

**INFORMATION PACKET for
DRAFT MASTER PLAN and
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING
Minnewaska State Park Preserve
July 8, 2008 6:30 pm
New Paltz
July 10, 2008 6:30 pm
Ellenville**



David A. Paterson
Governor

Carol Ash
Commissioner

Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Minnewaska State Park Preserve
Public Information Meeting

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions and Welcoming Remarks
2. Overview and Timeline of the Planning Process
3. Overview of the Park
4. Public Input
5. Next Steps

Agency Themes

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) has developed new Priority Themes and Initiatives that will help guide the agency's activities. These new priorities are;

- Revitalizing our Parks and Historic Sites
- Natural resource stewardship and interpretation
- Creating connections.
- Sustainability

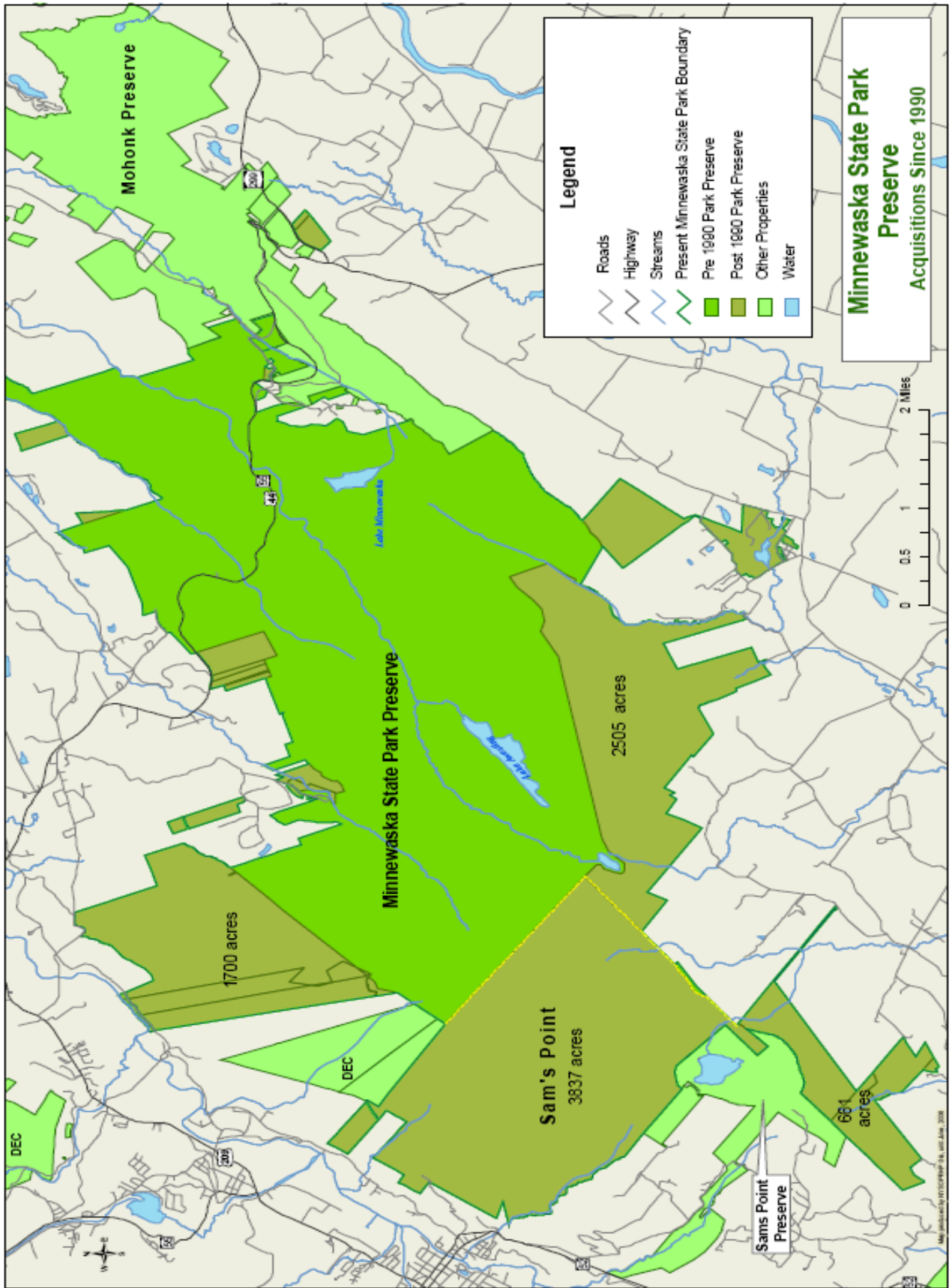
The master plan for Minnewaska State Park Preserve is part of an accelerated planning initiative that will advance these themes, and determine the best course of action to preserve and utilize park resources for this and future generations.

