



Bernadette Castro  
Commissioner

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation  
The Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza  
Agency Building 1, Albany, New York 12238

518-474-0456  
Human Resources  
518-474-0453  
Fiscal Management  
518-474-0061  
TDD: 518-486-1899

## AGENCY DECISION AND STATEMENT OF FINDINGS

### **Adoption of a Master Plan for Moreau Lake State Park Designation of Park Preservation Area Designation of a Bird Conservation Area Designation of a Natural Heritage Area**

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has prepared a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Final Master Plan, dated November 29, 2006, for Moreau Lake State Park located in the Towns of Moreau and Corinth in Saratoga County and the Towns of Lake Luzerne and Queensbury in Warren County.

By the authority vested in me in State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation Law, I do hereby adopt the Final Master Plan for Moreau Lake State Park. I also designate portions of the park, as detailed in the Master Plan, Park Preservation, Bird Conservation and Natural Heritage Areas.

This decision represents certification of the attached Findings Statement prepared in accordance with the requirements of 6 NYCRR Part 617.11, the regulations implementing Article 8 of Environmental Conservation Law - the State Environmental Quality Review Act. This decision is based on the Findings Statement and the content of the Master Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement.

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Bernadette Castro  
Commissioner  
NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**SEQR FINDINGS STATEMENT**  
**Moreau Lake State Park Master Plan**

**December 18, 2006**

Pursuant to Article 8 (State Environmental Quality Review Act – SEQRA) of the Environmental Conservation Law and 6 NYCRR Part 617, the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), as lead agency, makes the following findings.

**Title of the Action:**

Adoption and Implementation of a Master Plan for Moreau Lake State Park

**Location:**

Moreau Lake State Park is located in the Towns of Moreau and Corinth in Saratoga County and the Towns of Lake Luzerne and Queensbury in Warren County.

**Description of the Action:**

The action is the adoption and implementation of a Master Plan for Moreau Lake State Park.

**Date of Completion of the Final EIS:** November 29, 2006

**Findings:**

1. These findings consider the relevant environmental impacts, facts and conclusions disclosed in the final EIS; weigh and balance relevant environmental impacts with social, economic and other considerations; provide a rationale for the agency's decision; certify that the requirements of 6 NYCRR Part 617 have been met; and certify that consistent with social, economic and other essential considerations from among the reasonable alternatives available, the action is the one which avoids or minimizes adverse environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable, and that adverse environmental impacts will be avoided or minimized to the maximum extent practicable by incorporating as conditions those mitigative measures that were identified as practicable.
2. The Final Plan was subject to a complete Environmental Impact Statement process including two scoping meetings, an informal public meeting and a public hearing.

3. The Final Environmental Impact Statement contains a chapter on responses to comments on the Draft EIS. This chapter contains clarification of issues raised during the review of the Draft EIS. It also provides information that has been used in the preparation of the Final Plan.
4. The park is located in the Towns of Moreau and Corinth, Saratoga County and the Towns of Lake Luzerne and Queensbury, Warren County and is within OPRHP's Saratoga-Capital District State Park Region. The park occupies more than 4,100 acres and is divided by the Hudson River, which forms the boundary between Saratoga and Warren Counties.
5. The Park consists of forest, lakes, streams and other natural resources. The Park contains a variety of ecological communities and habitats including mature forests and wetlands. The general topography of the park is hilly with a combination of rolling hills and steep slopes. The park shows typical characteristics of both the northern Adirondack Mountains and southern Appalachian forests. An outwash plain that begins along the western bank of the Hudson River and extends down the valley supports oak-pine forests.
6. Inventories for the Park have shown that eighteen distinct natural community types were identified within Moreau Lake State Park. two of which are considered to be significant ecological communities. Large stands of hemlock-northern hardwood forest and associated beech-maple mesic forests dominate the landscape of the park. Other, less abundant, forest communities in the park include Appalachian oak-pine forest, chestnut oak forest, successional northern hardwoods, acidic talus slope woodland, hemlock-hardwood swamp and red maple hardwood swamp. Wetland community types were also found in the park.
7. The Hudson River and Moreau Lake are the two main water bodies within the park boundaries. Moreau Lake is a "kettle hole lake" formed during the advancement and recession of glacial ice. The Hudson River bisects the park and separates the northern Luzerne Mountains from the southern Palmertown Range.
8. Currently the Park is used for both active and passive recreational activities including swimming, picnicking, camping, hiking, boating, hunting, fishing, bird watching and environmental education. Swimming is permitted at the existing beach area of Moreau Lake, but not in the Hudson River.
9. The plan identifies a vision statement and goals for the Park. The vision statement is: Moreau Lake State Park will be a place for the residents and non-residents of New York State to visit, enjoy and appreciate the natural, cultural and physical resources and the recreational opportunities that the park offers.
10. During the development of the Plan, the park was divided into four management

areas; Hudson River Corridor, Warren County, Palmertown Mountains and Lake Recreation. Alternative management and development directions were developed for each area using information developed on existing conditions, the analysis of recommended directions for activities and constraint and considerations identified in the resources analysis.

