



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

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Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor

Rose Harvey
Commissioner

**AGENCY DECISION
AND
STATEMENT OF FINDINGS**

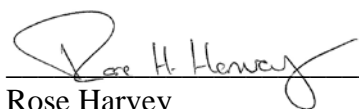
Adoption of a Final Master Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for Ogden Mills and Ruth Livingston Mills Memorial State Park, Margaret Lewis Norrie State Park, and Staatsburgh State Historic Site

Designation of a Bird Conservation Area

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has prepared a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Final Master Plan, dated April 17, 2013 for Ogden Mills and Ruth Livingston Mills Memorial State Park, Margaret Lewis Norrie State Park, and Staatsburgh State Historic Site.

By the authority vested in me in State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation Law, I do hereby adopt this Final Master Plan/FEIS. I also designate portions of the parks as a Bird Conservation Area.

My decision is based on the attached Findings Statement and the content of the Final Master Plan/FEIS, which have been prepared according to the provisions of Part 617, the regulations implementing Article 8 of Environmental Conservation Law - the State Environmental Quality Review Act.



Rose Harvey
Commissioner

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

May 22, 2013
Date

SEQR FINDINGS STATEMENT
Ogden Mills and Ruth Livingston Mills Memorial State Park,
Margaret Lewis Norrie State Park and Staatsburgh State Historic Site
Final Master Plan/FEIS

May 1, 2013

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

Title of the Action:

Adoption and Implementation of a Final Master Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for Ogden Mills and Ruth Livingston Mills Memorial State Park, Margaret Lewis Norrie State Park, and Staatsburgh State Historic Site (Mills-Norrie-Staatsburgh).

Location:

The Mills–Norrie–Staatsburgh park complex is located in the Town of Hyde Park, Dutchess County, NY.

Description of the Action:

The Final Master Plan for the Mills-Norrie-Staatsburgh park complex provides long term guidance for the development and management of the parks and site and protection of its resources as summarized below.

Date of Completion of the FEIS: April 17, 2013

Findings:

1. These findings consider the relevant environmental impacts, facts and conclusions disclosed in the FEIS; weigh and balance relevant environmental impacts with social, economic and other considerations; provide a rationale for the agency’s decision; certify that the requirements of 6 NYCRR Part 617 have been met; and certify that consistent with social, economic and other essential considerations from among the reasonable alternatives available, the action is one which avoids or minimizes adverse environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable, and that included within the plan are those mitigation measures that will avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable.
2. The Final Master Plan/FEIS was subject to a complete Environmental Impact Statement process including a public information meeting and a public hearing.
3. The Final Master Plan/FEIS contains a chapter on responses to comments on the Draft EIS. This chapter includes clarification of issues raised during the review of the Draft EIS and also provides information that has been used in the preparation of the Final Master Plan/FEIS.
4. Mills-Norrie-Staatsburgh is a multi-faceted facility that encompasses a wide variety of recreational, natural and historic resources. It encompasses 1,100 acres in the Town of Hyde Park, in western Dutchess County, New York. The park complex includes more than three

miles of Hudson River shoreline that is unimpeded by rail line. The parks are physically contiguous, with Mills on the north and Norrie to the south. Staatsburgh State Historic Site lies within the limits of Mills Memorial State Park.

