrink-swell ratio) amounts to approximately 75 percent of the total acreage of this percentage occurs sharply with the 18 and 20 percent figures for Allegheny and Beaver Counties, respectively.

FEATURES SHOWN ON THE MAP

Recent Landslides

More than 95 percent of the recent landslides in Washington County are small, generally less than 10 m in maximum dimension. Landslides whose maximum dimension is less than 5 m have not been plotted because of the map scale. The earthflow (fig. 4b) is the most dominant landslide type in Washington County. Slump, earthflow, and debris slides (figs. 4c-f) and combinations of the three are usually less than 2.5 m thick. However, a few slides occurring in relatively thick colluvium along lower slopes involve heterogeneous unconsolidated material more than 15 m in thickness. Also, some slides occur in relatively thick massive fill deposits which may or may not be related to tectonics. Over 2,300 recent slides have been identified.

In addition to obvious recently active slides, the unit "recent landslides" includes those slides which, judging from their appearance on the aerial photographs and from ground observations, are believed to have formed within the past 100 years. Since documentation is lacking, the differentiation of "recent" from "older" slides is based on the reconnaissance investigator's judgments. Therefore, some slides marked as "older" might actually have moved within the past 100 years.

Recent slides in the county have been caused by intense (temporarily heavy rainfall falling within a period of a few days to several years), by man-generated factors, or by a combination of these factors. The ubiquitous earthflow seen in pasture country has no important man-generated cause unless it can be attributed to a landslide slump from forest to pasture; most often, however, an earthflow appears to have been triggered by heavy rainfall.

Man's modifications of sensitive slopes include: excavation at the base of a slope resulting in its oversteepening; overloading a slope with fill causing instability; altering drainage conditions which affect both the surface and ground water; and vibrations caused by increased heavy construction (blasting and pile driving). Any one of these actions can oversteer the soil and cause slippage. Many of the slides in table 1 were initiated by man's activity.

Soil creep is the imperceptible downslope movement of soil and rock material (fig. 4d) and is not considered a landslide process; however, accelerated creep often precedes sliding. Creep is common on many slopes throughout the county where ground breakage is lacking.

Most slides closely resemble the example shown in figure 4a. A poorly drained hummocky surface commonly containing seeps and cattail marshes characterizes the toe of a recent slide. Fresh scars and obvious frontal movement typify the entire mass of an active slide. Fewer than half of the slides active as recent were active at the time of the reconnaissance. Many slides stabilized, at least temporarily, after movement ceased.

Slope failures related to strip mining constitute less than 4 percent of the recent slides and generally are due to slumping of spoil banks. Reconnaissance indicated that movement had been restricted generally to the waste material, and failure is largely independent of the underlying natural material. The cause of failure might be poorly controlled surface and subsurface runoff, improperly compacted spoil material, or a combination of these causes. A few slides occur where the highwall has been cut into relatively thick colluvium and the underlying bedrock is exposed. Relatively few slides have occurred in reclaimed land. Two sizable earthflows, located about 3 km southwest of Monongahela in eastern Washington County, occur along a regraded slope where the Westmoreland coal had been previously stripped (Roan and others, 1969).

Fill failures unrelated to coal mining are relatively few, unlike the situation in adjacent more populous Allegheny County (Pomeroy and Davies, 1975). A few examples are cited in table 1.

Landslides are not shown on the Prosperity quadrangle (Kent, 1972) because their representation would obscure the mapped bedrock units; Kent's been observations, however, are appropriate to reproduce herein.

