

## **Chapter 2 – Park Preserve Background**

### ***The Region***

New York State is divided into 12 Park regions. Eleven of these regions are under the jurisdiction of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). The twelfth region is composed of the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves and is administered by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Minnewaska State Park Preserve (the Preserve) is located in the Palisades Region which is administered jointly by the Palisades Interstate Park Commission (PIPC) and OPRHP. Regional characteristics of the area where Minnewaska State Park Preserve is located are described in this section of the chapter.

### **Location**

Minnewaska State Park Preserve is located in the Towns of Shawangunk, Rochester, Wawarsing and Gardiner in Ulster County. The Preserve is located south of the southern edge of the Catskill Mountains and approximately 90 miles North of New York City. See Figure 1 – Vicinity Map.

### **Access**

Minnewaska State Park Preserve is primarily accessed from State Highway 44/55. Several small parking lots are located along the perimeter of the Preserve and serve primarily as trail access points. The Berme Road Park, owned by the Village of Ellenville, is located adjacent to the Preserve. Due to its proximity, it is used as an access point to the Preserve. Visitors wishing to access the Preserve from this location must remain on the Smiley Carriage Road, which is only open for hiking. Access to the footpaths in this area requires a permit from Sam's Point Preserve. A permit system is in place to control and monitor the quantity of use in that specific area within the Preserve. See the Final Trail Plan Map (large format insert) for access points and the permit area.

### **Economic Contribution**

The citizens of Ulster County are well aware of the impact that money from outside the region can have on the economic well-being of the community. The State University of New York (SUNY) at New Paltz is frequently mentioned as a source of economic impact in this area. Minnewaska State Park Preserve also draws visitors that support the local economy of Ulster County. Although the greatest proportion of its attendance occurs from Memorial Day to Labor Day, Minnewaska State Park Preserve is a year-round facility with economic benefits that contribute to a stable year-round economy.

In March 2009, a study prepared for Parks & Trails New York by the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) University of Massachusetts-Amherst, found that the combination of state and visitor spending at State Parks supports up to \$1.9 billion in economic output and business sales and up to 20,000 jobs throughout the state. For the Palisades Region, which includes Minnewaska State Park, the figures are \$94 million and 1,052 jobs. State expenditures in the Palisades Region during fiscal year 2008/09 were \$24.9 million for operating expenses and \$7.5 million for capital expenditures. Visitor expenditures within the Palisades Region were estimated to be between \$75.0 million and \$154.4 million. The analysis by PERI was done on the regional level. In the discussion below, the economic impact of Minnewaska State Park is estimated using a slightly different methodology. Nonetheless, the results here, and the results from PERI do not conflict with each other.

One factor used to determine the extent of economic impact that a park or facility has on the surrounding area is how many people are attracted to the Preserve from outside the local community. Surveys have shown that Minnewaska is used heavily by local residents but also draws visitors from a wide area. A report done by OPRHP in 1997 estimated the economic impact of individual state parks on their communities. Drawing upon information provided by the National Park Service in their “Money Generation Model” (MGM1) and from a 1994 Park Visitor Survey, it was estimated that Minnewaska State Park Preserve had an impact on the local economy of \$17.2 million. This was sufficient to create approximately 515 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs and generate approximately \$644,000 in local sales tax revenue.

A more recent survey, done in the summer of 2007, indicated that visitors from outside the Palisades Region make up 74% of total Preserve visitors. A similar survey in 2008 generated a figure of 70%. For purposes of this section, a figure of 73% will be used. (In 2008, gasoline prices were unusually high and may have exerted downward pressure on the number of visitors travelling longer distances to the Preserve.)

Attendance for fiscal year 2007-08 was 210,000 visitors. At the time of the previous estimate of economic impact (1997), attendance was 318,000. Changes in management and resulting changes in the methodologies used for estimating attendance may account for at least part of the recent decreases in reported attendance. Using the same methodology applied previously in the MGM1 model, updating the input variables to be consistent with recent survey and attendance data, and adjusting dollar figures to account for inflation, it is estimated that the current economic impact of Minnewaska State Park Preserve is \$14.1 million. This amount should generate approximately \$540,000 in local tax revenues and 350 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs.

## **Recreational Needs Assessment**

Because of its size and the variety of recreational opportunities, Minnewaska State Park Preserve is a regional park with a service area of not only Ulster County but also nine additional counties: Bronx, Kings, New York, Queens, Orange, Nassau, Suffolk, Dutchess and Westchester. While users come from long distances to visit the Preserve, most notably from New Jersey, recent OPRHP visitor surveys in 2007 and 2008 have shown that the largest percentage of visitors is from these ten counties. This Master Plan relies on the 2009 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and these OPRHP visitor surveys to provide an estimate of the recreational needs for the service area for the Preserve.

