

A. INTRODUCTION

Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail, Inc. (HHFT, Inc.; the “Applicant”) proposes to construct the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail (“Fjord Trail”; the “Project”), a non-motorized, shared-use (pedestrian and bicycle), publicly accessible linear park along the eastern shore of the Hudson River, bookended by the City of Beacon, Dutchess County, New York on the north and the Village of Cold Spring, Putnam County, New York on the south (see **Figure I-1**). The Fjord Trail would include various trail components, including 7.5 miles of Main Trail, 2.8 miles of Trail Meanders, Trail Banks, Water Trail Connections, 2.2 miles of Regional Trail connections (“Connectors”), and ancillary components such as parking areas, restroom buildings, and a maintenance facility (the “Proposed Action”).¹ The term “Trail Corridor” is used to refer to the potential outer limit in which disturbance may occur for the Fjord Trail and its ancillary components. See Chapter II, “Project Description,” for further details about the Proposed Action.

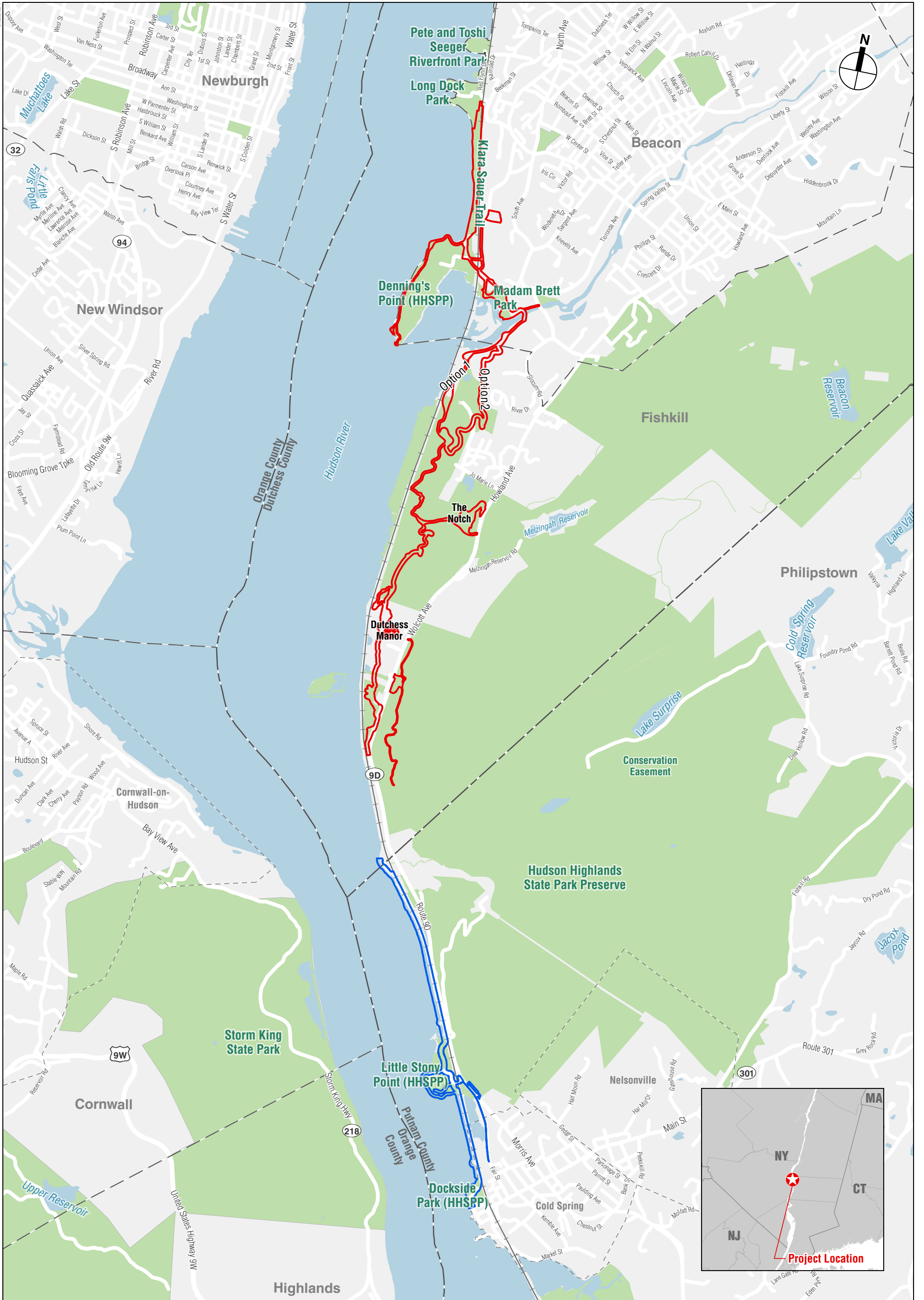
The Fjord Trail is proposed to be partially within the Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve (HHSP), which is owned and managed by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), and would extend through other public and private lands. Ultimately, the Fjord Trail would connect Beacon to Cold Spring and link existing parks and trails along the Trail Corridor.

This document is a Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement (DGEIS) for the Proposed Action prepared in accordance with the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) and its implementing regulations and includes all required elements pursuant to 6 NYCRR 617.9(b). As shown on **Figure I-1**, the Fjord Trail will consist of two sections, each described and discussed separately in this DGEIS: the approximately 5.5-mile northern portion of the Fjord Trail (“Fjord Trail North”) and the approximately 2-mile southern portion of the Fjord Trail (“Fjord Trail South”).² OPRHP was established as lead agency in October 2015 and accepts this DGEIS as Lead Agency for SEQRA (see Section B, “Summary of the Environmental Review Process,” of this chapter for further details).

