

Final Master Plan/ Final Environmental Impact Statement

For

Robert G. Wehle State Park

November 17, 2010



David A. Paterson
Governor

Andy Beers
Acting Commissioner

Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation



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

Date of Notice: November 17, 2010
Lead Agency: New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP)
Title of Action: **Adoption and Implementation of a Master Plan for Robert G. Wehle State Park**
SEQR Status: Type I
Location of Action: Robert G. Wehle State Park is located in the Town of Henderson in Jefferson County, NY.

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 Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on the proposed action has been prepared and accepted by OPRHP. The Executive Summary of the Master Plan/FEIS 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 FEIS; this consideration period ends on December 3, 2010. Copies of the Final Plan/FEIS are available for review at the Park Office; at the offices of the agency contacts and the Henderson Free Library, 8939 State Route 178, Henderson, NY. The online version of the Master Plan/FEIS is available at the following publically accessible web site: <http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/inside-our-agency/master-plans.aspx>

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Final Master Plan/
Final Environmental Impact Statement
for
Robert G. Wehle State Park

The Town of Henderson, Jefferson County

Prepared by
The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

Completed: November 17, 2010

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Acknowledgements

The Robert G. Wehle State Park Final Master Plan/Final Environmental Impact statement is a result of a cooperative effort by many persons. The Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) acknowledges the time and effort of each individual, public agency and interest group who participated in the development of the park and this Final Master Plan Document.

In a cooperative effort, the Agency worked with and coordinated input from the following agencies and schools: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, United States Department of Agriculture and Cornell University.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Commissioner of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) is proposing the adoption and implementation of a Master Plan for Robert G. Wehle State Park. The Final Master Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was written to provide the opportunity for individuals, organizations and other government agencies to participate in the development of the State Park.

Two public scoping/information meetings were held to gather information, concerns and issues surrounding the development of Robert G. Wehle State Park. Meetings were held in the park in Henderson, NY on July 14, 2009 at 3:00 PM and at 7:00 PM. A 30-day comment period was provided to collect comments and suggestions from patrons wishing to provide written comment. Additional visitor information was collected from a four month visitor survey. The public hearing on the Draft Master Plan/DEIS was held at the park in Henderson, NY on August 10, 2010 and the public comment period ended September 3, 2010.

The Commissioner has decided that a Master Plan/EIS is necessary to guide the management and development of the resources at Robert G. Wehle State Park. The Commissioner has also decided that the final plan is to be made available for public review and comment. There has not been any decision regarding the adoption of the Final Master Plan.

Park Background

The park is located on the eastern side of Lake Ontario on Stony Point, approximately eight miles south of Sackets Harbor.

In 1990, Robert G. Wehle sold 1,067 acres to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). After discussions between DEC and Mr. Wehle, it was determined that the land would be transferred to the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) for management as both a recreational facility and a facility which focuses on conservation. Following this transfer, Robert G. Wehle State Park was created in 2004 to provide a place for patrons to enjoy scenic views of Lake Ontario, the vast trail system and park facilities.

An Interim Management Guide (IMG) was written for Robert G. Wehle State Park in April 2004 in which OPRHP documented the uses, facilities and existing features in the park. In 2008 the ecological communities and significant species were recorded by the Natural Heritage Program and identified in the Natural Heritage Report for the park. A Phase 1A cultural report was conducted for the park identifying culturally significant aspects in the park. A more detailed Phase 1B cultural survey was conducted in 2008 for the main entrance roadway project. A five-year capital improvement plan was developed in 2004 to guide the development during the first years of the park's existence. The five-year capital improvement plan has, for the most part, been implemented.

Environmental Setting

The park occupies 1,067 acres in the Town of Henderson in Jefferson County. The park has three miles of Lake Ontario shoreline. The southern boundary is adjacent to the NYS DEC Henderson Shores Unique Area.

There are eleven ecological community types located in the park. Of the eleven, calcareous pavement barrens and calcareous shoreline outcrops are identified as significant natural communities

(Lundgren and Smith, 2008). These calcium-rich bedrock outcrops are one of the most prominent features of the park. There are approximately 98 acres of wetland habitat in the park. The primary water feature is Lake Ontario which provides significant scenic vistas.

The flora of the park is characteristic of limestone areas of northern and western New York and the wildlife is typical of the region and the rural setting. The park has an extensive infestation of the invasive plant pale swallow-wort. Research by the U.S. Department of Agriculture into the control of pale swallow-wort is currently being conducted in the park. The park's wildlife is also typical of the region and the rural setting.

Between 1895 and 1947, the U.S. military used the property for training purposes. The area was known as the Stony Point Rifle Range. Several historically significant structures remain on the land today including spotter stations, building foundations and rifle range landscape features.

In 1968 Robert Wehle acquired the land from his father's estate, constructing several of the structures seen on the site today. Buildings from the Robert Wehle period include the former Wehle summer home, a log cabin, barns, dog kennels, maintenance shed, bird coops and other supporting structures. Archeological studies have been conducted in the park showing signs of previous habitation by Native Americans, farmsteads and military activities.

Recreational activities in the park include hiking, mountain biking, cross country skiing, picnicking, tennis court, volleyball, and hunting. Interpretive/educational displays are also available for patron use throughout the park. The former Wehle summer home is a reservable rental compound overlooking Lake Ontario.

Vision and Goals

Agency Mission Statement

The mission of The Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation is to provide safe and enjoyable recreational and interpretive opportunities for all New York State residents and visitors and to be responsible stewards of our valuable natural, historic and cultural resources.

Park Vision

Robert G. Wehle State Park will continue to be a place for visitors to enjoy, appreciate and learn about the park's natural, cultural, and physical resources, and participate in the recreational opportunities that the park offers.

Park Goal

To be responsible stewards of the natural, cultural and physical resources of Robert G. Wehle State Park while making available to the public compatible recreational, interpretive and educational opportunities.

Analysis & Alternatives

The master plan presents a series of "preferred alternatives" for future development and operation of the park. Cumulatively, the actions described below present OPRHP's long term vision for the enhancement of the park.

The Master Plan

Natural Resource Protection

The plan includes the following management strategies which will provide guidance and direction for the management of significant natural communities, invasive species, water resources, flora and fauna and the protection of natural resources through the following actions:

- Protect and buffer wetland habitat.
- Conduct additional rare plant surveys.
- Implement the Invasive Species Management Plan.
- Continue the existing mowing regime to control swallow-wort and continue to support ongoing study and research of pale swallow-wort control at the park.
- Protect the calcareous shoreline outcrops by monitoring shoreline areas for impacts such as trampling and invasive species and maintaining shoreline buffer vegetation.
- Protect the calcareous pavement barrens through invasive species management and reduction of trails through this area.

Recreation Facility Development and Programs

Recreation facility improvements will include the following elements.

Trails

Hiking, mountain biking, cross country skiing and snowshoeing are allowed on all trails. All trails have been named and will be blazed with appropriate signage at all intersections. Trail improvements, reroutes or closures will take place per OPRHP Trail Standards. Improvements to the trail system will include:

- Close certain undesignated trails as identified on Figure 16 – Trail Map.
- Redesign or realign areas identified as wet conditions per Figure 13 – Trail Assessment Map and Appendix D.
- Remove the portion of the Dancing Gypsy Trail along the fence line from within the wetland.
- Realign a portion of the Bobolink Trail around calcareous pavement barren habitat. Portions of the trail will be lined with large rocks to help guide patrons.
- Realign a small portion of the Midge Trail. The portion of the Snakefoot Trail that connects to Parking Lot B will be renamed the Midge Trail.
- Install new trail head signage that will provide information about the trail such as its length and difficulty.
- Move the Marksman Trail away from the park road.
- Continue mowing and snow grooming operations on trails.

Fishing

- Continue to provide fishing access.

Group Camping

- Construct a group camping area within the park that will include fire rings and open areas to pitch tents.

Hunting

- Continue to provide hunting opportunities. Two small sections of park property will be removed from the designated hunting area.

Cultural Resource Protection

The park has an extensive military history within the Jefferson County Region. As such, the protection and interpretation of the cultural resources is also an important part of the master plan. Associated actions include:

- Interpret the firing range and wall as a significant cultural feature.
- Clear the firing wall of vegetation through the cutting of trees and shrubs.
- Continue to mow the berms and firing range.
- Remove trees from the firing range to enhance the visual connection with the firing wall.
- Install interpretive panels to educate patrons on the significant military activities.
- Interpret the watch stations and foundations from the military era.
- Repair or reconstruct watch stations as deemed necessary and in accordance with Field Services Bureau guidance.
- Protect the archaeological resources on a case by case basis where ground disturbance is anticipated during construction.

Scenic Resource Protection

Scenic resources are an important feature within the park. Protection will be given to the scenic nature of the park through the following actions:

- Protect the viewshed from Lake Ontario. The design and location of the picnic area and overlook will use materials which blend in with the surroundings. The design of the picnic shelter will consider low pitch roof lines, natural color tones, and placement and vegetative screening to minimize or eliminate view of this structure from the lake.
- Enhance views of the lake along the Snakefoot Trail through the selective removal of trees or shrubs at key points along the trail. Existing vista points will be maintained.

Interpretation and Education

Interpretation and education throughout the park will be enhanced by the following actions:

- Implement the Swallow-wort Interpretive Plan for Robert G. Wehle State Park.
- Construct and install swallow-wort seed check/boot cleaning stations.
- Provide interpretation and education on other topics such as the park's military, geologic and natural history.

Infrastructure and Operations

- Provide the log cabin as an optional amenity with the reservation of the rental house compound. Based upon usage trends and patron comment, the long term goals for the log cabin may be as a stand alone rental structure, separate from the rental house compound.
- Continue to use the two barns as storage space and to serve the future operational needs of the park.
- Continue with the rental of the Wehle house compound. (Maximum occupancy of eight). Large group events will be permitted on a case-by-case basis. Improvements will be made to the septic

system. Access to the game room will be improved, consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

- Maintain the roadway and parking layout. Improvements to the gravel service road will take place to provide access to the log cabin for patron use.
- Maintain the existing picnic area located on the southwestern shore as is. A small ADA accessible picnic area will be constructed closer to the main parking lot and include an overlook of Lake Ontario. If deemed necessary, a small picnic shelter will be constructed adjacent to this proposed picnic area.

Implementation

The master plan presents a vision for the rehabilitation and construction of improvements to the park. The plan identifies two priority levels and actions which are ongoing throughout the park. The pacing of plan implementation will depend on the availability of funds and labor to advance the proposed improvements, which need to be sequenced with other capital improvements in the park and Thousands Islands Region. The priority groupings identified on the Implementation Table in Chapter 6 are conceptual and subject to reorganization based on available resources.

Environmental Impacts

Consistent with the intent of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR), environmental considerations were among the criteria used in evaluating alternatives and in selection of elements within the Master Plan. Categories of impacts that were evaluated were: traffic and access, recreation, water resources, biological resources/ecology, cultural/archeological resources, scenic resources, public health and safety, and growth and character of the community and neighborhood. Actions outlined in the master plan are designed to minimize impacts in all of these areas. The plan proposes minimal changes to traffic circulation or access and current capacity is expected to meet the proposed needs. Changes to the trail layout, the addition of a new picnic and overlook area and group camping area, and the rental cabin option will all augment recreation opportunities at the park. Protection of shoreline plant communities and utility upgrades at some facilities will protect water resources. Plans for improved management of cultural/archeological resources will not only serve to protect those resources but will also offer new interpretive opportunities. The maintenance of appropriate overlooks and the careful design of shoreline development will protect scenic resources. Health and safety of patrons and staff will continue to be a priority. Overall the additional amenities are not expected to significantly increase visitation of the park.

