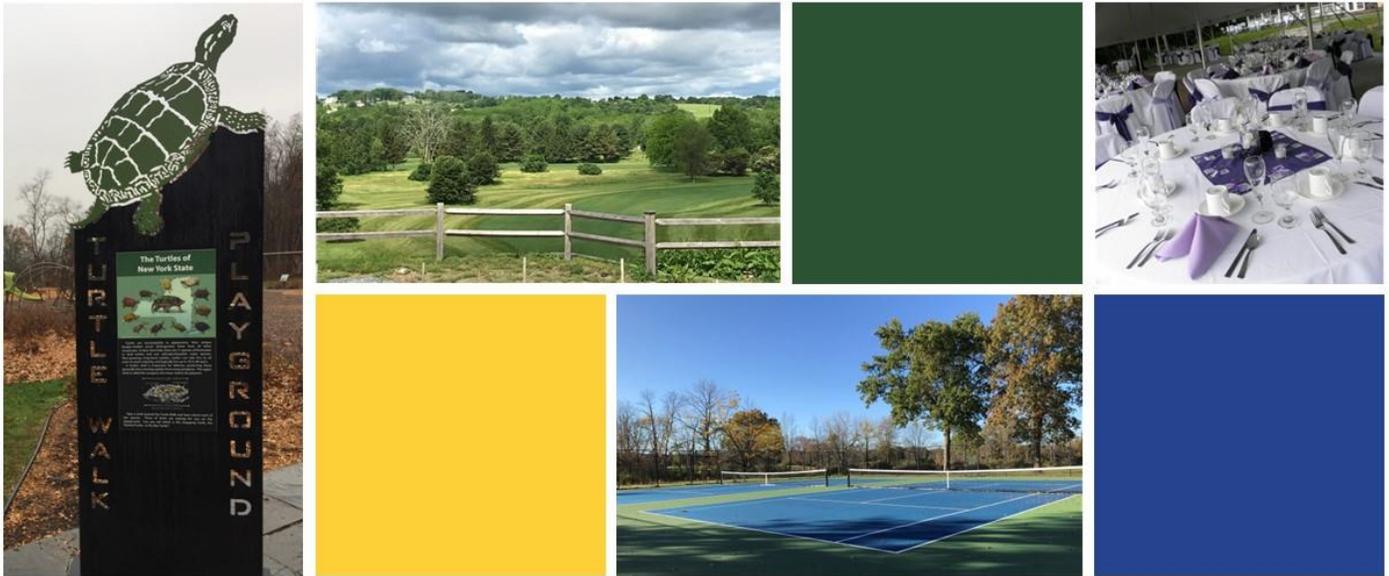


James Baird State Park | Dutchess County Town of LaGrange, NY



Final Master Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement for James Baird State Park

October 26, 2022
Revised January 25, 2023

James Baird State Park
Town of LaGrange, Dutchess County

Final Master Plan
and
Final Environmental
Impact Statement

October 26, 2022
Revised January 25, 2023



New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation



**SEQR
NOTICE OF COMPLETION OF A REVISED FINAL EIS**

Date of Notice: January 25, 2023
Lead Agency: New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP)
Title of Action: Adoption and Implementation of a Master Plan for James Baird State Park
SEQR Status: Type I

Location of Action: James Baird SP is located in the Towns of Pleasant Valley and LaGrange, Dutchess 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 Master Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on the proposed action has been prepared and accepted by OPRHP. The Final Master Plan includes proposals for natural and cultural resource protection, recreational resource enhancement, actions related to operations, infrastructure and facilities, and actions related to education and outreach. The Final Master Plan and FEIS describe the proposed action, the environmental setting, alternatives, and potential environmental impacts and mitigation of those that may be adverse. Areas or resources that have been evaluated with respect to impacts include land, water, air, biological/ecology, cultural/archaeological, agricultural, scenic, open space and recreation, traffic and access, public health and safety, energy, and noise, odor, and light.

The Final Plan/FEIS also includes a chapter summarizing public comments on the Draft Master Plan/Draft EIS and the Agency's responses to comments.

On October 26, 2022, OPRHP published the Final Master Plan and FEIS, with a consideration period ending on November 8, 2022. Subsequently, OPRHP has removed from the FEIS an alternative regarding Section 14.09 and certain activities on the Park's golf course. Through OPRHP's further consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)/Division for Historic Preservation staff, the SHPO has determined there are certain maintenance activities on the golf course that the facility may undertake without SHPO consultation pursuant to Section 14.09. The original Appendix P has been replaced with a letter from SHPO dated 12/23/2022 that lists the exempt activities pertaining to the maintenance of the Park's golf course facilities. Associated text in the Master Plan and EIS documents have been updated accordingly.

Agencies and the public are afforded the opportunity to consider this revised FEIS. This consideration period ends on February 5, 2023. Copies of the revised Final Master Plan/FEIS are available for review at the James Baird State Park office and at the offices of the agency contacts. The online version of the Final Master Plan and FEIS are available at the following publicly accessible website: <https://parks.ny.gov/inside-our-agency/master-plans.aspx>.

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**Final Master Plan and
Final Environmental Impact Statement
for
James Baird State Park**

New York
Dutchess County
Town of LaGrange

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

Completed: October 26, 2022
Revised January 25, 2023

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Acknowledgements

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The Agency worked with and coordinated input from the following agencies and organizations: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York Natural Heritage Program, and many other organizations.

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Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Contents.....	iv
Abbreviations Used.....	viii
Executive Summary	1
Planning and Environmental Review	1
Guiding Principles and Policies	2
Sustainability.....	2
Alternatives.....	2
Implementation Priorities.....	3
Environmental Impacts and Mitigation	7
Chapter 1 – Environmental Setting.....	8
Location and Access.....	8
Park Boundaries.....	8
Property Acquisitions.....	8
Land Use.....	8
Adjacent Land Use	8
Socioeconomic Characteristics	9
Economic Contribution	9
Recreational Needs Assessment.....	9
Legal Considerations	11
Land and Water Conservation Fund	11
Scenic Resources	12
Natural Resources.....	12
Geology	12
Topography	12
Soils	12
Water, Watersheds, and Wetlands.....	13
Wetlands.....	13
Ecological Communities.....	15
Fauna.....	17

Nuisance Wildlife and Invasive Fauna..... 19

Rare, Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals 20

Air Quality 21

Climate 21

 Climate Change 21

Cultural Resources 22

 Archaeological Resources 22

 Prehistoric 22

 Historic 22

 Regional Development..... 22

 Cultural Resources at Baird Pre-1940 23

 Cultural Resources 1940-1972 23

Recreational Resources and Activities 25

 Day Use Area 25

 Day Use Parking Lot 27

 Trails 27

Golf Course..... 28

Infrastructure and Operations 30

 Accessibility 30

 Emergency Plans and Services 30

Park Buildings..... 31

 Day Use Area Buildings 32

 Maintenance Facility 34

 Parking 36

Water Infrastructure 36

 Water Supply..... 36

 Other Park Infrastructure..... 37

Maintenance 38

 Solid Waste Management and Recycling Programs 38

 Sustainability 38

Special Events and Permits 40

Chapter 2 – Development of Alternatives 41

Goal Setting and Actions.....	41
Strategies for Natural and Cultural Resource Protection	42
Natural Resources	42
Cultural Resources	43
Natural Resource Protection.....	44
Pollinator Habitat.....	46
Invasive Species	47
Cultural Resource Protection	49
Interpretation.....	49
Cultural Resource Documentation.....	50
Recreational Resource Enhancement	51
Day Use Area.....	51
Bandshell.....	53
Day Use Area Parking Lot.....	54
Picnic Shelters	56
Playground	57
Ball Courts	58
Softball Field.....	58
.....	60
Former Roller Rink	60
Winter Recreation.....	61
Trail System.....	63
Education and Outreach	66
Recreation Programs.....	66
Environmental Education.....	67
Outreach	68
Strategies for Operations, Infrastructure, and Facilities.....	68
Vehicular Circulation	68
Signage	69
Park Entrances	70
Freedom Road Area Access.....	71
Maintenance and Operations	72

Regional Maintenance Facility	72
Utilities	73
Water System.....	74
Staffing	75
Park Manager’s Residence	76
Golf Course.....	77
Pro Shop.....	79
Freedom Road Area Development	80
Disc Golf	81
Winter Recreation.....	82
Fishing	83
Agricultural Use.....	83
Chapter 3 – Selection of the Preferred Alternative	85
Rationale for Selection.....	85
Chapter 4 – Environmental Impacts and Mitigation.....	89
Introduction	89
Environmental Impacts of the Alternatives	89
Status Quo Alternative.....	89
Preferred Alternative and the Master Plan	90
Environmental Impacts Associated with Implementation of the Master Plan and Proposed Mitigation	90
Land Resources	90
Water	93
Air.....	97
Biological Resources/Ecology.....	97
Ecological Communities	97
Impacts to Plants and Animals.....	98
Cultural Resources	100
Archaeological Resources	103
Agricultural Resources	103
Scenic Resources.....	103
Open Space and Recreation	103

Circulation, Access, and Traffic	104
Public Health and Safety	105
Energy, Noise, Odor and Light	105
Unavoidable Adverse Impacts	106
Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources.....	106
Growth Inducement.....	106
Supplemental Environmental Review.....	106
Chapter 5 — Comments and Responses.....	108
Public Comment Opportunities	108
Significant Changes to the Master Plan and EIS	108
General Comments of Support	108
Responses to Comments.....	108
Natural Resources.....	109
Blanding’s Turtle Habitat	109
Habitat Enhancement	109
Beaver Activity	109
Visual Impacts from Maintenance Center	109
Groundwater Protection and Spill Prevention.....	110
Recreation.....	110
Pickleball	110
Hours of Operation	111
Trails.....	111
Pedestrian Facilities	111
Freedom Road Area	112
Swimming Pool.....	112
Preserve Park Character.....	112
Historic Walls	112
Operations, Management & Maintenance.....	113
Park Signage	113
Playground Plantings	113
Agricultural Use of Park	113
Funding for Master Plan Implementation	114

Property Acquisition 114

Maintenance 114

Park Manager’s House 115

Park Fees 115

Public Input Opportunities..... 115

Persons/Organizations who Provided Comments (alphabetically by last name)..... 115

Photo Credits 116

References 117

Abbreviations Used

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
BLD	Beech Leaf Disease
CCC	Civilian Conservation Corps
DEC	New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
FEIS	Final Environmental Impact Statement
LWCF	Land and Water Conservation Fund
NYNHP	New York Natural Heritage Program
NPS	National Park Service
NWI	National Wetlands Inventory
NYSEG	New York State Electric and Gas
NYS	New York State
OPRHP	New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
RIN	Relative Index of Need
SEQR	State Environmental Quality Review Act
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
Baird	James Baird State Park
WPA	Works Progress Administration





Executive Summary

For more than 80 years, James Baird State Park has offered residents of Dutchess County and visitors from farther afield a place to exercise, play, celebrate, and relax. Today, the Park's ball courts, a popular new playground, rental pavilions, walking trails, and a well-regarded golf course complex continue to offer opportunities for active and passive recreation. Over time, however, the Park's infrastructure base has aged, and changes in recreation preferences have created the need to take a fresh look at the Park and develop a Master Plan.

During the Park's early development, a master plan was not developed. Recreational elements for the new James Baird State Park ("Baird") were based on the land donor, James Baird's, ideas for activities that reflected the preferences of the 1940s. While the original golfing, tennis, and picnic facilities remain popular today, the roller rink and Bandshell are no longer draws, resulting in underutilized areas in the Park. The growing need for a comprehensive assessment of the Park's resources, as well as a more recent focus on protecting important ecologically sensitive areas, were factors in initiating this plan's development.

The master planning process helps to generate new ideas for park uses and provides a clear direction for facility improvements. Actions proposed in the plan are based on an in-depth look at the whole Park to identify what is – or is not – working and where new opportunities may exist. Once completed, implementing the plan's preferred actions will help to ensure that the Park will meet the public's current and future outdoor recreation needs, be more resilient, and its natural, recreational, and cultural resources will be protected in the years to come.

Planning and Environmental Review

The environmental review portion of the proposed Master Plan for James Baird State Park is conducted in accordance with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR). Under SEQR, agencies consider environmental impacts as well as social and economic factors early in the decision-making and planning/project design process. Land use or resource management plans are considered Type I actions under SEQR; that is, they are likely to have a significant impact on the environment and may therefore require preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). OPRHP fully integrates the master planning and environmental review processes.

Guiding Principles and Policies

The plan's goals and actions are designed to create a stronger and revitalized facility. Planners, regional park staff, local stakeholders, biologists, historians, the public, and other resource people worked together to develop a vision for a park that will flourish in the twenty-first century.

Overarching OPRHP program principles, policies, and goals and objectives provide the foundation for planning, development, operation, and management decisions made during the master planning process. The following summarizes current directives considered while developing a plan for the Park. The OPRHP planning process follows three basic principles:

- Planning must be coordinated and provide the opportunity for public participation: cooperation among appropriate government organizations, the public at large, special interest groups, and the private sector is not only desirable but necessary.
- Planning is a continuous process: assumptions for the classification and management of park resources must be continually reevaluated in light of new information, changing needs and priorities, and resource character.
- Planning must be comprehensive: the information base, and additional pertinent 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.

OPRHP has developed agency-wide policies to address management issues commonly faced by the park system. Policies covering topics such as the management of trees and other vegetation, pesticide use, wildfire and controlled burns, oil, gas and mineral rights, wildlife management, and native plants are available on the OPRHP website at: <http://nysparks.com/inside-our-agency/public-documents.aspx>.

Sustainability

OPRHP is committed to reducing its impact on the environment and doing its part to reduce climate change impacts by becoming more carbon neutral and adopting more sustainable practices in park development, operation, and maintenance. Sustainable practices and alternatives were considered in this plan when recommending proposed changes and updates to existing facilities.

Baird has a strong record of reducing its environmental impact and incorporating new approaches to operation and management at the facility. Recommended actions in the Master Plan have been developed, when practicable, to maximize energy efficiency and minimize environmental impact; to reduce fossil fuel use and reduce or eliminate hazardous substances; to protect and enhance biodiversity and ecosystems and use resources efficiently to meet park needs. Existing infrastructure will be refurbished and repurposed to the extent possible, while ensuring that the Park's character and important park elements are maintained. Protecting, restoring, and enhancing natural areas and increasing biodiversity continue to be of high importance for the facility.

Alternatives

The Master Plan offers a series of "preferred alternatives" that will guide the future development and operation of Baird. Cumulatively, the actions in the plan represent OPRHP's long-term vision for the rehabilitation and enhancement of the Park, alongside the protection and preservation of its cultural, recreational, and natural resources. The Plan always considers the Status Quo Alternative: i.e., to keep the Park as it is used and operated today with no recommended expansion, updates, or improvements.

Implementation Priorities

A Master Plan establishes OPRHP’s vision for capital improvements and operational enhancements at a facility over the next ten to fifteen years. Detailed cost estimates have not been developed for proposed components, but it is likely that improvements will cumulatively cost tens of millions of dollars to implement.

The pace and sequencing of recommended actions will be determined by the availability of funding (a function of OPRHP’s annual capital budget), the availability of staff, and the need to balance investments throughout OPRHP facilities. Once adopted, the Master Plan will be reviewed annually to select projects for implementation and inclusion in the Site’s budget, and to assess implementation progress.

Operational improvements that are already planned at the time of the Plan’s adoption will go forward as scheduled. Implementation of the Master Plan is divided into priority phases, as follows:

- Priority 1 (completed in 1-3 years)
- Priority 2 (completed in 3-5 years)
- Priority 3 (completed in 5-10 years)

Plan elements shown in the table below are subject to reorganization based on need and available funding.

Table 1 - Implementation Priorities

IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES	Description/Development Component
Actions for Natural Resource Protection	
Priority 1 (1-3 years)	Develop and implement a more proactive invasive species management program.
	Expand and improve natural resource management practices by enhancing habitat, installing new wildlife protections, and developing educational programs to raise public awareness.
	Implement habitat enhancement strategies on former agricultural lands.
Priority 2 (3-5 years)	Investigate opportunities to implement riparian/streambank and wetland creation/ expansion; enhance buffers and create greater connectivity along wildlife migration zones.
	Construct a berm system planted with native species between the golf course and day use area, to provide pollinator habitat and create visual/functional separation.

IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES	Description/Development Component
Priority 3 (5-10 years)	Implement habitat enhancement for key species: acquire land when available, facilitate research opportunities, and implement techniques to decrease predation; partner with adjacent landowners and other involved agencies to develop additional species protection.
Actions for Cultural Resource Protection	
Priority 2 (3-5 years)	<p>Develop interpretive content that tells the story of the establishment of the Park and the significance of its design.</p> <p>Develop an annotated bibliography that catalogues original design documents and resources on the Park’s historical and cultural elements.</p>
Actions for Recreational Resource Enhancement	
Priority 1 (1-3 years)	<p>Construct a park-wide, accessible, multi-use path that separates pedestrians and bicycles from active roadways.</p> <p>Provide a pedestrian connection to trails in the Freedom Road Area as part of the park-wide multi-use path system</p> <p>Convert an existing tennis court to add two additional pickleball courts in the day use area.</p> <p>Repair low, wet, and eroded areas in the Park’s existing hiking trail system; reroute non-sustainable sections, repair culverts and bridges, and improve trail markings.</p> <p>Designate a natural surface hiking/cross-country ski trail system in the Freedom Road Area, eliminate unnecessary trails and provide connectors and/or new segments as appropriate.</p> <p>Develop low-maintenance winter recreation opportunities at the Park (e.g., snowshoeing, cross-country skiing) to encourage more year-round use.</p> <p>Repurpose the existing softball area as a fitness trail/exercise route.</p> <p>Install a disc golf course at the Park’s Freedom Road Area.</p> <p>Retrofit the bathhouse as an events venue to accommodate up to 500 guests, with accessible restrooms, upgraded utilities, facilities for caterers, and a large-scale pavilion.</p> <p>Make improvements to picnic shelters and upgrade associated comfort stations and utility infrastructure.</p>

IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES	Description/Development Component
Priority 1 (1-3 years)	Implement the Golf Course Bunker Rehabilitation project
	Develop new recreational amenities in the Freedom Road Area that are consistent with existing natural resource protections at the Park.
	Designate selected trails at the Freedom Road Area for four-season use by providing groomed trails for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.
	Provide a designated location for fishing access at the pond in the Freedom Road Area.
Priority 2 (3-5 years)	Create a multi-purpose court at the former roller rink (e.g., to accommodate basketball, lacrosse rebound wall, street hockey, handball, etc.).
Priority 3 (5-10 years)	Install an accessible walking path in the day use area with seating and shade structures with links to the multi-use path.
	Rehabilitate the Bandshell structure and adjacent paved area; provide visual separation from the adjacent parking lot.
Actions for Operations, Infrastructure, and Facilities	
Priority 1 (1-3 years)	Improve Park entrances to enhance visibility, aesthetics, and ensure safe access.
	Implement traffic calming measures (e.g., speed bumps, speed feedback signs, road narrowing, wildlife crossings, pavement markings, etc.) to improve safety and enhance Park character.
	Develop and implement a comprehensive, parkwide signage plan to ensure that information is accessible and welcoming to all visitors.
	Redevelop the golf Clubhouse parking lot to meet current and anticipated demand and provide a safe overflow area.
	Develop a staffing plan and a corresponding operational budget that addresses current and proposed operations at the Park.
	Redevelop the day use area parking lot with green infrastructure elements, a clear layout, and improved circulation.
	Implement the Golf Course Sand Bunker Rehabilitation Project
Priority 2 (3-5 years)	Upgrade water supply system to better accommodate current and future park operations.

IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES	Description/Development Component
Priority 2 (3-5 years)	Redevelop the Park’s maintenance area in its current location to ensure appropriate infrastructure is available for efficient functioning of the Park now and in the future.
	Develop additional park programming opportunities with new visitor activities.
	Develop a banquet facility in the former Pro Shop for smaller indoor events.
	Improve and upgrade the golf practice facility and driving range.
	Upgrade the Park’s electric infrastructure, including the phone/ internet system, to provide reliable service for current needs and planned park development.
Priority 3 (5-10 years)	Construct a new Park Manager’s house at the Freedom Road Area.
Actions for Education and Outreach	
Priority 1 (1-3 years)	Develop an up-to-date information resource to address frequently asked questions on park amenities, activities, events, and resources; to include handouts, interactive maps, and facility rental information.
Priority 2 (3-5 years)	Develop new visitor activity programs that utilize the Park’s upgraded sports infrastructure (e.g., workshops for beginner pickleball, golf, disc golf).
	Develop new partnerships to help develop and implement in-person environmental educational programs (e.g., with schools, colleges, DEC).
	Develop self-guided environmental educational content, including new signage, podcasts, QR codes, social media, and other platforms.





Environmental Impacts and Mitigation

This Master Plan proposes both entirely new facilities and expanded and/or rehabilitated facilities at Baird. There will be some physical changes to the land where new pavilions, trails, buildings, or other structures are constructed, and new recreation amenities are expanded or added, and upgrades to utilities occur.

The Master Plan provides recommendations for improved recreational opportunities and strategies for protecting the significant natural resources at the Park. To ensure minimal impact to the Park's sensitive natural resources, a holistic approach was used to determine locations for proposed new or expanded infrastructure. Adaptive re-use of some existing buildings and recreation elements was determined as key to the Park's redevelopment. Previously disturbed or developed areas, and areas that outside a buffer from locally significant natural communities, were prioritized for any new or expanded development.

Baird's natural communities, native plants and wildlife will benefit from the Plan's natural resource stewardship recommendations. New or expanded recreational elements will be sited to ensure the Park's natural areas are protected. Proposed improvements avoid or mitigate conflicts with, or impacts to, rare species and wildlife habitat. Natural resource strategies in the Plan also include taking a more proactive approach to increased threats from invasive species, seasonal shifts, extreme weather, and other anticipated impacts of climate change.



Chapter 1 – Environmental Setting

Location and Access

James Baird State Park inhabits 790 acres in southwestern Dutchess County, NY, approximately equidistant from the City of Albany and New York City. Located about 10 miles east of the City of Poughkeepsie, portions of the Park are in the Town of Pleasant Valley and the northern part of the Town of LaGrange.

The area surrounding Baird is home to several public parks and open spaces, with 11 parks within a 15-minute drive of the Park.

Park Boundaries

Baird is bounded by the Taconic State Parkway to the west and Mountain Road to the south (see Appendices, Figure 1, *Park Location Map*). There are two entrances to the Park: the primary entrance is at the eastern side of the Park and can be accessed directly from both north- and southbound exits of the Taconic State Parkway, about 12 miles north of the busy I-84 corridor. A second entrance is located to the west on Freedom Road and is intended primarily for delivery trucks and buses; access by car at this entrance is discouraged.

Property Acquisitions

The Park has expanded considerably in size since the original 590 acres donated by James Baird in 1939. In 2008, a 65-acre parcel east of Freedom Road was acquired, and in 2017, a 135-acre parcel west of Freedom Road was added to OPRHP's holdings, referred to here as the Freedom Road Area. These properties bring important wetland habitat into the Park and offer 50-mile views across the Hudson Valley. After their acquisition, the Freedom Road parcels were surveyed and recorded in deeds and are now included in the total Park acreage. The Master Plan proposes specific actions that will better integrate these properties into the Park and make them available for public use and enjoyment.

Land Use

Baird today encompasses 790 acres of land. Within Park boundaries, approximately 53 acres (6.7%) are developed (buildings, roads, and infrastructure); 412 acres (52.1%) are managed (mowed or other designated recreational use areas); and 325 acres (41.2%) are natural, undeveloped areas which are not managed. The Freedom Road Area have in the past primarily been used for agricultural purposes. A solar array on approximately six acres at the western Freedom Road Area is scheduled to come online in August 2021 (see Appendix L, *Freedom Road Solar Array Plan*).

Adjacent Land Use

The area around Baird is largely rural and agrarian and its borders are flanked by several active farms. Agricultural properties to the west are primarily cropland and pasture. Further west, along Freedom Road, residential development is expanding. Residential development is expanding to the south as well, with commercial and industrial areas in the vicinity of the Town of Freedom Plains and Route 55. The Park's eastern boundary is wooded and slopes steeply down to the boundary of the Taconic State Parkway.

The Park's closest neighbor is Arlington High School. The school has its own athletic fields, but student athletes often use the Park for cross-country practice and races.

Socioeconomic Characteristics

According to 2021 estimates by the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) the population of Dutchess County has increased slightly over the past decade, from 295,911 in 2010 to 297,112 in 2021. The population is also aging – the average age of residents changed from 36.7 in 2000, to 41.8 in 2015. The median age in the County is just over 42 years.¹

Between 2016 to 2020, the median household income in Dutchess County was \$81,842 (in 2020 dollars), with individuals living in poverty estimated at 8.3%. During the same period, over 90% of the population had obtained a high school diploma or higher level of education, with 36.4% having a bachelor's degree or higher. Approximately 11% of residents in the county were listed as foreign-born.²

Economic Contribution

The OPRHP Taconic region includes 14 state parks, seven state historic sites, and two state-owned golf courses, including the one at Baird. According to a 2017 report on the economic benefits of New York State's parks, these facilities create jobs throughout New York State and increase state Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a result of visitors shopping in the area around the parks as well as by spending by the state government on park operations and capital improvements.³ According to the NYS Tourist Industry Association, more than 4.75 million people are estimated to visit Dutchess County annually. In addition to spending over half a billion dollars on lodging, dining, shopping, area attractions and transportation, tourism in Dutchess County generated \$43 million in local taxes and \$33 million for New York State.⁴

Attendance at Baird has generally increased over the past few years (see below). With upgrades and planned development at the facility underway and proposed in this plan, it is anticipated that attendance will continue to increase. Annual attendance at the Park between 2016-2021 (shown for NYS Fiscal Year, April 1 - March 31) was as follows:

- 2018-2019 – 105,228 visitors
- 2019-2020 – 107,823
- 2020-2021 – 115,253
- 2021-2022 – 129,368

Recreational Needs Assessment

The state generates recreation supply and demand calculations for each county in NYS, resulting in a single number for each activity. This number, known as the relative index of need (RIN), indicates the ratio of demand to supply.

The RIN provides planners with an idea of how well counties in a park's region are meeting local demand for a range of activities. The higher the RIN number, the greater the need. For instance, a figure of 3 or lower indicates that the county-wide recreation needs for a given activity are generally being met, while a value of 4 or greater indicates a need for additional recreation of that type within a county. Need may reflect a lack of facilities, or that facilities may need to be rehabilitated or replaced if older ones deteriorate or close. For more information on statewide recreation demand see the [2020-2025 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan \(SCORP\)](#).⁵

Dutchess, Putnam, Westchester, and Ulster counties were identified as the primary service area for Baird. A custom RIN specific to the Park was calculated, based on its existing services. In general, Baird is shown to have a balanced recreation supply based on the spectrum of activities taking place in the Park (see Table 2, below). The RIN for winter activities is indicative of modest facility need but could also be attributed to a lack of snow, which is necessary to participate in these activities.

Table 2 – Relative Index of Need (RIN) by County

County	Park	Swim	Bike	Golf	Court Games	Field Games	Walk/Jog	Fish	Boat	Local Winter
Dutchess	5	6	6	5	9	5	4	6	5	8
Putnam	6	6	6	3	5	6	3	6	5	6
Ulster	7	5	5	4	10	6	3	6	6	10
Westchester	6	5	8	7	6	5	3	5	7	2
Weighted Avg.	3.39	3.0	4.1	3.45	3.9	2.9	1.8	3.1	3.6	4.0

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE RELATIVE INDEX OF NEED (RIN) TABLE

- Park** Relaxing in the park (picnicking, playgrounds, visiting nature areas, croquet, dog parks, etc.)
- Swim** Outdoor swimming (pool (public or private), lake, ocean, or river)
- Bike** Cycling/mountain biking (on trails, established paths, off-road, or on highways)
- Golf** Golfing (regulation 18- or 9-hole, miniature golf, driving ranges)
- Court** Court games (e.g., basketball, handball, tennis, racquetball, pickleball)
- Field** Field sports (baseball, football, soccer, and disc golf)
- Walk** Walking for enjoyment/jogging/running (on paths, trails, day hiking)
- Fish** Fishing (from land, by boat, or ice fishing)
- Boat** Boating (canoeing, kayaking, sailing, motorboating, rowing, paddle boarding, jet skiing, etc.)
- LocW** Local winter activities (ice-skating, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing)





Legal Considerations

An existing easement allows for the New York State Electric & Gas Corporation's (NYSEG) distribution lines, a sub-station, and electric service to the Park Manager's residence in the Park. An easement for the installation of a solar panel array by Solar Liberty Energy Systems is in place within the Freedom Road Area. (The solar project at Freedom Road had a separate environmental review completed during the design process, which predates this plan. At that time, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) fully reviewed the project and environmental impacts were considered.)

There are no known inholdings in the Park.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

Baird has received a number of development grants over the years from the National Park Service's Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The most recent of these was to install a water-friendly irrigation system for the golf course. Acceptance of this federal funding includes a requirement that these facilities remain in public outdoor recreational use in perpetuity. Any proposals for uses other than public outdoor recreation require prior approval of the National Park Service to lift the use restriction through a process known as "conversion." It is not anticipated that conversion will be required for any of the actions proposed in the Master Plan. LWCF grants that have been awarded at James Baird are:

- Park Rehabilitation Projects (36-00568; closed 1979)
- Taconic Multi-Site, James Baird Golf Course 14th Green Reconstruction (36-00634; closed 1980)
- Taconic Multi-Site, James Baird Sports and Playfields Rehabilitation (36-00711; closed 1984)
- Golf Rehabilitation (36-01043; closed 1988)
- Water Supply Improvements (36-01231; closed 2005)
- Golf Course Irrigation System and Pond (36-01310; closed 2015)

The LWCF boundary is defined under grant 36-01043 which was recertified in 1993 and filed again under 36-01231. For more information on the LWCF, see: <http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/lwcf/manual/lwcf.pdf>.

Scenic Resources

Baird's rural context and natural features provide a tranquil outdoor setting for family gatherings, play, exercise, and sports. Wooded slopes around the activity areas create a sense of being surrounded by nature, and foot trails offer pleasant routes through the Park's woodlands. Visitors to the golf course and day use area can enjoy views of the surrounding hills and rural landscape. The rolling terrain, agricultural fields, wide expanses of lawn, and views across the Park's ponds and wetlands together comprise a relaxing green open space for outdoor events and recreation.

Natural Resources

Baird has significant open space and natural areas in its woodlands, fields, and waterbodies. Nearly half of its total 790 acres (325 acres, or 41.1%) is classified as "natural." The Park's largely rural setting and the forested corridor of the Taconic State Parkway provide open space with varying wildlife habitats. Baird's most significant natural resource is its wetlands, which are part of ecologically important wetland complexes in the region that are home to rare turtle species.

Geology

The terrain at Baird was shaped by glaciation. When Dutchess County was entirely covered by glacial ice during the last ice age, accumulations of dirt and rocks (moraines) were left behind as the glacier slowly retreated. These deposits can be seen in the Town of LaGrange and, in the City of Poughkeepsie, the moraine is more than 90 feet in height, extending westward from Baird to the City. Gravel deposits, or glacial till, found in the county are generally dense, compact, materials and rich with clay. Thin layers of till are present in the County's hilly regions and scattered points of exposed bedrock can be seen, but till may be tens of feet thick near valley walls.