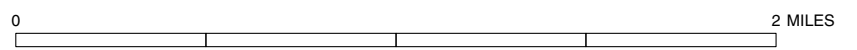
In February 2020, the Applicant published the 2020 Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail Draft Master Plan (Draft Master Plan), developed by Scenic Hudson, Inc. and HHFT, Inc. The Draft Master Plan, in addition to the trail components noted above, includes proposed “Destination” elements

¹ The Positive Declaration and Final Scoping Document for the Project indicate the Proposed Action is the adoption of the Fjord Trail Master Plan. Upon further consideration, OPRHP has determined that the Proposed Action is the development of the core elements of the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail analyzed herein.

² In previous documents, the northern portion of the trail has been referred to as the Master Planned Trail and the southern portion has been referred to as the Riverfront Trail or Shoreline Trail. These portions of the trail are being referred to as Fjord Trail North and Fjord Trail South, respectively, for ease of discussion in this DGEIS.



- Trail Corridor - Fjord Trail South
- Trail Corridor - Fjord Trail North



(such as outdoor classrooms, play areas, kayak launches, and forest nets). However, HHFT, Inc. is not proposing development of these additional project elements at this time. Accordingly, the Proposed Action does not include the “Destination” elements included in the Draft Master Plan. Any potential future enhancements to be constructed after the Fjord Trail is complete, such as the “Destination” elements, would undergo supplemental environmental review, as needed, to determine whether such enhancements may have significant adverse environmental impacts not described in the GEIS.

In addition, the Proposed Action does not include the separate Breakneck Connector and Bridge Project (BNCB), the approximately 0.6-mile project that includes a new bridge over the Metro-North Railroad (MNR) tracks, new parking areas along NYS Route 9D, trail connections within HHSPP, restroom buildings, and upgrades to the Breakneck Ridge train station and Trail, which was the subject of a prior SEQRA review for which a Negative Declaration was issued in December 2022. To be clear, this DGEIS does not include an analysis of BNCB, nor does it include an analysis of the restoration and reuse of Dutchess Manor, which is a separate action for which land use approvals are being sought from the Town of Fishkill, subject to environmental review by Fishkill. Nevertheless, due to their proximity, known and potential impacts from these actions have been incorporated into the cumulative impacts review of this DGEIS.

The DGEIS describes and analyzes reasonable alternatives to the proposed Fjord Trail North and Fjord Trail South; discusses potential significant adverse environmental impacts associated with their construction and operation; and identifies and considers mitigation measures to reduce or eliminate potential adverse impacts. The purpose of this DGEIS is to provide an objective analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the proposed Fjord Trail and its phased construction. This DGEIS also identifies conditions that could trigger the need for additional environmental review. An additional overview of the environmental review process; the project’s history and background; its purpose, need, goals, and benefits; and public involvement activities are provided in the following sections.

B. SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

As noted above, the Proposed Action is subject to environmental review under SEQRA. Portions of the proposed Fjord Trail would be located on state lands owned by OPRHP or lands that will be open to the public following acquisition of a future OPRHP easement or lease, and HHFT, Inc. would operate and maintain the Fjord Trail as a continuous public trail. It is expected that lands under OPRHP control (whether by a fee interest, an easement, or a lease) would be operated and maintained by HHFT, Inc. under a cooperative management agreement. As such, OPRHP is serving as Lead Agency for the environmental review of the Proposed Action.

On August 18, 2015, OPRHP commenced a coordinated review and circulated a Lead Agency Notice pursuant to SEQRA for the proposed Fjord Trail. On October 7, 2015, OPRHP declared its intent to serve as Lead Agency for the Proposed Action and issued a Positive Declaration of environmental significance, requiring the preparation of a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS).

OPRHP published a draft Scoping Document dated July 6, 2016, and held a public GEIS Scoping Session in November 2016. Written comments on the GEIS Draft Scoping Document were accepted through November 18, 2016. On March 21, 2017, OPRHP adopted the Final Scoping Document for the proposed Fjord Trail. A copy of the Final Scoping Document and other relevant SEQRA documentation can be found in **Appendices I-1 to I-3**.

This DGEIS has been prepared pursuant to the requirements of SEQRA (Article 8 of the Environmental Conservation Law and its implementing regulations at 6 NYCRR 617). The Lead Agency determined a GEIS to be appropriate for the proposed Fjord Trail due to its conceptual design, the need to broadly analyze the cumulative impacts of a series of actions (phased development of the Fjord Trail), and the regional extent of the Fjord Trail. In comparison to the evaluation of the northern section of the Fjord Trail, this DGEIS includes a more detailed review of the southern section of the Fjord Trail (i.e., Fjord Trail South) informed by surveys, engineering feasibility studies, and constructability assessments. This is due to the complexities associated with Fjord Trail South, largely on lands owned or controlled by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority/ Metro-North Railroad (referred to herein as “MNR right-of-way”), and proposed to be located within a very constricted section of land between the Hudson River and both NYS Route 9D and the MNR tracks (see Chapter II, “Project Description,” for further details). The Fjord Trail South extends about two miles from the southern end of the BNCB to Dockside Park in Cold Spring.

In accordance with SEQRA, this DGEIS has been made available for public and involved/interested agency review and comment for a 60-day period through February 2, 2025. Comments may be provided to the Lead Agency in writing during the comment period. Two virtual public hearings have been scheduled for January 14, 2025 to receive verbal comments on the DGEIS (see Section G, “Public Review of the DGEIS” of this chapter for further details). Following the close of the public comment period, the Lead Agency, in conjunction with the Applicant, will produce a Final Generic Environmental Impact Statement (FGEIS).

Following acceptance of the FGEIS and issuance of written findings, aspects of the Proposed Action which are consistent with the FGEIS may proceed to construction provided that the necessary property acquisitions and arrangements have been completed and final approved design and construction plans conform to the trail alignment, designs, and conditions established in the FGEIS. As design of the Proposed Action advances further and the permitting process proceeds, HHFT, Inc. will continue to consult with OPRHP (the Lead Agency) including submitting design drawings of trail reaches or trail sections at regular intervals (e.g., 30 percent, 50 percent, 80 percent) for OPRHP’s review.