The establishment of a new picnic area overlook, group camping area, and the clearing of the firing range and gun wall will require the removal of approximately three to five acres of some trees and shrubs. Clearing will be kept to a minimum and will provide improvements to recreation and historic interpretation. Approximately 2.5 miles of existing trails will be removed but the revised trail layout will clarify routes and lead to better enjoyment of the remaining 13.5 miles of trails in the park. The master plan also includes the adoption of an invasives species management plan. This plan will provide a framework to prioritize control efforts so that control of invasive plants can be done in the most effective manner from both an ecological and economic perspective. Near term activities that will be implemented under this plan include installation of swallow-wort seed check/boot cleaning stations and experimental swallow-wort control plots where swallow-wort will be tilled and removed and replaced with native vegetation.

As the park 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.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Planning and Environmental Review

Planning

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) planning process adheres to three basic principles:

- **Planning must be coordinated and provide for public participation:** Cooperation among appropriate governmental organizations, the public at large, special interest groups and the private sector is not only desirable but necessary.
- **Planning is a continuing process:** Assumptions for the classification and management of park resources must be constantly re-evaluated in light of new information, changing needs and priorities, and resource character.
- **Planning must be comprehensive:** The information base, and pertinent additional research, should support the planning process and should encompass relevant social, economic and physical factors relating to the management and operation of the park and its resources.

Environmental Review

The environmental review of proposed master plans for state park facilities is conducted in accordance with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR). OPRHP fully integrates the planning and environmental review processes. This document serves as both the Master Plan and the Environmental Impact Statement for Robert G. Wehle State Park.

To ensure that master plans conserve and protect coastal and watershed ecosystems of the Great Lakes, the Agency has embraced the principles of ecosystem-based management (EBM). The principles of EBM are included and represented throughout the master plan as well as the development and implementation of the plan. These principles are: start with a place based focus, base management decisions on the best available science, provide measurable objectives to direct and evaluate performance, use adaptive management to respond to new knowledge and changing conditions, recognize interconnections within and among ecosystems, and involve stakeholders to incorporate local knowledge. An EBM approach to management ensures that decisions are made holistically focusing not on a single species or resource, but considering all parts of the ecosystems, including humans.

Sustainability

Sustainability is a philosophy on how to improve, operate and maintain State Parks and Historic Sites, while at the same time, minimizing or reducing the impacts State Parks and Historic Sites have on the natural environment.

Sustainability looks at the whole rather than the individual parts to maximize energy efficiency and minimize environmental impact; reduce use of fossil fuels; reduce or eliminate hazardous substances; protect biodiversity and ecosystems; and use resources carefully, respectfully and efficiently to meet current needs without compromising the needs of other living creatures and the use of those resources by future generations.

OPRHP is committed to reducing its impact on the environment and to becoming more carbon neutral by adopting more sustainable practices in park development, improvement, operation and

maintenance. Sustainable practices and alternatives were considered in the planning process and incorporated throughout the master plan.

Introduction to the Park

Establishment of the park

In 1990, Robert G. Wehle sold 1,067 acres to the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). After discussions between DEC and Mr. Wehle, it was determined that the land would be transferred to the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) for management as both a recreational facility and a facility which focuses on conservation. Following this transfer, Robert G. Wehle State Park was created in 2004 to provide a place for patrons to enjoy scenic views of Lake Ontario, the vast trail system and park facilities.

Previous Planning Efforts

An Interim Management Guide (IMG) was written for Robert G. Wehle State Park in April 2004 in which OPRHP documented the uses, facilities and existing features in the park. In 2008 the ecological communities and significant species were recorded by the Natural Heritage Program and identified in the Natural Heritage Report for the park. A Phase 1A cultural report was conducted for the park identifying culturally significant aspects in the park. A more detailed Phase 1B cultural survey was conducted in 2008 for the main entrance roadway project. Cultural and natural analysis and surveys have been ongoing, from that time. A five-year capital improvement plan was developed in 2004 to guide the development during the first years of the park's existence. The five-year capital improvement plan has, for the most part, been implemented.

What has prompted the preparation of this report?

The Robert G. Wehle State Park master plan has been prepared to provide long-term safe recreational opportunities that are compatible with the resources while protecting the park's natural, cultural and scenic resources. The park, established in 2004 has been operating under short-range planning initiatives. The master plan provides for long range planning and opportunity for public input and will guide the direction of the park.

Chapter 2 – Park Background

The Region

New York State is divided into 12 Park regions. Eleven of these regions are under the jurisdiction of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). The twelfth region is composed of the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves and is administered by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Robert G. Wehle State Park (park) is located in the Thousand Islands Region administered by OPRHP.

Location

Robert G. Wehle State Park is located in the Town of Henderson in Jefferson County. The park is located on the eastern side of Lake Ontario on Stony Point, approximately eight miles south of Sackets Harbor. See Figure 1 – Vicinity Map.

Access

The main entrance to the park is accessed from Schoolhouse Road. A satellite parking area for approximately 10 cars is located on Windmill Road and provides access to the trail system. Additionally, patrons have pedestrian access to the park via the adjacent Department of Environmental Conservation’s Henderson Shores Unique Area. A parking lot is provided by DEC off Lighthouse Road.

Recreational Needs Assessment

As a relatively new state park created in 2004, Robert G. Wehle State Park has the potential to provide increased recreational opportunities for residents of Jefferson County as well as visitors to the region.

According to the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2009-2013 (OPRHP, 2008), “relaxing in the park” continues to be the recreation activity enjoyed by most New York State residents. This is followed by walking/jogging, visiting museums/historic sites, and swimming and biking. The Relative Index of Needs indicates that most of the existing and projected recreational needs for Jefferson County are at or below the state average. Those activities at the state average, indicating, at the very least, the need to maintain or increase current levels of service are cross country skiing, hiking and snowmobiling. While snowmobiling is not an allowed activity in Robert G. Wehle State Park, cross country skiing and hiking can be accommodated at the park. Since the opening of the park in 2004, it has continued to assist in meeting the existing and projected recreational needs of the area.

Recreational Needs from Public Comment

The comments received verbally and in writing during the public comment period for the master plan reflected suggestions on the types of activities people would like to have at the park. Recreational activities suggested through public comments included hiking, mountain biking, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, walking, equestrian activities and snowmobiling. All of these activities are allowed at the park with the exception of equestrian activities and snowmobiling.

Park Boundaries

The park occupies 1,067 acres in the Town of Henderson in Jefferson County. The park has three miles of Lake Ontario shoreline. The southern boundary is adjacent to the NYS DEC Henderson Shores Unique Area. The other areas of the park border private land which is primarily undeveloped successional fields with minimal residential development.

Adjacent Land Uses

The land uses immediately adjacent to the park consist primarily of vacant or residential land (as defined by Jefferson County zoning maps). The vacant land classification includes the Henderson Harbors Unique Area owned by DEC. The adjacent residential land is primarily successional farmland with minimal adjacent development visible from the park land. See Figure 2 - Adjacent Land Uses.

Partnerships, Deed Restrictions and Designations

Partnerships

Robert G. Wehle State Park receives funding support, on an annual basis, from distributions from the Robert G. Wehle Charitable Trust. A five person committee to monitor the Trust's performance was established after Mr. Wehle's death.

OPRHP has partnered with the United States Department of Agriculture and Cornell University to study Pale Swallow-wort, an invasive plant, within the park. Research plots have been established and are monitored on a regular basis to determine strategies for management and control of this invasive species.

Deed Restrictions

No deed restrictions are present for the park with the transfer of jurisdiction of the property from DEC to OPRHP. The transfer of jurisdiction is dated August 11, 2003. DEC requested that the transfer of jurisdiction be conditioned upon the continuation of hunting by the public on such land and cooperation by OPRHP with DEC on preservation of existing wildlife habitat, targeted wildlife species and protection of rare, threatened or endangered species.

Designations

The park currently has no State or Federal designations. The master planning process will determine if designations are suitable for the park.

Chapter 3: Environmental Setting

Physical Resources

Geology

The bedrock within the park is relatively close to the surface and consists primarily of Ordovician Rocks, including the Lorraine Trenton Black River Group. The shales, siltstones and sandstones of the Lorraine Group record a well-defined sea bottom marine community geological sequence. The Black River and Trenton geological groups are shallow water carbonates, such as limestone and some dolostone, which were deposited at or just below the shoreline in an ancient, shallow sea. The bedrock layer, as a result of years of erosion, is generally between 0” and 20” below the surface. The shallow depth of the bedrock is a limiting factor for development at the park. Underground utilities such as septic systems and buried electric lines need additional engineering and funding in areas of shallow bedrock conditions.

Topography

The park is roughly 250 to 310 feet above sea level and is generally flat with a gradual slope downward from northeast to southwest. The gradually sloping topography begins at lake level on the southwest end of the park and rises to cliffs as high as 85 feet along the shoreline at points near the park office. The topography has been a limiting factor in providing lake access opportunities given the steep, vertical shoreline near the main use area. See Figure 3 – Slope and Topography.

Soils

Soils within the park are generally shallow with depths to bedrock from 0-20”. The primary soil types within the park consist of the Benson-Galloo complex (BgB), and the Galloo Rock outcrop complex (GbB). Both of these soil types are very rocky with gradually sloping grades between 0 and 8%. In addition to these, there are smaller pockets of gravel and gravelly loam located in the western portions of the park including Groton Variant gravelly loam, Newstead Silt Loam and Farmington Loam. Each of these soil types are generally well drained on their own. Other influencing conditions such as shallow soil depths may impact their permeability. See Figure 4 – Soils for information on soil types and their locations.

Water

The primary water feature at the park is Lake Ontario. It receives the water from all of the other Great Lakes. It has 393 cubic miles of water and an average retention time of six years. Its watershed includes portions of Ontario and New York, and covers 24,720 square miles. The western part of the Canadian portion of the basin is highly urbanized and the remainder is largely in agriculture. The main flow of the lake is northeast toward the St. Lawrence River.

The entire lake shoreline within the park is rocky, consisting of calcareous shoreline outcrops and cobble shores (See Ecological Communities). Access to the water is available at the picnic area and at the end of the main access road. Two small man-made ponds constructed by Mr. Wehle, one for ornamental purposes and one to provide water for grazing animals, still exist today.

Floodplains

According to the National Flood Insurance Program maps for the Town of Henderson the park is located within a “Zone C” area which is an area of minimal flooding. These maps also indicate that

Lake Ontario at elevation 249' is within a "Zone A1" which is the 100 year flood zone. Any areas of shoreline at elevation 249' or below would be subject to such flooding.

Wetlands

According to the DEC freshwater wetland regulatory maps, approximately 15.8 acres of regulated wetland Y-1 exist in the northern part of the park. The remainder of wetland Y-1, a forested/shrub wetland, extends northward beyond park boundaries. Based on this mapping, DEC regulated wetlands account for roughly 1.5% of the park. A larger DEC regulated wetland complex exists south and east of the park within the adjacent Henderson Shores State Unique Area. See Figure 5 - Wetlands Map.

According to National Wetland Inventory mapping, which uses a much smaller wetland area threshold for mapping, there are seven different wetlands located within the park. They total approximately 82 acres and are scattered fairly evenly throughout the park. These wetlands represent approximately 7.5% of the park and include deciduous and coniferous forest/shrub wetlands as well as emergent and deepwater wetlands.

Air

The air quality in Jefferson County is considered to meet all air quality requirements. All of the measured pollutant levels were significantly lower than those required by the National Ambient Air Quality Standard, and fall within the Pollutant Standards Index category of having "good" air quality. (DEC 2009)

Natural Resources

Ecological Communities

The New York Natural Heritage Program survey (Lundgren and Smith, 2008) identified eleven ecological community types at Robert G. Wehle State Park. These are calcareous cliff community, calcareous pavement barrens, calcareous talus slope woodland, limestone woodland, successional old field woodland, successional red cedar woodland, calcareous shoreline outcrop, cobble shore, shallow emergent marsh, silver maple-ash swamp and sinkhole wetland (Figure 5). Although not included as a natural community type, it should be noted that large areas of the park are maintained as mowed lawn. Ecologically, the mowed areas of the park serve the purpose of reducing the spread of pale swallow-wort seeds. See Figure 6 – Ecological Communities Map.

