



New York State
Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

CAROL ASH
Commissioner

DAVID A. PATERSON
Governor

AGENCY DECISION
AND
STATEMENT OF FINDINGS

**Adoption of a Master Plan for Minnewaska State Park Preserve
Designation of a Park Preserve
Designation of a Bird Conservation Area
Designation of a Natural Heritage Area**

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and the Palisades Interstate Park Commission have prepared a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Final Master Plan, dated June 2, 2010, for Minnewaska State Park Preserve.

By the authority vested in us in State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation Law, we do hereby adopt the Final Master Plan for Minnewaska State Park Preserve. We also designate all areas of the park a Park Preserve and portions of the park, as detailed in the Master Plan, Bird Conservation and Natural Heritage Areas.

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

Carol Ash
Commissioner
NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation

Jim Hall
Executive Director
Palisades Interstate Park Commission

June 28, 10
Date

6/30/10
Date

SEQR FINDINGS STATEMENT

Minnewaska State Park Preserve Master Plan

June 15, 2010

Pursuant to Article 8 (State Environmental Quality Review Act - SEQRA) of the Environmental Conservation Law and 6 NYCRR Part 617, the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) and the palisades Interstate Park Commission (PIPC), as lead co-agencies, makes the following findings.

Title of the Action:

Adoption and Implementation of a Master Plan for Minnewaska State Park Preserve

Location:

Minnewaska State Park Preserve is located in the Towns of Warwarsing, Gardiner, Rochester, and Shawangunk in Ulster County.

Description of the Action:

The master plan for Minnewaska State Park Preserve provides long term guidance for the development and management of the Park Preserve and protection of its resources as summarized below.

Date of Completion of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS): June 2, 2010

Findings:

1. These findings consider the relevant environmental impacts, facts and conclusions disclosed in the final EIS; weigh and balance relevant environmental impacts with social, economic and other considerations; provide a rationale for the agency's decision; certify that the requirements of 6 NYCRR Part 617 have been met; and certify that consistent with social, economic and other essential considerations from among the reasonable alternatives available, the action is one which avoids or minimizes adverse environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable, and that included within the plan are those mitigation measures that will avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable.
2. The Final Plan was subject to a complete Environmental Impact Statement process including a public information meeting and a public hearing.
3. The Final Environmental Impact Statement contains a chapter on responses to comments on the Draft EIS. This chapter contains clarification of issues raised during the review of

the Draft EIS. It also provides information that has been used in the preparation of the Final Plan.

4. The Park Preserve is located in the Towns of Warwarsing, Gardiner, Rochester, and Shawangunk within the Palisades Park Region. The Park Preserve consists of over 21,000 acres of forested lands and lakes located along the Shawangunk Mountain Range (the Shawangunks) in Ulster County.
5. The general topography of the Park Preserve is a combination of vertical cliff faces, steep talus slopes and a relatively flat ridge top. The soils are generally acidic, shallow and nutrient poor. Shale mines have historically been located in the Park Preserve and provide surfacing material for the carriage road system.
6. The Park Preserve contains significant water resources. Three high-elevation sky lakes": Lake Minnewaska, Lake Awosting, and Mud Pond (Haseco Lake) are located along the ridge top. Lake Maratanza is further along the Ridge in Sam's Point Preserve; a fourth water-body, Tillson Lake is located at a lower elevation. Four major streams flow northward down the ridge and into the Rondout Creek: Peter's Kill, Stony Kill, Sanders Kill, and Coxing Kill. Several wetlands, wetland bogs and vernal pools are found throughout the Park Preserve.
7. Thirty two distinct natural community types occur within the Park Preserve, twelve of which are considered "Significant Natural Communities" by the New York Natural Heritage Program. Talus slope woodland, high bush blueberry bog thicket, dwarf shrub bog, pitch pine-oak heath rocky summits and vernal pools are the largest of these communities. The largest tract of chestnut oak forest in New York State is the dominant forest type within the Park Preserve. The Park Preserve has at least twenty-eight populations of nine rare animals including the timber rattlesnake and the peregrine falcon. The Park Preserve also contains forty-eight rare plant populations, representing nineteen species including state threatened mountain spleenwort and Appalachian sandwort.
8. The Park Preserve provides outstanding bird habitat and is a significant resting point for migratory birds. Many of the bird species supported by the forests are listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Portions of the Park Preserve are designated as both an Important Bird Area by Audubon NY and as a Bird Conservation Area by OPRHP and PIPC.
9. Invasive species are a significant threat to the Park Preserve's natural resources. An Invasive Species Management Plan for the Park Preserve was adopted by OPRHP and PIPC in 2008. This Plan guides ongoing efforts by staff and volunteers to monitor and control invasive species.