OPRHP would determine whether any changes to the Proposed Action would warrant supplemental environmental review, such as a substantial change in the trail alignment or the footprint of the trail or its ancillary components beyond those areas studied in the FGEIS or the addition of project components that are not included in the Proposed Action.

In the event of circumstances that may require supplemental environmental review, i.e., “project modifications,” HHFT, Inc. will submit to OPRHP technical memoranda and/or updated design drawings with sufficient information to allow OPRHP, as Lead Agency, to consider whether the project modifications will have significant adverse environmental impacts that are not addressed, or inadequately addressed, in the FGEIS. If OPRHP determines the project modification is consistent with the FGEIS’s conditions and findings, it will issue a consistency determination. Alternatively, if OPRHP determines the project modification may result in significant adverse environmental impacts that have not been addressed, or adequately addressed, in the FGEIS or SEQRA findings, OPRHP may undertake supplemental environmental review. This supplemental review may include completion of supplemental environmental assessment forms, supplemental significance determinations, supplemental environmental impact statements, or amended or supplemental findings, as necessary. See Chapter IX, “Supplemental Environmental Review,” for further discussion.

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This DGEIS describes the existing environmental conditions of the surrounding area, the potential impacts of the proposed Fjord Trail and its ancillary components and discusses potential mitigation measures (as needed) in the technical categories listed below. The DGEIS provides these analyses in Chapters III.A through III.P for Fjord Trail North and provides these analyses in Chapters IV.A through IV.P for Fjord Trail South.

- *A. Land Use and Zoning:* This section describes land uses and zoning within and adjacent to the Trail Corridor. It analyzes the proposed Fjord Trail's consistency with adopted local planning documents (as identified in the Final Scoping Document) and zoning laws. It also identifies historic fill areas, remediation sites, and landfills within the Trail Corridor, and describes which land uses may be impacted by development of the proposed Fjord Trail.
- *B. Land Ownership, Management and Maintenance:* This section describes the land ownership within or adjacent to the Trail Corridor that may be impacted by the proposed Fjord Trail. It also inventories current management and maintenance agreements for existing trails, HHSPP, and other parks. It identifies alternatives for the long-term management, maintenance, and operation of the Fjord Trail.
- *C. Land:* This section describes the surficial geology and soils, bedrock geology, and topography along the Trail Corridor. It details the type of materials to be excavated, the anticipated construction strategies and impacts regarding earthwork, and disposal of excess materials. It also examines the potential for construction on steep slopes.
- *D. Water:* This section describes and maps watersheds, surface water and hydrological settings, groundwater, and stormwater infrastructure along the Trail Corridor.
- *E. Biological Resources:* This section focuses on ecological communities, flora, and fauna, including rare, threatened, and endangered species and their habitats. It includes a summary of results from several visual encounter surveys of plant and animal species including surveys for rare species known in or adjacent to the trails. It also includes mapping of ecological communities within the footprint of the Trail Corridor.
- *F. Historic and Archaeological Resources:* This section maps and discusses the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area (within which the Trail Corridor is located) and identifies the presence of and potential impact on historic and archaeological resources from construction of the Fjord Trail.
- *G. Scenic Resources:* This section describes the visual character of the Trail Corridor, including the Hudson Highlands Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (within which the Trail Corridor is located). It maps and describes existing views from and to the Trail Corridor, and provides a visual analysis to assess potential impacts, during both construction and operation of the Fjord Trail.
- *H. Noise and Air Resources:* This section evaluates construction- and operation-related impacts to noise levels and air resources in the area around the Trail Corridor.
- *I. Recreational and Open Space Resources, Accessibility:* This section identifies and describes recreational resources within or directly adjacent to the Trail Corridor, including ownership, operation and maintenance responsibilities, type of recreational resource, current use levels, and capacity.
- *J. Growth and Community Character:* This section describes the character of the communities along the Trail Corridor, including population, demographics, education, housing, employment, and economics.

- *K. Socioeconomics:* This section discusses potential socioeconomic impacts of construction and increased visitation from the operation of the Fjord Trail. It reviews the existing sales tax sharing arrangements between local counties and jurisdictions. Using information provided by local tax assessors, this section examines current municipal expenditures allocated to the existing network of trails and parks.
- *L. Traffic and Transportation:* This section describes and analyzes existing parking, traffic and access, transit, vehicle, and pedestrian safety conditions along the Trail Corridor as well as visitation data from adjacent existing recreational resources. It reviews current roadway parking, pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure, traffic volumes at certain key intersections and presents the results of a visitor projection study that estimates potential visitation from the development of the Fjord Trail. It also identifies improvements to existing parking areas, and new parking areas to be constructed.
- *M. Infrastructure:* This section discusses water demand, wastewater and sewerage flows, electricity and lighting, and roads and bridges related to the proposed Fjord Trail.
- *N. Emergency and Public Services:* This section identifies police, fire, ambulance and emergency rescue, and other emergency service providers that serve the Trail Corridor area. It analyzes the potential impact of the Fjord Trail on each service area, and on the capacity of emergency service providers to serve the potential increase in demand. It also reviews the all-hazard emergency operations plans for Dutchess and Putnam Counties.
- *O. Other Planning Effort – Breakneck Ridge Visitor Use Management Plan:* This section discusses the Visitor Use Management Plan for Breakneck Ridge that is presently being developed by OPRHP.
- *P. Hazardous Materials Assessment:* This section provides a hazardous materials assessment of the potential presence of historic fill material and the proximity of New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) remediation sites within the Trail Corridor. It examines whether areas of environmental concern are present along the preferred trail alignment.

C. PROJECT SETTING, HISTORY, AND BACKGROUND

SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The proposed Fjord Trail would be located within the Hudson Highlands area of the Hudson Valley region of New York State, an area of low mountains generally between the City of Peekskill to the south and the Cities of Beacon and Newburgh to the north. The Hudson Highlands are a series of ridges and valleys divided by the Hudson River, which flows through a steep-sided fjord carved by glaciers. The area is popular with tourists due to its picturesque setting, abundant hiking trails, vibrant small towns, easy access by automobile and transit, and its proximity to major population centers, including the New York City metropolitan area.