The Park is underlain by shale, argillite (sedimentary rock composed mostly of clay) and chert, a hard, dark, rock composed of silica. Bedrock in this region is mostly easily eroded sedimentary rock such as shale, greywacke (a type of sandstone) and consolidated siltstone, a fine-grained sedimentary rock that was deposited as the glacier advanced and retreated. The bedrock is close to the surface on the east side of the Park, where there are some small outcrops.⁶

Topography

Much of the eastern border of New York State, in the area where Baird is sited, consists of long, narrow lowlands typical of the middle and lower portions of the Hudson Valley. Baird is set among rolling hills and has some steep slopes as well as level meadow areas. The highest elevation at the Park is 328 feet above sea level.

Soils

Predominant soils within Baird include (percentages shown) Hoosic gravelly loam (HsA-29%), nearly level, a well-drained, acidic soil derived from glacial outwash found at nearly level lands, and Hoosic gravelly loam undulating, (HsB-11.6%), found in more rolling topography. Also present is Nassau-Cardigan complex (NwB-15.8%), an acidic soil formed in glacial till. Nassau soils are shallow and somewhat excessively drained, while Cardigan soils are moderately deep and well-drained, typical of areas that are hilly and very rocky⁷ (see Appendices, Figure 8, *Soils*).

The predominant soil in Baird's eastern portion is the Nassau-Cardigan complex. The west side exhibits more gentle topography, with irregularly shaped mounds composed of sand, gravel, and till. Nassau-Cardigan complex and Hoosic soils are also found in areas surrounding the Park, along with the Dutchess-Cardigan complex, which consists of deeper, well drained soils that formed in till.⁸

The Hoosic terrain of western Dutchess County supports seasonal wetlands known as kettle shrub swamps, which were formed by melting blocks of glacial ice.⁹ The Nassau-Cardigan and Dutchess-Cardigan soils support these intermittent woodland pools; these wetland types are both important for supporting the State Threatened Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*), and the loose, well-drained upland soils provide important nesting habitat.

Water, Watersheds, and Wetlands

Baird is located within the Upper Hudson River drainage basin and is part of the NYSDEC-designated Dutchess County Wetlands Significant Biodiversity Area (SBA). Watershed information for Baird was identified using the US Geological Survey's (USGS) hydrologic unit code system (HUC). This is a standardized watershed classification system developed by USGS in the mid-1970s that identifies watershed boundaries in a hierarchy by size (see Appendices, Figure 6, *Watershed*).



Kettle shrub pools (top) are an important type of wetland habitat for NYS Threatened Blanding's turtles. Baird's small seasonal pools (above) provide important wildlife habitat and can be viewed from some of the park's foot trails.

Waterbodies are an important component of Baird's natural landscape and character (see Appendices, Figure 7, *Water Resources*). The Park has ponds of various sizes, including two larger ponds on the golf course (6.9 and 4.6 acres), which were created by damming Sprout Creek, the largest tributary of Fishkill Creek. A state-regulated stream with a C(T) classification,¹⁰ Sprout Creek is stocked annually by the DEC with 6,000 brown trout and has some wild brown trout population. It runs for nearly 25 miles through Dutchess County, passing through Baird on its way to joining the Fishkill Creek on its way to the Hudson River.

Wetlands

Four large, separate wetland complexes in central-western Dutchess County comprise a Significant Biodiversity Area (SBA) with a total of 66,000 acres.¹¹ Two of the complexes (Milan Window and Stissing Mountain) feed Wappinger Creek, which flows along the eastern edge of Poughkeepsie and through Wappinger Falls before reaching the Hudson River. These wetlands occur east of the Hudson River from Interstate 84 north to the Dutchess/ Columbia County line and are found in the towns of La Grange and Pleasant Valley, where the Park is situated.¹²



Typical wetland plants may include Floating liverwort (*Ricciocarpus natans*) (left) Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*)

The SBA encompasses several wetlands and their watersheds, as well as wetland buffer zones that are biologically significant for breeding waterfowl, turtles, plants, and other species. This SBA supports the highest diversity of turtles in the State (see Appendix C, *Significant Biodiversity Areas of the Hudson River Estuary*). The northwest corner and southern edge of Pleasant Valley contain portions of these wetlands and provide important habitat for a variety of species of amphibians, reptiles, and birds.

Baird contains at least 27 known and described wetlands, either on, or partially on, the Park property. They range from vernal pools and ponds to larger forested swamps, ranging in size from less than 0.5 acre to 16 acres, and totaling approximately 90 acres. The majority of these wetlands are identified on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetland Inventory (NWI) maps, and approximately 69 acres are regulated by the DEC. State mapped wetland boundaries at Baird were updated by DEC in October 2009 (see Appendix B, *NYS DEC Wetland Delineation*). The DEC's public wetland layer does not reflect these updates, but the Park and DEC Region 3 Office have the updated boundaries on file.

Wetlands at Baird and adjacent properties support Blanding's turtle populations as well as other turtle Species of Special Concern. In 1996 and 1997, new wetlands and uplands were constructed adjacent to the Park's southern boundary to mitigate the loss of Blanding's turtle habitat associated with the expansion of facilities at the adjacent AHS campus. Additional unmapped and/or undescribed wetlands are found in the eastern portion of the Park and a few wetlands are found in the Freedom Road Area. These wetlands may also serve as Blanding's turtle habitat and require future research efforts to better understand and protect the facility's full habitat complex.

Baird also contains unmapped vernal pools which are seasonally wet, containing water in spring and fall. These intermittent wetlands provide important habitat for amphibians and invertebrates uniquely adapted to these habitats, including the marbled salamander (*Ambystoma opacum*), Jefferson salamander (*Ambystoma jeffersonianum*), and blue-spotted salamander (*Ambystoma laterale*), all species of Special Concern in the State. Due to their small size, many of these vernal pools have not been visited and recorded. NYNHP conducted statewide surveys of selected vernal pools in 2018 including one in Baird. NYNHP will be evaluating and adding vernal pools to the ecological community maps in the future.

Turtle nesting habitat was created at a former landfill cap, as Blanding's turtles had historically nested in this location. An old borrow pit immediately south of the landfill was also converted to nesting habitat, and Blanding's turtles appear to have nested on the landfill cover since 2002.

Ecological Communities

The New York Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP) mapped twelve distinct ecological community types at Baird, representing three ecological systems and seven subsystems (see Appendices, Figure 9, *Ecological Communities at Baird* and Table 3 below). One natural community documented at the Park, considered significant from a statewide perspective, is a 348-acre Appalachian Oak-Hickory Forest that intersects Baird’s eastern side (NYNHP 2021). About 222 acres of this forest fall within the Park, which is dominated by red oak (*Quercus rubra*), pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*), black oak (*Quercus velutina*), white oak (*Quercus alba*), and chestnut oak (*Quercus montana*).^{13 14} This forest is recognized as significant due to its good representative native species composition, maturity, and low percentage of exotic species.

Additional natural ecological communities present in the Park include small patches of Hemlock-Northern Hardwood Forest, Successional Southern Hardwoods, Successional Red Cedar Woodland, Successional Old Field, Red Maple-Hardwood Swamp, Shallow Emergent Marsh, and Shrub Swamp (NYNHP 2001). At the time of this mapping effort, The Park was only 604 acres and thus the newer parcels on the west side of The Park were not included. These are dominated by fields and shrublands. This area will be included in future mapping efforts. Also note that small unmapped patches of various community types (such as Hemlock-Northern Hardwood Forest or Vernal Pools) may be embedded within the dominant forest types.

Flora

The Mid-Hudson River Valley in Dutchess County contains a rich diversity of habitats and flora, which has created a “biological crossroads between species and habitats of the surrounding regions.”¹⁵ Baird has a representative array of these species in its woodlands, wetlands and fields. In addition to the many native oak and hickory species, other native trees species in the Park include red maple, sugar maple, shadbush, black birch, flowering dogwood, white ash, hop hornbeam, red cedar, white pine, American basswood, and Eastern hemlock and others.

Some of the native shrubs and vines at Baird are witch hazel, Virginia creeper, highbush blueberry, maple-leaved viburnum, downy arrowwood and buttonbush. Herbaceous plants include wild sarsaparilla, Carey’s sedge, Pennsylvania sedge, spotted wintergreen, hay-scented fern, marginal wood fern, Christmas fern, silver rod, blue-stemmed goldenrod (NYNHP 2001) and many more, see Appendix F, *James Baird Flora Species List*.



Red Maple-Hardwood Swamp (above); Appalachian Oak-Hickory Forest (right)

In accordance with the required environmental review process, the New York Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP) database was reviewed for state-rare species at the Park. No NYNHP tracked plant species are currently documented at Baird. However, several locally uncommon species were documented in or near the Park by stewardship staff and other biologists and are also worthy of conservation attention. Buttonbush stands (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) growing in kettle shrub pools are a scarce plant community in the County. Buttonbush flowers attract a variety of insects, and the gray catbird is a common nesting species in buttonbush stands. In 2005 and 2006 the state-rare Field dodder (*Cuscuta pentagona*) was found in five separate locations on a former landfill. Due to questions on its origin, it has not yet been added to the NYNHP database.

Rare Plant Species

Other regionally rare or scarce plants associated with Blanding's turtle wetlands in The Park are shortawn foxtail (*Alopecurus aequalis*) and floating liverwort (*Ricciocarpus natans*). Of interest in some of the wetlands in the Park are dense stands of buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*); characteristic of many kettle hole shrub wetlands, these are considered a scarce vegetative community in Dutchess County. This species is pending verification and documentation as a potential NYNHP record.

Invasive Flora

The presence of invasive plants presents challenges to managing native ecological communities and critical habitats for rare species, as invasive plants often negatively impact native plant and animal species. Under New York State law adopted in 2007 and amended in 2008 (Environmental Conservation Law Article 9, Title 17) an "invasive species" is a species that:

- a. is non-native to the ecosystem under consideration; and
- b. their introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.¹⁶

The law also indicates that harm must significantly outweigh any benefits for a species to be considered invasive.



Porcelainberry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*), an invasive woody vine

Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) dominates the vegetation at a former landfill and in the surrounding area in the north end of the Park. This area is managed as Blanding’s turtle nesting habitat and it is likely that the mugwort, which has dense, tall growth, is a deterrent to nesting Blanding’s turtles and Eastern box turtles. Mugwort is currently managed by late season mowing on the capped landfill and early spring tilling in the adjacent newly created nesting area; however, the infestation hasn’t decreased.

Black swallow-wort (*Cynanchum louiseae*) is a vining invasive plant that also poses a threat to native plant communities as well as to the turtle nesting areas in the northern and eastern sections of the Park. Black swallow-wort is known to have been present in James Baird State Park for over six years and manual control efforts aimed at seed suppression have taken place annually, to reduce its abundance and prevent its spread. If black swallow-wort grows unchecked, it can quickly form dense patches and displace native plants. Documented invasive flora at Baird include:

- Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*)
- Black Swallow-wort (*Cynanchum loioseae*)
- Burning Bush (*Euonymus alatus*)
- Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*)
- Common Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*)
- Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*)
- Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*)
- Japanese Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*)
- Japanese Knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*)
- Japanese Stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*)
- Morrow’s Honeysuckle (*Lonicera morrowii*)
- Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*)
- Multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*)
- Mile-a-Minute Weed (*Polygonum perfoliatum*)
- Oriental Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*)
- Porcelainberry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*)
- Privet (*Ligustrum sinense*)
- Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)
- Spotted Knapweed (*Centaurea stoebe*)
- Tree-of-Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*)
- White Mulberry (*Morus alba*)

Fauna

In each of the five northeastern states where it occurs, the Blanding’s turtle is listed as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and as State Threatened in New York. The Blanding’s turtle is protected by Environmental Conservation Law, and a permit is required for any proposed project that may result in a “take” of a species listed as Threatened or Endangered or result in degradation or destruction of habitat occupied by the listed species.¹⁷ Loss of habitat is a significant cause for the decline of these turtles. They require large areas of land that offer a variety of permanent and temporary wetlands, as well as upland habitats such as ponds, rivers, marshes, fens, vernal pools, meadows, forests, and shrublands.

Since 2002, OPRHP has continued an intensive monitoring program for the Blanding’s turtles in the Park, collaborating with a wide range of groups and individuals, including high school students, interns, NYS DEC, regional nonprofit organizations, and other experts in the field. In spring and fall, the turtles’ movements are tracked, nests are protected, and hatchlings documented.

Table 2¹⁸

Ecological Communities observed within James Baird State Park (NYNHP 2001)				
System	Subsystem	Community Type	Acres	
Terrestrial	Forested Uplands	Appalachian oak-hickory forest	222	
		Hemlock northern hardwood forest	27	
		Successional southern hardwoods	67	
		Barrens and Woodlands	Successional red cedar woodland	24
		Open Upland	Successional old field	9
		Terrestrial Cultural	Conifer plantation	1
			Developed	15
	Mowed lawn		181	
Palustrine	Forested Mineral Soil Wetland	Redwood maple-hardwood swamp	17	
	Open Mineral Soil Wetland	Shallow emergent marsh	2	
		Shrub swamp	25	
Lacustrine	Lacustrine Cultural	Reservoir/artificial impoundment	14	
Total Acres			604	

In addition to Blanding's turtles, other turtle species have been identified at Baird. These include the common musk turtle (*Sternotherus odoratus*), painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta*), and several NYS Species of Special Concern: the spotted turtle (*Clemmys guttata*), Eastern box turtle (*Terrapene c. carolina*), and wood turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*).¹⁹

Spotted salamanders and wood frogs (both vulnerable, habitat-limited species), spring peepers, and American toads also breed in the Park's wetlands.



Blue-Spotted Jefferson salamander (*Ambystoma jeffersonianum*)

The Jefferson's salamander breeds in several wetlands in the Park. The blue-spotted salamander or a blue-spotted Jefferson hybrid was found in wetlands south of Route 55 and it is possible that this species could occur at Baird or at AHS. The marbled salamander occurs in at least one of the Park's woodland pools, and four-toed salamanders are also known to occur here. Gray tree frogs use cavities in dead and living trees in swamps and other habitats in the Park.

Vernal pools at Baird support breeding populations of amphibians, including wood frogs (*Rana sylvatica*), spring peepers (*Hyla crucifer*), gray treefrogs (*Hyla versicolor*), spotted salamanders (*Ambystoma maculatum*), marbled salamanders (*Ambystoma opacum*), Jefferson salamanders (*Ambystoma jeffersonianum*), and, potentially, blue-spotted salamanders (*Ambystoma laterale*). The regionally rare eastern ribbon snake (*Thamnophis s. sauritus*) has been found at Baird in addition to the more common garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*). The forests and fields support large mammals such as white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginiana*), black bear (*Ursus americanus*), and bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), which have been observed in the Park. (See Appendix D, *James Baird Fauna Species List*.)

Although surveys for rare invertebrates have not been conducted at Baird, Springtime physa, a snail species which appears to be rare in the Hudson Valley, could occur in Baird's wetlands. The array of habitats, including tree cavities in dead and living trees in the Park and in adjoining swamps, could support many more common and perhaps some uncommon invertebrate species not yet surveyed for.

Birds

According to data from the online citizen science website, [eBird](#), close to 140 species of birds have been documented at or near Baird between 1995 and 2021 (eBird 2021).²⁰ The recorded species include a mix of expected species in the following groups: Geese and Ducks, Herons, New World Vultures, Hawks, Rails, Sandpipers, Gulls, Doves, Owls, Nightjars, Swifts, Hummingbirds, Kingfishers, Woodpeckers, Tyrant Flycatchers, Vireos, Jays and Crows, Swallows, Chickadees, Nuthatches, Creepers, Wrens, Kinglets, Gnatcatchers, Thrushes, Mimics, Starlings, Waxwings, Wood-Warblers, Tanagers, Sparrows, Grosbeaks, Blackbirds, Finches, and Weaver Finches. (See Appendix E, *James Baird Bird Species List*, for a list of bird species observed at the Park or in the general vicinity.)

Nuisance Wildlife and Invasive Fauna

Beaver activity has occurred in the past at Baird. OPRHP works with the NYSDEC to address beaver impacts. Park staff partially removed a beaver dam in the Park near the state-regulated wetland close to the driving range pond and the beavers have since left. Beaver dams can change habitat lowering or raising water levels, which may impact existing wildlife habitat. In some areas, however, downed trees and wetter areas may add important wildlife benefit for turtles, bats, redheaded woodpeckers, and other species that live in the region.

A growing threat to the region is Beech Leaf Disease (BLD). The disease spread rapidly in the Hudson Valley and Western New York in 2020, affecting many forests, and has the potential to greatly impact beech trees — especially saplings and younger trees — throughout their range. BLD has been associated with a non-native nematode, *Litylenchus crenatae* (nematodes are wormlike in appearance but are multicellular insects). Little is known about this nematode and how it is spreading so quickly. It is suspected that it hitches rides on other animals, potentially birds. Nematodes need water, and dry out quickly; however, it is speculated that they may have a dormant stage that survives dry and cold conditions. BLD has recently been found in multiple NYS parks, including Allegany and a number of Hudson Valley parks. There are large distribution gaps and it is unknown if the populations in Western NY and the Hudson Valley are separate introductions or if there are populations in between.

Rare, Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals

The NYS DEC documents species which meet specified criteria in the state's Environmental Conservation Law, which are found, have been found, or may be expected to be found in NYS in the following categories:

- Endangered - Any native species in imminent danger of extirpation (not extinct but no longer occurring in the state) or extinction in New York State.
- Threatened - Any native species likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future in New York State.
- Special Concern - Any native species for which a welfare concern or risk of endangerment has been documented in New York State.²¹

Baird's population of the NYS Threatened Blanding's turtle is part of a larger population of these rare turtles in Dutchess County, which has been studied annually since 2002. This work, coordinated by NYS Parks Environmental Management Bureau staff (now the Division of Environmental Stewardship and Planning), has been conducted by Parks and NYSDEC staff, Hudsonia, Ltd., Student Conservation Association interns, consultants, and volunteers.



Maternity colonies of the Federally Endangered/NYS Endangered Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) have been documented nearby (NYNHP, 2021)²² and it is likely that the Park provides habitat for this species. Additional surveys are recommended in the Park. Any of the other eight species of bats found in NYS may inhabit Baird and should be considered in any project or tree cutting per agency guidance (see Appendix O, *ORHP Tree Removal Policy*).

Bird species of Special Concern at Baird include the Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), pictured at left.

Additional reptile and amphibian species recorded in the Park and listed by DEC as Special Concern include the North American Wood Turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*), spotted turtle (*Clemmys guttata*), marbled salamander (*Ambystoma opacum*), Jefferson salamander (*Ambystoma jeffersonianum*), and eastern box turtle (*Terrapene c. carolina*). These are protected under NYS regulations (see [New York State's Native Reptile and Amphibian Laws](#)).

Air Quality

An air quality monitoring station for Dutchess County is maintained at the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies in Millbrook, NY. The major air pollutants are ground-level ozone, particulate matter, and acid deposition. Because some of these pollutants are transported across state and county lines, the federal Clean Air Act was enacted to control these pollutants at the state and federal geographic scale. Some pollutants measured in Dutchess County are not emitted here but are carried in by air currents. Likewise, some pollutants emitted in Dutchess County affect downwind areas outside the County.²³

Climate

Dutchess County lies in the northern portion of the temperate climate zone and is typical of the humid continental type common in the northeastern portion of the continent. New York State has a fairly uniform distribution of precipitation during the year, with no distinct dry or wet seasons. Storm systems moving northward along the Atlantic coast have an important influence on the weather and climate of the lower Hudson Valley. Maximum quantities of rainfall are generally seen in summer, when high-pressure systems sit just off the coast, bringing very warm, often humid weather, and cause mild, more pleasant temperatures during the fall and spring seasons. Lower portions of the Hudson Valley have rather warm summers, with periods of high, uncomfortable humidity.²⁴

From late December or early January through February, the state's Atlantic coastal region experiences alternating periods of measurable snow cover and bare ground. Cold temperatures prevail when Arctic air masses flow southward from central Canada or Hudson Bay. The average number of frost-free days ranges widely in the Hudson Valley, from around 150 to 180 days, although that is changing due to climate changes. In recent years, much of NYS has seen snowfall amounts diminishing.

Climate Change

Climate change is having an increased impact on the state's parks. In the northeast U.S., annual precipitation is expected to gradually increase through 2100. Precipitation in the Hudson Valley region is projected to increase by as up to 10% by 2080.²⁵ Damaging floods with more frequent and intense storms are already impacting the region. Warming temperatures are bringing about noticeable changes to the climate of the state overall, and temperature extremes are increasingly the norm. Summers are projected to warm slightly more than winters, and the combination of warmer temperatures and high humidity may cause summer days to feel substantially warmer than at present, comparable to the current climate of South Carolina.²⁶

The mean annual temperature in Poughkeepsie has generally increased during the past 55 years, and the average mean temperature is predicted to continue to rise from climate change factors. The timing of the seasons is also being affected. As early as 2008, the growing (frost-free) season in Dutchess County had increased by over 20 days over the previous 60 years.²⁷

Development pressures and habitat fragmentation are also likely to complicate the adaptation of natural systems to climate change. As temperatures rise, some plants and animals will need to move north or to higher elevations.

Cultural Resources

According to NY's Cultural Resource Information System (CRIS), Baird has been determined eligible for inclusion in the State and National Register of Historic Places (S/NRHP) at the local level in the areas of recreation, architecture, and landscape architecture. The Park was deemed significant in association with Criteria A ("Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns in our history") and C ("Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or represents the work of a master..."). Other factors, such as proximity to the Hudson River corridor, also increase the potential for archeological sensitivity in the Park and surrounding area.

Archaeological Resources

The Hudson River region as a whole is significant for its Native American, early American trading, Revolutionary War, and Industrial Revolution history.²⁸

Prehistoric

The area near the City of Poughkeepsie was inhabited for centuries by a mixture of Algonquin-speaking peoples from the Mahican, Lenape, and Munsee cultures. Archeologists estimate that Native Americans, specifically Mahican and pre-Mahican people, lived in the Hudson Valley for about 10,000 years, with some archeological sites indicating continuous human settlement for approximately 5,000 years, until the area was colonized by the Dutch. Today's Dutchess County was the northernmost range of the native Lenape people who, like the Mahicans, thrived for thousands of years on the resources of the region's rich forests and waterways.

Historic

In 1609, when Henry Hudson sailed up the Hudson River, the east bank of the river had been home for centuries to the Wappinger Indians and other members of the Algonquin Federation. A local encampment was called Poughkeepsie, "the reed-covered lodge by the little water place."²⁹

In the seventeenth century the governing body of the Province of New York was known as the General Assembly. During this period, the state was part of the British Empire, and known as a "proprietary colony, in which large tracts of land were awarded to British affiliates."³⁰ First convened in 1683, this governing body established the twelve original counties of New York State in that year.

Dutchess County was named after Mary of Modena, then the Duchess of York and wife of the future King James II of England. Until the American Revolution, much of Dutchess was organized into large land patents owned by a few wealthy men, including the Rombout Patent, the Beekman Patent, and the Nine Partners Patent.³¹ Dutchess County's colonial history is still visible today in its early homesteads, clapboard farmhouses, Victorian villas, stone churches, and country inns, all of which represent past lives and events that have shaped the County's distinctive character and context for Baird.

Regional Development

During the Revolutionary War, the Village of Fishkill was a major logistical center and primary supply center for the entire Northern Department of the Continental Army. The Fishkill Supply Depot was a military camp with barracks, a hospital, various workshops, and storage yard, which became the main support for around 4,000 troops stationed in the area. After the burning of Kingston in October 1777, Poughkeepsie served as the NYS capitol until the war ended.

In post-Revolutionary Dutchess County, a slow climb to economic prosperity began. In 1785, the State granted the first license for Post Road, and a series of taverns and inns were built along what is now called Route 9, some which still stand today. Road networks continued to grow through the nineteenth century, eventually eclipsed by the railroad, which reached Poughkeepsie in the 1830s. A transportation system of highways, railroads, and river access transformed western Dutchess into an industrial powerhouse, while strengthening agriculture in eastern Dutchess. Early in the twentieth century, the County also regained political prominence as the home of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Prosperity continued to grow Post-World War II and in Dutchess was evidenced by IBM's purchase of property in Poughkeepsie in 1942. The corporation's expansion in the 1950s and 1960s introduced an era of growth which further transformed the landscape in the region. A growing population brought workers into expanding suburbs, which required new roads, services, businesses, and other infrastructure.

In more recent years, Dutchess County government has acted to preserve historical elements of the landscape through nomination of sites to the National Register of Historic Places, adaptive re-use, and the establishment of historic districts. To preserve the County's predominantly rural character, county government has also assisted in the creation of agricultural districts, preserving more than 200,000 acres of farmland.

Cultural Resources at Baird Pre-1940

Baird once contained numerous constructed features that predated the Park's establishment. Central among those was the vernacular dwelling referred to as the James Baird House, a portion of which may have predated 1800. This structure was demolished in 2016 due to its deteriorated condition and is no longer extant.

The principal remaining pre-Park resource is the current Park Manager's house, a nineteenth century vernacular dwelling, whose precise date has not been confirmed. U.S. Census data indicates that a portion of the building may have been built in the 1790s and occupied by Silas Pettit (1766-1848). The house appeared on maps as early as 1850, noted as owned or occupied by William Pettit (1793-1876) and his family. It is likely that Silas Pettit built the house earlier and his son William added a large addition. This is the only surviving nineteenth century building within the Park.

The Park also has pre-20th-century stone walls from the site's agricultural days. One large retaining wall on the south side of Tobin Lane has been surveyed and documented by OPRHP historic preservation staff. Other stone walls at Baird mark former field divisions and are considered an interesting "legacy" feature of pre-Park days which add character to the landscape. In general, they are considered to be complementary to the larger agricultural or designed landscape, rather than as individual historic components.

Cultural Resources 1940-1972

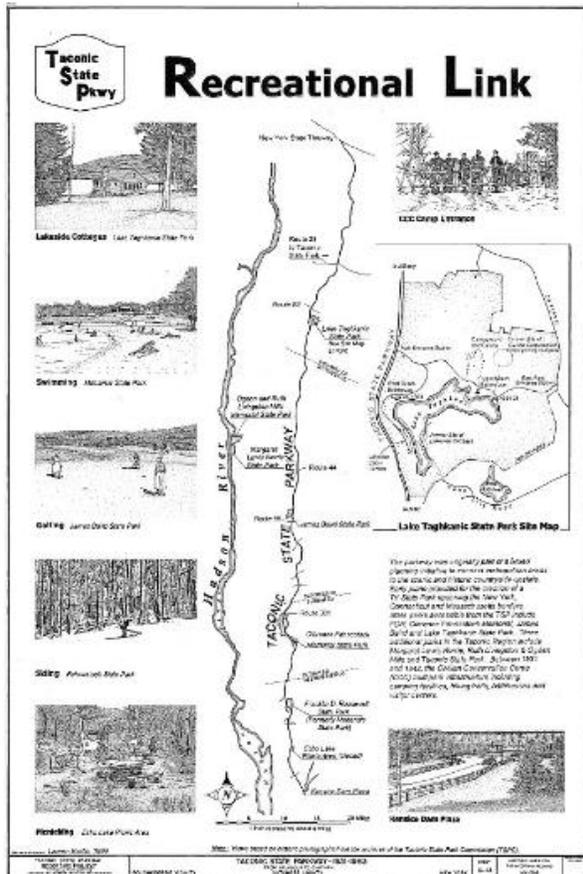
In March 1939, the Taconic State Park Commission (TSPC) accepted 571.24 acres of land from James and Cornelia Baird and an additional 9.3 acres in July of that year. The commission's October 1939 minutes noted that the Park's "development should comprehend intensive recreational day use and that the facilities to be provided should include a golf course, swimming pool and bathhouse, tennis courts, handball courts, shuffleboard, archery, bowling greens, restaurant, bridle paths and picnic places."

By 1940, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Camp SP-58 had been established in the area, and improvements to the Park were completed by the CCC between 1940 and 1942. Additional Works Progress Administration (WPA) projects were completed at Baird in February 1943. Baird's golf course

and Clubhouse were CCC/WPA projects under construction before World War II but were not completed until after the war. Between 1949-50, the swimming pool, bathhouse, and restaurant were constructed. A comfort station (referred to as Knollside) was also added around 1963, and later replaced with a more modern facility.

1940-72 period resources (historic/contributing to DOE) have been identified as follows:

- Golf Clubhouse (Jones, Davis & Associates), ca. 1940
- Golf Course (Robert Trent Jones, consultant), ca. 1940-48
- Former Bathhouse (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill), ca. 1949-50
- Former Skating Rink; ca. 1949-50
- Former Skating Rink Shelter/Nature Center, ca. 1949-50
- Music Bandshell; ca. 1948-49
- Baseball diamond; ca. 1950
- Picnic Shelter No. 1, ca. 1948-50
- Picnic Shelter No. 2, ca. 1948-50
- Cabin No. 2; ca. 1925
- Driving Range Shelter; ca. 1952-53
- Maintenance/Park Office, ca. 1936 and later
- Maintenance/Garage; ca. 1952
- Maintenance/Carpenter's garage, ca. 1936
- Golf cart garage, ca. 1952-53



In 2005 the Taconic State Parkway was listed on the National Register of Historic Places



Pickleball courts and a turtle-themed playground are both popular destinations in Baird's day use area

In the 1980s, the swimming pool was removed and backfilled, and a concession building with bathrooms immediately west of the pool was also demolished. The original bathhouse remains on the former pool's east side, as does a similarly styled building adjacent to the former roller rink to the south. The bathhouse is of historical interest, designed in the 1950s by one of the leading architectural offices in the nation – Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

In 1992, the Taconic State Parkway (TSP) was designated as a Scenic Byway by the NYS Department of Transportation, and in 2005, the entire TSP system was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.³²

Recreational Resources and Activities

Day Use Area

At the Park's center, the 20-acre day use area is bordered by the golf course to the south and wooded areas to the north. Activity here originally focused on a large public swimming pool, where early patrons could also enjoy the Park's original playground, a softball field, roller rink, tennis and volleyball courts, a Bandshell, and food concession stands. As the pool aged, maintenance and repair costs rose. Demand dropped as homeowners increasingly installed their own private residential pools. In the 1980s, OPRHP determined that the pool had reached the end of its useful life, and the pool was closed permanently.

Without the swimming pool, the Park's day use area lost its primary focal point. Today, people visit the day use area throughout the week for short visits to walk their dogs on paths around the bathhouse and ball courts (dogs are not allowed beyond the bathhouse – a rule remaining from the pool era). The remaining original infrastructure in the day use area are generally underused and most are in need of rehabilitation.

The day use area operates on a dawn to dusk basis only and the Park does not provide lighting for after-hours use.



A former roller rink pad at Baird is now used for basketball. The small building to the rear is no longer in use; original to the Park, it has been used as a ball-lending stand and a nature center.

Day Use Recreation

Baird's day use activity area includes a playground, softball field, sand volleyball and tennis courts and pickleball (see Appendices, Figure 10, *Recreational Resources*). The concrete pad of the former roller rink serves as a basketball court, and a lawn area near the playground and ball courts has tables with grills for picnicking. Two pavilions that can accommodate up to 300 people each are available in the Park by reservation. The small Bandshell can be reserved when the Park hosts larger events. Electricity is available at the stage and activated when organizations request a permit for the area.

In fall 2017, the "Turtle Walk Playground" was unveiled at the Park's day use area. The custom-designed playground incorporates an educational component with signage and sculptures that focus on turtle species in the Park, and quickly became a community asset and regional destination.

