

# NEW YORK STATEWIDE TRAILS PLAN

DECEMBER 2010



**New York State Office of Parks,  
Recreation and Historic Preservation**

*John Boyd Thacher State Park - Voorheesville, NY - John Rozell, OPRHP*



**STATE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY REVIEW (SEQR)  
NOTICE OF COMPLETION OF A  
FINAL GENERIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

**Date of Notice:** December 15, 2010  
**Lead Agency:** New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP)  
**Title of Action:** **Adoption and Implementation of the Statewide Trails Plan**  
**SEQR Status:** Type I  
**Location of Action:** Statewide

This Notice is issued pursuant to Part 617 of the implementing regulations pertaining to Article 8 (State Environmental Quality Review) of the Environmental Conservation Law. A Final Statewide Trails Plan and a Final Generic Environmental Impact Statement (FGEIS) has been prepared and accepted by OPRHP. The Final Statewide Trails Plan/FGEIS describes the proposed action, the environmental setting, alternatives and potential environmental impacts and mitigation.

Agencies and the public are afforded the opportunity to consider the FGEIS; this consideration period ends on December 24, 2010. Copies of the Final Plan/FGEIS are available for review at the office of the agency contact and at the Regional Offices of OPRHP and the Department of Environmental Conservation and at the New York State Library, Cultural Education Center, 222 Madison Avenue, Albany, NY (Documents Section, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor). CDs of the plan are available by contacting the agency contact below. A listing of regional offices may also be obtained from the agency contact. The Final Statewide Trails Plan/FGEIS can also be reviewed at the following publicly accessible website: <http://nysparks.com/inside-our-agency/public-documents.aspx>.

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# **New York Statewide Trails Plan and Generic Environmental Impact Statement 2010**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

New York's natural and cultural resources support a tremendous diversity of trails which offer myriad experiences ranging from hiking the Finger Lakes Trail, cross-country skiing in Allegany State Park, rollerblading along the Erie Canal, to snowmobiling on the Tug Hill, climbing the Adirondack high peaks, traversing the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, and biking on New York City's extensive greenway system. Every area of the state offers a unique setting and a different set of opportunities.

There are over 16,000 miles of trails in New York State, ranging from short nature trails to the 90-mile-long Genesee Valley Greenway, the 350-mile-long Long Path, the 360-mile Erie Canalway Trail and over 2,000 miles of Adirondack Park trails, as well as, over 10,000 miles of trails in the New York State (NYS) snowmobile trail system. New York's trails interpret a variety of cultural and historic periods ranging from Ganondagan State Historic Site's ethno-botanical Earth is Our Mother Trail at the 17<sup>th</sup>- century Seneca village site to Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park's 26-mile-long path along the 19<sup>th</sup>-century engineering marvel that carried water to New York City from its distant water supply. In addition, new trails are constantly being developed, such as the 625-mile-long New York portion of the North Country National Scenic Trail, and additions to the Erie, Champlain, Cayuga-Seneca, and Oswego Canalway Trails of the 524-mile New York State Canal System.

The Statewide Trails Plan/Generic Environmental Impact Statement is comprised of seven chapters that provide a comprehensive look at the history, development, management, and future planning for trails in New York State.

Chapter I, this introduction and summary, provides the basic framework for the development of this plan including the definition of trail utilized for this plan and the purpose of this plan. It describes the planning process, other statewide plans, and includes the authorization of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) to act as the state trails coordinator for development of a Statewide Trails Plan.

Chapter II describes the history of trails in the United States and specifically in New York State. It includes the evolution of supporting legislation for trails to trends in trail use to trail system network development and on the ground trail construction of some long distance trails. In addition, it describes the development of two National Scenic Trails that pass through the state.

Chapter III provides descriptions for the types of trails found in New York State. Trails include those designed for motorized and non-motorized uses.

Chapter IV describes the multiple benefits that trails provide from enhancing the overall health of individuals and connecting children with nature to providing spiritual and educational experiences to benefitting local economies and the environment.

Chapter V describes surveys and workshops that were conducted to identify the needs of NYS citizens regarding trails in the state. In addition, it identifies overall trends for a variety of trail activities. This valuable information was used to guide development of the remainder of this plan.

Chapter VI lays out the overall vision, goals, and objectives for the creation of a statewide trails system. The vision provides direction of what the trail system should be and the goals and objectives provide direction in how the vision will be achieved. This chapter provides the statewide trails framework in the form of maps depicting networks of existing and proposed greenway trails, long distance hiking trails, and water trails. It describes the importance of trail connections with neighboring states and provinces as extensions to the statewide networks. Ten trail issues, identified

as significant considerations during planning, development, and maintenance of trails, are included as well as detailed strategies to address each issue; these strategies include actions that can be taken on a local, regional, and/or statewide level. The section on Standards and Guidelines provides guidance and resources for trail development (including a summary of accessibility guidelines), signage, maintenance, monitoring, and closure. This chapter describes the need for, and actions to be taken to develop, a Statewide Trails Clearinghouse. The implementation section describes the roles and partnerships of all levels of government and the private sector, the role of the State Trails Council, and funding sources available for trail projects, all needed to further the goals and objectives of this plan.

Chapter VII describes potential environmental impacts associated with adoption and implementation of this plan as well as mitigation measures that could be taken to reduce potential impacts. Together with other chapters of the plan, this constitutes a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) pursuant to the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) Act.

## **A. Definition of Trail for this Plan**

For the purposes of this plan, a “trail” is defined as a path or route marked for human travel, open for public use, and separated from a public road, except where seasonal roads are used as trails when closed to highway use, and when highways are used as connector routes between non-contiguous sections of long distance trails. A “water trail” is a designated route suitable for recreational motorized and/or non-motorized watercraft which may include access points, boat launches, day use areas, campsites, and other facilities. Although the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) definition is very broad by including historic or heritage routes, most people do not perceive roads to be trails. Therefore, highway routes are not defined as trails in this plan except as stated above. The NYS snowmobile trail system is guided by the Snowmobile Trails Plan.

## **B. Purpose of the Plan**

The purpose of this Statewide Trails Plan is to:

- Provide statewide policy direction for trail planning, development, and management
- Develop a framework for the statewide trails system
- Identify trail related issues and provide strategies to address them
- Provide standards and guidelines and resources for development of sustainable trails statewide
- Recommend the creation of a Statewide Trails Clearinghouse
- Define roles and responsibilities for implementation.

## **C. Planning Process**

This Statewide Trails Plan is an update of the 1994 Statewide Trails Plan. The development of this updated plan followed a fundamental planning process that included inventory and documentation of existing conditions; identification of issues, needs, and trends; analysis; plan formulation; and development of an implementation strategy. The planning process included the undertaking of a comprehensive inventory of all types of trails throughout the state; surveys and meetings with trail users; identification of issues, needs, and trends in trail usage; research and

analysis of the development, management, and maintenance of existing trails and trail systems; review of trails planning efforts nationwide; and formulation of planning goals and objectives.

A number of statewide surveys conducted between 2004 and 2008 provided a wealth of information about the extent and types of recreation that NYS citizens enjoy including trails-related activities, statistics about trail users, economic impacts of trail use on local communities, and identified trail issues affecting park professionals and trail organizations. In 2008, a series of five public workshops was held across the state by OPRHP, in conjunction with Parks & Trails New York. The workshops provided the public, regional planning organizations, and public officials with an opportunity to review inventory and mapping work completed by OPRHP, identify obstacles and opportunities to achieving a trails network, offer ideas for new opportunities to create connections, and express a vision for trails in each area.

This plan for a Statewide Trails System, including goals and objectives, was formulated based on public input and the analysis and experience of agency planners. The plan provides the overall concept and policy framework for trails and program development and identifies the implementation devices and strategies necessary to effectuate the plan. It is important to note that planning is a continuous process and, in order to successfully continue the process, the Statewide Trails Plan must be reexamined frequently in light of changing conditions and new information.

## **D. Other Statewide Plans**

The NYS **Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)** is prepared periodically by OPRHP. The 2009-2013 SCORP provides statewide policy direction and fulfills the agency's recreation and preservation mandate. The updated SCORP serves as a status report and as an overall guidance document for recreation resource preservation, planning, and development. The document is also used to guide the allocation of state and federal funds for recreation and open space projects. Chapter 5 of the 2009 SCORP is dedicated to "Creating Connections Beyond Parks and Open Spaces," which includes trail and greenway connections, both between existing open spaces across the state and as essential elements of community infrastructure. The SCORP lists the following goals with respect to trails and connections:

1. Encourage federal and state funding and program initiatives that enhance trail and other recreation opportunities for the public.
2. Strengthen the State Trails Planning and Development Program.
3. Strengthen stewardship of the State's trails systems.
4. Encourage coordination of trail planning and development across lines of political jurisdictions, agencies, and levels of the government.
5. Strengthen communication and cooperation among all types of trail users and providers.
6. Advance the development of a statewide system of interconnected trails and greenways and provide access to them.
7. Conduct research and education to improve the quality of user experiences and enhance resource protection.
8. Increase public awareness of New York State's trails and greenway corridors and their economic, social, health, educational and environmental benefits.
9. Provide and improve trail systems for persons with disabilities.

The **New York State Open Space Conservation Plan (Open Space Plan)** provides an integrated statewide strategy for land conservation that is guided by a set of underlying goals and principles. The Open Space Plan has been revised every three years since 1992 in order to adapt to shifting conservation priorities. The 2009 revision is refocused and reorganized to provide relevant priorities without altering the purpose of land conservation for which the plan was originally created. In addition to identifying 135 priority conservation projects, the plan identifies a number of conservation tools other than acquisition for the protection of open space.

The **State of New York Snowmobile Trail Plan (Statewide Snowmobile Plan)** guides development and maintenance for a cohesive statewide snowmobile system. The plan encourages tourism and promotes the safe utilization of associated trails and facilities, as well as addressing the protection of environmental resources. The plan identifies a concept for an interconnecting statewide snowmobile trail system. As a supplement to the Statewide Snowmobile Plan, the **Snowmobile Plan for the Adirondack Park** was produced to address the snowmobile trail system within the Adirondack Park Preserve.

In the State Park Master Plans, trails planning is either integrated with the Park Master Plan or published as a separate Trails Plan as an appendix to the Master Plan. The existing trails are inventoried and assessed. Alternatives are considered for expanding new trails, eliminating trails, and providing a variety of trail opportunities/experiences. The ultimate goal is to designate and maintain a sustainable trail system that is compatible with the natural resources. Plans also provide guidance for trail design, maintenance, and future modifications of the trail system. The Unit Management Plans (UMPs) produced by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) are similar in context to the State Park Master Plans.

## **E. Authorization**

The following are the relevant sections of the state and federal authorizations of OPRHP to act as the state trails coordinator. Authority resides with OPRHP for the development of a Statewide Trails Plan, for the establishment of the State Trails Council, and for administration of the Recreational Trails Program. See **Appendix A** for additional details.

### **New York State**

**Consolidated Laws, L. 1972, Chapter 660 Article 3, Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; Commissioner**

#### **§3.09 General functions, powers and duties.**

The office by and through the commissioner, shall:

3. Encourage, facilitate and coordinate the planning and implementation of parks, recreational and historic preservation activities of state agencies.
4. Cooperate in the planning, organization, development and operation of municipal and private park, recreational and historic preservation projects and programs.
7. Undertake surveys or analyses deemed appropriate for the performance of the functions, powers and duties of the office through office personnel or consultants, or in cooperation with any public or private agencies.
  - 7-a. Promulgate a comprehensive plan for the establishment of a statewide trails system. For the purposes of this subdivision “trails” shall include footpaths, bike ways, snowmobile trails, horse trails, cross country ski trails, roads and other rights-of-way suitable for hiking, strolling, cycling, horseback riding, skiing and other means of motorized and

non-motorized travel for recreational purposes and shall include combinations and systems of trails, including connecting and side trails, and trails leading to scenic and recreational areas. The commissioner, with the approval of the director of the budget, may, within the appropriations made available by the legislature, purchase such abandoned railroad rights-of-way as can be used in the comprehensive plan, and make improvements where necessary, in order to make them suitable and available for use as trails.

- 11 When designated by the governor, act as the state agent for the receipt and administration of any federal grant or advance of funds for the assistance of any project, program or activity related to the functions, powers and duties of the office, where the designation of a state agent is required under federal law or regulation, regardless of whether the project, program or activity is undertaken by the office or another person.

### **Federal Highway Administration**

**Codified in Title 23 United States Code (23 U.S.C.)**

#### **§104. Apportionment**

#### **§206. Recreational trails program**

- a. State Responsibilities.--To be eligible for apportionments under this section--
  1. the Governor of the State shall designate the State agency or agencies that will be responsible for administering apportionments made to the State under this section; and
  2. the State shall establish a State recreational trail advisory committee that represents both motorized and non-motorized recreational trail users, which shall meet not less often than once per fiscal year.
- b. Use of apportioned funds.--
  1. In general.--Funds apportioned to a State to carry out this section shall be obligated for recreational trails and related projects that--
    - A. have been planned and developed under the laws, policies, and administrative procedures of the State; and
    - B. are identified in, or further a specific goal of, a recreational trail plan, or a statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plan required by the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (16 U.S.C. 4601-4 et seq.), that is in effect.



# CHAPTER II: HISTORY OF TRAILS

## A. History of Trails in the United States

Trails preceded human existence as paths accommodating the movements of land animals. With a subsistence lifestyle, Native Americans used animal paths for hunting and gathering food. Over time, these trails became established trade routes and transportation corridors. As the United States developed, trails served as routes for exploration and migration and some were gradually converted into road systems.

As technology allowed people to experience life beyond subsistence in the 1800's, leisure activities and tourism evolved, leading to recreational uses for trails, railroads, and roadways. However, there was little recognition of formal recreational trails in the United States until the early 1900's. The nation's first long distance hiking trail, the Long Trail in Vermont, began to be developed in 1910, followed by the Appalachian Trail in 1921. Support for recreational trails, as well as a national trail system, grew throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC) was established by Congress in 1958 and chaired by Laurance Rockefeller. The Commission's study indicated that 90% of all Americans participated in some form of outdoor recreation, with walking for pleasure ranking second. Findings by the ORRRC led President Johnson in 1965 to call for the nation "to copy the great Appalachian Trail in all parts of our country, and make full use of rights-of-way and other public paths." Congress followed in 1968 with passage of the National Trails System Act to develop a process to create a network of national scenic and historic trails.

The President's Commission on Americans Outdoors (PCAO) was established by President Reagan in 1985 as a second ORRRC. The PCAO's report recommended the creation of a continuous nationwide network of recreational trails and greenways to draw Americans together, provide them with easy access to the natural world close to where they live, and protect natural resources. The PCAO report was followed by a report in 1990 by the National Trails Agenda Project, a public/private initiative, outlining recommendations for implementing the Commission's vision.

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), passed by Congress in 1991, initiated a new era in transportation policy by establishing a major funding source for trails, once again recognized as transportation routes. ISTEA also established the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), which provides funds for states to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities. ISTEA was replaced by The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) in 1998 and Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy For Users (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005, both of which reauthorized funding for trails.

Technology has not only led to the development of trails for recreation, it has also changed the ways in which those trails are used, resulting in changes in the design of trails. The use of bicycles has especially had an increasing impact on trail design. Bicycles became popular late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and bicyclists advocated for smooth hard surfaces on which to ride their bikes. Roads were gradually paved using asphalt, which provided the type of surface that became ideal for bicycling. But as road surfaces became more amenable to bicycle use, at the same time they became highways for increasing numbers of motorized vehicles and unacceptably dangerous for bicycle use. A new type of trail that could accommodate bicyclists was developed using flat corridors that had once been railroads, canal towpaths, or other transportation or utility rights-of-way.

*Greenways* or *rail trails*, the new trails that came of age in the 1960s, were often paved to better accommodate road bikes, and in so doing accommodated a new trail user, the skater. Roller skates, once mostly confined to indoor use, gave way to in-line skates, or roller blades, for use on greenway trails. As paved greenway trails were developed, a new type of bicycle, the mountain bike, was developed for use on backcountry trails. Meanwhile, as snowmobile technology improved and use increased, snowmobile users advocated for their own trails. Similarly, All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) became much more common and their users desired trails to ride on as well.

Popularity of, and therefore demand for, various uses of trails continually change as trends change and as other uses are developed or improved. Thus, technological change and personal preferences lead to changing pressures and challenges for trail planners and managers to provide for new and improved trail uses. The foot paths of the past are no longer sufficient for today's diversity of trail users, which include cross country skiers, off-road vehicle users, joggers, hunters, persons with disabilities, skateboarders, water craft users, hikers with llamas, technical rock climbers, geocaching enthusiasts, dog sledders, commuters, skate skiers, and interpreters of history, to mention a few.

## **B. History of Trails in New York State**

The opening in 1825 of New York's Erie Canal, an engineering marvel of its time, spurred the first great westward movement of American settlers, allowed access to the rich land and resources west of the Appalachians, and made New York City the center for commerce in the United States. America's most famous canal provided a safe and reliable route for west-bound migrants and manufactured goods and east-bound farm products and natural resources. Connecting people, places, and ideas, the Erie Canal defined the Empire State and fostered social and reform movements. This was the beginning of the development of a corridor that would eventually become one of the nation's premier recreational corridors, and its towpath part of one of the longest greenway trails in the nation.

The formal origins of recreational trail use in New York State occurred in 1891 when the Legislature appropriated \$250 for completion of a public path to the summit of Slide Mountain in the Catskills. The Northville-Placid Trail, New York's own "Long Trail," was built by the Adirondack Mountain Club in the early 1920's. A complex recreational trail system gradually evolved on both public and private land across the state, with the former NYS Conservation Department taking over most trail construction and maintenance.

New York's trail clubs have always had a leading role in trail development. The New York Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) was formed in 1912 as the AMC's first chapter. The New York – New Jersey Trail Conference (NYNJTC) was formed in 1920 when local hiking clubs gathered to plan a system of marked hiking trails in Harriman and Bear Mountain State Parks. The NYNJTC built the first section of the Appalachian Trail in these parks in 1923. The Adirondack Mountain Club was formed in 1922. The Finger Lakes Trail Conference was formed in 1962 as a coalition of local outdoor clubs for the purpose of building a western New York trail system that included an east-west long distance hiking trail across the state. The Finger Lakes Trail (FLT), first conceived by Wallace Wood in 1961, would become New York's longest hiking trail, now 562 miles long.

In 1969, the New York State Council of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, chaired by Laurance Rockefeller, released its report *Outdoor Recreation Trails in New York State*. This report outlined recommendations for trails policy and development. Capitalizing on national momentum toward

trail and greenway development, the report especially advocated for a New York State Greenway network using existing trail routes, canal corridors, abandoned rail corridors, and utility rights-of-way.

The term *recreationway* was used for New York's greenways beginning with the 1972 New York Statewide Comprehensive Recreation Plan (SCORP). That plan advanced the concept set forth in the 1969 trails report for a statewide greenway system, now called a recreationway system. The plan urged rapid development of recreationways to take advantage of abandoned and lightly used railroad, canal, and utility corridors. The state's waterways and roadways were included as an integral part of the recreationway system.

Progress on a NYS recreationway system proceeded rapidly at first with extensive development of the Old Croton Aqueduct and the NYS canal system for recreation. The New York State Canal Recreation Development Program was established by the NYS Office of Parks and Recreation (OPR, later OPRHP) and NYS Department of Transportation (DOT) following the 1972 SCORP. OPR and DOT entered into a formal agreement for joint development of the 524-mile long canal system for recreational purposes, with OPR having primary responsibility for recreation. Many sections of the Canalway Trail were constructed over the next several years.

However, the 1972 SCORP began to temper the bold vision of the 1969 trails report by acknowledging that shifting priorities and fiscal constraints made prospects poor for establishment of a statewide trail system. Despite comprehensive inventories of abandoned railroad rights-of-way completed by OPR and DOT prior to the 1972 SCORP, lack of funding severely restricted development of trails and greenways throughout the 1970s. The 1972 SCORP identified the lack of state and federal authorization for land acquisition for trails as the leading reason for holding up trail development.

Trail development did continue in other ways, predominantly through the efforts of volunteers. For example, the New York Snowmobile Coordinating Group, formed in 1975 and now named the NYS Snowmobile Association, is a coalition of over 200 local snowmobile clubs which has developed and maintains over 10,000 miles of NYS snowmobile trails, the vast majority of which are on privately owned land. (Legislation created a dedicated fund to implement a statewide snowmobile system in 1985, administered by OPRHP.) The Long Island Greenbelt Trail Conference, formed in 1978, helped create over 200 miles of hiking trails on Long Island. The Tug Hill Ski Club, now the Winona Forest Recreation Association, formed in 1980 to host the annual Tug Hill Tourathon and maintain a network of cross country ski trails.

The New York State Trails Council was formed in 1981 to ensure citizen participation in trail planning and management by including representatives from many different categories of trail users.

The late 1980s and early 1990s brought renewed government involvement in trail development, due especially to a burgeoning greenway movement and to the financial incentives of ISTEA. In addition to the PCAO report, 1987 was also the year of a report produced by the Regional Plan Association (RPA). RPA is an independent, not-for-profit regional planning organization focused on the New York City Metro area. The report outlined a plan for a regional network of greenways. Their strategy called for united action from the governors of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, establishment of state laws and policies facilitating greenway networks, and local initiative guided by state and federal leadership. Also that year, the Neighborhood Open Space Coalition of New York City proposed a 40-mile-long Brooklyn-Queens Greenway.

Established by the Greenway Act of 1991, the Hudson River Valley Greenway's Trail Vision Plan includes the establishment of a network of multi-use trails along both sides of the Hudson River as well as a water trail for paddling and boating along the length of the Hudson River. In 1992, the first sections of the 90-mile-long Genesee Valley Greenway (GVG) opened. The GVG, one of New York's longest greenways, developed as the result of a public-private partnership between the New York Parks and Conservation Association (now Parks & Trails New York), Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway, OPRHP, and DEC, using ISTEPA funding. Also in 1992, the NYS Canal Corporation, formed when the NYS Canal System was transferred from DOT to the Thruway Authority, set about advancing the transformation of the Canal System into a world-class recreationway. The NYS Canal Recreationway Commission, created by the Legislature in 1992, developed a *Canal Recreationway Plan* that led to the adoption of a five-year *Canal Revitalization Program* and the development of an additional 40 miles of Canalway Trail. Additional work is underway to complete the development of the trail to span the entire length of the canal system.

In 1993, the New York City Department of City Planning presented that city's vision for creating the nation's most extensive urban greenway system with the release of *A Greenway Plan for New York City*. That plan greatly expanded on the existing development of the Brooklyn-Queens Greenway by outlining a proposal for 350 miles of landscaped bicycle and pedestrian trails throughout the city. The NYC Greenway System is now over 40 percent complete.

## **C. National Scenic Trails in New York State**

The National Trails System Act of 1968 established three types of trails to be included within a new nationwide system of trails, a fourth type being added in 1978. Two National Scenic Trails (NSTs), the most restrictive category, were initially designated: the Appalachian Trail and the Pacific Crest Trail. NSTs are long distance, primarily hiking, trails that combine recreation and conservation, are planned to be continuous, and can only be established by Congress. The United States now has eight NSTs, two of which pass through New York State.

The first section of the Appalachian Trail (AT), America's first interstate long distance hiking trail, was built in New York in 1923 by the New York – New Jersey Trail Conference. First conceived by Benton MacKaye in 1921 as a regional plan that combined aspects of recreation, conservation, and economic socialism, including wilderness camps where people could renew themselves, the AT was completed simply as a hiking trail in 1937. Now 2,175 miles long, the AT has evolved from a simple marked trail into a 250,000-acre greenway connecting Maine to Georgia, without MacKaye's concept of camps, but with rustic amenities for overnight travelers.

The most significant evolution of the AT came with the 1968 National Trails System Act. As one of the first two National Scenic Trails, specific responsibilities were established for the AT including mapping, selection of rights-of-way, relocations, maintenance, development, acquisition of land, and protection of a permanent trail route. The primary partners involved were the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the Appalachian Trail Conference (ATC, now the Appalachian Trail Conservancy), and the various states along the trail.

Slow progress and lack of initiative by some states led Congress to strengthen the National Trails System Act in 1978 with an amendment known as the Appalachian Trail Bill, signed by President Carter. That bill initially authorized \$90 million to protect the AT, including acquisition of a corridor. More money was appropriated during subsequent administrations, resulting in permanent protection for 99 percent of the AT on public lands.

New York's second National Scenic Trail, the North Country Trail (NCT), was first conceived in the mid-1960's and was included in the 1966 federal report *Trails for America*, which studied potential trail routes for a system of trails similar to the AT and set the stage for the 1968 Trails System Act. That Act authorized a study for a North Country Trail, which was subsequently authorized as a National Scenic Trail by Congress in 1980. The most notable difference between the AT and the NCT was that the National Park Service did not have authorization to acquire land for the NCT.

Initially conceived as a 3200-mile-long trail connecting the Missouri River in North Dakota with the AT in Vermont, the NCT was eventually projected to become 4600 miles long. Due to opposition in Vermont during the 1970's, that state was dropped from the NCT route before the 1980 authorization, and the official eastern terminus became the bridge over Lake Champlain at Crown Point State Historic Site in New York. The Finger Lakes Trail, completed in the early 1990's, was the chosen route for the western 300 miles of the NCT in NYS.