SCORP assesses the statewide supply and demand for recreational resources. Relaxing in the park (which also includes picnicking, playground use and other generic day use), is the recreational activity most enjoyed by New York residents, followed by walking/jogging, visiting museums and historic sites, swimming, and biking. SCORP cites that the highest total number of activity days is for walking/jogging followed by relaxing in parks, swimming, visiting museums and historic sites, and biking.

The Relative Index of Needs data (RIN) in SCORP assigns a number to each type of recreational activity by considering the supply of recreation facilities and the demand for those facilities now, and estimating how that demand, compared to the current supply, will change in the future. (In SCORP, the target year for the future is 2025). Numbers are calculated for each county in the state.

The Recreation Index of Need for the Service Area of Minnewaska State Park Preserve (Table 1) shows the RIN numbers for the ten counties in the service area (10 being the highest need and 1 being the lowest). Using a formula that includes the RIN numbers and the activity days within each county, a weighted average score is produced for each activity. These weighted scores illustrate that

the activities with highest relative index of need in the Preserve service area are, in descending order: walking, biking, equine activities, cross-county skiing, field games, relaxing in the park, and hiking. These are the activities that will, over the period 2005 to 2025, experience the greatest growth in the ten county service area relative to the existing supply of resources.

Two informational meetings plus a public comment period were conducted during the planning process. Over three hundred verbal and written comments were received. Comments ranged widely and were not necessarily all related to recreational needs. Of those comments that were related, a comparison to the RIN index reveals that several of the needs expressed by the public are the same as those with the highest RIN scores (8.0 or above) and can be met at the Preserve including: biking, equine activities, cross-county skiing, relaxing in the park, walking and hiking. The need for field games expressed in the public comment will not be accommodated at the Preserve.

**Table 1 - Recreational Index of Need for the Service Area of Minnewaska State Park**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Bronx</b>	<b>Kings</b>	<b>New York</b>	<b>Queens</b>	<b>Ulster</b>	<b>Orange</b>	<b>Nassau</b>	<b>Suffolk</b>	<b>Dutchess</b>	<b>Westchester</b>	<b>Weighted Average</b>
<b>Relaxing in the Park</b>	8	10	10	10	4	5	7	6	4	7	8.2
<b>Swimming</b>	8	7	7	8	5	7	6	5	5	7	6.1
<b>Biking</b>	10	10	10	10	5	7	9	8	6	9	9.1
<b>Golfing</b>	6	7	6	6	5	5	6	6	5	6	5.9
<b>Walking for pleasure</b>	10	10	10	10	4	6	7	6	5	8	9.2
<b>Tennis</b>	6	6	6	6	4	4	5	7	4	10	6.2
<b>Court Games</b>	7	7	7	7	4	4	7	5	5	5	6.6
<b>Field Games</b>	9	10	10	10	5	6	6	5	5	5	8.3
<b>Equine Activities</b>	10	10	10	10	5	7	10	10	6	10	8.7
<b>Visiting Historic Sites</b>	8	10	9	10	4	5	6	5	5	8	7.9
<b>Camping</b>	10	10	10	10	6	7	10	8	6	8	7.1
<b>Hiking</b>	10	10	10	10	5	7	10	9	7	10	8.2
<b>Boating</b>	6	6	6	6	5	7	5	5	6	6	5.5
<b>Fishing</b>	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	7	5.7
<b>Local Winter</b>	10	9	10	8	3	4	5	7	4	6	7.4
<b>X-Country Skiing</b>	10	10	10	10	6	7	10	10	7	10	8.6
<b>Downhill Skiing</b>	10	10	10	10	5	6	9	8	6	8	6.6
<b>Snowmobile</b>	10	10	10	10	5	6	10	8	6	7	6.6

## ***The Preserve***

### **Preserve Boundaries**

The Preserve occupies more than 21,000 acres within the Towns of Rochester, Wawarsing, Gardiner and Shawangunk in Ulster County. Adjacent to the Preserve on the west side is the Village of Ellenville and the Witch’s Hole State Forest, owned and managed by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Two privately owned preserves border Minnewaska, the Mohonk Preserve along the northeast boundary, and Sam’s Point Preserve on the southwest. There are a few parcels that are separate from the main body of the Preserve. The Tillson Lake area is a small parcel on the south side of the Preserve bordered by South Mountain Road, Lake Road and Lake Avenue. The Shawangunk Gateway Campground area is located to the northwest along Route 299 in the Town of Wawarsing. See Figure 2 – Preserve Boundary Map.