10. The Park Preserve contains important historic and archeological resources, including over 35 miles of historic carriage roads. Other historic structures remaining in the Park Preserve include the stable, power house, and Aumick farmstead.
11. The Park Preserve is open year round and provides a variety of recreational activities including picnicking, hiking, cycling and horseback riding. There are two swimming beaches one at Lake Minnewaska and one at Lake Awosting. SCUBA diving and distance swimming are allowed by permit in Lake Minnewaska. Rock climbing and bouldering are allowed in the Peter's Kill climbing area. Deer hunting is allowed in designated areas during the State designated season. Winter uses include cross country skiing and snow shoeing.
12. In 1993 OPRHP and PIPC adopted a Master Plan for Minnewaska and the Park was designated a Park Preserve under Article 20 of NYS Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law.
13. The Plan identifies a vision statement and goals for the Park. The vision statement is: Minnewaska State Park Preserve will be a place for the public to visit, enjoy and appreciate the natural, cultural and physical resources and the recreational opportunities that the Park offers. The overall goal of the Plan is: to preserve and protect the natural, cultural and physical resources of Minnewaska State Park Preserve while making available to the public compatible recreational and educational opportunities.
14. The Plan presents a series of "preferred alternatives" for future development and operation of the Park Preserve. Cumulatively, the actions described in the Plan present the long-term vision for the rehabilitation and enhancement of public use facilities and the protection and preservation of the cultural and natural resources at the Park Preserve.
15. Two primary alternatives were identified in the Plan: (1) the Preferred Alternative, and (2) the Status Quo Alternative. The Status Quo Alternative consists of the current facilities, programs and practices. The Preferred Alternative combines the preferred options for recreation development and resource protection into one that best meets the goals for the Park. This alternative represents the Final Master Plan.
16. The Master Plan considers the historic, cultural, natural and recreational resources of the Park and responds to the needs and safety of Park patrons, protection of natural, cultural and scenic resources and the principles of sustainability. It details the proposed designations, recreation and stewardship elements. The Plan also recognizes that the initiation of each specific action will be determined by the level of funding available to OPRHP in future years.
 - The 2009 Minnewaska State Park Preserve Master Plan remains consistent with the planning efforts, goals and direction of both the 1971 and the 1993 Master Plans. The Park Preserve will remain a day use facility with a strong focus on natural resources.

- All new lands added to the Park Preserve since the 1993 Plan will be designated a Park Preserve under Article 20 of PRHPL. The purpose of such a designation is to conserve and protect Park lands containing wildlife, flora, scenic, historic and archeological sites that are unique and rare in New York State.
- The NYS Bird Conservation Area (BCA) Program was created by state law in 1997. It calls for the dedication of state-owned lands as BCA's. Most of the Park Preserve's land was evaluated and designated a BCA in 2006. The BCA will be expanded to include all land acquired after 2006 that is consistent with BCA designation criteria.
- Article 5 - Title 11 - Section 0539 of the NYS Environmental Conservation Law calls for the dedication of state-owned lands with rare species and/or significant natural communities as Natural Heritage Areas. These lands must meet certain criteria identified within the law. The entire Park Preserve with the exception of the Tillson Lake area will be designated as a Natural Heritage Area.
- The Plan provides for the protection of the significant natural resources of the Park Preserve through several means, including continuation of our cooperative work with Ridge partners and the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership (SRBP).
- A Ridge-wide fire management plan is being developed by the SRBP to reduce the threat of wildfires and enhance the biodiversity. OPRHP is participating in preparation of this Plan. Consistent with OPRHP's fire management policy, this ridge-wide plan will serve as a basis for specific fire management within the Park Preserve.
- Invasive species management is important to protecting the biodiversity of the Park Preserve. Work will be guided by the Park Preserve's Invasive Species Management Plan, with the goal of maintaining a large "weed free" Invasive Species Prevention Zone in the Park Preserve.
- OPRHP has been working with Ridge partners on evaluating deer populations to determine the effects deer are having on the biodiversity on the Ridge and in the Park Preserve. Management strategies will be developed and implemented to address this issue.
- OPRHP will continue to consider protection of open space and acquisition of land from willing sellers that will protect and buffer the resources of the Park Preserve.
- Education and interpretation opportunities will be enhanced through an increased programming effort, interpretive kiosks and the creation of a Visitor Center. Education and interpretation will focus on natural and cultural history as well as sustainability.
- The new Visitor Center and Park Preserve Office will overlook Lake Minnewaska. The

structure's design will use current sustainable design practices and will meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Certification wherever possible. This structure will provide greater educational opportunities and an enhanced visitor experience, while improving the operation of the Park Preserve.