11. The park will be classified as a Scenic Park with a designated Park Preservation Area. A Scenic Park is located in a natural setting and has limited development which is oriented toward accommodating visitors who seek nature oriented activities and scenic attractions. While the management areas are unique in the opportunities they offer, they meet the criteria and character of a Scenic Park when viewed together as a whole area.
12. Article 20 of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law states that portions of a park may be designated as Park Preservation Areas. The purpose of such designation is to conserve and protect park lands containing wildlife, flora, scenic, historic and archeological sites that are unique and rare in New York State. The Palmertown Mountain Area of the park will be designated as a Park Preservation Area. There are many lower intensity uses within this area of the park. These uses include, but are not limited to: hiking, biking, hunting, birding, nature study. Park Preservation Area designation is consistent with the type and extent of use proposed for the Palmertown Range Area in the Plan and will encourage the study and interpretation of environmental resources in the area.
13. The NYS Bird Conservation Area (BCA) Program was created by state law in 1997. It calls for the dedication of state-owned lands as BCA's. These lands must meet certain criteria identified within the BCA law. Moreau Lake State Park was evaluated and determined to meet several of these criteria. As a result the Plan proposes that a BCA be designated within the Park. The areas to be included in the BCA consist primarily of hemlock-northern hardwood and beech-maple forests and exhibit characteristics most critical to bird conservation. The Hudson River, its shoreline and the intensive recreation use areas are not included in the BCA although they do exhibit some conservation value to birds and bird habitat. The immediate Hudson River shoreline is not state owned and therefore not eligible for BCA Designation. Management of these areas will incorporate strategies to enhance bird habitat. The vision for the Moreau Lake BCA is to achieve an appropriate balance between conservation of the diverse assemblage of bird species using the area for breeding or during migration, and access to and recreational use of various areas of the BCA.
14. Article 5 - Title 11 - Section 0539 of the NYS Environmental Conservation Law calls for the dedication of state-owned lands with rare species and/or significant natural communities as Natural Heritage Areas. These lands must meet certain criteria identified within the law. Moreau Lake State Park was evaluated and portions of the Park were determined to meet the criteria. The hemlock-northern hardwood forest

and the calcareous talus slope woodland communities, which have been determined by the New York Natural Heritage Program to be significant ecological communities, will be designated as Natural Heritage Area.

15. Various options for both resource stewardship and recreation elements, such as bird conservation, camping, boating and trails, were evaluated, and a recommended direction identified. These recommended directions provided the basis for the development of the Plan alternatives.
16. Two primary alternatives were identified in the Plan: (1) the Preferred Alternative, and (2) the Status Quo Alternative. The Status Quo Alternative consists of the current facilities, programs and practices. The Preferred Alternative combines the preferred options for recreation development and resource protection into one that best meets the goals for the park. This alternative represents the Final Master Plan.
17. The Master Plan details the proposed park classification, designations and recreation and stewardship elements:
  - Management within the Hudson River Corridor will focus on providing visual and physical access to the Hudson River. The two existing boat launches will be maintained and improved with better parking and access for persons with disabilities. Primitive water-accessed campsites will be maintained and sites added as use of the Hudson River Water Trail demands. With the phased development of a campground and cabin colony on the Hudson River the overall variety of camping experiences are increased within the Park.
  - The Warren County Management Area focus will be on providing access to this area of the park. A small year-round parking area will be established along with trails and a cartop launch. A trail plan for the area will be developed before any new trails are designated or built. Access to the car-top launch would be located on land that National Grid has retained and development at this site is dependent upon obtaining agreement with National Grid for access. Primary uses of this area are anticipated to be trail activities including: hiking, biking, horseback riding, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling.
  - The focus of the plan for the Palmertown Management Area is on access, trail use and resource protection. Trailheads and parking areas will be created and existing areas improved. Non-motorized trail activities will include: hiking, biking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Equestrian uses are not recommended for this area due to the steep slopes that form the perimeter of the plateau.
  - The Lake Recreation Area contains the more intense uses and recreation facilities. The day use/beach area will be improved through better parking configurations,

an additional pavilion, and a reconfigured bathhouse. In the campground area, improvements will be made that address: user impacts on the campsites, camper amenities, third car parking and access for persons with disabilities.

Development of the parkland between Route 9 and Old Saratoga Road will include two RV camping loops and a picnic area. The dumping station will also be relocated within this area.

- The entrance of the Park will be redesigned to address vehicle stacking, overflow parking, and access to the parkland between Route 9 and Old Saratoga Road. Entrance congestion and stacked vehicles will be addressed through the addition of a right turning lane to the north of the entrance and an additional parking area near the Park Office. The right turning lane will be created by adding a traffic lane to the north of the park entrance on the northeast bound lane side (on the Route 9 property). This will not require the closure of Old Saratoga Road or interfere with existing traffic patterns. The stacking/ right turning lane provides a safer alternative for park patrons waiting to enter the park.
- Hunting and fishing will continue in the park consistent with current practices.
- Park maintenance functions will be relocated to the parkland area between Route 9 and Old Saratoga Road.
- The Nature Center will continue as the main programming “headquarters” for the park. Programming will be expanded to offer more and a greater variety of programs including community outreach. Brochures, maps and guides for interpreting such themes as wildlife, birds, ecology scenery, and history, will be developed. Existing partnerships will be maintained and new partnerships will be developed with volunteer organizations who conduct various guided hikes and interpretive programs within the park. Kiosks with informational panels will be installed at appropriate trailheads and parking areas. The Nature Trail will be improved to facilitate self guided study and enhance guided tours of the trail. A winter programming space will be developed.