5. The Mills-Norrie-Staatsburgh complex is a mix of historic designed landscapes, historic buildings, undeveloped shoreline, and wooded areas. There are approximately 11 miles of year-round trails, an 18-hole golf course, a campground, ten cabins, a marina, picnic areas, kayak rentals, and an environmental education & interpretation facility. The OPRHP Taconic Regional Headquarters is also located in Norrie State Park in the former Staatsburg Public School.
6. Mills and Staatsburgh are day-use facilities, whereas Norrie provides overnight accommodations at its campground and cabins during the summer and fall. In addition to camping, cabins, golfing, boating and fishing, the parks are used for winter activities as well including sledding, cross country skiing and snowshoeing. Passive uses such as walking, running, dog walking, bird watching and just sitting and enjoying the views are perhaps the most popular recreational activities. A variety of events, festivals and concerts are held as well.
7. The vast cultural resources of the facility are interpreted in many ways; most significantly, guided tours are offered at Staatsburgh State Historic Site. Environmental education and interpretation is offered at the Norrie Point Environmental Center.
8. The principal vehicular access is Old Post Road, a Town of Hyde Park maintained highway that also serves the hamlet of Staatsburg. The railroad passes through both parks carrying freight and Amtrak passengers, but there are no rail services (stops) in the vicinity of the parks. The Norrie Marina provides limited service for transient boaters on the Hudson River, along with seasonal docks, a boat launch ramp and other services. A pier for US Coast Guard/Hudson River Pilots Association's use is located adjacent to the Norrie Point Environmental Center. Car-top boat launching is found adjacent to the marina and in the central portion of the park near the Lewis Gordon Norrie playground area (gazebo).
9. The parks have a total of 11.6 miles of trails including the River Trail which is a designated Hudson River Valley Greenway Trail and is part of the Hyde Park Trail System. The parks receive substantial local day-use, being located within the hamlet of Staatsburg, and the Dinsmore Golf Course draws people from the mid-Hudson region. The Norrie campground and marina, and the Staatsburgh State Historic Site serve a larger geographic area including the New York City Metropolitan area and adjacent states.
10. Norrie State Park was established in 1934 with the gift of 323 acres of land to the state. Four years later Mills State Park was established through the donation of 190 acres of land, including the 1895 mansion (Staatsburgh State Historic Site) and numerous outbuildings. Staatsburgh State Historic Site was designated as a historic site in 1970. The park complex has gradually been added to over the decades, particularly with the addition of the Hoyt property, the Lewis Gordon Norrie playground, the Staatsburg School, the former Stonehurst estate, and former Hull and Huntington properties.
11. Mills-Norrie-Staatsburgh has a long history of human use, particularly for agriculture. Currently, the facility encompasses a mix of primarily second growth forest, expanses of lawn,

a golf course, maintained successional old fields, and an extensive area of Hudson River shoreline that also includes Esopus Island. The area along the river contains many bedrock outcroppings and upland portions of Mills consist of mostly rolling hills (0-8% slope) towards the river. Numerous vernal pools and forested wetlands are scattered throughout the park. The final stretch of the Indian Kill is within Norrie, flowing through tidal marsh and tidal swamp communities near its mouth before emptying into the Hudson River. This diversity of forests and fields, intermittent, permanent and tidal wetlands, Hudson River shoreline, and human-influenced landscapes supports a variety of flora and fauna.

12. Two of the ecological communities found in the park have been identified as significant by the Natural Heritage Program (NHP). These are the Hudson River and the freshwater tidal swamp located along the Indian Kill. Four rare plant species and at least six species of rare animals have been recorded in Mills-Norrie-Staatsburgh. The area of the Hudson River adjacent to the parks supports significant fish habitat and is also a winter waterfowl concentration area.
13. The parks and historic site are set in the scenic Hudson River Valley. In addition to the natural beauty of this region, the parks and historic site contain historic, designed landscapes that date back to when the facility was separate Hudson River estates. Views from U. S. Route 9 near the golf course sweep down towards the river, as do views from “Staatsburgh” (formerly known as Mills Mansion) and Norrie Point. The park facility is also located within a Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS) per the NYS Department of State (DOS).
14. The majority of the cultural resources that exist within Mills-Norrie-Staatsburgh are associated with the establishment of American Renaissance and Gilded Age country seats along the Hudson River. The significant cultural resources that remain include numerous structures as well as designed landscapes. Native American tribes and cultural groups occupied both sides of the Hudson River for thousands of years before European settlement. Mills-Norrie-Staatsburgh is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Sixteen Mile District (1978) and is a National Historic Landmark as part of the Hudson River National Historic Landmark District.
15. The plan identifies a vision for the parks and the site. The vision for Mills-Norrie is that these parks will continue to offer existing recreational opportunities within the highly scenic and historic setting with extensive direct and visual access to the Hudson River. The golfing, boating, camping and trail facilities will be improved, respond to changing trends, and retain their design character. Infrastructure needs for improved operations, Hudson River access, and sensitive reuse of historic buildings will be given priority in capital construction. In addition, interpretive research and programming will be developed in conjunction with other partners on the numerous themes identified within the parks and the general Hudson River Valley. An emphasis will be placed on Native Americans, land-use, including agriculture and estate development, transportation, Civilian Conservation Corps, and the parks movement. Finally management plans for the parks’ historic structures, cultural, scenic, and natural features will be prepared, integrated, and implemented.
16. The vision for Staatsburgh State Historic Site is that it will continue to be a tourist destination in the Hudson Valley that provides protection and interpretation of a country estate and tells a multigenerational story of the Lewis-Livingston-Mills family and those who lived, worked