Of the eleven natural community types identified at the park, calcareous pavement barrens and calcareous shoreline outcrop were identified as significant natural communities (Lundgren and Smith, 2008). Calcareous pavement barrens, or alvar, are landforms that originated from sedimentary deposits in a vast, shallow inland sea that covered much of New York approximately 450 million years ago. These areas often harbor rare species of plants and animals.

Calcareous shoreline outcrops occur along almost the entire Lake Ontario shoreline within the park. These outcrops of calcium-rich bedrock, such as limestone, are one of the most prominent features of the park. There are several hundred occurrences statewide of varying quality. This community type is limited to the calcareous regions of the state. The communities at Robert G. Wehle State Park are considered one of the few high quality examples. See Figure 7 – Significant Communities Map.

Flora

The flora of Robert G. Wehle State Park is characteristic of limestone areas of northern and western New York, where shallow limestone bedrock affects everything from soil depth and drainage to soil

chemistry and susceptibility to erosion. Most of the park contains second growth forest due to past human use and is comprised of a diverse assemblage of young and mature trees and shrub and herbaceous plant species (Lundgren and Smith 2008).

Rare Plants

The New York Natural Heritage Program survey also identified several specimens of *Ulmus thomasii* within the park. Known as "cork elm" for the distinctive corky ridges on its twigs and branches, this species is listed as threatened by New York State, but is not identified federally on the "Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants" list published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This species has a limited range in New York State consisting mostly of the areas along Lake Ontario and the Finger Lakes. Primary threats to cork elm are logging of larger trees and Dutch elm disease.

Fauna

The park's wildlife is typical of the region and the rural setting. The park supports a wide diversity of mammals, birds, fish, amphibian, reptile and insect species that are common to the northeastern United States.

Endangered, Threatened and Rare Animal Species

According to the New York State Breeding Bird Atlas, Stony Point, where the park is located provides habitat for 90 total bird species, three of which are designated as species of special concern in New York: Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*), and Whip-poor-will (*Caprimulgus vociferus*).

Invasive Species

Invasive species are defined as species (e.g. plants or animals) non-native to the ecosystem that cause or are likely to cause economic or environmental harm, or harm to human health. Invasive species can develop extremely large populations, usually due to a lack of competition or predation, thereby causing adverse effects such as a loss of wildlife habitat and impacts to landscapes and ecosystems.

The park contains an extensive infestation of the invasive plant pale swallow-wort (*Cynanchum rossicum*). This is an aggressive invasive species from the milkweed family that can form dense patches that crowd out native plant species and impact wildlife habitat. In addition to being a long-lived perennial, pale swallow-wort is a prolific seed producer and produces allelochemicals that inhibit the development of neighboring plants. These adaptations likely play a strong role in pale swallow-wort's ability to almost completely take over habitats in both sunny old-fields and shaded woodlands. As pale swallow-wort densities increase, the physical and chemical ecology of these areas is altered. Swallow-wort can adversely affect grassland bird populations and insects such as monarch butterflies in infested areas (<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/>). Pale swallow-wort's aggressive spread also threatens rare ecological communities such as globally rare alvar plant communities in the pavement barrens.

Swallow-wort is not only a serious problem for biodiversity at the park but also presents challenges for maintenance and enjoyment of the park's trails (Lundgren and Smith, 2008). Due to the large extent of its coverage at the park, control has proven difficult and currently consists of expanded mowing operations in an attempt to limit the plant's spread. Research by the U.S. Department of Agriculture into the control of pale swallow-wort is currently being conducted in the park. There is currently educational information about swallow-wort at park kiosks. Other invasives species are

present at the park and include multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*), buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), phragmites (*Phragmites australis*) and purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*). The invasive animal, Zebra mussel (*Dreissena polymorpha*), is also present in Lake Ontario (Lundgren and Smith, 2008).

Fish

Fish species common in Lake Ontario include brown trout, rainbow trout (including steelhead), coho salmon, chinook salmon, pink salmon, lake trout, Atlantic salmon, bass, muskellunge and tiger muskellunge, northern pike, walleye, lake sturgeon, American eel, yellow perch and sunfish. The two small ponds in the park do not support fish populations.

Recreational Resources/Activities

There are several recreational resources provided at the park.

Picnicking

The park has one picnic area on the shore of Lake Ontario with access to the water's edge. It includes ten picnic tables, a group grill and a composting toilet. Patrons are required to park in the visitor parking lot and walk one and one-half miles to use this facility. The capacity of the picnic area is between 20 and 50 people.

Tennis Court

A concrete tennis court located near the visitor center was included with the property upon purchase. The court is in good condition and is used frequently on weekends. See Figure 8 – Main Use Area Map.

Volleyball Court

A sand volleyball court located near the visitor center was developed at the park subsequent to acquisition by the State and provides another recreational opportunity for park patrons. See Figure 8 – Main Use Area Map.

Hunting

Hunting for large and small game is allowed during the State regulated seasons in designated areas throughout the park. State rules and regulations apply. See Figure 9 – Hunting Map.

Trails

The park includes 16 miles of mowed trails which meander along the lake's edge and through both forest and successional fields. Lake side trails provide many scenic vistas from the bluff top while other trails provide scenic views of the interior areas of the park. The trail system connects to the adjacent Henderson Shores Unique Area, allowing patrons to experience both areas. Hiking, mountain biking, cross country skiing and snowshoeing are allowed on all trails. See Figure 10 – Existing Trails Map.

Table 1 - Trail Descriptions

Trail Name	Mileage	Blazing	General description
Bobolink	1	Blue	Trail cuts through wooded and open pavement barrens passing two spotters boxes along the way to the Henderson Shores Unique Area.
Dancing Gypsy	2.25	Green	Winding around the wooded northern section of the park this trail links the main parking area with the Snakefoot trail offering views of Lake Ontario from atop 85' bluffs.
Huckleberry	.6	Purple	Trail meanders through wooded areas in the interior of the park.
Jungle	1.6	Brown	This trail wanders around the wooded interior of the park.
Knickerbocker	.5	Black	This trail offers a shortcut from the main parking area to Dancing Gypsy along the edge of the old firing range.
Marksman	1.4	Red	Winding from the interior property line to the lake shore, this trail cuts through the heart of the park's wooded area.
Midge	.5	White	A quick trail leading from Snakefoot to the rental house compound, this trail skates along the edge of the park's pavement barrens.
Snakefoot	5.5	Yellow	This long looping trail starts in the main recreation area of the park leading along the shoreline to the south passing many views of the lake and islands eventually following the property line with the adjacent parcels.
Unmarked	2.7	none	These trails run as connectors between the various other trails.
Total Mileage	16		

Cultural Resources

Historic

Between 1895 and 1947 the U.S. military used the property for training purposes in preparation for warfare. The area was known as the Stony Point Rifle Range and housed soldiers for several days at a time as they trained for land, oversea and air combat. The Stony Point Rifle Range was the main firing range used by Pine Camp (now Fort Drum), Fort Ontario and Madison Barracks.

Stony Point Rifle Range was used for overland artillery practice until 1925 when the U.S. Coast Guard began to use Stony Point for anti-aircraft gun training. The firing took place along the shoreline over Lake Ontario. Anti-aircraft guns would shoot at targets which were either floated in the lake or pulled behind an aircraft. The firing range was also used as a temporary landing field during this period. In 1926, Madison Barracks and Fort Ontario considered abandoning the firing

range due to its disrepair. In 1927 the decision was made that extensive facilities were already in place and that they should continue to use it. The Army repaired the facility in April and began hosting troops.

During World War II, the firing range was used heavily for artillery training. The facility had many mess halls, a kitchen, a training staff tent, sleeping quarters and other support structures. The remnants of these structures can be seen throughout the park today including the concrete spotter boxes, the rifle range and associated landscape features, foundations, sewage treatment facility, a water pump house, roadways and more. See Figure 11 – Cultural Resources Map.

In the 1950's, after the military use of the property, Robert Wehle's father, Louis Wehle, purchased the land with Thomas Nagle. Together, they used the land for cattle grazing and agriculture until 1964 when Louis Wehle passed away. Recent archeological surveys have shown remnants from this period including a farmstead foundation.

In 1968, Robert Wehle acquired the land from his father's estate, constructing several of the structures on the site today. Buildings from the Robert Wehle period include the former Wehle summer home, a log cabin, barns, dog kennels, maintenance shed, bird coops and other supporting structures. These buildings, while significant to the recent use of the park, are all outside the "period of significance" for the park (when the property gained its historic significance and National Register Eligibility). They are not considered a significant historical element within the park and are not National Register Eligible.

The following buildings, structures, landscapes and/or sites are located within the park.

Rifle Range Landscape Features

A series of low earthen berms running across the former firing range were used by soldiers, situated in a prone position, as they fired their weapons at the firing wall. The firing wall is approximately 10 feet tall and served to protect soldiers from gunshot as they waved target flags. The firing wall is constructed from a combination of earth, stone and concrete and remains a significant feature from this military period.

Spotter stations

Six small concrete spotter stations (also known as pill boxes or watch boxes), located along the shore line and farther inland, are considered contributing historic features. The existing conditions of these spotter stations vary widely from feature to feature. At least one spotter station is severely deteriorated from wave action exacerbated by wind, water and ice. Others have only a small amount of concrete deterioration, while others are in overall good repair.

Foundations

There are several building foundation in the park including the "Officer's Quarters," the water treatment plant, and the footings of a former building near the visitor center. From a historic preservation standpoint, all of these foundations are in relatively good condition.

Former Water Pumping Building

This small concrete building near the shore at the northern part of the park is a contributing feature from the rifle range/target training period(s) of the property's use. At present it lacks a roof, but from a historic preservation standpoint is in fair to good condition overall, with equipment fairly intact.

Former Wehle Residential Compound Structures

The buildings at and around the former Wehle residence include the guest house, game house, guest cabin, garages, stables and barns. As mentioned earlier, these buildings are all outside the period of significance for the park, and are not considered a significant historic element within the park. They do, however, document the past use of the park.

Former Wehle Game Bird and Dog Structures

These structures include the remaining kennel features, bird enclosures, statuary, animal graves, etc. These features are also outside the period of significance for the park, and are not considered significant historic features.

Archeological

A Phase 1A Archeological Sensitivity Assessment for Robert G. Wehle State Park was completed in September, 2004. This report recommends that a Phase 1B survey be done in the previously undisturbed portions of the park prior to any future sub-surface work. A Phase 1B survey was completed for the new entrance roadway in March 2005. The survey identified a farmstead and various artifacts from the Stony Point Rifle Range era.

Scenic Resources

The park provides many scenic views of Lake Ontario, Galloo Island and, in the distance, Canada. Vista points maintained in the park include the picnic area, rental house compound, the log cabin and areas along the Snakefoot and Dancing Gypsy trails.

Interpretive/Educational Programs

Interpretive and educational programming includes informational kiosks in the main use area which educate park patrons about the Wehle family history and swallow-wort management. A small visitor center located near the main parking lot provides additional information about the Wehle family and the Elhew Kennels (the name of Robert Wehle's kennel for English pointers).

Infrastructure

The Park has several structures with varying levels of infrastructure associated with each. Below is information on each one and the level of service provided. See Figure 8 – Main Use Area and Figure 12 – Base Map for structure and roadway locations.