The conceptual NCT route through eastern NYS followed Old Erie Canal State Park to Rome and crossed the Adirondacks through the High Peaks Wilderness Area. However, concerns were raised about overuse of the High Peaks region resulting in a delay of any serious consideration of an eastern New York route until 1995. In that year, National Park Service (NPS) funding provided for a study of alternative route options, which included potential routes both inside and outside of the Adirondack Park. Consensus was reached in 1997 on routing the NCT through the Adirondacks to the south of the High Peak region. In 2005, a central Adirondack route was determined to be the most viable to pursue. The *North Country National Scenic Trail Draft Adirondack Park Trail Plan/ Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement* was released in November 2007 and has undergone public review. However, the final plan has not yet been released by the DEC.



## CHAPTER III: TYPES OF TRAILS

New York State has a wide variety of trails that accommodate many different types of users. These diverse trails are commonly identified by the use for which they were designed. The designed use standard, as developed for the federal Interagency Trail Data Standards (ITDS), is the intended use that requires the highest level of development. Although the trail may be actively managed for more than one use, and numerous uses may be allowed, only one use is identified as the designed use. Greenway trails are an exception, as these types of trails are designed for multiple uses.

The designed use controls the desired design and the subsequent maintenance of a trail. For example, horse trails are designed and maintained for horseback riding even though they may be available for other uses that require less development. Trails designed for skiing but open seasonally for hiking or biking are marked for skiing and called ski trails; conversely, trails designed for hiking but open seasonally for skiing are called hiking trails, not ski trails. With the designed use basis for categorizing trails, not all trail uses are trail types. For example, people can run or snowshoe on any trail and do not require trails designed specifically for those uses. Road bicyclists and inline skaters use greenway trails, which are designed for multiple uses. However, greenway, hiking, interpretive, fitness, and ATV trails can all be designed for accessibility; therefore, trails designed for use by persons with disabilities result in an overlapping designation of *accessible* trails.

Although some highway routes are officially labeled with the term “Trail,” any road that is open for use by motor vehicles as a public highway is not considered a “trail” for the purposes of this plan. However, seasonal roads are considered trails during that portion of the year when they are closed to public highway use, and the shoulders of highways that are used as connector routes between non-contiguous sections of long distance trails are considered integral parts of those trails. Downhill ski trails and technical whitewater routes are not covered within the scope of this plan.

### **A. Greenway Trails (Shared Use)**

A greenway can be defined most simply as a thin linear park. However, greenways vary considerably, from the 90-mile-long Genesee Valley Greenway, which is primarily a narrow rural park with a trail surface of packed cinders, gravel, and grass, to New York City’s greenway network, which consists of interconnected bicycle paths paved with asphalt. Although greenways can be defined in terms of conservation, open space, landscape design, scenic value, cultural development, ecology, and various interactions between people and nature, in many areas greenways have become synonymous with bicycle paths, known locally as rail trails, bike trails, recreationways, canal trails, bikeways, or community trails. One of the most common types of modern greenways is the rail trail, a railroad that has been converted into a multi-use trail, and is especially used by bicyclists.

One type of greenway has been defined through New York State legislation, which has established two greenways as regional planning initiatives for heritage development, economic revitalization, resource preservation, and tourism, rather than as specific linear corridors. The Hudson River Valley Greenway was established in 1991 to advance the state’s commitment to the preservation, enhancement and development of the scenic, natural, historic, cultural and recreational resources of the Hudson River Valley while continuing to emphasize economic development activities. The Niagara River Greenway, established in 2004, was charged by legislation to develop a plan to implement a system of Parks and Trails along the Niagara River from the City of Buffalo to the Village of Youngstown, with access to the Niagara River and up-land communities for everyone. The Niagara River Greenway is a world-class corridor of places, parks and landscapes that celebrates and interprets the unique natural, cultural, recreational,

scenic, and heritage resources and provides access to and connections between these important resources while giving rise to economic opportunities for the region. With their broad missions and large geographic areas that overlap many municipal and county boundaries, these two greenways are more akin to heritage areas or heritage corridors than to the greenway trails described in this plan.

It is obvious that a greenway can mean different things to different people, and can mean different things to the same person depending on the context. But among the many greenway definitions are recurring themes of nature, ecological integrity, and sustainability (“green”) and linearity, trails, and travel (“way”). For the purposes of this plan, a greenway is defined as: “a linear corridor of open space connecting public places, connecting people with nature, and protected for environmentally sustainable purposes that include recreation, conservation, and transportation.”

This plan uses the term *greenway trails* to refer to those multi-use (shared use) trails known variably as rail trails, bicycle paths, greenways, recreationways, bikeways, carriage roads, and community trails. They are relatively straight and flat, often hardened with asphalt or crushed stone, and designed for a multitude of uses that may include bicycling, hiking, strolling, jogging, inline skating, birdwatching, dogwalking, cross country skiing, snowmobiling, and horseback riding. Greenway trails are distinguished from other shared use trails by including a transportation component, in that they are desirable for use as a thoroughfare, and are suitable for the use of road bicycles, in addition to mountain bikes.

It is important to note that although greenway trails are designed for multiple uses, trail managers allow differing sets of uses along different trails. Not all greenway trails allow all of the uses noted above, and some trails allow other uses. It is up to the managing agency, organization, or landowner to decide which uses are allowed and which are prohibited, and these regulations can vary, even along the same trail as it crosses jurisdictional lines.

Primary greenway trails are the longer multi-use trails of national, statewide, or regional significance that form the basis for a statewide network. Primary trails frame governmental planning initiatives and support the efforts of municipalities and volunteers to develop local trail networks. Secondary greenway trails are generally shorter in length than primary trails and cross fewer political boundaries. They often provide linkages to support services, attractions, and communities from the primary greenway trails. Stand-alone greenway trails are often shorter still and are considered locally important but may not be connected to a trails network. Examples of primary greenway trails in NYS include:

- Catharine Valley Trail (Chemung and Schuyler Counties)
- Catskill Scenic Trail (Delaware County)
- Champlain Canalway Trail
- Delaware & Hudson Canal Trail (Sullivan and Ulster Counties)
- Erie Canalway Trail
- Genesee Valley Greenway
- Harlem Valley Rail Trail (Columbia and Dutchess Counties)
- Hojack Trail (Cayuga and Wayne Counties)
- Hudson River Greenway (New York City)

- Lehigh Valley Trail (Monroe and Ontario Counties)
- Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail (Albany and Schenectady Counties)
- North County Trailway/ Putnam Trailway (Putnam and Westchester Counties)
- Old Croton Aqueduct Trail (Westchester County)
- Ontario Pathways Rail Trail (Ontario County)
- Orange Heritage Trail (Orange County)
- Oswego County Recreational Trail
- Pat McGee Trail (Cattaraugus County)
- South County Trail (Westchester County)
- Wallkill Valley Rail Trail (Ulster County)
- Warren County Bikeway

Although this plan provides a distinct definition of *greenway trails*, this is not meant to diminish the intent and important impacts of the legislative type of greenway as well as other regional efforts throughout the state but in fact complement these programs. The Hudson River Valley Greenway, for example, provides guidance and support for designation and development of trails that provide physical and visual access to the Hudson River where possible. Many of these trails included in the system are considered greenway trails as defined above and may become part of a larger statewide network. The *Niagara River Greenway Plan*, adopted by the Niagara River Greenway Commission in 2007, includes the establishment of a multi-use trail network throughout the Niagara River Greenway designated area. Many of these trails are and will be developed as greenway trails.

## **B. Hiking Trails**

Walking is one of the most popular outdoor activities. Generally, all trails are open for use by pedestrians. Trails designed specifically for foot travel are called hiking trails. These trails may contain design features such as stone steps and narrow rock cuts that are only accessible by foot; therefore, non-pedestrian uses of hiking trails are often prohibited. Hiking trails are, however, sometimes constructed to sustain other uses.

**Long Distance Hiking Trails** are identified as those hiking trails that are maintained by an established organization or agency and are desirable for a linear overnight hiking trip (available camping facilities and locations will vary). Regional and local hiking trails are generally shorter than long distance trails, although they may still be part of an extensive trail system, such as in the Adirondack and Catskill Parks. These shorter trails may also be used for multi-day hiking trips but are not generally recognized as through routes for linear long distance hikes. The long distance hiking trails of NYS include the following:

- Appalachian Trail
- Bristol Hills Trail
- Conservation Trail
- Crystal Hills Trail (part of the Great Eastern Trail)
- Finger Lakes Trail
- Highlands Trail

- Letchworth Trail
- Link Trail
- Long Island Greenbelt Trail
- Long Path
- North Country Trail
- Northville Placid Trail
- Paumanok Path / Pine Barrens Trail
- Shawangunk Ridge Trail
- Taconic Crest Trail

## **C. Snowmobile Trails**

State legislation created a dedicated fund to implement a statewide snowmobile program in 1985, administered by OPRHP. The NYS Snowmobile Program, funded through snowmobile registrations, provides for snowmobile trail grants, a law enforcement grant, a law enforcement snowmobile school, safety education, special event permits, accident reporting, snowmobile publications, grooming education, trail signage guidelines, and trail inspection oversight. Snowmobile registrations for the 2009-2010 season totaled 131,664.

The statewide snowmobile trail system, based on four classes of trails, traverses 47 counties and is maintained by approximately 200 clubs funded through 55 municipal sponsors. During the 2009-2010 season, \$4,836,891 was budgeted for maintenance and development of this vast trail network of 10,423 miles, comprised of lands under the jurisdiction of OPRHP, DEC, NYS Canal Corporation, local governments, and many private landowners, whose insurance coverage is also provided by the NYS Snowmobile Program.

Several years ago, in an effort to clarify the overall statewide trail system, the OPRHP Snowmobile Unit began an inventory of trail types and mileages. As a result, the Snowmobile Unit produced a much more accurate depiction of actual trail mileage than had previously been available. To continue improving the accuracy of trail system information, OPRHP will be requiring that all state-funded trails be located using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data or Global Positioning Systems (GPS) data for the 2010-2011 season. Trail miles will only be added if they meet criteria established in the Statewide Snowmobile Trail Plan and trail reroutes and connections will only be approved if verified by GIS or GPS.

## **D. Horse Trails**

Horse trails (“pack and saddle trails” in the Interagency Trail Data Standards) are natural surface trails designed for equestrian use. They may be either double or single track and are most often part of a designated trail network where there is adequate space for a trail loop or a series of loops. Many horse trails are shared use trails and often accommodate winter uses, such as snowmobiling or cross country skiing. Examples of horse trail networks in NYS include the Bedford Riding Lanes Association Trail System in Westchester County, Brookfield Trail System in Madison County, Cold River Horse Trail System in Essex and Franklin Counties, Otter Creek Horse Trail System in Lewis County, and Six Nation Trail System in Schuyler County.

## **E. Mountain Bike Trails**

Traditionally, all types of bicycles have been grouped together for statistical and planning purposes. However, different types of bicycles are used for different purposes and their uses are significantly different. These differences are especially evident when trail use is considered. Road bikes are designed especially for use on paved surfaces whereas mountain bikes are designed especially for use on backcountry trails. Mountain bike trails are typically designed for low-impact use and can range from general use to challenging. Mountain biking has been one of

the fastest growing recreational activities in the United States over the past two decades and the International Mountain Bicycling Association estimates that about 20% of Americans age 16 and over now participate in mountain biking.

In recent years, the mountain biking community has become well-established. The increasing demand for mountain bike trails has increased the pressure for use on trails established for other uses and for the development of additional trails constructed to sustainable trail standards that provide a narrower trail experience. The biking community has sought to reduce conflicts by maintaining trails, educating trail users, minimizing environmental impact, and pursuing user agreements with land management agencies.

Mountain bike trail networks in NYS generally consist of multi-use trails. Examples of these networks include the Ellicottville area bike trails in Cattaraugus County, Great Bear Recreation Area in Oswego County, Highland Forest Park in Onondaga County, Hunters Creek Park in Erie County and many networks located on Long Island.

## F. Cross Country Ski Trails

Cross country ski trails are designed specifically for skiing and are often a system of looped trails of varying difficulty over rolling terrain in a park-like setting. Other winter uses are often prohibited along designated ski trails unless there is space alongside the ski tracks for the additional use. Ski trails are, however, often compatible with a variety of summer uses. Many formal ski trails are groomed for skiers while other trails are designed for backcountry skiing without mechanized grooming. Narrow ski trails often restrict users to traveling in only one direction from the trailhead while wider ski trails are often groomed with two sets of tracks for two-way traffic. Cross country ski trails are often rated to signify their comparative level of difficulty.

Examples of cross country ski trail networks in NYS include the Art Roscoe Ski Touring Area at Allegany State Park in Cattaraugus County, BREIA Cross Country Ski Trails in Oneida County, Jackrabbit Trail in Essex and Franklin Counties, Winona State Forest trails in Oswego and Jefferson Counties, Highland Forest trails in Onondaga County, and Hammond Hill State Forest trails in Tompkins County.

## G. Interpretive Trails

Interpretive trails are pedestrian trails designed for educational use in interpreting natural and/or historical features in the landscape. They are relatively short and are often laid out as a loop trail in a park-like setting. Interpretive trails can be similar to greenway trails in construction and are often accessible to persons with disabilities, but although they often accommodate wheeled vehicles, interpretive trails are not designed for through traffic. They can also be similar to hiking trails, but interpretive trails usually have a very gentle grade and are meant for users strolling at a casual pace.

**Nature trails** are interpretive trails designed to educate users about natural features, natural history, or wildlife along the trail. **Fitness trails** are designed with specific features that can be used to increase the physical fitness of persons using the trail. Other interpretive trails are designed to educate users about natural and cultural history along the trail.

Interpretive trails are generally posted with distinctive interpretive signage to educate users about the surrounding environment as they make careful observations along the trail. In addition to interpretive signs and kiosks, directional and regulatory signs are also used along interpretive

trails. Fitness trail signs are similar to other interpretive trail signs, but they guide users in interpreting the specialized fitness features of the trail.

## **H. ATV and OHM Trails**

Off-highway motorcycles (OHMs), also known as trail bikes, dirt bikes, and trail motorcycles, are categorized as all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) by the NYS Department of Motor Vehicles and are included with ATVs in this plan. Although ATV trails are often multi-use trails, they are categorized separately from greenway trails because the use of motorized vehicles results in these trails having a much different character, usually making them undesirable for typical greenway trail uses.

In general, there is currently no provision for state designation of trails that accommodate ATVs, except for trails that are open for ATV use by persons with disabilities by permit only. The role of the state in the development and management of ATV trails is limited to providing funding for counties, municipalities, and private organizations to develop their own ATV trails. Some public multi-use trails do allow ATV use, including the Rivergate Trail in Jefferson County and the Rutland Trail in St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties. Also, the Winona Forest Recreation Association maintains a network of ATV trails in Jefferson and Oswego Counties, and Lewis and St. Lawrence Counties are developing county-wide ATV trail networks.

Any conceptual plans for an ATV trail system could focus on county, municipal, and private land areas that provide ATV trail opportunities. Due to the year-round nature of the activity and general unwillingness of private landowners to allow such activities across their lands, development of a linear system, similar to the snowmobile system that relies heavily on private lands, would be difficult.

## **I. Four Wheel Drive**

As with ATVs and OHMs, off-road four-wheel-drive (4WD) vehicles are generally not provided access to trails that have state designation. Again, the role of the state is only to provide funding for counties, municipalities, and private organizations to develop their own 4WD trails.

Four wheel drive enthusiasts generally desire a technically challenging trail with interesting destination points rather than a long distance trail. These technical trails challenge the user's skills in negotiating various types of terrain and conditions. Any conceptual plans for four wheel drive trails could focus on regions rather than on longer trails.

## **J. Water Trails**

Water trails, also known as blueways, are designated recreational water routes suitable for canoes, kayaks, and small motorized watercraft. Water trails require more than designation on a map. In order to adequately accommodate recreational use, they need facilities such as docks, boat launch sites, day use areas, campsites, parking lots, and adequate public access. For water trail users to find facilities along the designated route, they need signs. Canoe trails are water trails that are designated for non-motorized recreational use only, suitable for canoes and kayaks. These routes may occasionally traverse land portages and may include waterways that are also open to motorized water craft. Whitewater routes are rivers that are designated for whitewater recreational use, such as rafting and whitewater kayaking. Technical whitewater routes are not covered within this plan.

The American Canoe Association maintains a list of Recommended Water Trails that meet the following requirements:

- The trail must be a contiguous or semi-contiguous waterway or series of waterways open to recreational use by paddlers
- The trail must have public access points for paddlers
- The trail must be covered by a map, guide, signage or a web site that is of reasonable quality and detail and available to the public
- Published or printed materials for the trail (e.g. guidebook, map, signs, website) must communicate low-impact ethics to trail users
- The trail must be supported and/or managed by one or more organizations.

Examples of water trails in NYS are:

- Black River Canoe Trail
- Chemung Basin River Trail
- Headwaters River Trail
- Hudson River Greenway Water Trail
- Hudson River Water Trail
- Lake Champlain Paddlers' Trail
- Marden E. Cobb Waterway Trail
- NYS Canalway Water Trail includes:
  - Cayuga-Seneca Canal
  - Champlain Canal
  - Erie Canal
  - Oswego Canal
- New York City Water Trail
- Nine Mile Creek Water Trail
- Northern Forest Canoe Trail
- Paddles Up Niagara Trail
- Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River

## **K. Bicycle Routes**

Bicycle routes are highways that are signed as bicycle touring routes for recreational bicycle travel. The NYS Department of Transportation (DOT) maintains three signed, long distance, on-road bicycle routes for experienced cyclists who are comfortable sharing the roadway with motorized vehicles and with traveling at higher speeds. State Bicycle Route 9 runs north-south linking Canada to New York City. State Bicycle Routes 5 and 17 run east-west through the mid-section of the state and close to the southern boundary, respectively. A United States Bicycle Route System is under development by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. Determination for New York State segments of this national system is currently pending. In addition to the longer statewide routes, there are many regional bicycle routes and existing or developing systems for major cities in the state.

## **L. Tourist and Interpretive Routes**

Tourist routes are highways that are signed for automobile tourism and educational purposes. Most of these routes fall under the NYS Scenic Byways Program, established by the state legislature in 1992 and administered by the NYS DOT. NYS Scenic Byways designate highway corridors that are of particular statewide interest, notable for their scenic, historical, recreational, natural, and/or cultural value. In addition, NYS has three National Scenic Byways, as designated by the Federal Highway Administration, including the Lakes to Locks Passage, the Mohawk Towpath Byway, and the Seaway Trail. Interpretive Routes are routes that may be driven to link sites of natural, historical or cultural significance and/or to follow an historic route. These routes do not necessarily follow highways but do provide a thematic linkage between sites and/or along a route. Some type of interpretive material (such as markers, brochures and/or website resources) is provided. Examples of these routes include the Lake Champlain Birding Trail (an approximately 300 mile highway-based trail with 88 birding sites in the Lake Champlain Region), the Henry Knox Cannon Trail and the Washington Rochambeau Revolutionary Route (W3R) (a multi-state National Historic Trail that follows the route the US Continental Army marched in 1781).

## CHAPTER IV: BENEFITS OF TRAILS - A PATH TO A GREENER COMMUNITY

In addition to recreational opportunities, trails provide multiple benefits for individuals and communities and these benefits are measurable and definable. Increasingly, as the cost of operating an automobile increases – both monetarily and environmentally – trails accommodate safer and less expensive alternatives for people to commute between home and work. As our individual health is being thought of in a more holistic way, trails are at the forefront of offering a healthy lifestyle for both the mind and body. With many trails having their origins in the history of a community, they afford educational opportunities and a pride of place. Many communities are finding that trails are a component of their economic infrastructure and see businesses sprout from or enhanced by their existence. Trails are good for the environment, good for health, good for the economy, and help improve the quality of life in every community.

### A. Healthy Hearts and Healthy Minds

More and more, good health is viewed in a holistic way rather than being defined by the absence of disease. This view includes mental health, appropriate personal choices in diet, and, importantly, an active lifestyle for people of all ages. The use of trails for exercise can play a large role in providing both physical and mental health benefits. Studies show inactivity to be a significant contributor to a negative quality of life for our older population. An increasingly overweight population has become a significant health issue, especially for our younger population. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently estimated that the annual medical costs of obesity in the United States are \$147 billion ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)). By providing more community trails and encouraging people to live a healthier lifestyle by exercising regularly, this financial burden can be lowered.

The NYS Department of Health (DOH) identifies walking as the most popular form of physical activity. According to a 2009 CDC report, however, 24% of adult Americans get no exercise and more than 49% of New Yorkers do not get enough exercise to achieve a health impact. Furthermore, the DOH reports that the percentage of NYS adults who are overweight or obese increased from 42% to 60% between 1997 and 2008; obesity among children and adolescents has tripled over the past 30 years; and obesity-related illnesses cost the state more than \$7.6 billion per year ([www.nyhealth.gov](http://www.nyhealth.gov)). Being overweight is a major risk factor for many serious chronic diseases, and the US Surgeon General declared obesity an epidemic in 2001 ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)).

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), even a moderate walk can help a 150-pound person burn 240 calories per hour (see **Appendix B**). Calorie use for different physical activities can be calculated at:

[http://www.prohealth.com/weightloss/tools/exercise/calculator1\\_2.cfm](http://www.prohealth.com/weightloss/tools/exercise/calculator1_2.cfm). The 2008 *Physical Activity Guidelines* ([www.health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/](http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/)) developed by the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) establishes key physical activity guidelines for adults, children, and adolescents. For substantial health benefits, the guidelines state that **adults** should do at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes (1 hour and 15 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity. Aerobic activity should be performed in episodes of at least 10 minutes, and preferably, it should be spread throughout the week. For *additional* health benefits, an adult should move from 150 minutes a week toward 300 minutes (5 hours) a week. For **children and adolescents**, the guidelines recommend 60 minutes (1 hour) or more of physical activity daily.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) notes that physical activity can help control weight, reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers, strengthen bones and muscles, improve mental health and mood, and increase chances of living longer.

Walking also combats the decline in physical activity and strength that generally accompanies the aging process. Seniors who exercise regularly reduce their risk for chronic diseases and have half the rate of disability of those who do not (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2003). According to the AHA and American College of Sports Medicine, there is substantial evidence that physical activity reduces risk of injuries from falls, prevents or mitigates functional limitations, and is effective therapy for many chronic diseases among older adults (Nelson et al. 2007).

Regular exercise is a simple way to control weight and increase a person's overall health and life span. Trails can play an integral role in improving the physical and mental health of all citizens of all ages. When trails connect people's homes with places they wish to go, they are able to run errands, commute to work or school, or simply enjoy being outdoors thereby incorporating exercise into their daily schedule.

## **B. Connecting Children and Nature: No Child Left Inside**

Children today are less connected to the natural world than ever before. They spend half as much time outdoors than they did 20 years ago and the effects of sedentary indoor lifestyles have become increasingly evident. One third of New York's children are obese or overweight. Associated with obesity is a decreased life expectancy and higher risk of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and joint problems ([www.nyhealth.gov](http://www.nyhealth.gov)).

Meanwhile, studies show that children who play and learn outside have less stress, fewer sleep disorders, a more positive outlook on life, improved test scores, greater conflict resolution skills, are more creative, motivated, and physically fit, and develop stronger immune systems. Research has also found that exposure to nature helps reduce the severity of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, diagnosed in over two million U.S. children (White 2008).

According to studies by Nancy Wells, Associate Professor at Cornell University, "Natural areas proximate to housing and schools are essential features in an effort to foster the resilience of children and perhaps to promote their healthy development" (Wells 2003). "As we fit together the various studies, the emerging pattern suggests that nature matters to children's well-being in general, and to their attentional capacities in particular" (Wells 2000). These studies imply that if children have regular contact with nature, their minds will be clearer, more focused, and less stressed.

Richard Louv began a nationwide movement in 2005 with the publication of his book about the disconnection between children and nature, *Last Child in the Woods*. In his book, Louv describes a concept he coined called "nature deficit disorder" as "not an official diagnosis but a way of viewing the problem... diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses." The World Future Society ranked nature deficit disorder as the fifth-most-important trend of 2007 and the years to come (Charles et al. 2008).

The No Child Left Inside Coalition, representing more than 300 environmental, educational, business, public health, outdoor recreation and conservation groups nationwide, was created in 2006 to help connect children with nature and to advocate for environmental education and funding. Another initiative spearheaded by Louv, the National Forum on Children and Nature

was launched in 2007 and is supported by The Conservation Fund. The Forum will select and fund 20 nationally significant demonstration projects in four key areas of health, education, the built environment, and media/culture.

Reasons for our children's nature deficit are many, but particularly strong is the parental perception that nature is unsafe, including fears of strangers, getting lost, unfamiliar plants and animals, insect bites, traffic hazards, and other causes of physical injury. Other reasons are lack of awareness of opportunities, cost, lack of time, transportation difficulties, liability concerns, and competition with structured sports and electronic media. But with increasing attention focused on the problem, solutions are plentiful. One solution in particular, greater access to parks, is associated with more physical activity and less sedentary behavior among youth according to a 2006 study published in *Psychological Science* (Krisberg 2007).

With public attendance dropping sharply at many state and national parks, the National Association of State Park Directors and the National Park Service agreed on a joint "Children and Nature Plan for Action" in September of 2007. This initiative calls for state and national parks to work collaboratively to increase public awareness of the value of connecting children and nature, discuss common issues and solutions, share information about opportunities, engage other agencies and organizations in shared technology, programs, and activities, and promote a national campaign to highlight the importance of connecting children and nature. Trails do and can play an integral role in re-connecting the younger generation to the natural world.

## **C. A Quiet Economic Engine**

Economic benefits have been studied in two distinct areas: 1) the direct and indirect impact of trail user expenditures and 2) the impact of trails on adjacent property values. In each case there appears to be considerable evidence that trails are a positive contributor to community economic activity and value.