Introduction

Minnewaska State Park Preserve distinguished by its unique natural character, scenic vistas and is noted for its historical carriageways, resort era history and recreational resources. The park offers a multitude of traditional recreational opportunities such as hiking, bicycling, swimming, picnicking, boating, walking, bird watching, rock climbing, bouldering, cross country skiing and snowshoeing. The park also offers a variety of educational and interpretive programs for groups and park patrons throughout the year.

The purpose of this public information meeting is to actively invite public participation and involvement in the planning process. Public participation will help OPRHP in identifying issues, concerns and alternatives as well as determining the depth to which each of the topics is explored within the Draft Master Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Statement(DEIS). It is important to provide public input opportunities now and throughout the planning process to encourage identification of the compelling issues to be addressed within this planning effort.

This information packet and the public information meeting are intended to provide the public with a concise overview of Minnewaska State Park Preserve, the setting, the resources and the issues identified to this point. Additionally the meeting is designed to provide an opportunity for public input at an early stage in the master planning process.



Minnewaska State Park Preserve
Public Information Meeting

Overview

The existence of Minnewaska State Park Preserve (Park) stands as testimony to the desire of New York State and the Palisades Interstate Park Commission (PIPC) to preserve a tract of land of extraordinary qualities. It is a reflection of the dual mission of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) to be a responsible steward of these resources and to make accessible the recreational and interpretive resources of the State. It recognizes the potential accessibility of the Park to millions of people living in the urbanized metropolitan areas, as well as the natural attributes that require dedicated and careful stewardship and protection if it is to retain its integrity. Minnewaska State Park Preserve is currently comprised of 20,103 acres of principally forested land and lakes located along the Shawangunk Mountain Range (the Shawangunks) in the towns of Rochester, Wawarsing and Gardiner in Ulster County, New York. The Shawangunks are noted for their spectacular rock formations, soaring precipices, panoramic views, windswept ledges, pine barrens, fast flowing mountain streams, mountain lakes, and scenic waterfalls. The Park contains three lakes: Lake Minnewaska, Lake Awosting and Lake Haseco (also known as Mud Pond). The remnants of 19th and early 20th century carriageways wind for miles through these forested lands, and connect the various portions of the Park. The quality of the lakes, the steep, stark cliffs and natural ridge lines singly, and in combination, form one of the most scenic and biologically unique resources in New York State. The complex history of the land that constitute Minnewaska State Park Preserve form a compelling backdrop for the Master Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) processes. Since the late 1800s, the lands that constitute Minnewaska State Park Preserve has evolved from a substantial resort function in a semi-wilderness setting to their current status as a limited day use facility, under state jurisdiction, with an intact infrastructure of carriageways and trails extending from the core of the former resort at Lake Minnewaska to its most remote extremes. State involvement in Minnewaska State Park Preserve dates to 1969, and through a combination of acquisitions, deed restrictions, and easements and, most recently, through the purchase of over 8,000 acres, has grown to encompass over 20,000 acres of forests, cliffs and watercourses.

Timeline

- 1972 State completes purchase 6725 acres around Awosting.
- 1987 State purchases Minnewaska property.
- 1993 As part of the previous master plan, Minnewaska State Park is designated Minnewaska State Park Preserve (MSPP) under Article 20 of New York State Parks, Recreation Historic Preservation Law.
- 2003 – 2006 Property acquisitions expanded the park by more than 8,000 acres.
- 2008 Wild fire burns through portions of park.