Structures

Park Office

The park office, constructed in 2008, is located adjacent to the maintenance area and serves as the headquarters for all operational and administrative needs.

Visitor Center

The visitor center is located near the park office and the main parking lot. Constructed in 2008 through the rehabilitation of an existing structure, the visitor center offers exhibits and information about the park and its history and provides restroom facilities for park visitors. The visitor center also serves as a warming hut during winter months.

Maintenance Buildings

The maintenance area serves as the headquarters for all maintenance needs and provides ample storage for equipment. A new maintenance shop was constructed in 2008.

Barns

Two barns are located adjacent to the rental compound and log cabin. They serve as additional covered storage areas for park materials and equipment.

Log Cabin

The log cabin is located on the bluff overlooking Lake Ontario. It is furnished with two bunk beds, a wood stove and chairs. The cabin is not ADA accessible and not open for public access.

Rental House Compound

The rental house compound rents by the week during the main season, from mid May to mid September, and can be rented daily during the off-season through mid October. It is closed for the remainder of the year. The compound includes the following,

- The main cottage features a sun porch, two bedrooms with private baths, living room with fireplace and a fully furnished kitchen and laundry room. The main cottage is ADA accessible.
- The guest cottage features two bedrooms with private baths, bay windows and a kitchenette with sink, microwave and small refrigerator. The guest cottage is not ADA accessible.
- A third building, a former artist's studio serves as a recreational game room and is not ADA accessible.

Electric

The primary electrical system is owned and maintained by National Grid up to the two transformers on the property. One transformer is located behind the recreation room of the rental compound. The other is located behind the visitor center. The secondary electrical system on the property is owned and maintained by NYS OPRHP.

Water

The park has three potable water wells: one at the maintenance shop/office: one at the visitor center: and one serving the rental house compound. The water systems at the shop and visitor center are UV treatment systems, while the rental compound is a chlorine treatment system.

Restrooms

There are public restrooms in the park visitor center. Waterless restrooms are available near the tennis court, and the picnic area on the west end of the property. The rental compound has a private full bathroom with tub, toilet and lavatory for each of the compound's four bedrooms.

Telephone

The telephone system is owned and maintained by Frontier up to the same locations as the National Grid primary electrical system transformers on the property. One telephone termination point is located behind the recreation room of the rental compound. The other is located behind the visitor center. The remainder of the telephone system on the property is owned and maintained by NYS OPRHP.

Radio and cell phone reception is limited at various locations within the facility.

Petroleum Storage

Petroleum storage includes one 185 gallon gasoline storage tank and one 185 gallon diesel tank located in the staff parking lot near the maintenance shop/office. The tanks are relatively new and new electric dispensers have been installed.

Roads and Parking

The road network within the park includes a 2000 foot long, two-lane paved entrance road leading to a paved 38 car parking lot. A 400 foot single lane paved road leads from the main parking area to the maintenance/shop parking area. There are approximately 5000 feet of single lane stone roads from the main parking area to the rental compound. The stone roads are constructed of a 2” stone base with crusher fines and include a stone dust topping. The stone dust topping needs to be maintained each year. Maintenance includes the dragging the road surface to remove the highs and lows along the roadways. Stone is added each year to keep a smooth roadway. The remainder of the roadways consist compacted earth roads typical of a field access roadway. In general, the roadways are in good shape.

Operations and Maintenance

Park Season, Hours and Special Events

The park is open seven days a week from sunrise to sunset. The visitor center is open during park hours.

Special events and group events are allowed at the park year round. Fees are charged for the rental house compound. Scouting events and other group events are also held at the park. Groups must apply for a permit which requires proof of insurance and identifies the number of people attending.

Emergency plans and services

Safety and Security

To ensure the safety and security of park employees and patrons, a detailed schedule is designed to maintain adequate staffing, using both permanent and seasonal employees, to support operational needs. Park Police patrol the area to enforce park rules and regulations.

Fire

The park is served by the volunteer fire department and rescue squad from the Town of Henderson. In all incidences that occur, the New York State Park Police are notified and appropriate incident reports are completed.

Police

The park is under the jurisdiction of the Thousand Islands Region State Park Police, headquartered at Alexandria Bay. Patrols by the State Park Police originate from Westcott Beach State Park. If a situation occurs that requires additional service or an immediate response is not possible by State Park Police, assistance may be requested from the New York State Police and Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office.

Ambulance/Rescue

The park is served by a volunteer rescue squad and paramedics from the Henderson Fire Department, with assistance from State Park Police and park staff.

Evacuation Plan

In the event of an evacuation of the park, a standardized, on-scene, Emergency Action Plan is utilized with assignments originating from the park manager to park staff. Command and control of the evacuation of patrons from within the park is immediately assigned to park staff. State Park Police are contacted and assistance is request from regional park headquarters. New York State Police and the Jefferson Country Sheriff's Office may also be called upon for assistance.

Chapter 4: Park Vision and Goals

The vision and goals described below uphold the preservation, recreation and environmental education values of the park and OPRHP while guiding management and development actions.

Agency Mission Statement

The mission of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation is to provide safe and enjoyable recreational and interpretive opportunities for all New York State residents and visitors and to be responsible stewards of our valuable natural, historic and cultural resources.

Park Vision

Robert G. Wehle State Park will continue to be a place for visitors to enjoy, appreciate and learn about the park's natural, cultural, and physical resources, and participate in the recreational opportunities that the park offers.

Overall Park Goal

To be responsible stewards of the natural, cultural and physical resources of Robert G. Wehle State Park while making available to the public compatible recreational, interpretive and educational opportunities.

Natural Resource Goals

Overall Goal

Protect, conserve, enjoy and interpret the significant natural resources throughout Robert G. Wehle State Park.

Goals

- Protect, manage and maintain areas important as habitat for rare, threatened, endangered or protected plant and animal species and community types.
- Identify areas with environmental sensitivity, such as wetlands, and direct intensive development away from such areas.
- Maintain, restore and/or enhance the natural environment to improve the quality of natural resources and support biodiversity of plant and animal species.
- Encourage the propagation of species of plants and animals that are native and indigenous to the area.
- Monitor and control the impacts of invasive species on the biodiversity of plants and animals as well as recreational opportunities and activities within the park.
- Protect and maintain the quality of water resources both on and associated with the park.
- Apply the principles of Ecosystem-based Management to operational and resource protection activities within the park.
- Maintain up-to-date inventories of biological resources.
- Provide opportunities for research and study of the parks natural resources.

Recreation Goals

Overall Goal

Provide recreational opportunities compatible with the character of the park and its resources and complimentary to the opportunities provided within the surrounding area.

Goals

- Continue to provide year-round facilities and programs for the public.
- Maintain the year-round trail system for a diversity of trail users compatible with the resources of the park.
- Implement programs and facilities that are consistent with regional and local needs and demands as well as identified within the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, and other federal, state, regional and local plans and programs.
- Continue to maintain existing recreational opportunities and develop new opportunities as appropriate.

Cultural Resource Goals

Overall Goal

Identify, preserve, protect, and interpret the elements of Robert G. Wehle State Park that are significant to the history, archeology and culture of the local community, region, state and nation.

Goals

- Identify, protect and study archeologically significant resources within the park
- Minimize or avoid disturbances within archeologically sensitive areas.
- Investigate, evaluate and interpret key resources resulting from military use and significance of the area.
- Investigate, evaluate and interpret key resources from the Prehistoric Era.
- Develop programs and activities that interpret the history and culture of the area and the park.
- Provide opportunities for research and study of the parks cultural resources.

Scenic Resource Goals

Overall Goal

Enhance, preserve and protect various scenic resources within Robert G. Wehle State Park

Goals

- Enhance and maintain scenic vistas.
- Design and locate activities, structures and infrastructure to minimize visual impacts and to fit into the park's setting.
- Provide greater opportunities to view landscapes and other natural features.
- Identify key scenic resources for potential acquisition for viewshed protection.
- Minimize visual impacts of the shoreline from off shore viewing areas.

Open Space Protection Goals

Overall Goal

Protect open space within and adjacent to the park through acquisition, designation, coordination with existing partners, and creation of additional partnerships.

Goals

- Research connectivity to nearby parks and other open spaces.
- Create a buffer zone to development using open space protection strategies.

Access Goals

Overall Goal

Provide appropriate access to the park and its natural, recreational and cultural resources in a manner that ensures the safety and security of park patrons and its resources.

Goals

- Provide and maintain access for emergency response and rescue operations.
- Provide safe and appropriate traffic and pedestrian flow through the park.
- Provide and maintain appropriate public access to areas designated for public use.
- Provide access to park resources for persons with disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG).

Education and Interpretation Goals

Overall Goal

Provide an increased level of education and interpretation by developing programs to interpret the natural, cultural and physical resources and educate the park patrons of their importance.

Goals

- Develop public education and interpretation programs that foster appreciation and conservation of the park's natural, cultural, scenic and physical resources.
- Design interpretive programs that focus on invasive species management, military presence and the Wehle Family.
- Provide interpretive programs designed for the general public and for organized groups.
- Design programs that are compatible with the protection of park's resources.
- Provide year-round interpretive opportunities.
- Develop partnerships that can offer interpretive programs designed for park patrons and groups.
- Improve and maintain the visitor center to serve as a centralized location for education and interpretive programming.

Operation and Maintenance Goals

Overall Goal

Provide a continued high level of service to patrons and employees in a safe, clean manner that protects the natural, cultural and recreational resources of the park.

Goals

- Replace high maintenance items with more sustainable, low maintenance items
- Provide adequate funding for operational needs.
- Provide adequate staffing consistent with the needs of the park.
- Maintain the existing partnership for maintenance and operation of park facilities.

Sustainability Goals

Overall Goal

Protect the natural systems of the park and the region through the implementation of sustainable and environmentally sensitive management and operation actions.

Goals

- Use green technology in construction and renovation of facilities.
- Replace park vehicles and maintenance equipment with those that are more efficient and/or do not use fossil fuels.
- Reduce energy consumption.
- Improve solid waste management and recycling programs in park operation.
- Improve and expand sustainable park operation practices.

Facility Development and Capital Investment Goals

Overall Goal

Provide quality facilities consistent with the park's design aesthetic and sustainable/green buildings practices

Goals

- Develop a signage plan for the park according to regional standards for emergency response and operational needs.
- Explore the use of alternative pavement and surface hardening methods/materials.
- Expand picnicking opportunities.
- Enhance accessibility to the park.
- Explore overnight camping opportunities.

Communication and Partnership Goals

Overall Goal

Facilitate information flow to park users and surrounding communities and partners and allow for the creation of partnership opportunities.

Goals

- Maintain and enhance the partnership with the Robert G. Wehle Charitable Trust.
- Provide outreach within the community for volunteerism and relationship building.
- Coordinate with local and state agencies in the conservation and protection of the natural, cultural and recreational resources of the park.

- Provide opportunities for input regarding park management and development from the public.
- Provide opportunities for the creation of new partnerships.
- Promote regional tourism.
- Continue and enhance partnerships to assist with operations and programming at the park.

Inventory, Monitoring and Research Goals

Overall Goals

Encourage efforts to inventory, monitor and conduct scientific research of the natural and cultural resources of the park.

Goals

- Continue cooperative research and data collection partnerships such as those currently ongoing with swallow-wort control.
- Provide a coordinated approach to inventory, monitoring and research that facilitates data exchange.
- Develop and implement a monitoring program that measures conditions and changes within the park.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Alternatives

Introduction

One of the important aspects in the master planning and environmental review process is the identification of alternatives and associated analysis. This section essentially represents a concise summary of a detailed report on Analysis and Alternatives evaluated as part of the planning process for Robert G. Wehle State Park. The detailed report is contained in Appendix A.