### **Adjacent Land Uses**

The land uses immediately adjacent to the Preserve consist primarily of “Wild, Forested, Conservation Land” (as defined by Ulster County zoning maps) with Sam’s Point Preserve, the Mohonk Preserve and the Witches Hole parcel owned by DEC comprising the majority. “Wild, Forested and Conservation Land” comprises 4,824 acres of the adjacent land use zoning. Much of this land contains a mix of preservation and recreation. A second significant adjacent land use surrounding Minnewaska is residential. Residential land use comprises 3,330 acres of land bordering Minnewaska. Local commercial and industrially zoned land is limited to the west side of the Ridge. The character of the area is generally rural, although residential development along the base of the Ridge is expanding. See Figure 3 - Adjacent Land Use Map.

### **Partnerships, Deed Restrictions and Designations**

#### ***Partnerships***

##### ***Natural Resource Management Partnerships***

The Preserve is an active and formal partner with the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership (SRBP) which preserves and protects the natural resources and wildlife habitat on the Shawangunk Ridge through research, monitoring, education and land management strategies. The SRBP works to sustain the long-term viability of native plants and animals and the integrity of ecosystems of the Shawangunk Ridge through implementation of the Partnership’s comprehensive ridge-wide Protection and Management Guidelines. The stewardship initiatives of the Preserve remain consistent with the goals of the SRBP.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) / Sam’s Point Preserve is a formal partner on biodiversity management strategies. Through a management agreement, Sam’s Point Preserve manages 3,799 acres of OPRHP land to protect and enhance the significant natural communities located there. These partnerships foster the preservation and protection of the natural resources, wildlife habitats and scenic beauty along the Ridge while enhancing its biodiversity.

The Mohonk Preserve has contributed greatly to the research and protection of significant ecological communities throughout the Preserve, assisting with strategies to protect the biodiversity ridge-wide. Additionally, the Mohonk Preserve has a memorandum of understanding with PIPC to undertake a carriage road restoration study and to manage the Shawangunk Gateway Campground upon construction.

The Preserve is a partner with DEC for wildfire containment, wildlife management, and search and rescue operations. The Preserve has several informal partnerships with various New York State agencies including the New York State Department of Corrections and the New York State Department of Transportation (DOT) for both maintenance and invasive species control.

Natural resource management partnership opportunities exist for a variety of specific management issues. For wildfire control and fire management issues the Preserve works cooperatively with organizations such as the Mohonk Preserve, TNC, the DEC, DOT and numerous fire departments surrounding the Shawangunk Ridge.

Invasive species are one of the most serious threats to the Preserve's biodiversity. Cooperative management of roadside and Preserve wide invasives is highly important. The Preserve will continue developing and furthering relationships with county, local and DOT roadway managers. The Preserve will continue to work with organizations to control invasive species including the Lower Hudson Valley Partnership for Regional Invasives Management, SRBP and TNC.

Over-browsing by white tailed deer is recognized as another serious threat to the biodiversity of the Preserve. OPRHP is coordinating deer management strategies with DEC and the SRBP to monitor impacts and identify strategies to reduce the impacts to the Preserve.

Other organizations and non-profits that the Preserve collaborates with include Shawangunk Ridge Coalition, Friends of the Shawangunks, and Friends of the Palisades, whose efforts as partners will continue to be appreciated and fostered. Land protection institutions such as the Open Space Institute (OSI) and the Trust for Public Lands (TPL) have played a significant role in acquisitions and the preservation of open space at the Preserve.

### ***Educational and Stewardship Partnerships***

Numerous partnerships exist to benefit the educational and stewardship programs and goals of the Preserve. Chief among them is the long-standing partnership with the Hudson Valley Student Conservation Association (SCA/AmeriCorps). This not-for-profit organization has been providing education interns for the Preserve since 1999. These SCA interns remain an integral component of the Preserve's education and stewardship programming. The education department also collaborates with other members of the SRBP to provide an annual lecture series for the public on topics of natural history. Future partnerships with local libraries are planned in order to offer public education programming locally.