- and visited the mansion. While on-going restoration of the mansion and its collection will continue, the boundary of the site will expand to include the historic designed landscape and the outbuildings that were originally included in the estate in order to properly preserve historic resources and allow for expanded interpretative and passive recreation opportunities.
17. The plan presents a series of “preferred alternatives” for future development and operation of Mills-Norrie-Staatsburgh. Status quo alternatives were also evaluated for each element of the plan as well as other feasible alternatives. The various preferred alternatives were combined to create a single preferred alternative that best met the long-term vision for the rehabilitation and enhancement of public use facilities and the protection and preservation of cultural and natural resources. This alternative represents the Final Master Plan.
 18. The Final Master Plan considers the historic, cultural, natural and recreational resources of the parks and responds to the needs and safety of park patrons, protection of natural, cultural and scenic resources and the principles of sustainability. It also details designations, recreation and stewardship elements. The plan also prioritizes implementation actions and recognizes that implementation will be dependent on the level of public and private funding available to OPRHP in future years.
 19. The Bird Conservation Areas (BCA) program is established in Environmental Conservation Law Section 11-2001, and authorizes the designation of BCAs in order to integrate bird conservation into agency planning, management and research projects within the context of the agency mission. The park complex supports a diverse array of bird life. Following an evaluation of bird data, it was determined that the parks meet three criteria to be designated a Bird Conservation Area including migratory bird concentration area, diverse species concentration site and species-at-risk site. Under the Master Plan a BCA will be designated within a portion of Mills-Norrie-Staatsburgh. The designation provides recognition on a statewide level relative to other state parks and sites. The BCA designation itself does not preclude existing or future recreation uses or park operations.
 20. The Final Master Plan calls for natural resource protection and management strategies for invasive species management, wildlife management, protection of the freshwater tidal swamp natural community, wetland stream and river protection , successional old field management and scenic vista management. OPRHP will also work with the Town of Hyde Park and the Dutchess County Soil and Water Conservation District on storm water management mitigation efforts.
 21. The plan calls for the following improvements to recreation opportunities:
 - The campground will be assessed for impacts related to soil compaction. Additional tent platforms will be constructed at existing sites and a new shower building/comfort station will be sited.
 - The existing group camp area will be redesigned and improved to include a pavilion, new restroom, and a parking area to improve the desirability of this camping location.
 - The campground will be assessed for the potential and/or need for expanding camping to include RVs and additional sites.

- A new ADA compliant cabin will be sited and constructed in a complementary design aesthetic to the existing CCC era cabins.
- Trail recommendations will be implemented, including rehabilitation of the River Trail (erosion control and protecting the shoreline habitat) and promoting external trail connections.
- The Lewis Gordon Norrie Playground Area will be enhanced to utilize the natural, tiered landscape of the site to have a connected, dynamic passive recreation area. Improvements will include: a picnic grove, new parking/roads, a composting toilet, a playground, fishing access, improved ADA access, and car-top watercraft launch at the Hudson River.
- The Dinsmore Golf Course's irrigation system will be upgraded and improved.

22. The Final Master Plan includes the following cultural resource protection and management actions:

- Ongoing restoration efforts will be continued at Staatsburgh, including completing the restoration of the mansion's exterior, east portico, and roof. Staff and volunteers will be trained in the care of the site's historic furnishings collection.
- A Cultural Landscape Report will be developed for the park facility and Historic Structures Reports will be developed for most of the qualifying buildings.
- Hoyt House will be stabilized as funding becomes available. OPRHP will attempt to secure a licensee or concessionaire to renovate and reuse the building.
- The numerous historic views and vistas within the parks and site will be restored in concert with applicable OPRHP Policies.
- The historic stone wall of the estate will be repaired.

23. The Master Plan also includes the following actions relative to park and historic site operations:

- The boundary of the Staatsburgh State Historic Site will be revised to include the adjacent historic buildings and landscapes. The Historic Site Manager will become responsible for those structures and will continue to work in concert with Park Manager with respect to maintenance.
- A new maintenance facility will be constructed to better serve the entire complex and Taconic Region storage needs. Regional storage will be relocated out of the historic Carriage Barn to this new facility. The building will be approximately 7,500 square feet and located across from the golf course between the railroad and Old Post Road.
- The parks and site will be divided into management zones to help provide better direction with respect to the care and maintenance of the historic landscape, natural and recreational resources.
- Infrastructure upgrades (roads/bridges, waste water, water, electrical/internet) will occur throughout the complex.

24. In addition, the plan recognizes that implementation of all of the actions will require substantial investment of state funds, along with additional funding from other public and

private sources. The implementation of the Master Plan is divided into three priority phases. The initiation and completion of these priority phases will depend upon funding and demand and will be balanced with the need to make ongoing capital improvements to maintain and rehabilitate the park's roads, bridges, utilities, buildings and infrastructure.