The analysis of Alternatives used the information contained in Chapter 2 – Park Background, Chapter 3 – Environmental Setting and Chapter 4 – Vision and Goals. Plan elements were identified and alternatives for each element were evaluated. All of the preferred alternatives were then reviewed in concert to determine if any additional adjustments were needed. The end product of this effort on plan element analysis was two master plan alternatives: Status Quo and Preferred master Plan.

Analysis and Alternatives of Master Plan Elements

For each plan element the resource and inventory information was analyzed, identifying opportunities and limits of the resources and existing facilities. The findings from this analysis were used in developing and defining element alternatives pertaining to the stewardship of resources, recreation opportunities, and facility development.

Appendix A provides a thorough description of alternatives considered for natural resource stewardship strategies, recreation resource development/management, cultural resource protection, scenic resource protection and infrastructure development. The discussion of each element includes: 1) a background section with analysis, 2) a list of alternatives including the Status Quo alternative along with a listing of considerations for each alternative, and 3) identification and description of each preferred alternative.

Master Plan Alternatives

There are two Master Plan alternatives that have been considered for this plan. The first is the Status Quo Alternative which is a compilation of all the Status Quo element alternatives listed in Appendix A. Under this alternative, the park would continue to operate as it is now. The Status Quo alternative proposes no changes to natural resources protection strategies, recreation resource development/management, cultural or scenic resource protection and infrastructure improvements.

The second alternative is the Preferred Master Plan alternative, this alternative is a compilation of the preferred alternatives identified for each element discussed in Appendix A. OPRHP staff reviewed the listing of each preferred master plan element to determine if any adjustments were needed in arriving at the Master Plan. This synthesis review did not identify the need for any substantive changes in the set of preferred master plan elements. Thus, the Preferred Master Plan Alternative represents the master plan itself which is fully described in Chapter 6 – The Master Plan.

Selection of the Preferred Master Plan Alternative

Before the start of this master plan process, the park had been undergoing continued improvements. A new park office, maintenance shop and visitor center were constructed and improvements have been made to the rental house compound to improve park patrons' experiences. Maintenance and upgrading of the park's infrastructure has been ongoing.

This ongoing improvement and maintenance is important and is not overlooked as a significant factor in the master plan alternative. Many of the recommended directions chosen in analyzed elements were the status quo alternatives. In addition, projects designed to improve on current functions, identify future improvement to existing facilities, and provide for new opportunities are provided. These include changes to trail configurations and designations, natural resource protection strategies, recreation resource development and infrastructure not currently in the park.

The preferred master plan alternative provides for improved natural resource protection. It recommends the implementation of swallow-wort management strategies through the Robert G. Wehle State Park Invasive Species Management Plan (ISMP, Appendix B). It also recommends protection and enhancement strategies for the parks significant communities. An ISMP was preferred over current efforts or not preparing a plan due to the need to set goals and priorities, identify best management practices, and measure effectiveness.

Various military structures located throughout the park are significant cultural resources but are currently deteriorated and visitors are not aware of their significance. The preferred alternative includes needed strategies to identify, interpret, and further protect these cultural resources, as well.

The park provides opportunity for scenic vistas, but the need for an area easily accessible was identified in the planning process. In addition, the size and access to the existing picnic area are limited. Although a new picnic area on the shore was considered, instead the alternative of an overlook of Lake Ontario with a picnic area was preferred due to easier accessibility. Recreational opportunities will be enhanced by improvements to the trail system, which are needed to designate and mark trails with additional signage, address erosion and protect sensitive natural resources such as wetlands. Although primitive camping was considered, the creation of a group camping area available by permit was identified as a priority that should be included in the plan because groups currently using the park for various outdoor educational programs are allowed to camp overnight in tents on an informal basis. Siting alternatives were considered, and the site chosen that would not require new support facilities.

In choosing the Master Plan Alternative over the Status Quo Alternative OPRHP is providing an overall direction for improvements and changes which will have a positive impact on the recreation and natural resources within the park.

Table 2 - Comparison of Status Quo and Preferred Master Plan Alternative

Element/Topic	Status Quo Alternative	Preferred Master Plan Alternative
Park office	The park office was constructed in 2007 and is located within the maintenance area.	No changes are recommended for this building.
Maintenance area	The maintenance area consists of several buildings. A new shop was constructed in 2007 and is located in the same structure as the park office.	No changes are recommended for these buildings.

Element/Topic	Status Quo Alternative	Preferred Master Plan Alternative
Visitor Center	The Visitor Center was opened in 2008 and will receive minor changes to enhance visitor satisfaction.	No significant changes are recommended for this building.
Picnicking	A picnic area is provided one and a half miles from the parking lot on the shore of Lake Ontario.	A second picnic area is constructed one quarter mile from the parking lot and will include ten picnic tables in the short term. In the long term, a picnic shelter will be constructed.
Fishing	Fishing is allowed from the shoreline. The park does not have a designated fishing access location.	No changes are recommended. Informal access to Lake Ontario may be achieved through the existing picnic area and at the southwest portion of the park.
Trail activities	Hiking, mountain biking, cross country skiing and snowshoeing are allowed on all 16 miles of trail. In the winter, four miles of trail are groomed.	Hiking, mountain biking, cross country skiing and snowshoeing are allowed on all trails. Minor improvements will be made to the trail system.
Rental Compound	The rental compound is used by both large and small groups.	The rental compound will continue to be used by both large and small groups. The septic system will be replaced and minor improvements will be made to enhance the experience of the park patrons.
Log Cabin	The log cabin is not open for public use. The cabin continues to deteriorate.	The log cabin will be available for public rental as an optional rental feature for patrons renting the compound. Upon demand, the long term goals for this structure may include having it as a stand alone rental cabin including restroom facilities, electric, roadway improvements and the realignment of the Snakefoot Trail.
Barns	The barns are in good condition and used for storage.	The barns will continue to store materials and equipment.
Roadways	The main roadway and parking lot are asphalt. Secondary roadways and parking lots are gravel. The secondary roadway to the rental compound is single lane.	No changes are recommended for any roadways.

Element/Topic	Status Quo Alternative	Preferred Master Plan Alternative
Bird Conservation Area	The park is not designated as a Bird Conservation Area (BCA).	Little is known about the potential for bird habitat at the park. Designation may be considered when more detailed information is known about birds within the park.
Cultural Resources	Cultural resources from the military era are unprotected. Ground disturbing projects receive an archeological review.	The military features including the firing range, gun wall and the spotter stations will be managed to protect the features. The firing range will have some vegetative management and the firing wall will be cleared of vegetation. Ground disturbing projects are subject to an archeological review.
Interpretive and Education Programs	Interpretation and educational opportunities are provided at four kiosks and within the visitor center. A swallow-wort interpretation plan has been developed.	Interpretation and educational opportunities are expanded to include additional topics such as the military activities. The swallow-wort interpretation plan will be implemented to educate patrons.
Invasive Species Management	Invasive species are controlled through mowing. Studies are underway to determine effective methods of control.	An Invasive Species Management Plan is developed and provided as Appendix B of the master plan. Various methods of control will be implemented and studied. Mowing will remain a significant method of controlling swallow-wort

Chapter 6: The Master Plan

Classification

The park will remain classified as a Scenic Park, which reflects the scenic nature and the type and level of development proposed within the master plan.

Designations

Bird Conservation Area (BCA)

The potential for BCA designation exists in the park. However, there is a need for additional information before recommendations are made. OPRHP staff will coordinate with state and local experts to determine if a BCA designation should be considered.

Natural Resource Protection

Invasive Species Management

As stated in Chapter 3, the biggest threat to biodiversity in the park is the prevalence of the aggressive non-native plant, pale swallow-wort. The preparation of an invasive species management plan provides guidance and priorities so that control efforts may be undertaken in the most effective means possible, both ecologically and economically. See Appendix B – Robert G. Wehle State Park Invasive Species Management Plan for more information.

Significant Natural Communities Management

Calcareous Shoreline Outcrops

The protection of the calcareous shoreline outcrops will be incorporated into the design of the new picnic area. In addition the master plan calls for the protection of shoreline buffers vegetation at vista areas. The shoreline outcrop community will be monitored for overuse and invasive species.

Calcareous Pavement Barrens

The manual removal of invasive plants in the calcareous pavement barrens followed by the restoration of native species is the most appropriate course of action at this time, as recommended in Appendix B – The Robert G. Wehle Invasive Species Management Plan. The current extent of the barrens will be maintained. If expansion of the barrens is considered in the future, management practices such as mechanical removal of inconsistent plant species or the use of prescribed burning may be utilized.

The trail network through the barrens will be reduced to promote a balance between recreation and conservation of this rare habitat. Trails within the barrens have been identified and will be evaluated for relocation away from or around the most sensitive barren areas on a case-by-case basis. Trail relocations described in Appendix A and shown on Figure 15 – Trail Modification Map are conceptual. Specific locations for reroutes will be determined through detailed fieldwork by OPRHP staff.

Recreation Facility Development and Programs

Trails

Hiking, mountain biking, cross country skiing and snowshoeing are allowed on all trails. All trails have been named and will be blazed with appropriate signage provided at intersections. Trail improvements, reroutes or closures will take place per OPRHP Trail Standards (Appendix C). See Figure 15 – Trails Modification Map for more information.

Improvements to the trail system will include the following.

- Close certain undesigned trails as identified on Figure 16 – Trails Map.
- Improve or realign areas identified with wet conditions per Figure 13 – Trail Assessment Map and Appendix D.
- Remove several small unmarked trails as identified in Appendix A and Figure 15 – Trail Modifications Map.
- Remove the portion of the Dancing Gypsy Trail along the fence line from within the wetland.
- Realign a portion of the Bobolink Trail around calcareous pavement barren habitat. Portions of the trail will be lined with large stones to create a more clearly defined trail and keep patrons and equipment from unnecessarily leaving the trail.
- Realign a small portion of the Midge Trail. The portion of the Snakefoot Trail that connects to Parking Lot B will be renamed the Midge Trail.
- Install new trail head signage that will provide information about the trail such as length and difficulty.
- Move the Marksman Trail away from the park road.
- Continue mowing and snow grooming operations on trails.

Fishing

Continue providing fishing access.

Group Camping

A group camping area will be constructed within the park. Its location will allow campers to make use of an existing restroom facility and water spigot. The design will include fire rings and open areas to pitch tents for approximately 75 people. See Figure 14 – Group Camping and Day Use Alternatives Map.

Hunting

A small section of park property will be removed from the designated hunting area. This small area is separated from the rest of the park by North Schoolhouse Road and is not considered a popular hunting area. All other designated hunting areas will remain open for hunting and be administered in accordance with State hunting rules and regulations. See Figure 9 – Hunting Map.

Cultural Resource Protection

Firing Range and Wall

The firing range and wall are National Register eligible features and will be interpreted as a significant cultural feature within the park. The firing wall will be cleared of vegetation through the cutting of trees and shrubs. All vegetation will be cut flush with the wall leaving the roots intact to minimize disturbance to the historic structure. The berms and firing range will continue to be

mowed. Trees will be removed from the firing range to enhance the visual connection with the firing wall. Tree and shrub removal will take place as needed. Interpretive panels will be installed to educate patrons on the significant military history of the site. Archeological clearances are not required for the cutting of vegetation from the firing range or wall. See Appendix C - Cultural Resources Recommendations Memo.

Watch Stations and Foundations

The watch stations and foundations from the military era are National Register eligible features and will be interpreted as a means to inform visitors of their importance and to help protect their composition. These structures are in various conditions and will be evaluated further. Repair or reconstruction will be done as deemed necessary in accordance with Field Services Bureau guidance. Until that time, these structures will remain in their present condition. See Appendix C - Cultural Resources Recommendations Memo.