For the past two decades many studies have examined and confirmed the economic contribution of trails to the economy of the host area. These studies have reported a wide range of expenditures per visit from just over \$1 to amounts greater than \$30 per visit. Parks and trails can attract visitors, extend their length of stay, and add to the collection of attractions in the area. A growing number of Americans view outdoor activities as a way for the entire family to enjoy safe and scenic recreation (NYPCA 2000).

An oft-quoted 1992 National Park Service (NPS) study of three rail trails — the Heritage Trail in rural Iowa, St. Marks Trail outside Tallahassee, and the Lafayette/Moraga Trail in the developed suburbs of San Francisco — found that trail use generated \$1.2-1.9 million annually in economic activity and pumped \$294,000 to \$630,000 into the economies of trail communities. Direct expenditures ranged from \$3.97 to \$11.02 per user for consumable items and \$130 to \$250 for durable goods associated with trail use in the prior year. Consumable items included food, lodging, transportation, and any visits to local attractions, while durable goods were primarily recreation-specific clothing and equipment (Moore et al. 1992).

More recently, the 2007 User Survey and Economic Impact Analysis on the York County Heritage Rail Trail reported average "soft good" (consumable) expenditures (72% of respondents) of \$12.66 per trip. "Hard good" expenditures (85% of respondents), mostly bicycles and bicycle-related expenses, averaged \$367 per trip. The 2007 Survey also compared results of three prior surveys that had been undertaken on the same trail beginning in 1999 when the trail opened. Hard good expenditures have remained relatively stable while soft good expenditures

have nearly doubled. It is suggested that the increase is attributable to a much longer and more developed trail system (York County Department of Parks and Recreation 2007).

A few different studies have measured the economic impact of NYS trails. A 1998 Schenectady County study focusing on the economic benefit of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail concluded that 458,000 trail users contribute \$533,570 related to trail use based on a conservative assumption of trail user expenditures and not attempting to estimate hard good expenditures (Feeney 1998). A 2008 OPRHP study (**Appendix C – Every Mile Counts – An Analysis of the 2008 Trail User Surveys**) of users of eight shared use trails around the state surveyed users regarding money they spent on soft goods on their most recent visit to the trail. The survey results concluded that trail users spend an average of \$21.20 per trail visit, with average trail expenditures ranging considerably from \$13.50 to \$40.60 per visit. The OPRHP, NPS, and York County studies each noted that the amount spent by trail users on trail-related soft good expenditures was directly related to the distance traveled by the user to get to the trail.

Snowmobiling makes a significant contribution to the NYS economy and the more than 10,000 miles of NYS snowmobile trails accommodate an estimated 70% of statewide snowmobile trail activity. The total economic impact of snowmobiling in NYS was estimated to be \$476.2 million for the 1996-1997 season. A 2003 study estimated that the snowmobiling industry contributes approximately \$850 million statewide, including \$217 million in direct expenditures. It has been generally accepted that snowmobiling is an important economic driver in many northern NY communities where it represents a major source of business income during the winter.

In the year 2000, 67 million Americans, one-third of the population, went hiking. This number is increasing annually and is having a beneficial effect on the economy. OPRHP's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan of 2009 reports that there were just under 400 million recreation days undertaken by New Yorkers engaged in walking and bike riding each year. If only 10% of this recreational activity takes place on a trail, it can be reasonably assumed that \$40 million dollars is generated in direct expenditures each year relating to trail use based on the average spending per trail visit established in the 2008 Trail User/Economic Survey.

Whenever new trails are proposed, there is the potential for neighboring property owners to express concern that their property and property values may be negatively impacted. This concern can transform into outright opposition and hinder opportunities to expand trail networks. Several studies have examined the impact of trails, particularly rail trails, on adjoining real property. Most of the studies have examined neighboring landowner attitudes towards the trail. An early study of property owners along and near the Burke-Gilman Trail concluded that the trail had no significant negative impact on properties adjacent to the trail, but did have a significant positive impact on the value of real estate, and that homes were easier to sell near the trail (Puncochar and Lagerwey 1987).

A recent Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) survey of property owners along three trails in the Albany area found that while landowners were overwhelmingly satisfied with the trail as a neighbor, there were differing rates of dissatisfaction depending on whether their property was acquired before or after trail construction. A similar relationship held true for perceptions relating to the effect of the trail on property value. While most thought that it had no effect or had no opinion on the effect, those who thought it had a negative effect were more likely to have purchased their home before the trail was constructed. Respondents from along the Mohawk Hudson Bike Hike Trail clearly stated that they thought that selling their home would be made easier by the existence of the trail. (Of the three trails surveyed, it is this trail that has been in operation the longest and had the largest percentage of survey respondents who

purchased after the trail was constructed.) The study also looked back at a prior survey and noted that the more recent study showed an increasing percentage of residents who feel their home would be easier to sell along the trail.

While the CDTC study measured perception, a Massachusetts study of communities through which the Minuteman Bikeway and Nashua River Rail Trail pass found that homes along the trail sold for a higher percentage of their asking price and sold faster than homes away from the trail within the same towns (Della Penna 2006). This result complements the findings of a survey of 2000 new home buyers undertaken by the National Association of Realtors and the National Association of Homebuilders. When asked what local amenity could influence them in their purchase of a home, the proximity of greenway trails was identified by 36% of the respondents, exceeded only by highway access (National Association of Realtors 2002).

A recent study of the Little Miami Scenic Trail measured actual sales history of single family residences along a portion of this Ohio rail trail, which has been in operation for some time. Utilizing a more direct measure (hedonic price techniques), the study concluded that single family residential home value was increased by the trail. Specifically, it related a one-foot increase in distance to the trail with a decrease in sale price of \$7.05. Studies across the United States indicate that trails increase the market value of properties within one mile of the trail, resulting in a corresponding increase in local tax revenues (Karadeniz 2008).

Trails also stimulate the economies of nearby towns. A 2008 study surveyed businesses in proximity to the Allegheny Heritage Trail. The study found that approximately one quarter of the revenue generated in these businesses was attributable to the presence of the Allegheny Heritage Trail. A majority of the respondents indicated that business had increased at least somewhat because of the trail. The Allegheny Heritage Trail Alliance, with assistance from the Progress Fund, has established a Trail Town Program to maximize the economic opportunities in communities through which the trail passes, including start-up assistance to trail-related businesses (Campos Inc. 2008).

## **D. A Spiritual Experience**

Landscapes, and the trails that run through them, are not strictly utilitarian. They can be: places that free people from artificiality and help them reconnect with nature; places of healing, regeneration and peace; and places to find spiritual solace. Walking on a trail, peddling a bike, or paddling a canoe can reconnect people with their inner selves. Trails can take people away from their everyday working lives and allow them the opportunity to find respite from distraction.

Humanity is increasingly becoming a species of passive spectators, viewing nature from a bus, at a zoo, or through a television screen. People experience nature through the experiences of others and hearing stories of what it must be like without having personal adventures of their own. Some people realize that something is missing, that something precious and real is lost. Others simply have no conception of the natural world.

Trails and the surrounding landscapes can offer a place of spiritual renewal. People need not only wilderness paths and open waterways but also places in our cities and neighborhoods where they can find a spiritual experience. Trails are indeed vital infrastructure because they provide the perfect setting for people to make a spiritual experience part of their daily lives.

## **E. Alternative Transportation: Leave the Car Home**

Trails and trail systems provide a safe and viable transportation opportunity that is an alternative to the traditional use of automobiles, buses, and other fossil fuel-powered vehicles. Well-placed

and well-designed trails can be commuter highways for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized users. Trails can also connect residential areas with businesses and community services to provide access for other daily routine errands.

The US Department of Transportation first recognized the value of non-motorized transportation in 1990 by seeking to "increase use of bicycling, and encourage planners and engineers to accommodate bicycle and pedestrian needs in designing transportation facilities for urban and suburban areas." The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) estimated that walking and bicycling displaces between 7.6 and 28.1 billion passenger vehicle miles traveled per year, saving up to 1.5 billion gallons of gas each year (FHWA, 1993). The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), passed by Congress in 1991, initiated a new era in transportation policy by establishing a major funding source for trails. In 1994, the FHWA established two national goals: 1) double the percentage of all transportation trips made by bicycling and walking from 7.9% to 15.8%, and 2) reduce by 10% the number of injuries and fatalities sustained by bicyclists and pedestrians in transportation crashes. Subsequently, ISTEA and its later reauthorizations, TEA-21, SAFETEA, and SAFETEA-LU, have been the most significant source of funding for greenway trails, with the Transportation Enhancements Program investing \$2.8 billion (NTEC 2008). According to the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, there are now over 15,000 miles of rail trails alone, with another 9,500 miles in various stages of planning ([www.railstotrails.org](http://www.railstotrails.org)).

Motorized transportation is the single largest manmade source of air pollution in the United States, responsible for producing nearly 30% of US greenhouse gases, about 80% of the carbon monoxide, more than half of the ground-level ozone, and 29% of air toxics (US EPA 2007). In 2001, Americans took 411 billion trips, 87% of which used personal transportation and 56% of which were 5 miles or less. The FHWA predicted in 1993 that walking and bicycling could displace up to 100 billion miles traveled by car, save up to 5.1 billion gallons of gasoline, and prevent 50 million tons of greenhouse gases from entering the atmosphere by 2001 (FHWA 1993). Ten years later, the total number of bicycle and walking trips had nearly doubled to 38 billion, but trips using motorized vehicles had also increased substantially, frustrating efforts to increase the percentage of non-motorized trips taken.

## **F. Education: Creating Connections between the Past and Present**

New York's historic transportation corridors, including canals and railroads, today support extensive trails networks, which not only provide us with new opportunities for recreation, transportation, and conservation, but also provide us with a connection to our historic past with glimpses of the westward expansion and industrial development of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Examples of these include the Old Erie Canal State Historic Park and the Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park. Along many of our trail corridors, interpretive materials and visitor centers highlight the importance of historic places in the development of New York State and its centers of commerce and immigration. Herkimer Home and Schoharie Crossing State Historic Sites are two such places located along the Erie Canal. This complementary relationship between trails and history can give children and adults alike a sense of place and an understanding of the enormity of past events when visiting our trails. As demonstrated along the Erie Canalway, a trail can be the catalyst for a community to establish a local museum and interpretive facilities to complement use of the trail.

Many schools utilize trails as destinations for field trips since they act as hands-on environmental classrooms where children can explore the natural world while learning to respect and protect it. A trail can serve as an outdoor classroom, giving students the opportunity to use all of their

senses to discover the resources they are learning about and encouraging them to make their own observations.

Another educational opportunity is constructing a trail, where students can learn teamwork, cooperation, communication, and even leadership skills. Trail construction also teaches safety when using hand tools and the values of minimizing disturbance to conserve resources (North American Association for Environmental Education 2002).

## **G. Green Infrastructure, Smart Growth and Conservation**

In the 1970s, conservationists worked to protect individual parcels of land. Today, while the trend is toward protection of larger interconnected networks of open space, many land conservation efforts are still haphazard and reactive. Successful land conservation requires a green infrastructure approach and a framework that preserves open spaces for conservation, recreation, and sustainable transportation. Similar to the built infrastructure of urban roads, sewers, and utilities, green infrastructure links our natural landscapes and communities.

The Green Infrastructure Work Group, led by The Conservation Fund, developed the following definition for green infrastructure in 1999: “Green infrastructure is our nation’s natural life support system — an interconnected network of waterways, wetlands, woodlands, wildlife habitats, and other natural areas; greenways, parks and other conservation lands; working farms, ranches and forests; and wilderness and other open spaces that support native species, maintain natural ecological processes, sustain air and water resources and contribute to the health and quality of life for America’s communities and people.”

Smart growth is defined as sensible, planned growth that integrates economic development and community quality-of-life. Principles of smart growth include compact, mixed-use community design, preserving open space and critical environmental areas, regional planning, and providing alternative choices for transportation. Studies have shown that the rate of land development in our nation far exceeds the rate of population growth. This suggests a problem with the pattern of growth and development, and correspondingly, how growth and development impacts natural and cultural resources. In August 2010, the *State Smart Growth Public Infrastructure Policy Act* was signed into law. The act authorizes state infrastructure agencies to create smart growth advisory committees and instructs state agencies, authorities and public corporations to align spending on infrastructure with smart growth criteria. Some of the criteria are to protect, preserve and enhance state resources such as recreation and open space, scenic areas, and significant historic and archeological resources and to provide mobility through transportation choices and reduction in automobile dependency.

Greenway trails and other trails and corridors can help to preserve the natural landscape and provide protection to environmentally sensitive areas. Trails can provide formal passageways through environmentally sensitive land and can minimize impacts to the surrounding landscape when properly planned and constructed. Without trails, informal entry into sensitive areas can result in trampled vegetation, accelerated erosion, and disturbed habitats. Natural areas are especially important in our urban and suburban areas in helping to provide clean air, clean water, habitat for wildlife, and other natural resources, along with space for people to recreate and relax. These all combine to enrich our quality of life.

## **H. Conclusion**

Throughout New York, examples abound of trails that contribute to quality of life. New York City’s greenway system connects residents to the city’s extensive waterfront and provides

opportunities for walking and biking without competing with local traffic. The Erie Canalway Trail has become a source of pride and a location for community events in cities and villages across upstate NY. Even relatively small trails provide venues for community activities and events.

From physical activity to needed contact with nature, from increased revenue and property values to environmental benefits, from connecting with others to connecting with ourselves, trails benefit everyone. With healthier lifestyles, expanding businesses, less pollution in the air, and a greater connection with nature, trails provide a path to a greener community.

## CHAPTER V: NEEDS AND TRENDS

In an effort to identify the needs and demands of NYS citizens regarding trails in the state, OPRHP conducted the 2004 General Public Recreation Survey (GPRS) and a 2008 Trail User/Economic Survey. In addition, public trails workshops were held statewide in 2008 to gather information regarding trail efforts and issues in communities and to provide an opportunity for discussion amongst user groups and levels of government regarding the development of a statewide trails network. In order to assess needs and issues facing trail managers, OPRHP conducted the 2005 Park Professional Survey of local government officials and the 2006 Trail Organization Survey. The following is a brief summary of findings for these efforts, as well as for trail activity trends.

### **A. 2004 General Public Recreation Survey**

The 2004 General Public Recreation Survey was conducted to assess the extent and types of recreation that the citizens of New York State enjoy. Approximately every five years the OPRHP Planning Bureau surveys the general public as part of its continuing planning efforts. The survey benefits the agency by affording the opportunity to hear from the general population. In January 2004, approximately 10,000 surveys were mailed to NYS residents. Over 1,100 completed forms were returned detailing the recreational activities of approximately 2,300 individuals. The survey covered four areas of importance to the planning process: recreation participation; individuals' experience with OPRHP facilities; opinions on important recreation issues; and demographic data.

Many questions in the survey included information on trails-related activities. This information was used to assess the needs and demands of the general public regarding trail use, to determine general public trends when compared to past surveys, and to provide statistics for future projections of trail-related activities.

Overall the results of this survey are consistent with the findings of previous surveys. Picnicking/relaxing in the park, walking/jogging, swimming, and biking are still among the most popular activities. The majority of the general public agrees that more recreational facilities are needed in their areas, which shows a continued desire for recreational opportunities. In addition, the public strongly supports the idea that more lands should be purchased by government for recreation and more so that government should increase spending for development of recreational facilities, including trails. The full report is attached as **Appendix D**.

### **B. 2008 Trail User/Economic Survey**

In summer 2008, OPRHP conducted a Trail User/Economic Survey along eight shared use trails in the state. Trail selection was based upon geography and having a willing trail steward who could undertake the work needed to complete the survey. With one exception, all the trails surveyed were relatively long or were a part of a larger system. All of the trails possessed the characteristics of a rail trail or towpath trail being relatively wide, flat, and firm. The trails ranged from urban to suburban to rural in character.

The survey form contained 25 questions regarding trail use and five demographic questions. Topics included general use questions about the trail including frequency and timing of trail use (daily, weekly and annually), types of activities participated in by users, duration of trail visits, and reason for trail use (recreation, commuting, health and exercise, etc). Questions were also asked pertaining to the user's most recent trail visit including the number of people with whom they visited the trail, type of activity, and miles travelled to the trail and on the trail. Surveys

were conducted between Memorial Day and Labor Day and were undertaken in partnership with the trail stewards who care for the various trails. Trail User Counts were also conducted on five of the eight trails.

The survey found that the average distance travelled on the trail was 14.0 miles. The average distance travelled to the trail was 13.5 miles with 86.3% of the trail users being local (defined here as travelling 20 miles or less to the trail). Expenditures were much lower for these local trail users than non-local visitors. Local trail users reported an average of \$9.61/trail visit, while non-local expenditures reported an average of \$179.97/trail visit, due mostly to the expenditures on accommodations which averaged \$97.0/night. The survey found that the average for users indicating an amount spent on beverages, candy/fast food, meals or fruit was \$26.60. In addition, those surveyed indicated that they spent an average of \$342.50/year on equipment for their trail activities.

See Appendix C – *Every Mile Counts – An Analysis of the 2008 Trail User Surveys* for the full report.

## **C. 2008 General Public Trails Workshops**

In spring 2008, a team from the Planning Bureau of OPRHP conducted a series of five public workshops across the state on the topic of trail development. The public meetings were held in partnership with Parks & Trails New York, a statewide non-profit organization. These workshops were held to provide the public, regional planning organizations and public officials with an opportunity to review the inventory and mapping work completed by the agency, to offer information on new opportunities to create connections between communities, parks, and ecological communities, and to express a vision for trails in their area. In particular, goals of the meetings were to: formulate a vision for a trail system in each region; identify multi-use trails which have not been identified in the existing inventory; identify linkages which are under discussion in each region; and identify obstacles and opportunities to achieving a regional trail network.

Comments were received during the workshops, as well as by mail and email. Topics that were brought up at the workshops included: suggestions for statewide trail connections including the use of utility corridors and abandoned railroad lines; the need for information about working with utility companies and about developing rail trails; the importance of continued maintenance of trails and available sources of maintenance information; trail liability issues, including the need for added protection under the General Obligations Law; recommendations and successful stories of dealing with safety issues or perceived safety issues on trails; the importance of partnerships in trails development; the need for a statewide trails website and publicly accessible database of trails information; and some use-specific comments, such as the need to unite bicycle on- and off-road groups, the need for additional horse trail opportunities, and the request for snowmobile access along canal corridors throughout the state.

In addition, participants provided regional and trail-specific comments. Many comments were received regarding developing trail connections. Some proposed connections in western NY included: interest in developing a link between Old Fort Niagara and Erie, PA; utilizing the Buffalo-Pittsburgh Railroad for trail development; a proposed connection from the Groveland Secondary Trail to the Genesee Valley Greenway; and connecting the Ontario Pathways and the Keuka Outlet. More snowmobile trail connections were requested for the central and northern areas of the state. Participants in the eastern part of the state supported connections between state

parcs and town lands and development of a trail along the Champlain Canal connecting Waterford and Whitehall (this is currently underway).

A complete listing of comments received is provided in **Appendix E - 2008 General Public Trails Workshops – Comment Summary**.

## **D. 2005 Park Professional and 2006 Trail Organization Surveys**

In addition to gathering data on the public needs and demands regarding trails, OPRHP gathered information from trail managers to assess the needs and issues they face. In 2005, OPRHP conducted a Park Professional Survey of local government officials and State Park managers and in 2006 conducted a Trail Organization Survey.

The 2005 survey was sent to every municipal government in NYS targeted to the local government recreation provider and to all State Park managers. Questions ranged from ranking recreational facility needs to recreational funding and planning efforts, as well as specific questions related to trails. Over 500 completed surveys were received from municipalities and 132 State Park managers responded.

Results from the survey indicated that hiking trails, bicycle paths and nature/interpretive trails were the top three trail facility types needed by both local government officials and park managers. State Park managers and local government officials agreed on priority of importance of trail needs with the top three responses being: trails linked to other trails; trails in rural areas; and trails connecting residential areas to schools, parks, etc. When asked about the most important physical issues related to trails, both groups ranked weather damage to trail structures, treadway maintenance, and uncontrolled undergrowth and weeds as the top three issues.

The 2006 Trail Organization Survey was conducted in conjunction with Parks & Trails New York. This survey was a shortened and modified version of the 2005 survey. Questions covered activities occurring on trails, physical and social issues related to trails and organizational concerns. Over 200 responses were received from trail organizations statewide.

Results of the survey indicated that the most frequent summer activities along trails were walking/jogging/hiking, nature interpretation and bicycling. The most frequent winter activities were snowmobiling and cross country skiing. The most frequently noted trail issues were maintenance, user safety, sources of funding, points of access to trails, and landowner concerns. The highest rated social concerns were illegal use of trails, littering and dumping, user/landowner conflicts, and trail vandalism.

See Appendix F - Results from the 2005 Park Professional Survey and Appendix G – Results from the 2006 Trail Organization Survey for more results.

## **E. Trail Activities and Trends**

The 21st century brings many challenges in meeting the recreational needs and desires of New York State's residents and visitors. As population composition, land use, and environmental conditions change, so do the types of and demand for recreational activities and available resources. New York State's population level, estimated at 19.5 million in 2009, is projected to increase only slightly over the next couple decades. However, changes in the composition of the population have been substantial due to immigration, out-migration, increase in racial diversity, and increase in proportion of senior citizens.

Numerous statistics point to a substantial increase in need for more accessible trails over the coming years. The number of New York State residents over the age of 60 is projected to

increase by 52.6% by the year 2030 and the GPRS of 2004 shows that “walking for pleasure” is enjoyed by 57% of residents over the age of 60. This translates into a substantial projected increase in the number of walkers over the age of 60. Meanwhile, 20.6% of the population above the age of 5 is considered to have a disability and approximately 92% of New York State’s residents live in urban areas, illustrating a great need for accessible urban trails.

Further emphasis on the need for accessible urban trails is provided by the NYS Department of Health in its 2004 report “New York State Strategic Plan for Overweight and Obesity Prevention,” which emphasizes the importance of physical activity during leisure time for the promotion of health. The report says that walking, running, and bicycling are among the most frequently mentioned physical activities during leisure time and it stresses the importance of accessibility to sites on which to participate in these activities.

Meanwhile, there is an increasing need to improve the physical fitness levels of today’s youth, who are spending less time participating in outdoor recreational activities. This is a factor in the rise of childhood obesity and its associated health concerns. There is a need to increase public awareness about the value of connecting children and nature toward a goal of improving the knowledge of our state’s natural resources and the health and welfare of our youth.

Another trend that affects trail use is the continual increase in the economic gap between the affluent and the poor. As a result, activities with higher costs will decrease in total participation while those activities that are most accessible and free of cost will increase in demand. Travel and recreational activities dependent on gasoline will become more uncertain due to cost and availability. This could impact trail activities such as snowmobiling, ATV/ORV use, boating, and equestrian activities, which often require transport to trailheads.

Based on the 2004 GPRS, which is consistent with previous surveys, the most popular trail-related activities are overwhelmingly pedestrian, in terms of both the number of participants and the number of activity days (a product of the number of participants and the average number of days per year that each participant is active). Even more significant is the combined participation in activities that are accommodated on greenway trails, including bicycling and rollerblading in addition to pedestrian activities. The GPRS also indicates strong support for purchase of lands for open space and recreation, increased access to and safety of water resources, and the development, maintenance, and repair of recreational facilities.

**Hiking** is an activity enjoyed by many people at different levels of difficulty. As an activity, hiking ranges from a short, informal walk at a nature center to a multi-day backpacking trek through the wilderness. Involvement in hiking is predicted to be fairly flat over the projection period with a very slight decrease in number of participants offset by an increase in the number of days of hiking per participant.

**Bicycling** is one of America’s major outdoor recreation and transportation activities. The transportation component will likely grow in importance as the cost of gasoline and concerns over environmental issues increase in the future. Projections based on the 2004 GPRS indicate both the number of participants and bicycle days/year will increase about 3% by 2025. Because bicycling is an important mode of transportation, and because much of the recreational bicycling takes place on public roads, an important component of improving this activity is increased safety.

Over 1 million New Yorkers participate in **cross-country skiing** and/or **snowshoeing** at least once a year, generating over 4 million activity days. Both the number of participants and activity

days are expected to increase between now and 2025, although the potential effects of climate change have not been taken into account in these projections.

**Equestrian** activities are popular throughout New York State and are important to many local economies. Results from the 2004 GPRS indicate that over 5% of the state's population had participated in this activity at least once during the previous 12 months. The average number of days per participant was 22, with those under 20 years old riding more than 30 days/year and senior citizens about 10 days/year. The projections for this activity indicate that between 2005 and 2025 there will be a modest increase of about 1.77% in the number of participants. However, a small decrease in the number of activity days per participant will result in the number of equestrian activity days remaining flat for this period. Nonetheless, there are areas of the state for which these participants need additional trails and other facilities.

Based on the 2004 GPRS, approximately 6.4% of New York's population participates in **all-terrain vehicle (ATV)** or other **off-road vehicle (ORV)** use. Among those who do participate, the mean level of participation was 6.5 days per year. Over the projection period, due to aging of the population and other factors, the percent of New Yorkers engaging in this activity will decline to 5.9%, but the frequency of participation will remain about the same. At the present time, most public lands are not available for use by this group of recreationists and consequently most of the trails that may be used by this group are on private lands. Although long term participation in this activity is expected to decrease, ATV registration has been increasing in recent years.