Environmental Setting

Minnewaska State Park is located on a beautiful site on the Shawangunk Ridge. It is an area of diverse natural and cultural qualities, capable of providing a wide range of recreational activities. Its history - particularly development of the 19th century resort complex around Lake Minnewaska in contrast with the larger, undeveloped parkland to the west -- essentially defines present usage. The Lake Minnewaska area generally sees the highest level of activity, largely due to its convenient access and proximity to Route 44/55, while smaller numbers of visitors travel to the Lake Awosting area, 3 miles to the west. The

easy accessibility of Lake Minnewaska and the extensive carriageway system that links it to the rest of the Park, dates back to the earlier use of the property as a resort complex.

Natural Resources

Ecological Communities

The northern Shawangunk Ridge is home to more than 30 rare plant and animal species and supports more than 35 natural communities, five of them globally rare. The Nature Conservancy designated the ridge as one of Earth's "Last Great Places" for landscape-level biodiversity conservation. The Park has a diversity of habitat types including "dwarf pine ridges", wetlands, ice caves, cliffs and talus slopes, slabrock barrens, ravines, old-growth forests, and oligotrophic lakes. Different plant communities are distributed along the soil moisture gradient from the forests of sheltered, moist ravines to barrens and scrub on exposed rock. The dwarf pine ridge community is particularly rare, with a Natural Heritage biosphere classification rating of G-1 (critically imperiled globally). This community has been established by conditions that include soil infertility, drought, and exposure, and its plants have adapted to survive periodic fires. Without periodic fire there can be serious consequences, including successional change to a different type of community and/or an intense and destructive fire due to the accumulation of combustible material.

Flora and Fauna

The dwarf pine ridges support heath meadows in disturbed areas and prairie grasses which are thought to be remnants from an interglacial period. The Park is rich in old growth stands of trees, including some of the oldest pitch pines in the world and hemlocks several hundred years old, as well as the largest tract of chestnut oak forest in the state. Important trees include chestnut oak, red oak, red maple, sugar maple, sassafras, tupelo, black birch, beech, hemlock, white pine, and pitch pine. Common shrubs and understory trees include mountain laurel, striped maple, flowering dogwood, witch-hazel, shadbush, scrub oak, low blueberry, huckleberry, raspberry, mapleleaf viburnum, and American chestnut sprouts. Black bears, bobcats, foxes, fishers, timber rattlesnakes, spotted salamanders, and more than 200 species of birds can all be found in the Park. There are three species of plants or animals found in the Park that are listed as endangered within New York State, five species listed as threatened, and one species of special concern.

Topography and Soils

Minnewaska State Park is located along the dramatic Shawangunk mountain ridge, geologically separate from the nearby Catskill Mountains. The terrain is rugged and rocky with spectacular rock formations, soaring ledges, streams, lakes, and waterfalls. The broad ridgetop within the Park is several miles long, reaching its highest elevation of 2289 feet at the western end. The Park descends to below 300 feet on its northwestern side and below 400 feet on its southeastern side. Soils in the Park are generally acidic, shallow, and nutrient-poor. They provide little buffering capacity, are easily eroded, and contain erosion-resistant quartzite conglomerate rock. There is little highly fertile soil. The soils are generally unsuitable for septic tanks, tile fields, and similar sanitary drainage devices.

Water Resources

There are three high-elevation water bodies within the Park: Lake Minnewaska, Lake Awosting, and Mud Pond (Haseco Lake). Lake Maratanza is further along the ridge in Sam's Point Preserve and was enlarged by human activity. These lakes are all highly acidic, resulting in water with extreme clarity and little aquatic life. Mud Pond is very shallow in comparison, with a maximum depth of four feet. Tillson Lake, created by damming the Palmaghatt Kill below the southeastern side of the ridge, was part of the Awosting Reserve which was recently added to the Park. Several streams drain the ridgetop. Four major ones flow northward down the ridge and into the Rondout Creek: Peters Kill, Stony Kill, Sanders Kill, and Coxing Kill. The Palmaghatt Kill flows southward down the ridge and then eastward into Tillson Lake and the Wallkill River.

Cultural Resources

Historic Viewing Points

Visitors to Lake Minnewaska during the Resort Period were treated to a number of spectacular views from a series of viewing points and overlooks. Typically these observation points were of two different kinds. Most impressive among these were the spectacular long distance vistas and easterly, 180 degree panoramas over the Walkill and Hudson Valley landscapes toward the Taconic and Berkshire Mountains beyond. The easterly view from some of these points was further enhanced by equally dramatic views of the Catskill Mountains to the west.