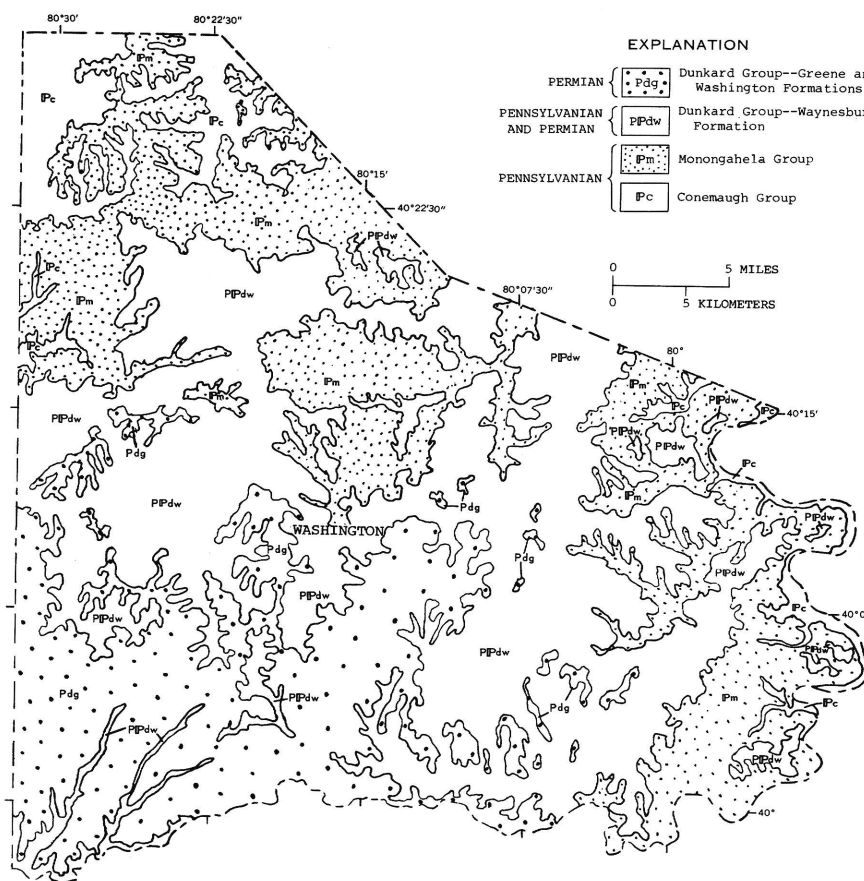


Figure 1.—Generalized geologic map of Washington County, Pennsylvania. Adapted from geologic map of Pennsylvania by the Pennsylvania Geological Survey (1960).

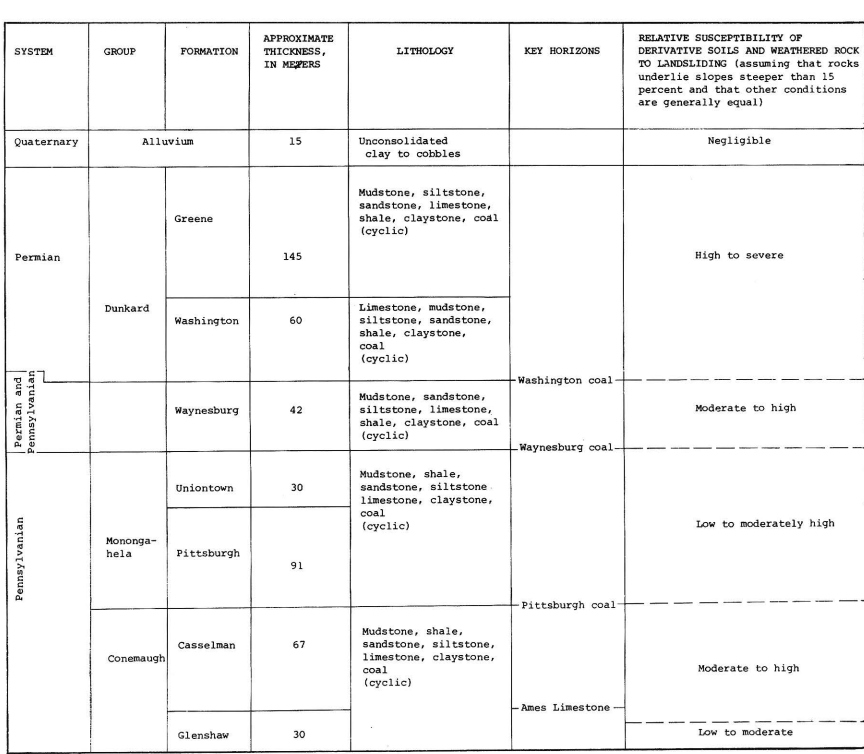


Figure 2.—Generalized stratigraphic section, Washington County, Pa. and relative susceptibility of derivative earth material to landsliding.