**Snowmobiling** is an important part of the economy in many remote New York communities. A 2003 report indicated that spending attributable to snowmobiling was in excess of \$800 million. This figure includes expenditures not only on equipment, but insurance, maintenance, gasoline, and travel. The number of snowmobiles registered in New York State has decreased from approximately 166,000 in 2002-03 to 130,000 in 2006-07. Current projections are that snowmobiling will continue to decrease by about 5% both in number of participants and activity days by 2025. Snowmobiling could become more popular should the industry continue to become more "green" in terms of noise and air pollution abatement as well as fuel efficiency.

New York State has abundant water resources and most areas of the state provide numerous facilities for **boating**. According to the 2004 GPRS, the following percentages of the population participated in boating activities at least once during 2004: almost 19% for boating (with a motor); over 17% for rowboating/canoeing/kayaking; and over 3% for sailing. Combining the types of boating, almost 30% of the population participated in one or more boating activities during 2004. Boating was noted as the most popular non-winter activity that respondents would like to participate in but are unable to for various reasons. Over 20% of respondents indicated that additional boating/water access facilities were needed in their area. According to the most recent SCORP, the participation rate change for this activity is expected to only slightly increase over the next 15 years.



# CHAPTER VI: STATEWIDE TRAILS SYSTEM – CREATING CONNECTIONS

New York’s landscape includes a large patchwork of trails, parks, greenways, and other public open spaces. Creating connections among these areas is critical, both to allow wildlife to move freely from place to place and to enhance the quality of life of our state’s citizens in numerous ways. Development of a trails and open space fabric across the state will advance “smart growth” objectives, contribute toward a healthy citizenry, help meet the needs of underserved populations, increase property values, and otherwise generally improve quality of life.

A system can be defined as a group of interacting, interrelated, or interdependent elements forming a complex whole, or as a social, economic, or political organizational form (<http://dictionary.com>). A statewide trails system provides the opportunity for all parts of the state to be connected through interrelated networks of trails, and for the many benefits of trails to be equitably distributed across the state. A statewide system provides public access to public places, provides sustainable travel opportunities within the state, promotes interaction among all New Yorkers, and allows residents and visitors to better appreciate the entire state, its communities, its varied landscape, and its wealth of natural, recreational, cultural, and historical resources at a desirable pace.

The primary objective for New York’s Statewide Trails System is the creation of connections: between people and nature, among residents and visitors, among all levels of government, between government and citizenry, between communities and open spaces, between private enterprise and public goods, bridging concepts and development, connecting habitats separated by urban sprawl, and advancing knowledge for public benefit. In addition, the Statewide Trails System provides connections with New York’s neighbors: Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, Quebec, and Ontario.

## **A. Vision and Goals**

### **Vision**

New York’s Statewide Trails System is envisioned as interconnected world-class networks of land and water trails that: are designed to be sustainable; provide a multitude of recreational opportunities; conserve the environment; connect parks, forests, open spaces, historic and cultural sites, public facilities, communities, and neighborhoods; attract economic opportunities; provide for alternative means of transportation; support tourism; promote the health and well-being of state residents; and otherwise enhance our quality of life as they allow people and wildlife to freely move across the diverse landscapes of New York State.

### **Goal 1: Cultivate Development of a Statewide Trails System**

#### **Objectives**

- Foster the development of trail connections between natural, recreational, and cultural areas, including parks, forests, greenways, blueways, historic sites, public facilities, businesses, educational institutions, communities, and neighborhoods.
- Develop a Statewide Trails Clearinghouse to include a statewide trails website and a comprehensive inventory of NYS trails.
- Utilize existing linear corridors (parkways, railroads, utility ROWs, canals, rivers) in the development of trail systems.

- Coordinate with federal and state agencies and utility companies to ensure that transportation and utility corridors are considered for trail systems and use in their design, operation, and maintenance.
- Incorporate water access into transportation and other projects and programs that are associated with water bodies (e.g. hydroelectric, Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP)).
- Continue efforts through constituency groups to strengthen and expand, as needed, provisions of the General Obligations Law, to protect landowners who allow responsible public recreational use of their lands.
- Facilitate the acquisition of corridors for use in developing regional trail systems.

**Goal 2: Provide opportunities for all New Yorkers to have easy access to trails.**

**Objectives**

- Create and encourage the creation of new trail opportunities close to where people live.
- Provide and improve trails and trail information for persons with disabilities. Ensure that new trails are designed for maximum accessibility.
- Improve intermodal transportation facilities to support trail user needs and improve accessibility.
- Accommodate all trail activities based on relative needs and demands as well as compatibility with resources.

**Goal 3: Increase education about, cultivate support for, and promote the use of New York State trails among the general public.**

**Objectives**

- Increase public awareness of the health, economic, social, educational, and environmental benefits of New York State's trails to strengthen support for trail development, maintenance, and use.
- Promote trail activities and programs that encourage children and youth to connect with nature; encourage use of trails in environmental education programs.
- Encourage the use of trails to increase physical activity and combat the obesity epidemic as well as reduce the risk for many chronic diseases and some forms of cancer.
- Promote and improve trail user education programs.
- Develop educational and promotional content for a statewide trails website.
- Coordinate a statewide National Trails Day promotion in conjunction with the American Hiking Association and trails groups within NYS.
- Promote trails in statewide and regional tourism campaigns.

#### **Goal 4: Advance environmental resource protection and sustainability in the development and management of trails.**

##### **Objectives**

- Foster the development of ecological corridors in the development of trail corridors.
- Provide resource protection guidance including information on methods and best management practices in trail design, development, and management.
- Utilize the latest environmental information and construction techniques to aid in the design and management of trails.
- Develop trail systems that are sustainable over time.

#### **Goal 5: Promote communication, cooperation, and coordination among all government entities, landowners, user groups, and other non-governmental organizations involved in trail planning, development, management, and maintenance.**

##### **Objectives**

- Integrate trails into the state, regional, and local planning processes.
- Establish a federal and state interagency working group on trail planning and development.
- Encourage local communities to include trails as an essential and mainstream element of infrastructure planning.
- Facilitate statewide and regional workshops to encourage regional planning, improve communications, and provide information on trail-related topics.
- Encourage partnership agreements between trail user groups, private and not-for-profit organizations, and land management agencies to enhance or develop new trail opportunities.
- Maintain the New York State Trails Council to function as a forum to discuss trail-related issues.
- Advance a system of signage for all types of trails along highways and state roads in partnership with NYS DOT.

#### **Goal 6: Conduct research to aid in the planning and management of trails.**

##### **Objectives**

- Monitor trends in trail activities through surveys, registrations, sales figures, and the experiences of other states.
- Conduct economic impact studies of trails and establish a model for trail managers to use.
- Establish a standardized trail count protocol that can be applied to greenway trails throughout the state.
- Utilize GIS and GPS to gather, analyze, and disseminate trails data.

#### **Goal 7: Provide adequate funding and support for trails projects from various sources.**

##### **Objectives**

- Encourage and support sustained federal and state funding and programs that enhance trails planning, trail acquisition, development, and maintenance.

- Partner with foundations and corporations for matching funds.
- Publicize Federal, State, and local grant funding opportunities for trail building and maintenance.
- Encourage preparation of National Register of Historic Places nominations for historic corridors to make structures eligible for EPF Historic Preservation Grants.
- Pursue alternatives to direct funding, such as, donations of land, creation of trail easements, acquisition by private organizations (e.g. land trusts), and endowments.
- Seek corporate or individual contributions to fund signage projects.
- Explore options with friends groups, foundations, organizations, and businesses for matching funds, grants, donations of money, materials and/or labor (volunteer days), and technical expertise (e.g. donated engineer services).

## **B. Statewide Trails Framework**

New York State's primary trails are comprised of both land-based and water-based trails of national, statewide, or regional significance that form the basis for a statewide network. These are generally trails, either existing or under development, which are long in distance and form a framework for governmental planning initiatives and for the development of interconnected regional and local trail systems. Examples of primary trails include the Appalachian Trail, Canalway Trails, Finger Lakes Trail, Genesee Valley Greenway, Harlem Valley Rail Trail, Long Island Greenbelt Trail, Long Path, North Country Trail, Northern Forest Canoe Trail, Northville-Placid Trail, and primary corridor snowmobile trails.

Secondary trails are generally shorter in length than primary trails and cross fewer political boundaries. Secondary trails often provide linkages to support services, attractions, and communities from the primary trail system, and they include trails within parks and other open spaces that are connected by primary trails. Although intended to be part of an interconnected network of trails, in many instances the connection between a secondary and a primary trail may not exist. Even shorter are stand-alone trails, often locally important but not connected to a trails network of statewide significance.

It is impractical to group all of the state's diverse trails together in a universal hierarchal system. Therefore, the framework for the Statewide Trails System consists of separate networks. For the purposes of this plan, three trails networks are included: greenway trails, long distance hiking trails, and water trails. Networks not included in this plan include the NYS snowmobile trails system, planned and managed separately by the OPRHP Snowmobile Unit, and recreational highway routes (bicycle routes and tourist routes), planned and managed by other agencies. Horse, mountain bike, and cross country ski trails are generally systems of loops confined within a limited area or which utilize segments of greenway and/or hiking trails; interpretive trails are often a single loop or short path; and ATV or four wheel drive trails generally occur within areas or regions of the state; therefore, these types of trails are not part of the statewide trails system.

The Statewide Trails System builds on and enhances existing trails networks and trails development efforts. Many trails have been created over the years through the efforts of both professionals and volunteers within both government agencies and non-governmental organizations. These trails traverse many political divisions and land ownerships, and as development increases, the ability to create new trails becomes more difficult. Some of the best opportunities are provided by the joint and adaptive reuse of existing or abandoned corridors, including canal systems, railroad lines, aqueducts, and utility rights-of-way, as well as river

valleys, highway corridors, and parkways. It is important to develop partnerships or acquire corridors as they become available; once the linear system is segmented it is more difficult to develop a contiguous trail.

## 1. Greenway Trails Network

The Statewide Trails System's network of greenway trails is an amalgam of diverse shared use trails that have been developed over many years through the efforts of state and local government agencies and non-governmental organizations. This is a network of rail trails, canal trails, parkway trails, riverfront trails, and other multi-purpose trails, many of which have become internationally known and attract users from around the world. These include the Canalway Trail along the famed and historic 524-mile New York State Canal System, New York City's busy Hudson River Greenway, the scenic 90-mile-long Genesee Valley Greenway extending southward from Rochester, the historic 26-mile-long Old Croton Trailway in Westchester County, the 1.28 mile Walkway over the Hudson, and the 46-mile-long Harlem Valley Rail Trail under development in eastern New York. The NYS greenway trails network is envisioned to connect these existing trails with each other and with all areas of the state, providing state residents with multiple recreational opportunities. Although the Hudson River Valley Greenway Trail is currently composed of a multitude of shorter trails along the Hudson River from Saratoga County to New York City, the vision for a continuous land trail to span the Hudson Valley is worth noting. The Niagara River Greenway Commission, as well, is in the process of developing of a system of greenway trails to connect the Niagara River region.

The Greenway Trails Network map [**Figure 1**] includes all rail trails, canal trails, and parkway shared use trails in the state (see **Appendix H** for the listing of Greenway Trails). These existing primary greenway trails are generally longer trails due to the nature of the existing corridor and are envisioned to become a part of the Statewide Trails System. Proposed trails are shown to connect cities and towns across the state into the greenway trails network, and also to connect secondary and stand-alone trails within the larger network. Many of these trails have been formally proposed for development by local or state government agencies or by local interest groups. Other trail segments shown as proposed were selected based on the most logical route to make the connection within the statewide system, often using abandoned or existing rail corridors. It is recognized that future trail alignments and development may vary from the proposed trail alignments but it is more important to acknowledge the connections that can be made. In some cases, a parallel trail may be developed; in other cases, an alternate alignment may be developed; and yet in other cases, with additional review, a feasible connection may not be found.

The New York City Greenway Trails Network map [**Figure 2**] depicts all existing and proposed greenway trails that provide an extensive network throughout the five boroughs. Development of these trails is the result of the city's vision to enrich the lives of all New Yorkers as presented through the release of *A Greenway Plan for New York City* in 1993. Over 140 miles of greenway trails are complete. This trail network services a significant portion of the state's population and is included as part of the state's greenway trails network.

## 2. Long Distance Hiking Trails Network

New York State's network of hiking trails began to be developed nearly a century ago when the newly formed New York – New Jersey Trail Conference (NYNJTC) completed the first section of the Appalachian Trail in Harriman and Bear Mountain State Parks in 1923 and the

newly formed Adirondack Mountain Club built the 133-mile-long Northville-Placid Trail, also in the 1920s. Since that time, non-governmental organizations and volunteers have been at the forefront of the development of New York's long distance hiking trails, which form the basis of the statewide network. The 562-mile-long Finger Lakes Trail, first conceived in 1961, is New York's longest trail.

Although NYS long distance hiking trails are mostly complete, there are significant segments yet to be developed, including the Adirondack portion of the North Country National Scenic Trail, sections of the New York portion of the Great Eastern Trail (Crystal Hills Trail), and the Highlands Trail east of the Hudson River. NYNJTC's Long Path is envisioned to extend into the Adirondacks; however, a route has not yet been chosen.

The Long Distance Hiking Trails Network map [Figure 3] shows all long distance hiking trails within the state. These are defined as hiking trails that are maintained by an established organization or agency and are desirable for a linear overnight hiking trip (available camping facilities and locations will vary). Regional and local hiking trails, such as those found within the extensive trail systems of the Adirondack and Catskill Parks, are generally shorter than long distance trails and, although they may also be used for multi-day hiking trips, are not shown on the map.

### **3. Water Trails Network**

New York State's waterways extend into every region of the state and many have been used for travel since early times. In recent years, formal water trails have developed to provide recreational opportunities throughout the state. The Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River received federal designation in 1978. The Hudson River Watertrail Association was formed in 1992 to assist in the development of a NYS water trail from the Atlantic Ocean to Canada. The Hudson River Greenway Water Trail has been developed since 1994. The Northern Forest Canoe Trail and the Lake Champlain Paddlers' Trail were also developed in the 1990s. Recently, the NYS Canalway Water Trail was established which includes the Erie, Champlain, Cayuga-Seneca and Oswego Canal systems. The Statewide Trails System brings all long distance water trails in NYS together into a comprehensive assemblage of segments [Figure 4] that were developed independent of one another, allowing for a vision of a statewide network of water trails. There are many more localized water trails throughout the state that are not shown here.

The Statewide Trails Plan combines the three statewide trails networks into a **Statewide Trails Framework** [Figure 5] to show a comprehensive system that reaches all areas and provides connectivity throughout the state. These three networks are not independent of each other but truly interconnect the parks, forests, open spaces, historic and cultural sites, public facilities, communities, and neighborhoods to allow people and wildlife to freely move across the landscape. From mountain tops to deep river gorges, from backcountry wilderness areas to highly urbanized environs, the communities of NYS are linked by land and water trails.

### **4. Interstate Connections**

Beyond the trails that are part of the Statewide Trails System are connections with similar trails in neighboring states and provinces, as part of regional or national networks, or on an individual basis. For example, existing downstate greenway trails are used for the East Coast Greenway which is currently under development as a greenway trail system linking major cities along the eastern seaboard between Calais, Maine and Key West, Florida. Upstate, the Delaware and Hudson Rail Trail straddles the border between Vermont and New York.

Although mostly undeveloped on the New York side, it has been given special OPRHP designation as a “cross-border snowmobile trail” for the purposes of interstate snowmobile travel, allowing snowmobilers to use the trail without NYS registration. The potential exists for many more interstate greenway trail connections, most notably with Connecticut between Brewster (NY) and Danbury (CT), along New Jersey’s northern border, and with Pennsylvania including between Rochester (NY) and Williamsport (PA) along the Genesee River and Pine Creek corridors (newly named the Triple Divide Trail System).

There are many interstate connections involving hiking trails. Two National Scenic Trails pass through New York State: the Appalachian Trail, connecting with New Jersey and Connecticut; and the North Country Trail, currently connecting with Pennsylvania with the potential for a future Vermont connection via the Crown Point Bridge. The Great Eastern Trail, being developed from Alabama to New York as an alternative to the Appalachian Trail, connects the Finger Lakes Trail in Steuben County with Pennsylvania. The Conservation Trail, the longest branch trail in the Finger Lakes Trail System, unofficially connects with the Bruce Trail, Canada's oldest and longest footpath, via the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge. The Long Path, Shawangunk Ridge Trail, and Highlands Trail all connect with New Jersey. The Highlands Trail is also projected to connect with Connecticut in the future. The Taconic Crest Trail straddles the eastern border of NYS, connecting with both Massachusetts and Vermont.

Much of NYS is bordered by water bodies and this provides many interstate water trail connections. The Northern Forest Canoe Trail connects NYS with Vermont. The Lake Champlain Paddlers' Trail connects with Vermont and Quebec. The NYS Canalway Water Trail extends to both Lake Champlain and the Niagara River, allowing for potential connections with both Vermont and Ontario. The New York City Water Trail system borders New Jersey. The Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River borders Pennsylvania and connects downriver with New Jersey as part of the longest undammed river east of the Mississippi, extending 330 miles from the confluence of its East and West branches at Hancock, NY to the Atlantic Ocean. The Chemung Basin River Trail connects with Pennsylvania and its extensive Susquehanna River Water Trail system.

Development and maintenance of interstate connections requires interstate trails planning and coordination. State trails planners, regional planning organizations, and user groups of adjacent states could all be involved to explore future opportunities. As with the statewide networks, existing linear corridors could be utilized in the development of these trails. Interstate connections provide corridors by which people and wildlife can move across the landscape, create added potential for tourism and allow people to explore new areas via an alternate means of transportation across state borders. They provide additional connections between parks, forests, open spaces, historic and cultural sites, public facilities, communities, and neighborhoods as extensions to the Statewide Trails System.

## **C. Trail Issues and Strategies**

All trails provide opportunities and challenges. There are many considerations when designing, developing, maintaining, upgrading, and rehabilitating trails. This plan identifies the following ten trail issues as significant considerations during planning, development, and maintenance of trails. Detailed strategies are provided to address each of these trail issues.

In an effort to address many trail issues within New York State Parks, OPRHP has developed a series of technical documents. These documents provide standards and guidelines for trail development, trail signage, trail closure/site restoration, and trail assessments, among other topics. The series is available for public use at <http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/recreation/trails/technical-assistance.aspx>. There are many more resources available from a wide variety of agencies and organizations to help implement strategies and address trail issues. State and federal partner agencies and trail organization websites are listed at <http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/recreation/trails/partners.aspx>.

## **1. Development and Design**

The need and demand for new trails near home and work will likely grow over the coming years, continuing to spark interest in the creation of trails. Local and regional land-use planning can play a key role in protecting open space for future trail development even when funding is not currently available. New trail development can become problematic when availability of land for trails is limited, landowner permission can not be secured, or resources to manage and maintain the trail decrease.

Different types of trail users are often in competition for the same trail corridor. Constructing parallel trails in close proximity to one another may, however, pose environmental and managerial problems. Sustainability of trails, in terms of both physical construction and the ability to apply resources for long-term maintenance, should be considered before a new trail is built or before adding new user groups to an existing trail. The public expects all trails to be well-maintained and sustainable.

The public's role in providing input on trail uses, type of trail surface, positive or negative impacts of the trail, and trail management, can lead to many conflicting desires that require careful analysis and resolution. Given the chance to provide input, people are more likely to advocate for trails, invest their time in trail maintenance, and develop a sense of ownership of the trail.

### **Strategies**

- Work with local governments and regional planning organizations to develop plans for regional trail systems to connect homes, work places, schools, open space, and recreation areas.
- Maximize the involvement of interested individuals and groups, including landowners, businesses, community groups, municipalities, and the general public, in the process of planning new trails.
- Identify and facilitate the use of existing corridors for community trails and work toward their permanent protection as public open space.
- Consider the impact of climate change in design and location of new trails.
- Locate trailheads and road crossings to maximize the safety of trail users.
- Consider desired trail experience, expected intensity of use, resistance to vandalism and weather, environmental conditions, and the impact on historical resources in the design of trails and trail amenities.
- Use sustainable design techniques and standards when constructing trails to ensure long term use and protection of resources.

## **2. Trail Access**

Providing information on access at the trailhead and through various types of media is critical for people's use and enjoyment of the trail. Trail access can take the form of a roadside pull-off, a trailhead with a dedicated parking area, or a "walk-in" point from a sidewalk, roadway, or other trail. Access points should be planned, designed, and maintained to reflect the type and level of use desired. Trailheads and their associated facilities, such as rest rooms and parking lots, should be accessible to persons with disabilities. Providing enhanced access to trails is an important goal of this trails plan and a concern for those who manage a trail.

### **Strategies**

- Consider appropriate access points in the design of new trails to include sufficient space for the trailhead and parking.
- Consult with state and/or local DOTs when determining locations of new parking areas.
- Keep parking areas and trailheads clean and well-maintained to attract users and discourage unauthorized activities.
- Design trails to the extent possible to be accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Provide Universal Trail Assessment Process (UTAP) training to foster the design and modification of trails to make them more accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Support efforts to undertake UTAP assessments.
- Ensure that new trails and trails to be rehabilitated are developed considering proposed ADA guidelines.

## **3. Signage**

Every trail can benefit from a carefully crafted signage plan. Signs in nearby communities can direct visitors to the nearest trailhead while signs on the trail or at trailheads can direct users to services and points of interest in communities. Often overlooked are the signs which must be placed on public highways to inform motorists of entrances to trailheads and warn of pedestrian crossings.

### **Strategies**

- Utilize a trail signage manual that conveys sign standards and guides signage design and installation along trails, at trailheads and intersections, in parking areas, at road and trail intersections, and along approach roads.
- Ensure that trail signage includes trail characteristics such as allowable uses, surface conditions, slope, trail length, distance between rests, and distance to significant barriers to a person with limited mobility, etc.
- Consider the installation of distance markers along trails to aid in management and emergency response.
- Provide sufficient and clear road signage directing trail users to trailhead parking areas and trail crossings at roads.
- Utilize universal symbols in trail signage.
- Assure that signage is adequately maintained and replaced as necessary by documenting signs and locations and establishing a maintenance schedule.

## **4. Education, Interpretation, and Promotion**

It is likely that trails developed along old transportation corridors such as railroad lines or canals may have historical significance and historic or archeological resources that are listed on or may be eligible for listing on the State or National Register of Historic Places. Most trail managers and trail organizations will use the history and historic resources of a corridor as an interpretive tool to add diversity and interest to the trail. Features such as tow paths, bridges, culverts, and canal prisms, as well as adjacent buildings, structures, districts, sites, and objects, are usually historically significant and warrant preservation and adaptive reuse. Determining the historical significance and preserving, repairing, and properly interpreting these features is a challenging but important aspect of trail planning and management which requires special expertise. This process may also be expensive, however, these properties are often eligible for grants and other incentives that help reduce these costs. Additionally, these projects produce many benefits and are often the product of creative community partnerships.

### **Strategies**

- Inventory, research, protect, and interpret historic structures and archeological resources along trail corridors.
- Promote trail use by engaging local populations in programs, such as school activities, health walks, nature walks, historical tours, hike or bike-a-thons, and trail festivals, to foster a greater appreciation for natural, cultural, and historical resources.
- Partner with local businesses to provide incentives to encourage use of trails.
- Develop press releases for trail events.
- Provide trail information and promote trail use through official publications, such as guides, brochures, and maps, at trailheads, on websites, and through events.
- Partner with health agencies and organizations to promote trail use as a health benefit.
- Promote the many benefits of trails to broaden support.
- Promote trails in statewide and regional tourism campaigns; develop a coordinated program of trail promotion with an annual trails promotion work plan that involves multiple state agencies assuming different responsibilities.
- Foster trails as an economic asset to the State and local communities and as an asset to enhance tourism.
- Increase local education on benefits of trails to promote landowner and community support.
- Encourage trail users to join trail organizations and friends groups.
- Encourage a sense of community ownership of trails.

## **5. Environmental Management**

Trails are developed based on anticipated allowable uses, an expected or desired level of use and utilizing a design standard that serves that level of use and permitted types of use. Clearly a trail is overused when the physical structure is incapable of sustaining use without degradation of the trail or the surrounding environment. Such overuse usually results in the

degradation of the trail experience. Overuse is not sustainable and should be rectified by either lowering the level of use of the trail or raising the design standard to mitigate the types and levels of use. The trail standards and guidelines in Chapter VI Section D help to assure checks and balances needed so that overuse does not occur or is addressed to correct the problems.

Invasive species are non-native to the ecosystem under consideration that cause or are likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health (NYS Legislature 2008). Invasive species can alter ecological communities by displacing native species and changing the community structure or its ecological functions. Disturbances associated with trail and road construction create ideal conditions for establishment of invasive species. In natural areas these species often first appear at trail heads and along parking lots (CT DEP 2007). Signage and other educational strategies along with monitoring and maintenance should be used to prevent and control the spread of invasive species along trails.

### **Strategies**

- Educate trail users about modes of transmission of invasive species and preventive measures.
- Conduct training sessions for trail maintainers on how to identify, remove, and dispose of invasive species.
- Utilize appropriate design guidelines in the development and rehabilitation of trails.
- Consider environmental conditions and plant and wildlife habitat, and animal movement corridors when planning and developing trails.
- Encourage users to stay on trails for safety and protection of resources.
- Assess trail locations and consider relocation or closing trails (seasonally if appropriate) which are in sensitive areas.
- Consider the following actions to help disperse users and/or avoid overuse of trails:
  - Limit trailhead parking
  - Limit access points
  - Modify trail design standards to accommodate greater use
  - Limit group size
  - Institute a permit system
  - Limit specific trail uses to specified times (temporal distribution)
  - Identify and encourage the use of alternate trails.