The Hudson Highlands have been noted for their scenic quality. The New York State Department of State (NYS DOS) has designated this region of the Hudson River Valley as a Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS).³ The value of the Hudson Highlands SASS's scenic and recreational resources has been further recognized through the development of expansive State parks in the region, and the protection and preservation of the area's scenic character. On the eastern shore of the Hudson River, much of the natural and scenic landscape is preserved in

³ <https://dos.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2020/08/hudson-river-valley-sass.pdf> (accessed April 5, 2024).

Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail

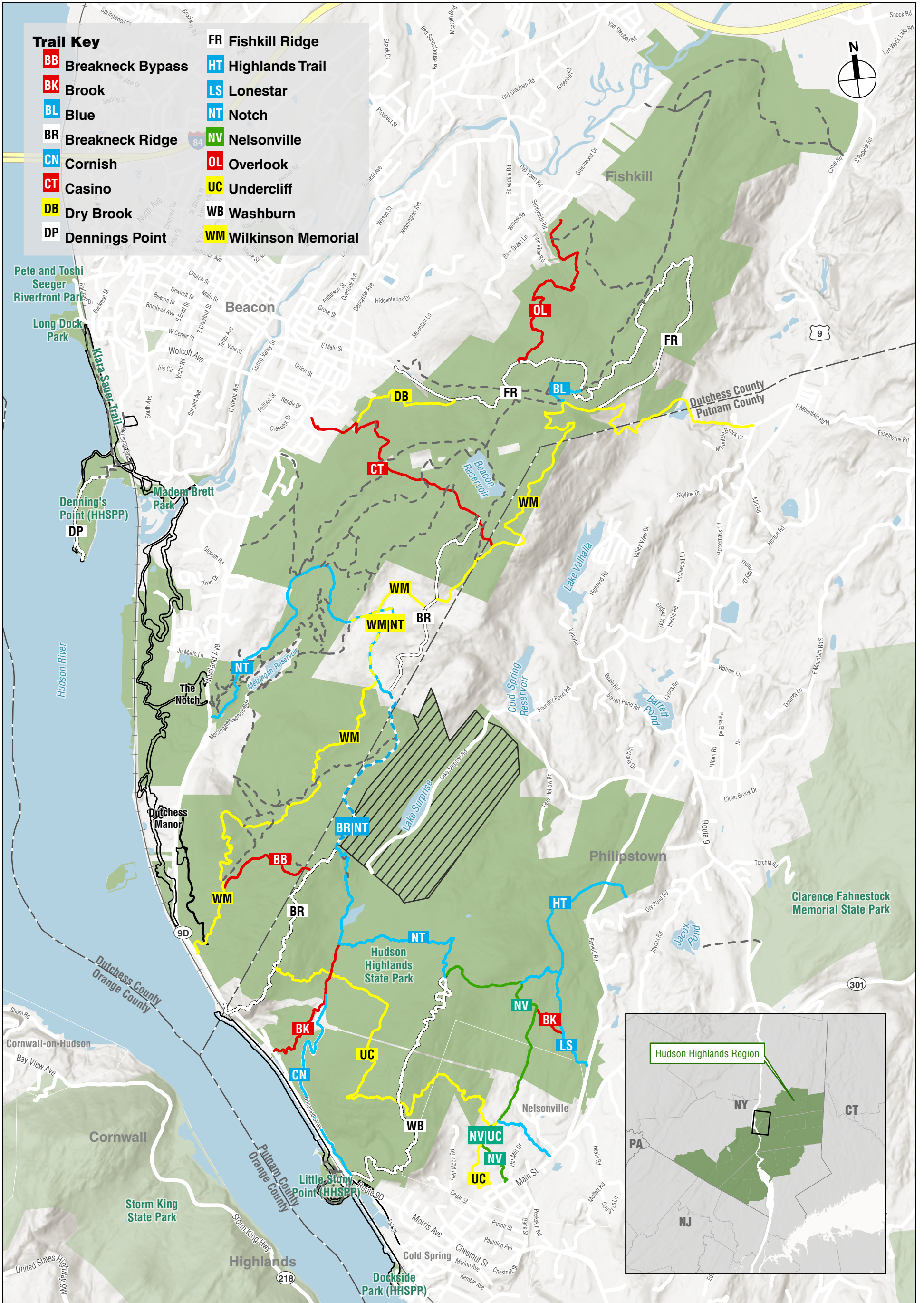
HHSP, a 9,740-acre park preserve that spans portions of Dutchess, Putnam, and Westchester Counties (see **Figures I-2a and I-2b**). OPRHP designated the park as a park preserve in 2010, affording legal protection to all the park's resources—natural, historic, and archaeological. Just east of HHSP is the 14,000-acre Clarence Fahnestock Memorial State Park and on the western shore of the Hudson River, across from HHSP, is the 1,900-acre Storm King State Park. To the south, on the western shore of the Hudson River, is the 5,000-acre Bear Mountain State Park. Additionally, a number of roads have been designated as Scenic Roads under Article 49 of New York State's Environmental Conservation Law, including portions of the Old Storm King Highway (NYS Route 218), US Route 9W, US Route 202, the Bear Mountain Bridge, Bear Mountain Bridge Road, the Bear Mountain-Beacon Highway (NYS Route 9D) and local roads within Bear Mountain State Park.