Archaeological Resources

Archaeological artifacts have been located within the park including objects from previous military activities, farmstead settlements and Native American presence. A Phase 1A Archeological Sensitivity Assessment for the park was completed in 2004. A Phase 1B archeological survey was conducted before the entrance roadway construction. Any new ground disturbing development may require a Phase 1B survey to identify any archaeological significance before development begins. Projects which are not ground disturbing will not require archeological clearances. See Appendix C - Cultural Resources Recommendations Memo.

Wehle Structures

All buildings and structures constructed by Robert Wehle are not eligible for listing on the National Register. These structures and their grounds will be maintained for existing uses or adaptive reuse. See Appendix C - Cultural Resources Recommendations Memo.

Scenic Resource Protection

Viewshed from Lake Ontario

The viewshed from Lake Ontario will be protected and considered in the design and location choice for the picnic area and overlook. The overlook design will incorporate materials that blend with the surroundings. The design of the picnic shelter will consider placement, low pitch rooflines, natural color tones and vegetative screening to minimize or eliminate view of this structure from the lake.

Views of the lake will be enhanced along the Snakefoot Trail through the selective removal of trees or shrubs at key points along the trail. Existing vista points will be maintained.

Interpretation and Education

As stated in Appendix A, recommendations from the “Swallow-wort Interpretive Plan for Robert G. Wehle State Park” (Veverka, 2010) will be implemented. Swallow-wort seed check and boot cleaning stations will be installed at entry/exit points and additional interpretive panels will be provided at swallow-wort research areas, trailheads and at the visitor center. These actions will provide park patrons with a better understanding of this invasive plant and encourage them to participate in preventing its spread.

Additional interpretation and education on other topics, such as the park’s military activities, geology and natural history, will also be provided. OPRHP is interested in speaking with any

individual with information concerning the history of the park. Outreach will be conducted within the confines of available resources.

Infrastructure

Structures

Log Cabin

The log cabin will be an optional amenity provided for an additional fee with the reservation of the Rental House Compound. The cabin will receive enhancements before it becomes available for public use including the addition of a pit toilet, electricity and roadway improvements. Based upon usage trends and patron comment, the long term goal for the log cabin may be as a stand-alone rental structure, separate from the rental house compound.

Storage Barns

The use of the two barns will remain as storage space and for the future operational needs of the park.

Rental House Compound

The rental house compound will continue to serve both large and small groups to provide unique, high quality experiences for a variety of patron uses. Improvements will be made to the septic system. The size of the group will determine the additional support services that will be required for each event.

Roads and Parking

The roadway and parking layout will remain unchanged. The current parking lots meet the capacity needed for park use. The asphalt roadway and parking area have been recently installed and are in very good condition. The gravel roadway to the rental house compound will remain as a single lane gravel road in keeping with the character of the park. Improvements to the gravel service road will take place to provide access to the log cabin for patron use.

Picnic Areas

The existing picnic area located on the southwestern shore will remain as is. A small picnic area will be constructed closer to the main parking lot and will include several picnic tables. The trees in this area will be thinned. All hardwoods will remain to provide shade. The portion of the Snakefoot Trail leading to this area will be enhanced to provide access to the picnic area and meet ADA requirements.

If deemed necessary, a small picnic shelter will be constructed adjacent to the proposed picnic area allowing groups to have convenient access to a picnic shelter in a very scenic location. Its design and location will incorporate ways to minimize its visibility from the lake. The enclosure of this shelter will be explored during its design.

Overlook

An overlook will be included within the proposed picnic area. Visual impacts from the lake will be considered during the design of the area and minimized to the greatest extent possible.

Operations and Maintenance

The planning process has identified various aspects related to the alternatives which could impact park operations and infrastructure. Below is a list identifying the areas where potential demands on park staff and the operation of the park may be affected by the implementation of the master plan.

Mowing

All day-use areas as well as multiple fields will continue to be mowed for recreational use as well as swallow-wort management.

Group camping area

Routine mowing will be provided in the group camping area.

Picnic area

The new picnic area will need some minimal pruning of vegetation, grading and the removal of rocks if necessary. Routine maintenance will include mowing and litter removal.

Rental compound

The maintenance and operational demand of the rental compound will remain relatively unchanged with the implementation of the master plan.

Trail maintenance

Maintenance of all trails will continue to be an operational component at the park. The trail assessment will be used to inform the maintenance program for the trail system.

Upkeep of gravel surfaces

All gravel roads will continue to be maintained. The gravel ADA trail access to the picnic area will be maintained as needed to remain in compliance with ADA regulations.

Upkeep of interpretive structures

Interpretive panels will be cleaned and maintained twice per year.

Upkeep of cultural resources

The firing range will continue to be mowed. Some tree removal will be done. The firing wall will be cleared of vegetation. Occasional maintenance will be required to keep trees from growing on this structure.

The concrete spotter stations and other foundations will not require any maintenance in the short term. If deemed appropriate in the future, preservation techniques can be discussed with Field Services Bureau staff.

Swallow-wort Management

In addition to the mowing of swallow-wort mentioned above, maintenance staff will install the proposed seed check/boot cleaning stations every August before the swallow-wort seed pods open, and remove and store them before the first snowfall. Maintenance of these stations will be on an as-needed basis. Staff will also continue current practices to prevent the spread of swallow-wort outside the park. This includes minimizing the use of the park's maintenance equipment at other state parks. In general, the equipment at the park is used exclusively at Robert G. Wehle State Park and does not

move from park to park. If any equipment is borrowed by other parks, it is thoroughly cleaned to insure that swallow-wort seeds or plant material are not inadvertently transported out of the park. Also, staff vehicles are inspected and washed as necessary during the seed season before leaving the park. Staff will also use the boot cleaning/seed check station before leaving the park during the seed season.

Safety and Security

The safety and security of park staff and visitors is maintained by permanent and seasonal staff with support from Park Police. Recommendations concerning safety and security are described below.

- Signage will be erected on kiosks and at key locations in the park with language warning of potential risks and providing emergency contact information. Since some trails are adjacent to steep descents and cliffs, extreme caution must be exercised in all areas.
- Brochures and kiosk panels with maps will provide information on trails to assist with visitor orientation. Emergency contact information will be provided on brochures and maps.
- The rental compound is fenced and has a lockable gated entrance that enhances patron safety and security. While this fence and gate were initially constructed to keep deer out of the area, it now serves to separate the rental compound from the rest of the park, keeping it secure from potential vandalism.
- Park staff will continue to remove hazardous trees near roadways, trails and other use areas as per the OPRHP Tree Removal Policy to protect patrons and staff. Patrons are encouraged to report hazardous or overhanging trees.
- All buildings, petroleum storage and water systems will continue to be maintained in accordance with current New York State and Federal laws, standards and inspections.
- Vehicular access will remain in the current configuration, which will minimize potential vandalism and traffic incidents throughout the park.

Land Acquisition

OPRHP will evaluate and consider acquisition of fee title or easement of adjacent properties or existing in-holdings for purposes of recreation and resource protection, as they become available.

Implementation

Timeline

The master plan sets forth OPRHP's vision for capital improvements and operational enhancements to the park. The pace and sequencing of recommended actions will be determined by the availability of funding either through OPRHP or through the Robert G. Wehle Charitable Trust.

The master plan presents a vision for the rehabilitation, protection and construction of improvements to the park. The following items will be considered during the implementation of the master plan.

- The plan components shall be incorporated into the annual operating plans and budgets for the park.
- The plan will be reviewed annually to identify projects that will be considered for implementation and to assess the progress of plan implementation.

The implementation of the master plan for the park is divided into two priority phases, as well as ongoing actions. The activities identified in the table below are conceptual and subject to reorganization based on available funding for specific components in any given group.

Table 3 - Implementation Priority List

Priority 1	Description/Development Component
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relocate a portion of the Bobolink Trail to minimize damage to the pavement barrens and close the duplicate path of the Dancing Gypsy Trail through a wetland in accordance with OPRHP Trail Standards. Implement other trail improvements per Figure 15 and Appendix C. • Construct a new picnic area and improve the scenic vista. • Construct group camping area. • Improve the trail and interpretive signage throughout the park. • Upgrade the rental house compound sewage system upgrades and provide accessibility improvements to the game room. • Develop the log cabin for inclusion in the compound rental availability. This includes the construction of a restroom, electrical upgrades, road access improvements and re-alignment of the Snakefoot Trail.
Priority 2	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement interpretive improvements in the firing range area. Remove vegetation, provide interpretive panels and mow the range field, including the slope up the wall.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construct a covered picnic shelter.
On-Going	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the Invasive Species Management Plan.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the Swallow-wort Interpretation Plan.

Actions Proposed Outside the Park

Development actions outside of the park boundary that are proposed within the viewshed of the park, including but not limited to wind farms and associated transmission lines, may have an impact on the park’s resources and park patron’s experience. Such actions are of interest to the agency but such proposals are not considered within the scope of this master plan. The agency will, however, monitor projects that could impact the park and will participate in their environmental review as appropriate.

Sustainability

In keeping with a strong commitment to sustainability, OPRHP will continue to increase the incorporation of sustainable practices into its daily operations. In addition, OPRHP will implement the following measures within the park.

- Parking Lots and Roadways – The secondary parking lots and the roadway to the Rental House Compound will remain gravel to reduce runoff and improve infiltration.
- Vehicles and equipment – Alternative fueled and energy efficient vehicles and equipment will be considered upon replacement or purchase.
- Renewable Energy – The agency will explore the harnessing of renewable energy sources, such as solar panels and geothermal heating systems. Heating and cooling improvements will be

added, where possible, such as attic fans to decrease the energy use of air conditioners, and centralized air to replace wall units.

- Maintenance – The use of alternative fueled equipment and alternative fuels such as solar, electric and propane fueled equipment and bio-based products (including soy based chain-saw oil and biodegradable products) will be considered. The proper storage and disposal of chemicals and fuels, limiting the storage of chemicals on site to the quantity which can be used in one year, and the proper clean-up of spills shall all remain a high priority for the park maintenance staff. The recycling of used oils, batteries and metal will be continued.
- Trails – Sustainable trail construction practices will be utilized to reduce maintenance needs and erosion from water run off.
- Waste disposal – The Carry in/Carry out Policy will remain in place. Visitors will continue to be educated on the policy and be encouraged to participate in solid waste reduction and recycling programs. Signage will be considered to encourage visitors to recycle. Park staff will continue recycling in the park office.
- Water Conservation – The park will continue water conservation measures including the use of low flow fixtures. The use of green infrastructure techniques such as rain barrels can be used to minimize water use and reduce runoff.
- Wastewater – Wastewater is minimized through the use of pit toilets. The outdated water treatment systems will be upgraded to improve wastewater treatment.
- Vegetation - Grass mowing will remain a significant swallow-wort management strategy in the park until other acceptable solutions are found. Upon the replacement of mowers and grass trimming equipment, sustainable or alternate fuel equipment will be considered. If plantings are needed, native species will be used to reduce water and maintenance requirements.
- Education – Staff will educate visitors on the park’s sustainable features. Sustainability will be a component of the interpretive plan for the park. Interpretive panels and displays will be added to educate visitors on what they can do to lead a more sustainable lifestyle.
- Energy Efficiency – Existing systems will be audited and re-commissioned to improve energy efficiency.
- Pest Control – The use of pesticides will be in accordance with the Agency’s Pesticide Reduction Policy. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and organic pest control methods will be utilized.
- Waste Reduction – A concerted effort will continue to be made to reduce office/administrative waste, construction and yard/food waste. On-site composting will be explored and considered.

Relationship to Other Programs

OPRHP continues to be committed to partnering with groups that are interested in furthering the mission of the park. The park staff is interested in working with other outside planning groups to further the park’s contribution to and participation in the recreation resources of the area. Partnerships with local groups such as Boy/Girl Scouts will continue to provide maintenance assistance and improvements to the park.