The large scale, long distance views from most, if not all, of these observation points are still available to Park visitors today. Because of their location on precarious precipices well above the treetops of the foreground woodlands, these views have not been intruded upon and closed off by unmanaged woodland growth.

A single gazebo remains from the earlier resort period which still accommodate the visitor to the Park much as they did in earlier times.

Historic Roads and Trails

The historic landscape of Lake Minnewaska and vicinity was laced with an extensive network of horse drawn carriageways and pedestrian paths. Many of these routes were located along the top of precipitous escarpments adjacent to the Palmaghatt Gorge or along the eastern front of the northern Shawangunks. Accordingly, they provided access to the spectacular viewpoints mentioned above as well as to the more intimate sequences of natural landscape scenery which are also available from these routes.

Archaeological

According to OPHRP Historic Preservation records, some areas of the park are considered archeologically sensitive. The newly acquired areas will require further investigation.

Scenic Resources

The landscape associated with the Park and the Shawangunk Ridge provides a wide variety of features of significant visual and scenic value:

- Scenic viewpoints;
- Lakes, ponds and seasonal water bodies, streams and waterfalls;
- Wilderness areas;

- Rock ledges, escarpments and extremely steep slopes;
- Vegetation communities.

An important characteristic of these resources is the wide variation in the forms of these resources which can be seen from within the confines of the Park. These include a variety of water features, a wide range of forest, woodland and other vegetation communities, and many different rock formations. Many of these features are rare if not unique to the region and constitute a spectacular visual resource.

Recreational Resources

- Interpretive/education programs
- Carriageways (multiple use)
- Footpath trails
- Peterskill climbing area
- Picnic areas
- Swimming area
- Distance swimming area
- Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing
- Hunting
- Passive activities (sightseeing, birding)
- SCUBA Diving
- Special events

Infrastructure

A clear assessment of the existing structures, roads, parking and utilities requirements needs to be conducted in the master planning process. The current infrastructure is not adequate for the demands which are placed upon the park

- Existing Buildings
- Roads and Parking Areas
- Water and Sewer
- Heating
- Electricity
- Phone/Internet
- Solid Waste
- Recycling

Operations

- Park Staff
- Park Headquarters
- Maintenance
- Emergency Operations
- Sustainability

Sustainability

- “Green” Buildings
- Energy Alternatives
 - Sky lights
- Transportation Alternatives
 - Bike Patrols
- Solid Waste and Recycling
 - Carry-in/Carry-out
- Water Usage
 - Self Composting Toilets
- Efficiency

Public Input

You’re information and suggestions are important in the master planning process. The information gathered at tonight’s meeting provides us with a valuable component and will be reviewed and considered before determining master plan alternatives that meet the needs and mission of the park

Preliminary list of items to be addressed in master plan

- Access To Park
- ADA Compliance
- Archaeology Resources
- Beach/Swimming
- Boundary Encroachments
- Camping
- Climbing
- Education/Interpretive Programs (ex. BCA)
- Hunting
- Infrastructure Needs
- Invasive Species Management
- Maintenance of facilities (trails, carriageways, structures)
- Main use area/Entrance design
- Nature/Visitor’s Center New Recreational Trends
- Partnerships (SRBP/Friends Groups)
- Potable Water
- Property Acquisitions/Connectivity
- Public Safety and Security
- Preservation – Natural and Cultural
- Recently Purchased Properties – future uses
- Sewage/waste management
- Shale Sources For Carriageways
- Sustainability
- Traffic and Parking
- Trails and Carriageways

Next Steps

The issues, concerns and alternatives identified at the public information meeting and through written comments will be summarized and made available. The Draft Master Plan/Draft EIS will address these issues. Further opportunities for public input may take place during the preparation of the Draft EIS/Draft Master Plan. Public review of this document will include a public hearing and public comment/review period. Comments made during this time will be considered in the preparation of the Final EIS/Final Master Plan. After the issuance of the final plan and a public consideration period, a findings statement will be issued along with the Commissioner's decision regarding adoption of the plan. Comment and suggestion forms are available at the sign in area.

Master Plan Timeline

Public Information Meetings	July 8 and 10, 2008
Draft Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)	January 2009
Hearing	March 2009
Final Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)	June 2009
Findings and Adoption	June 2009

Additional information can be obtained from OPRHP at:

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