## **6. Maintenance**

Maintenance can include everything from resurfacing the trail to picking up litter. Trail user groups, organizations, and volunteers often assist with daily maintenance of trails, such as litter removal, mowing, and pruning. In fiscally difficult times, public agencies may be forced to defer routine maintenance. Backlogs can develop quickly and can lead to unsightly or unsafe conditions. Small problems can evolve into big capital projects when not addressed

in a timely fashion. The appearance of the trail, such as the presence of litter and dumping, can influence a person's willingness to use a trail.

Many trails are located on routes not initially developed for trail use. Some trails may have started out as logging roads that traverse areas not sustainable for continued trail use. These types of trails may have wet areas, steep slopes, ruts, or other poor conditions because they were not designed for use as trails. Social trails are not designed or planned but simply develop through use over time.

Controlling undergrowth and overgrowth is a basic maintenance issue. The main components of the trail corridor include the vertical and horizontal clearances and the treadway. Tree roots can lift and destroy pavement and compromise other trail surfaces. Undergrowth can reduce the clearance width of a trail significantly if not kept pruned back or mowed. Overgrowth can obstruct uses of a trail if it lowers the vertical clearance.

Weather will continually impact trail conditions as signs fade, trail surfaces soften, and wooden structures decay. Weather events such as severe thunderstorms, hurricanes, heavy snowstorms, and ice storms can be highly destructive as they wash out trails, bring down trees, or create other dangerous conditions. Water runoff, if not managed, can impact the trail surface.

### **Strategies**

- Adhere to design standards in constructing or rehabilitating trails.
- Encourage the use of regularly scheduled trail monitoring and maintenance that includes inspection and assessment of trail conditions, use, signage, and structures followed by prompt repair.
- Foster the development of partnerships and "friends" groups to encourage community involvement, promote stewardship, and assist with trail maintenance.
- Support and pursue trail adoption programs for individuals and groups to assume maintenance responsibilities.
- Establish clear lines of communication between landowners and trail maintainers in order to review trail maintenance responsibilities and conditions and to address issues as they arise.
- Acknowledge and recognize the work of all groups and volunteers for their efforts on trails.
- Sponsor and publicize volunteer trail work days (with fun events) to involve community members in trail maintenance.
- Encourage the donation of materials, equipment, and labor by local businesses to relieve maintenance costs.
- Conduct trainings in best practices for management or maintenance as needed.
- Ensure maintenance of critical transportation systems that are part of a trail system, i.e. road shoulders and sidewalks.

## **7. Landowner Relations**

Many trails have been established on private property by the landowner or with the permission of the landowner, and many trails pass close to adjoining parcels of private land.

Whether a trail passes on or near private property, landowners are concerned with a number of issues, including liability, vandalism, litter, privacy, property value, and safety. Although these issues are often more perceived problems than actual problems, landowner concerns must be taken seriously and respected. Relations with landowners can become strained when use of the trail goes beyond the permission given, when trespassing occurs in areas not open to the public, when vandalism of private property occurs, when a trail is constructed in a way that is undesirable to the landowner, or when trail users engage in an activity that intrudes visually or audibly. A potential result is the trail being closed to the public or certain recreational activities being eliminated.

Communication with landowners is an often overlooked investment of energy when trails are being planned. Property owners are often much more amenable to solving problems when communication is good from the start of the planning process and continues on a regular basis. Meetings with property owners can do a great deal to suppress opposition to trails and to satisfy or eliminate landowner concerns.

### **Strategies**

- Involve landowners and adjoining property owners in the trail planning process.
- Provide guidance to trail managers and stewards in landowner relations.
- Ensure that trail users are aware when trails cross private property and encourage respect of landowners and their desires.
- Install vegetative screening, fences or other barriers to prevent trespass in problem areas.
- Close social trails that lead to adjoining private property.
- Assure open lines of communication with landowners regarding trail issues and provide contact information of trail managers.
- Publicly thank landowners (with their consent) who open their land for trail use.

## **8. Liability**

Despite the rarity of a lawsuit involving trail use, a common concern of landowners is their liability in the event that someone is hurt while using a trail or while trespassing on their property. Significant protection is provided to landowners through the “Recreational Use Statute” (Article 9, Title 1, Section 9-103) of the NYS General Obligations Law (GOL). The GOL provides that a landowner “owes no duty to keep the premises safe for entry or use by others” for a number of named recreational uses. While the law does not prevent lawsuits, it encourages landowners to open their property to recreational use and has made it very difficult to recover damages that result from the simple negligence of the landowner. The GOL has proven to be a powerful tool in opening private land to recreational activities and has been expanded over time.

It may be prudent for trail owners and management organizations to carry liability insurance no matter what protections are offered by law. Liability insurance, often carried by homeowners and landowners, can provide for the defense of trail managers and landowners should legal action be brought as a result of an accident involving a trail user. Publicly owned trails are usually covered in the same way as other municipal land, such as park land. The GOL has helped to limit the cost of insurance. In 2002, several insurance providers stopped offering policies to snowmobile clubs for their activities, and in 2003, the remaining insurance provider left the market, leaving clubs with no coverage. The New York State

Snowmobile Association in partnership with OPRHP acquired a statewide policy that included an aggressive defense strategy using the GOL along with risk management. Since 2003, the cost of the policy has fallen to less than half its original cost and provides better coverage for the clubs and their members.

### **Strategies**

- Provide clear and concise information to landowners, including the protection afforded by the General Obligations Law.
- Continue efforts through constituency groups to strengthen and expand, as needed, provisions of the General Obligations Law, to protect landowners who allow responsible public recreational use of their lands.
- Encourage insurance companies to make available liability coverage for trail maintenance organizations, individual trail adopters, and landowners who allow public access to trails on their property.
- Develop a publication of best management practices for trail risk management.

## **9. User Conflicts and Illegal Use**

Whenever there is more than one user on a trail, the potential exists for conflicts between users. Conflict is most notable on shared use trails, often when one type of user objects to another type of user utilizing the same trail. Conflicts are often related to expectations of users, environmental values, and the level of tolerance for others. Conflicts can be minimized with adequate planning and communication among all user groups. Trail planners need to take into account the historical uses of an existing trail corridor and the potential conflicts that may occur if new uses are introduced. Conflicts can also occur when the levels of certain types of use are not perceived during the planning process. For example, a narrow paved greenway trail that is used by many faster-paced roller bladers or bikers is likely to generate conflict. Considering the trend to make trails universally accessible to older persons and persons with disabilities, there is a potential for more conflicts in the future.

Greenway trails are typically designed for the greatest diversity of trail users. If the management or maintenance of a greenway trail is delegated to a specific user group or organization, there is the potential that conflicts will not be perceived or resolved in a fair manner. Trail users may perceive that they do not have a voice within the organization and are being treated unfairly. Management of greenway trails must be reflective of all allowable uses.

Illegal use of a trail occurs when the trail is used in a manner other than its intended purpose. This can have a negative impact for those users who are properly utilizing the trail as well as adversely impacting the trail and environmental resources. Illegal uses may involve the same or different type of trail activity.

### **Strategies**

- Limit uses of trails to those that can be sustainably accommodated based on trail design and impact of use.
- Consider the needs of the various user groups in the trail development planning process.
- Actively seek user input on trail issues and address their concerns.

- Foster the development of trail friends groups that involve all trail interests, including users, managers, maintainers, landowners, and other local residents, and incorporate a focus on conflict resolution.
- Clearly post, publish, and promote trail rules and regulations, allowable uses, and trail etiquette.
- Consider alternatives that can meet user needs and avoid conflicts.
- Modify trail design to better accommodate desired uses or discourage undesired uses.
- Foster community involvement and sense of ownership.
- Communicate with illegal users and explore options for accommodating their desires.
- Develop trail monitoring programs to identify user perceptions and to assess levels of use and trail conditions.
- Establish volunteer or paid “trail rangers” to interact with and educate trail users and to encourage compliance with trail rules.
- Promote trails by directing users to trails that can accommodate the desired use.
- Install gates or other means of controlling access to trails to discourage illegal activities on the trails.

## **10.Safety and Enforcement**

Concern for personal safety emanates from fear of personal injury and crime, especially in areas where user traffic is sparse and emergency response time would be long. Law enforcement agencies are concerned about criminal activity and rescue agencies are concerned about locating and accessing remote sites. Despite a generally low risk, good management requires that strategies for user safety, law enforcement, and emergency response be included in trail plans.

Vandalism on the trail can be in the form of damage to trail structures, missing or broken signs, graffiti, and other actions which damage trail resources. Property owners may occasionally see similar problems, as well as damage to crops or private structures. It is generally accepted that vandals do not possess a sense of investment (ownership) in the trail and that vandalized property can encourage other acts of vandalism if not repaired promptly.

### **Strategies**

- Provide local law enforcement and emergency response agencies with updated trail information, trail maps, and phone numbers of trail managers.
- Provide safety and enforcement information at trailheads, including maps, trail conditions, access points, and contact information.
- Provide mileage markers along trails.
- Maintain trailheads and parking areas in a manner that is attractive and inviting to the general public.
- Foster a sense of ownership of the trail within local communities.
- Encourage more use of trails that experience a high degree of vandalism.
- Quickly remove litter and repair damaged property.

- Monitor problem areas frequently.
- Develop a “trail ranger” program of volunteers or paid staff to regularly monitor trails, as well as to educate trail users on trail hazards, personal safety techniques, proper trail etiquette, fragile trailside vegetation, etc. (e.g. Canalway Trail Ambassadors program <http://www.ptny.org/canalway/ambassador/>)

## **D. Standards and Guidelines**

One of the primary goals for the Statewide Trails System is to develop sustainable trails that have minimal impacts on the environment, require little maintenance, and meet the needs of the users. Standards and guidelines are provided here for design, development, and maintenance techniques that help ensure a sustainable trail system, including guidelines for accessibility, signage, trail monitoring, and trail closure.

As noted earlier, OPRHP has developed a series of trails technical documents located at: <http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/recreation/trails/technical-assistance.aspx>. These documents were designed for use within New York State Parks but can be used as resources for trail projects outside of the Parks. These documents may be updated periodically. Additional documents will be developed in the future as part of this series. Currently available on the website are:

- Standards and Guidelines for Trails in NYS Parks
- Trail Signage Guidelines for the NY State Park System
- Guidelines for Closing and Restoring Trails in NYS Parks
- NYS Parks Trail Assessment Process and Forms
- NYS Parks Trail Assessment Process PowerPoint Presentation
- Trail Conditions Assessments - Analysis and Maintenance Guidelines
- Trail Project Approval Process for NYS Parks
- Sample Trails Memorandum of Agreement
- Accessibility and the Universal Trail Assessment Process

### **1. Trail Development**

Trails should be developed using appropriate design standards based on desired uses. Considerations should be made for either a single or multiple treadway, tread width and surface, corridor and vertical clearance, sight distance, grades, and turning radius to provide an appropriate trail experience for expected users and levels of use. The following table provides some general trail development standards based on type of use. These standards should be used as a starting point and modified as necessary to address the natural characteristics of the resource and specific needs of the project.

**Table 6.1: Trail Development Standards**

Trail Type	Vertical Clearance	Corridor Clearance	Treadway Width	Surface	Trail Length	Sight Distance	Slope	Turning Radius	Users / Mile
<b>Bicycle Class 1 (Greenway Trail)</b>	8-10 feet	10-12 ft (1 lane) 12-16 ft (2 lane) 16-20 ft (2 lane – high volume)	6 ft. (1 lane) 8-10 ft. (2 lane) 12-14 ft. (2 lane – high volume).	Smooth pavement, asphalt, concrete, crushed stone, clay or stabilized earth.	Min. – 5 mi. loop (1.5-2 hour) 15-25 mi. of linear or loop trails (day trip)	Min. of 50 ft. up to 100 ft. on downhill curves or road crossings	0-5% Max: 5-10% sustained 15% shorter than 50 yd. Outslope of 2-4%	8-14 feet depending upon speed.	40
<b>Mountain Bike</b>	8-10 feet	1.5 – 6 ft. (1 lane)	Novice-36 in. Intermediate 24-30 in. Advanced - 12-18 in.	Firm natural surface including soil, rocks, wood; hardened surface for wet areas.	Min. – 5 mi. loop (1.5-2 hour) 15-25 mi. of linear or loop trails (day trip)	Min. of 100 ft. up to 150 ft. on downhill curves or road crossings	Over all grade not to exceed 10%. Climbing turns not to exceed 7-12%. Out slope of 3-5%	Novice/ Intermediate - min of 8 ft Advanced – 6 ft min.	10
<b>Cross Country Ski</b>	8-10 feet above snow depth. (10-12 ft in summer)	8 ft (1 lane) 10-12 ft. (2 lane)	4-6 ft. (1lane) 7-8 ft. (2lane) 8-10 ft. (up hill)	Snow with underlying bare soil, rocks or wood chips. Outsloped underlying material. Can be groomed or ungroomed	0.5-3 mi. loops up to 4-8 mi. (2-4 hour trip)	Down hill runs, stream or road crossings 50 ft. Otherwise not critical	0-5% Max – 10% sustained 15-25% shorter than 50 yd. 25-40% shorter than 50 yd., experts only Outslope – 0-2%	Avoid sharp turns. Never locate a turn at the base of a downhill run. Min. - 50 ft. Preferred – 100 ft.	5-30
<b>Hiking (developed interpretive, group or connector)</b>	8-10 feet	4 –8 ft	4-6 ft	Bare soil, rocks, stone dust, or wood chips. May have hardened surface (concrete, asphalt or boardwalks) in high use areas	0.25 – 5 mi. (1/2 day) 5-15 mi. (full day)	Not critical barrier on reverse curves may be used	0-5% Max – 15% sustained 40%+ shorter than 50 yd. Outslope – 4% max	N/A	1-30
<b>Hiking (primitive backpacking)</b>	8-10 feet	4-6 ft.	18 –30 in.	Bare soil, rocks, gravel, wood hardened surface for wet areas	Min – 5 mi. 15 – 25 mi.	Not critical	1-5% Max - 15% sustained 40-50% shorter than 50 yd.	N/A	1-5
<b>Horse</b>	10-12 feet	5-6 ft. (1 lane)	18-30 in. (1 lane)	Soils having a large percentage of rocks, clay and or organic matter. Void of rocks football sized or larger. Little treadway development required if soils are appropriate. In problem areas, water control measures may be installed. Brush and saplings should be cut flush or below ground level. Remove dead or leaning trees.	Min – 5 mi. (1-1.5 hour) 15-25 mi. of looped trails (full day)	Not critical unless 2 way traffic. 50-100 ft. 100-200 ft. at motorized road crossings.	0-10% Max – 10% sustained 20% shorter than 50 yd. Outslope 4% max.	Min. 6 ft. Wider turns preferred.	5-15

Trail Type	Vertical Clearance	Corridor Clearance	Treadway Width	Surface	Trail Length	Sight Distance	Slope	Turning Radius	Users / Mile
<b>Snowshoe</b>	8-10 feet above snow depth (10-12 ft. in summer)	8 ft. (1 Lane) 10-12 ft. (2 Lane)	4-6 ft. (1 Lane) 7-8 ft. (2 Lane) 8-10 ft. up and down hill	Snow with underlying bare soil, rocks or wood chips. Outsloped underlying material. No grooming is needed.	0.3 mi. loops 4-8 mi. (2-4 hr. trips)	N/A	0-5% Max. – 10% sustained 15-25% shorter than 50 yds. for experienced snowshoers	N/A	5-30
<b>Snowmobile</b>	8-12 feet above snow depth	1A - 14- 16 ft. 1B - 14-16 ft. C - 8-12 ft. D - 8 ft. min.	1A – 12 ft. 1B – 8-12 ft. C – 4-8 ft. D – 4ft. min.	Groomed snow Groomed snow Groomed snow Ungroomed snow	50 – 80 mi.	Min – 50 ft. 100+ ft.	10 – 15% Max - 25% sustained 40% shorter than 50 yd.	Min. 50 ft. 100 ft.	15
<b>ATV – novice</b>	6 feet	10 ft.	6 ft.	Smooth, no rocks over 3 in. diameter, tread plane flat, wet crossings 6 in. deep, 10 ft. long.	20-40 mi.	100+ ft.	Max. – 20% over 200 ft.	Min – 20 ft.	25
<b>ATV – intermediate</b>	6 feet	9 ft.	5 ft.	Some rough sections, no rocks over 5 in. diameter, tread plane 5%, wet crossings 10 in. deep, 10 ft. long.	30-60 mi.	50 + ft.	Max. – 25% over 300 ft.	Min – 10 ft.	15
<b>ATV – expert</b>	5 feet	8 ft.	4.5 ft.	Some very rough sections, no rocks over 10 in. diameter, tread plane 10%, wet crossings 18 in. deep, 10 ft. long	30-80 mi.	20 + ft.	Max. – 35% over 500 ft.	Min. – 5 ft.	10
<b>Trailbike – novice</b>	8 feet	8 ft.	4 ft.	Smooth, no rocks over 3 in. diameter, avoid loose material	20-40 mi.	100+ ft.	Max. – 15%	Min. – 15 ft.	20
<b>Trailbike – intermediate</b>	8 feet	6 ft.	2 ft.	Some rough sections, no rocks over 6 in. diameter, loose material, logs than 6 in. diameter	30-60 mi.	50 + ft.	Max. – 30%	Min. – 10 ft.	15
<b>Trailbike – expert</b>	8 feet	4 ft.	1 ft.	Very rough sections, no rocks over 12 in. diameter	30-80 mi.	20 + ft.	Max. – 50%	Min. – 5 ft.	10

Trail Type	Vertical Clearance	Corridor Clearance	Treadway Width	Surfacing Materials	Trail Length	Sight Distance	Slope	Turning Radius	Users / Mile
<b>Four Wheel Drive.</b> <b>Rated from Class 1 to Class 4 (easiest to most difficult).*</b> <b>Half-day ride (~ 4 hrs).</b> <b>Full-day ride (~ 6 hrs).</b>	8-10 feet	12-14 ft. (1 lane) 19-24 ft. (2 lane)	8-10 ft. (1 lane) 15-20 ft. (2 lane)	"Soils having a large percentage of rocks, clay and or organic matter. Including (obstacles) ruts, rocks, hill climbs, and ledges football size and larger. In problem areas, water control measures may be installed. Class 1* - obstacles to 8" Class 2* - obstacles 12" - 16" Class 3* - obstacles 18" -24" Class 4* - obstacles 24+"	2-30 mi. 20 miles (easy) to 2 miles (hard). A 2-mile Class 4 trail can create a full day of trail riding.	Not critical, unless on multi-use trail. (50-100 ft.)	0-40%	Not critical, but avoid sharp turns on steep slopes. (25 ft. avg.)	5-15

<b>*Four Wheel Drive Vehicle Class Requirements</b>	
<b>Class 1:</b>	Only general safety requirements. <i>Recommended: disconnected sway bar. Stock Vehicles</i>
<b>Class 2:</b>	Disconnected sway bar. <i>Recommended: aggressive tread tire.</i>
<b>Class 3:</b>	Disconnected sway bar, 30" or larger aggressive tread. <i>Recommended: winch &amp; locker</i>
<b>Class 4:</b>	Disconnected sway bar, 32" or larger aggressive tread, minimum one locker, winch. <i>Recommended: both front &amp; rear lockers</i> (Note: vehicle size restrictions generally - 80" width, 105" wheelbase)

## 2. Shared Use

Shared use trails may accommodate a variety of users, such as walkers, joggers, persons with disabilities, bicyclists, skaters, equestrians, cross-country skiers, and snowmobilers. These trails can be single tread or have multiple treads, provide a variety of surfaces to accommodate different uses, and provide different trail experiences. Shared use trails can be located in urban, suburban, or rural settings and used for multiple purposes, such as recreation, commuting, and health and exercise.

Properly designed and maintained trails will be sustainable over time, accommodate the allowable uses, and reduce potential conflicts among the users. With these design guidelines in mind, shared use trails can provide an expected and cooperative trail experience for a variety of user groups.

When planning for development of a trail or trail system to accommodate multiple users, planners should:

- design trails based on the desired and expected intensity of use, the types of allowable uses and environmental conditions
- consider the needs and demands of the various user groups early in the planning process
- consider the physical limits of the trail and understand the potential impacts of the allowed uses
- develop and implement a monitoring program to assess level of use, perception of trail users and trail conditions.

There is no single set of design standards for a shared use trail that will be appropriate for all conditions and circumstances. The following manuals are suggested resources for the design and construction of shared use trails:

- *Designing Sidewalks and Trails for Access, Part II of II: Best Practices Design Guide*. 2001. United States Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration. <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/sidewalk2/contents.htm>
- *Equestrian Design Guidebook for Trails, Trailheads, and Campgrounds*. 2007. United States Department of Agriculture – Forest Service and United States Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration. <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/fspubs/07232816/index.htm>
- *Shared use Paths and Greenways*. 2006. Massachusetts Highway Department. [http://www.mhd.state.ma.us/downloads/designGuide/CH\\_11\\_a.pdf](http://www.mhd.state.ma.us/downloads/designGuide/CH_11_a.pdf)
- *Trail Planning, Design, & Development Guidelines*. 2007. State of Minnesota, Department of Natural Resources. Trails and Waterways Division. <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/index.html>
- *Trails for the Twenty-First Century, Second Edition, Planning, Design, and Management Manual for Multi-Use Trails*. 2001. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.
- *Guide for the development of Bicycle Facilities*. 1999. American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. [www.sccrtc.org/bikes/AASHTO\\_1999\\_BikeBook.pdf](http://www.sccrtc.org/bikes/AASHTO_1999_BikeBook.pdf)

### 3. Accessibility

Trails play an important role in providing a physical recreational opportunity for a diverse group of users with a full range of physical abilities. It is expected that over the next decade the average age of New Yorkers will continue to rise and this group will have a continued if not expanded interest in accessing our state trails system. Persons with limited physical ability should be provided with trail opportunities so that they may share in the benefits offered by trail use. Providing enhanced access to trails by persons with disabilities is an important goal of this trails plan.

Beginning in the mid 1990's the Regulatory Negotiation Committee on Accessibility Guidelines for Outdoor Recreation was established by the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board) to look at a number of issues relating to persons with disabilities access to outdoor recreation areas including trails. Their final report issued in 1999 greatly advanced the understanding of the issues relating to developing guidelines for accessible trails. In 2007, the Access Board proposed a rule that would apply to federal agencies and their facilities under the Architectural Barriers Act. The rule included a statement, "At a future date, when an assessment of the impacts on State and local governments and private entities can be prepared, the Access Board will conduct a separate rulemaking for outdoor developed areas subject to the Americans with Disabilities Act" (Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board 2007).

Most trail stewards will ask, "What is an accessible trail?" The proposed federal rule by the Access Board provides guidelines outlining what characteristics an accessible trail should have. It also makes it clear that every trail will not be accessible because of terrain or environmental conditions but accessibility will be a consideration when looking to develop a trail. It also recognizes that persons with a disability are a diverse group composed of people

with varying physical conditions who are capable of making choices. An accessible trail will be one that has a firm surface, of a certain tread width (minimum 36”), not exceeding certain running or cross grades, without large rocks or roots of a certain height and frequency, and absent of protruding objects.

In the absence of an adopted rule, when preparing to develop a new section of trail or undertaking a major alteration, trail stewards, to the extent feasible, should either follow the guidance offered in the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Guidelines for Bicycle Facilities or in the proposed federal rule by the Access Board. The AASHTO Guidelines provide greater access than the proposed rule but may not be adaptable to the broad diversity of trails.

When the primary purpose of the trail is a foot path, then the Access Board proposed rule is recommended to be followed. When developing a shared use trail such as a rail trail or canal towpath trail, where the trail tread will be improved, the AASHTO Guidelines for Bicycle Facilities and the applicable ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities (ADAAG) rules will always be required when a trail acquisition and development project is supported by Federal Highway Transportation Enhancement Funds. Comprehensive best practices for accessible sidewalks and trails can be found in a publication distributed by the Federal Highway Administration titled, “Designing Sidewalks and Trails for Access: Best Practices Design Guide” ([www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/sidewalk2/](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/sidewalk2/)).

Trail stewards should also be aware that routine maintenance may also provide additional opportunities to improve access. The installation of informative trail head signs that include information on trail conditions and grade is a way to provide greater access. This type of information may allow persons with a disability or persons with limited physical ability to make an informed decision regarding their use of a trail. The Universal Trail Assessment Process (UTAP) is a program that trail stewards can utilize to objectively establish the accessibility of their trail and assess the feasibility of making them more accessible. Undertaking this process is highly recommended. For more information about UTAP, visit [www.beneficialdesigns.com/](http://www.beneficialdesigns.com/).

The *Draft Final Accessibility Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas* (AGODA), published in 2009 by the Access Board, contain the most recent standards used to design and construct pedestrian trails to be accessible and to assess accessibility. Trails should be designed to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities if they are newly constructed or altered so that the original design, function, or purpose of the trail is changed and they are connected to an accessible trail or designated trailhead. Trail conditions, including topography, geology and ecology and expected experience will modify the number of trails that can be fully accessible. There are some departures permitted from the technical provisions. For further details, refer to the AGODA at <http://www.access-board.gov/outdoor/index.htm>. The following is an abbreviated listing of the proposed standards without the exceptions:

- Surface – The trail surface shall be firm and stable.
- Clear Tread Width – The clear tread width of the trail shall be 36 inches minimum.
- Openings – Openings in trail surface shall be of a size that does not permit passage of a ½ inch diameter sphere. Elongated openings shall be placed so that the long dimension is perpendicular or diagonal to the dominant direction of travel.
- Protruding Objects – Protruding objects on trails shall have 80 inches minimum clear head room.