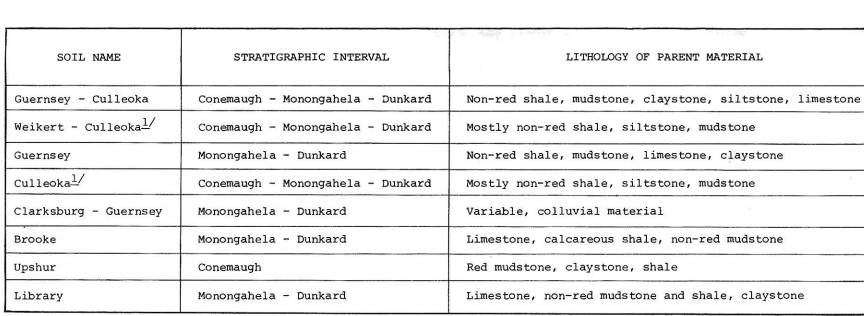
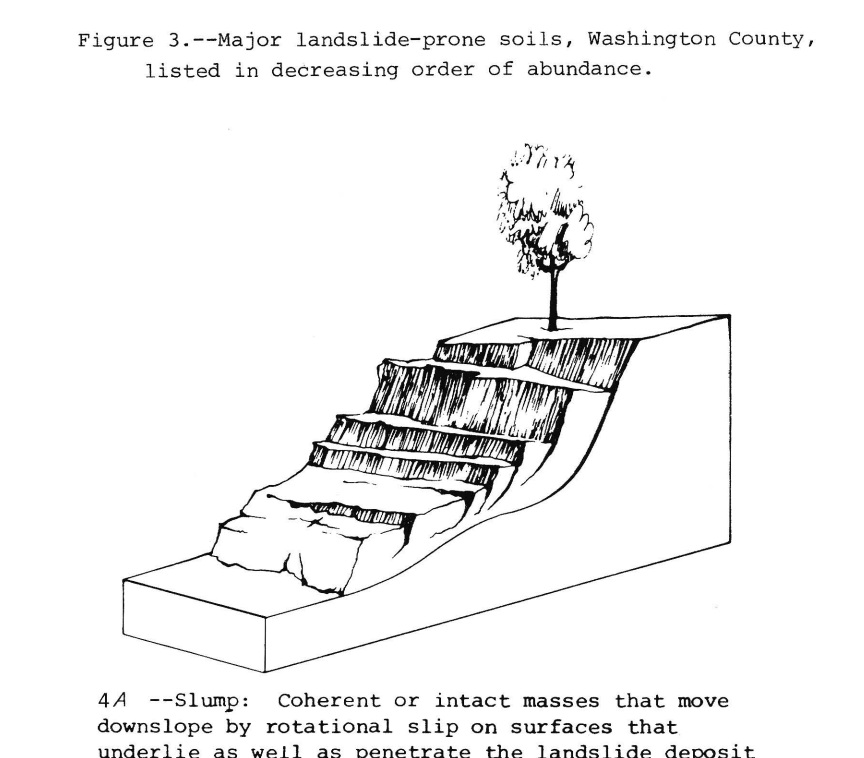


Figure 3.—Major landslide-prone soils, Washington County, listed in descending order of abundance.