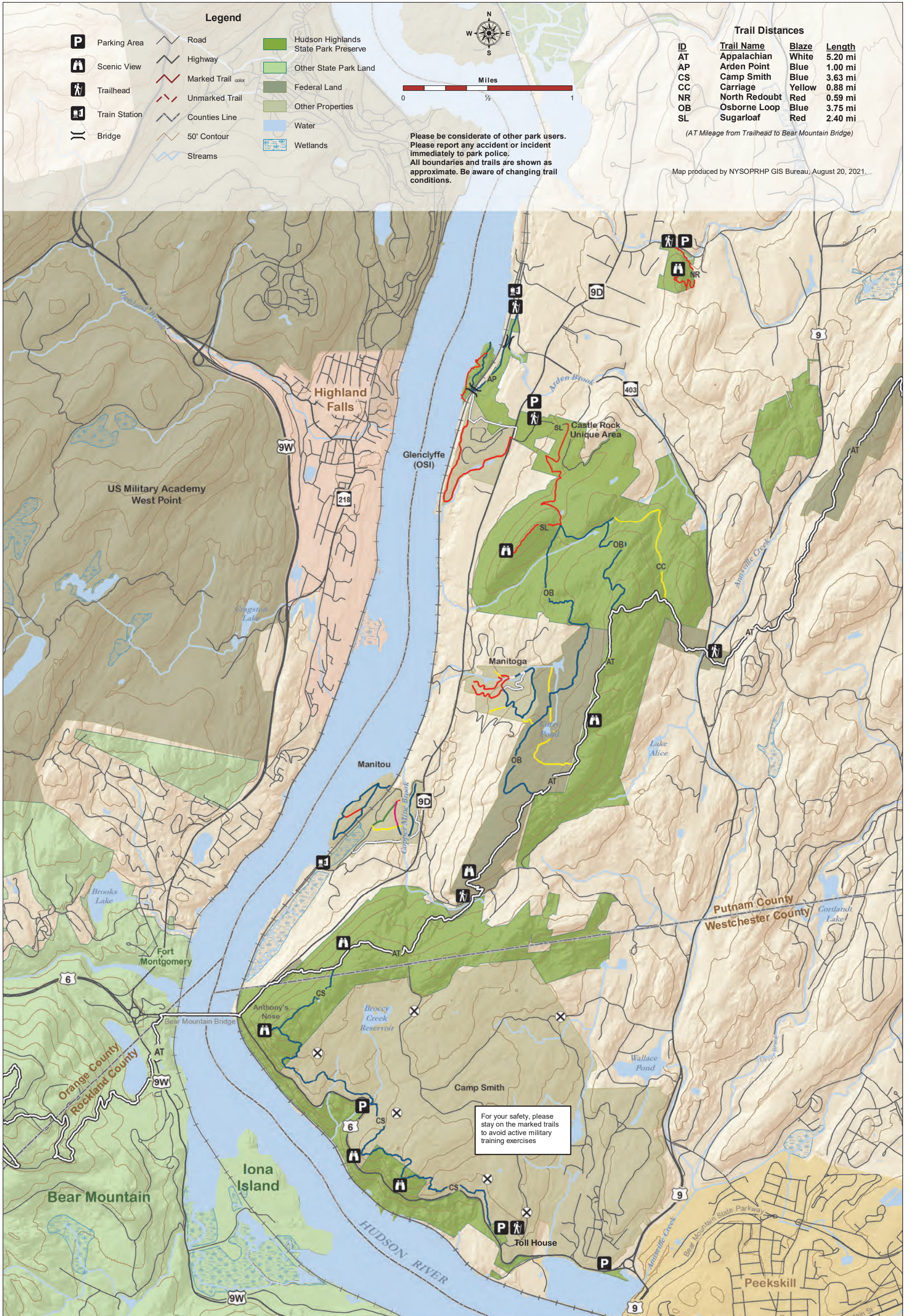
HHSP, where much of the Fjord Trail Corridor is located, provides over 70 miles of trails and includes recreational and open space resources along and near the Trail Corridor, including Denning's Point, Little Stony Point, Dockside Park, the Breakneck Ridge Trail, Wilkinson-Memorial Trail, Washburn Trail, and Cornish Trail. Near the Fjord Trail Corridor, HHSP also includes Mount Beacon, which contains the highest peak in the Hudson Highlands, and Pollepel (Bannerman) Island just off the Hudson River shore, which contains the ruins of Bannerman Castle and is only accessible by water. Outside HHSP, other parks along the Fjord Trail Corridor include Long Dock Park, the Klara Sauer Trail, and Madam Brett Park, each owned by Scenic Hudson. Together, these parks and trails along and near the Fjord Trail Corridor draw nearly a half million visitors annually. Breakneck Ridge is among the most popular day hikes in the United States and is estimated to draw nearly 100,000 visitors per year.

While the land along the Trail Corridor is largely preserved and undeveloped, the northern and southern termini of the Trail Corridor are within two small population centers: the City of Beacon, with a population of about 14,000, and the Village of Cold Spring, with a population of about 2,000. Each of these municipalities have active main streets with shops and restaurants that attract tourists and serve as a hub for visitors to HHSP and other local parks. Between Beacon and Cold Spring, the Trail Corridor passes through sparsely populated areas of the Town of Fishkill and the Town of Philipstown. The City of Beacon and Town of Fishkill are within Dutchess County, which has a population of about 296,000, and the Village of Cold Spring and the Town of Philipstown are in Putnam County, which has a population of about 98,000.

This area of New York State is rich in history. Prior to European colonial settlement, there was a strong Native American presence in the area surrounding the Hudson River. European settlement increased in the 17th and 18th centuries, with the earliest settlers establishing a mill at the mouth of Fishkill Creek in what is now Madam Brett Park and building a home nearby in 1709. The area played a key role in the Revolutionary War as host to a large military encampment and with signal fires on Mount Beacon to warn of British advancement. Industries later developed and the area's population grew. The West Point Foundry was established in the Village of Cold Spring. The City of Beacon grew into a factory town, which persisted throughout the 1800s and 1900s until an economic downturn in the 1960s. Beacon later experienced economic growth and rebirth in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In 2003, the Dia Beacon art museum opened in the former Nabisco box-printing facility, helping to further fuel the resurgence of the area.