- Tread Obstacles – Where tread obstacles exist, for concrete, asphalt or boards, they shall not exceed ½ inch in height; for all other surfaces, they shall not exceed 2 inches in height.
- Passing Space – Where the clear tread width of the trail is less than 60 inches, passing spaces shall be provided at intervals of 1,000 feet maximum. Passing spaces shall be either 60 inches minimum by 60 inches minimum space, or an intersection of two walking surfaces which provide a T-shaped space provided that the arms and stem of the T-shaped space extend at least 48 inches beyond the intersection.
- Slopes – Slopes shall comply with the following:
  - Cross Slopes – For concrete, asphalt or boards, the cross slope shall not exceed 1:48; for all other surfaces, the cross slope shall not exceed 1:20.
  - Running Slope – Running slope of trail segments shall comply with one or more of the provisions of this section. No more than 30 percent of the total trail length shall exceed a running slope of 1:12.
  - The running slope of any segment of a trail shall not be steeper than 1:8.
  - Where the running slope of a segment of a trail is steeper than 1:20, the maximum length of the segment shall be in accordance with the table below, and a resting interval shall be provided at each end of the segment.

Running Slope of Trail Segment		Maximum Length of Segment
Steeper than	But not Steeper than	
1:20	1:12	200 feet (61 m)
1:12	1:10	30 feet (9 m)
1:10	1:8	10 feet (3050 mm)

- Resting Intervals – Resting intervals shall be 60 inches minimum in length and shall have a width at least as wide as the widest portion of the trail segment leading to the resting interval. Where the surface is concrete, asphalt, or boards, the slope shall not be steeper than 1:48 in any direction; for all other surfaces, the slope shall not exceed 1:20 in any direction.
- Edge Protection – Where edge protection is provided along a trail, the edge protection shall have a height of 3 inches minimum.
- Signs – Newly constructed and altered trails and trail segments that are accessible shall be designated with a symbol at the trail head and all designated access points. Signs identifying accessible trail segments shall include the total distance of the accessible segment and the location of the first point of departure from the technical provisions.
- Where gates or barriers are constructed to control access to trails, gates and barriers shall provide a clear width of 32 inches minimum.

In all cases, it is recommended that basic information about trail characteristics be displayed at the trailhead. This allows the trail user the opportunity to determine if the trail is appropriate for their abilities. This information should be available for all trails regardless of whether they meet the accessible guidelines.

The following is a recommended list of information that should be displayed at the trailhead:

- Trail Symbol
- Total trail length (in linear feet)
- Length of trail segments meeting accessible standards (in linear feet)
- Location of the first point of exception to accessible standards
- Running slope (average and maximum)
- Maximum cross slope
- Minimum clear tread width
- Surface type, firmness, and stability
- Tread obstacles that limit accessibility
- Elevation (trailhead, maximum, and minimum)
- Total elevation change

#### 4. Trail Signage

A comprehensive signage system is an important aspect of a trail network. The objectives of trail signing are to:

- improve the trail user experience
- enhance the safety of people, vehicles, and property
- improve travel within and between trail systems
- increase comfort and confidence in navigating the statewide trail system
- promote recreational trail use
- interpret the natural environment and cultural resources
- protect the environment by directing visitors onto designated trails, thereby helping to avoid trampling of fragile trailside vegetation and prevent erosion.

Types of trail signs include directional, trailhead, interpretive, regulatory, and cautionary signs, as well as markers and blazes, kiosks, and pavement markings. OPRHP has developed a document entitled *Trail Signage Guidelines for the NY State Park System* (<http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/recreation/trails/technical-assistance.aspx>). While this is geared toward use by park managers in New York State Parks, it may be utilized as a reference for all trail managers. For projects located along the New York State Canal System uniform signage guidelines are available from the New York State Canal Corporation at: <http://www.canals.ny.gov/corporation/signage-guidelines.html>. Other sources of information that can be referenced for guidance in developing trail signage may be found in the Resources section of the *Trail Signage Guidelines*.

#### 5. Trail Maintenance

The following manuals may be used as resource guides for trail maintenance:

- *Trail Planning, Design, & Development Guidelines*. State of Minnesota, Department of Natural Resources, 2007. Trails and Waterways Division.  
<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/index.html>

- *Trail Maintenance Manual, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition Revised*. 2007. New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, Inc. <http://www.nynjtc.org/pform/trail-maintenance-manual>.
- *Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook*. 2007 Edition. Forest Service, US Department of Agriculture. <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/fspubs/07232806/index.htm>.
- *Lightly on the Land: The SCA Trail-Building and Maintenance Manual*. 2006. Robert C. Birkby, The Student Conservation Association. <http://www.thesca.org/>
- *Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack*. 2004. International Mountain Bicycling Association. <http://www.imba.com/index.html>
- *Equestrian Design Guidebook for Trails, Trailheads and Campgrounds*. December 2007. US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service - Missoula Technology and Development Center. <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/fspubs/07232816/index.htm>

## 6. Trail Monitoring

Trail monitoring and inspections are an important aspect of managing trails. Regular monitoring of trail conditions and trail use allow for early detection of safety or maintenance issues before user safety is compromised or trail conditions worsen. There are a variety of programs and processes that have been developed for monitoring trails and trail systems. The following is a short list of resources:

- *Developing a Natural Resource Inventory and Monitoring Program for Visitor Impacts on Recreation Sites: A Procedural Manual* by the National Park Service (Marion 1991)
- *The Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) System for Wilderness Planning* by the US Forest Service (Stankey et al. General Technical Report INT-176, 1985).
- *The Protected Area Visitor Impact Management (PAVIM) Framework: A Simplified Process for Making Management Decisions* (Farrell and Marion, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* Vol.10. #1, 2002).
- *The Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) Framework: A Handbook for Planners and Managers* by the National Park Service (1997).
- *Wilderness Recreation Use Estimation: A Handbook of Methods and Systems* by the US Forest Service (Watson et al. General Technical Report RMRS-GTR-56, 2000).

## 7. Trail Closure

Sometimes it is necessary to close or reroute a trail due to poor initial design, overuse, illegal use, or other natural factors having caused some type of degradation. Trail erosion, the most common reason for the need to relocate a trail or trail section, can be caused by a combination of trail use, gravity and water. Relocating a trail may be hard work and time-consuming, but in the long run, closing a poorly sited trail may be the best strategy for management and maintenance, for the user and for the environment.

Reclamation strategies include closure, stabilization, recontouring, revegetation, and monitoring. Each site should be evaluated individually for its potential to be rehabilitated. Trail restoration must be carefully planned, and the consequences of each strategy should be evaluated. Restoration can be as simple as blocking a closed section of trail and passively allowing the vegetation to recover, or include more complex projects, such as removing any trace of the tread, actively planting native vegetation, and constructing check dams to help

stop erosion. Careful monitoring of a restored section of trail is then needed to ensure that little evidence remains of the old trail.

The *OPRHP Guidelines for Closing Trails*

(<http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/recreation/trails/technical-assistance.aspx>) document provides the process to be followed in closing trails in state parks. Again, this process may be used by all trail managers.

## **E. Statewide Trails Clearinghouse**

The first goal of this plan is to cultivate development of a Statewide Trails System. One objective listed under this goal is to develop a Statewide Trails Clearinghouse to include a statewide trails website and a comprehensive inventory of NYS trails. This section provides some background and future actions for furtherance of this particular objective.

The Statewide Trails System requires central coordination and a central repository for trails data and information. NYS currently lacks a truly comprehensive organization of trails and trail information. A comprehensive inventory of trails statewide has been undertaken by the OPRHP Planning Bureau and a central repository of trail data is being developed. In addition, the Planning Bureau is compiling an extensive database of State Park trails statewide through the use of GPS. A new trails website has been developed as part of the OPRHP website. This, along with websites of other state agencies (Canal Corp., DEC, DOH, DOT, HRVG), statewide trail organizations (PTNY) and regional and local trail groups, currently provide trail inventory, mapping and use information, technical assistance documents and support for trail development, maintenance, and advocacy for trails.

A Statewide Trails Clearinghouse would acquire, store, and distribute information on all trails across the state under the coordination of the Statewide Trails Coordinator. The Coordinator would be responsible for overseeing and maintaining the Clearinghouse, implementing the Statewide Trails Plan, and continually updating trail information. In addition, the Clearinghouse could manage statewide trail networks, coordinate trail maintenance activities, promote NYS trails, acquire new data, respond to public requests for information, continually update and improve the statewide trails website, monitor trail use, conditions, and trends, and produce yearly progress reports with new information, products, and trends. The Statewide Trails Clearinghouse is not intended to compete with or replace the wealth of information now provided to the public by many agencies, organizations and trails groups. It would serve as a central repository for trails information incorporating links to various groups and resources.

The comprehensive inventory of trails as gathered by OPRHP, along with the OPRHP trails website, will be used as the basis for the Statewide Trails Clearinghouse. The following list provides actions to be taken as part of developing, maintaining, and enhancing the Clearinghouse.

### **Actions:**

- Maintain a dedicated “Statewide Trails Coordinator” position within OPRHP. The primary responsibility of the Trails Coordinator would be implementation of this plan.
- Maintain a comprehensive statewide inventory of trails. Continually acquire updated information on all trails in the state.
- Maintain a dedicated statewide trails website. Include opportunity for public comment and feedback on the Statewide Trails System.

- Assure progress on implementation of this plan. Produce yearly progress reports on both accomplishments and future needs in plan implementation.
- Monitor trends in trail activities.
- Assure provision of all trails information to the public.
- Gather and distribute information on case studies on innovations and model demonstration projects.
- Strengthen stewardship of trails through the utilization of Friends and User Groups.

## **F. Implementation**

### **1. Roles and Partnerships**

The trails in New York include national, state, regional, and local trails. They occur on public and private property and are developed and maintained by the public and private sector. Through cooperative efforts by both these sectors, statewide and regional trail systems have evolved. The larger systems provide links to local or secondary trails. In many cases, national and state designated trails provide the foundation for a primary trail system. Such is the case with the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, Lake Champlain Bikeway, Canalway Trail, Hudson River Valley Greenway Trails (land and water), and Statewide Snowmobile System that link to local trail systems.

Trail systems are acquired, developed, maintained, and promoted through a variety of relationships among units of government, organizations, and individuals. There is no single set of roles and responsibilities for all trails. In many cases, a single trail may consist of various trail segments that have been acquired and developed by different units of government utilizing different methods. The trail may be maintained by the land owner or through an agreement with another unit of government or trail organization. A good example of this is the Canalway Trail. To the public it is perceived as a single trail when in fact many agencies and levels of government each have responsibilities for various segments of the trail. Although there is some overlapping of roles and responsibilities, there are some general distinctions among the various providers and maintainers of New York State's trails.

Abandoned railroad corridors represent a special opportunity to acquire a potential trail corridor. NYS Transportation Law Article 2, Section 18 provides the State with a preferential right to acquire any real property that has been abandoned for railroad transportation purposes and prohibits the disposal of such railroad property without a determination from the NYS DOT that Section 18 does not apply or releases the State's preferential right. This authority, combined with the federal Surface Transportation Board's (STB) recommendations regarding public use of abandoned railroad rights-of-way, has been used to preserve critical railroad corridors for reuse as restored rail lines, highways, utility corridors, and greenway trails. The STB abandonment proceedings in NYS are open for negotiation with various public entities regarding trail use. OPRHP staff developed a number of white papers to more clearly inform and guide the public in the process of converting rails to trails (see **Appendix I – Rail Trail White Papers**).

#### **a. Federal**

**Provider:** The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Park Service (NPS) are the primary federal agencies in New York State with land holdings that provide trail opportunities. This includes the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (AT), Upper

Delaware Scenic and Recreational River, the North Country National Scenic Trail, and the numerous trails within national parks, seashores, wildlife, and recreation areas.

The federal government also provides support for trails within the context of federal law. The 1981 Federal Trails Act included a provision that greatly encouraged the use of abandoned rail corridors for trail purposes. The law allows for the interim use of any abandoned rail corridor for a trail. This provision also known as “rail banking” has facilitated the conversion of thousands of miles of abandoned railroad to trail while preserving the railroad corridor for future rail use. This process is administered by the Surface Transportation Board.

**Operations/Maintenance:** The federal agencies manage the trails within their facilities. Management of long distance trails such as the AT is accomplished through an agreement with state agencies and trail organizations.

**Funding:** Various federal grant programs are available for acquisition and development. Most are administered by state agencies such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Recreation Trails Program through OPRHP, and SAFETEA-LU through the DOT. Almost all the grants require a local match of funds received. Although the NPS Rivers and Trails Program does not direct or fund projects, it can assist citizens and community leaders who have decided to conserve close-to-home landscapes and get them started.

**Technical Assistance:** Technical assistance to state and local agencies, not-for-profit groups and trail organizations is provided through NPS’s Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program. Additional assistance is provided through design and construction and maintenance manuals produced by various federal agencies.

## **b. State**

**Provider:** The State has a dual role in providing trails on state-owned lands and in developing statewide and regional trail systems. Many trail opportunities exist within the open space resources managed by OPRHP, DEC, and Canal Corporation. Over 1,350 miles of trail are maintained within the 178 state parks, 35 historic sites and 9 trail corridors administered by OPRHP. DEC manages more than 2,000 miles of recreation trails on nearly four million acres of land statewide. In addition, DOT has signed 1,200 miles of bicycle routes along the State’s road system. The Canal Corporation manages nearly 200 miles of multi-use trails along the 524-mile New York State Canal System.

**Operations/Maintenance:** Trails on lands administered by OPRHP, DEC, and Canal Corporation are maintained by park personnel, friends groups, volunteers or through formal agreements with trail organizations. DEC’s Adopt-a-Natural Resource (AANR) Stewardship Program is an example of the success of local municipal volunteer services used to establish and maintain access to trails. Volunteer recognition is given with the placement of appropriate signs on or near the adopted trail. Other forms of recognition, including but not limited to certificates, press releases, and newsletters may be provided.

**Funding:** The state agencies, such as OPRHP, DOS, DOT, and Canal Corporation, administer various federal and state funds for trail-related projects. This includes Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), LWCF Grants, Snowmobile Grants, Recreation Trail Program (RTP) Grants, EPF- LWRP Grants, Hudson River Valley Greenway

Grants, SAFETEA-LU Grants and Scenic Byway Grants. It is the responsibility of the administering agency to establish a fair and equitable system to distribute funds.

**Technical Assistance:** State Agencies provide technical assistance in the form of standards and guidelines, technical information, grant assistance, and, to a limited extent, training. DOS, as part of its LWRP planning process, provides communities with planning assistance. Regional programs such as the Tug Hill Commission and the Hudson River Valley Greenway provide additional assistance.

### **c. Local Government**

**Provider:** Many counties, towns, villages and cities have developed trails that link open spaces, parks, schools, and/or residential and business areas within their communities. Some of the trails are segments of or connect to broader systems that extend beyond the unit of government's boundaries. Trail lengths and activities vary. In many cases a municipal government will enter into a partnership to develop a trail on linear corridors owned by a state agency. Local governmental support is critical in the development of regional and statewide systems and determination of the types of allowable trail activities. Local municipalities often develop formal community trail plans that include references to regional nodes or corridors and encourage or mandate that developers design trail systems within new community complexes.

**Operations/Maintenance:** Local government involvement is important in the operations and maintenance of local, regional, and statewide trail systems. Agreements are commonly developed with counties, municipalities, and not-for-profit organizations to manage the segment of a regional or statewide trail system that is within their boundaries. Local law enforcement, in particular, is critical in maintaining safe and enjoyable trail systems.

**Funding:** County and municipal governments can provide funding through their own budgets and bond acts, seek funding through various state and federal grant programs, or function as a pass through for grants to local organizations.

**Technical Assistance:** Technical assistance among counties and municipalities varies considerably.

### **d. Private/Not-for-Profits/Trail Organizations/Trail Advocacy Organizations**

**Provider:** A percentage of trails in the State are on private land or on land owned by land trusts or other not-for-profit organizations. For example, approximately 85% of the snowmobile trails are on private lands. These trails are the result of the efforts of various trail organizations to facilitate agreements with landowners. Not-for-profits, trail organizations and trail advocacy organizations, including friends groups, are critical for providing support for securing funding and advocating for land acquisition and development and maintenance of trails. Such is the case with the acquisition of Sterling Forest State Park and the Genesee Valley Greenway. As part of their role, not-for-profit organizations lobby the legislature and decision makers to raise funds and create a vision for a statewide trail system. Parks and Trails New York, for example, works with decision makers on all levels to help envision, plan, develop, and promote a growing network of trails across the state; provides a trails technical assistance program; is instrumental in promoting and helping to develop the Canalway Trail; runs cycling tours across the state

to promote trails and eco/heritage tourism; and provides a wide variety of trail-related reports, inventory and links on their website. The New York State Trails Coalition, formed in 2007, is a group of 85 trails groups, educational institutions, nature centers, local development agencies, land trusts, historical organizations, and village, town, and county governments from all regions of the state. The goal of the Coalition is to foster enhanced networking and stronger working relationships among New York's trail advocates. Each year Parks & Trails New York works with Coalition members to organize an annual Trails Advocacy Day during which members meet with lawmakers to discuss issues related to funding and legislation affecting trail promotion, operation, and development. The private sector is also critical in providing support and facilities, such as lodging, food and other amenities.

**Operations/Maintenance:** Not-for-profits and trail organizations maintain trails on lands they own, on privately held lands via an agreement with the owners, and on various public lands. Maintenance agreements range from formal agreements, such as management of the AT to informal assistance from friends groups, such as the Green Lakes Friends Group, and individual volunteer efforts. An Adopt-A-Trail program provides a formal means of establishing partnerships between state agencies and local governmental entities and trail organizations for maintenance of specific trails.

**Funding:** The private sector has the ability to directly raise funds for projects, apply for various grants, assist with negotiations and direct funding, provide in-kind and monetary match for grants, and donate land and resources. In some cases, not-for-profits are able to move faster than a governmental body to advance a project, such as acquisition of a piece of land which would otherwise be lost. They also have the ability to advocate for funding, legislation and other support.

**Technical Assistance:** Not-for-profit and trail organizations play an important role in providing technical assistance and disseminating information about various aspects of development, including acquisition, design, construction, maintenance, and management. This is accomplished through training manuals, workshops, conferences, inventories, informational brochures, and maps.

## **e. Land Owners**

As noted above, many trails throughout the State are located on private property. Land owners play an essential role in allowing trails to cross their land which can create larger trail connections and promote a network of trails. Landowners may manage and maintain trails on their own property. In many cases, though, land owners have an agreement with a local trail partner (e.g. town trail committee, trail organization, friends group) for management and maintenance of the trail corridor. Types of agreements between landowners and a local trail partner include simple handshake agreements, revocable written agreements, and trail or conservation easements. In some cases, land owners may sell or donate land in order to establish a trail. Allowing use of private land for trails not only promotes recreational opportunities but also preserves open space and resources and enhances the quality of life in local communities.

## **f. Volunteers/Interest/User Groups**

Volunteers play an essential role for most trails and trail systems. Volunteers may be individual citizens, interest or user groups, adopt-a-trail groups or not-for-profit Friends

Groups. These volunteers may advocate for trails, raise additional resources to support trails or provide volunteer labor. Trail managers increasingly rely on volunteers and interest groups to enable them to properly maintain as well as build trails. Volunteers help to maintain thousands of miles of trails statewide on both public and private lands. Most new trail initiatives are the result of volunteer efforts. In some cases, volunteers act as stewards or ambassadors of trails by greeting visitors, providing educational tours, and answering questions. Volunteers can play many different roles and serve in many different capacities, such as:

- Advocate for legislation, funding, and policies that positively affect trail development
- Clearing and establishing new trails
- Signage and kiosk installation
- Mowing, pruning, removing fallen trees
- Installing/replacing water management systems (e.g. culverts, drain pipes) or trail structures (e.g. bridges, boardwalks)
- Litter removal
- Invasive species removal
- Regular patrolling of trails
- Providing emergency response volunteer services
- Publicizing trail events
- Hosting community trail work days
- Acting as stewards to trails and resources
- Raising additional funding for trail development and trail-related projects

In some instances it is a volunteer trails organization that is the primary promoter of the trail no matter who it is owned and operated by. Every trail can benefit from having active volunteers and volunteer groups. Common to volunteer organizations throughout the state, these individuals and groups invest great energy in sustaining their efforts over time.

## **2. State Trails Council**

The New York State Trails Council (NYSTC) was established in October 1981 to ensure citizen participation in trail planning and management. The NYSTC was made the formal citizen advisory council for administration of the National Recreational Trail Act. The existence of the NYSTC is required for state eligibility for Recreational Trails Program funding. The advisory council was organized to: 1) advocate trail interests to all levels of government and to the public; 2) provide a reliable source of information on trail based recreation; 3) coordinate efforts to develop, construct and maintain recreational trails; 4) foster trail user ethics; and 5) provide a forum for mediating differences among trail user groups.

The Trails Council consists of delegates representing eleven trail user groups, including motorized and non-motorized interests:

- All-terrain vehicles
- Bicycling

- Four-wheel drive vehicles
- Hiking
- Equine trail interests
- Nordic skiing (cross-country)
- Running
- Snowmobiling
- Snowshoeing
- Trail-bike riding (motorized)
- Water trails

There is a maximum of three representatives per user group, and representatives are trail users who do not represent commercial interests. Unlike most advisory committees, the trail delegates are approved by the Trails Council and not by a State Agency. Meetings are held at least two times per year.

Also represented on the State Trails Council are OPRHP, the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Canal Corporation, the Department of Transportation, the Hudson River Greenway, the New York State Senate and Assembly, the Federal Highway Administration, the National Park Service, and Parks and Trails New York. These agency representatives serve as advisors to the council and do not have voting privileges but may participate in discussions and raise issues for the council to consider. The Trails Council is provided with technical assistance and support through the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and the Department of Environmental Conservation.

### **3. Funding**

While there are dedicated funding sources for building trails through various state and federal grant programs, budgeting a steady source of funds for trail maintenance rarely takes place. Local governments and State Park managers deal with operating budgets for trail work. Trail organizations rely on membership dues, volunteers, donations and grants to meet funding needs for trails and trail work. Some user groups, such as snowmobilers, have an additional fee charged on their vehicle registrations that goes into a dedicated fund for trail development and maintenance. However, that type of system does not work for trail uses such as hiking or cross country skiing.

The federal and state governments are the primary sources for funding of trails projects. In most cases, the State functions as the administering agent for federal funds. As might be expected, the need for funding generally exceeds the funds available. As the demand for open space and recreation resources increases, the resource base available to provide new opportunities is decreasing.

The rating systems for EPF, LWCF, RTP and Open Space Plan consider the goals and Statewide Trail Systems in the evaluation of development and acquisition projects. A factor or factors within the rating systems reflects the significance of a trail and/or consistency with the Statewide Trails Plan. This will help facilitate the development of comprehensive and integrated trail systems.

The following is a list of funding programs for trail projects. Although these programs are active in 2010, sources of funding are continually changing as legislation expires, programs are phased out, and new programs are established. Refer to trails advocacy websites, such as Parks & Trails New York (<http://www.ptny.org>) and American Trails (<http://www.americantrails.org>), for up-to-date information regarding funding for trails.

### **National Programs**

- **Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)**

Expired on September 30, 2009, but was extended through December 2010. SAFETEA will likely be eventually replaced with a similar act. SAFETEA provides for several different programs that fund trails, most notably the **Recreation Trails Program (RTP)** and the **Transportation Enhancements Program (TEP)**.

- **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)**

<http://www.nps.gov/lwcf>

The LWCF program provides matching grants to States and local governments for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. The program is intended to create and maintain a nationwide legacy of high quality recreation areas and facilities and to stimulate non-federal investments in the protection and maintenance of recreation resources across the United States. At its high point in 1979, the State received about \$24 million, which was used to provide grants to municipalities and to undertake State Park development and land acquisition projects. Since 1965, the LWCF has partially funded 1,250 projects within the State. Virtually every community in the State has acquired and/or developed outdoor recreational facilities with the help of the LWCF. When funds are apportioned, it is the State's responsibility to solicit applications, evaluate projects and recommend grants to the National Park Service for approval. The State may allocate funds among both local and state projects; all awards must be matched with 50 percent of the total project cost.

- **National Recreation Trails (NRT)**

<http://www.americantrails.org/nationalrecreationtrails>

The NRT program supports designated National Recreation Trails with an array of benefits, including promotion, technical assistance, networking, and access to funding. Its goal is to promote the use and care of existing trails and stimulate the development of new trails to create a national network of trails and realize the vision of "Trails for All Americans."

- **Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)**

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/index.htm>

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/discretionary>

The FHWA administers federal transportation funds for a wide variety of bicycle and pedestrian projects, including those related to trails, through the following programs: **Bridge Program, Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality Program (CMAQ), Federal Lands Highway Program (FLHP), Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), National Highway System (NHS), National Scenic Byways Program, Recreational Trails Program (RTP), Safe Routes to School Program (SRTS), Surface Transportation Program (STP), and Transportation Enhancements (TE)**. The

FHWA also administers a variety of discretionary programs through its various offices. These programs represent special funding categories where FHWA solicits for candidates and selects projects for funding based on applications received. Each program has its own eligibility and selection criteria that are established by law, by regulation, or administratively.

- **National Trails Fund (NTF)**

<http://www.americanhiking.org/>

A program of the American Hiking Society and the only privately supported national grants program providing funding to grassroots organizations working toward establishing, protecting, and maintaining foot trails in America.