"Limestone units with interbedded layers of claystone and black shale create zones of impervious bedrock that act as barriers to downward percolation of ground water through overlying siltstone and sandstone, causing ground water to move laterally to hillsides in land-sliding of the earthflow type water-saturated matrices of soil and rock fragments begin creeping or flowing downhill, and usually some rotational movement ensues. Consequently, areas of rock type near the uphill boundary of the hummocky, grass-covered mounds of slide material. Undoubtedly there are many localities along hillsides in the area where some matrices of soil and rock fragments are ready to slide, and will do so as soon as some natural or artificial event triggers them. A prolonged period of heavy rainfall may activate new landslides, or any excavation of the toe of a dormant slide may reactivate the slide. Landslide units are the originating points of present slides, and they also mark the most likely points from which new slides will develop in the future."

Recent landslide investigations in Washington and adjacent counties to the north and east indicate that limestone does not have to be a necessary impediment in the landslide process. In Washington County large slides have developed on slopes underlain by sandstone and other lithologies; there is no indication that limestone has played a significant role. Berryhill and others (1971, p. 20) mention some large slides which have developed on thick units of sandstone that contain a large amount of clay.

Older Landslides

More than 6,000 older landslides have been identified by reconnaissance methods in the present inventory in Washington County. Approximately 45 percent of these slides have well-defined geomorphic features, such as hummocky ground, that indicate former movement. The remaining 55 percent have similar but subdued characteristics and are fairly to poorly defined (landslides). The head scarp and hummocky lower slope of landslide slides are not always apparent due to erosion.

Figure 5 shows the characteristic topographic expression of older landslides. Generally, older landslides occur in hillslope recesses which are concave both across slope and downslope. Instability is enhanced in these concave-shaped areas which collect more ground water than adjacent slopes. About 81 percent of the older slides occur on concave slopes; the remainder occur on planar, convex, or a combination of slope forms. Colluvial material at the foot of many of older landslides exceeds 10 m in thickness.

Older landslides shown on the map are either individual slides or a series of coalesced slides that are mapped together as one slide. The latter are the result of 7.0 km and do not represent a single event in the history of the area but are part of a continuing process that has been developed since Wisconsin glaciation. The rate of sliding was no doubt greater immediately after Wisconsin time because of increased rainfall.

These older landslides, although presently stable, can be reactivated by a prolonged period of heavy rainfall and by man-generated slope modification.

Areas Most Susceptible to Sliding

It is important to note that landslides can occur anywhere in the geologic section when optimum conditions for movement are present. However, the weathered material around which collect more ground water than adjacent slopes. Figure 2 shows the relative susceptibility to landsliding of the weathered material derived from the various rock units.

Areas underlain by mudstones and claystones of the Dunkard Group, particularly that part of the section lying above the Washington coal, are more susceptible to sliding than are other areas as evidenced by the many recent and older landslides in this terrain. Second to mudstone and claystone is the area underlain by the indurated clay of the Dunkard Group.

Of the more than 2,300 recent slides documented on the map, approximately 89 percent occur within the Dunkard Group whose axial extent amounts to about two-thirds of the county area. A composite inventory of all slides (recent and older) shows that as many as 10 slides per square kilometer have occurred on Dunkard slopes as on Conemaugh slopes.

Throughout the Allegheny Plateau, stress release following the removal of support by stream erosion along major valleys has produced extensive parallel joints that can result in the rotational slumping of bedrock and adjacent colluvium. Some landslides along the Monongahela River and some tributary valleys in the eastern part of the county owe their origin to this process.

Isopleths of area covered by landslide deposits

Methods.—The isopleth map was constructed to quantify the distribution of landslide deposits in the county. R. H. Campbell first applied the isopleth technique to landslide distribution in a southern California quadrangle (Campbell, 1973). The technique was later applied to a smaller scale compilation in the San Francisco region (Wright and Nilsen, 1974; Wright, Campbell, and Nilsen, 1974).

Briefly, the following procedures were used:

1. A grid of 0.10 in. x 0.10 in. squares (100 in. 2) was placed over the landslide map. Each intersection which fell within or on the boundary of a landslide was marked with a dot.
2. A circle 1 in. 2 in. area was then moved across the grid overlap, and at each 0.5-in. interval, the total number of dots was counted and recorded on the grid beneath the center of the circle.
3. Numbers of dots were translated into percent of area covered by landslide deposits. For example, if there were 10 dots within a 100-square area, a value of 10 percent would be assigned to that area. Contours were then drawn at 1 percent and at multiples of 10 percent.