Sports Facilities

The Park's 18-hole golf course complex includes a Clubhouse with a restaurant and outdoor dining patio with views across the course. The facility includes putting and driving ranges and has three acres of greens and 2.8 acres of tees. The total area of the fairways is about 30 acres. Approximately 30,000 to 40,000 rounds of golf are played at Baird's course each year.

A softball field in the northwest corner of the day use area includes a chain link backstop and faint markings for bases. A sand volleyball court sits at the western end of the activity area. The court is most often used by families picnicking. Four tennis courts, enclosed by a chain link fence, were repaved in 2008. In 2019, pickleball courts were installed in place of two of the tennis courts. Baird does not have an official date for opening the ball courts. They are opened based on safety considerations according to weather conditions

South Field

A mowed field at the southern end of the day use area is occasionally used for field games. This open area also provides a buffer between the day use area and the golf course's ninth hole. A chain link fence separates the areas.

Day Use Parking Lot

Arriving at the 180,000 square-foot day use area parking lot is often a visitor's first experience of the Park. With capacity for 190 cars, three travel lanes, and six rows of angled parking, the lot is well-sited for large group events. Original to the Park, the pavement is deteriorated and does not have painted lines for stalls, pedestrian walks, or driving aisles.

Trails

The Park features seven miles of natural surface trails which traverse Baird's hilly terrain, winding through woodlands and past wetlands, small ponds, and streams. The trails connect the day use area to other activity areas in the Park. Baird's trails are not formally designated for specific uses and are generally used for short walks or hikes in the warm months and cross-country skiing and snowshoeing in the winter.

Local Boy Scouts are regular visitors to the Park and have performed community service projects on the trails. In 2016 a Scout troop constructed a new section of trail in the Park's northeast corner.



Baird's day use area parking lot during a charity event, the Lake Effect Car Meet, which raises money for the Miles of Hope Breast Cancer Foundation.

The Park's trails are designated by color (see Appendices, Figure 11, *Existing Trails*). The condition of the Park's trails varies (see below, and Figure 11a, Trail Conditions Map):

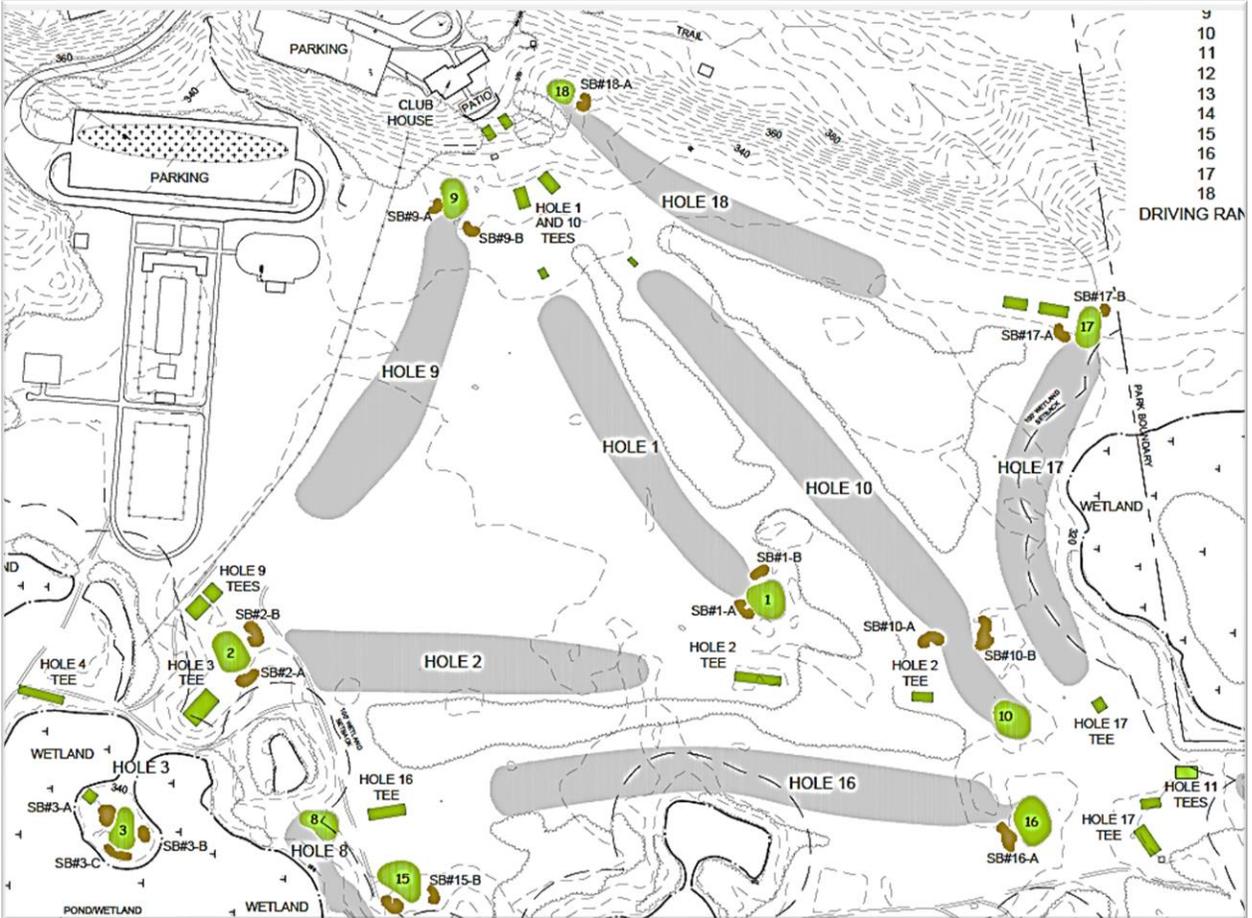
- Blue Trail – 0.9 miles, from driving range trailhead to the playground. It is in overall good condition. With an average tread width of 48 inches, it features moderately rolling terrain and two stream crossings over footbridges. The northernmost footbridge has fallen into disrepair and needs replacement. The Blue trail features multiple spur trails leading off it, some are marked blue, and some are unmarked. The southernmost section between the playground and the Shelter 2 parking area is severely eroded; it needs further assessment to determine whether to rehabilitate or reroute.
- Red Trail – 2.14-mile loop; longest trail in the Park. Average tread width is 48 inches, overall, in good condition. Crosses Park entrance road in two locations. The south side of the western road crossing features a split in the trail. The western route is in good condition. This segment is poorly marked, mostly with red paint. The eastern route of the trail has red trail markers and passes through a wet area with multiple social trails routing around a muddy spot. Several areas along the Red Trail need to be further evaluated for improved drainage or minor rerouting.
- Yellow Trail – .53 miles; in northeast section of the Park. Offers the most challenging terrain in the Park. Average tread width is 24 inches; branches off from the Red Trail, gains elevation, then descends to rejoin the Red Trail. Overall, in good condition, some trail sections show signs of erosion and need to be further evaluated for tread and drainage improvements.
- Green Trail – .18-miles; connects two portions of the Red Trail. Average tread width is 48 inches; some sections showing signs of holding water. Needs to be evaluated for drainage improvements or rerouting.
- Connector Trail – .18-miles; average tread width is 48 inches. Connects Blue and Red Trails. The southern portion of the trail travels along the edge of the Wedding Pergola field and could benefit from improved signage.

Golf Course

Designed by the prominent golf architect Robert Trent Jones, the golf course at Baird is considered a “contributing resource,” eligible for listing in the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The course was opened in 1948. Over time, plantings have grown in, and necessary repairs and maintenance have altered some of its original elements.

A project to rehabilitate 35 of the golf course's bunkers was developed in 2021. This work will include replenishing sand, refining the shapes, and improving drainage. Most of the bunkers will occupy the same footprint, although several will be enlarged slightly. Two new bunkers will be added, at hole 6 and hole 10, and one will be removed. Project design is complete, and SHPO approval was received in 2020. (For a complete set of design documents for this project, see Appendix S, *Golf Course Sand Bunker Rehabilitation Plan Documents*.)

Several bunkers have small sections within 100 feet of DEC wetlands. Environmental review for this project is included within this EIS; the project will be implemented pending available funding. Projects that may impact identified historic elements are required to be reviewed by the OPRHP Division for Historic Preservation prior to construction approval to determine any potential impacts to the facility's historic character.



Baird golf course

Infrastructure and Operations

Baird is open year-round. Some sections of the Park may be inaccessible in winter, since only core access roads are plowed. There is no entry fee at the Park.

The Park is open during daylight hours, and the golf course operates from April to mid-November and is open from 6:00 a.m. until dusk on weekends and 7:00 am until dusk on the weekdays.

The official pet policy is a maximum of two pets per household allowed in the day use area unless prohibited by directive. Pets are to be supervised at all times and either crated or on a 6-foot maximum length leash. Pets are not permitted in the playground, buildings, or golf course (this does not apply to service animals).

Seasonal hunting is allowed in the Park with a permit. See Special Events and Permits below.

Accessibility

Accessibility for persons with disabilities is always considered when implementing new projects at the Park. Currently, there is one accessible golf cart available (allows for playing golf from cart), which is shared with the Dinsmore Golf Course. The Clubhouse has one accessible bathroom (unisex).

The comfort station in what is known as the Top of the Hill section of the Park was recently renovated and is accessible, and Shelter 2 is also accessible. The route to reach the playground is accessible (curb ramp from parking lot); restrooms at the bathhouse in the day use area does not have accessible stalls. The golf driving range is in a flat area and is functionally accessible.

Emergency Plans and Services

The Park has an All Hazard Emergency Action Plan (AHEAP) which establishes procedures for emergency preparedness, response, and recovery for building evacuation, severe weather, and medical emergencies at the facility. The AHEAP details Park staff roles and responsibilities, evacuation protocols, and responses to emergencies. The facility was assessed for the potential of emergency situations related to all hazards.

Portions of the Park are within the Towns of LaGrange and Pleasant Valley. The Town of LaGrange Fire Department, Ambulance Corps, and Rescue Squad are responsible for emergencies at the Park.

The Freedom Road entrance has been designated as the initial primary ingress and egress for emergency responders. The Taconic State Parkway is the secondary ingress and egress.

Medical Emergencies

If there is a medical emergency, a call goes to 911 or local emergency number. The LaGrange Fire and Ambulance squads are responsible for EMS responses at the Park.

Fire

The LaGrange Fire Department will respond to and assume command of any reports of fire at the Park. OPRHP facilities have written evacuation procedures for each occupied building.

Severe Weather and Natural Disasters

During severe weather events, such as thunderstorms, tornados, floods, hurricanes, and blizzards, the National Weather Service, a division of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), may issue a watch, advisory or warning. All weather-related emergencies are called in to 911.

Emergency shelter areas within the Park are:

1. James Baird Golf Course Clubhouse
2. Regional Maintenance Office
3. Maintenance Building
4. Picnic Pavilions 1 and 2

Evacuation

The evacuation of part of or an entire facility may be necessary in an emergency. In an evacuation, Park staff immediately notifies Park Police and Regional Administration. If assistance is needed from the local Fire Department, EMS and/or local police, Park staff will contact 911 or the local emergency number. Park evacuation routes are:

1. Baird Park Road heading east to Taconic State Parkway
2. Clubhouse Road heading west to Freedom Road/State Rte. 47

Park Buildings

In addition to buildings in the day use area, Park infrastructure includes structures associated with the golf course as well as storage and maintenance facility buildings. Two of the Park's historical structures, the James Baird House and the Tobin House, both late eighteenth century dwellings, have been demolished, as has a food concession building (foundation remains). (See Appendix A, *Historic/Non-Historic Review Resource Designations*.)



Day use area in winter



Day Use Area Buildings

Bathhouse – Built in 1949, the 5,090 square foot, one-story wood frame Bathhouse has a hip roof with asphalt shingles. The building is kept open in warmer months for restroom access but is unheated and closed in winter. Changing areas and showers have not been used since the pool closed. Water occasionally leaks into the basement and must be pumped out. Utility access is in the basement. The center portion of the bathhouse is used for storage.



Bandshell – Constructed 1948-1949, the 1,080 square foot wood structure with a sloped, shed-style asphalt shingle roof and stucco and tongue-and-groove siding. The building's concrete stage is used when the Park hosts larger events and live performances. It was last repainted in 2009. Electricity is available and activated when groups receive a use permit.



Picnic Pavilions – Two pavilions are available to rent for parties, corporate events, and weddings. Shelter 1 can accommodate 200 to 250 people and Shelter 2, from 250 to 300. Constructed between 1948-1950, the structures are 4,000 square feet, one-story brick, with asphalt shingle gabled roofs. Rental cost ranges from \$100 to \$300 per event. Pavilion rental information and reservations can be found online using [Reserve America](#), where visitors can find information on capacities, cost, maps, and a calendar with availability.

From top: Bathhouse, bandshell, picnic pavilion



***Park Manager's house (top),
viewed from the northeast; Tobin
House, east elevation (above)***

Park Manager's Residence – A 2,500-square foot, one-and-a-half story Greek Revival style wood frame house, the earliest portion of which dates to early nineteenth century, and possibly earlier. The house appears to have been the home of William Pettit and his offspring. The gable roof is asphalt shingle with cedar shake siding. The southern one-and-a-half story portion of the house is likely the oldest section (although some features, such as the saltbox or “cat slide” roof on the back, suggest a possible earlier construction date). A large two-story addition in the Italianate style was built on the north side of the house, which was common from the mid-1850s until about 1880. Additional architectural investigation is needed to determine original layouts, construction sequence, and approximate dates, and establish what historic character-defining features remain intact.

James Baird House (demolished) – Located on the original 280-acre farm lot obtained in 1697 by Colonel Henry Beekman, the seven-bedroom James Baird House was occupied by staff for a time but after 1973-74 remained vacant. The house was demolished in 2016 after it was deemed too deteriorated to restore. A garage associated with the James Baird House remains and is still in use for storage. Built in 1940, the one-story wood frame structure has an asphalt shingle gable roof and clapboard siding.

Tobin Property House (demolished) – Located at 91 Freedom Road in the Town of Lagrange, the Tobin property consisted of a 60-acre farm, house, and a 20th century garage/workshop. The house was demolished in October 2017 due to its deteriorated condition. The house's estimated construction date was between the 1790s and the 1830s. Hand-hewn timber framing with mortise and tenon joinery may have dated from the late 18th to mid-19th centuries, but most evidence suggests an early 19th century origin. Knee wall windows on the east elevation were unusual for 1772, but common in the Hudson Valley, especially from the 1810s through the 1850s. Their presence suggests that an original 1772 structure may have been enlarged in the early to mid-1800s. Back-to-back five-foot-wide fireplaces in two rooms suggest an early construction date due to their generous size. However, these still could just as easily have been from the early to mid-Federal period.

It appears that the present-day Tobin property was a part of William McCord's purchase of 195 acres in 1804. An informal visual inspection in 2016 by OPRHP Historic Preservation staff confirmed that the house had been heavily altered, particularly during the 20th century. The NYS Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has little information on the structure and indicated that extensive alterations made it ineligible for the National Register for Historic Places.



Maintenance Facility

The Park maintenance facility is located at 14 Maintenance Lane in the Town of Pleasant Valley. This facility serves as a regional maintenance center for the entire OPRHP Taconic region. Regional maintenance staff consists of carpenters, electricians, plumbers, auto mechanics, and heavy equipment operators. The facility also serves as an equipment depot, office, and workshop for golf course maintenance. Some maintenance area buildings are original to the Park.



Covering approximately eight acres, the maintenance area has a fueling facility, a surplus vehicle yard, a chemical storage shed and yard, a scrap metal and used tire holding area, and a gravel parking area for state and personal vehicles. Buildings located within the maintenance area include the Park office and maintenance shop, a small tool shed, and an automotive shop, which provides vehicle maintenance for the OPRHP Taconic Region.



The Regional Maintenance Facility at Baird, which serves OPRHP's Taconic Region

The complex also includes a lock shop, parts storage, and furnace repair building, a pole barn used for equipment storage (tractors, mowers, loaders, and spray vehicles) and to stockpile grass seed, salt, sand, and fertilizer.

Equipment for maintaining the Park includes a wide variety of mowers, including reel, rotary and brush cutters; utility vehicles, golf carts, heavy equipment such as skid steer and backhoe, small dump trucks and pickup trucks, hand power tools including chainsaws, weed whackers, drills, saws, and various other items used for ongoing maintenance tasks.

In July 2007 an underground waste oil tank was removed from the maintenance area and a new, above-ground tank was installed.

Maintenance Office Building – One-story concrete block, 4,100 square foot, gable roof and asphalt shingles. Constructed between 1936-1978, the building houses office space and a maintenance shop.

Maintenance Garage – 4,200 square foot, one-story concrete block structure with a gable roof and asphalt shingles. Built in 1952, it contains an auto and equipment repair facility.



**Clubhouse terrace (top);
Baird's Golf Course (above)**

Carpenter's Garage – 750 square foot one-story concrete block structure with gable roof and asphalt shingles, constructed in 1936. It is used for storage.

Pole Barn – 4,800 square foot one story, pole-framed structure with gable roof and asphalt shingles, built between 1977-1978. It is used for machine storage.

Pole Barn Addition – 3,040 square foot, one-story pole frame structure with standing seam metal roof and open front, constructed in 1992. Used for equipment storage.

Storage Shed – 170 square foot, one-story wood frame has a gable roof with asphalt shingles and novelty siding. It was built in 1940.

Golf Course Structures

Clubhouse – two-story wood frame, 8,740 square foot gable roof with clapboard siding and asphalt shingles, built between 1936-1940.

Golf Cart Shed – 3,300 square foot, one-story wood frame structure with asphalt shingle gable roof and vertical board and batten siding, constructed between 1960-1963, with an addition added in the mid-1990s. The shed is used to store golf carts.

Driving Range Building – one story, 410 square foot wood frame structure with brick veneer and asphalt shingled hip roof, constructed between 1952-1953. The building is used for golf equipment storage.

Other Park Structures

Pump Houses (two structures: #1-Potable Water and #2-Irrigation) – 100 square foot, one-story concrete block structures with gable roofs, asphalt shingles and clapboard siding, built 1948-1950. #1 (not in use) formerly used as potable water pump equipment. #2 is used for irrigation water pump equipment.

Water Treatment Building – 100 square foot, one-story wood frame, gable roof with asphalt shingles, built in 2010 to house water treatment equipment.

Log Cabin (Cabin 10) – one-story 625 square foot built in 1925. In 2020, the building was declared uninhabitable and slated for demolition.

Parking

Existing parking available:

- Clubhouse Parking lot – 90 spaces
- Driving Range parking – 20 spaces
- Day use parking – 190 spaces (500 +/- people)
- Shelter #1 parking – 70 spaces
- Shelter #2 parking – 45 spaces
- Top of Hill parking lot – 20 spaces

Water Infrastructure

Water Supply

There are two potable water supplies within JBSP: a Park water system and a maintenance area water system. Water for both systems comes from underground aquifers. The Park water system is a non-community public water system regulated by the NYS Department of Health (DOH). The system provides potable water to the golf course Clubhouse, Park picnic shelters and restroom facilities. The source of the water is a drilled well. A second water system in the maintenance area serves the Park Manager's residence, the Park's office and maintenance facility. It is a non-public water system, not regulated by the DOH. It is continuously monitored and maintained by OPRHP to ensure that the water supplied by the system is in full compliance with DOH standards, OSHA regulations and the NYS Building Code.

Golf Course Irrigation

Irrigation infrastructure for the golf course provides a sprinkler system for watering tees, greens, and fairways and all holes on the golf course. In 2014, an approximately 3-acre irrigation pond with a pump station was constructed to the west of south golf course pond and south of the existing maintenance facility. The pond and pump station support non-potable water for irrigating the 18-hole golf course. Water from three drilled wells is pumped to the storage pond, and when water is required for irrigation, it is pumped from the storage pond to supply all irrigation system sprinklers. The golf course irrigation pond was designed to protect wildlife, with perimeter fencing to keep turtles and other species from entering the irrigation pond. The fence was designed with openings that allow turtles can escape, if needed.

Wastewater and Sewage

Baird's wastewater treatment system operation (complying with the SPDES Permit #NY0093017), consists of eight outfalls, with eight septic systems at the Park. All Park buildings with a sink or toilet have a septic tank and leach field. The wastewater of all system outfalls is treated by septic tanks and leach fields, with underground discharge. The Clubhouse septic system also has a grease "trap" for kitchen wastewater. It is intended that all septic tanks be pumped every two to three years.

Water Usage

The Park has 6,700 linear feet of water lines, excluding the line installed in 2014 for golf course irrigation:

- Golf Course Club House – design flow 4,000 gpd, seasonal operation
- Sport/Playground (former Pool) Complex, design flow 20,000 gpd, seasonal operation
- Shelter #1, design flow 2,000 gpd, seasonal operation
- Shelter #2, design flow 2,000 gpd, seasonal operation
- Comfort Station #1, design flow 1,500 gpd, seasonal operation
- Comfort Station #2, design flow 1,500 gpd, seasonal operation
- Maintenance Area, design flow 500 gpd, year-round operation
- Manager's Residence, design flow 1,000 gpd, year-round operation

Water Quality

All the Park's water systems are tested regularly for hazardous materials and no issues have been detected. The Park has monitoring wells for the closed landfill that are tested every year, and inspections are made monthly. The county-permitted public water supply well at the Park Manager's house is tested regularly for chemicals and other contaminants. The wells are also tested monthly for bacteria. Testing results are consistently negative for contaminants.

The Park is required to follow NYS DEC rules on bulk petroleum storage and US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rules for Underground Storage Tanks (USTs) for all gas, diesel, or fuel oil stored at the Park. Petroleum bulk storage guidelines are reviewed by a consultant every three years and spill containment kits are kept near all petroleum products. A detailed and up-to-date Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure Plan approved by the NYSDEC is in place at the Park's maintenance center. It is reviewed regularly and, if needed, amended.

Most underground fuel storage tanks at the Park have been removed and surrounding areas have been tested and remediated where required. An underground diesel oil tank at Freedom Road with some leakage was removed several years ago, and full remediation of the area was completed (by the estate of the former landowner). There are currently no active spills. There is one remaining UST at the Park which has all protection measures in place including spill prevention, inspections/testing, double wall, interstitial monitoring, and a leak detection system.

Baird staff partners with Cornell University to implement the latest Best Management Practices and ensure that all protocols for any fertilizer and pesticide use are adhered to for golf course maintenance. Pesticides are kept in a special structure with their own built-in spill containment.

Other Park Infrastructure

Baird has 12,600 linear feet of paved roadway, 13,300 linear feet of gravel service roads, and 410 parking spaces. A 1.37-acre former landfill located at the Park's northwest end (used for solid waste disposal from 1948 to 1981), was formally closed in 2002 in compliance with NYS DEC solid waste regulations.

Bridges and Culverts

There are 14 drainage culverts in the Park. In addition to several small golf cart bridges, the southbound lane overpass from the Taconic State Parkway has a bridge that leads to the Park. The DOT recently completed repairs and is responsible for maintaining this bridge.

Utilities

Baird has 10,500 linear feet of overhead electric line and 7,400 linear feet of underground electric line.

Maintenance

Management of Baird's physical complex is based primarily out of the Park's maintenance area, located near the golf driving range. The maintenance facility developed over the years with elements added as needed. Office space and some storage buildings at the facility are shared by both Park and regional maintenance staff. Baird's maintenance staff includes 12 to 15 members (depending on the season). Approximately 20 regional maintenance employees work on rotating schedules, with five working exclusively at Baird on an ongoing basis. Other regional staff report in at Baird and leave to work at other facilities.

Vehicles from other parks are serviced by the auto shop at Baird, and staff from other parks obtain gas or diesel fuel at the facility on a limited basis. Baird's maintenance area also houses the Park office in a new, dedicated space built in 2020, also shared with regional maintenance staff.

Ongoing maintenance activities at the Park include mowing, trail maintenance, trash collection, restroom cleaning, picnic shelter maintenance, litter cleanup, playground, tennis, and volleyball court maintenance, as well as plumbing and electrical repairs, tree pruning, and road and parking lot maintenance. Winter maintenance includes plowing, sanding, and salting Park roads and parking areas. Snow is generally plowed onto the shoulders or pavement edges and is not removed to other locations. Sand and salt are applied to the Park's roads only as needed for patron safety. (Salting is limited, when possible, in proximity to wetlands and known Blanding's Turtle habitat.) Winter road materials are stored in a concrete barrier box inside the maintenance area pole barn. The Park uses approximately 25 tons of sand and two tons of salt annually.

Golf operations are handled from the golf pro shop. Golf course maintenance includes applying fertilizers, weed and insect control, irrigation, moving cup and tee locations, maintaining cart paths, signage, and rain sheds; golf ranger patrol, and making waterline and electrical repairs. Turf on the course is mowed at different heights according to use (i.e., greens, roughs, and fairways): greens and tees are maintained between 5/8" and 7/8" height; fairways 7/8", and roughs at 2".)

Solid Waste Management and Recycling Programs

Baird has a "carry in-carry out" policy, which requires patrons to remove their trash, and the Park does not provide trash barrels for patron use. A 40-yard dumpster is used for trash collected from the golf course and from maintenance activities. The dumpster is emptied approximately every three months.

Recyclables generated at the Park are collected in a five-yard, single-stream dumpster, and a small recycling container for cardboard is also available. Tires, scrap metal, and wooden products are stored within the maintenance area and are removed annually for recycling. The golf pro shop and restaurant concessions use a dumpster located at the Clubhouse. A 20-yard metal dumpster is used to collect scrap metal from Park and golf operations. Revenue from the sale of scrap metal helps to offset waste removal fees.

An area near the Baird House is used to collect tree and brush debris until it is chipped for use in planted areas and trails. A compost pile is also kept in this area. Materials such as sand for golf sand traps, topdressing, and topsoil are occasionally placed temporarily in the day use area parking lot before use.

Sustainability

Baird utilizes Integrated Pest Management (IPM), an approach to fertilizer and pesticide management for pest control at the golf course that has reduced the use of pesticides. This approach uses biological, organic, cultural, mechanical, and chemical options to manage pests, which might include fungi, bacteria,

viruses, weeds, wildlife, and more. Factors considered when selecting plant health and protectant products are environmental impact, efficacy, level of disease pressure and cost. Weather data is also used to develop disease outbreak models, along with scouting for pest and disease. Aeration, venting, sand topdressing and other processes are also used to help to increase plant health and limit chemical inputs.

A “smart” golf course irrigation system was installed in 2014. This system features a weather station which monitors air temperature, wind speed, rainfall, and evapotranspiration rates. Sensors relay soil moisture, temperature, and salt levels, and forecasts weather to help staff determine how much water is needed to maintain healthy turf. Hand watering and wetting agents are also used to minimize water use. The system helps to conserve water by enabling more targeted water use and results in a more uniformly watered course.³³ Park staff also utilize Cornell University’s Integrated Periodic trainings and updates further ensure the use of Best Management Practices.

Golf course operation at Baird includes many other environmentally friendly practices, and OPRHP has applied for an Audubon certification program for golf courses that meet certain environmental standards (Audubon International’s [Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses](#)). Approval of the application generally takes one to three years and has not yet been received.

The Park has implemented a reduced mowing program since 2005. Some out-of-play areas on the golf course are now mowed just once a year, in the fall. Mowing less reduces fuel usage as well as wear and tear to equipment and reduces staff time. Areas that are not regularly mowed increase wildlife habitat. Wildflower plots and milkweed have been planted at the Park as part of “Monarchs in the Rough,” an effort developed by Audubon International and the Environmental Defense Fund to encourage golf course managers to restore pollinator habitat.³⁴ The Park’s goal is to keep increasing the pollinator and butterfly habitats where possible throughout the Park.





A solar generating system, installed at Baird in 2021

A solar array at the Freedom Road Area was brought online in 2021 (for location, see Appendix L, *Freedom Road Solar Array Plan*). Clean power generated from this passive solar array helps offset electricity costs for the region and generates a clean source of energy. It advances both the state's [Clean Energy Standard mandates](#), which aim for 70% of New York's electricity to come from renewable energy sources by 2030, as well as OPRHP's sustainability initiative for the statewide park system.

An Electric Vehicle (EV) charging station is available at the Clubhouse, and LED lights have replaced older technology bulbs at the Clubhouse.

Special Events and Permits

Permits are issued for running events, orienteering events, pony rides, use of commercial tents, bounce houses, wedding ceremonies, and any other activities allowed at the Park. Several hundred people come out to the Park each year for events such as the charity walk for the Miles of Hope Breast Cancer Foundation and use the Bandshell and seating area in the day use area as a gathering place.

OPRHP's Taconic Region's park office also issues annual hunting permits. Hunting is allowed in the Park providing the individual presents a valid state hunting license (issued by DEC) and OPRHP's regional permit. Hunting permits coincide with the hunting season designated for NYS DEC Wildlife Management Unit Regions 3 and 4, with the exception of spring turkey bow-hunting. About 100 hunting permits are issued annually.

Geocaching, an outdoor recreational activity using Global Positioning System (GPS) or a mobile device to hide and seek containers ("geocaches" or "caches"), is allowed at Baird, but requires a permit.

Chapter 2 – Development of Alternatives

This chapter provides an analysis of a range of possible alternatives for future actions at the Park, then selects the actions that best meet the vision for the Park. The alternatives and preferred alternative(s) developed for each plan element are described in narrative form. A complete description of the plan that results from the preferred alternatives is found in the accompanying Master Plan document.

The Master Plan includes a proposed implementation timeline for these actions that will be reviewed annually. Ultimately, implementation of the preferred alternatives will be determined by the level of funding available to OPRHP and the facility in future years. This chapter is divided into three broad resource categories:

Strategies for Natural and Cultural Resource Protection – Alternatives that focus on strategies for stewardship of the Park’s natural and cultural resources.

Strategies for Recreational Resource Protection and Enhancement – Alternatives that primarily concentrate on the areas of the Park that support various recreation activities. Included in this category are the built facilities and consideration of different types of recreation activities.

Strategies for Operations, Infrastructure and Facilities – Those buildings and management practices which provide support for the functioning of the Park.

Goal Setting and Actions

Determining the best future actions to implement at Baird was a collaborative process that included the planning core team, the public, Park partners, and specialized resource people. The group considered the stated vision for the Park’s future, as well as the OPRHP mission, then set broad goals for the Park that were organized under each of the resource categories above. Alternative actions were proposed in each category, and different potential outcomes were analyzed. Determining the best alternatives to act upon constitutes an action plan designed to motivate and guide future development at the Park while protecting its resources.





Strategies for Natural and Cultural Resource Protection

Natural Resources

Existing natural resource protections and management strategies at Baird help to protect its important ecological communities and biodiversity. The new and more active management strategies proposed in this Plan will ensure a road map for the future protection and management of forest health, wetlands, and invasive species, and mitigate potential impacts to water quality and wildlife.

Protection and habitat enhancement for rare and endangered species, especially Blanding's Turtle populations, is a priority at the Park. Management strategies must also consider potential future impacts from proposed actions to the Park, for instance, from new and different user groups, changing environmental conditions from climate change, and damage from invasive species like Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, Emerald Ash Borer and Asian Long-horned Beetle.

New York's Wildlife Resources

Of the nearly 350,000 acres of State Park lands and waters statewide, approximately 85% are considered "natural habitat." These important habitat complexes support an extraordinary diversity of fish and wildlife, and the diversity within State Parks is considered an important component of the state's overall biodiversity. This wildlife is also a recreational resource, enhancing visitors' experiences across the state.