### ***Scientific and Research Partnerships***

Scientific and research organizations have long studied and contributed to the volume of knowledge available on the Preserve. This group includes the Smiley Research Center, Mohonk Preserve, SRBP, TNC, SUNY, NYS Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI), and student and professional researchers. Local naturalists have long provided their observations to assist with ongoing research efforts, and school groups take part in trail building and invasive species management. Research partnership opportunities will continuously be a part of the management of the Preserve.

### ***Community Organizations and Volunteers***

Since the creation of the Preserve, many organizations and volunteer contributions have enhanced the land in many ways. A broad spectrum of interests is represented including the New York - New Jersey Trail Conference which has been maintaining and performing trail work at the Preserve for many years. Volunteers have regularly maintained trails throughout the Preserve and coordinated new trail construction projects when needed. The Gunks Climbers Coalition has been very active in improving and maintaining the climbing area annually as part of the national Adopt-a-Crag effort. Coalition volunteers have also assisted in research in the climbing area. The Gunks Mountain Bike Association, Fats in the Cats Bicycle Club, Backcountry Patrol, and Ski Patrol have all been involved with enhancing patron safety and reporting hazards to staff. Hundreds of individual volunteers lead organized walks, perform research, help manage invasive species, and more. These relationships are a significant contributing factor to the operation of the Preserve and their continued support is vital. The Preserve greatly appreciates the efforts of these volunteers and looks forward to continued support from these and others in the future.

### ***Deed Restrictions***

The Preserve is comprised of a number of properties that have been acquired over the past four decades. Some of these land purchases included easements, while a few others have minor deed restrictions attached with their purchase. A comprehensive review of the parcel purchases indicates relatively minor conditions attached to certain land purchases, with relatively insignificant impact to the operations of the Preserve.

Two regionally significant utilities that pass through the Preserve carry easements. Central Hudson Gas and Electric has a 69 KV transmission line through the Preserve with a 100-foot right of way easement that allows for the utility line and access corridor. The other large utility is the Delaware Aqueduct, owned by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, which includes a 25 ft. subsurface right of way easement.

The Smiley Carriage House, which was acquired as part of the original purchase that established the Preserve in the 1980s, is one of the more significant deed restrictions. This two story residential structure and surrounding property, which is located near Lake Minnewaska, carries a 99 year lease of ownership and usage for the property owner.

### ***Sam's Point Preserve***

Sam's Point Preserve, operated by TNC, holds a management agreement for 3,799 acres of land within the boundaries of Minnewaska State Park Preserve. This management agreement allows TNC to manage OPRHP/PIPC land under its own management strategies and regulations for a period of 20 years. Sam's Point Preserve also contains four easements and/or deed restrictions (including a water system easement to the Village of Ellenville) within its property. Each is relatively insignificant to the operations of the Preserve.

### ***Designations***

#### ***Park Preserve***

As noted in Chapter 1, Minnewaska State Park Preserve was designated a Park Preserve under Article 20 of the NYS Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law with the adoption of the previous Master Plan in 1993. The preserve status helps to ensure the preservation and protection of land containing wildlife, flora, scenic historical or archaeological sites that are unique and rare in New York State. The Preserve is managed to support and promote its designation through the use of

education, interpretation, biodiversity management strategies as well as low impact development and recreational activities.

Since the initial designation, PIPC has made significant acquisitions that have been incorporated into the Preserve. Acquisitions taking place after 1993 consist of more than 9,000 acres and have not been designated as part of the Park Preserve. These acquisitions, including the Ellenville Tract, the former Awosting Reserve and the Shevchenko Parcel, are significant both in acreage and in quality of resources including rare and endangered species.

### ***Bird Conservation Area***

The goal of the Bird Conservation Area (BCA) program is “to integrate bird conservation interests into agency planning, management and research projects, within the context of agency missions.” While bird conservation at Minnewaska will remain a high priority within designated areas, designation does not place any explicit restrictions on future land use decisions. In addition to emphasizing bird conservation within the planning process, BCA designation also brings greater public awareness of the Preserve’s bird community, and funding opportunities for bird-related publications, kiosks, bird lists, research and management.

The intact forested landscape at Minnewaska provides outstanding habitat for a variety of bird species that are sensitive to habitat fragmentation. Many of the bird species supported by the forests of Minnewaska have been listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need, including Red-shouldered Hawk, Whip-poor-will, Wood Thrush, and Canada Warbler. OPRHP designated almost the entire Preserve as a BCA in 2006. The Preserve’s unique bird community has also been recognized as an Important Bird Area by Audubon New York. See Appendix C – Birds of Minnewaska State Park Preserve and Appendix G – BCA Management Guidance Summary for more information.