The Fjord Trail Corridor is readily accessible by various means of transportation. Its northern and southern termini in Beacon and Cold Spring, respectively, are each within one-quarter mile of an MNR train station with regular service to Grand Central Terminal in midtown Manhattan. In addition, the MNR Breakneck Ridge train station (with weekend service only) is located midway





Source: New York State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation

between Beacon and Cold Spring. NYS Route 9D parallels the Fjord Trail Corridor between the City of Beacon and the Village of Cold Spring, and the area is served by major highways, including Interstate 84 and the Taconic State Parkway, providing convenient vehicle access to the area. The Newburgh-Beacon Ferry, a weekday commuter ferry with a 10-minute ride between Newburgh on the western shore of the Hudson River and the City of Beacon,⁴ also docks adjacent to Long Dock Park. Bus service is provided by Dutchess County in the City of Beacon and Putnam County operates a seasonal trolley on weekends out of Cold Spring, which serves several trailheads within HHSPP.

PROJECT HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Hudson Highlands region of New York is among the state's top outdoor regions due to its popular hiking, biking, cross country skiing trails, and historic and cultural destinations, with visitors arriving from the Hudson Valley, the New York City metropolitan region, across the country and around the world. As noted in the Scoping Document, visitation to this area has produced many economic and community benefits, but also created traffic and pedestrian safety, quality of life, and maintenance/up-keep issues in and around HHSPP and within the surrounding municipalities of the City of Beacon, Town of Fishkill, Town of Philipstown, and Village of Cold Spring. To foster the continued draw to the region's rich scenic, natural, and cultural resources and to enhance access to the Hudson River, while considering the local concerns noted above, HHFT, Inc. developed a Draft Master Plan to conceptualize a trail that would extend through the Hudson Highlands between Beacon and Cold Spring and provide a more cohesive connection among the existing network of trails and parks. The development of the Draft Master Plan is summarized in the following sections.

2015 PRELIMINARY DRAFT MASTER PLAN

In 2015, Scenic Hudson, Inc., Hudson Highlands Land Trust, Town of Philipstown, Town of Fishkill, Village of Cold Spring, City of Beacon, Friends of Fahnestock & Hudson Highlands State Parks, New York-New Jersey Trail Conference (NYNJTC), Little Stony Point Citizens Association (LSPCA), OPRHP, New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), NYSDEC, and MNR collaborated to prepare a Preliminary Draft Master Plan (PDMP) for the Fjord Trail. The 2015 PDMP considered potential trail alignment alternatives to link Cold Spring and Beacon with a multi-use, user-friendly, recreational, tourism-oriented connection, with a strong visual and physical connection with the Hudson River and its environs. The PDMP presented a preferred alignment that best achieved four goals:

1. *Safety*: Pedestrian, hiker and cyclist safety was the initial issue that led to early grassroots support for a riverside trail in the area. The proposed off-road trail would address traffic and pedestrian safety concerns along NYS Route 9D, where visitors were parking along the shoulders of the roadway to access trailheads. Study goals included implementing traffic calming and pedestrian safety measures.
2. *Recreation*: The PDMP noted a new shared-use trail would provide a recreational amenity for the region, accessible to a broader user group than just hikers. The trail could transform the character of the adjacent stretch of NYS Route 9D from a high-speed thoroughfare into a multimodal recreational corridor. The trail could be accessible where possible to open the area

⁴ <https://www.nywaterway.com/newburghtobeaconroute.aspx> (Accessed April 4, 2024).

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up to families with young children, and users of all ages and abilities. The trail would also link adjacent recreational opportunities and natural assets.

3. *Highlight and retain natural beauty, ecology, and environment:* The PDMP noted public support for a continuous off-road, multi-use trail that would provide visual and physical connections to the Hudson River and surrounding areas. Design concepts were based on an analysis of critical areas of environmental, cultural, and archaeological significance, and developed to minimize impacts to these resources during construction and in long term use and to increase exposure to natural settings and views.

4. *Economic development:* The PDMP trail would encourage non-motorized travel between Cold Spring and Beacon, and the tourism-based destinations in those municipalities. The trail would bring new visitors to the area, and facilitate access to regional attractions, enhancing economic development along the entire trail route.

Following the adoption of the Final Scoping Document (March 21, 2017), HHFT, Inc. initiated site investigations, field work, data gathering, and collection of relevant reports. In early 2018, the SEQRA process investigating the impacts of the 2015 PDMP preferred alignment paused as public input and field work indicated that additional planning, design, and assessment of route alternatives was merited. Specifically, there was strong local reaction to the possibility that the Fjord Trail’s proposed “Fair Street route” would bring people through the Village center of Cold Spring, raising concerns over potential congestion, garbage, safety, and quality of life impacts.

In 2018, HHFT, Inc. retained a new master planning team that established a new project vision and approach, based partially on input from stakeholders, and developed functional principles and performance criteria to be used to locate trail elements and determine amenities and programming. The planning team worked closely with the Project Steering Committee⁵ and Ecological Working Group⁶ on proposed ideas and incorporated feedback into the plan. The collaborative efforts of these groups yielded “The Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail Draft Master Plan” (2020 Draft Master Plan).⁷ The proposed alignments presented in the 2020 Draft Master Plan are the subject of this DGEIS.

⁵ The Project Steering Committee comprises representatives from HHFT, Inc., OPRHP, Hudson Highlands Land Trust, NYSDEC, NYSDOT, New York State Department of State (NYSDOS), New York City Department of Environmental Protection (NYCDEP), MNR, NYNJTC, City of Beacon, Town of Fishkill, Village of Cold Spring, Suffolk County Department of Children and Families (SCDCF), Cold Spring Fire Company, Friends of Fahnestock and Hudson Highlands State Parks, LSPCA, Open Space Institute, River Keeper, and The Lenape Center. Subsets of the Steering Committee met six times in 2016 and 2017 to discuss the 2015 PDMP Preferred Alternative and guide the SEQRA review. The Steering Committee reconvened in 2018 and 2019 to guide the development of Alternatives presented in the 2020 Draft Master Plan.

