

INFORMATION PACKET for
DRAFT MASTER PLAN and
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING
Robert G. Wehle State Park
July 14, 2009
3:00 and 7:00 PM
Held in the Robert G. Wehle State Park
Maintenance Facility



David A. Paterson
Governor

Carol Ash
Commissioner

Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Agenda for Public Information Meeting

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

Introduction

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, and Creating Connections and Sustainability. The Master Plan for Robert G. Wehle State Park 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.

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 the Park, 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.

Overview

The 1,087 acre Robert G. Wehle State Park (Park) is located in the Town of Henderson in Jefferson County, NY. It is located on the eastern shore of Lake Ontario on a prominent peninsula and in relatively remote area known as Stony Point. The shoreline here has historically been known as a difficult and dangerous access point, thus, development has occurred to the north and south of the Park.

During the World War II era, the land was owned by the U.S. government and operated as a military gunnery range. Several features from that era remain today. Wehle family purchased the land from the government in the 1950's.

Robert G. Wehle was the former owner of the Genesee Brewing Company in Rochester and Elhew Kennels. Mr. Wehle raised English Pointers and also pursued other interests here including sculpture and conservation. These interests are still reflected at the Park. Mr. Wehle sold the land to the State in 1990 with the intention of providing public access to the property. The property became a state park in 2003. Upon Mr. Wehle's death in 2002, The Robert G. Wehle Trust was created to fund the creation and long term upkeep of the Park providing many of the improvements seen at the Park today.

The Park provides many recreational opportunities along the scenic shore of Lake Ontario. The Park has both active activities such as tennis, volleyball, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking and mountain biking and more passive activities such as bird watching, picnicking and enjoying the scenic vistas along the lake. For visitors wishing to stay overnight at the Park, the former Wehle summer house complex is a rentable facility where visitors can stay a week at a time atop a sixty foot cliff overlooking scenic lake vistas. Additionally, deer hunting opportunities are provided in designated areas during State regulated seasons.

Facilities in the Park include the park office, warming/interpretive building maintenance/storage buildings, a picnic area, rest rooms, parking area, informational kiosk, tennis court, volleyball court, former dog kennels and the former family summer home complex.

The Park has a unique and distinct history as it has evolved from agricultural and grazing fields to a World War II gunnery range complex to the Elhew Kennels, Wehle summer home and private wildlife conservation area to a State Park. Each of these portions of the history of the land helped to create what is seen today at the Park.

Timeline

1895 - United States government purchase Stony Point and creates a rifle range.

1950's - Louis Wehle and Thomas Nagle purchased the former Stony Point Rifle Range.

1964 - Louis Wehle passed away.

1968 - Robert Wehle receives the property from the estate.

1984 - Robert Wehle moves his kennels from Scottsville, NY to Henderson, NY.

1990 - Mr. Wehle sold the property to DEC and has life time use of the property.

2002 - Robert Wehle passed away. Upon Mr. Wehle death a Trust was established to assist with the maintenance of the park.

2003 - The Department of Conservation turn the property over to State Parks. Three parking lots were constructed to allow public access to the property.

2004 - The Robert G. Wehle State Park is created. Furniture is purchased for the rental house, an archaeological study is conducted.

2005 - 2008 – Improvements are made to the park including; a new entry roadway and parking lot, updated bathroom, kitchen windows and ADA accessibility improvements at the rental house, upgraded water system and drinking fountain installed, restroom installed in the picnic area, a visitor center with bathroom and interpretive panels created and a new shop and office is constructed.

2009 - U.S. Army Core of Engineers study, Invasive Species Management Plan and Master Plan conducted.



Environmental Setting

The Park is accessed from Military Road off of Route 3 in the Town of Henderson, Jefferson County. It is bordered by the Henderson Shores Unique Area which is owned by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, private lands and three miles of Lake Ontario shoreline. The Park consists of a variety of features including, cultural, natural and recreational.

Archeological Resources

For a period just before and during World War II the property was owned and operated by the United States Army as a gunnery range. Gun installations known as “pill boxes” can be found throughout the Park. Septic treatment foundations, a large concrete rifle range wall and rifle range earthen structures (berms) can still be seen at the Park. Additionally, there are remnants of a farmhouse and barns constructed in the 1700’s located within the Park.

Natural Resources

Ecological Communities

The NY Natural Heritage Program conducted a survey of the park and produced the report “Rare Species and Ecological Communities of Robert G. Wehle State Park” (NY NYS OPRHP and Natural Heritage Program, 2008). This survey identified two significant ecological communities at the Park: a calcareous shoreline outcrop along much of the Park’s western perimeter, and a calcareous pavement barren that extends across much of the park and across to the adjacent Henderson Shores Unique Area owned by the New York Department of Conservation. The shoreline community contains relatively few invasives and limited human disturbance. The calcareous pavement barren is a rare and vulnerable community in New York State, mainly occurring on the eastern side of Lake Ontario, the St. Lawrence River and along Lake Champlain. Globally it is restricted primarily to the Great Lakes Region, in both the United States and Canada.