The park, through the regional office, continues to reach out to the larger service area to encourage individuals, groups and other federal and state agencies to contribute to the park.

OPRHP will continue to work with New York DEC on management issues common to the park and the adjacent Henderson Shores Unique Area. It will also continue swallow-wort research partnerships with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Cornell University.

Robert G. Wehle Trust

As stated in Chapter 3, Robert G. Wehle State Park receives funding support, on an annual basis, from distributions from the Robert G. Wehle Charitable Trust. The relationship with the Trust will remain an important aspect in supporting the park and in creating an environment for park patrons' enjoyment.

Chapter 7: Environmental Impacts and Mitigation

Introduction

Consistent with the intent of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), environmental factors were considered in evaluating the plan alternatives and in selecting the preferred alternative, i.e., the Final Master Plan, which is described in Chapter 6. This chapter focuses on the environmental impacts and mitigation of adverse effects; however, for the purposes of SEQR compliance, the entire document (Master Plan/FEIS) satisfies the requirements for an environmental impact statement as specified in Part 617, the rules and regulations implementing SEQR. The environmental setting of Robert G. Wehle State Park is discussed in Chapter 3 and Appendix A (Analysis and Alternatives).

This chapter has two primary parts: a summary of environmental impacts associated with alternatives and a more detailed analysis of impacts associated with implementation of the Final Master Plan including a discussion of mitigation measures.

Environmental Impacts of Alternatives

In Appendix A, alternative management and development directions were developed for the park using information on existing conditions, the analysis of recommended directions for activities, and constraints and considerations identified in the resource analysis. The preferred alternative for the entire park (i.e. the Final Master Plan) consists of the preferred alternative for each identified activity and resource.

Much of the information on the environmental impacts of alternative actions is presented in Appendix A. The following is a summary of the findings from the impact analysis.

Status Quo Alternative

The Status Quo alternative consists of the current facilities and practices as described in Chapter 3 (Environmental Setting). Under this alternative, the current resource protection and facility management practices would continue. Additional recreational opportunities would not be provided and the park would continue to operate under short range initiatives with respect to operations and resource management and protection. Any improvements would be assessed on a case by case basis.

Preferred Alternative and the Final Master Plan

The preferred alternative is the compilation of the preferred recreation activity, development and resource stewardship options identified during the Analysis and Alternatives process summarized in Chapter 5. The compilation at the end of Appendix A and within Chapter 6 was subject to a final evaluation (or synthesis) to assure that there was consistency among the various alternatives. The master plan, described in Chapter 6, provides considerable recreational and resource protection benefits. This Final Master Plan/EIS also identifies potential adverse impacts, both short and long term, as well as ways to minimize, if not eliminate, them to the fullest extent possible through appropriate mitigation measures. Impacts and mitigation, in addition to information provided in Appendix A, are discussed in the following sections. From a long-term perspective, implementation of the park master plan will have beneficial environmental impacts by insuring that the most sensitive areas of the park will be monitored and provided appropriate stewardship and that the ecosystems and the services they provide are maintained, preserved and protected.

Potential Environmental Impacts associated with Implementation of the Master Plan and Mitigation

Traffic and Access

The master plan does not change traffic patterns or access to the park. After analysis of the roads, access and parking capacity it was determined that these facilities are in good condition and function effectively in their current configuration. The parking facilities are currently sized to accommodate existing and proposed activities.

Recreation

The implementation of the master plan will have a positive impact on recreational opportunities at the park. An additional picnic area will be constructed that will have several benefits. First, it will provide a scenic picnic area with dramatic vistas of Lake Ontario that will be easily accessible from the main parking area, as opposed to the current picnicking area which is 1.5 miles from the parking lot. Second, it will be compliant with the American Disabilities Act which is also not available at the current picnic area. Third, it will provide a new picnic shelter to protect park visitors from inclement weather.

Another recreational opportunity that will be enhanced is group camping. An area for group camping by special permit is proposed to be developed. At present, groups using the park under special permit informally use the mowed areas around the park office. The new location will provide a more formal designated area with several fire rings and will still be convenient to the main parking lot and the existing restrooms.

Another improvement will be the new availability of the log cabin for public use as an optional amenity to the rental compound. The cabin will receive some upgrades to accommodate this new use.

The park's trail system will be modified somewhat to provide a more clearly defined circulation pattern with less duplication of trails. Improved signage will also be provided to clarify routes and will be designed in accordance with OPRHP's trail signage guidelines (OPRHP, 2010). Trail closures and rerouted sections will be done in accordance with the agency's trail design guidelines and trail closure guidelines.

The Master Plan provides improved interpretive opportunities for both natural and cultural resources. This will include interpretation of the park's geology and former land uses including its military history. Some new interpretive signage will be developed in conjunction with seed check/boot cleaning stations. These stations will educate park users in how they can assist in preventing the spread of swallow-wort seed beyond the park.

Water Resources

The implementation of the master plan will have minimal impact to water resources. The park has a significant shoreline along Lake Ontario and also contains wetland areas. The master plan calls for a protection of the buffer vegetation along the park's shoreline to prevent erosion and runoff from impacting Lake Ontario water quality. Recognition of the importance of protecting the shoreline buffer vegetation will be applied to both ongoing park vista maintenance procedures as well as in the design of the new shoreline picnic area. No new development is proposed within state or federal wetlands within the park. There are, however, several trails that cross small federal wetland areas. These sections will be further evaluated to determine the best means of managing these areas to

minimize impacts to these wetlands (e.g. re-routing around the wetlands or construction of boardwalks over them.) Any applicable wetland permits will be obtained as needed.

The current septic system at the rental compound will be upgraded to better accommodate existing wastewater treatment needs. This will better protect groundwater quality.

Biological Resources/Ecology

The implementation of the master plan will have beneficial impacts on the park's natural resources. The natural resource protection strategies that have been developed through the planning process will result in enhanced protection of significant ecological communities at the park as well as better management of swallow-wort, which is pervasive throughout the park. These strategies reflect the recommendations of the Natural Heritage Program scientists in the "Rare Species and Ecological Communities of Robert G. Wehle State Park" (Lundgren and Smith, 2008).

Significant Ecological Communities

The adoption of the Invasive Species Management Plan will provide guidance for management of invasive species within the significant pavement barrens and calcareous shoreline outcrop communities. Invasive species, primarily swallow-wort, will be removed from these sensitive areas and replaced with native species where possible and appropriate.

The shoreline outcrop community will also be further protected through the plan's recognition of the importance of the vegetative buffer along the shoreline. Park maintenance procedures will insure that vista maintenance includes protection of the buffer vegetation. Shoreline areas will be monitored for overuse and trampling of this vegetation. The construction of the new picnic area will incorporate buffer vegetation into the design.

Rare Species

In order to protect rare species at the park such as the Cork elm (*Ulmus thomasi*), areas which will be developed, such as the new picnic area, the new group camping area and the trail relocation area, will be surveyed for this species as well as other rare plants. If the cork elm or other rare plant species are found then the design and construction plans will be modified to avoid them.

Invasive species

The adoption of an Invasive Plant Management Plan as part of the master plan will provide needed guidance and a planning framework to prioritize control efforts so that control of invasive plants can be done in the most effective manner from both an ecological and economic perspective. Due to the severe infestation of swallow-wort at the park, this plan places an emphasis on its removal and control. The plan also includes information on the identification and control of other invasive species known to exist at the park. Near term activities that will be implemented under this plan include installation of swallow-wort seed check/boot cleaning stations and experimental swallow-wort control plots where swallow-wort will be tilled and removed and replaced with native vegetation. The experimental plots impact vegetation and soils in four separate areas totaling one acre. This disturbance will be mitigated through the careful restoration of these sites with native vegetation and invasive-free soil and will hopefully yield vital information into the use of a new technique for managing this pernicious invasive species.

Public Education

Further public education about the significant ecological communities at the park will add to the public's appreciation of the park's natural resources. The master plan also calls for additional efforts to educate the public about swallow-wort such as new signage and seed check/boot cleaning stations.

These efforts will provide additional information about the plant itself, the impact it has on the park's ecosystem, the park's operations, and most importantly how to help control its spread beyond the park.

Cultural/Archeological Resources

The master plan recognizes and protects the historic and cultural resources within the park. OPRHP's Division for Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau has reviewed the master plan and determined that it will have No Adverse Impacts on historic resources either listed or determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, provided certain conditions and processes are followed, which are outlined in their review letter (Appendix E).

Archaeological artifacts have been located within the park including objects from military activities, previous farmstead settlements and Native American settlements. A Phase 1a Archeological Sensitivity Assessment for the park was completed 2004. A Phase 1B archeological survey was conducted prior to the park entrance roadway construction. To assure there are no adverse impacts to archeological resources, additional Phase 1B surveys may be required before any future sub-surface work is undertaken within the park.

OPRHP's Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau has reviewed all of the buildings, structures and landscapes at the park and determined that several of these features including the rifle range landscape, the "Watch Stations," several foundations and a former water pumping building are considered contributing to the historic significance of the park. All work near or on these features other than normal maintenance and repair will be submitted to the Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau for review.

Scenic Resources

Implementation of the master plan will not result in any significant adverse impacts on scenic resources in the park. The park's three mile shoreline along Lake Ontario is a significant scenic resource. The new picnic area on the shoreline will be relatively small and will be designed, using appropriate setback and materials, to blend into the wooded shoreline to minimize visual impacts from the lake.

Public Health and Safety

OPRHP places a strong emphasis on both visitor and staff safety. The primary safety hazard at the park is the steep shoreline along Lake Ontario. As part of the design of the new picnic area, consideration will be given to the protection of park patrons in this area. This will also be considered as part of the renovations that will occur at the cabin. There is a safety warning given with the rental compound agreement regarding the steep cliffs in this area.

OPRHP will continue to operate drinking water and wastewater facilities at the park in accordance with all Department of Health and DEC standards. Trail maintenance will continue to address roots and rock fissures in some areas of the park which can be tripping hazards.

Impact on Growth and Character of Community and Neighborhood

Implementation of the master plan is not expected to significantly increase the use of the park. The new picnic area and group camping facilities will attract some additional visitors. As word continues to spread about the spectacular scenery at the rental compound for use as a backdrop for weddings or other gatherings, the demand may increase. The limited number of possible time slots will likely continue to keep the compound facility fully rented throughout the spring, summer and fall. This use is not expected to exceed the carrying capacity of the park's facilities.

Unavoidable Adverse Effects

The proposed master plan will result in minor unavoidable adverse impacts. There will be some short term aesthetic impacts due to construction of the new picnic area, the ADA accessible pathway and the group camping area. These new facilities will require removal of approximately 2 acres of some shrubs and trees. The preservation and restoration of the firing range and firing wall will require removal of approximately 3 acres of trees and shrubs. Surveys will be conducted prior to removal to insure that no rare plants are affected.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

The planning, development and implementation of this master plan, including construction of additional facilities and the undertaking of additional management activities, will involve the irreversible and irretrievable commitment of public resources in the form of time, labor, materials and energy use. It will also require a commitment to the long term operation and maintenance costs of the park, although much of these costs are subsidized through the Robert G. Wehle Charitable Trust.

Supplemental Environmental Review

Portions of this Final Master Plan/EIS are somewhat general or conceptual. Decisions regarding the type and extent of certain actions will be dependent on the findings from more specific studies or analysis still to be completed. For example, the development of the new picnic facility will require additional review for potential archeological impacts. The findings from these site specific evaluations may identify impacts that were not adequately addressed in this plan/EIS. Under such a circumstance, an additional or supplemental environmental review will be required. As part of the agency's responsibility under the State Environmental Quality Review Act, OPRHP will review proposed implementation projects with respect to consistency with this plan and EIS. Projects found by OPRHP to be consistent with the plan can go forward without any additional review. Other types of proposals may require additional review ranging from completion of an environmental assessment form to perhaps a site specific environmental impact statement.