18. Impacts associated with the implementation of the plan and mitigation measures identified are as follows:

- The Master Plan will improve or expand existing parking areas in the Hudson River, Warren County and Palmertown Mountain areas. These improvements will increase parking and provide safe access to these areas of the park. The redesign and improvement of the the Lake Recreation Area entrance will reduce traffic backups due to park patrons waiting to enter the park and create a safer more inviting park entrance. The proposed addition of a right turning/stacking lane will remove park patron vehicles from the through traffic lanes creating a safer situation on Old Saratoga Road. This option does not require the closure of

Old Saratoga Road nor does it interfere with existing traffic patterns.

- Implementation of the plan will result in substantial beneficial recreation and open space impacts. The plan proposes additional and improved camping opportunities, an improved trail network, better access to open space and scenic areas, improved and expanded natural and cultural resource interpretive and educational programs. There will be a minimal increase in boater use of the Hudson River and a modest increase in use of Moreau Lake for swimming, non-motorized boating and fishing as a result of implementing the plan. The existing campground area shows signs of overuse as documented in an earlier study. Each loop and the individual sites will be given additional evaluation for improvement. Techniques that will be considered at individual sites will include site edging, added plantings for screening, and creation of buddy sites. Camper education will also be an important component. This work will be phased and monitored and the various management strategies used will be evaluated for effectiveness. Design of new campsites proposed will also utilize techniques such as site edging to minimize potential use impacts to the greatest extent possible.
- Overall the Master Plan will have a positive impact on the natural resources within the park. Limited new development is proposed in the large forested area along the Hudson River. Direct impacts will be lessened since new development proposals will be focused in areas that have been previously disturbed, have limited environmental sensitivity and which generally possess accessibility to, and use of, existing infrastructure. Within the Warren County Area proposals for a picnic area and/or a cartop boat launch as well as the trail plan will require supplemental environmental review. Lake Recreation Area proposals involve the rehabilitation of the existing camping loops, construction of a warming hut/shower building and a new parking lot near the park office, relocation of the maintenance area and the dump station, and construction of new picnic areas and camping loops. With the exception of the new picnic area and camping loops, all new development has been located in existing cleared or previously disturbed areas.
- The large expanses of unfragmented forest in the park provide significant bird habitat. Recognizing the importance of these areas to providing habitat, a large portion of Moreau Lake State Park will be designated as a NYS Bird Conservation Area (BCA). A Management Guidance Summary (MGS) has been prepared for the BCA which identifies operation and management considerations relating to protection of birds and bird habitat in the park. In particular, the Bald Eagle, a federal and state listed threatened species, uses the Hudson River below the Spiers Falls dam during the winter. Winter trail use, including snowmobiling, has been an existing activity within the portion of the Park that is in Warren County. This use is local in nature and low in numbers. The Agency will continue to monitor Bald Eagle activity in the Park along with snowmobile and

other trail uses within this area. The Agency will consult with the Endangered Species Unit at the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) on all matters pertaining to Bald Eagles, use and protection. As identified in the MGS, potential impacts to the Bald Eagles from any new activity, in particular increased winter use, along the Hudson River will be evaluated as plans are developed. This will include the Trail Plan for the Warren County area. The Agency will also continue winter monitoring and will consult with DEC staff on any new activities planned in the Hudson River area.

- The important and significant ecological communities within the park will be designated as a Natural Heritage Area. The Palmertown Mountain Area of the park will be designated as a Park Preservation Area. These designations each recognize and serve to further protect the significant resources within the Park.
  - Ground disturbing activities such as digging or grading, have the potential to disturb archeological resources within the park. Phase 1A Cultural and Archeology studies have determined the potential for the park to have prehistoric cultural resources is moderate to high. Therefore, ground disturbing activities will require additional review to determine if there will be potential impacts to cultural resources.
  - The park is to be classified as a Scenic Park under the State Parkland Classification System. For this reason, maintenance of the scenic and natural character of the park has been a primary consideration of the Plan. The Park will continue to provide a scenic backdrop for visitors using the trails and recreation areas. New facilities will be sited in such a way that they take maximum advantage of existing scenic features such as lakes and wooded areas, yet will be located so that they do not intrude on currently undeveloped viewsheds.
19. The Plan describes the process for supplemental environmental review. The Plan also provides for guidance as to when additional environmental review may be required. It also identifies the types of actions that are likely to require additional review. These include the preparation of a Trail Plan for the Warren County Area of the park, development of a picnic area and/or car-top boat launch off Corinth Road in the Warren County Area, and any proposal which results from the Saratoga County's study of water supply needs that affect park land.