⁶ The Ecological Working Group comprises representatives from OPRHP, Scenic Hudson, Riverkeeper, NYSDEC, New York Natural Heritage Program, Hudsonia, the Hudson River Foundation, the Hudson Highlands Land Trust, and the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies. The Ecological Working Group assisted the Project Team with developing planting and landscape restoration strategies along the Trail Corridor and lending their expertise related to ecological communities, flora, and fauna that may be in and around the proposed Fjord Trail.

⁷ <https://parks.ny.gov/inside-our-agency/public-documents.aspx>

2020 HUDSON HIGHLANDS FJORD TRAIL DRAFT MASTER PLAN

The 2020 Draft Master Plan (February 2020) carried through the 2015 PDMP goals, established two new project goals and expanded the vision for the Fjord Trail from a singular trail into a “linear park experience.” The six goals identified in the 2020 Draft Master Plan are:

1. *Express Reverence for the Regional Landscape:* This goal would be achieved by exposing people to the region’s culture, history, and ecologies; establishing a design language for the Fjord Trail that expresses the identity of the Hudson Highlands; and ensuring the Fjord Trail does not dominate the health of the landscape itself.
2. *Cultivate the Ecological Sublime:* This goal would be achieved by fostering visual and physical connections with the landscape; promoting an understanding of the ecological processes that enhance and preserve the scenic beauty of the area; and seeking out opportunities to repair the land and water edge.
3. *Reunite with the River’s Edge:* This goal would be achieved by respecting and engaging the dynamic processes of the Hudson River and its tributaries; creating new water access locations and opportunities; and enabling water-based experiences and activities along the Fjord Trail.
4. *Connect with the Greater Region:* This goal would be achieved by creating a new type of recreational amenity (a linear park) for the region; enhancing access to and connectivity among regional trails, parks, and local destinations; making access to the region safer (including along NYS Route 9D) and more enjoyable; and creating a multi-modal Fjord Trail experience.
5. *Choreograph Visitation and Stewardship:* This goal would be achieved by managing and curating access to popular destinations and sensitive areas; encouraging visitors to respect and care for the landscape; minimizing the negative impacts of high visitation levels; and connecting users to the landscape through educational and creative programs.
6. *Inspire and Implement:* This goal would be achieved by developing a feasible and implementable design; emphasizing resiliency and long-term sustainability; inspiring lasting support and stewardship; and considering material life cycles and durability.

The trail alignments and ancillary components (e.g., restroom buildings, parking areas, and maintenance facility), including the preferred route for both Fjord Trail North and Fjord Trail South, as set forth in the 2020 Draft Master Plan, are evaluated in the DGEIS. The DGEIS considers viable alternatives to avoid potentially significant adverse impacts, and proposes mitigation measures, where necessary. Fjord Trail North is evaluated in Chapters III.A – III.P and Fjord Trail South is evaluated in Chapters IV.A – IV.P.

D. PROJECT PURPOSE, GOALS, PUBLIC NEED, AND BENEFITS

As noted above, the proposed Fjord Trail project was initiated based upon the need to address increasing visitation to HHSPP and surrounding communities (i.e., the City of Beacon and the Village of Cold Spring) and related public safety, quality of life, and maintenance concerns arising from such increased visitation. The existing trail network lacks sufficient amenities, such as parking and restroom facilities, for the level of visitation that the area has experienced in the past decade or more, and unsafe parking conditions have resulted along NYS Route 9D. There is also a need to provide more cohesive, organized, and safer access to the extensive trail network that exists in the corridor between the City of Beacon and the Village of Cold Spring. Trailheads are interspersed along NYS Route 9D in this corridor, and visitors arriving by rail must travel along

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roadways with limited safe trail access for pedestrians. In addition, many of the area’s existing trails are on rugged terrain and not Accessible.

The multi-use, non-motorized recreational Fjord Trail would connect the Village of Cold Spring and the City of Beacon, providing access to the Hudson River waterfront, and offering connections to other existing regional trails. Benefits of the Proposed Action would include expanded access to the area’s highly valued scenic, recreational, and cultural resources, including provision of an Accessible trail (see Chapter II, “Project Description”); expanded parking accommodations and trail access, including a proposed shuttle service along the Trail Corridor (see Chapter III.L, “Traffic and Transportation – Fjord Trail”), which would enhance access, safety and mobility; off-road access to the trail network for users arriving by transit (i.e., MNR), including a more direct route from the MNR Cold Spring station to area trails for days when the MNR Breakneck Ridge station does not have service (weekdays); and a new off-road alternative transportation route between Beacon and Cold Spring as a public amenity. The Fjord Trail would also be consistent with local and regional plans that advocate for expanded hiking and biking amenities, including the Dutchess County and Putnam County Greenway Compacts. The Fjord Trail can provide a critical link in the Hudson River Valley Greenway Trail, the development of which was established as a State priority by the Greenway Act of 1991, and further identified as a priority in the 2016 New York State Open Space Plan (which notes that the Fjord Trail could serve to link other trails⁸) and the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2019).

The project goals were developed through the PDMP and the 2020 Draft Master Plan planning processes and augmented with the input of the Project Steering Committee, community engagement initiatives, and priorities expressed by the public during various workshops and outreach events. The design of the proposed Fjord Trail has been informed by the following goals:

1. *Express Reverence for the Regional Landscape.*
2. *Cultivate the Ecological Sublime.*
3. *Reunite with the River’s Edge.*
4. *Connect with the Greater Region.*
5. *Choreograph Visitation and Stewardship.*
6. *Inspire and Implement.*

E. PROJECT WEBSITE AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Applicant maintains a website (<https://hhft.org>) to share project information and documents, announce public meetings and upcoming events, provide updates, and connect interested parties to volunteer opportunities related to the proposed Fjord Trail and the HHSPP. Visitors to the website are able to subscribe to receive updates about the Fjord Trail. A link to the DGEIS is also provided on the website (see Section G, “Public Review of the DGEIS” below).