## **State Programs**

### **Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)**

In 1993, the Legislature enacted the Environmental Protection Act. The Act created, for the first time in the State's history, a permanently dedicated Environmental Protection Fund to meet many of the State's pressing environmental needs. The main grant programs applicable to trails and funded through the EPF are the Parks Program, Heritage Areas Program, Historic Preservation Program, Acquisition, Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, and Hudson River Estuary.

- **Parks Program**

<http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/grants/parks/default.aspx>

A matching grant program for the acquisition or development of parks and recreational facilities for projects to preserve, rehabilitate, or restore lands, waters, or structures for park, recreation, or conservation purposes. Projects must reflect the priorities established in the NY Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).

- **Heritage Areas Program**

<http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/grants/heritage-areas/default.aspx>

A matching grant program for projects to preserve, rehabilitate, or restore lands, waters, or structures identified in a management plan. Projects must be located within a designated New York State state Heritage Area.

- **Historic Preservation Program**

<http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/grants/historic-preservation/default.aspx>

A matching grant program to improve, protect, preserve, rehabilitate or restore properties listed on the National or State Registers of Historic Places. Funds are available to municipalities or not-for-profits with an ownership interest.

- **Acquisition**

<http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/grants/acquisition/default.aspx>

A matching grant program for the acquisition of a permanent easement or fee title to lands, waters, or structures for use by all segments of the population for park, recreation, conservation, or preservation purposes.

- **Local Waterfront Revitalization Program**

[http://www.nyswaterfronts.com/grantopps\\_EPF.asp](http://www.nyswaterfronts.com/grantopps_EPF.asp)

Provides grants to waterfront municipalities for a variety of planning, design and construction projects to protect revitalize waterfront resources, including visioning and development of local or regional revitalization strategies, urban waterfront redevelopment, creating a blueway trail, and interpreting waterfront resources.

- **Grants Program for the Hudson River Estuary**

<http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/5091.html>

Provides approximately \$1 million annually in grants to municipalities and non-profits located within the Estuary Watershed Boundaries, including grants for Hudson River Access.

Other grant opportunities include:

- **Snowmobile Trail Grant Program**

<http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/grants/snowmobile-trail/default.aspx>

Provides funds to local governmental sponsors that engage in the development and maintenance of snowmobile trails designated as part of the State Snowmobile Trail System.

- **Hudson River Valley Greenway Grants Program**

<http://www.hudsongreenway.state.ny.us/GrantFunding/GrantsOverview.aspx>

In addition to technical assistance, this program provides competitive grant funding opportunities to communities and not-for-profit organizations within the designated Hudson River Valley Greenway area, which extends from Saratoga County and Washington counties to Battery Park, Manhattan. The program offers funding for trail planning and design, construction and rehabilitation, and education and interpretation as well as for water trail site development.

- **Parks & Trails New York**

- **Healthy Trails, Healthy People**

<http://www.ptny.org/greenways/hthp/index.shtml>

This program, funded in part by the Healthy Heart Program of the NYS Department of Health, offers assistance to communities wishing to develop a new multi-use trail or increase usage on an existing trail. Communities are selected to receive help with technical issues, planning, public outreach, grant writing, fundraising, programming, organizational development and other activities critical to the long-term success of trail projects. However, no actual funds are available for communities selected.

- **Capacity Building Grants Program**

<http://www.ptny.org/advocacy/grants.shtml>

This program for parks and trail groups provides grants of up to \$3,000 to strengthen not-for-profit organizations that are working to build and protect parks and trails in communities across the state. Funds can be used to assist with activities associated with organizational start-up and development, training, communications, and volunteer recruitment and management

# CHAPTER VII: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

## A. Environmental Review

New York's State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR) requires all state and local government agencies to consider environmental factors in agency decision-making processes along with social and economic factors. Agencies must assess the environmental impacts of actions which they propose, evaluate alternatives, develop methods for minimizing potential adverse impacts, and provide an opportunity for the public to participate in the planning process when proposals may have significant impacts. This means these agencies must assess the environmental significance of actions they have discretion to approve, fund or directly undertake.

SEQR requires the agencies to balance the environmental impacts with social and economic factors when deciding to approve or undertake an "action." The action in this case is the development and update of the Statewide Trails Plan. This plan provides direction and management strategies for trails for both non-motorized and motorized recreational trail use. A statewide framework for the development of an interconnecting trail system is provided for Greenway, Long Distance Hiking, and Water trails. These systems will connect urban, suburban and rural areas and cross nearly all the physiographic regions of the state.

When the action is determined to have potentially significant adverse environmental impacts, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required. The SEQR process uses an EIS to examine ways to avoid or reduce adverse environmental impacts related to a proposed action. The SEQR decision-making process encourages communication among government agencies, project sponsors and the general public.

The updated plan will guide future trail planning and development. Its adoption and implementation has the potential for significant effects, thus it was determined that an EIS should be prepared. Since the plan is a broad-based plan, an EIS which evaluates site-specific impacts of projects is not possible; thus, a Generic EIS (GEIS) is being prepared. A GEIS is an assessment of potential impacts of broad based or related groups of actions. It is more conceptual in nature than a site specific EIS which addresses a particular proposed project. It may provide a general discussion of the rationale and impacts of the proposed action.

This chapter, together with the other chapters of the plan, constitutes a GEIS for the plan. Chapters 1 through 6 describe the proposed action as well as numerous ways in which the impacts of the plan are mitigated. These chapters provide the reviewer with detailed information on the history, types and benefits of trails; needs and trends and the development of a statewide trails system including vision, goals and objectives; statewide framework; issues and strategies; standards and guidelines; development of a Statewide Trails Clearinghouse and overall implementation. They are thus integral components of the GEIS and should be referred to while reviewing this chapter.

This chapter discusses impacts and mitigation of impacts associated with adoption and implementation of the Statewide Trails Plan by OPRHP. This chapter also briefly identifies the Environmental Setting of the plan, and alternatives with regards to adoption of the plan. Other chapters of the plan are discussed briefly within the context of the goals and objectives.

The GEIS is not intended to provide a comprehensive analysis of impacts of each action which may be undertaken pursuant to the plan. It serves as a reference and sets forth the process for the implementation of future actions and related impacts, providing a sound environmental planning base. Existing evaluation and review processes are discussed in terms of assuring that resource

protection is given appropriate consideration during planning and implementation of actions pursuant to the plan.

Specific trail-related projects undertaken, funded or approved by state or local agencies pursuant to the plan are subject to SEQR if the projects meet certain thresholds as defined by SEQR regulations. Evaluation of some of these specific proposals will result in determinations that they will not have significant adverse effects on the environment as a result of undertaking the actions. Those proposals that may have significant adverse effects on the environment will require the preparation of an EIS. Under SEQR, the EIS process assures that an action to be undertaken will avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable. Through SEQR and other existing review mechanisms such as permit processes, consideration of environmental factors is a part of all plans or specific actions undertaken to implement the Statewide Trails Plan.

The Draft Statewide Trails Plan/GEIS was made available for public review and was the subject of a public hearing in accordance with the public review process of SEQR. Comments on the Draft Plan/GEIS were incorporated and addressed in this Final Statewide Trails Plan/GEIS as part of the SEQR record, prior to adoption of the plan.

## **B. Environmental Setting**

The environmental setting for the plan consists of the people and the natural, recreational, scenic, historic and cultural resources of New York State, as well as social and economic characteristics. The resources potentially affected by the plan include recreational areas, lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, coastal and estuarine waters, significant habitats, fish and wildlife, rare species of plants and animals, forests, agricultural areas, parklands, historic sites, archeological areas, scenic areas, and communities. The setting also includes the general public, park and recreation service providers, and both resident and nonresident users.

## **C. Alternatives**

There are two basic alternatives – to not update the existing Statewide Trails Plan, or to prepare an update to the existing plan. The existing Statewide Trails Plan was prepared in 1994, which means it is more than 15 years old. Although a number of issues and concerns have remained, new ones have surfaced, as well as strategies to address these issues. Likewise, opportunities for the development of segments of the statewide trail systems have been lost since 1994, while others not considered have emerged. Since 1994 the demographics of New York State have changed, along with the economy and social issues.

The update of the Statewide Trails Plan, through extensive public input plus participation by the State Trails Council, assesses the issues and concerns for the development, maintenance, and operations of trails and provides strategies to address these issues. It considers opportunities for trail connections utilizing new technologies. Supporting technical documents were produced for signage, maintenance, monitoring, and closure and restoration of trails (<http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/recreation/trails/technical-assistance.aspx>). The vision, goals, and objectives were revised to provide clear direction for the development of a statewide framework and guidance for all levels of government, trail groups, and individual trail users.

## **D. Environmental Impacts and Mitigation**

The plan identifies a vision, six goals and objectives to reach each goal, presents a statewide framework, identifies trail issues and strategies to address each issue, provides trails standards

and guidelines, and lays the groundwork for development of a Statewide Trails Clearinghouse. Combined, these all work together to provide guidance in supporting the vision for a statewide trails system. All of the strategies will have a positive overall impact on the natural and cultural resources, sustainability, communities, and the public in general.

## **1. Vision and Goals.**

*New York's Statewide Trails System is envisioned as interconnected world-class networks of land and water trails that are designed to be sustainable; provide a multitude of recreational opportunities; conserve the environment; connect parks, forests, open spaces, historic and cultural sites, public facilities, communities, and neighborhoods; attract economic opportunities; provide for alternative means of transportation; support tourism; promote the health and well-being of state residents; and otherwise enhance our quality of life as they allow people and wildlife to freely move across the diverse landscapes of New York State.*

This vision provides a balance between recreation trail opportunities and protecting the environment in a holistic manner. It provides a broad direction that considers all aspects for the development of interconnected land and water trails systems. These trails systems will result in benefits to both trail users and wildlife.

### **Goal 1: Cultivate development of a Statewide Trails System**

The development of primary trail connections between natural, recreational, and cultural areas will increase the public's recreational opportunities and access to trails, reduce the need for vehicle use, encourage physical activity, increase health benefits, including a potential reduction in obesity, and create avenues of connectivity for both people and wildlife. Trail construction is generally recognized as having impacts on natural resources in regards to clearing and development of treadways and trail corridors. Utilization of existing linear corridors, such as railroad rights-of-way and utility corridors, in the development of the trails system will greatly reduce the adverse impacts to natural areas. In addition, use of up to date natural resource and GIS data, a coordinated planning approach, and use of trail development standards and guidelines will help to minimize impacts. Development of water trails may include the need for facilities such as docks, boat launch sites, day use areas, campsites, parking lots and adequate public access. These facilities will result in changes to the environment and will require a closer look for potential adverse impacts and their mitigation. This is accomplished through site specific review and coordination with the appropriate resource and permitting agencies.

It is recognized that in the short term there may be impacts associated with trail construction and that these can be addressed in most instances through proper siting, design and construction of trails and trail corridors relative to natural resources. For example, resource agencies provide specific recommendations for erosion control during construction activities. It is also recognized that the plan provides the benefit of the long term protection of the corridors and their natural, cultural and scenic resources.

With the growing number and types of trail opportunities it is important to develop a Statewide Trails Clearinghouse to maintain an inventory that will be made available to the public. This will encourage both support and use of the trails.

There are a number of existing corridors, such as railroad rights-of-way, that provide excellent opportunities for trails. Reuse of these corridors would, in most cases, have fewer environmental concerns, be more energy efficient and less costly than acquisition and development of a new corridor.

Sound trails planning will result in a comprehensive trail system that will meet the needs of the users and the communities while protecting environmental and cultural resources. Trail plans provide the means of assessing existing trails and determining which trails should be maintained, relocated, improved and where new trails should be developed. The end result is an environmentally sound and sustainable trail system. Providing funding support is critical for this process to occur.

Trails cross both public and private properties. Strengthening the General Obligations Law that protects landowners who allow public recreational use of their lands will help facilitate the continuation and expansions of trails on private lands. Without the willingness of the private landowner, trails can become fragmented and alternative routes can result in greater impacts to the environment.

The plan provides the broader framework for statewide trails systems. Of equal importance are regional trail systems that consider the needs and resources on a regional level. This generates local support and a sense of “ownership” which helps assure appropriate use and maintenance of the trails and protection of the resources.

**Goal 2: Provide opportunities for all New Yorkers to have easy access to trails.**

Developing new trail opportunities close to where people live will encourage people to use the trails and, thereby, enhance physical activity and the use of trails instead of motor vehicles as a means to get to nearby locations and services. Improvements to trails and new construction should be designed for maximum accessibility. This will allow more opportunities for people with disabilities and responding to the needs of an aging population. The use of intermodal transportation to access trails, especially in and near urban areas, would reduce dependency on motor vehicles and result in energy savings. Regardless of the location of the trail, the trail activities should be based on relative needs and demands as well as compatibility with resources. This would help assure protection of the natural and cultural resources.

**Goal 3: Increase education about, cultivate support for, and promote the use of New York State trails among the general public.**

Increasing public awareness of the health, economic, social, educational and environmental benefits of trails will strengthen support for trail development, maintenance and use. Through these efforts, children and youth will be encouraged to connect with nature; increased physical activity will help in combating the obesity epidemic as well as reduce the risk for many chronic diseases and some forms of cancer; and new opportunities will be available for environmental and cultural interpretation. The means to accomplish this can be through the statewide trails website, National Trails Day promotions and statewide and regional campaigns.

**Goal 4: Advance environmental resource protection and sustainability in the development and management of trails.**

Trail corridors can have multiple benefits, functioning as a connecting resource for both people and wildlife. Sustainable design standards and best management practices will be utilized in the development and management of the trail to protect the natural and cultural resources. As indicated in Chapter VI Section C.5., as the need for additional environmental protection due to overuse is identified, these standards and guidelines can be revised. A key element in environmental resource protection is knowing the resources, their location and sensitivity. As a result the plan calls for inventories and mapping of

resources and environmental impact analysis as part of trail planning. This will reduce environmental impacts during the construction phase and long term use of the trail.

**Goal 5: Promote communication, cooperation, and coordination among all government entities, landowners, user groups, and other non-governmental organizations involved in trail planning, development, management, and maintenance.**

Communication, cooperation, and coordination are key in advancing a planning process and ultimately a sustainable trail system. Statewide and regional workshops can assist in determining the most sustainable route with the least environmental impacts. Partnership agreements between the land manager and the trail user groups and private and not-for-profit organizations can help assure appropriate and long term management of the trail. The New York State Trails Council will continue to function as a forum to discuss trail-related issues among motorized and non-motorized trail users.

**Goal 6: Conduct research to aid in the planning and management of trails.**

Monitoring trends in trail activities can help in determining who are the trail users, level of trail use and if the activities provided meet their needs. This information can aid in the management and maintenance of the trails. Together with economic impact assessments, additional support for the trails could be generated by the local communities and businesses.

The use of GIS and GPS technologies to gather, analyze, and disseminate trails data will have extensive benefits in identifying trail segments that require rehabilitation or relocation, developing maintenance and operational programs, disseminating trail information and assisting in emergency situations.

**Goal 7: Provide adequate funding and support for trails projects from various sources.**

Sustained federal and state funding and programs for trails projects help to ensure continued development of trails as recreation and alternative transportation routes that provide a multitude of benefits. Rating systems for some federal and state grants consider the goals and Statewide Trail Systems in the evaluation of development and acquisition projects. Funding will enhance trails planning, acquisition of land for trails, trails development and maintenance which can preserve and protect natural and cultural resources. Alternative sources of funding and donations for trails projects will provide similar benefits.

Preparation of National Register of Historic Places nominations for historic corridors to make structures eligible for EPF Historic Preservation Grants will help promote protection of cultural and historic resources along trails. Register-listed properties are eligible for additional funding and/or tax incentives that can assist in promoting these resources and trail access to them.

## **2. Statewide Framework**

The Trail System Framework provides a conceptual statewide trail system for greenway, long distance hiking and water trails. The systems are based on existing trails and potential corridors. Any new trail segment would be assessed on a case by case basis. However, the plan provides the context of how it would fit within the overall trail system. This is important

since progressing trail development can be determined by avenues of opportunity such as when a railroad right-of-way is being abandoned.

### **3. Trail Issues and Strategies**

Significant environmental benefits can be derived through the strategies recommended that address development, maintenance and operational issues impacting the trails. The plan identifies strategies for the following issue areas:

- Development and design
- Trail access
- Signage
- Education, interpretation and promotion
- Environmental Management
- Maintenance
- Landowner relations
- Liability
- User conflicts and illegal use
- Safety and enforcement

The strategies are designed to have a positive impact on the physical characteristics of the trails and surrounding environments and natural resources, the trail users, adjacent landowners, local communities and the trail experience as a whole. The strategies will help mitigate existing and reduce future adverse impacts to natural and cultural resources. The strategies associated with the environmental management issue areas are particularly applicable to impact identification and mitigation. For example the strategies recognize that trails can serve as possible pathways for invasive species and call for education and training to thwart the progression of invasives into invasive free environs. In addition, the strategies are applicable to local, regional and statewide trails.

### **4. Standards and Guidelines**

The plan points to technical documents and resource manuals (Chapter VI Section D) that provide standards and guidelines for trail planning, location, design, construction and management. In addition to providing guidelines for different trail design and uses such as shared use, signage, and trail closure/site restoration, their use helps address consistency in design and compatibility of recreation users of trails. The standards and guidelines also provide assistance regarding proper trail construction and maintenance methods which can limit and/or mitigate adverse environmental impacts of trails. Trail-specific evaluation and methodologies should also be identified.

### **5. Statewide Trails Clearinghouse**

The Clearinghouse will serve as a central repository of trails data and information. The Clearinghouse will include information on potential environmental impacts and how such impacts can be mitigated through trail design and implementation. Examples of such information are reports on *zones of influence* (Hecht et al. 2009), trail impacts such as “Scientific Literature Review and Summary of Potential Environmental Impacts of Trail

Construction and Recreational Use on Natural Resources within New York State Parks” (Stein 2007) and other resources such as *Planning Trails with Wildlife in Mind – A Handbook for Trail Planners* (Colorado State Parks 1998). Thus the Clearinghouse will provide information important to natural and cultural resources and, in doing so, contribute in a positive way to protection of those resources.

## **6. Implementation**

To fully implement the vision and goals, objectives and strategies have been identified in the plan. To develop and maintain a system of national, state, regional and local trails will require the involvement by the public and private sector. The plan identifies the role of each entity, including ownership, operations and maintenance, funding and technical assistance. In addition, the plan recognizes the importance and role of the State Trails Council in fostering cooperation and understanding among the various motorized and non-motorized trail interests and advocating trail interests to all levels of government and the public. The directions set forth within the plan will be incorporated within the rating system for various federal and state grant programs. Finally, the plan identifies federal and state funding sources that support the development and maintenance of trails. As part of this implementation, the plan’s goal and related objectives for advancing environmental resource protection and sustainability in the development and management of trails fosters identification and long-term protection of natural and cultural resources.

## **E. Cumulative Impacts**

The primary effect of the Statewide Trails Plan flows from the promotion of the goals, the statewide trails framework, and the strategies to address issues and concerns associated with trails. The plan calls for increasing coordination, protecting resources, expanding trail opportunities, and improving maintenance, operation, research and management of trails.

The cumulative effects of applying the goals and strategies will be substantially beneficial. Existing trail opportunities to the public will be maintained and expanded while at the same time protection of the natural and cultural resources will be ensured.

One of the most important cumulative effects of the plan is also the least tangible. The expansion of the trails systems and the commitment of resource protection guidance provided within the plan will substantially enhance the physical and psychological well being – the quality of life – of the residents of the State.

The furthering of the quality and extent of trails has substantial beneficial effects on economic activity, as well as open space preservation and recreation opportunities, within affected communities. Development of trails often contributes to the attractiveness of a municipality for investment by businesses and as primary means of non-motorized transportation that provide connections between and within recreation areas, residential areas, businesses, schools, and places of work. Thus, trails are an important adjunct to factors leading to economic recovery and development.

Application of the goals, strategies, and framework for the development of trails requires a commitment of resources. Resources for planning, development, and maintenance are committed through federal, state and municipal programs or projects. The plan helps determine the priority use of these committed resources. Implementation of actions which are guided by the plan will result in irreversible and irretrievable commitments of time, funding, and energy resources, but

overall the benefits of recreational opportunity, better health, open space protection, and stewardship outweigh these commitments.

The guidance provided within the plan will result in a significant reduction in energy consumption. This will especially be the situation in urban areas where trails function as a non-motorized means of transportation. Therefore, the plan will foster actions that will help mitigate climatic change.

Since the Statewide Trails Plan is a general plan, identification of program specific or site specific adverse impacts, including those which are unavoidable, will be accomplished during future planning and environmental review of programs and projects. Although specific adverse impacts associated with the application of the plan's goals and strategies cannot be identified, adverse impacts may arise when one or a group of goals and/or strategies are given more emphasis over other goals and strategies. Minimization of conflicts and adverse impacts is accomplished through planning, environmental review, public participation and priority rating systems.

## CHAPTER VIII: COMMENTS AND RESPONSES

This chapter contains the responses to the comments received by OPRHP on the Draft Statewide Trails Plan and Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement (DGEIS). The Draft Statewide Trails Plan/DGEIS was issued September 29, 2010. A Public Hearing was held October 19, 2010, in the Gideon Putnam Room at Saratoga Spa State Park, Saratoga Springs, NY. The comment period ended November 1, 2010.

During the Public Hearing, one person spoke out of nine attendees and her comment was recorded. During the comment period for the Draft Statewide Trails Plan/DGEIS, OPRHP received 44 written comment letters. A list of persons providing comments is included at the end of the chapter.

OPRHP appreciates the time and effort that persons interested in the future of trails in New York State have invested in their review and comments on the Draft Statewide Trails Plan/DGEIS and their participation in the public hearing.

The types of comments received included document editing suggestions, requests for clarification of information presented in the document, and comments related to specific aspects of the plan. All comments were reviewed and organized by categories.

Responses to these comments are found in this chapter and were considered in the revisions found in this Final Statewide Trails Plan/Final Generic Environmental Impact Statement (FGEIS).

### **Response to Comments**

The following section contains a detailed list of comments received from the public during the comment period and public hearing and the responses. The comments are organized by category. Following each category heading, there is a summarized comment. Following each summarized comment is OPRHP's response.

OPRHP received many comments in support of the entire plan and/or for specific sections and topics within the plan. OPRHP very much appreciates the support and interest expressed by comments on the plan. Some editing comments were also received and corrections made to the plan accordingly.

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#### **Category: Recreational Activities**

##### ***Comment: Bicycling***

Continue to support and expand bicycling opportunities as a component of the plan and the statewide trails system.

##### ***Response:***

Bicycling will remain a component of the plan and of expansion to the statewide trails system.

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##### ***Comment: Bicycling***

Page 19. Bicycle Routes. Include the use of the Erie Canalway Trail as a major element of US Bike Route 30 across New York State.

**Response:**

The designation of new Bike Routes is currently under review with the NYS Department of Transportation. It is clear, however, that the Erie Canalway Trail will remain as a major bicycling connection across the New York State.

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**Comment: Equestrian Trails**

Concern was expressed that there are very few officially designated and protected equestrian trails in Niagara and Erie Counties. The state is requested to provide a county by county checklist of trail uses/trail types that have been or need to be developed for use by planners.

**Response:**

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) provides a relative index of need for numerous recreational activities (including equine) by county (see SCORP (<http://www.nysparks.com/recreation/trails/statewide-plans.aspx>) - Chapter 3 Trends, Issues and Needs). This is intended to provide guidance to planners and land managers. OPRHP encourages user groups to work with local, county and regional planning and land managing entities. SCORP and local entities, including equestrian groups, can work together in providing and enhancing trail uses commensurate with demand and need. OPRHP will continue to serve as coordinator for such efforts.

---

**Comment: Mountain Biking**

Many comments requested improved trail access for mountain bikers to non-motorized multi-use trails and more trails for mountain biking in the plan and in the state (recreation areas, state parks, and forests). It was noted that improved access and more trails would help the NYS economy and promote a healthy lifestyle. Mountain biking groups are willing to work with the state and other trail user groups on development and maintenance of trails that allow mountain biking.

**Response:**

OPRHP recognizes that mountain biking has been one of the fastest growing recreational activities in the US over the past 20 years. Opportunities for mountain biking have increased statewide through local, regional and international groups coordinating with land managing entities. The state encourages coordination among user groups and appreciates the assistance of mountain biking groups. The state will continue to work with groups to provide appropriate access.

---

**Comment: Mountain Biking**

Development of mountain biking trails should take into account long-distance trails that would allow multi-day mountain biking trips and shorter loop trails that already exist in many regions of the state.

**Response:**

There are many considerations when determining appropriate uses for trails. A variety of trail experiences is preferred by many trail users. Mountain biking groups are encouraged to work with local, regional, and state entities, as well as other user groups, to develop and connect regional networks.

---

**Comment: Mountain Biking**

Page 17. Mountain Bike Trails, last paragraph. The plan should include mountain bike trail networks that exist on Long Island.

**Response:**

Mountain biking networks located on Long Island have been added to the list (Chapter III.E. Mountain Bike Trails).

---

**Comment: Off-Highway Vehicles**

Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) sports and recreation have not been included in Unit Management Plans, public workshops and state trails workshops. The State should include more OHV trails in the plan and other plans and turn to the New York State Off-Highway Vehicle Association (NYSOHVA) for support and input. NYSOHVA would like to be more involved with state agencies on this issue. Does NYS have a vision plan for its trail system that will include areas designated for OHVs?