The resultant isopleth map thus shows the percentage of the area covered by landslide deposits. Its utility is evident in that one can quantitatively compare slope conditions among various parts of the county. Furthermore, an isopleth map used in combination with maps showing geology, soils, slope, relief (all of which affect landsliding) enables one to make a framework for a slope stability study.

The relative groups supported below show degrees of landslide susceptibility which may be useful in regional planning:

Landslide susceptibility	Percent of area covered by landslide deposits
Very high to severe	70-80 percent
High to very high	50-70 percent
Moderate to high	30-50 percent
Low to moderate	10-30 percent
Nil to low	0-10 percent

It is recommended that the intervals be colored to make the map easier to interpret.

Discussion.—Slopes most susceptible to landsliding in several counties in the Greater Pittsburgh region are concentrated within two major red-bed sequences in the Conemaugh Group of Pennsylvanian age (Pomeroy and Davies, 1975; Pomeroy, 1976). However, since in Washington County landsliding is more widespread and is especially pronounced throughout a 180-m section of part of the Dunkard Group of Permian age, an inventory map of landslide deposits in Washington County alone makes a slope-stability study difficult.

The user should bear in mind that the isopleth map is based largely on the distribution of older landslide deposits because the area covered by older deposits is significantly greater than that area covered by recent landslide deposits. This map is not an incidence map of recent landslides. Areas of frequent landslides, such as the strip-mine area surrounding Basin Station in the northwestern part, may show on the isopleth map as having a moderate susceptibility to landsliding. Other areas with a moderate number of man-induced small recent slides such as the 17-19 corridor area between Washington and the Allegheny County line occur in a generally low-susceptibility area. In both areas despite man's influence, the slope material is simply not as prone to sliding as that of areas in the southern part of the county.

In the present study some factors which relate to slope stability (geology, soils, slope, relief) have been combined with the isopleth map to present a clearer understanding of landslide susceptibility. The contouring reveals several areas of varying size having 50 to 80 percent of the land covered by landslide deposits. These high-susceptibility areas have the following characteristics: (1) they are underlain by Washington and Greene Formations of the Dunkard Group; (2) they involve Guessey-Culicoka soils; (3) they have

25 to 60 percent slopes; and 4) they have average maximum relief of 90-150 ft. By contrast, most areas showing less than one percent of the area covered by landslide deposits are located in the northwestern part of the county and have the following characteristics: (1) they are underlain by upper part of the Conemaugh and lower part of the Monongahela Groups; (2) they involve Wehretts-Culicoka soils; (3) they have 8 to 25 percent slopes; and 4) they have average maximum relief of 45-60 ft.

ROCKFALLS (not shown on map)

Widely differing physical characteristics of individual lithologies cause geologic engineering problems in an area underlain by cyclic sedimentary rocks. The rockfall problem is a prime example.