In general, OPRHP follows a "passive management" approach, allowing natural processes to maintain wildlife populations in ecological balance. However, there are circumstances when active management is necessary, such as improving habitat through restoration, or managing specific wildlife populations. Additional information about wildlife management in the State Park System can be found at: <https://parks.ny.gov/documents/inside-our-agency/PolicyOnFishAndWildlifeManagement.pdf>.

Threats to Natural Resources at Baird

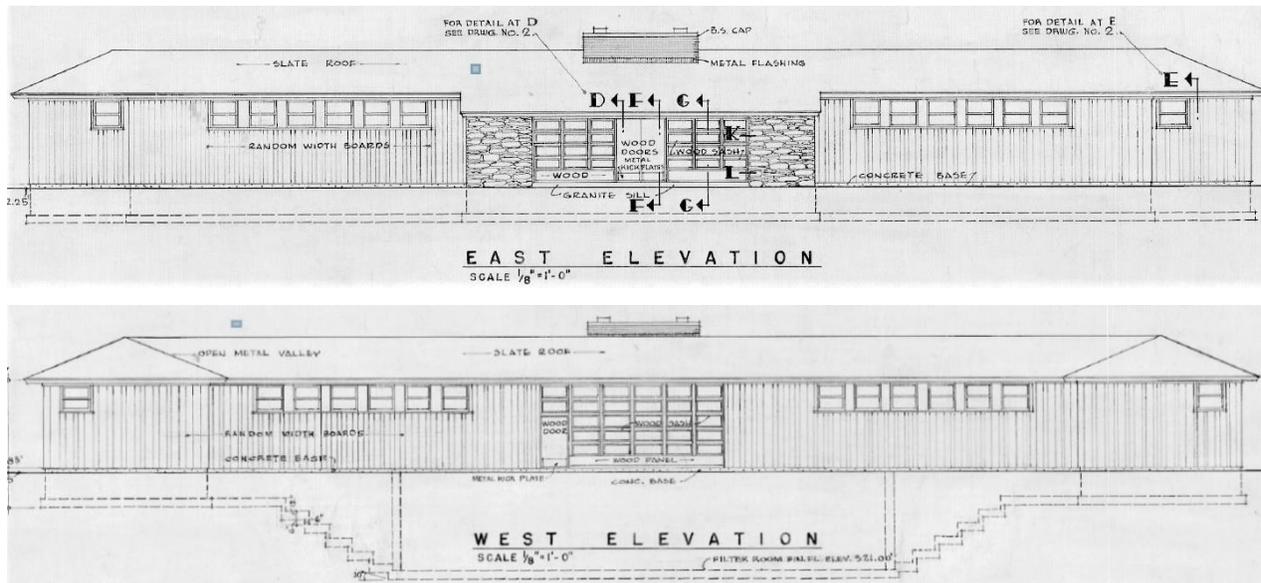
The varied habitats at Baird include wetlands, wooded slopes, open meadows, and a rich array of waterbodies. Threats to the Park's fish and wildlife populations, including its native flora, come from growing pressures from invasive plants and animals, pests and disease, habitat fragmentation from development, vehicles, and other human-related factors. Although active wildlife disease monitoring is not currently necessary at Baird, when observed, diseases in wildlife are reported to the DEC or other appropriate contacts.

Road mortality is considered a threat to the Park's wildlife, especially to species that have low reproductive potential and/or cannot move across roads quickly (e.g., turtles). Other human-related activities considered to be a threat to sensitive species are intentional disturbance, including illegal killing, and illegal collection.

Cultural Resources

The buildings and structures, historic landscapes, archaeological sites, artifacts, and documents that collectively represent New York's rich and diverse cultural history are embodied in material elements that human activity has left behind. For state parks, integrating cultural resource protection into park planning and management entails avoiding or minimizing adverse effects, as well as interpretation and education for greater public understanding.

Cultural resources at Baird primarily include original Park elements in the day use area, as described earlier in the plan, as well as its golf course and Clubhouse. Baird has been determined eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, due to its association with the Taconic State Parkway, which was constructed to provide direct vehicular access to parks located along its course, such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Fahnestock, and Lake Taghkanic.



Bathhouse elevations from original construction documents by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill Architecture



Threats to Cultural Resources

Threats to historic resources at Baird include deterioration due to deferred maintenance or lack of use, alteration, and demolition in association with rehabilitation activities or new development, and the disturbance of prehistoric and historic archaeological sites.

Elements deemed eligible for the National Register require consultation with State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) prior to activities that may alter or affect their historic character-defining features. The Park's buildings and structures have been fully surveyed and those with cultural or historic significance have been identified. Potential adverse impacts on historic resources will be considered in advance of any proposed construction or maintenance work. Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 4, and in Appendix P, SHPO has determined there are certain maintenance activities on the golf course that the facility may undertake without SHPO consultation.

Natural Resource Protection

Wildlife habitat in the Hudson Valley is under intense development pressure. Over the past 50 years, much of the landscape surrounding Baird has been extensively altered for agriculture, housing, commercial use, and other development, and the region's wetlands have been impacted through drainage, dumping, filling, clearing of vegetation, and pollution. Implementing actions that protect and enhance natural resources helps increase regional habitat connectivity, foster knowledge-sharing, and provide greater protection and habitat enhancement for fragile wildlife populations.

The state is in a position to improve regional habitat by improving the connectivity of natural areas to expand crucial wildlife habitat. Habitat fragmentation in Baird's region is a primary threat to diminishing Blanding's turtle populations. A major problem facing turtle populations continues to be the destruction of appropriate habitat from development. Forest and wetland loss and fragmentation limits opportunities to maintain connectivity, as do barriers in streams. Without routes for migration and dispersal, wildlife species that require a complex of habitats for survival may decline.

Background

Natural resource protections for key species/habitats, particularly Blanding's turtle populations in the Park, include active management protocols to protect and enhance habitat. State and regional staff have worked within the Park and partnered with other groups to study, document, and protect the Park's turtle populations. Wetland delineation and mapping have been completed at Baird. Monitoring has established that the Blanding's turtles do utilize the wetlands, woodland pools, ponds, and depressions at the Park and adjacent properties, and that they use the surrounding uplands for nesting and migratory movements. A draft Blanding's Turtle Management Plan has also been developed.

Protection efforts at Baird have included habitat restoration projects and relocating turtle nests from private lands to Park property. Nesting habitat was created when a new golf course irrigation system was constructed. Roads that cross migration routes between ponds where turtles hibernate, and their nesting sites are also hazardous for turtle populations. "Turtle Crossing" signs are installed on Park roads during turtle nesting season to alert drivers when they may be crossing.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Continue current management practices for the Park’s natural resources.

Considerations:

- Species habitat would remain as is with existing wildlife hazards
- Some areas would continue to be separated by developed areas
- Existing water quality impacts will continue
- Monitoring (radio-telemetry) will continue to identify movements and protect nests
- Invasive plants will not be addressed in these areas
- Turtle nesting areas will continue to be mowed and tilled
- Invasive species in turtle habitat would not be addressed
- Black swallowwort treatment will continue
- Current practices may not address all known issues

Alternative 2 – Expand and improve natural resource management practices by enhancing habitat, installing new wildlife protections, and developing educational programs to raise public awareness.

Considerations:

- Continues successful protections already in place
- Addresses invasive species in habitat areas (mugwort and other invasives in wetlands)
- Further improves quality of turtle habitat, (e.g., providing adequate buffers around wetlands)
- Likely improves nesting success
- Provides opportunities to enhance and expand wider, regional wetland complexes
- Improves public awareness and Park aesthetics with new interpretive signs to replace existing deteriorated and dated signs
- Offers new educational/programming opportunities to further engage the community
- Adds additional turtle protections (e.g., crossing signs; physical mechanisms to help turtles move about the Park more safely) and decreases road mortality

Alternative 3 – Implement habitat enhancement for key species: acquire land when available, facilitate research opportunities, and implement techniques to decrease predation; partner with adjacent landowners and other involved agencies to develop additional species protection.

Considerations:

- Will further protect existing turtle population and improve the quality of nesting habitat by increasing habitat continuity
- Promotes new partnerships with local schools, agencies, and organizations to encourage awareness and support for Blanding’s turtle populations within the region (e.g., headstarting, population monitoring, etc.)
- Will improve wider knowledge of these species and their needs and habitat requirements
- Enhances habitat connectivity and genetic dispersal

Alternative 4 – Investigate opportunities to implement riparian/streambank and wetland creation/expansion; enhance buffers and create greater connectivity along wildlife migration zones.

Considerations:

- Improves the quality of wildlife habitat, increases flora and fauna diversity, and promotes better natural system function
- Reduces potential wildlife hazards within the Park
- Potentially will improve water quality
- Offers new opportunities for partnerships and environmental education

The preferred alternatives are 2), 3), and 4).

The Baird site offers important habitat for both rare and more common turtle populations, as well as other species that rely on healthy wetlands. Significant efforts have already been made at the Park to protect wildlife and improve the site’s sensitive habitats. Turtles and other animals travel beyond Park boundaries, however, and use the more expansive wetland complex found throughout and beyond the region. these actions will help to ensure that key species will be further protected, and the region’s natural environment will be expanded and enhanced. Implementing As these alternatives are implemented, they will also offer new opportunities for a more active environmental education and interpretation program at the Park.

Pollinator Habitat

Background

The decline in pollinator populations in North America have been attributed to increases in habitat fragmentation and loss, as well as pressures on native flora from invasive species and pests. Efforts to increase pollinator habitat and increase plant diversity at Baird have included reducing mowing in lawn areas, when practicable, and planting appropriate species. An opportunity to increase pollinator habitat in the day use area is possible where a chain link fence separates this area from the golf course. The lawn adjacent to the fence is difficult to mow and becomes unsightly as vegetation grows up around it.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Continue current mowing and maintenance practices between the golf course and the day use activity area.

Considerations:

- No new pollinator habitat will be created
- Maintaining the area around the fence will continue to be labor intensive
- Existing fence will continue to be an unsightly boundary between the day use area and golf course
- Missed opportunity for educating visitors about the value and importance of pollinators
- Staff time will be required for maintaining berms (e.g., weeding, removal of invasive plants)



Conceptual rendering of proposed berm system at Baird's day use area

Alternative 2 – Construct a berm system planted with native species between the golf course and day use area to provide pollinator habitat and visual/functional separation.

Considerations:

- Converts an area of lawn (which has low plant diversity) to a mix of native grasses and flowers to provide new habitat and food sources for pollinator species
- Provides a visual and physical separation between two different Park use areas
- An unsightly fence will be removed, improving Park aesthetics in this area
- Maintenance tasks will increase (e.g., berms will require periodic mowing, weeding, and may need occasional irrigation)
- Offers the opportunity for new educational programming related to the lifecycle and decline of pollinators and greater awareness of the importance of native plants
- Will help meet the state’s initiative to increase pollinator habitat statewide

The preferred alternative is 2).

Building a berm system planted with native pollinator species is an innovative approach to providing physical and visual separation between Park uses. The berms will improve the appearance of the day use area by replacing an unsightly chain link fence. It will provide important wildlife habitat for declining pollinator species and expand opportunities for interpretive elements and environmental education.

Invasive Species

Invasive plants and animals impact wildlife by degrading, altering, or displacing native habitats. These species can crowd out native plant communities and compete with native wildlife for food, water, shelter, and space. Invasive plants can also increase erosion along streambanks, damage trees, and increase the need for hazardous tree removals. Although some invasive species are used for food and cover by some species, habitats altered by the presence of invasive species are generally considered to have negative impacts on wildlife, and are disruptive to natural ecosystem processes, overall.

OPRHP has established a statewide Invasive Species Control Program (ISCP) with clear goals intended to preserve biodiversity and reduce the threat of invasive species to the natural, recreational, cultural, and interpretive resources within state parkland. Environmental Stewardship staff at Baird have identified the presence of some invasive species found at the Park and made recommendations for their management; however, there is currently no established management approach to address these species.

Background

Invasive species management at Baird has been limited to targeted species (primarily black swallowwort and mugwort). Controlling the spread of all harmful invasives is particularly important at Baird, as their presence threatens the Park’s native biodiversity and ecosystem function, impacting both rare flora and fauna as well as Park aesthetics. Invasive species identified at the Park include:

Terrestrial Fauna – Several invasive forest pests are either in the Park or close to breaching its borders. These are listed in Chapter 1, under ‘Invasive Fauna; Terrestrial.’ Emerald Ash Borer (*Agilus planipennis*) has been found in the Park.

Aquatic Fauna – Chinese Mystery snails (*Cipangopaludina chinensis*) and the Asian Clam (*Corbicula fluminea*) are present in the region and may potentially exist in waterbodies at Baird.

Flora – At least 19 terrestrial and 2 aquatic species of invasive plants have been documented in the Park. Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Continue current invasive species management practices with no changes.

Considerations:

- Will not address identified invasive species issues in the Park, including those within the Freedom Road area
- Unmanaged invasive species will continue to spread into and degrade important habitat
- Construction/maintenance activities may continue to spread invasives
- Only previously targeted areas will be addressed

Alternative 2 – Develop and implement a more proactive invasive species management program.

Considerations:

- Parkwide surveys to identify invasive species will help address harmful species
- Mapping/planning will help target/prioritize management areas and species
- Ensures that Park activities, development, and maintenance will not spread invasive species
- Will help to establish healthy native plant species populations, following OPRHP native plant policy and other best practices
- Prevents users from spreading invasives (e.g., installing boot brushes at trailheads)
- Will improve/protect wildlife habitat
- Offers the opportunity for educational programming
- May result in an increase in maintenance responsibilities for Park staff

The preferred alternative is 2).

Implementing a more systematic approach to invasive species management at Baird will further protect wildlife habitat and enhance biodiversity in the Park's natural areas.



Invasive species such as Mugwort or Common Wormwood (*Artemisia vulgaris*) create a monoculture that crowds out native plants, limiting biodiversity

Cultural Resource Protection

Background

The Hudson River Valley region has a long and varied history of human occupation. Through the centuries the land Baird occupies today has been home to a progression of groups, including the Wappinger Indians, early European settlers, and modern-day suburbs and farms. This region was also important during the Revolutionary and Civil Wars and saw two world wars in the twentieth century. This long history has left many imprints on the land. The criteria for elements considered significant changes over time, however, and staff from the OPRHP's Division for Historic Preservation are working to assess the agency's facilities for historically and culturally significant elements across the state. An assessment was completed for Baird In 2020 as part of the master planning process.

Interpretation

Interpretation and programming at Baird has largely focused on environmental content related to the site's important natural resources. As part of a historic park system, however, there is a story to tell about how the facility came about and the cultural significance of some of its elements. The buildings, golf course and other built infrastructure within the Park have been determined to be eligible for historic designation and therefore provide an opportunity to educate the public on their development.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Continue existing educational programs and content.

Considerations:

- Public awareness of the Park's history, development, and existing significant elements will remain unchanged
- Will not address the lack of awareness of the significance of these elements, and may put these resources at risk and will not be sufficiently protected
- Visitors may not use the facilities appropriately
- Appropriate maintenance measures for significant Park features may not be established
- May lose institutional history of Park background and the significance of key elements

Alternative 2 – Develop interpretive content that tells the story of the establishment of the Park and the significance of its design.

Considerations:

- New programming and interpretive content will educate the public about the Park's context and history, including the state park system's development and its relationship to the historic Taconic State Parkway
- Encourages awareness/curiosity about the Park's culturally significant elements and their origin
- Fosters better stewardship of these elements as the public and staff better understand their significance
- Documenting and interpreting the Park's historic elements will help to preserve important institutional knowledge related to the Park's development and story

The preferred alternative is 2).

Providing new educational content on elements determined to have historic significance will raise visitor awareness of their value and help protect historic elements. It will foster a wider understanding of the Park's development and past within its regional context and the role that Baird (and state parks) have played in the state's development. This alternative also meets Park goals for improving the visitor experience.

Cultural Resource Documentation

Background

As this plan was developed, the need for a centralized resource for information on the Park's significant elements became evident. Background material on Baird was housed in multiple locations and original documentation was difficult to obtain.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Do not document material related to the Park's identified historic and cultural elements.

Considerations

- Resources are not compiled in one place for Park staff and the agency to utilize
- Potential loss of institutional knowledge of the Park's history
- Does not facilitate informed decision-making related to historic/cultural elements
- Helps to support more efficient park management

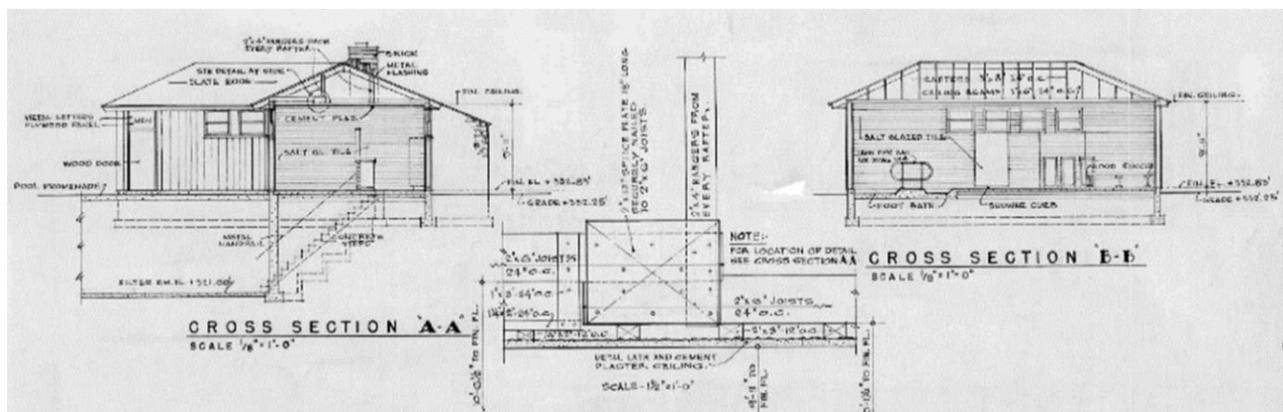
Alternative 2 – Develop an annotated bibliography that catalogues original design documents and resources on the Park's historical and cultural elements.

Considerations:

- Will facilitate ease of access
- Ensures retention of information for institutional knowledge of the Park's development and history
- Provides a guide for management of elements identified as significant Park features
- Will inform future development and protect historic/cultural assets

The preferred alternative is 2.

Documenting the Park's significant historical and cultural elements will help to ensure that information will be retained and accessible for the agency in the future. Having this resource readily available will improve the efficiency of Park operations.



Bathhouse detail from original construction documents

Recreational Resource Enhancement

Day Use Area

Background

Recreational facilities at James Baird SP are generally underutilized. Although the Park has an appealing setting, good infrastructure, and resources for active and passive recreation, it no longer meets the demands of current recreation needs and trends. Some of its facilities are aging, dated, or have been closed. While the golf course continues to draw visitors, the Park has the potential to offer more recreational opportunities to communities in the area and beyond.

Bathhouse

An important component of Baird’s original infrastructure, the bathhouse has been identified by OPRHP Historic Preservation staff as having historical significance. The Bathhouse remains a dominant visual feature of the day use area. While no longer used for its original purpose, it continues to be an important Park structure. It is a focal point that visitors encounter when entering the day use area, and in its current condition appears vacant – even threatening – to some patrons.

Today, the Bathhouse is kept open during the warmer months to provide access to restrooms for visitors using the day use area but is kept closed and unheated in winter. Changing areas and showers have not been used since the pool closed, and the center portion of the bathhouse is used only for storage. Park staff use some of the rooms for storage.

Due to its historic significance, any proposed changes to the Bathhouse will be reviewed and approved by NY State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) prior to implementation.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Continue to maintain the bathhouse as is with no modifications.

Considerations:

- The Bathhouse is in a highly visible location and in its current condition creates a negative first impression for visitors to the day use area
- Does not provide a sense of entry/welcoming
- Has potential to become an attractive centerpiece of the revitalized Park
- The building no longer serves its original purpose and is underutilized
- Will continue to provide restrooms for day use visitors and Park storage
- Park will lose an opportunity to host larger events as existing pavilions do not accommodate larger groups
- If bathhouse remains as is, no additional costs will be incurred
- An important historical/cultural element will continue to deteriorate and may require funding to rehabilitate

Alternative 2 – Retrofit the bathhouse as an events venue to accommodate up to 500 guests, with accessible restrooms, upgraded utilities, facilities for caterers, and a large-scale pavilion.

Considerations:

- An upgraded building will provide a welcoming entry experience to the Park’s day use area
- Upgraded facility will be more accessible, energy efficient, and functional
- Utilities will meet needs of larger gatherings
- Will provide a destination venue that can accommodate large groups, unique to this area
- Park will attract more, larger events, with potential for significant revenue

- Significant cost to implement
- Adaptive reuse of an existing structure is more “sustainable” than demolishing and constructing a new building
- Will need to identify/comply with SHPO requirements for retrofitting historic structures
- Interpretive material can be provided to educate visitors about the significance of the structure’s design and its contextual significance in state park development
- A newer facility will be easier for staff to maintain/clean

Alternative 3 – Rehabilitate the bathhouse and maintain its current function.

Considerations:

- Building will continue to be underutilized and less than welcoming
- Will not meet the goal of reprogramming the day use area for the twenty-first century
- Utilities will be more energy efficient
- Code-compliant, modern restroom facilities will be available to day use area visitors
- Easier to maintain/clean a newer facility
- Will not become a destination that meets a regional need or increase revenue for Park
- Park will continue to accommodate only smaller events
- Creates less impact to the site
- Cost will be moderate, without adding functionality

Alternative 4 – Demolish the existing bathhouse and construct a new modern facility in the footprint of the bathhouse.

Considerations:

- Historic significance of the existing structure will be lost
- Would require SHPO approval
- Building will meet current codes and standards for energy efficiency and accessibility
- Building can be designed to address the facility’s specific needs and will meet the Park’s vision for becoming an events destination
- A new building will provide a welcoming entry experience to the Park’s day use area
- Cost will be significant
- Facility will be easier for staff to maintain
- Adaptive reuse of an existing structure is more “sustainable” than demolishing and constructing a new building

The preferred alternative is 2).

Repurposing the Bathhouse as an events facility supports the Master Plan vision of Baird as a destination for larger events and allows the Park to offer an amenity not readily available in the area. The Bathhouse’s central location and large adjacent parking lot make it ideal for this purpose and retrofitting the underutilized bathhouse will address an identified need for a larger events venue at the Park. As a significant part of Baird’s historic infrastructure, upgrading and restoring the Bathhouse for a new use will help protect and preserve the structure and provide visitors with a more welcoming entry experience.

Providing a comfortable, energy-efficient, up-to-date facility in this section of the Park will substantially improve the visitor experience, potentially attracting more visitors. The Bathhouse will become a focal point and a productive, functioning asset for the Park.



Bandshell Background

Constructed in the late 1940s, the Park's small Bandshell has been identified as significant to the historic character of the Park. The modest-sized structure has a deteriorating paved area in front of the stage. The structure is generally underutilized; used only occasionally for performances and as a gathering point for larger events in the day use area. A permit is required to use the Bandshell for group events.

As a historic element and original to the Park, any proposed alterations to the Bandshell and its immediate context (lawn, pavement), will need to be reviewed and approved by SHPO prior to implementation.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – No changes to Bandshell or surrounding area.

Considerations:

- Structure will remain underutilized
- Visual impact and noise from parking lot activity will not be remedied
- An improved performance venue will not be provided for Park patrons
- Will not attract new visitors/events
- No costs will be incurred

Alternative 2 – Rehabilitate the Bandshell and improve the adjacent paved area; provide visual separation from the adjacent parking lot.

Considerations:

- Adding visual separation/screening from the parking lot (e.g., fencing, vegetation and/or berms) will improve visitor experience during events
- Creates a more discrete performance space
- Reduces visual impacts of parking lot and car noise
- Ambiance of performance space would be improved
- Venue would be more attractive to patrons and performers
- Utilities are already available
- Comfort station and parking are convenient
- Cost is moderate
- Current location and size are not ideal for larger groups

Alternative 3 – Remove the Bandshell and relocate the performance space to improve function/separation from parking lot.

Considerations:

- A new location would be selected to be convenient to the proposed large event pavilion, comfort stations, and parking area

- Would provide a discrete place for larger performances in a more natural context (e.g., within day use lawn area)
- Environmental impacts may be significant due to proposed location (vegetation removal, fill, etc.)
- Would need to demolish/remove existing Bandshell structure and restore site
- SHPO will need to be consulted regarding demolition/removal of structure
- Utilities (electric/water) would need to be added at new location
- Costs may be significant

Alternative 4 – Remove the Bandshell and reprogram the space.

Considerations:

- The Park will still be able to bring in local performers/events/presentations/educational programming for small gatherings in day use area
- Event space for larger groups with temporary equipment could be provided elsewhere in the Park
- Would need to demolish/remove existing Bandshell structure and restore site
- SHPO will need to be consulted regarding demolition/removal of structure
- Minor costs would be incurred
- SHPO will need to be consulted regarding demolition/removal of structure

The preferred alternative is 2).

The Bandshell is a significant component of the facility's original infrastructure, and it continues to be used by patrons during events. As currently sited, the structure has no visual or functional separation from the adjacent Bathhouse or playground, however, diminishing the effectiveness of its function. The structure's location close to the day use area parking lot also creates visual and auditory challenges from the nearby car activity, which can become an issue during events.

Day Use Area Parking Lot

Background

The four-acre paved parking lot that serves the day use area has the capacity for approximately 190 cars. The lot is well-located for events and for visitors using the Bandshell, ball courts bathhouse, and playground. The parking area does not have pavement markings for parking spaces, handicap aisles, or driving lanes, and there are not curb ramps, plantings, or stormwater management infrastructure. The



Day use area parking lot

existing pavement is deteriorated. This large parking area is oversized for ordinary day use needs and fills up only a few times a year.

The parking lot is original to the Park and adjacent to historic elements in the day use area; changes must be in keeping with the overall character of this section of the Park. Proposed changes will need to be reviewed by OPRHP Historic Preservation staff prior to implementation.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1– Status quo – Do not make any improvements to the day use area parking lot.

Considerations:

- Will not meet the region’s vision for the Park or commissioner goals of creating a welcoming environment
- Current environmental impacts will continue (e.g., stormwater runoff not managed, heat island effects)
- Pedestrian circulation will continue to be unsafe and not appropriately managed
- Parking layout will continue to be inefficient, with no striping and poor design for maximum usage
- Pavement will remain deteriorated and unsightly
- Lot will continue to be oversized for most Park activities
- There will be no improvement to the environment
- No shade or green refuge islands
- No cost incurred
- Unprogrammed space in open lot can be used many ways
- Will continue to offer ample space and access for large vehicles to maneuver (tractor trailers/large equipment)
- No change in maintenance

Alternative 2 – Redevelop the parking lot in the day use area with green infrastructure elements a clear layout, and improved circulation.

Considerations:

- Aesthetic/infrastructure improvements will provide a safer, more welcoming entry to day use area
- Improves visitor comfort and experience, providing shade, pedestrian walkways, and vegetation
- Stormwater management using green infrastructure will reduce runoff and heat island effect
- Provides an opportunity to educate the public about environmental issues (benefits of bioswales, porous pavement, etc.)
- A well-designed layout will result in no net loss in parking and may improve parking capacity
- Circulation (vehicular/pedestrian) will be improved
- With a more park-like environment, the lot will become a recreation asset, which may lead to new uses/users
- Additional maintenance tasks would be required to support green practices
- Must be designed to accommodate large vehicles (tractor trailers/emergency/large equipment)
- Needs to include vehicular access to bathhouse that can accommodate large catering trucks etc.
- Costs may be significant

Alternative 3 – Resurface existing pavement, restripe, and reduce impervious area by adding vegetation to selected areas.

Considerations:

- Circulation will improve with demarked parking stalls/driving aisles/pedestrian routes
- Minor environmental improvement/benefit
- Day use lot function will be more pedestrian friendly and have visual improvement
- Does not address stormwater runoff or heat island issues.

- Will continue to accommodate large vehicles
- Cost would be moderate
- Will require some minor maintenance changes (landscaping, paint)

The preferred alternative is 2).

For many visitors, the day use area lot is their first impression of the Park. Deteriorated pavements and lack of sidewalks, painted lanes, and stalls results in poor functionality and aesthetics for both vehicles and pedestrians. Redeveloping the parking lot will result in a safer, more welcoming, and environmentally friendly environment. Incorporating green infrastructure helps to protect the environment while offering new educational opportunities at the Park. This action also supports the Master Plan vision of Baird as a unique destination for events in the region.

Picnic Shelters

Background

Two existing picnic pavilions are available at Baird as rentals for parties, corporate events, and weddings. In warmer months, these spaces are booked most weekends. However, these structures and associated comfort stations are aging and in need of upgrades.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – No changes or improvements to existing picnic shelters and comfort stations.

Considerations

- Will not encourage additional use of these facilities
- Does not facilitate access from pavilions to day use activity area
- Path continues to need ongoing maintenance/repair
- Does not meet current demand for this type of facility in the region
- Park is losing revenue due to inadequate utilities

Alternative 2 – Make improvements to picnic shelters and upgrade associated comfort stations and utility infrastructure.

Considerations:

- More visually appealing pavilions and better services will encourage more bookings and revenue
- Maintenance will be easier
- Will meet regional demand for this type of facility
- Cost is moderate and may be offset by additional revenue
- Will encourage more special events at the Park

The preferred alternative is 2).

Improvements to the existing picnic shelters will help Baird meet current and future demand for group event space in the community. Upgraded these structures and their supporting utilities will help to attract more use and offer a better visitor experience at the Park.



Playground

Background

Baird's educational, turtle-themed playground is a popular destination in the region. It is close to other recreational activities in the day use area and easily accessed from the Park's paved walking paths and woodland trails. There is a need in the playground area for shade, places to rest, and a more stroller-friendly and universally accessible pathway.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – No changes to the playground or accompanying amenities.

Considerations

- Will not provide amenities for visitors enjoying passive recreation in this area
- Will not improve pedestrian safety, comfort, and accessibility
- Does not provide facilities with places to rest and have small parties in day use area
- Accessible facilities for pedestrian circulation will not be available Park-wide
- No additional cost will be incurred

Alternative 2 – Install an accessible walking path with seating and shade structures in the day use area with links to the multi-use path.

Considerations

- There is a need in the playground area for shade, places to rest, and a stroller-friendly pathway.
- Providing accessible amenities with seating and shelter in the activity area encourages visitors to spend time outdoors and potentially lead a more active lifestyle
- Will improve amenities for active and passive recreation in the day use area
- Adding small pavilions or shade structures would enable groups to have birthday parties or to picnic while at the playground.
- Cost is minimal

The preferred alternative is 2).

Adding an accessible walking path near the playground improves Park circulation, increases connectivity with other pedestrian infrastructure at the Park, and addresses a need for shade/shelter and seating at the playground and within and day use area. Providing these amenities at a popular destination within the Park encourages an active lifestyle while improving the overall visitor experience.

Ball Courts

There is a strong demand for pickleball facilities in the region, and public outreach for this plan highlighted that need at Baird. Park staff recognizes this interest and new pickleball courts are planned for installation in fall 2022.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – No additional pickleball courts at the Park.

Considerations

- Does not respond to high demand for this activity in the region
- Courts will continue to be overcrowded
- Visitors may not have a positive experience if no courts are available, or there are long wait times
- Tennis courts will continue to be used for pickleball

Alternative 2 – Convert an existing tennis court to add two additional pickleball courts in the day use area.