**Response:**

OHVs are not permitted or treated as a recreational activity or program on state lands; therefore, OHV trails do not exist on state lands. OHV users are encouraged to participate in planning efforts that include all trail uses and OHV groups should continue to coordinate with all agencies. The plan notes that development of OHV trails should focus on county, municipal and private lands.

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**Comment: Shared Use Trails**

The plan should emphasize non-motorized trails. Trails that allow motorized uses do not offer the health and environmental benefits as laid out in the plan for multi-use trails.

**Response:**

The plan recognizes all the benefits including: physical, mental, connection with nature, economic, spiritual, environmental, educational, and conservation, for all types of trail use.

---

**Comment: Shared Use Trails**

Safety concerns were noted with the development of multi-use trails. OPRHP should develop mountain biking and hiking trails separately whenever possible and avoid steep, singletrack trails.

**Response:**

OPRHP recognizes the need for single use and shared use trails in different circumstances. OPRHP promotes cooperation among the various trail user groups. Chapter VI.D. Standards and Guidelines provides guidance for the development of sustainable trails.

---

**Comment: Shared Use Trails**

ATV trails should be separate from other trails and trail uses.

**Response:**

ATVs are discussed in Chapter III.H. ATV and OHM Trails in the plan. Examples are cited of public multi-use trails that allow ATVs. ATV use of trails is generally determined at the municipal or county level.

---

**Comment: Shared Use Trails**

Develop more shared use trails.

**Response:**

Figure 1 and Chapter VI.B.1. Greenway Trail Network provides the framework for development of a statewide greenway trail system. Development of these shared use trails will depend on state, regional and local initiatives depending on the length and scope of the trail project.

---

**Comment: Snowmobiling**

The plan states that snowmobile trails are not included as snowmobile activity is covered in the NYS Snowmobile Trail Plan. Any statewide trails plan should include snowmobiling even if there is an additional plan to address the recreational activity. By not including snowmobiling in the plan, this may be interpreted as a reason to deny snowmobile presence on any trail opportunity.

**Response:**

Snowmobiling is included in the plan. The vision, goals, objectives and trail guidance apply to snowmobile trails. This activity, along with others, was not included in the statewide trails framework section due to the existence of the NYS Snowmobile Trail Plan and to minimize duplication of information.

---

**Comment: Water Trails**

Calorie usage for canoeing, kayaking, and rowing should be added to Appendix B – Physical Activity Calorie Use Chart.

**Response:**

The source of the Calorie Use Chart is the American Heart Association website. Water activities were not included in this specific chart. A website link to calculate calorie use for other activities, including water related activities, has been included in Chapter IV.A. Healthy Hearts and Healthy Minds.

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**Category: Needs and Trends- Surveys**

**Comment: Economic Impact**

Make gathering additional credible economic impact data a high priority.

**Response:**

Additional economic impact surveys will be conducted as resources are made available.

---

**Comment: 2005 Park Professional Survey**

Concern was expressed regarding the 2005 Park Professional Survey. If certain trail uses were not permitted in some parks, then the survey did not capture issues related to that use. Also, it did not capture the potential need for trails for those certain uses not currently permitted in those parks.

**Response:**

The survey included a question for rating the need for various types of trails within the community; this was regardless of whether the trail use was permitted within a park. The survey also included a question regarding trail issues in the community; issues identified were not related to specific trail uses.

---

***Comment: Surveys for winter activities***

There is a need for collection of surveys geared toward winter activities. Surveys geared toward winter activities should not have less importance than surveys geared toward trail uses at other times of the year.

***Response:***

Winter uses are included in a variety of statewide surveys. Additional surveys will be conducted as resources become available.

---

***Comment: Conducting Surveys***

The NYS Snowmobile Association (NYSSA) offers its assistance to OPRHP to conduct surveys geared toward winter activities.

***Response:***

As in the past, OPRHP will continue to coordinate with NYSSA in conducting snowmobile and winter use surveys.

---

**Category: Vision Statement*****Comment: Trails and Community Infrastructure Planning***

Expand the Vision to include “throughout the state, trails will be acknowledged as an essential and mainstream element of community infrastructure, much as utility lines and sidewalks are thought of today.”

***Response:***

It is agreed that trails should be considered as part of community infrastructure planning. The following text has been added as an objective under Goal 5 (Chapter VI.A. Vision and Goals): Encourage local communities to include trails as an essential and mainstream element of infrastructure planning.

---

**Category: Goals and Objectives*****Comment: UTAP Trainings***

Goal 2 - Provide opportunities for all New Yorkers to have easy access to trails. OPRHP should continue to dedicate resources to training personnel and volunteers in the Universal Trail Assessment Process (UTAP).

***Response:***

OPRHP will continue to support UTAP trainings as resources are available.

---

***Comment: Trail Promotion***

Goal 3 - Increase education about, cultivate support for, and promote the use of New York State trails among the general public.

There should be a coordinated program of trail promotion with an annual trails promotion work plan that involves multiple state agencies assuming different responsibilities (i.e. I Love NY promoting trails in statewide and regional campaigns with emphasis on trails included in the statewide network).

**Response:**

“Develop a coordinated program of trail promotion with an annual trails promotion work plan that involves multiple state agencies assuming different responsibilities” was added to the eighth bullet under Chapter VI.C.4. Education, Interpretation and Promotion.

---

**Comment: Wayfinding signage**

Goal 3. The NYS DOT, DEC, and OPRHP should work together to develop a uniform system of wayfinding signs that direct motorists to trailheads and that advertise major trails on highway exit ramp signs.

**Response:**

This is addressed in Chapter VI.A. Vision and Goals – Goal 5. The agencies will work together to advance this system of signage.

---

**Comment: Grant Rating Systems**

Goal 5. Promote communication, cooperation, and coordination among all government entities... Extra points should be awarded to towns, villages and counties with established trails plans when applying for CMAQ, LWCF, RTP, TEP, and EPF-funded grants. This will promote the inclusion of local and regional planning processes in the implementation of this plan.

**Response:**

Rating systems for LWCF, RTP, TEP and EPF-funded grants currently consider local and regional trails plans. Consideration for trails plans in CMAQ- funded projects will be addressed in the future.

---

**Comment: Impact of Trails**

Goal 6: Conduct research to aid in the planning and management of trails. Include the need for research and dissemination of information about the ecological impact, or lack thereof, of recreational trails.

**Response:**

All trails produce some type of impact on the environment. Use of sustainable design and construction methods can reduce the impact associated with trail development and use. Goal 4 includes the objective: Provide resource protection guidance including information on methods and best management practices in trail design, development, and management. OPRHP’s approach to trail siting and design takes into consideration sensitive ecological communities and species. Chapter VI.C.5. Environmental Management provides a listing of strategies to implement to reduce impacts on natural resources. Chapter VII.D. Environmental Impacts and Mitigation includes the benefits of developing trail connections to the movement of wildlife and in providing long term protection to natural resources. The plan calls for inventories and mapping of resources and environmental impact analysis as part of trail planning to reduce environmental impacts.

---

**Comment: Trail Count Protocol**

Goal 6. Use the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Count protocol for trail counts and work with SUNY colleges to create a model survey process that trail managers can use to obtain data on economic impact. Having standardized protocols for collecting data on counts and economic impact will add to the validity of results and facilitate comparisons among trails throughout the state.

**Response:**

This protocol and other suggestions will be considered when establishing a standardized method for use statewide.

---

**Comment: Funding Sources**

Goal 7: Provide adequate funding and support for trails projects. All funding sources listed under this goal are alternatives to state-provided funding. This goes against the stated goal of providing funding.

**Response:**

This goal refers to funding and support from various sources including the state (which is identified in three of the bullets). The text “from various sources” has been added to the goal to clarify this point. (Chapter VI.A. Vision and Goals)

---

**Comment: Coordination**

Goal 7 - “Provide adequate funding and support for trails projects” is critical to the entire plan’s success. The incoming OPRHP Commissioner should work in concert with the commissioners of other state agencies, such as, DEC, DOT, DOH, DOS, and DED, to seek the vocal support of the Governor for trails in New York.

**Response:**

Through coordination of the State Trails Council, the inclusion of trails and connectivity as major components of OPRHP policy, and through development of a Statewide Trails Plan and other initiatives, OPRHP Commissioners have consistently supported trails. OPRHP will continue to work with other agencies and the Governors office to support and promote trails within the state.

---

**Comment: Environmental Education**

The state should encourage use of trails for environmental education of school students and teachers.

**Response:**

The plan includes the need to connect children and nature and notes that trails can serve as outdoor classrooms. “Encourage use of trails in environmental education programs” was added to the second bullet under Goal 3 (Chapter VI.A. Vision and Goals).

---

**Category: General Obligations Law**

**Comment: Strengthen GOL**

Strengthening the General Obligations Law (GOL) to protect private landowners should be a priority.

**Response:**

‘Continue efforts through constituency groups to strengthen and expand the GOL’ is included as an objective under Goal 1 (Chapter VI.A. Vision and Goals) and in Chapter VI.C.8. Liability.

---

**Comment: Strengthen GOL**

OPRHP is urged to strengthen the General Obligations Legislation by encouraging the state to intervene in court cases to foster good case law.

**Response:**

OPRHP has and will continue to make requests to the Attorney General’s Office to file amicus briefs in cases involving the General Obligations Law in issues important to outdoor recreation.

---

**Category: Statewide Trails Framework**

**Comment: Greenway Trails**

What are the criteria or thresholds for “Proposed Greenway Trails?”

**Response:**

The proposed greenway trails depicted on Figure 1 represent trails that: have been formally proposed for development by local or state agencies or by local interest groups; were identified as preferred connections by participants at public workshops in 2008; and/or were logical connections to connect the statewide system. These connections often follow existing linear corridors such as canals, rivers and abandoned or active railroads.

---

**Comment: Greenway Trails**

Some of the proposed greenway trail alignments are along existing and active railroads. Some owners or operators of these rail lines may have no intention of converting the rails to trails. This is in direct conflict with the NYS DOT 2009 State Rail Plan. If this is the case, environmental impacts should be covered in the Environmental Impact section of the plan.

**Response:**

The alignments of proposed greenway trails along active railroad lines are proposed only. The Executive Summary acknowledges that future trail connections may vary from these proposed alignments but that it is important to identify preferred connections. In some cases, a parallel trail may be developed; in other cases, an alternate alignment may be developed; and yet in other cases, with additional review, a feasible connection may not be found. Text has been added to Chapter VI.B.1 Greenway Trails Network to clarify this point.

---

**Comment: Greenway Trails**

The plan does not include the Niagara River Greenway or the role of the Niagara River Greenway Commission in the implementation of the Niagara River Greenway Plan.

**Response:**

The Niagara River Greenway was identified in Chapter III.A Greenway Trails. Additional text has been added to the plan to clarify the Greenway’s mission and to note the implementation goal of establishing a multi-use trail network throughout the Niagara River Greenway Designated Area (see Chapter III.A. Greenway Trails and Chapter VI.B.1 Greenway Trails Network).

---

**Comment: Greenway Trails**

The 1994 Statewide Trails Plan identifies the Remsen-Lake Placid Railroad Corridor as a ‘travel corridor.’ The 2010 Draft Statewide Trails Plan lists the Remsen to Lake Placid Travel Corridor as a ‘proposed greenway.’ Why was the classification changed and what criteria were used? Should the public have had input before the change was made? Comments were received in opposition to the

classification as a greenway for potential undesired future motorized uses and impacts along the corridor and for the desire to restore passenger and freight railroad service along the line.

**Response:**

The classification for the Remsen to Lake Placid Travel Corridor has not been changed. The Travel Corridor was included as a proposed greenway trail on Figure 1 of the plan to show potential for a multi-use connection along this corridor. The Corridor is used by tourist trains of the Adirondack Scenic Railroad in the spring, summer, and fall. In the winter, it is open to snowmobiling and some sections are open to cross country skiing and hiking. Additional trail development and trail uses along this corridor will be determined by state, regional and local coordination and will be in accordance with the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor Management Plan.

---

**Comment: Long Distance Hiking Trails**

Two trails listed as long distance hiking trails in the plan have very limited overnight camping facilities. The definition for a long distance hiking trail includes overnight camping. Consider revising the definition for long distance hiking trails.

**Response:**

The definition states: "... and are desirable for a linear overnight hiking trip." In some cases, off trail camping facilities may be required. The text "available camping facilities and locations will vary" has been added to the definition.

---

**Comment: Long Distance Hiking Trails**

Figure 3 – Long Distance Hiking Trail Network. The Great Eastern Trail is shown only as proposed. There are many miles of the trail (now named the Crystal Hills Trail as a branch to the Finger Lakes Trail) existing and open to hiking. Please update the maps.

**Response:**

The maps and text (Chapter III.B. Hiking Trails and Chapter VI.B.2. Long Distance Hiking Trails Network) have been updated.

---

**Comment: Water Trails**

Include the Paddles Up Niagara Trail (a 25 mile long water trail established by the Niagara River Greenway Commission) in the plan.

**Response:**

The trail has been added to the plan (Chapter III.J. Water Trails) and maps.

---

**Comment: Water Trails**

Include the Headwaters River Trail (a water trail that includes the Susquehanna, Chenango, Otselic, Unadilla, and Tioghnioga Rivers and was designated by the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network) in the plan.

**Response:**

The trail has been added to the plan (Chapter III.J. Water Trails) and maps.

**Comment: Water Trails**

A couple of towns located along Long Island’s North Shore have received grants for planning and development of water trails. Consider adding Long Island’s North Shore coastline to the Water Trails Network in the plan.

**Response:**

The water trails depicted on the Water Trails Network map (Figure 4) consist of the state’s long distance water trails, both existing and planned. These long distance trails generally cross many political boundaries. Addition of a water trail along Long Island’s North Shore will be considered on future revisions of the map (and plan) as formal plans are established for development of water trails along a significant portion of Long Island’s North Shore.

---

**Category: Trail Issues and Strategies**

**Comment: Invasive Species**

More emphasis should be placed in trails planning on preventing the spread of invasive species (IS), which trails can unwittingly facilitate. Stronger preventive measures and more vigorous removal efforts are needed, especially in and near canals.

**Response:**

The recent development of the New York State Invasive Species Council has brought greater attention to this issue on a statewide basis. In Chapter VI.C.5 Environmental Management in the plan, strategies include the need for education about modes of transmission and preventive measures for IS and the need for training of trail maintainers in identification, removal and disposing of IS. Chapter VI.F.1.f – Volunteers/Interest/User Groups discusses the important role of volunteers including for trail maintenance and the removal of invasive species. Chapter VII.D.3. Trail Issues and Strategies reiterates the need for education and training regarding IS.

---

**Comment: Sustainability of trails**

Page 42. Development and Design. "Sustainability of trails, in terms of both physical construction and the ability to apply resources for long-term maintenance, should be considered before a new trail is built..." Include `when a new user group is added to a trail' as a consideration.

**Response:**

This text has been added to Chapter VI.C.1 Development and Design.

---

**Comment: Accessibility**

Accessibility information should be added to the trails database and used to encourage trail managers to incorporate accessibility information into trailhead signage.

**Response:**

Accessibility information will be included in the database as information is available for specific trails. Trail managers are encouraged to incorporate accessibility information into trailhead signage as noted in the plan to Chapter VI.C.3. Signage and Chapter VI.D.3. Accessibility. These recommendations are also included in the *Trail Signage Guidelines for the NY State Park System* located at: <http://nysparks.com/recreation/trails/technical-assistance.aspx>.

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**Category: Standards and Guidelines****Comment: Shared Use Resources**

Page 54. Shared Use. Top of page. Please add a new bullet: Guide for the development of Bicycle Facilities. 1999. American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. [www.sccrtc.org/bikes/AASHTO\\_1999\\_BikeBook.pdf](http://www.sccrtc.org/bikes/AASHTO_1999_BikeBook.pdf).

**Response:**

This reference has been added to Chapter VI.D.2 Shared Use.

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**Comment: Trail Signage**

Page 57. Trail Signage. Add: "For projects located along the New York State Canal System uniform signage guidelines are available from the New York State Canal Corporation <http://www.canals.ny.gov/corporation/signage-guidelines.html>."

**Response:**

This reference has been added Chapter VI.D.4 Trail Signage.

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**Comment: Trail Development Standards**

Why are ATV, OHV, and 4-wheel drive trails included in the plan and the Trail Development Standards table when these uses are prohibited on state lands?

**Response:**

As per New York State Law, the Statewide Trails Plan shall include motorized and non-motorized uses (see Appendix A of the plan). The Statewide Trails Plan is meant to act as a resource for all trail uses.

---

**Comment: Trail Development Standards**

Amend the Trail Development Standards (page 51) for hiking trails as follows:

- a. Hiking (developed, multi-track, high use); Corridor Clearance: 6-10'; Treadway Width: 4-8'; Trail Length: Not Applicable
- b. Hiking (primitive, single-track, low use); Treadway Width: 1-2'; Trail Length: Not Applicable

**Response:**

The Trail Development Standards are provided as general standards and used as guidance. The standards may need to be modified in some cases to adjust to specific site conditions, to address the natural characteristics of the resource and/or for specific needs of a project. This clarification has been added to the plan (Chapter VI.D.1. Trail Development). OPRHP will work with trail maintaining, user groups, the State Trails Council and natural resource stewardship staff on future revisions to the Trail Development Standards table.

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**Comment: Trail Development Standards**

Page 51. Bicycle Class I (Greenway Trail). A treadway width of 6-8 feet for a two-lane greenway trail that will accommodate multiple uses seems insufficient. Change the 1-direction width to 6 feet and 2 direction width to 8-10 feet as per the AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities 1999.

**Response:**

The Bicycle Class I classification should reflect the AASHTO guidelines. The table was not revised per the last updated version in 1999. The treadway and corridor width standards have been modified to reflect AASHTO guidelines (Chapter VI.D.1 Trail Development).

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**Category: Statewide Trails Clearinghouse**

**Comment: Trails Inventory**

The statewide trails inventory should include existing trails, planned trails (funding applied for), and trails under development (funded, active construction projects).

**Response:**

Efforts will be made to include this information in the inventory.

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**Comment: Trails Inventory**

The creation and updating of a comprehensive statewide trails inventory will require cooperation from multiple agencies, local governments, and non profits engaged in trail operation and development.

**Response:**

The plan recognizes the need for coordination among all levels of government and the private sector.

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**Comment: Roles and Responsibilities**

The plan states that the Clearinghouse “could manage statewide trail networks, coordinate trail maintenance activities, promote NYS trails, acquire new data, respond to public requests for information, continually update and improve the statewide trails website, monitor trail use, conditions, and trends, and produce yearly progress reports with new information, products, and trends.” It is unclear who, in addition to the Statewide Trails Coordinator, will be responsible for accomplishing these many tasks, especially with reductions in OPRHP funding and staff.

**Response:**

Coordination, communication and participation by all levels of public and private sectors are required for implementation of the plan. OPRHP will work in partnership with PTNY, and in conjunction with the State Trails Council, to provide guidance for implementation steps and coordination of efforts.

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**Comment: Trails Data**

It is unclear how much trails data the Clearinghouse would manage, as the plan states the Clearinghouse would “acquire, store, and distribute information on all trails across the state under the coordination of the Statewide Trails Coordinator.” It is not clear which trails that represents. Information presented on the Statewide Trails Clearinghouse website should be kept current.

**Response:**

It is the intent of the Clearinghouse to capture information on the range of trails located in the state from long distance statewide trails to regional trails to shorter local community trails. OPRHP will

coordinate with all levels of government and trail groups to collect this data. This will be an on-going effort to keep information up to date.

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***Comment: Links to not-for-profit organizations***

A statewide trails website must include links to not-for-profit organizations that are also working to provide and promote trail activities. It was stated during one of the webinar presentations of the plan that the Statewide Trails Clearinghouse is not intended to compete with or replace the “wealth of information” now provided to the public by many groups “but to link to them.” This intention should be clearly stated in the plan.

***Response:***

The Clearinghouse will include links to other agencies and organizations related to trails. Text has been added to Chapter VI.E. Statewide Trails Clearinghouse to clarify that this is not intended to compete with or replace the information provided on the other websites.

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***Comment: Online database and maps***

There is a need to provide an online collection/database of trails including online maps.

***Response:***

The Clearinghouse will include a trails database. Maps will be added to the Clearinghouse as resources allow.

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**Category: Implementation**

***Comment: Roles and Responsibilities***

Concern was expressed about the impact decreasing levels of funding and staffing at OPRHP will have on the implementation of the seven goals of the plan.

There is no prioritization given to the goals and objectives outlined in the plan or for the proposed trail corridors.

It is suggested to add “priorities will be determined in part by the department’s ability to leverage its resources by working with local and regional organizational partners.”

The plan’s implementation section should contain a detailed, prioritized implementation plan with near, mid and long-term goals and objectives. It should also state what entity would be responsible for ensuring that the recommendations are carried out. Proposed corridors could be listed as near, mid and long term priorities on a map with an accompanying chart that provides information such as length of project, steps needed for trail development, and a cost estimate. For example, the completion of the Canalway Trail System should be the highest trail development priority in the state. Prioritization of trail corridors would guide state and local governments in reaching the objectives of Goal #1.

***Response:***

As stated in the plan, implementation of the plan will require the resources, energy, knowledge and expertise, and coordination of many agencies, organizations, and individuals.

As in the past, OPRHP will partner with Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) in coordinating statewide leadership efforts regarding trails planning and development. This partnership, in conjunction with input from the State Trails Council, will provide initial guidance for development of prioritization of the plan’s goals and objectives. Guidance will include developing specific approaches for soliciting

input from other state agencies and regional and local municipalities regarding priority projects and for more specifically identifying implementation steps, priorities, and responsible entities.

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***Comment: Interagency Working Group***

Specific recommendations were provided regarding the establishment of the federal and state interagency working group (listed objective under Goal 5) as to who should be represented in the group and responsibilities of the group.

***Response:***

As noted above, OPRHP and PTNY, in conjunction with the State Trails Council, will provide guidance on development of priorities for the goals and objectives listed in the plan, including the establishment of a working group. The specific recommendations provided in the comments will be considered at that time.

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***Comment: NYS Trails Coalition***

Page 63. Private/Not-for-Profits/Trail Organizations/Trail Advocacy Organizations. The plan should include information on the New York State Trails Coalition.

***Response:***

Information about the NY State Trails Coalition has been added to Chapter VI.F.1.d. Private/Not-for-Profits/Trail Organizations/Trail Advocacy Organizations.

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***Comment: Volunteers***

Page 63. Volunteers. Add “Advocate for legislation, funding, and policies that positively affect trail development” as a bullet under the roles that volunteers can play.

***Response:***

This text has been added to Chapter VI.F.1.f. Volunteers/Interest/User Groups.

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***Comment: Coordination***

The state should work with private groups on cohesive trail systems that benefit local economies, route trails away from sensitive resources, and enhance environmental education and conservation. This should lead to completion and promotion of the Long Path, Northern Forest Canoe Trail, Champlain Paddlers' Trail and North Country National Scenic Trail.

***Response:***

Coordination on trail projects is occurring statewide. Progress towards completion of these trails is in various stages and is dependent upon available resources.

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**Category: Funding**

***Comment: Funding source***

OPRHP should establish a reliable funding source to secure trail easements for permanent trail locations.

***Response:***

OPRHP continues to identify funding sources for trails programs and acquisition – including easements. OPRHP considers proposed trail easements on a case by case basis and moves to secure them when funding and resources become available.

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***Comment: Grant Opportunity***

Page 65. Funding. Add Parks & Trails New York’s Capacity Building Grants Program as another source of funds for park and trail not for profit organizations.

***Response:***

This grant opportunity has been added to Chapter VI.F.3 Funding.

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**Category: Review Period**

***Comment: Length of Review Period***

The length of the public review period was too short.

***Response:***

The State Environmental Quality Review Act requires a 30-day minimum public review period for a Draft Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The comment period followed that requirement.

## Persons/Organizations Who Provided Comments

First Name	Last Name	Organization
Kenny	Boettger	
Benjamin D.	Clauss, DDS	
John	Davis	Adirondack Council
Fay (Moak)	DeTraglia	NCATVA
John	DiMura	NYS Canal Corporation
Louis	Eichel, M.D.	
Todd	Fiore	WNYMBA
Joelle	Foskett	ADK
Tyler	Frakes	Adirondack Council
Samuel A.	French, Jr.	
Edward	Goodell	New York-New Jersey Trail Conference
Fran	Gotcsik	Parks & Trails New York
Dr. John W.	Green	
Erin	Heard	Upper Susquehanna Coalition
Larry	Kennedy	
Kurt A.	Kress	NYS OPRHP
Mary	Kunzler-Larmann	
Albert	Larmann	NCTA
Paul G.	Leuchner	Niagara River Greenway Commission
Paul	Marko	Download Design
Jennifer	May	
Douglas	Meyer	
Nathan	Morgan	
Lukas	Novotny, PhD	University of Rochester - The Institute of Optics
David	Perkins	NYSSA
Jennifer	Sappell	The Long Island North Shore Heritage Area
Carol A.	Schmelz	
William M.	Schultz	
David I.	Schwartz	
Todd	Shapiro	
Irene	Szabo	Finger Lakes Trail Conference
Matthew	Tallman	The Bread Basket Bakery
Eric	Thomas	
Steve	Toman	
Zack	Vogel	
Russ	Wait	
Georgette	Weir	New York-New Jersey Trail Conference
Richard E.	Williams	
Kristopher	Williams	
Jerry	Wolfert	

<b>First Name</b>	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Kathryn	Woodruff	NCTA
Chris	Yarsevich	
Andrew	Zygmunt	
Andrea	Zygmunt	



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