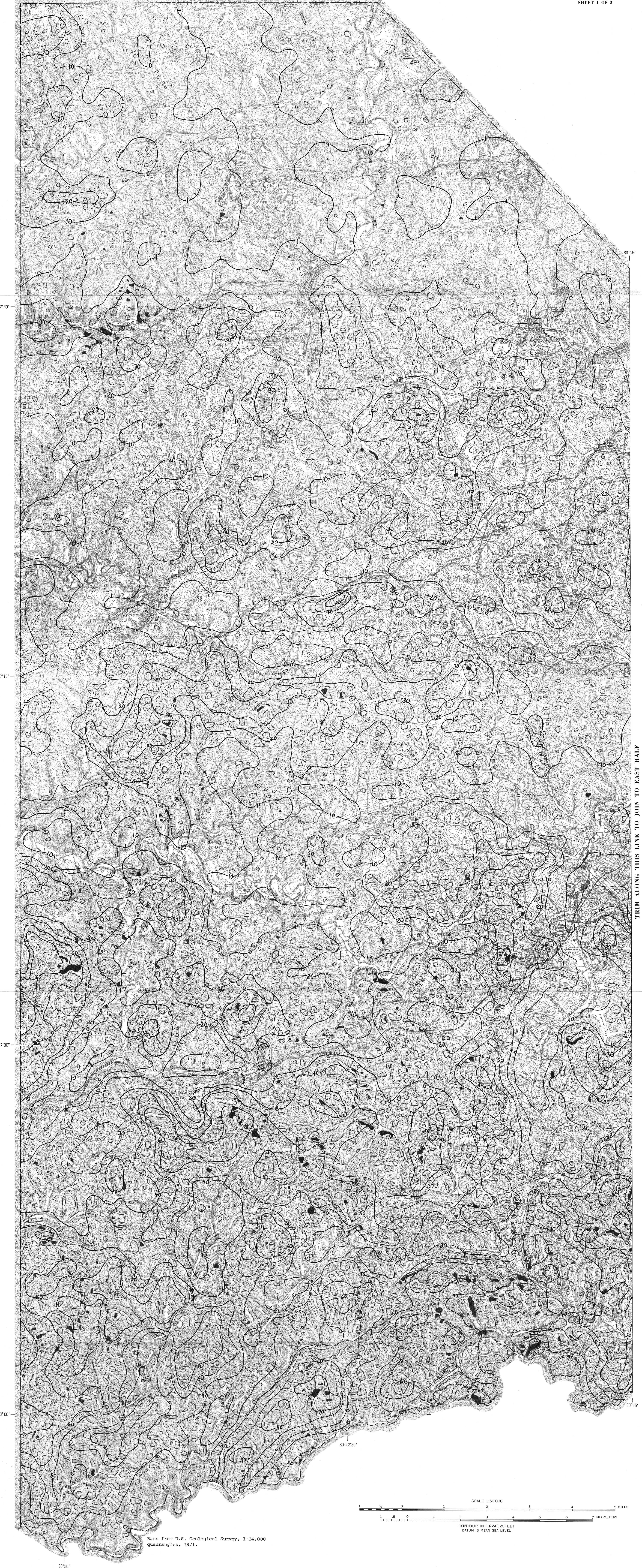
Rockfalls (fig. 4f) are produced by weathering and erosion which affect mudstone and shale more readily than sandstone, siltstone, and limestone. As a result, unsupported ledges of the more resistant rocks break away by falling. Jointing is a significant factor. In Washington County, joints are common on outcrops along the Monongahela River, along tributary drainages in the extreme eastern part of the county, along stretches of major highways (such as I-79 north of Washington). However, rock-fall volumes in these localities are small and not negligible at the scale of this map. Rockfalls can occur anywhere in the geologic section, and their potential for catastrophic damage cannot be understated. One rockfall in 1941 in adjacent Beaver County killed 22 people (Ackebell, 1954).

SUMMARY

More than 10,000 landslides have been identified in Washington County. Landslide-prone soils are widespread in Washington County than in any of the other counties which are part of the Greater Pittsburgh region. The widespread earth movements are not confined to distinct geologic horizons; this fact makes the job of showing susceptible horizons difficult. The isopleth map quantifies those areas where susceptibility to sliding is high. Most landslides are earthflows which are colluvial or residual. Some slides of clayey silt soil and weathered rock derived from mudstone, claystone, and shale of the Dunkard Group. Down-slope movement of soil and weathered rock is a continuing and natural process which can be accelerated by man. Proper engineering and judicious use of land in sensitive areas can be used to check the threat of landslides.

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ISOPLETH MAP OF LANDSLIDE DEPOSITS, WASHINGTON COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA - A GUIDE TO COMPARATIVE SLOPE STABILITY

By
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1978

TRIM ALONG THIS LINE TO JOIN TO EAST HALF