To assist in this consistency evaluation, the following types of actions have been identified as likely to require additional review under SEQR:

- Any new actions not addressed within the Master Plan that do not meet the Type II categories with Part 617, the rules and regulations implementing SEQR;
- Any change from the preferred alternative for recreational and facility elements of the plan which would result in significant environmental impacts;
- Any leases, easement, memoranda of understanding, or other agreements between OPRHP and private entities or other agencies that affect resources in a manner that is not sufficiently addressed in this plan;

Relationship to Other Programs

Ecosystem-Based Management

This plan has incorporated the agency's sustainability initiatives and goals as well as an ecosystem-based management (EBM) approach to planning. This was discussed in the sustainability section of Chapter 6. Overall the master plan is designed to limit impacts to the environment and provides modest improvements to respond to the needs of park users. These improvements are expected to be within the carrying capacity of the park, as well as the adjacent areas.

The principles of EBM will be followed to the greatest extent possible in plan implementation. This plan integrates the interests and activities affecting the park while recognizing impacts and influences beyond the border. Where appropriate, work should be science-based. OPRHP will strive to establish measurable objectives for projects and programs and will adapt management in response to monitoring and feedback. The plan also addresses ecosystems and their health and will promote their wise management and restoration where possible. The health and functionality of natural systems are being considered and promoted with the master plan. The agency and regional/park staff will reach out to park partners, and also strive to foster connections with the park's neighbors and more regional agencies and organizations. The master planning process has considered public input from the early stage of planning and outreach, and the EIS process will further integrate public input with the plan.

Coastal Zone Management Program Consistency

Robert G. Wehle State Park is located within New York's coastal area, specifically the Great Lakes. In accordance with the NY Waterfront Revitalization and Coastal Resources Act (Executive Law Article 42) state agency actions within the coastal area must be evaluated for their consistency with the State's coastal policies. The overall objective of this program is to assure a balance between development and preservation of the State's coastal areas.

Robert G. Wehle State Park is not located within an area that has a Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP); thus the Agency has evaluated consistency with State Coastal Policies. If a LWRP is developed for the area encompassing Robert G. Wehle State Park, any action beyond that identified in the plan will need to be consistent with the LWRP.

A Coastal Assessment Form (CAF) was completed to assist in the identification of applicable policies. After a review of all the coastal management policies (NYCRR Title 19, Part 600.5) OPRHP has determined which policies are applicable to the Robert G. Wehle State Park Master Plan. The CAF and discussion of those policies are provided in Appendix F. Policies applicable to the plan include those related to water dependent uses and facilities, natural protective features such as bluffs, access to public water related recreation, water-dependent and water-enhanced recreation, significant historic and cultural resources, scenic quality, best management practices, and protection of wetlands..

Summary

Based on the coastal policy discussion contained in Appendix F, it is OPRHP's determination that the action will not substantially hinder the achievement of any of the policies and purposes of the State Coastal Policies as described in the New York Coastal Management Program.

Chapter 8 – Comments and Responses

Introduction

This section contains the responses to the comments received by OPRHP on the Draft Master Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Robert G. Wehle State Park. The Draft Master Plan/DEIS was issued July 21, 2010. A Public Hearing was held on August 10, 2010 at the park. The comment period ended September 3, 2010.

During the Public Hearing, six people spoke and their comments were recorded. During the comment period for the Draft Master Plan/DEIS, the Agency received an additional six written comment letters. A list of persons providing comments is included at the end of this chapter.

OPRHP appreciates the time and effort that persons interested in the future of Robert G. Wehle State Park have invested in their review and comments on the Draft Master Plan/DIES 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 section and were considered in the revisions found in this Final Master Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

Comments and Responses

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

Designations

Comment: Bird Conservation Area (BCA)

The park offers unique opportunities for birders to observe waterfowl and bird migration on Lake Ontario. Wehle should be designated as a BCA.

Response:

The criteria for BCA designation was reviewed as part of the master planning process and it was concluded that not enough is known about the birds of this park to warrant designation at this time. OPRHP will work with Onondaga Audubon and others to gather additional information on the park's bird population. New data will be reviewed and evaluated to determine if they support one or more criteria that would make the site eligible for BCA designation. The text in Chapter 6 has been modified to reflect this change.

Development

Comment: Dogs/Off Leash Area

An off leash area for dogs should be constructed at Robert G. Wehle State Park as a tribute to Mr. Wehle. It will separate dogs from potentially rabid animals and protect other park patrons from

unwanted interaction with dogs. The off leash area should include two areas; one for dogs over thirty pounds and one for dogs under thirty pounds. Please continue to keep the park dog friendly.

Response:

This concept has been reviewed. OPRHP determined that the park is not close enough to a large population to warrant the costs associated with the development and maintenance of an off leash area. The park currently provides a small off leash area adjacent to the volleyball court. Dogs are allowed on leash throughout the park.

Comment: Camping

Campsites in the area have seen a large volume of litter and under age drinking. To keep the park pristine, camping should not be considered at this park.

Response:

The group camping area will be reserved for groups through the park office by permit only. Individuals wishing to reserve an individual campsite in the area must use other local camping facilities.

Wildlife

Comment: Bird Watching

Consider including an enclosed picnic shelter in place of the proposed open shelter so bird watchers are able to watch waterfowl and migratory birds in December on the shore while staying out of the cold wind.

Response:

OPRHP will work with the Onondaga Audubon Society and other interested birders regarding suggestions for design and placement of a shelter/viewing blind that would enhance bird observation while offering shelter from the weather. The recommendations will be considered in the context of meeting the needs of birders and non-birding park users. The text in Chapter 6 has been modified to reflect this change.

Comment: Waterfowl Disruption

The Snakefoot trail should be moved away from the bluff in some areas to minimize disturbance of waterfowl.

Response:

Upon receipt of additional relevant information, OPRHP would be willing to work with interested parties to identify areas where minor trail realignment might benefit waterfowl.

Trails

Comment: Trail Signage

Improve trail signage to reduce the quantity of people getting lost.

Response:

Trail signage improvements are proposed in the plan.

Comment: Quantity of Trails

There are too many trails. OPRHP should continue to reduce trails.

Response:

Trails are the main activity in the park. The master plan assessed the trail system and proposed modifications, including some re-routes and elimination of trails considered duplicative. This resulted in a net reduction in the total miles of trails. The trail system is very popular and the proposed system is considered to be appropriate.

Comment: DEC Henderson Shores Unique Area Connections

OPRHP should promote greater cooperation with DEC regarding the management of both properties. A loop trail system should be constructed across both properties.

Response:

A trail connection does exist between the park and the Henderson Shores Unique Area. OPRHP currently coordinates with DEC regarding management of both properties. OPRHP would entertain additional trail connections proposed by DEC.

Health and Safety

Comment: Barriers along cliffs

Install barriers along the cliffs to improve safety.

Response:

Signage is provided at trailhead locations advising patrons of the potential risks associated with hiking adjacent to cliffs in the park. Barriers or fencing will not be installed, in general, along the cliff's edge, unless a hidden danger is identified. Cliffside fencing may be installed at designated gathering points.

Comment: Deer Ticks

There are many deer located in the park, please consider educating patrons on ticks and Lyme disease to prevent possible health issues.

Response:

OPRHP will provide educational information concerning ticks and Lyme disease.

Swallow-wort Management

Comment: Management and Control

The priority for this park should be to control the spread of swallow-wort.

Response:

Swallow-wort management in the park is a very high priority for OPRHP. Reducing the spread of swallow-wort is the focus of current management such as extensive mowing and future management actions described in the Invasive Species Management Plan (Appendix B). The Swallow-wort Interpretive Plan for Robert G. Wehle State Park also recommends educating park employees and patrons about the plant and how they can reduce spreading swallow-wort. Both of these plans were

developed in conjunction with the Master Plan and the implementation of each of these plans is identified as an ongoing action in Table 1 – Implementation Priority Table.

Comment: Spread of Seeds

OPRHP should reconsider allowing mountain bikes in the park as swallow-wort can get stuck on them and then be transported out of the park.

Response:

The spread of swallow-wort seeds beyond park boundaries is of great concern to OPRHP. The possibility of swallow-wort seeds being spread beyond the park by patrons is a very real possibility, no matter what their activity. One of the top priorities of the Invasive Species Management Plan is to install seed check stations where patrons will be taught how and encouraged to check that seed or other plant parts are not inadvertently stuck to their clothing, boots, dogs, bikes or cars. Additional education about swallow-wort at other locations in the park is also proposed and will aid in this effort as well.

Comment: Pesticide Use

Please reconsider the OPRHP herbicide policy. Herbicide should be used on the swallow-wort in the park. OPRHP inherited the swallow-wort on the property and, given the nature of the plant, should be allowed to use herbicides on it. Insecticides, which are used by OPRHP are far more dangerous than herbicides.

Response:

The use of herbicides and insecticides for control of invasive species is allowed under the OPRHP Pesticide Reduction Policy (<http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/inside-our-agency/public-documents.aspx>). However, the swallow-wort infestation in the park covers almost 1000 acres. The use of herbicide on such a large scale could have deleterious environmental and human health effects. Biological control agents and mechanical removal methods are being researched with the hope of finding an alternative to the use of herbicide. During implementation of the Invasive Species Management Plan, herbicide use may be warranted in certain circumstances, such as protecting significant ecological communities.

Education and Interpretation

Comment: Expansion of military interpretation

The interpretation of the military history at the park should be expanded. OPRHP should talk with the local veterans who were stationed at the Stony Point Rifle Range.

Response:

The interpretation of the park’s military history will be expanded. OPRHP has conducted one oral history interview with a local veteran. OPRHP is interested in speaking with any individual with information concerning the history of Robert G. Wehle State Park. The text in Chapter 6 has been modified to reflect this change.

Lake Access

Comment: Lake Access

The plan should clarify if boats and swimming access is allowed.

Response:

Swimming and boating access to Lake Ontario will not be provided at Robert G. Wehle State Park because the shoreline conditions are not suitable. Swimming and boating access sites are available at other near by parks.

Persons/Organizations Who Provided Comments

Name	Title	Organization
Bonanno, Sandy	Resident	
Cook, Tim	Resident	
Glovey, Margaret	Resident	
Griggs, Janis	Resident	
McGowan, Jim	Trustee	Robert G. Wehle Charitable Trust
Root, Amanda	Resident	
Shupe, Scott	Director	Oneida Lake Association
Smith, Gerald	President	Onondaga Audubon Society
Tiano, Karen	Resident	
Whiteman, Robert	Resident	

References

- Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Ambient Air Quality Monitoring. <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8406.html>. February 2009.
- New York State Museum (NYSM 2008). “NYS Surficial Geology – Listed Alphabetically”. http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/data/surficial_alpha.html. May 2008.
- New York Natural Heritage Program Conservation Guide Calcareous Pavement Barrens. (NYNHP, 2008) July 2008.
- Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). New York State Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan and Generic Environmental Impact Statement 2009-2013. New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Albany, NY. Dec. 2008.
- OPRHP. 2004. Robert G. Wehle State Park Interim Management Guide.
- Smith, K.J. and J.A. Lundgren. 2008. Rare species and ecological communities of Robert G. Wehle State Park. New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and New York Natural Heritage Program. Albany, NY.
- Veverka, John. 2010. Swallow-wort Interpretive Plan for Robert G. Wehle State Park

Personal Communication

- Julian Adams, OPRHP
- Amos (Andy) Cambron – Stationed at Stony Point Rifle Range
- Ella Shultz – Former caretaker of the Wehle property