⁸ 2016 Open Space Conservation Plan. <https://www.dec.ny.gov/nature/open-space/2016-open-space-conservation-plan> (accessed February 21, 2024).

Various other project participants maintain their own websites with information about the proposed Fjord Trail, including Scenic Hudson (<https://www.scenichudson.org>).⁹ OPRHP also posts notices related to the proposed Fjord Trail on the press releases section of its website.¹⁰

F. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND OUTREACH

The Applicant has conducted a robust public involvement and outreach program to inform development of the proposed Fjord Trail. During the early stages of development, the Applicant conducted four public workshops during the preparation of the 2015 PDMP with between 125 and 150 people attending each workshop. The workshops were held at the Chalet on the Hudson, just south of the Breakneck Ridge Trailhead along NYS Route 9D near the Village of Cold Spring. The topics of each workshop, and the nature of information shared and feedback received, were as follows:

1. Project Overview and Initial Route Idea Generation (March 21, 2014): This first workshop introduced the project and discussed potential routes to be explored through the planning process.
2. Existing Conditions and Constraints and Route Alternatives (July 9, 2014): This workshop occurred after the consultants had completed their field assessment and had identified potential alternative routes. The workshop showcased plausible routes and discussed the constraints and considerations of each while gathering route preferences from the public for each section of the trail.
3. Draft Preferred Route (October 23, 2014): This workshop presented the draft PDMP preferred route to the public, and consultants explained the rationale for selection.
4. Preliminary Draft Master Plan (April 29, 2015): This final PDMP workshop presented the Preliminary Draft Master Plan, focusing on the trail route, and highlighted the survey responses for each section of the trail.

The Applicant also conducted an online survey, which was open between October 23, 2014, and April 29, 2015. The survey was publicized through the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail Facebook page, a listserv of stakeholders and past workshop attendees (several hundred), and through various newsletters sent out by the project partners. The survey was designed to collect community feedback on the draft PDMP preferred alternative (presented in the October 23, 2014 workshop), and concerns related to environmental, functional, or aesthetic considerations. The survey received 464 individual responses, predominantly from residents local to the area. The results of the survey were presented at the April 29, 2015 PDMP workshop. The survey allowed the Applicant to broaden its outreach and capture input from members of the community in addition to those that were reached through the evening workshop meeting format.

The Applicant conducted two online webinars in the summer of 2019. The first webinar, which attracted more than 200 attendees, focused on the Draft Master Plan. The second webinar, with approximately 150 participants, focused on the Breakneck Connector and Bridge Project. Both webinars were interactive, included polling and a question-and-answer period. Attendee questions concerned timing and implementation of the project. Input was gathered from attendees and,

⁹ *Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail*. <https://www.scenichudson.org/our-work/trail-projects/hudson-highlands-fjord-trail/>

¹⁰ <https://parks.ny.gov/newsroom/press-releases/>

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where appropriate, it was considered during the 2020 Draft Master Plan planning process and trail alignment development.

Although public and stakeholder engagement was briefly paused during the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Applicant undertook robust public engagement efforts in 2022, 2023, and 2024. This included public presentations to the Town of Fishkill, Cold Spring Chamber of Commerce, Philipstown Trails Committee, Village of Cold Spring, and City of Beacon throughout 2022. The Project Steering Committee met in March and November 2022, and July 2023. Additionally, throughout January and February 2023, the Applicant met with OPRHP, the Village of Cold Spring Mayor, Putnam County Transportation Director, Dutchess County transportation representatives, and NYS Assemblywoman Dana Levenberg. Further, a Visitation Data Committee was established in fall 2023 with members of the local communities and the Applicant and its consultants to collaborate on the assessment of potential visitation projections for the Fjord Trail and related transportation impacts. The Visitation Data Committee met in fall 2023 through spring 2024, which included a field visit to the Village of Cold Spring on October 22, 2023. In addition, the Applicant held several public workshops during the winter and spring of 2024 to present and gain feedback on various aspects of the project, including the schematic design of Fjord Trail South, project alternatives, and visitation projections and related potential effects on traffic.

As noted above, in accordance with SEQRA, this DGEIS is undergoing a public review period, which will be followed by development of a Final GEIS.

G. PUBLIC REVIEW OF THE DGEIS

This DGEIS was made available on December 4, 2024 for a 60-day public review period through February 2, 2025. The DGEIS has been posted on the OPRHP website at <https://parks.ny.gov/inside-our-agency/public-documents.aspx> and the HHFT, Inc. website at <https://hhft.org/>, as well as the viewing locations listed in **Table I-1** below.

Two virtual public hearings have been scheduled for January 14, 2025 at 2 PM and 6 PM. Attendees may provide oral comments at the public hearings, which will be recorded electronically and by a stenographer. Written comments may be submitted via email to hhft.plan@parks.ny.gov. Substantive comments received will be reviewed and addressed in the FGEIS.

Table I-1
DGEIS Viewing Locations

Location	Address
Philipstown Town Hall	238 Main Street, Cold Spring, NY 10516
Beacon City Hall	1 Municipal Plaza, Beacon, NY 12508
Fishkill Town Hall	807 Route 52, Fishkill, NY 12524
Cold Spring Village Hall	85 Main Street, Cold Spring, NY 10516
Nelsonville Village Hall	258 Main Street, Nelsonville, NY 10516
Blodgett Library	37 Broad Street, Fishkill, NY 12524
Howland Library	313 Main Street, Beacon, NY 12508
Desmond Fish Library	472 Route 403, Garrison, NY 10524
Butterfield Library	10 Morris Avenue, Cold Spring, NY 10516
OPRHP Taconic Regional Office	9 Old Post Road, Staatsburg, NY 12580
Office of HHFT, Inc. c/o Scenic Hudson, Inc.	85 Civic Center Plaza, Ste 300, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601
HHFT, Inc office	14 Coris Lane, Beacon, NY 12508

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