Considerations

- Can be accomplished quickly and for low cost
- Visitor experience will be improved
- Helps to meet high demand for this activity in the region
- Existing courts are heavily used, and visitors sometimes experience long wait times

The preferred alternative is 2).

Community residents regularly use the existing courts and indicated that long waits are sometimes required to get a court. Adding pickleball courts will help meet demand for this sport in the region.

Softball Field

Background

The softball field in the day use area has seen little use over the past decade. Park staff continue to mow the field, but the bases and backstop are deteriorated. This flat, open area offers the potential for a range of other possible recreation uses. The softball field is original to the Park and adjacent to historically significant elements. Proposed changes are subject to review by OPRHP Historic Preservation staff.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – No changes to the Park’s softball area.

Considerations:

- Area continues to be underutilized
- Will not encourage new usage of the Park
- Unsightly infrastructure will remain
- Does not meet demand for alternative recreation activities in the region
- Will not address potential safety issues of existing infrastructure

Alternative 2 – Repurpose the existing softball area as a fitness trail/exercise route.

Considerations:

- Area is currently maintained but underutilized
- Will provide new outdoor recreation opportunities and may attract new types of visitors
- Meets current demand for this type of amenity which is not widely available in the area
- Creates a new destination in the Park
- Will require the removal of existing infrastructure (backstop) that is original to the Park, requiring review by OPRHP Historic Preservation staff
- Compatible with other recreation facilities in day use area
- Cost is moderate

Alternative 3 – Renovate and upgrade the softball field.

Considerations:

- Installing more comprehensive infrastructure for softball (e.g., seating for teams/spectators, new backstop; base lines, pitcher's mound, etc.) may attract local leagues and/or day use visitors to engage in ad hoc games/batting practice
- Location of the softball field is isolated from other day use/picnicking facilities.
- Restrooms, water fountains, and shade structures are not available in the immediate area
- Will incur some cost
- Maintenance needs will increase

Alternative 4 – Repurpose the softball field as a multi-sport field/play area.

Considerations:

- Area would be an open space for pick-up games of frisbee, catch, soccer drills, and general play.
- Groups could use this area for yoga, tai chi, or other group exercise/meditation classes.
- A fitness trail/exercise route could lead to this area. (See Alternative 2)
- Proposed changes are subject to review by OPRHP Historic Preservation staff

Alternative 5 – Both Alternatives 2 and 4, and Create a softball field in another location more convenient to day use visitors and parking (e.g., in the open area adjacent to the tennis/pickleball courts, behind the former roller rink)

Considerations:

- Would be closer to parking, comfort stations and the proposed large pavilion area.
- Outfield would be smaller
- Fencing may be required because of proximity to golf course
- Building at roller rink could be repurposed as a concession stand, equipment loan/storage area, or rest room, to serve the basketball and softball area.
- Proposed changes are subject to review by OPRHP Historic Preservation staff

The preferred alternative is 2).

Numerous softball facilities exist in the region and demand for softball at Baird is not high. This open lawn area offers an opportunity for the Park to offer a new and different type of activity in the day use area, that may draw more people to the Park. An exercise course encourages a healthy lifestyle and adds interest and improved functionality to this underutilized part of the Park.



Softball field, day use area

Former Roller Rink

Background

In Baird's early days, an outdoor rink was available for the then-popular activity of roller skating. A large oval concrete pad remains, flanked by a small wood frame building, formerly used as a ball-lending stand and a nature center. Staffing cuts and a lack of demand closed the nature center, but the building remains and is in good condition, and has potential to serve a range of other purposes. The former roller rink is now used for basketball.

Alternatives for repurposing these elements were discussed by the planning team. The roller rink and wood frame building are original to the Park and part of its historically significant infrastructure. Proposed changes to these elements are subject to review by SHPO.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Leave existing pavement and do not repurpose the roller rink area.

Considerations:

- Will not encourage new usage or bring new visitors to the Park
- Current condition and configuration is not designed for basketball
- Will not provide new amenities for visitors or attract different user groups
- Currently the pavement and building do not make efficient use of the area
- Unsightly/deteriorated pavement and vacant building will remain as is

Alternative 2 – Remove existing roller rink pavement and install new basketball court(s).

Considerations:

- Will provide better sports facilities for Park visitors.
- Improves use, function, and aesthetics of the area for a better visitor experience
- Building would need cosmetic upgrades
- Opportunity to bring in concessionaire to rent recreation equipment and/or offer food
- Compatible with other recreation amenities in day use area
- Reduces impervious surface at the Park, improving environmental conditions
- Cost will not be substantial

Alternative 3 – Remove roller rink pavement and create green open space.

Considerations:

- Reduction of impervious surfaces improves environmental conditions
- Lose opportunity to maximize active recreation offerings in day use area
- Will incur some cost
- Would not optimize use of area for improved Park functionality

Alternative 4 – Create a multi-purpose court at the former roller rink (e.g., to accommodate basketball, lacrosse rebound wall, street hockey, handball, etc.).

Considerations:

- Offers a greater range of amenities for Park visitors
- Re-energizes this area and Park esthetics will be improved
- Building would need cosmetic upgrades
- Opportunity to bring in concessionaire to rent recreation equipment and/or food
- Compatible with other recreation facilities in day use area
- Costs would be minimal (pavement rehab/paint/concrete for wall)
- Reduces impervious surfaces/improves environmental conditions

The preferred alternative is 4).

A multi-purpose court can offer a variety of sports that will appeal to a range of visitors. Adding these options will encourage visitors to engage in healthy activities and may attract different users. This area is underutilized. Installing new pavement and paint markings for more options for use will improve Park aesthetics and help realize the vision of the Park as a regional destination that offers a range of up-to-date recreation opportunities.

Winter Recreation

Background

Baird's recreational facilities are mostly used in the warmer months and visitor numbers decrease significantly in the winter. The planning team discussed strategies for offering new opportunities that will appeal to visitors and help to activate the Park year-round without requiring significant maintenance.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Do not develop new winter recreation opportunities at the Park.

Considerations:

- Will not encourage new users to visit the Park
- Demand for ice skating/x-country skiing/snowshoeing is only partially met in region
- Facility will continue to offer few winter recreational resources
- Patrons will use the golf course for cross-country skiing (which can damage the course surface)
- Existing trails and the new multi-use trails may meet snowshoeing demand
- Does not provide the opportunity to fully utilize existing and proposed Park facilities
- Creating an ice-skating facility would not be cost effective
- A missed opportunity to address a need for this type of recreation and activate the Park year-round

Alternative 2 – Develop a full range of winter opportunities to encourage more year-round Park use (e.g., groomed trails for cross-country skiing).

Considerations:

- Investment may not be cost-effective if weather conditions are not appropriate for winter recreation
- High capital investment and maintenance/operations costs
- May require additional staff and/or equipment to operate facilities
- Keeps Park active with more public use year-round
- May bring new/different visitors into Park
- Expands range of recreation amenities available
- Offers opportunity for an active lifestyle year-round, with benefits to health, community, youth, etc.
- Park will accrue additional costs for both capital construction and maintenance/operations
- Will provide designated Park areas for these activities with appropriate safety measures/design
- Historic structures less likely to be impacted

Alternative 3 – Develop winter opportunities at the Park that do not require significant maintenance (e.g., snowshoeing, cross-country skiing) to encourage more year-round Park use.

Considerations:

- The multi-use trail to be constructed in the Park can be used for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing without grooming
- Golf course greens can be roped off in winter so only fairways can be used as trails
- Select trails in the Freedom Road Area will be groomed for cross-country skiing
- Existing trails/golf course can continue to be used for winter activities such as snowshoeing
- The Taconic region offers groomed cross-country skiing trails at Fahnestock Winter Park
- A concessionaire could offer snowshoe rentals
- Will require minimal additional staff and/or equipment to operate facilities
- Keeps park in active public use year-round
- Will expand recreation amenities for visitors, which may bring new/different visitors to park
- Can be implemented relatively quickly and easily
- Park will accrue less cost for capital construction and maintenance/operations
- Opportunity to offer an active lifestyle year-round with benefits to health, community, etc.
- Will need winterized facilities (restrooms)
- Historic structures will not be impacted



The preferred alternative is 3).

This action offers the most benefit to the Park with minimal cost. It is also most cost-effective in terms of return, offering winter recreation opportunities without adding significant staff maintenance responsibilities. It will increase enjoyment of the Park by the public year-round.

Trail System

Background

The park's seven miles of trails are natural surface and located primarily in wooded areas. Some have steep slopes. The trail network is not accessible to all users and does not provide connections to all sections of the Park. As a result, visitors often walk, run, or bike along the roads, creating safety issues for both cars and pedestrians. Students from the adjacent high school also use the Park's road system for cross-country practice, running in groups on the active roadway. Some roadway sections are steep, and they generally lack the wide shoulders necessary to safely accommodate cyclists or pedestrians. Park staff have ongoing concerns about potentially hazardous conditions particularly potential conflicts between cars, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

Park users noted the need to separate pedestrian activity within the facility's circulation system. There is a clear need for a dedicated, accessible, off-road path that connects the Park's different sections and provides a safe route for visitors to exercise and enjoy the Park's outdoor setting.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Do not develop dedicated, accessible facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Considerations:

- Safety issues will not be addressed (potential vehicle/pedestrian conflicts)
- Public concerns will not be addressed
- Will continue to limit event opportunities (e.g., road closures during events limit emergency access and generate visitor complaints)
- Park will continue to lose patrons due to unsafe conditions
- Park circulation/connectivity overall will not be improved
- No environmental impacts related to new trail construction
- Will not incur new costs

Alternative 2 – Construct a park-wide, accessible, multi-use path that separates pedestrians and bicycles from active roadways.

Considerations:

- Will increase safety/comfort by keeping pedestrians/runners off the road
- Significantly improves park experience for visitors (e.g., accessibility)
- Offers additional recreation opportunities
- Promotes active lifestyle
- Improves connectivity to amenities throughout the Park
- Will increase park maintenance (mowing, weed control, etc.)
- Will have environmental impacts (stream crossings, tree removals, potential for wetland impacts, etc.)
- May make park more desirable for fundraising events
- Cost may be substantial

The preferred alternative is 2).

Public feedback included requests that the Park provide separate off-road facilities for pedestrians and bicycles. Installing a park-wide multi-use path at Baird will bring an important new recreational amenity to the Park while addressing existing circulation and safety issues. It will provide a non-vehicular connection to the facility's recreation activity areas and to the Freedom Road section of the Park. Offering this resource in the Park will help unify the Park and encourage healthy outdoor activity. It will increase opportunities for year-round Park use.

Hiking Trails

The Park features four miles of mostly wooded natural surface trails which traverse the Park's rolling terrain, taking users past wetlands, vernal pools, and small streams. Although none of the trails have been formally designated for specific uses, the Park's trail system allows for hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing,

In 2020, an assessment of trail conditions was conducted and areas in need of repair or maintenance were documented (see Appendices, Figures 11 and 11a, *Existing Trails, and Existing Trail Conditions Map*).

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – No improvements to the Park's existing hiking trail system.

Considerations:

- Trails will continue to deteriorate
- Maintenance will continue to be time-consuming
- Trails may present safety risks to visitors
- May degrade the visitor experience
- May lead to environmental impacts to the Park's natural resources/sensitive areas
- Minimal to no cost

Alternative 2 – Repair low, wet, and eroded areas in the Park's existing hiking trail system; reroute non-sustainable sections, repair culverts and bridges, and improve trail markers.

Considerations:

- Provides a safer, more enjoyable user experience
- Allows better access in emergency situations
- Reduces environmental impacts and protects natural resources
- Reduces the need for frequent, recurring trail maintenance and larger-scale repairs
- May increase park attendance

The preferred alternative is 2).

Baird's foot trail system is an important part of the Park's recreational amenities and implementing this action will contribute to a more safe, cohesive circulation system for the facility. Having well-functioning and clearly marked trails is important for reducing impacts to the Park's sensitive natural resources as well as for an enjoyable outdoor experience.

Freedom Road Area Trails

Hiking, walking, and enjoying nature are popular outdoor activities at Baird and providing new trail routes and connections within the Park offers the public the opportunity to explore, exercise, and enjoy new vistas while addressing demand for this type of activity. Baird's most recent addition, the Freedom Road area, significantly expanded the Park's size. Integrating the parcel into the overall facility, as well as protecting its natural resources, is an important goal for the Park and region.

Providing safe pedestrian access to the Freedom Road Area presents a challenge. Heavy traffic and fast-moving vehicles present safety issues for pedestrians and cyclists and there are no traffic signals or crosswalks. The planning group and regional trail planners explored potential strategies and routes for the proposed multi-use path that would connect with the Freedom Road Area. Three preliminary routes were considered (see Appendix M, *Freedom Road Conceptual Trail Plan*).

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Do not create a trail system in the Freedom Road Area with connections to other trails in The Park.

Considerations:

- Not having trails or access to this section limits recreational opportunities within the Park
- Linking to other trails in The Park will help integrate the new section into the facility
- Visitors may create social trails in sensitive areas
- If no connection exists to existing trails, visitors will need to drive to the Freedom Road area, or may try to cross County Road 47 unsafely on foot or bicycle
- Establishing a designated trail system improves safety for users
- Does not protect important natural resources at the site
- Does not meet the need/demand of community or region for this type of activity or provide facilities for events

Alternative 2 – Designate a natural surface hiking/cross-country ski trail system in the Freedom Road Area, eliminate unnecessary trails, and provide connectors and/or new segments as appropriate.

Considerations:

- Encourages appropriate use of roads and trail systems
- Increases visitor safety
- Will use existing service roads, utility corridors, and farm roads, to the extent practicable
- May help foster new partnerships with the community and school district
- Improves recreational offerings at Baird by expanding the Park's trail system
- Expands public access to parkland
- Routing trails to avoid environmentally sensitive areas protects natural resources at the site
- Offers additional opportunities for wildlife viewing
- Expands opportunities for seasonal use such as cross-country skiing/snowshoeing

Alternative 3 – Provide a pedestrian connection to trails in the Freedom Road Area as part of the park-wide multi-use path system.

Considerations:

- Proposed route will offer visitors a pleasant walk as it passes through an open meadow with views of nearby wetlands and woodlands
- Trail will utilize previously developed areas as much as possible
- Route will be sited to address safety considerations, to include a buffer area from busy traffic flow on County Route 47/Freedom Road
- The proposed crossing point at Freedom Road/County Route 47 will require a new crosswalk or other traffic control mechanism(s), as determined by a traffic engineer
- Proposed crossing point will require review and approval from appropriate Dutchess County agencies (e.g., Planning and DOT)
- To minimize disturbance and environmental impacts, the proposed trail will be designed to protect the existing wetlands and potential turtle crossing corridors
- Trail route will be routed outside wetland buffer areas and be developed alongside a habitat management plan
- Coordination with appropriate County agencies will take place as the project moves forward
- Proposed design will require additional site-specific assessments prior to implementation
- Trail will provide educational opportunities as it passes near a wetland connectivity project proposed north and south of Baird Park Road
- Appropriate trail materials will be determined during design

The preferred alternatives are: 2), and 3).

Integrating the Freedom Road area into the Park's older section is an important Park goal. Providing safe and accessible pedestrian and bicycle connections to new trails and recreation amenities planned in the Freedom Road Area will expand options for visitors and help to create a more cohesive facility.

Education and Outreach

Background

In recent years, educational programs at the Park have largely focused on Baird's rare turtle species populations. A number of older interpretive signs related to turtle populations are in place around the Park, and the playground has a themed educational component that provides information about the region's turtle populations

Recreation Programs

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Continue to implement existing educational content and programs.

Considerations:

- The Park will continue to provide minimal opportunities for sports activity programs
- Limits the visitor experience
- Will not attract new users
- Does not promote a healthy lifestyle
- May result in a decrease in attendance

Alternative 2 – Develop new visitor activity programs that utilize the Park's upgraded sports infrastructure (e.g., workshops for beginner pickleball, golf, disc golf).

Considerations:

- Increases active community use of the Park and may introduce new visitors to park
- Helps the region meet its goal for the Park to become a recreation destination
- Expands knowledge and participation in specific sports, encouraging physical activity and providing knowledge that fosters a healthier lifestyle
- Improves park image as an active, engaged community resource that offers a variety of up-to-date programs
- Would require staff time and/or bringing in specialized resourced people to implement

The preferred alternative is 2).

New and upgraded recreation infrastructure proposed in the Master Plan offers the opportunity to bring visitors in for new types of programming. This action builds on the growing interest in sports with potential to bring different users to the Park. Programs that teach the basics of a sport, or help improve existing skills, will encourage participants to engage in healthy activities. Offering regular activity programs will encourage people to become more engaged with the facility.

Environmental Education

Background

In the past, educational material that informs visitors, park staff, and contractors on Blanding's turtles has included primarily interpretive signs and informational brochures. Other efforts have included collaboration with Arlington High School on Blanding's turtle protections and a range of research in partnership with NYS DEC, The Wetlands Trust, the Northeast Blanding's Turtle Working Group (<http://www.blandingsturtle.org>) and others. Arlington High School science classes have had school tours of the turtle habitat restoration site, and a lecture presentation on Blanding's turtle projects in the area. Opportunities to expand upon current approaches were discussed during Master Plan development.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Continue to utilize existing environmental education content.

Considerations:

- Environmental education offerings will continue to be minimal
- Park patrons may not be aware of sensitive areas and may damage habitat
- Patrons may be dissatisfied or not clear on reasons behind some management practices (e.g., reasons for reduced mowing)
- Does not meet agency or park goals to educate the public and improve the visitor experience

Alternative 2 – Develop new partnerships to help develop and implement in-person environmental educational programs (e.g., with schools, colleges, DEC).

Considerations:

- Will educate patrons and future park users to the benefits of diversity and environmental health
- May increase visitation and diversify visitors
- Park will add function as an outdoor education classroom for students to learn about nature and the environment
- Partnerships will help bring in new ideas and reach more people
- Using volunteers and leveraging their time and resources can reduce costs
- Without partnerships will not have in-person advantages/interactive benefits
- Programming will have greater depth/impact with in-person contact

Alternative 3 – Develop self-guided environmental educational content, including new signage, podcasts, QR codes, social media, and other platforms.

Considerations:

- May not get the same level of impact or quality as in-person programming
- Technologies have advantages and may reach greater numbers/different populations
- May be more convenient for some visitors
- May attract new people/different groups to the Park

The preferred alternatives are: 2) and 3).

These actions will help to revitalize the Park by raising awareness of its existing and new natural resources and offering programs using a variety of technologies that will appeal to new audiences. Developing new partnerships and a larger on-line media presence will promote a wider public knowledge of the Park's educational programming and enable the Park to reach new people who might not otherwise be aware of the Park's unique offerings.

Outreach

Staff are regularly asked questions about the Park's offerings (e.g., pavilion sizes, capacity, rental information, cost, availability, etc.), and Park staff identified a need to have a one-stop information source for frequently asked questions. This type of resource would save staff time and provide visitors with basic information about the Park.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Do not develop additional or new forms of outreach regarding the Park's resources.

Considerations:

- Park management will continue to refer patrons to website or explain verbally
- When staff is not available, information about the Park's offerings is not readily available to visitors
- Does not provide the best or most up-to-date information regarding the capacity, extent, and nature of what the Park has to offer
- Will not publicize new opportunities or facilities as they are developed at the Park

Alternative 2 – Develop an up-to-date information resource to address frequently asked questions on park amenities, activities, events, and resources; to include handouts, interactive maps, and facility rental information.

Considerations:

- Will provide clear and consistent parameters for park facility usage
- If park information is available only in print (e.g., brochure or handout), it may limit park usage and wider outreach
- Can utilize the Parks Explorer Mobile App
- Saves staff time from answering frequently asked questions
- Supplements outreach when staff is not available
- Increases business outside of park hours –available 24/7

The preferred alternative is 2).

A one-stop source for park information will provide visitors with comprehensive and consistent information about the Park's amenities. As new programs and amenities are added, an online resource will be easily updated, helping park staff to function more effectively while improving the visitor experience.

Strategies for Operations, Infrastructure, and Facilities

The Master Plan proposes a wider range of activities, infrastructure upgrades, and new amenities at Baird, which, once implemented, may result in the increased use of park facilities. The planning team determined the need for improvement in various areas that affect the Park's overall functionality, while considering how these changes may affect the visitor experience.

Vehicular Circulation

Background

Park roads at Baird are used both by drivers traveling between different sections of the Park and cars crossing through the Park to reach outside destinations. "No Thru Traffic" signs installed at both park entrances discourage "pass-through" drivers, however, an estimated 20 to 30 cars daily used the Park's western entrance in 2000 as they crossed through the Park on their way to the Taconic State Parkway.

Many drivers do not comply with the 25-mph park speed limit, a concern, since (as noted earlier), the Park's roads are also used by pedestrians, bicyclists, and wildlife.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Do not implement traffic calming measures at the Park.

Considerations:

- Potentially unsafe conditions will continue, with higher risk for roadway conflicts
- Roadway use will continue to have negative effect on overall character of the Park (e.g., traffic noise, speeding cars, threats to wildlife)
- Will not address safety concerns of park users
- Traffic volume will remain the same

Alternative 2 – Implement traffic calming measures (e.g., speed bumps, speed feedback signs, road narrowing, wildlife crossings, pavement markings, etc.) to improve safety and enhance park character.

Considerations:

- Will increase safety for park visitors, reducing pedestrian-bicycle-vehicle conflicts/accidents
- Patron satisfaction will be improved
- Ensures safer conditions for planned future development with potentially more visitors
- Reduces wildlife injuries/mortality
- Some commuters who drive through the Park (e.g., people who use park roads to access the Taconic Parkway) may object to the changes
- May reduce overall traffic in park and lower traffic noise levels
- Will enhance park-like character of the facility
- Costs will be minor

The preferred alternative is 2).

Traffic calming uses physical design such as pavement markings, barriers, road humps and other measures to improve safety for motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists. Implementing this action will help address a known issue at the Park and provide a safer park experience. When combined with proposed improvements in park signage and the addition of a dedicated, off-road multi-use path, circulation and safety for both vehicles and pedestrians will improve. Implementing these measures will also protect Baird's wildlife, including Blanding's Turtles, who are known to cross the Park's roadways.

Signage

Background

Many of the facility's existing signs are deteriorated; wayfinding signs are minimal, and public awareness of the Park's recreational offerings is limited by a lack of signs indicating the Park's available facilities. Visitor safety, park aesthetics, and the overall experience at Baird are all impacted by the facility's limited wayfinding, interpretive, directional, traffic/regulatory, trails, and informational signage.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Retain current signage and do not develop a plan for signage parkwide.

Considerations:

- Potentially unsafe conditions will continue

- Visitors may not take full advantage of all Park resources if signage does not fully address all amenities
- Will not provide sufficient information and wayfinding for new park elements/future development
- Possible environmental impacts will continue (e.g., protections for sensitive habitats)
- Poor aesthetics from aging/deteriorated signs will not be addressed
- Incorrect information creates frustration for visitors/unsatisfactory park experience
- Visitors may not be able to plan their visit or locate resources with insufficient signage
- Park perception may continue to be focused on golf course and not on available and updated recreation amenities
- Will not meet Master Plan vision as recreation/events destination in the region

Alternative 2 – Develop and implement a comprehensive, parkwide signage plan to ensure that information is accessible and welcoming to all visitors.

Considerations:

- Signage at the Park is outdated and needs updating
- Will heighten visibility of facility and its offerings, creating a more welcoming visitor experience
- Signage content will be gender-neutral and offer information in additional languages or use non-verbal graphics to ensure greater access to information at the site
- Wayfinding, entry/arrival, traffic (regulatory/traffic control), trails, and interpretative signage will be updated
- Signage will be designed to be accessible, wherever practicable
- May increase attendance and bring in additional revenue
- Will set good precedent for future development and other facilities
- Cost is relatively low for good return on investment

The preferred alternative is 2).

Both the planning team and the public identified the need to address the Park's insufficient and aging signage. Developing a comprehensive signage plan will work hand-in-hand with other park improvements to improve access, aesthetics and provide a safer, more cohesive facility. Visitors will be better informed on the location and types of park amenities, traffic will flow more smoothly, and pedestrian safety issues will be addressed. Overall, the facility will function more efficiently and offer a more cohesive and up-to-date appearance.

Park Entrances

Background

Baird has two formal entry points, at its east and west borders. Both staff Park users indicated that existing entrances do not serve as welcoming or effective indicators for entry. While a new sign was recently installed at the Freedom Road (east) Park entrance, the turn-off is challenging to see from a passing car. There is also a need to develop a more legible and welcoming Park presence within the community. Improving visibility and providing a clear entrance experience are important for fostering a positive presence and will support future improvements at the Park.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – No improvements to the Park's entrances.

Considerations:

- Possible unsafe conditions will continue (e.g., cars making U-turns, roadside erosion)
- Southbound exit from Taconic State Parkway (TSP) requires a sharp turn and little direction is offered to motorists as to route or Park offerings for drivers using this entrance

- TSP entrance will continue to lack aesthetic appeal that might attract new visitors who get off the parkway
- The Freedom Road (east) Park entrance will continue to lack a positive arrival experience with clear information about the Park

Alternative 2 – Improve the two Park entrances to enhance aesthetics, visibility, and ensure safe access.

Considerations:

- The Park will be more visible and attractive for arriving visitors
- Safety will improve along the roadways
- Will provide a more welcoming experience for visitors
- Will improve the visitor experience and provide a greater sense of place
- Will better integrate the Park within the community

The preferred alternative is 2.

Regular Park visitors and nearby residents expressed the need for more clearly defined Park entrances. Clear signage, plantings, and other improvements will facilitate park access, visibility, and improve public safety. It will provide a more welcoming experience and offer a positive presence for the Park. Baird will be a more defined presence within the community.

Freedom Road Area Access

Background

Freedom Road (County Route 47) bisects the Park, separating the Freedom Road Area from the Park's other activity areas. Along with new recreational amenities planned at the Park, goals for increased connectivity were identified as a high priority for the facility. A new parking lot at the Freedom Road Area will allow visitors to access this area by car; however, options for safe foot and bicycle access were also evaluated.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Do not make modifications at the Park to allow pedestrian access to the Freedom Road Area.

Considerations:

- Freedom Road has fast-moving traffic and is currently unsafe for pedestrian crossing
- The road is under the County's jurisdiction (CR 47)
- If no accommodations are made, visitors may cross the road to access this area unsafely
- OPRHP will need to work with Dutchess County planning and DOT staff to develop a safe crossing point
- Important to provide connections with trails on both sides of Freedom Road

Alternative 2 – Direct visitors to access the Freedom Road Area by car only, with no provision for pedestrian or bicycle access.

Considerations:

- Limits public use of Freedom Road area to those owning cars
- Signs can be placed along roadway at north and south boundaries of the Freedom Road Area indicating that drivers are entering/leaving James Baird State Park, and directing cars to appropriate turn-off points
- To ensure safe vehicular access here will need to work with County Planning/DOT (e.g., for curb cuts, road markings, message signs to slow drivers, etc.)

Alternative 3 – Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle access to the Freedom Road Area and connect to the planned multi-use trail.

Considerations:

- Will require County Planning/DOT approval
- A consultant may be required to identify a safe crossing point and mechanism
- Pedestrians and cyclists must be directed to use the designated crossing point only for access
- Will provide connectivity with existing and planned trails and activity areas in the Park
- Better integrates both sides of Freedom Road sections of the Park into the overall facility
- Provides visitors with a variety of safe access options (on foot, bicycle, or car)
- May improve overall safety of this section of the roadway by slowing traffic and increasing awareness of pedestrians
- Could be timed with repaving project
- This location may not be appropriate for a crosswalk (limited site distance, etc.)

The preferred alternative is 3).

A goal for this master plan goals is to integrate the Freedom Road Area into the overall Park. This acquisition has not been developed for recreational use and offers some unique opportunities as well as challenges, particularly related to access. Implementing this action will promote safe use of the area's recreational offerings and offer more opportunities for cyclists and pedestrians to enjoy extended routes to new amenities in this area and improve connections throughout the Park.

Maintenance and Operations

Regional Maintenance Facility

Background

Baird houses the Taconic Regional Maintenance Center and its services and infrastructure support all facilities in the Taconic Region. The maintenance area developed piecemeal over the years and staff have indicated that it does not adequately meet Park or regional needs. In addition to needing better workspaces for efficiency and comfort, its physical infrastructure does not meet some health and safety standards. A new building for maintenance activities has been proposed to improve staff working conditions and address these issues.

Some structures in the maintenance complex also fall within the Park's historic period and relate to the Park's early development. National Register-eligible elements within Baird's Maintenance Center include a farm road associated with the former Baird House, as well as dry-laid fieldstone walls and an allée of trees. These important landscape features associated with the farmstead must be protected and preserved as part of any proposed work in the area.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Do not redevelop the Park's maintenance area.

Considerations:

- Lack of space and poor functioning does not provide an efficient work environment and limits what the facility can accomplish
- Region will continue to lack resources to maintain its facilities and equipment
- Environmental impacts to turtle habitat will continue
- Health and safety protections will continue to be insufficient
- Sustainability and function of the complex will not be improved
- Costs incurred from energy consumption, loss of materials, equipment repairs/parts will continue

- Working conditions (lack of heat, etc.) will continue to impact staff

Alternative 2 – Redevelop the Park’s maintenance area in its current location to ensure appropriate infrastructure is available for efficient functioning the Park in the future.

Considerations:

- Will improve staff efficiency for the region
- Siting and design consider Blanding’s turtle critical habitat and movements
- A new facility will have improved workspaces and safer work environment
- Will improve conditions for equipment storage (protection from weather, rodents, etc.)
- Health and safety protections for airflow and filtration will be installed
- An insulated, climate-controlled environment will provide a more comfortable work environment
- Improved energy efficiency and improved lighting at facility
- Cost is substantial
- Creates potential for future solar install
- An enhanced wildlife corridor will be created as part of the project to include new habitat and protections

Alternative 3 – Relocate the maintenance area within the Park and build a more efficient and functional regional facility.

Considerations:

- Will improve facility and staff efficiency
- Siting and design will need to consider Blanding’s turtle critical habitat and movement to avoid impacts to sensitive resources
- A new facility will provide a more comfortable, safe, and efficient workspaces
- Will provide improved equipment storage (protection from weather, rodents, etc.)
- Health and safety protections for air handling and filtration and improved lighting will be installed
- An insulated, climate-controlled environment will provide a more comfortable work environment
- Improved energy efficiency at facility
- Cost is substantial
- If relocated, will allow restoration of wildlife habitat at existing location
- Continued possible use of some structures/facilities at existing location for maintenance

The preferred alternative is 2).

Improvements in working conditions enables staff to provide better service. Improved trade workshops, a golf course shop, restrooms with showers, and a covered area for tractors and other large equipment were identified as needed improvements. A more up-to-date and functional maintenance area will also help to meet OPRHP goals to improve energy efficiency and update aging infrastructure. It will improve the working environment for employees and upgrade an essential operational facility in the region.

Utilities

Background

As with many older facilities, the utility infrastructure at Baird is aging and has become inadequate for current needs. Existing systems are not energy-efficient and require a high level of maintenance. The need for frequent repairs requires significant staff time. The Park must also be able to accommodate planned development to ensure it can adequately meet future demand.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – No upgrades to the Park’s electricity infrastructure.