25. Environmental impacts associated with the implementation of the plan were addressed under general areas:

- The plan will result in some physical change and disturbance to land where new construction is proposed. Some new projects will be constructed in areas with soil or slope limitations for development, and in these cases special considerations will be given in their design. All projects which involve ground disturbance, whether new or within an existing developed area, will minimize sedimentation and erosion impacts through the use of Best Management Practices.
- New trail construction will include review of final trail layouts in the field by appropriate agency staff to ensure consistency with trail standards and protection of sensitive environmental resources. The policy and guidelines for trail building that have been established by recognized trail organizations and governmental agencies will be followed. The goal of all trail work is to have trails that provide access to the resource without adversely affecting it.
- The Master Plan implementation is expected to have minimal impact to water resources. Several of the natural resource management strategies provide guidance for the future management and protection of important water resources such as wetlands, streams and the Hudson River. Projects that require permits, such as the new fishing dock at Norrie, will follow all permit requirements regarding mitigation of potential water quality impacts. Projects that involve new construction as well as those that are rehabilitative will incorporate buffer areas near water resources and features such as bio-swales or pervious pavement to minimize storm water runoff.
- Limited new development is proposed and therefore direct impacts to biological resources are expected to be minimal. Projects have generally been sited in areas with previous development, limited environmental sensitivity and which generally possess accessibility to and use of existing infrastructure. The natural resource management strategies provide guidance for the future protection of biological resources.
- In areas that will require vegetative restoration (e.g. campground improvements; tree replacement; trail closure) native species or historically appropriate non-invasive species that are indigenous to the area will be used.
- The designation of a Bird Conservation Area (BCA) will provide added recognition of the importance of the facility for bird habitat, particularly as a migratory concentration site and for species at risk. The plan's natural resource management strategies call for additional protection particularly sensitive wildlife habitats such as the Indian Kill, vernal pools and river shoreline.
- Control of nuisance Canada geese around the marina has been successful and further controls will be implemented in northern sections of the facility. Deer population levels may be adversely affecting the vegetation at the park through over browsing and these

impacts will be further examined to allow for informed decision making with regards to future management options or strategies

- The master plan calls for the preparation of an invasive species strategy that will provide guidance for prioritizing control efforts, so that invasive species control can be undertaken in the most effective manner from both ecological and economic perspectives.
- Implementation of the Master Plan will result in continued maintenance of the existing scenic vistas. In addition some historic vistas will be restored, such as between the Hoyt House and the Hudson River. New construction or renovations to existing structures will be designed to complement their surroundings and will not be visually intrusive.
- The Master Plan will have significant beneficial impacts on the many significant cultural resources within the Mills-Norrie-Staatsburgh complex. This includes preparation of Cultural Landscape and Historic Structures Reports that will provide important information about these resources and provide guidance for their future management and protection. In addition, the use of management zones will provide the needed guidance for the appropriate management of natural and cultural resources, including historic buildings and landscapes.
- Implementation of the Master Plan will result in substantial beneficial recreation and open space impacts. The plan provides for new and improved recreation facilities and visitor amenities. The plan will create a better organized trails system which will accommodate a variety of uses including hiking, biking, and cross country skiing. It is anticipated that implementation of the Master Plan will result in increased use of the parks and historic site. This increased use will be managed to maintain the quality of the recreational, natural, scenic and historic resources.
- The plan proposes no changes to traffic circulation or access and current capacity is expected to meet the proposed needs. Health and safety of patrons and staff will continue to be a priority. Sustainability principles and energy efficiency will be incorporated into the design of all proposed construction. Master Plan implementation may result in some temporary increases in noise during construction. Construction is generally scheduled for periods of low park use to minimize impacts to park visitors.

26. As this facility is located within New York's coastal area, the Master Plan was reviewed for consistency with the NY Coastal policies. Based on review of applicable policies, it is OPRHP's determination that the plan will not substantially hinder the achievement of any of the State's coastal policies.
27. The plan describes the process for supplemental environmental review and provides for guidance as to when additional environmental review may be required and identifies the types of actions that are likely to require additional review. These include new actions not addressed with the final Master Plan/FEIS that are not Type II actions within Part 617, any change from the preferred alternative for recreational and facility elements of the plan that may result in significant adverse environmental impacts and any leases, easements or other agreements between OPRHP and other entities that would affect resources in a manner that is not adequately addressed in the final Master Plan/FEIS.