Flora and Fauna

Other ecological communities at the Park include; successional woodlands, mowed fields, hardwood forests, and rocky shores and outcrops. Oaks, cedars, hickories, and elm characterize the woodlands. Over twenty-four native tree species were documented at the Park including one rare plant species; cork elm. This type of tree is characteristic of the calcareous pavement barrens community and is readily identifiable by its corky branches. No rare animals have been documented in the Park; however the Park supports a wide variety of wildlife commonly found within the area.

Birds

The New York State Breeding Bird Atlas (2000-2005) identified 90 bird species as possibly nesting in the Stony Point area, with 48 of those confirmed breeding on site and another 30 as probable. Three species of concern are listed as possibly nesting here, the whip-poor-will, sharp-shinned hawk and cooper’s hawk. Whip-poor-will are very likely in the Park based on the numbers found in similar habitats within the county; Furthermore, the park and adjacent lands on Stony Point are likely to host good concentrations of migrant land birds, particularly as birds make their way north along the shoreline during spring migration.

Invasive Species

The Natural Heritage Survey Report identified the biggest threat to biodiversity at Wehle State Park as the prevalence of the aggressive non-native plant, pale swallow-wort. To date, methods for controlling

the species are very limited. Control experiments are ongoing within the Park and include biocontrol research being conducted by Cornell and the USDA. In addition OPRHP is developing an Invasives Species Control Plan and an Interpretive Plan for Swallowwort in an effort to manage the plant within the park as well. Other non-native weedy species are also abundant in some areas of the Park and may pose a threat to the native diversity. Canada bluegrass is abundant in some of the calcareous pavement barren areas. Other invasive species include multiflora rose, buckthorn, purple loosestrife and phragmites.

Soils

The area of the park is underlain by Ordovician Rocks which include the Lorraine Trenton Black River Group. The fossiliferous shales, siltstones and sandstones of the Lorraine Group record a well-defined offshore-to-onshore benthic marine community sequence. The Trenton-Black River Group is composed mostly of limestone and some dolostone. The entire Stony Point geographical area is noted for very shallow soils with depths to bedrock from 0-20”.

Topography

The Park gradually slopes downward from east to west. Based on the International Great Lakes Datum (IGLD) the property’s highest point sits along the northern edge of the property at an approximate elevation of 332 ft. IGLD. The land surface slopes downward from this point to near lake level of 246 ft. IGLD at the far western end. The rising land surface creates 60’ to 85’ high escarpments along the northern shoreline.

Water Resources

The primary water feature is Lake Ontario. The main flow of the lake is northeast toward the St. Lawrence River. Water quality for the lake is an issue and fish consumption advisories exist.

Wetlands

A small DEC regulated wetland exists in the northern part of the park and extends northward outside of park boundaries. A larger DEC regulated wetland complex exists south and east of the park within the Henderson Shores State Unique Area.

Scenic Resources

The primary scenic resources include views of Lake Ontario, the shoreline and the natural and cultural resources within the Park.

Recreation Resources

The recreational uses include trails for hiking, biking, cross-county skiing and snow shoeing, dog walking, open field activities, picnicking, a volleyball court, a tennis court and deer hunting.

Education & Interpretation

The primary educational and interpretive components at the Park include the Wehle history and Elhew Kennels, the past military use of the land and the Swallow-wort issues. A visitor center provides educational opportunities for through interpretive panels describing the history of the Park

Infrastructure

The infrastructure within the Park includes the park office, maintenance complex, house rental complex, picnic area, utilities (supply & treatment, electric, telephone, sewage/septic systems), parking lots, roads, toilet facilities and petroleum storage for the maintenance and operation of the Park.

Operations

Park operations consist of general maintenance, upkeep and cleaning of the rental complex and picnic area, mowing, trail maintenance and the plowing of snow.

Partnerships

- DEC
- Military – US Army Corps of Engineers
- Robert G. Wehle Charitable Trust
- Boy Scouts & Girl Scouts
- USDA
- Cornell Cooperative Extension

Public Input

Your 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

- Lake access
- Swallow-wort management
- Rental areas- pavilions, houses, cabins
- Potential for camping
- Trail system – accessibility
- Education and interpretation opportunities
- Military history
- Connectivity to other public lands
- Dog breeding interpretation
- School summer camp program
- College program
- Seaway trail
- Scenic vistas

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/DEIS will address these issues. Further opportunities for public input may take place during the preparation of the Draft Master Plan/DEIS. 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 Master Plan/FEIS. 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.

Master Plan Timeline

- Public Information Meeting – July 14, 2009
- Draft Plan/ Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) – June 2010
- Public Hearing – June 2010
- Final Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) – July 2010
- Findings and Adoption – September 2010

Public Comment Period

We will be receiving comments and suggestions for Robert G. Wehle State Park until August 14, 2009.

Written comments may be sent to:

Mark Hohengasser
Planning Bureau
Agency Building 1
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12238
RobertWehle.Plan@oprhp.state.ny.us

Additional information may be obtained from OPRHP at:

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