Considerations:

- Does not address current inadequacies in existing power supply
- The park’s poor internet access and phone coverage will continue to be insufficient for an efficient work environment
- Hazardous conditions created by downed power lines and fire risk will continue
- Revenue collection at Point of Service will continue to be substandard, with possible decreases in revenue
- Underlying infrastructure issues will continue to inhibit technology use that would improve facility operation
- The existing potable water system is dependent on electricity (and not on a generator), preventing some Park activities from taking place
- Concessionaires will be impacted by power outages with potential loss of food supplies
- Electric dependent resources (e.g., Shelter 2 comfort station) will not function when power is lost
- Necessary frequent repairs to electric system will continue to interrupt service, requiring the added expense of bringing in vendors
- Will not offer appropriate, efficient support for existing and planned amenities
- Upgrades to power lines has the potential for environmental impacts to turtle habitat (where utility lines currently run)

Alternative 2 – Upgrade the Park’s electricity infrastructure, including phone/internet systems, to provide reliable service for current needs as well as planned park development.

Considerations:

- Patron satisfaction and staff efficiency will substantially improve
- Will reduce revenue loss caused by outages (concessionaire and operations)
- Park will be safer and more energy efficient
- Cost will be significant to implement
- Will address power lines that impact turtle habitat (wetlands)
- Will improve the site’s viability as the alternative regional office (per the Continuity of Operations Plan — a FEMA designation that ensures that necessary operations continue during emergencies)
- Will ensure the system will support future development

The preferred alternative is 2).

Providing up-to-date electric infrastructure will help to ensure that the Park is resilient and able to function efficiently in the future. Upgrades are necessary to enable Baird to accommodate larger events and support new or upgraded infrastructure proposed in the Master Plan. This action will improve both the visitor experience and provide a more efficient working environment for staff.

Water System

Background

The Park’s water system is aging and in need of continual repair. The waterline that provides potable water for the day use area and picnic shelters needs upgrading, and the main waterline has multiple leaks. Freeze-thaw issues in the Bathhouse restrooms are causing water damage to the structure, and plumbing systems in the Clubhouse and Maintenance Facility are also aging and deteriorated.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Do not upgrade water supply infrastructure at the Park.

Considerations:

- Will not sufficiently support existing or planned amenities.
- Will not support increased use/demand for potable water for planned future day use activities
- Repairs will continue to close bathrooms, impacting patrons and possibly decreasing the number of visitors
- Costs and demands on staff time for repairs and maintenance will remain high

Alternative 2 – Upgrade the Park’s water supply system to better accommodate current and future park operations.

Considerations:

- Cost may be moderate
- Patron experience will improve
- Upgrades will require environmental/SHPO review
- Will support future planned development
- Will help meet Master Plan vision

The preferred alternative is 2).

Improving the Park’s water infrastructure will reduce loss of water through leaks and make the Park more resilient. It will free staff from spending time on repairs and will also help meet the statewide goal to improve aging infrastructure in OPRHP facilities.

Staffing

Background

Actions proposed in the Master Plan will result in changes in the Park’s operation. While new uses will be implemented in phases and the Park overall will operate more efficiently, proposed event facilities, recreation amenities, and expanded infrastructure, will impact management responsibilities, maintenance and operation tasks, and/or other park functions that may result in different staffing needs.

During the spring, summer, and fall seasons, approximately 50 people are employed at Baird. A Park Manager, Golf Course Manager, and one full-time permanent employee oversee the Park’s day-to-day operations. Six permanent staff work at the auto shop, and there are approximately 25 seasonal staff (approximately 15 associated with park concessions such as the Clubhouse restaurant). Demands on Park staff are currently high.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Do not create a staffing plan for the Park.

Considerations:

- Park operations may not be able to support future planned development and activities
- Facility maintenance and operations may be impacted
- Does not address inadequacies for full-day coverage of operations (e.g., cleaning bathrooms, helping with events)
- Facility will remain understaffed
- With potential increases in visitation, patron services may not consistently be met
- Some regular maintenance practices will not be completed
- Golf course and/or overall park conditions may deteriorate
- Some unsafe conditions may result (e.g., hazardous trees, road conditions)

Alternative 2 – Develop a staffing plan and corresponding operational budget that addresses current and proposed operations at the Park.

Considerations:

- Plan can be created in-house with minimal expense
- Costs will be moderate to implement (salaries)
- More strategic staffing may result in increased revenue/visitation
- Maintenance costs may decrease with efficient staffing
- Will likely improve the visitor experience
- Facility has sufficient office space to accommodate additional staff
- Appropriate levels and types of staffing will help improve staff efficiency
- Training for new staff is available (online and in-person)

The preferred alternative is 2).

Visitor satisfaction can be impacted by insufficient staffing. Proposed capital and programming changes at Baird may increase the need for staff support and identifying current and anticipated future staffing needs at the facility will enable the Park to function more efficiently. Creating a comprehensive staffing plan and operational budget will help the Park better prepare for planned new amenities and activities proposed in the Master Plan.

Park Manager's Residence

Background

The Park Manager's house is aging and not energy efficient. The layout and overall function of the house does not adequately meet staff needs.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – No changes to the Park Manager's housing.

Considerations:

- Does not address current housing inadequacies
- Poor energy efficiency and high heating costs will continue
- House layout will not provide for an efficient work environment
- As the first building visitors see from Freedom Road entrance, the house's deteriorated appearance will continue to affect visitor experience of Park
- House will continue to deteriorate
- Current location near busy road is not optimal

Alternative 2 – Retrofit and upgrade the existing Park Manager's residence for continued residential use.

Considerations:

- Structure will be more energy-efficient with lower utility costs
- Will improve staff living conditions for current and future staff
- Minimal environmental impacts
- Will require SHPO review to determine any impacts from modifications
- Cost would be significant
- Park aesthetics would improve

Alternative 3 – Build a new Park Manager’s house at the Freedom Road Area.

Considerations:

- Most cost-effective option (i.e., cost would be less than retrofit)
- Would provide a caretaking presence for Freedom Road Area/more coverage for park security and emergency response
- Improved location for residence away from busy road
- Would improve energy efficiency and park appearance
- With minimal upgrades, the existing house could be repurposed and/or generate revenue (as a rental, or used for office space and/or storage)
- Location for new house would have minimal environmental impact (new site will be on footprint of previous structure at Freedom Road)
- Overall functionality of the residence would be improved (HVAC/airflow/layout issues)
- Existing house can continue to be used (e.g., for staff housing/office space/storage) with minor improvements

The preferred alternative is 3).

Providing a new, Park Manager’s house will best meet staff needs and is consistent with OPRHP goals for improving aging infrastructure at its facilities. A new, energy-efficient house will provide better working conditions for the Park Manager and meet the functional needs of a family. The existing structure will be maintained and be used for staff housing and other park functions (to be determined).



Baird's golf course facilities: Events tent at the Clubhouse (top), Driving Range (above)

Golf Course

Baird’s golf course continues to be a big draw for visitors and a focal point of the Park. The course is also significant as a historic element. Recent upgrades at the golf Clubhouse have included a new bluestone patio and firepit. A bunker rehabilitation project is also planned (see Appendix S, *Golf Course Sand Bunker Rehabilitation Plan Documents*). Some golf course infrastructure is outdated, and additional upgrades to the complex would help the facility function more safely and efficiently. Improving overall Park aesthetics and offering patrons a more up-to-date level of service are also plan goals.

Background

Elements in the golf course complex were evaluated for their existing condition and function as well as for anticipated future needs. As with other recreational infrastructure at Baird, much of the facility’s infrastructure, including its restrooms, buildings, signage, and parking area are aging and outdated.

Clubhouse Parking Lot

The parking lot at the Park's Clubhouse was identified by Park staff as insufficient for larger group events. To ensure safety during these events, staff need to be stationed in the parking lot to direct traffic and ensure that cars park in appropriate overflow areas. Other issues identified were ensuring sufficient emergency vehicle access and issues that arise from overcrowding in the lot, particularly the increased risk of pedestrian/vehicle conflicts during high-volume events. Golf course patrons will sometimes leave Park if the lot appears full.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – No changes to the Clubhouse parking lot.

Considerations:

- Safety issues will not be addressed
- The lot will not accommodate existing/future demand/need
- Will not address visitor dissatisfaction
- Lot does not provide sufficient parking for restaurant and golf patrons, especially during events
- Does not support the Master Plan vision to provide an events destination for the region
- Will continue to require staffing during high use periods
- No additional cost to facility
- Tight turning radius will continue to make truck deliveries challenging

Alternative 2 – Redevelop the Clubhouse parking lot to meet current and anticipated demand and provide a safe overflow area.

Considerations:

- Existing safety issues in the parking area will be addressed and traffic flow will improve
- Will meet existing and future demand and provide a better experience for park visitors
- Offers opportunity to incorporate sustainable elements in parking design
- Provides a more welcoming entrance for the golf course and Clubhouse
- Cost will be significant
- Construction may have some environmental impacts
- Lot will be able accommodate both restaurant and golf patrons during events
- Will meet Plan goals to provide better events facilities for the region
- Will improve delivery access and large vehicle maneuvering
- Provides better pedestrian connections between the Clubhouse and other Park activities

The preferred alternative is 2).

Redeveloping the Clubhouse parking area was selected as the best option to appropriately serve the existing and future facility. The golf course and its Clubhouse are popular destinations for recreation and large events. Improving the parking lot will address circulation and safety issues that can arise from high volume use. Together with other planned improvements, the Park's overall circulation will improve, as will the Park's aesthetics. An upgraded Clubhouse parking lot will also provide better staff working conditions.

Driving Range

The driving range is an important part of Baird's recreation offerings and a source of revenue the Park. A popular park amenity, it is a good place for beginning golfers to learn, and for golfers of all levels to practice. The driving range also has potential as a venue for golfing workshops and other recreational programs.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – No changes to the golf course driving range.

Considerations:

- Restrooms and building will not offer universal access
- Will not encourage users new to golf
- Inadequate practice options will continue (e.g., no chipping area, sand trap, natural turf tee, separators, covered hitting areas)
- Revenue will remain flat
- Visitor concerns/needs will not be addressed
- Facility will remain unappealing/unwelcoming
- Signage/visitor support needs will not be addressed
- Parking capacity will remain inadequate

Alternative 2 – Improve and upgrade the golf practice facility and driving range.

Considerations:

- Cost is moderate
- Good return on investment (increased revenue; enhanced visitor experience)
- Facility will be more appealing/welcoming
- Signage/visitor support needs will be addressed
- Golfer experience will be enhanced (clinics, pro services, expanded programming, etc.)
- Encourages active lifestyle
- Expands amenities for park visitors and may encourage new users/visitors
- Opportunity to learn and practice golfing increases
- With improved building, option to offer a small concession
- Opportunity to improve energy efficiency
- Driving range may be more marketable for concessionaire, requiring less park staff time

The preferred alternative is 2).

Improving the golf driving range was identified as a good investment for the facility. The area is aging and its infrastructure needs updating. Improvements here will meet Master Plan and OPRHP goals to upgrade infrastructure and offer new recreational opportunities. An improved golf practice facility will support new programs, such as beginners' workshops, and may attract new users.

Pro Shop

A golf Pro Shop at the Park was relocated in 2014, and its former building is now vacant. The structure is still in good condition and mostly used to store items for the banquet tent and outdoor patio. Park staff have discussed repurposing the building as an indoor banquet space or party room for the restaurant, for groups up to 50 people. The repurposed building could also serve as a staging area for events at the tent. Its interior would require full renovation, including two accessible, unisex bathrooms. Hazardous material testing previously done in the building found asbestos in the carpet adhesive, and abatement has been completed.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – No changes to the former Pro Shop.

Considerations:

- Space will continue to be underutilized
- Will not encourage new/different users to utilize the Park's resources
- Demand for this type of facility will not be met

- Limits concessionaire's opportunity to operate efficiently and potentially increase business
- Seasonal events would continue to be limited in colder months
- Restrooms would continue not to be accessible
- Use overlap between public restaurant patrons and private groups will continue
- Will not provide a space for larger staff meetings (off-site staff events, etc.)
- No indoor venue for smaller parties/events

Alternative 2 – Develop a banquet facility in the former Pro Shop for indoor events up to 50 people.

Considerations:

- Cost is modest
- Demand for small parties will be met (birthdays, wedding showers, etc.)
- Reduces conflicts with patrons using restaurant
- Expands amenities for park visitors
- Increases opportunities for more events/revenue
- Improves efficiency for staffing tent events
- Updated restroom facilities Improves patron experience
- Provides a space for larger staff meetings

The preferred alternative is 2).

Re-purposing an existing building for smaller indoor gatherings will increase opportunities for restaurant concessionaires and provide a wider variety of options for visitors planning events year-round. By providing an indoor venue for smaller groups, it will help realize the master plan vision of Baird as an events destination with a variety of options for the region. Repurposing underutilized infrastructure makes the best use of the Park's resources with minimal investment, creating a more active and functional facility.

Freedom Road Area Development

Background

In 2017, the State acquired a 135-acre parcel adjacent to Baird and incorporated it into the existing park (see Appendix K, *Freedom Road Area Location Map*). This property has a pond and wetlands which include significant Blanding's Turtle habitat, as well as scenic, 50-mile views. Much of the parcel is former agricultural land, with upland wooded areas and wetlands. Wetlands and other natural habitat in this region are prioritized in the 2016 NYS Open Space Conservation Plan (OSP) as turtle conservation areas, and the OSP specifically calls out James Baird, the Freedom Road Area, and Sprout Creek (which bisects the Park) as having wetlands that support the highest diversity of turtles in New York State.³⁵

The Freedom Road Area is also the location of a solar project which came online in 2021 (see Appendix L, *Freedom Road Solar Array Plan*). Central Hudson Electric and Gas holds a 150-foot-wide power line right-of-way that crosses the property from the northeast to the southwest, and another that crosses the western tip of the property. This area has limited parking and at present does not generate significant numbers of visitors.

The planning team determined that the Freedom Road Area was not appropriate for recreation that would require extensive new infrastructure (e.g., ballfields, tennis courts, pools, etc.), and that passive recreation activities (e.g., walking, bird watching, fishing) is more consistent with goals and objectives for this part of the Park.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Do not develop new recreation amenities or implement natural resource protections at the Freedom Road Area.

Considerations:

- Solar array and supporting access road will be the site's primary function
- Will not expand recreational offerings at the Park
- Demand for new activities in the region will not be met (e.g., fishing, disc golf, new trails)
- This area will not function as an integral part of the Park
- Will not provide for safe and appropriate public use of the property
- Former agricultural areas on property will not be managed
- Natural resource protections will not be put in place
- Invasive plants could expand into sensitive habitats

Alternative 2 – Develop new recreational amenities in the Freedom Road Area that are consistent with existing natural resource protections at the Park.

Considerations

- A greater variety of recreational amenities will be available at the Park
- The site will be better integrated into the overall facility
- Allows for safe and appropriate public use of the area
- May attract new types of visitors
- Habitat management will improve natural environment
- Will increase connectivity with adjacent habitat
- Former agricultural areas will add new wildlife habitat (e.g., developed as grasslands for bird species)
- Passive recreation activities are consistent with current state park goals for natural resource protection
- May increase workloads operational/maintenance and staff
- Implementation of protections will enhance the natural environment

The preferred alternative is 2).

The Freedom Road Area offers the opportunity to add new, low-impact recreation opportunities as well as enhance the region's important natural resources. The public will have the opportunity to walk, fish, and play in a natural setting, while natural resource management practices in place at the Park will be used to protect and enhance key regional habitats.

Disc Golf

As the planning team considered options for recreation offerings in the Freedom Road area, they looked for activities that would require minimal development. A growing sport that requires minimal infrastructure, disc golf was identified as requiring minimal new infrastructure, limiting environmental impacts to the site.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Do not install a disc golf course at the Park's Freedom Road Area.

Considerations:

- Park will not meet demand for this popular recreational amenity in the region
- No environmental impacts
- No cost
- Will not require additional maintenance (e.g., mowing)

- Will not meet Master Plan goal to integrate the Freedom Road Area into the Park
- No additional staff time or responsibilities will be required

Alternative 2 – Install a disc golf course at the Park’s Freedom Road Area.

Considerations:

- Will expand recreational amenities for park visitors
- Demand for this popular activity will be met
- Environmental impacts will be minimal
- Minimal cost to install
- Parking requirements will need to be determined and accommodated
- Will be sited at sufficient distances from existing solar facility to avoid any conflicts
- Will have to consider utility rights-of-way in design
- Minimal staffing is required and will not substantially increase facility maintenance

The preferred alternative is 2).

Offering a new course for this popular sport will help to integrate the Freedom Road Area into the overall facility. It will offer new a recreational amenity that will have minimal environmental impact, low cost, and minimal maintenance and staffing needs. A disc golf course may attract new types of visitors from within and outside the region. It will provide additional opportunities for people in the community and beyond to exercise and enjoy the outdoors.

Winter Recreation

There is demand in the Taconic region for public outdoor winter recreation facilities. While Baird has no dedicated facilities for popular winter activities such as cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, patrons do use the Park for these activities, and sometimes cause damage to the golf course’s turf and greens.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Do not designate selected trails at the Freedom Road Area for four-season use.

Considerations:

- Will not meet demand for winter recreation opportunities in the region
- Will not encourage four-season use of the Park
- New types of visitors will not be attracted to the Park
- Opportunities for healthy winter recreation will not be as readily available
- If a dedicated resource is not available, impacts to the golf course may continue
- Will not require additional staff time or new equipment purchase for grooming/maintenance

Alternative 2 – Designate selected trails at the Freedom Road Area for four-season use by providing groomed trails for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

Considerations:

- Helps to activate winter use of the Park
- Protect other parts of the Park by providing dedicated facilities for winter recreation
- May attract new types of visitors
- May require additional parking capacity
- Cost of maintenance may be significant
- Will require additional staff time
- Will require new equipment purchases/maintenance
- May be some noise impacts to wildlife from motorized groomer

The preferred alternative is 2).

Offering groomed cross-country ski trails in one section of the Park will help protect other sections of the Park from potential damage. Visitors will have safe, dedicated trails for winter activities, which will help meet an identified demand in the region for winter recreation. It will help meet a plan goal to activate the Park year-round.

Fishing

While there is substantial demand in the region, recreational fishing has not previously been available at Baird. A small pond in the Freedom Road Area offers the opportunity to provide this activity. Located about half a mile walk from the parking lot, the pond is known to contain species such as largemouth bass, sunfish, and carp.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Do not provide fishing access to the pond in the Freedom Road Area.

Considerations:

- Does not meet regional demand for this popular activity
- No other locations at Baird are appropriate for fishing
- May present enforcement issues for park staff (e.g., visitors may access the pond for fishing and impact sensitive habitats)

Alternative 2 – Provide a designated location for fishing access at the pond in the Freedom Road Area.

Considerations:

- Provides the community with a new and popular recreational amenity
- May attract new patrons to the Park
- May cause enforcement issues (e.g., DEC fishing regulations, etc.)
- Offers potential for new programming/educational opportunities
- Will need to ensure protections are in place for important species (e.g., turtles)
- Signage and monitoring can help address potential for natural resource impacts (e.g., overfishing)
- Access will need to be limited/sited to avoid sensitive habitat/wetland areas
- Requires minimal staff time to manage
- Low cost to implement

Preferred alternative is 2).

Providing a designated location for fishing at the pond in the Freedom Road Area will help to meet demand for this activity in the region and may attract new visitors. It will help meet Plan goals for offering new recreation activities at the Park and will help to integrate this new area into the overall facility.

Agricultural Use

As with much of the Taconic region, the Freedom Road Area has long been used for farming. Here, OPRHP has the opportunity to improve the region's natural resources through land management strategies including reduced mowing and other low-impact activities that are not dependent on chemicals to maintain. Allowing former agricultural properties to revert to meadow or woodland increases wildlife habitat and can provide environmental benefits, including improved water quality.

Alternatives considered:

Alternative 1 – Status quo – Do not manage former agricultural lands at the Freedom Road Area for habitat enhancement.

Considerations:

- Successional vegetation (i.e., shrubland to forest) will develop in these areas
- Invasive species may increase
- No additional maintenance will be required
- Will not address a park goal to enhance wildlife habitat

Alternative 2 – Implement habitat enhancement strategies on former agricultural lands.

Considerations:

- Quality of environment/habitat will improve
- Invasive species will be managed appropriately
- Will expand amenities for park visitors
- Maintenance requirements will increase (mowing)
- Additional staff time will be required for implementation/maintenance
- Some cost for seed/plantings
- Will provide educational/partnership opportunities

The preferred alternative is 2).

Open space in parks helps to protect important regional habitats from development while offering the public new educational opportunities. At Baird, the agency has the opportunity to increase much-needed natural habitat in the region, by phasing out agricultural use at the Freedom Road Area and allowing it to revert to grassland.



Chapter 3 – Selection of the Preferred Alternative

Rationale for Selection

As the planning team analyzed the status quo (no action) and other alternatives, the focus was on actions that will enrich the visitor experience at Baird and help achieve the Park's vision and goals. While Baird currently provides an acceptable level of recreation offerings, changes in recreation trends have resulted in the need for new and upgraded resources that will meet current and future recreational demand, and this evolves over time.

Much of the Park's infrastructure is aging and needs updating, and the facility is faced with new pressures on its important natural resources. Park staff and visitors have indicated areas where changes and improvements can be made that will offer both a greater variety of recreation options and increased resource protections. In choosing to implement actions proposed in the Master Plan over the status quo, OPRHP is making a commitment to improving the Park over the next decade and beyond. The result will benefit both users and staff and will likely have a positive impact on the community and region.

When funding is identified and the actions described here are implemented, Baird will be significantly improved. The park's roads will be safer, and its trails expanded and clearly marked, with signage, blazes and designated trailheads. Ball courts and other recreation facilities will be up-to-date, and the Park's popular playground and golf course, will be supported by improved parking, trails and other amenities. Baird will offer expanded, up-to-date event facilities that will provide comfortable venues for groups to gather.

Implementing the selected actions in the Master Plan ensures that natural resources are better protected, with site-specific strategies that protect rare species and control harmful invasives. Monitoring the Park's rare species and the quality of its important water resources will be expanded. New educational programs and interpretation will increase the public's understanding of the Park's significant natural, historic, and cultural resources.

Actions in the Master Plan will improve Baird's operations and provide a more efficient working environment for staff. Infrastructure will be improved over the status quo with restored water and electric utilities. Circulation and parking will better support new and expanded event facilities. Park buildings, including comfort stations and picnic pavilions, will be upgraded, repurposed, or built new. The Park's maintenance facilities will be improved for more efficient park function. These improvements will be accomplished while exploring use of sustainable resources and following ADA compatibility standards.

Implementation of the selected alternatives will occur pending available funding.

Table 4 – Proposed Actions with Status Quo and Selected Actions

James Baird State Park Master Plan	
Status Quo and Selected Alternatives	
Strategies for Natural Resource Protection	
Rare Species at Baird	
<u>Status Quo Alternative</u>	<u>Selected Alternative(s)</u>
Continue current management practices for the Park's natural resources.	<i>(1) Expand and improve natural resource management practices by enhancing habitat, installing new wildlife protections, and developing educational programs to raise public awareness. (2) Implement habitat enhancement for key species: acquire land when available, undertake research projects, and implement techniques to decrease predation; partner with adjacent landowners and other involved agencies to develop additional species protection. (3) Investigate opportunities to implement riparian/streambank and wetland creation/expansion; enhance buffers and create greater connectivity along wildlife migration zones.</i>
Continue current mowing and maintenance practices between the golf course and the day use activity area.	<i>Construct a berm system planted with native species between the golf course and day use area to provide pollinator habitat and visual/functional separation.</i>
Continue current invasive species management.	<i>Develop and implement a more proactive invasive species management program.</i>
Strategies for Cultural Resource Protection	
Historically Significant Elements at Baird	
<u>Status Quo Alternative</u>	<u>Selected Alternative</u>
Continue existing educational programs and content.	<i>Develop interpretive content that tells the story of the establishment of the Park and the significance of its design.</i>
Do not document material related to the Park's identified historic and cultural elements.	<i>Develop an annotated bibliography that catalogues original design documents and resources on the Park's historical/cultural elements.</i>
Strategies for Recreational Resource Enhancement	
Day Use Area Amenities	
<u>Status Quo Alternative</u>	<u>Selected Alternative</u>
Bathhouse	
Continue to maintain the bathhouse as is with no modifications.	<i>Retrofit the bathhouse as an events venue to accommodate up to 500 guests, with accessible restrooms, upgraded utilities, facilities for caterers, and a large-scale pavilion.</i>
Bandshell	
Do not make any changes to bandshell.	<i>Rehabilitate existing Bandshell structure and adjacent paved area; provide visual separation from the adjacent parking lot.</i>
Day Use Area Parking Lot	
Do not make any improvements to the day use area parking lot.	<i>Develop a new parking lot in the day use area that includes green infrastructure elements, improved layout, and circulation.</i>
Picnic Shelters	
No changes or improvements to existing picnic shelters and comfort stations.	<i>Make improvements to picnic shelters and upgrade associated comfort stations and utility infrastructure.</i>

Status Quo Alternative	Selected Alternative
Playground	
No changes to the playground or accompanying amenities.	<i>Install an accessible walking path with seating and shade structures in the day use area with links to the multi-use path.</i>
Ball Courts	
No additional pickleball courts at the Park.	<i>Convert an existing tennis court to add two additional pickleball courts in the day use area.</i>
Softball Field	
No changes to the Park's softball area.	<i>Repurpose the existing softball area as a fitness trail/exercise route.</i>
Former Roller Rink	
Do not repurpose roller rink area.	<i>Create a multi-purpose court at the former roller rink (e.g., to accommodate basketball, lacrosse rebound wall, street hockey, handball, etc.)</i>
Winter Recreation	
Do not develop new winter recreation opportunities at the Park.	<i>Develop winter opportunities at the Park that do not require significant maintenance (e.g., snowshoeing, cross-country skiing) to encourage more year-round Park use.</i>
Trail System	
Do not develop dedicated, accessible facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists.	<i>Construct a park-wide, accessible, multi-use path that separates pedestrians and bicycles from active roadways.</i>
No improvements to the Park's existing hiking trail system.	<i>Repair low, wet, and eroded areas in the Park's existing hiking trail system; reroute non-sustainable sections, repair culverts and bridges, and improve trail markers.</i>
Do not create a trail system in the Freedom Road Area with connections to other trails in The Park.	<i>(1) Designate a natural surface hiking/cross-country ski trail system in the Freedom Road Area, eliminate unnecessary trails, and provide connectors and/or new segments as appropriate. (2) Provide a pedestrian connection to trails in the Freedom Road Area as part of the park-wide multi-use path system.</i>
Vehicular Circulation	
No improvements to the Park's entrances.	<i>Improve the two Park entrances to enhance aesthetics, visibility, and ensure safe access.</i>
Do not implement traffic calming measures at the Park.	<i>Implement traffic calming measures (e.g., speed bumps, speed feedback signs, road narrowing, wildlife crossings, pavement markings, etc.) to improve safety and enhance park character.</i>

Strategies for Education and Outreach

Status Quo Alternative	Selected Alternative
Continue to implement existing educational content and programs.	<i>Develop new visitor activity programs that utilize the Park's upgraded sports infrastructure (e.g., workshops for beginner pickleball, golf, disc golf).</i>
Continue to utilize existing environmental education content.	<i>(1) Develop new partnerships to help develop and implement in-person environmental educational programs (e.g., with schools, colleges, DEC). (2) Develop self-guided environmental educational content, including new signage, podcasts, QR codes, social media, and other platforms.</i>
Do not develop general information resDo not develop additional or new forms of outreach regarding the Park's resources.	<i>Develop an up-to-date information resource to address frequently asked questions on park amenities, activities, events, and resources; to include handouts, interactive maps, and facility rental information.</i>
Retain current signage and do not develop a plan for signage parkwide.	<i>Develop and implement a comprehensive, parkwide signage plan to ensure that information is accessible and welcoming to all visitors.</i>

Maintenance, Infrastructure and Operations	
<u>Status Quo Alternative</u>	<u>Selected Alternative</u>
Maintenance Facility	
Do not redevelop the park maintenance facility.	<i>Redevelop the maintenance area in its current location to ensure appropriate infrastructure is available for efficient functioning the Park in the future.</i>
Utilities	
No upgrades to the Park's electricity infrastructure.	<i>Upgrade the Park's electricity infrastructure, including phone/internet systems, to provide reliable service for current needs as well as planned park development.</i>
Park Water System	
Do not upgrade water supply infrastructure at the Park.	<i>Upgrade the Park's water supply system to better accommodate current and future park operations.</i>
Staffing	
Do not create a staffing plan for the Park.	<i>Develop a staffing plan and corresponding operational budget that addresses current and proposed operations at the Park.</i>
Park Manager's Residence	
No changes to the Park Manager's housing.	<i>Build a new Park Manager's house at the Freedom Road Area.</i>
Golf Course	
No changes to the Clubhouse parking lot.	<i>Redevelop the Clubhouse parking lot to meet current and anticipated demand and provide a safe overflow area.</i>
No changes to the golf course driving range.	<i>Improve and upgrade the golf practice facility and driving range.</i>
No changes to the former Pro Shop.	<i>Develop a banquet facility in the former Pro Shop for indoor events up to 50 people.</i>
Freedom Road Area Development	
<u>Status Quo Alternative</u>	<u>Selected Alternative</u>
Do not make modifications at the Park to allow pedestrian access to the Freedom Road Area.	<i>Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle access to the Freedom Road Area and connect to the planned multi-use trail.</i>
Do not develop new recreation amenities or implement natural resource protections at the Freedom Road Area.	<i>Develop new recreational amenities in the Freedom Road Area that are consistent with existing natural resource protections at the Park.</i>
Do not install a disc golf course at the Park's Freedom Road Area.	<i>Install a disc golf course at the Park's Freedom Road Area.</i>
Winter Recreation	
Do not designate selected trails at the Freedom Road Area for four-season use.	<i>Designate selected trails at the Freedom Road Area for four-season use by providing groomed trails for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.</i>
Fishing	
Do not provide fishing access to the pond in the Freedom Road Area.	<i>Provide a designated location for fishing access at the pond in the Freedom Road Area.</i>
Natural Resource Enhancement	
Do not manage former agricultural lands at the Freedom Road Area for habitat enhancement.	<i>Implement habitat enhancement strategies on former agricultural lands.</i>

Chapter 4 – Environmental Impacts and Mitigation

Introduction

This chapter considers the environmental impacts and mitigation of potential adverse impacts that may result from the implementation of the Master Plan. For the purposes of SEQR compliance, the two documents together – Master Plan and EIS - satisfy the requirements for an environmental impact statement as specified in NYCRR §617, the rules and regulations implementing SEQR. A description of the preferred alternative can be found in the Master Plan document. The environmental setting is discussed in the EIS Chapter 1. Chapter 2 of this document contains the alternatives analysis and the selection of the preferred alternatives for each element or activity. The rationale and summary of the preferred alternative is contained in Chapter 3.

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

Environmental Impacts of the Alternatives

In Chapter 2, alternatives were developed and analyzed for natural and cultural resource protection strategies, recreation resource enhancement, education and outreach, and maintenance and operations at the Park. The analyses and choice of preferred alternatives are based on:

- Information about existing conditions (EIS Chapter 1)
- Vision and goals of the Master Plan
- Consideration of demand for various activities
- Site constraints
- Other considerations as identified in resource analyses for each element.

The Master Plan consists of the combined preferred alternatives for each identified element or activity.

Much of the information on the environmental impacts of alternatives is discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter summarizes the findings from the impact analysis which make up the Status Quo alternative and the preferred alternative.

Status Quo Alternative

This alternative consists of the current facilities, programs and practices at the Park as described in Chapter 1 (Environmental Setting). Under this alternative, current resource protection, operations, and facility management practices would continue unchanged. Any increased or changing recreational demand on the Park would not be addressed, nor would existing impacts be mitigated. Any improvements would be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

The Status Quo alternative would result in no disturbance from proposed development, including roads, parking, buildings, and infrastructure needs. Although this alternative may not result in any immediate additional adverse environmental impacts, the potential exists for long-term indirect adverse environmental impacts. The facility would continue to be managed with no specific plan or goals to guide continued use, protection, and development of the Park. As more visitors use the Park, and/or use it in new or unforeseen ways, additional demands will be placed on the natural, cultural, and recreational

resources, as well as on park staff. Actions proposed in the Master Plan strategically direct more intensive use and development toward areas with capacity for such use, and away from the more sensitive areas in the Park. Without this guidance, the potential for adverse impacts on environmental resources will increase.

Preferred Alternative and the Master Plan

The Master Plan compiles all preferred alternatives for natural and cultural resource protection, recreation resource enhancement, education and outreach, and maintenance and operations as identified in Chapter 2. These elements were subject to final evaluation and synthesis to assure that there was consistency among the various alternatives. This assessment resulted in the Master Plan. The Plan will provide considerable resource protection and recreational benefits. The MP/EIS identifies potential adverse impacts, both short and long term, and ways to, if not eliminate them, minimize them to the fullest extent possible through appropriate mitigation measures. From a long-term perspective, implementation of the Park's Master Plan will result in beneficial environmental impacts by ensuring that recreation enhancement takes place in areas of the Park that are appropriate and effective while the most sensitive areas of the Park are identified, monitored, and provided appropriate stewardship. Environmental impacts of the Master Plan are discussed more fully in the rest of this chapter.

Environmental Impacts Associated with Implementation of the Master Plan and Proposed Mitigation

Land Resources

The Master Plan proposes several projects which will or may require disturbance to the land. New areas of disturbance may occur with the following projects: expansion and improved management of wildlife habitat, riparian and wetland areas; construction of a berm system; invasive species management; installation of interpretive, trail, traffic and wayfinding signage; installation of shade structures at the playground; installation of a park-wide multi-use path including a connection to the Freedom Road Area; some existing trail system improvements; construction of a new maintenance center building; some new utility infrastructure; construction of a new Park Manager's house; expansion of the golf course parking lot; installation of a disc golf course; and fishing access to the pond at Freedom Road Area. Structures or facilities that will be refurbished, retrofitted or rehabilitated in place include: the Bandshell structure and seating area; the main parking lot; picnic shelters and pathways; comfort stations; utility infrastructure as feasible; softball area and former roller rink; sections of the existing trail system; roadways and parking lots for implementation of traffic calming measures; the golf course driving range and bunkers; the bathhouse and former pool area; and the former pro shop.

Parks makes every effort to minimize impacts and disturbance to land resources by repurposing existing structures rather than building new structures, and siting new construction in previously disturbed areas, when possible and appropriate. As noted above, some significant projects in the Master Plan are proposed to reuse existing structures, including refurbishing the bathhouse to accommodate large, catered events, adding a pavilion on a portion of the footprint of the former swimming pool site, retrofiting the golf pro shop as a banquet facility, and converting a former outdoor roller rink into a multi-purpose court. Appropriate erosion and sediment control measures will be used during all rehabilitation projects. Proposed redevelopment or rehabilitation of park amenities and infrastructure will require some grading. To minimize the amount of grading needed, site specific design of these facilities will accommodate the



A former roller rink in the day use area will be repurposed as a multi-use court.

existing grade levels where possible. Best management practices will be utilized to prevent impacts to adjacent areas. Project staging areas will be located in previously disturbed areas such as mowed lawn or parking areas when this can be accommodated.

As noted above, there are some larger construction projects proposed in the Master Plan:

New Trail Construction – To improve pedestrian safety and overall circulation at the Park, the plan proposes the addition of a parkwide, accessible multi-use pathway (see Appendices, Figure 12, *Multi-Use Path Conceptual Alignment*). The new pathway will separate pedestrian and vehicular circulation, which was identified as a need at the Park. A new exercise route will be installed in the day use area (see Appendix H, *Proposed Exercise Trail Concept Plan*). Some portions of the pathway will be aligned adjacent to park roadways and in open mowed areas to reduce new disturbance. There will be some new land disturbance and vegetation removal through forested areas (see further details under Trails below).

Maintenance Area Improvements – The plan proposes projects that will provide Baird with a more efficient and functional maintenance area. OPRHP is proposing renovation of the maintenance area which will include a new building with a trade workshop, administration offices, and a golf workshop. A wash pad/chemical mix and storage building separate from this facility is also being evaluated for possible inclusion in this project, and other facilities for maintenance use may be proposed. Feasibility studies/ alternative designs were prepared for the maintenance area improvements, with the preferred option included in the master plan (see Appendix I, *Regional Maintenance Facility Master Plan*). No funding or construction schedule has been as yet identified for this project. Much of the maintenance and surrounding area consists of pavement or mowed lawn. The proposed building and associated parking are planned for an open mowed lawn area.

Park-wide Utility Improvements - The Master Plan proposes upgrades to utilities parkwide to provide reliable service that will be able to accommodate new and expanded development. Replacing this infrastructure will require ground disturbance of existing utility trenches that are in the developed area of the Park. New or upgraded utilities will be aligned in existing utility trenches and/or along existing roads or other corridors, as feasible, both to minimize disturbance in new areas and to keep utility infrastructure easily accessible. Providing internet and Wi-Fi coverage in developed areas of the Park may require some ground disturbance for trenching cables. Directional drilling will be used when practicable to reduce ground disturbance. The majority of cables will likely be placed along existing corridors, such as along roads and in open areas.

New Park Manager's House - The plan proposes building a new house at the Freedom Road Area of the Park, near the entrance area, in a previously disturbed location. The house will be in a better location for staff purposes and will be energy efficient (see Appendix N, *Park Manager's Residence Floor Plans*). There is expected to be minimal new soil disturbance due to the use of a previously paved/disturbed site.

Parking Lot Improvements - Two of the Park's larger parking areas will be retrofitted to accommodate current and anticipated demand. The golf Clubhouse parking lot may have an expansion of a new overflow parking area, which will be constructed of porous pavement, if feasible. (See Appendix G, *Golf Clubhouse Pedestrian and Parking Site Concept*.) The day use area parking lot will be reconstructed to improve function and will incorporate green stormwater infrastructure. Most of these improvements will take place within the existing footprint of the parking lots with minor expansion areas.

Rehabilitation of Golf Course Bunkers - This project will restore 35 of the golf course bunkers, improving drainage, adding new sand, and refining their shape. The majority of the bunkers will occupy the same footprint; several will be enlarged slightly. One bunker will be removed, and two new bunkers will be added, at holes 6 and 10. Standard work at all bunkers is removal of sand, placement of underdrain and installation of sand with grading. Expansion of a bunker is the standard work with an increase in the footprint. New bunkers will have their sod and topsoil removed and excavated, underdrain installed and covered with sand to be graded. Holes where work will occur near water resources will have erosion control installed. The bunker to be removed will be filled and covered in sod. All of this work will occur within the golf course fairways with no expansion into undisturbed areas.

For all projects, construction documents will include appropriate erosion and sediment controls and wildlife protection measures; controls will be implemented and monitored in the field. Any permits will be acquired as needed. Larger construction projects may take significant time to complete and may result in increased potential for erosion. Erosion control best management practices (BMPs) will be used to mitigate movement of sediment from the work site during construction. Many of the soils at the Park have limitations for certain types of construction due to shallow depth to bedrock and other factors (NRCS, 2021). Construction in these areas will be designed to accommodate these factors and will minimize impacts to existing soils.

Trails

Potential impacts on land will result from the construction of new trails. The net result will be an increase in approximately 2 miles of trails. The proposed parkwide multi-use trail, including the trail extension to Freedom Road area, will add approximately 1.25 miles of new trail to the Park (see Appendices, Figure 12, *Multi-Use Path Conceptual Alignment*). The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) guidelines recommend a minimum of 10 feet for multi-use trails. Impacts from trail construction will vary based on the proposed trail width, surface material, and its

location with respect to vegetation, steep slopes, and waterbodies. Some trail segments may potentially be planned on slopes exceeding 15%. Stormwater runoff from the additional impervious surfaces is expected to be minor. Mitigation such as porous paving and bioswales will be considered to reduce potential impacts from stormwater runoff.

The Master Plan proposes that the Park provide dedicated cross-country ski trails in the Freedom Road Area (see Appendix M, *Freedom Road Conceptual Trail Plan*). The standard for groomed cross-country ski trails is eight feet for one lane and 10 to 12 feet for two lanes (with 8-foot treadway). This means an increase of a range of 1.45-1.82, or 2.18-acres for the Freedom Road Area trails, which will utilize existing roads and open areas (e.g., former agricultural roads and fields) to the degree possible and appropriate. Trails are expected to remain natural surface trails. Some trees and shrubland vegetation will need to be removed for trail construction.

For all trail construction, disturbance of land will be limited to the required width of the trail corridor. Trails will be carefully planned for grades, accessibility, surfacing, and minimum required width to the extent practicable. They will be designed to provide safe routes through the Park, with viewpoints and improved access to the Park's resources while protecting highly sensitive areas. Trail construction will follow the policies and guidelines for trail building that have been established by recognized trail organizations and government agencies. Adherence to these guidelines will ensure that work is completed in a manner that maximizes protection of the Park's resources. Signage may be installed for navigation and to help educate patrons about the need to protect the Park's resources. Coordination with the region's trail crew and stewardship staff for trail design will help minimize potential impacts on resources as well.

No new buildings are proposed in flood-prone areas within the Park. The new multi-use path will cross a stream also noted as high risk to flooding. The future design of the path will incorporate measures to avoid issues from flooding and impairments to the floodplain.

Water

Impact on Ponds and Stream Water Quality

It is not anticipated that the implementation of the Master Plan will have significant adverse environmental impacts on water resources in the Park. Waterbodies are an important element of the Baird site. As discussed earlier, wetland complexes provide important habitat for sensitive species. Streams, wetlands, and ponds contribute to the Park's scenic character, and the Park also relies on its water resources for irrigation, to maintain a high-quality recreation experience at the golf course.

Most projects proposed within the Master Plan have the potential to adversely impact water quality due to the presence of loose soils because of vegetation removal, excavation, and/or grading. Some projects, like construction of a berm system, a park-wide multi-use path, a new maintenance center building, new Park Manager's house, rehabilitation of the golf course bunkers, and expansion of the golf course parking lot have more potential than other projects.

In general, new construction projects will be located with appropriate buffers from the Park's waterbodies. Rainfall and strong wind events may move loose soil into streams causing turbidity. Stormwater carrying heavy sediment loads may scour and cause erosion on slopes and at stream banks. Stormwater containing soils or causing erosion may have impacts downstream away from the project site.



Irrigation pond at Baird's golf course

Stormwater runoff volumes will generally increase with the addition of impervious surfaces such as new buildings, paved trails, and expanded paved parking lots. Runoff from impervious surfaces can increase sediment loads to surface waters such as streams and ponds and introduce pollutants that are carried by the runoff. Stormwater can also cause erosion, which can change stream morphology and depth, resulting in habitat changes. This can have a direct effect on the biodiversity of the stream and its corridor.

All proposed construction documents and projects will be reviewed to assure that stormwater management and sediment and erosion control measures are incorporated into design and construction, as appropriate. Best management practices and adequate erosion control will be used during all projects, as needed, to prevent loose soil from moving into sensitive areas. All areas disturbed by the project will be stabilized prior to the project's completion. Following construction, project sites will be monitored to ensure that drainage and erosion control measures are working effectively.

For The Park-wide multi-use path, during field layout, the agency will attempt to minimize stream crossings to the extent possible and retain a buffer between the new trail and waterbodies. All work will be designed to manage and infiltrate stormwater and minimize erosion. Proposed trail segments that require more than routine measures, such as construction of culverts, bridges, or boardwalks, will be identified through the approval process described in the plan and remedies. Regional staff will review proposals and consult with NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and/or the US Army Corps of Engineers as appropriate.

The Master Plan proposes installing a new exercise path in the existing softball area. This project will add a minor amount of impervious pavement in an area that currently is mowed grass. Runoff from the path will be minimal, and the work is not anticipated to impact any of the Park's waterbodies.

The plan also identifies several existing trails with drainage problems, including standing water, erosion, and seasonal wet areas. Standard water abatement techniques and repair and re-routing of some sections will help remediate these issues and decrease sediment loads to adjacent waterbodies.

Any projects that disturb one acre or more will be subject to the [State Pollution Discharge Elimination System](#) (SPDES) General Permit process. Best management practices (BMPs) as described in the [New York Standards and Specifications for Erosion and Sediment Control](#) (DEC, 2016 Blue Book) will be used to reduce impacts to soils and surrounding water resources on the project sites. Some measures which will be used include minimizing soil disturbance and vegetation clearing, use of green stormwater infrastructure measures, the use of silt fencing and straw bales where needed, preservation of vegetated buffers and seeding and mulching of disturbed areas as soon as possible following work. New plantings of native species may also be used for aesthetics, shade, and soil stabilization.

Implementation of the Plan will result in some beneficial impacts to water quality and aquatic habitat. The Plan proposes implementing riparian and wetland creation and expansion, enhancing natural buffers and, when possible, creating more habitat, with connectivity along wildlife migration corridors. Upgrades in stormwater management design, including the use of green infrastructure along trails, in the upgraded Clubhouse and day use area parking lots, where appropriate, will reduce flows and sediment loads to adjacent natural areas.

Wetlands

The park contains several important wetland complexes, with four State-regulated freshwater wetlands and numerous National Wetland Inventory (NWI) wetlands in the Park. Stringent measures for protection of the Park's wetlands are already in place and care has been taken to ensure that none of the wetlands will be adversely changed or affected by implementation of the Master Plan.

Proposed improvements to riparian areas and other natural habitats in the plan will enhance and protect the Park's existing wetlands. Any new development proposed near these locations will be done in consultation with regional natural resource stewardship biologists and staff from NYNHP, as appropriate, to avoid or minimize potential impacts to these sensitive areas. The rehabilitation of the golf course bunkers has some project work proposed within the 100' buffer of state-regulated freshwater wetlands. No work will occur within the wetlands. OPRHP will acquire needed DEC permits for any work proposed within the 100-foot buffer area.

A major threat to all wetlands is the expansion of invasive species. Improved management of invasive species proposed in the plan and providing restoration plantings where needed will help to restore and protect wetland health and biodiversity. The Master Plan calls for a more structured and proactive approach to invasive species management, which will have a beneficial impact on the Park's wetlands.

Impact on Groundwater

Current pavement and impervious surfaces at Baird are limited compared to the acreage of the Park, consisting mostly of the roadways, parking areas at the Clubhouse, day use area, and maintenance area, the former roller rink, and park buildings, including the bathhouse, Bandshell, Clubhouse, maintenance area structures, picnic shelters and comfort stations.

Additional impervious surfaces from new structures or facilities have the potential to change the way stormwater infiltrates to groundwater. There will be minor increases in impervious surfaces by the expansion of the parking lot at the Clubhouse, addition of a new paved trail, and new shade structures. Roof area will be added from new pavilions proposed in the day use area, a new Park Manager's house, and new maintenance facility building. These elements are generally sited in previously disturbed areas and the total maximum acreage of new impervious surfaces from structures will not be significant. In all new construction, green design will be used, where possible and appropriate, to help capture and filter stormwater before it enters groundwater.



Golf Clubhouse

Golf Course

While new invasive species management and other projects proposed in the plan may require the additional use of pesticides, no impacts to groundwater from chemical use (e.g., pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides) are anticipated from implementation of the Master Plan. New York State has some of the nation's strictest state regulations on pesticide and fertilizer use. At Baird, pesticides used to maintain the golf course are kept in a special structure with their own built-in spill containment. To minimize potential water quality impacts, the Park has also implemented Cornell University's Best Management Practices for NYS Golf Courses, which trains staff to use BMPs designed specifically for New York's climate and environment.³⁶ Based on the latest research, these practices help reduce the use of chemicals and fertilizers and minimize impacts to groundwater and other environmental resources.

Golf courses can use thousands of gallons of well water a day to keep the turf green, and irrigation has the potential to impact groundwater supplies.³⁷ In areas where annual rainfall is high, this generally does not pose aquifer overuse problems. In areas with low annual rainfall, the withdrawal of groundwater can impact the levels of the water table in nearby wells by drawing down a "cone of depression" around the irrigation well. With climate change impacting weather patterns, extended periods of drought may increasingly impact areas like the northeastern U.S. that generally receive ample rainfall. When irrigation is required at Baird, water from three drilled wells is pumped to a three-acre man-made storage pond within the golf course boundary. Baird has installed a "smart" irrigation system with soil moisture sensors and a weather station, which helps conserve water use by targeting water needs at the course to minimize the amount of water pulled from the wells.

Other Protections

Petroleum products used at Baird are kept in bulk storage at the maintenance facility. Detailed spill prevention plans are in place at the facility, and spill containment kits are kept near all petroleum products. Petroleum bulk storage guidelines are reviewed by a consultant approximately every three years. Some underground storage tanks (UST) at the site have been removed and surrounding areas have been remediated and tested, with one 1,000-gallon UST remaining. An underground diesel oil tank was previously removed, and full remediation of the area was completed (funded by the estate of prior

landowner). DEC Spill Response maintains records of the incident. Efforts are being made by the agency to remove all USTs as funding allows.

A capped landfill at the site has monitoring wells that are tested every year (for landfill location, see Appendix R, *Miscellaneous Park Infrastructure*).

The county-permitted public water supply well at the Park Manager's house is also tested regularly for chemicals, petroleum, E. coli, and other contaminants and, according to records, has never shown positive results.

Air

Full implementation of the Master Plan may result in increased use of the Park. Vehicle emissions are one of the primary factors in the creation of ozone, and most visitors access the Park in private vehicles. An increase in the number of vehicles traveling to the Park due to proposed new park amenities is expected to be minor and air quality impacts from an increase in traffic volume are not expected to be significant.

Short-term, temporary air quality impacts during large events may occur due to a minor temporary increase in vehicle exhaust, and during construction there may be exhaust from construction vehicles and equipment and some generation of dust. These will be temporary and localized. Construction of projects will take place over several years as the plan is implemented. Air quality impacts from construction vehicles will be mitigated by assuring that these vehicles are in good running condition and are not producing excessive exhaust.

Biological Resources/Ecology

As discussed earlier, Baird inhabits a region with important natural resources and is home to rare species. The significance of the Park's natural environment is recognized by the agency, and the region has been extremely proactive in its efforts to protect and enhance the natural environment. The Master Plan's vision statement, strategies, and proposed actions and recommendations also serve to protect and enhance these sensitive resources. To build upon previous efforts, the Plan proposes to implement a more comprehensive approach to invasive species management, to restore and expand habitat when possible, and undertake new projects with wildlife considerations at the forefront.

Overall, the Master Plan will have a positive impact on the natural resources within the Park. Limited new development is proposed in the Plan, and therefore direct impacts to biological elements are expected to be minimal. Projects have been primarily sited in previously developed areas with limited environmental sensitivity, and placement of proposed facilities is in accordance with all designations. All proposed projects will employ design strategies and protections that minimize impacts to sensitive areas.

Ecological Communities

Implementing the Master Plan will have some impact on the statewide significant natural community type located in the Park (see Table 2, page 15). The expansion of the parking area at the golf course may impact edges of the Appalachian Oak-Hickory forest around the lot. This forest type covers most of the eastern half of the Park. Impacts will be mitigated by providing appropriate site design to reduce vegetation loss.

Impact to natural communities from construction of new trails will be mitigated by careful assessment of the trail routes on site before any construction is approved. To minimize impacts to sensitive areas,

locations for new proposed pedestrian pathways and trails will be assessed and will incorporate sustainable design. Facility and infrastructure improvements outlined in the Master Plan, including improvements to utilities, the maintenance facility, Clubhouse, and day use area are primarily in areas that are already developed or in culturally derived natural community types, such as lawn.

Impacts to Plants and Animals

Flora

The construction of new facilities will require removal of some vegetation during construction. For buildings and other infrastructure, vegetation loss will be minimal and primarily within the building footprint and associated outdoor spaces, which are primarily in lawn or developed areas. Where new trail segments are proposed, impacts will be mitigated by requiring selection of the most appropriate routes, employing BMPs such as found in established guidelines for sustainable trail design during layout and construction, minimizing removal of vegetation to the required corridor width, and installing signs or blazes to mark the trail corridor for trail users. Consideration for the protection of the Park's rare species and sensitive areas will be part of the final planning process when selecting preferred locations of new trail development. Well-designed trails that provide access to a variety of natural features will enhance the visitor experience and help to reduce potential impacts from off-trail and social trail development.

None of the construction/rehabilitation projects proposed under the Master Plan will be located near known rare plant locations; however, the Natural Heritage Program Report (2001) calls for a survey for rare plants prior to any development or new management practices. New or expanded facilities in the Plan have been located to minimize conflicts with, or impacts to, rare species and sensitive natural resources, thereby reducing potential impacts of development. The regional biologist or stewardship staff will be consulted regarding the need for additional rare plant surveys during design of proposed renovation and redevelopment projects and regarding any trees to be removed. Proposed actions to increase management of non-native, invasive plant species and restore natural areas will benefit native plants in the Park, providing them with more opportunity to flourish. Areas that will require vegetative restoration will incorporate native species or non-invasive species regionally appropriate to the area.

The regional landscape architect and regional biologist or stewardship staff will be consulted regarding the appropriate species to be used in any planting plans or site restoration. Facility design and construction will be consistent with OPRHP's Tree Management and Native Plants policies (OPRHP, 2009 and OPRHP, 2015). This includes providing appropriate buffers to ensure protection of known rare plant species.

Fauna

Minimal impacts to the fauna are expected due to the small amount of physical change being proposed in the Master Plan. Areas proposed for improvements through either rehabilitation or new construction are not located near sensitive environmental areas and are not expected to affect wildlife in the area. Consideration of potential impacts on the fauna of the Park was part of the planning process when selecting preferred alternatives and will also be considered during future implementation of new projects. Protection measures for focal species, particularly Blanding's Turtle, are in place and additional measures are discussed below. The Plan recommends allowing fishing at the Freedom Road Area pond. Signage and monitoring will address any potential for overfishing the pond.

Construction in OPRHP facilities is usually planned for the late fall and winter when public use is lower. This timing also reduces potential disturbance to wildlife by avoiding periods of higher biological activity,

such as bird breeding seasons and bat roosting. Indiana bats are known to occur nearby the Park and likely use the Park for habitat. Any tree removals will follow the OPRHP Tree Removal Timing Guidelines to avoid potential impacts to listed bats, wildlife and protected migratory bird species (see Appendix O, *OPRHP Tree Removal Policy*). Site-specific design of new facilities and trails will include surveys for sensitive or rare species or habitats. If needed, proposed facilities or trails will be relocated to avoid or minimize any adverse impacts to wildlife.

Some positive impacts to animals in the Park may occur due to restoration and expansion of habitat proposed in the Master Plan. Current wildlife management practices will continue, in consultation with NYS DEC. The plan's natural resource management strategies call for the continued passive management of wildlife following the agency's guidelines (OPRHP, 2010). Habitat for native bees, butterflies, and other pollinators will be enhanced by the implementation of the Plan. Portions of the Freedom Road Area of the Park formerly under agricultural use may be allowed to revert to grassland, allow for successional growth, or other similar ecosystem changes.

As previously discussed, there are rare animals that have been documented within the Park and use portions of the Park as habitat. Of specific concern are populations of Blanding's turtle, which use the wetlands and waterbodies within and adjacent to the Park. Project designs will avoid turtle habitat to the extent possible and include turtle friendly measures, as appropriate, to allow for the safe movement of turtles through the Park. Construction projects and ground-disturbing activities will be monitored to avoid any direct impacts to turtles potentially crossing or using the project area. Generally, silt fencing would be used to delineate the project area to protect turtles from entering the project area and to ensure erosion control measures.

The Master Plan includes additional efforts to protect Blanding's such as through land acquisition, implementing riparian/streambank and wetland creation/expansion projects, enhancing buffers, and creating greater connectivity along wildlife migration corridors, as well as facilitating research opportunities to better understand turtle movements, implementing techniques to decrease predation, and increased public education about Blanding's.

The New York Natural Heritage Program Report (2001) recommends scheduling mowing operations during times that would be least impactful to Blanding's (such as, avoiding late afternoons and evenings) and possibly to not mow during the nesting season (late May through June or early July) and in August and September when hatchlings are moving away from the nesting grounds. Operations staff should be educated on these procedures. Additionally, the NYNHP report indicates that reducing vehicle speeds on park roads through speed bumps and other methods and installing turtle crossing signs would likely help reduce turtle mortality. Signs have been installed previously and more will be installed. Traffic calming measures are called for in the Master Plan.

Most projects proposed in the Plan will be located away from wetlands, waterbodies, and other sensitive areas. Only the multi-use trail may be in proximity to wetlands or other waterbodies (see Appendices, Figure 12, *Multi-Use Path Conceptual Alignment*). While the trail itself is not anticipated to impact any rare, threatened, or endangered species, minor impacts to their habitat are possible, as the multi-use trail will be located within portions of the site that may contain habitat for those species. To minimize impacts to habitat, the regional biologist or stewardship staff will be consulted before final locations are selected for all projects, and any impacts are not anticipated to be significant.

Invasive Species

Forest pests and invasive species are a significant threat at Baird. The Emerald Ash Borer and Hemlock Woolley Adelgid have already been identified in the Park, and the Asian Longhorned beetle has the potential to result in major damage to the forests if introduced. Surveying and monitoring for such species will be included as part of a more proactive invasive species strategy. Educational information will also be provided for visitors, with brochures, signs, posters, and other materials.

Park and regional environmental staff are very knowledgeable regarding the impacts of invasive species. New interpretive programs, management protocols, and training will improve their ability to prevent the spread of invasives. Implementing new and more proactive invasive species strategies at the Park will focus on prevention, identification, early detection, rapid response, and eradication from sensitive habitat.

It is important to implement Best Management Practices to minimize the spread of invasive species. New construction projects as well as day-to-day operations are able to introduce and spread invasives. Trail use, construction, and landscaping management can also facilitate the spread of invasive species. Invasive plant seeds can be inadvertently introduced on construction equipment and through the use of imported mulch, imported soil, straw, gravel, and sod. Proper material disposal and equipment cleaning methods help limit the potential of invasives to establish in new locations both within and beyond a site.

OPRHP has drafted BMPs for invasive species control for park projects and operations. The [NYS DOT](#) has developed useful BMPs and [construction specifications](#) for invasive plant control (DOT 2009) that can be tailored to agency or park-specific projects and operations. These methods will be implemented at the Park during construction.

Firewood also poses a risk of introduction of invasive forest pests when it is transported from its location of origin to new locations. Firewood is often derived from trees that have died or are weakened or damaged. Their demise or weakened state may have been brought about by invasive insects or diseases, even though the exact pests have not been found or identified. Previously, firewood cutting in the Park was allowed by permit but for safety purposes is no longer allowed.

Education, Outreach, and Interpretation

Programming, online resources, and on-site signage are important tools for informing people about how the choices they make may ultimately impact their environment. Effectively engaging visitors of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds can lead to changes in individual behaviors. The Master Plan proposes developing new environmental programming that will work to educate visitors about the Park's special habitat and cultural resources, to focus visitors' attention on important aspects of the physical setting. Programs and other content on topics such as the spread of invasive species, the state's rare plants and animals, or regional history help teach the inherent value of the natural and cultural environment and how human actions can affect them.

Educating the public on these and other topics is an important goal of the Master Plan, which also proposes establishing new partnerships and reaching people through signage, podcasts, social media, and other technologies, as well as offering self-guided educational material.

Cultural Resources

James Baird State Park has an existing State/National Register of Historic Places determination of eligibility (2017) as a historic district in the areas of recreation, architecture, and landscape architecture. To ensure that such resources are not adversely impacted, any projects or activities, except for the

exempt activities noted below, that require modification to structures or ground disturbance will require review by State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) under Section 14.09 of New York’s Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law.

Based on consultation with SHPO, it has been determined that some golf course maintenance activities are exempt from the Section 14.09 review requirement (see Appendix P). The golf course maintenance activities that are **exempt** from SHPO review under Section 14.09 are as follows:

- Mowing of greens, collars, tees, approaches, fairways, and roughs
- Raking/smoothing sand traps and bunkers
- Spraying fertilizers and plant protectants
- String-trimming around trees, signs, sand traps, buildings, and other course features
- Changing hole locations within existing greens
- Edging sand bunkers
- Sod removal to re-grass a tee or other turf areas
- Aeration of greens, tees, fairways and rough
- Mowing of high rough and native areas
- Green construction within existing location
- Tee construction within existing location
- Sand bunker renovations within existing location
- Trenches less than three-feet wide
- Holes to repair sprinkler heads less than three feet in diameter
- Excavation for golf cart path construction that does not exceed six inches in depth

Adaptive reuse and/or rehabilitation of some of the Park’s cultural elements has been proposed in the Master Plan. To assure that there are no adverse impacts on cultural or historic resources, projects will be reviewed under Section 14.09 by SHPO. Actions proposed in the Master Plan that propose changes to the Park’s original elements include:

- Retrofitting the bathhouse to accommodate larger, catered events
- Rehabilitating the Bandshell, removing adjacent paved area, and creating a visual buffer from the day use area parking lot
- Redesigning and reconfiguring the day use area parking lot to improve circulation and functionality
- Making improvements to picnic shelters
- Repurposing the existing softball area as an exercise route
- Creating a multi-purpose court at the site of the former roller rink

The rehabilitation of the golf course bunkers project has already been reviewed by SHPO, and a letter stating no adverse impact upon historic or archeological resources (Cumming, 1/29/2020).

There are historic and archeological resources within the Park, including multiple structures and areas designated as sensitive archeological sites. Project locations have been chosen to avoid both structural and subsurface resources. Projects at historic structures will be for refurbishment and re-use to meet current needs while maintaining historical character and context, under the guidance of SHPO staff. All changes to historic elements will follow the Department of Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.³⁸ Any project that cannot be located away from potential subsurface resources, and is not considered an exempt activity, will receive, at a minimum, a Phase I Archeological Survey. All



The Park's original bathhouse will be retrofitted as an event facility

projects will be subject to NY State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) approval. As such, no adverse impacts to historic or archeological resources are anticipated.

The Plan proposes developing new interpretation materials that will educate visitors on the Park's history and the significance of its design. A proposed annotated bibliography will compile important documents, such as original architectural drawings and other information about park elements, providing further assurance that knowledge of important park elements will be retained.

The existing bathhouse will be renovated and retrofitted as a full-service facility sized to accommodate up to 200 people. A covered patio/pavilion area adjacent to the bathhouse will be sited within the footprint area of the former pool.

In general, when repair or alteration of a historic building or site is needed to accommodate contemporary use, any repairs or alterations should not damage or destroy materials, features, or finishes that are important in defining the building's historic character. Recognizing these elements as a physical record of their time, place, and use, in general, their modification for new uses should result in minimal changes to their defining characteristics, including their site and context, with a goal of retaining and preserving their historic character. Design modifications should avoid removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize the element. Additionally, most properties change over time, and changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right should be retained and preserved.

Alterations or modifications to these elements is subject to SHPO review prior to implementation and the guidelines below should be followed:

- Minimal changes to a property's defining characteristics should be made, and the historic character should be retained, preserving as much of the original fabric as possible.
- Changes proposed to the exterior and the interior of historic buildings, the building's site and environment and landscape features, and any attached, adjacent, or related new construction must be reviewed and approved by SHPO.

- As much as possible, building elements should be repaired rather than replaced. If an element cannot be repaired, then a replacement should be identical in appearance and material to the original, as practicable.
- If new work, or an addition, is to be made, it should be differentiated from the old while keeping with the original structure's architectural features and scale.
- Buildings and their surroundings must not be harmed during the rehabilitation process. This includes the use of harsh surface treatments or using irreversible connection methods for new additions.
- Additions that create a conjectured or false history are not to be made, though additions that have been made throughout a building's life should be preserved.

Archaeological Resources

Except for the golf course maintenance activities described here in Chapter 4 and Appendix P, any project that could result in ground disturbance and potentially affect the Park's cultural resources may require consultation with the SHPO Archaeology Unit to determine if a site-specific archaeological survey is needed. All such projects will follow the *OPRHP Intra-Agency Protocol for the Application of Section 14.09* of the NYS Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law. The majority of the projects proposed in the Master Plan may require review under Section 14.09 for historic and/or archeological resource considerations.

Agricultural Resources

Portions of the Freedom Road Area are currently and previously under agricultural use. In the future, some or all of that area may be allowed to revert to grassland, allow for successional growth, or other similar ecosystem changes. The disc golf course may be developed in this area with minimal improvements needed.

Scenic Resources

Implementation of the Master Plan will not result in any significant adverse impacts to scenic resources, and recommendations in the Plan will help to protect the Park's scenic resources and vistas. The Plan also recommends continued monitoring and maintenance of current, as well as to-be-identified, scenic vistas throughout the Park, following Agency policy. Projects proposed in the Park will not have any significant effect on the view of the Park from off site.

Open Space and Recreation

There will only be temporary, minor adverse impacts to open space from implementation of the Master Plan; this will occur during construction projects where the project sites are temporarily closed off to public access. Once completed, public access will be restored. If acquisition recommendations are implemented, the impact will be positive, adding open space acreage and improving wildlife habitat in an area with increasing development pressure.

The 790 acres of public parkland at James Baird are an important piece of the county and region's open space system. The Park provides significant open space that will continue to be protected under the Master Plan. OPRHP will evaluate and consider acquisition of fee, title, or easements on adjacent open space areas as they become available. It will also monitor any development proposals that may affect the quality of its scenic and open space resources.

Implementation of the Master Plan will result in significant, beneficial improvements to many aspects of the Park's recreational facilities. While current recreational opportunities at Baird will remain available, a

variety of new and improved recreation facilities and visitor amenities are proposed in the Plan. These include new accessible pedestrian pathways, a new exercise-themed trail (see Appendix H, *Proposed Exercise Trail Concept Plan*), upgrades to the Park's golf course and driving range, and basketball and sand volleyball courts. Two new sand volleyball courts are planned (see Appendix Q, *Sand Volleyball Court Location Options*).

Improvements are also proposed to the day-use and Clubhouse parking lots. A disc golf course is proposed in the Freedom Road Area. The route will be sited to avoid environmentally sensitive areas. Required infrastructure is minimal and minimal impacts to the site are anticipated.

Enhancements to Baird's events facilities will include a new pavilion, renovated stage/Bandshell area, and adaptive re-use of the existing bathhouse as a large-scale event facility. All improvements will follow ADA guidelines.

Improvements and additions to the trail system will increase the variety of recreation experiences for walkers, hikers, cyclists, cross-country skiers, and snowshoers. The park's trail system will continue to include existing single track foot trails while adding off-road multi-use trails which will connect the day use area with other activity areas throughout the Park.

LWCF

The Park has received funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which is administered by the National Park Service. Acceptance of this federal funding includes a requirement that these facilities remain in public outdoor recreational use in perpetuity. Any proposals for uses other than public outdoor recreation require prior approval of the National Park Service to lift the use restriction through a process known as "conversion." Actions proposed in the Master Plan will enhance the Park's facilities for public outdoor recreational use. It is not anticipated that any proposed elements will require conversion.

Circulation, Access, and Traffic

Implementing the Master Plan will improve access to Baird, with proposed new entrance designs and signage. The capacity of the existing road system was examined during the planning process, and it was determined that the roadway layout for vehicular circulation generally functions effectively. While full implementation of the plan may result in some increased visitation to the facility, and an associated potential increase in traffic, it was determined that the Park's existing roadways will accommodate the anticipated added volume. The Master Plan does not therefore significantly change traffic patterns or access, and traffic circulation will remain the same.

The planning team identified safety issues related to the Park's pedestrian circulation. Visitors regularly walk or jog along the Park's roadways, resulting in potentially hazardous conditions along the active roadways. Some commuters cross through the Park to access the Taconic State Parkway and do not always adhere to posted speed limits. The plan proposes traffic calming measures to slow traffic moving within and through the Park, as well as additional wayfinding and directional signage consistent with OPRHP wayfinding signage guidelines to improve both circulation flow and the overall visitor experience. In addition, the Plan's proposed addition of a park-wide multi-use path will separate pedestrian and vehicular traffic and provide a safer environment for pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles using the Park.

The planning team identified deficiencies in the Park's signage (i.e., directional, regulatory, traffic control), and proposes developing a comprehensive, parkwide signage plan to improve wayfinding, entry/arrival, traffic management, wildlife protection, and interpretative signage. There will be minor impacts from the installation of new signposts, and some vegetation may be removed. The signs will generally be located in areas that have been previously disturbed (e.g., along roadsides and at entrances) and will be sited in areas appropriate to historic/cultural elements at the Park. No adverse impacts to any of the Park's natural habitats or cultural resources is anticipated from their installation. Additionally, improved signage at the entrances will address safety issues that can occur when visitors miss the entrance and turn around in the driveways of nearby private residences.

Proposed redevelopment of the facility's parking lots will further improve circulation at the Park. Circulation issues at the Clubhouse occur during large events, an ongoing issue which was identified as unsafe and taxing on staff time. During these events, traffic in the parking area and associated roadways becomes congested and to maintain safe conditions, the cars need to be manually directed. Implementing the proposed re-design of the Clubhouse parking lot will result in a slight increase in the quantity of parking spaces at the facility and overflow areas will be available during times of peak capacity (see Appendix G, *Golf Clubhouse Pedestrian and Parking Site Concept*). Clearly delineated ADA-compliant parking spots, as required, will be available.

Public Health and Safety

Public health and safety are vital to park operations and an important component of OPRHP's mission. New or substantially rehabilitated facilities will be designed and constructed to meet all applicable health and safety codes. The design and rehabilitation of new or upgraded infrastructure systems, such as pedestrian facilities, comfort stations, electric, water, and sewer, where needed, will ensure public health protection at the facility.

Energy, Noise, Odor and Light

Construction of new facilities and improvements to existing facilities are likely to require increases in energy use. Those increases are anticipated to be minor and represent only an insignificant increase in energy use at the facility over existing uses. Proposed sustainable practices include upgraded utilities and LED lights to improve energy efficiency. Lighting at new or rehabilitated Park facilities will be designed to be "dark sky" friendly and to minimize impacts on adjoining properties.

Renovation projects of existing buildings will meet or exceed the state energy code by 20%. Reduced energy use in the Park contributes to the overall reduction of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions from park operations statewide. Sustainability principles and energy efficiency will be incorporated into the design of all new park buildings, especially the redeveloped maintenance facility.

No significant adverse impacts to the local community are anticipated from projects proposed in the Park. New construction or maintenance activities resulting from the Plan may temporarily increase noise at the Park and surrounding area, and there will be temporary adverse air and noise impacts (e.g., fugitive dust, noise from construction equipment and vehicles) associated with construction of proposed improvements. During construction, there will also be a temporary increase in vehicular traffic levels and related emissions. Construction and maintenance activities may also be associated with related odors such as fuel and exhaust odors.

Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

The proposed Master Plan will result in some unavoidable adverse impacts. There will be some minimal permanent loss of pervious soil surface and vegetative cover as a result of construction of the new multi-use trail, pavilions, pathways, and other proposed new facilities. This will be monitored by park staff and action will be taken, if necessary, to prevent any significant impacts from occurring.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

The planning, development, and implementation of the Master Plan, including construction of new maintenance facility elements, trails, and other new proposed infrastructure will involve the irreversible and irretrievable commitment of public resources in the form of time, labor, and materials. It will also require a commitment to the long-term operation and maintenance costs of the Park.

Growth Inducement

Implementation of the Master Plan may result in some increased recreational use of the Park. This increased recreational use will be carefully managed to support the vision and goals established to maintain the quality of the Park's important natural, cultural, and scenic resources. Increases in visitation may result in positive, on-going, economic impacts to communities surrounding the Park, in the form of business to local gas stations, restaurants, shops and convenience stores. Tourism-related expenditures for activities such as golfing, special events, and use of rental facilities can be an element in the economic vitality of localities. New recreation activities, open space with significant natural resources, and the Park's location near state and county roadways, all contribute to regional benefits.

Supplemental Environmental Review

As part of the Agency's responsibility under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR), OPRHP will review proposed implementation projects with respect to consistency with the Master Plan and EIS. Projects found by OPRHP to be consistent with the Master Plan, and where impacts were adequately addressed in the EIS and Findings Statement, can go forward without additional review under SEQR. However, portions of the Master Plan and EIS are somewhat general or conceptual. Decisions regarding the type and extent of certain actions will be dependent on the results from site-specific studies or analysis in the field. For example, the specific site designs for the maintenance facility or multi-use trail will require more detailed site analysis. The results from these site-specific evaluations may identify impacts that were not adequately addressed in the EIS. Under such a circumstance, an additional or supplemental environmental review will be required. Any proposed additional development will be subject to additional review.

To assist in this consistency evaluation, the following types of actions have been identified in 6 NYCRR Part 617 as likely to require additional review under SEQR:

- Any new actions not addressed within the EIS that do not meet the Type II categories identified in part 617;
- Any change from the preferred alternatives for natural resource protection, recreational and facility development (including trails) or other elements of the Plan that would result in significant environmental impacts;
- Any leases, easements, 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 the Master Plan and EIS; and
- Any project determined through SHPO review to have an Adverse Impact on historic resources at The Park .

Further analysis will be done to assess the final trail alignment of the new multi-use trail as well as the trail connection to the Freedom Road area. This will include coordination with the County for the road crossing. The need for additional environmental review would be evaluated based on this more site-specific planning.



Chapter 5 — Comments and Responses

James Baird State Park has a committed user base, with many nearby residents and others in the broader community having a long history of coming to the Park. Comments received on the Draft Master Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement are compiled in this chapter, along with OPRHP's responses. A list of all persons providing comments on the Plan is included at the end of this chapter.

OPRHP appreciates the time and effort that those interested in the future of Baird have invested in providing comments on the Master Plan and EIS. The types of comments that were received included requests for specific recreation amenities, questions about the future of the Park, and comments related to the impacts of elements proposed in the Plan.

Public Comment Opportunities

An initial public comment period was provided during the SEQR scoping process, beginning on February 17, 2021, when the Draft Scoping Document was issued for public review. Scoping is the process by which potentially significant adverse environmental impacts related to work proposed in the master plan are identified and possible mitigation measures are considered. This provides the public an opportunity to and to provide input on actions proposed in the Plan and to participate in identifying potential impacts from implementing the actions. The Draft Scoping Document comment period ended March 17, 2021.

An additional opportunity for the public to provide input on the Plan was during a public comment period held from December 15, 2021, to January 21, 2022. During this time, a Draft Master Plan/Draft EIS was published for public review and interested parties were able to submit comments on the content. During this comment period, residents, stakeholders, and others were also invited to attend a virtual public meeting held on January 5, 2022. At this online public meeting, the planning team provided an overview of the planning process and reviewed Master Plan highlights. Attendees had the opportunity to comment at the meeting or in writing anytime during the public comment period.

Comments received during the December 15, 2021, to January 21, 2022 comment period have been reviewed by the planning team and all substantive comments appear in this chapter. OPRHP's responses to the comments were considered for any potential impact on the Plan's content, and whether revisions were made to the final plan as a result of the comments.

Significant Changes to the Master Plan and EIS

Revisions to the Master Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), as incorporated in the Final Master Plan/Final EIS, include a description of water quality protection measures that are in place at Baird. To view this information, see the FEIS, Chapter 1 – Environmental Setting, p. 37).

General Comments of Support

A significant number of comments received during the public comment period, provided orally and in writing, expressed general support for the master plan, noted their positive experiences with the Park, and encouraged OPRHP to move forward with implementation.

Responses to Comments

The following section contains comments received from the public on the Master Plan/EIS. Comments have been categorized and are grouped together. The agency's responses to the comments are provided below each summarized comment, and references to subsequent changes incorporated into the Final Master Plan and FEIS are provided.

Natural Resources

Blanding's Turtle Habitat

Comment: *Does the work on improving the Blanding's Turtle habitats involve any interaction with Arlington High School, as they have a very active turtle tracking project and have turtle habitat at their campus adjacent to the Park?*

Response: Yes, the Park has collaborated with Arlington High School on Blanding's turtle protections, and high school science classes have had school tours of the turtle habitat restoration site (see FEIS, p. 67).

Habitat Enhancement

Comment: *As adjacent landowners, we would welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively with the Park to improve the habitat for the rare species, birds and pollinators that also live and travel through our property. We and our neighbors have successfully implemented a Bluebird nesting box program over the last 30 years that has yielded much success.*

Response: The Park has collaborated with nearby neighbors on wildlife projects in the past and is open to future collaborations that will help enhance wildlife habitat in the area. Neighbors and other visitors are always welcome to contact the Park Manager with suggestions or ideas for improving habitat.

Beaver Activity

Comment: *Our property borders the Park on two sides, and we are active Park users. Our concern is beaver activity on Park property that in the past created a temporary rise in water level, impacting our property with flooding, potential damage to a structure and tree damage, and a dramatic change in the ecology of the area. While the Park Manager was very responsive and took prompt action to curb the beaver activity, what longer term plan can be implemented to manage this issue in the future?*

Response: Heavy rains a couple of years ago impacted a wetland near the Park's driving range pond as well as some adjacent areas. OPRHP received a permit from DEC to lower the dam within the wetland, and the water level dropped quite a bit. This area is monitored several times a year to ensure the water level doesn't rise again and that there isn't any new beaver activity. Please note, however, that the wetland is state-regulated, and while beaver activity may change habitat, dead trees and wet areas benefit wildlife such as turtles, bats, redheaded woodpeckers, and other species that live in the region. Lowering water levels may also impact wildlife habitat. Trees within the wetland or in previously flooded areas within the Park are not removed if they are not a threat to developed areas.

Visual Impacts from Maintenance Center

Comment: *We are concerned about light pollution from the large Park Maintenance Area. The lights are extremely bright and not aimed or covered to prevent them from beaming onto adjoining properties. They light up the sky and the adjoining neighborhood with unwanted/unneeded light.*

Response: The lights at the maintenance center are on timers which can be adjusted. Residents are encouraged to contact the Park Manager and staff will work with neighbors to address the issue.

Comment: *The disarray and sprawl of the maintenance area is a concern.*

Response: The Master Plan proposes improvements to the Park's maintenance center which will include new and upgraded structures (see p. 75). The upgraded facility will have a more efficient layout and improved circulation. Note that there is no immediate timeline for this project, which will be implemented when funding is available.

Groundwater Protection and Spill Prevention

Comment: *I am concerned about possible leakage from the Park's former landfill site and from vehicles and stored equipment at the Maintenance Area, as well as from petroleum products. The Park and nearby properties are located over one of Dutchess County's primary aquifers and I fear a water pollution issue with my well.*

Comment: *Any planned expansion/increased activity of the Maintenance Area or on-site petroleum product storage should be evaluated with regard to impact on groundwater. Chemicals and pesticides for maintaining the golf course and park should be reviewed for safety and best practices, and test wells and soil testing should be required.*

Responses

Responses to multiple comments received on this topic are categorized by subject.

Spill Prevention: The Park is required to follow NYS DEC rules on bulk petroleum storage and US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rules for Underground Storage Tanks (USTs). Petroleum bulk storage guidelines are reviewed by a consultant every three years and spill containment kits are kept near all petroleum products. A detailed and up-to-date Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure Plan approved by the NYSDEC is in place at the Park's maintenance center. It is reviewed regularly and, if needed, amended. Note that the Plan has been updated to reflect this information, see FEIS, Chapter 1 – Environmental Setting, p. 38.

Water Quality Protection: All Park water systems are tested regularly for hazardous materials and no issues have been detected. Two county-permitted public water supply wells at the facility include one at the Park Manager's house, and one adjacent to the Clubhouse (near the golf course's 18th hole). Both are tested regularly for chemicals and other contaminants. The wells are also tested monthly for bacteria. Testing results are consistently negative for contaminants.

Most underground fuel storage tanks (UST) at the Park have been removed and surrounding areas have been tested and remediated where required. An underground diesel oil tank at Freedom Road with some leakage was removed several years ago, and full remediation of the area was completed (by the estate of the former landowner). There is one remaining UST at the Park which has all protection measures in place, including spill prevention, inspections, testing, double wall, interstitial monitoring, and a leak detection system. There are currently no active spills at the facility.

Closed Landfill Site: The park has monitoring wells for the closed landfill that are tested every year, and inspections are made monthly.

Maintenance Practices: Baird staff partners with Cornell University to implement the latest Best Management Practices and ensure that all protocols for any fertilizer and pesticide use are adhered to for golf course maintenance. Pesticides are kept in a special structure with its own built-in spill containment.

Recreation

Pickleball

Comment: *Multiple Park users expressed their appreciation for providing pickleball courts. They also identified an increasing demand for these courts and requested that the Park add more. Some Park users have experienced unreasonable wait times or have gone elsewhere because the courts are filled.*

Response: Park staff recognize that pickleball is a growing sport and in high demand. The Master Plan/FEIS has been amended to include this as a preferred alternative for implementation (see FEIS, Chapter 2 – Development of Alternatives, p. 61). Two additional pickleball courts are planned for installation in fall 2022.

The Park has no plans to implement a reservation system; however, some visitors use a private (i.e., non-Parks) reservation system that allows patrons to schedule time on Baird's pickleball courts.

Hours of Operation

Comment: *Is it possible to have lights installed on the ball courts for use later in the evening? I understand that the Park closes at dusk, but in late afternoon or on cloudy days, lights would be appreciated (for instance, by those who cannot use the courts during the day due to employment responsibilities). We would also like to see the pickleball courts open sooner than mid-April.*

Response: The Park operates on a dawn-to-dusk basis. The ball courts are in the Park's day-use area which, due to operational protocols and safety considerations, does not provide lighting for after-dark recreation use.

The Park does not have an official date in spring for opening the ball courts. They are opened based on weather conditions and safety considerations.

Trails

Comment: *The Park needs better signage for trails. Existing signs and trail map are confusing.*

Response: The Plan proposes upgraded signage throughout the Park. This will include wayfinding signs, and improved maps and blazing for trails. (See FEIS, pp. 70-71.)

Comment: *Are there any plans for trails that would take one through or around the fields, near the old house and old road entrance and around the solar area with its beautiful views?*

Response: The Master Plan proposes new trails in the Freedom Road Area that will connect to a park-wide multi-use path (see FEIS Chapter 2 – Development of Alternatives, pp. 64-66 and Appendix M, *Freedom Road Conceptual Trail Plan*, and Appendices, Figure 12, *Multi-Use Path Conceptual Alignment*).

Pedestrian Facilities

Comment: *As year-round walkers and hikers in the Park, we are encouraged by plans to create a walking path. In addition to the new path, we hope that the roadway can also be modified in a manner that would improve the walking/biking experience. Although most drivers travel at a reasonable speed and are courteous to walkers, some are not. There is a need for a pedestrian walking path along the roadway.*

Response: The Master Plan proposes developing a park-wide multi-use path that will separate pedestrian and vehicular uses. The Plan also proposes traffic calming strategies for the Park's roadways. A park-wide signage plan will clearly display park information, policies, and wayfinding (see the FEIS, Chapter 2 – Development of Alternatives, pp. 64, 70-71, and Appendices Figure 12, *Multi-Use Path Conceptual Alignment Plan*).

Freedom Road Area

Comment: *I do not think the State needs to develop the recently acquired former Tobin Farm for any more recreational use. The parcel could be leased separately to area farmers.*

Response: The Freedom Road Area of the Park will be minimally developed to offer primarily passive recreation, including walking trails, fishing access, and disc golf, all of which require little to no infrastructure. The park does not plan for any new agricultural use for the Park.

Comment: *At the Freedom Road Area there is a large population of Blanding turtles that have been monitored by NYS for years and need to be protected. A topic of concern is their protection during construction of solar panels since the array is adjacent to their nesting area.*

Response: The solar array installation at the Freedom Road Area was completed and activated in December 2021. The project was reviewed under a separate environmental review process which predates this plan. At that time, OPRHP consulted with NYSDEC regarding protection measures for Blanding's turtles. New development in this area and other sections of the Park may be subject to environmental reviews, as required.

Swimming Pool

Comment: *I was sorry to see the pool dismantled years ago and would love to see another built.*

Response: OPRHP decided to close the pool at Baird due to both rising expenses for upkeep and a decrease in demand. By the 1980s, maintenance and repairs on the pool had become costly, and demand had dropped as more homeowners in the region were installing private residential pools. OPRHP determined that the pool had reached the end of its useful life, and in 1990 it was removed and then backfilled for safety and aesthetics in 1998. The day use area will offer new activities that were selected based on current recreation trends and public demand.

Preserve Park Character

Comment: *My family has owned a dairy farm that borders Baird for 96 years. One thought is to keep the original park the way it is — golfing, hiking, walking, picnicking, restaurant, etc., since this was the way James Baird wanted it when he left it to the state. Also, a word of caution not to overdevelop the Park. Dutchess County is home to people who enjoy the rural feel of parks and nature. Suburbanizing a park with fences and signage does not fit into our community. Any work done to the Park should coexist with its current rural feel.*

Response: Most work proposed in the Master Plan consists of upgrades to existing park elements, and proposed new infrastructure is minimal. Proposed projects have been carefully considered to ensure that new elements will be designed to preserve the Park's rural character. The Plan has been developed and reviewed by OPRHP's Division for Historic Preservation to ensure new elements are in keeping with the Park's original intent and design. Future projects will undergo additional review, as required.

Historic Walls

Comment: *There are many pre-20th century stone walls in the Park from the area's agricultural days. The stone walls lend to the overall character of the neighborhood. It would be of great interest to me to see these walls surveyed and conserved.*

Response: One stone wall on the south side of Tobin Lane has been surveyed by OPRHP's Division for Historic Preservation staff. In general, however, stone walls within the Park are considered as complementary to the larger agricultural or designed landscape of a previous era, rather than as

individual historic components. Given this, OPRHP has no plans to survey or maintain stone walls at Baird. (For related content, see FEIS, p. 22).

Operations, Management & Maintenance

Park Signage

Several comments were received on the need for improved signage at the Park.

Comment: *The south facing sign is faded and not prominent enough to identify the entrance to the Park.*

Comment: *Additional signage regarding leash requirements for dogs while in the Park is also requested.*

Response: A new entrance sign at Freedom Road was installed in 2022. The Master Plan calls for improved design of park entrances that will include updated signage, plantings, and safety measures to better define the entrances and make them more visually appealing (see pp. The Plan also proposes a comprehensive signage plan for the Park, which will address upgrades to signage parkwide. Signs indicating park regulations, such as those related to leashing dogs will be included (see FEIS, Chapter 2 – Development of Alternatives, pp. 70-71).

Playground Plantings

Comment: *The Turtle playground is wonderful, but the lovely plantings have been overrun by weeds. Volunteers have done some weeding, but staff needs to be informed about plant identification and have time scheduled to remove the weeds.*

Response: This is an region-wide issue for OPRHP facilities. The Park has only two maintenance staff and they are scheduled to work on this area as they are available. Volunteers have been helpful, but during the growing season these areas require weeding on a weekly basis and sufficient staff is not available to accommodate that. Some parks in the region have volunteers doing much of this type of work. This offers an opportunity for park users to be involved. Many OPRHP facilities have organized “friends” groups that support the Park through volunteer activities. Anyone interested in forming a Friends group for Baird should contact the Park Manager.

Agricultural Use of Park

Comment: *We are concerned about current and future agricultural use of this area. Our property borders the Park east of Freedom Road on both its northern and western boundaries. Although we support local agriculture and farmers, we are concerned about the use of any agricultural chemicals, fertilizers or pesticides that could enter our or our neighbors’ wells/drinking water. Our well is +/-50 feet from the Park’s property line. We are concerned that (as was stated) the agriculture use will continue indefinitely. How much longer will agriculture be active on the east side of the Freedom Road property? What assurances can you provide to neighbors that the state/park will not allow any chemical usage that could pose a health risk to humans and wildlife?*

Response: Farming on Park property will continue with the current license agreement, which is renewed annually. Once the existing agricultural lease is no longer active, the Park will no longer be offering any lands for agriculture use. Agriculture within the Park will be phased out and the land will be allowed to revert to meadow to improve regional wildlife habitat.

The agricultural agreement follows [OPRHP policy](#), which requires the elimination or minimized use of pesticides (as used in this policy, “pesticides” means pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, rodenticides), and any other chemicals or substances intended to prevent or eradicate unwanted pests or weeds).

Funding for Master Plan Implementation

Comment: *In the virtual public meeting you mentioned funding limitations related to implementation of the master plan. How far short of ideal is your current funding?*

Response: Budget specifics are not developed for a master plan. The plan creates a path, a vision, and direction for a facility over the next 10 to 15 years. To implement all proposed actions will entail large expenditures over time. The plan helps inform future budget decisions and offers flexibility as to how projects are implemented, depending on regional priorities which may change over time. Priority actions are identified in the Plan, which the region and state will use to determine which projects to move forward on as funding becomes available (see FEIS, pp. 3-6, *Table of Priority Actions*).

Property Acquisition

Comment: *The plan mentions future property acquisitions. An advantageous acquisition would be the purchase of a large farm presently on sale that adjoins the Freedom road area on the northeast corner. Once this land is sold and developed, the state will never again have this opportunity. All the neighbors would support this acquisition.*

Response: Parks follows the guidelines for acquisition outlined in the [Open Space Conservation Plan](#) (current edition, 2016). The agency pursues properties from willing sellers that meet the region's property acquisition goals. The property mentioned above is being evaluated for acquisition.

Comment: *By purchasing the large farm property [mentioned above], Freedom Road could be rerouted to eliminate two deadly curves which have been the site of many accidents and fatalities. This would also allow Freedom Road to run around the Park and not through it.*

Response: Freedom Road (CR 47) is under Dutchess County's jurisdiction. Parks is coordinating with County staff to evaluate options for safe visitor access to the Freedom Road Area.

Comment: *The plan does not address how will Freedom Road be crossed by Park users. High speed traffic and large trucks create a dangerous situation for pedestrians trying to cross this road to access the newly acquired park property.*

Response: Parks is working with Dutchess County staff to determine the feasibility of providing a pedestrian crossing point on Freedom Road. Optimally, the multi-use path proposed in this Plan would connect with trails proposed in the Freedom Road Area, linking these sections of the Park.

Comment: *Traffic on Freedom Road could increase upon park renovation. There have been several accidents in the vicinity of the Park entrance in the past and bus traffic is significant. Do not create additional entrances off Freedom Road. Instead consider adding a turning lane at the Park entrance.*

Response: It is not anticipated that actions proposed in the Master Plan will generate significantly more traffic to the Park than previously seen. The Freedom Road Area will have limited parking and is not anticipated to generate significant numbers of visitors or to increase traffic volumes. No additional entrances to the Park are proposed along Freedom Road. Visitors currently access this part of the Park via an existing driveway.

Maintenance

Comment: *We share a Park boundary of about 1000 feet along the Freedom Road (east) portion of the Park. The majority of the boundary borders agricultural land and the remainder is wooded. The entire boundary is defined by original stone walls. There has been no maintenance of the Park side of this boundary since 1990, when we purchased our property. The result has been a proliferation of nuisance*

plants and trees that cover the stone walls, undermines their integrity, and creates a barrier for their maintenance. This also creates a “spillover” of vegetation to our side of the boundary. We would welcome a plan for periodic cutting along this border and maintenance of the stone walls for mutual benefit.

Response: This portion of the Park is primarily a natural area, which Park staff does not generally maintain. Any safety issues should be brought to the attention of the Park Manager and staff will work with you to address any concerns.

Park Manager’s House

Comment: *Why build a new Park Manager's house? The current one is old but charming. What would happen to it?*

Response: The Park Manager’s house does not provide appropriate accommodation for staff members with a family. The existing house will be retained, updated, and will continue to be used by the Park either as staff housing or for other purposes, to be determined.

Park Fees

Comment: *Fees established for any new recreational facilities should be kept to a minimum so that all residents can enjoy the entire park.*

Response: Parks recognizes the importance of keeping its facilities affordable. In general, policies guiding the implementation and collection of fees are established on a statewide basis and not at the park level. Once completed, proposed new facilities at Baird, such as an events pavilion in the day-use area, will be available for a rental fee.

Public Input Opportunities

Comment: *If there is consideration given to the establishment of a Park friends or advisory committee, we would be interested in participating.*

Response: One of the recommendations in the plan is to encourage the development of partnerships. A Friends Group could be a valuable resource for the Park. An advocacy group, Parks and Trails New York (PTNY), offers expertise and funding for the formation and development of Friends Group organizations. Information can be found [here: https://www.ptny.org/our-work/support/nys-park-friends/resource-kit](https://www.ptny.org/our-work/support/nys-park-friends/resource-kit). Individuals interested in forming a Friends Group should also reach out to the Park manager about their interest.



Persons/Organizations who Provided Comments (alphabetically by last name)

- | | |
|------------------|------------------------|
| David Auffarth | Joanne Pinello Kaley |
| Kevin Barnes | Regina Klein |
| Valerie Carlisle | Stephen J. Kondas, Jr. |
| John Colacchio | Nancy Michaelis |
| Sharon Fleury | Beth C. Mostransky |
| Paul Horstmann | Terry Novicki |
| Nick Joseph | Sue Sciacca |
| Brian Kaley | Ellen Waggener |

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P. 16 – Floating liverwort (*Ricciocarpus natans*) (Christian Fischer, CC BY-SA 3.0), <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10415438>; Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) (CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=92468888>)

P. 18 – Jefferson Salamander Complex, Google Sites. Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/fieldamphibiansofwilton101/jefferson-salamander-complex>

P. 20 – Coopers Hawk Rhododendrites, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cooper%27s_hawk_in_Prospect_Park_\(22513\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cooper%27s_hawk_in_Prospect_Park_(22513).jpg)

P. 24 – Taconic State Parkway, Poughkeepsie, Dutchess County, NY. Library of Congress. Material in these collections is generally considered to be in the public domain. Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/resource/hhh.ny1847.sheet/?sp=3>

P. 35 – Matthew Conroy, AllTrails. Retrieved from <https://www.alltrails.com/parks/us/new-york/james-baird-state-park>

P. 65 – Hike the Hudson. Retrieved from <https://hikethehudsonvalley.com/hikes/baird-park/>

P. 79 – James Baird State Park (Facebook page). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/JamesBairdSP/photos/126800936321974>



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