- Both the Lake Minnewaska and Awosting Parking areas will be improved to better configure the areas. At the SR 44/55 entrance, a new and relocated gatehouse, associated roads and pedestrian carriage road will improve traffic safety and reduce the stacking of vehicles on the highway. Several small, new or expanded Parking areas at trailheads, such as a new area proposed off Shaft 2A Road, will improve Parking and access.
- Recreation facilities will be improved. A picnic area will replace the former Wildmere Parking. New restrooms and a new water supply system will be built. The Tillson Lake Parking area will be improved and a gravel boat launch built to provide better access for fishing and boating.
- A Trail Plan was developed for the Park Preserve that will guide improvements to the extensive trail and carriage road system. The system will continue to accommodate a variety of uses including walking/hiking, biking, equestrian, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. The Plan includes several new trails and trail reroutes that will provide expanded visitor access to the Park Preserve. New trail opportunities in the former Awosting Reserve area include the creation of a sustainable single track mountain bike trail system and the designation of the existing woods roads as hiking and equestrian trails.
- The historic carriage road system will remain essentially the same. OPRHP and the Mohonk Preserve, which has a similar and adjoining network of historic carriage roads, are developing a plan for restoration of these roads. A detailed report is being prepared which will provide guidelines and standards for construction and maintenance and will assist the staff in prioritizing the restoration work.
- Climbing and bouldering opportunities will be expanded within the Dickie Barre area adjacent to the Peter's Kill climbing area. During the public review period for the Draft Plan/DEIS, OPRHP received a significant number of comments requested additional climbing access to the Park Preserve. It was agreed that this will be considered and a climbing management plan will be created for the Park Preserve to determine suitable locations for additional climbing opportunities.
- Park operations, maintenance and infrastructure will be improved and actions taken will increase efficiency. Among these are moving Park Preserve offices to more appropriate accommodations and the rehabilitation and improvement of the existing maintenance facility.

- Partnerships with the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership, The Nature Conservancy, the Mohonk Preserve and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation are important to the Park Preserve and will continue. Biodiversity management strategies are consistent with the ridge wide efforts in the areas of deer management, fire management, invasive species management and the continued monitoring of carrying capacities.

17. Impacts associated with the implementation of the Plan and mitigation measures identified are as follows:

- The Plan will result in substantial and beneficial recreation and open space improvements including such items as expanded picnic areas, additional climbing and bouldering opportunities within the Dickie Barre area adjacent to the Peter's Kill climbing area, and an expanded trail network as described in the Trails Plan.
- The acquisition of land from willing sellers incorporated with open space protection will provide the dual benefits of open space and resource protection.
- The Master Plan will not significantly change traffic patterns or vehicular access locations to the Park Preserve. The main entrance will continue in its present location off of Route 44/55. The significant safety improvements that are proposed for the entrance area are very similar to those proposed in the 1993 Plan. Improvements address safety concerns related to the stacking of vehicles on the highway awaiting entrance to the Park Preserve. Improvements to the existing Awosting and Lake Minnewaska Parking lots are consistent with what was proposed in the 1993 Plan.
- There will be some physical change to the land, particularly where new recreation facilities and trails will be constructed or segments of trails relocated. Most new recreation facilities will be located in areas that were previously disturbed. The design guidelines incorporated into the Plan also provide direction for environmentally sensitive design and construction of new and renovated facilities and landscape.
- Protection of the water resources in the Park Preserve is a major goal of this Plan and new development and site restoration proposed has been sited so as to assure this. Erosion control and storm water management techniques will be incorporated into the detailed site designs for these areas. New potable water and wastewater systems will be designed with consultation and approval of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and NYS Department of Health and design will take into account problems associated with previous systems. Improvements to carriage roads and trails will follow established guidance in such areas as drainage and culvert design. Protection of the wetlands and vernal pools is important to the biodiversity of the Park Preserve and monitoring will continue, particularly of those wetlands near trails or carriage roads. Monitoring of the water quality of Lakes Minnewaska and Awosting will continue in partnership with the Mohonk Preserve

and DEC. OPRHP will also work with our partners regarding the non- native shiner species recently observed in Lake Minnewaska. Invasive species will be identified and removed quickly to avoid spread and impairment of habitat.

- Overall, the Plan will have a positive impact on the significant natural resources within the Park Preserve. The importance of these resources is acknowledged by the Park Preserve and BCA designations being extended to include all the newly acquired lands as well as designation of the Park Preserve as a Natural Heritage Area. In addition, OPRHP and PIPC will continue working with ridge-wide partners on three major issues affecting natural resources and biodiversity on the Ridge: deer management, fire management and invasive species control. The Trails Plan incorporates measures to inventory and review proposed new trail routes to assure that their use does not result in any significant adverse impacts. The Palmaghatt Ravine will remain undeveloped with no trails as a protection measure for the old growth forest. Rare plants and animals will be monitored to identify potential impacts and protective measures that need to be taken.
 - The Plan recognizes and protects the important historic and cultural resources within the Park Preserve. The carriage road restoration plan is being developed with input from OPRHP's Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau (FSB) and the guidance and standards developed will be consistent and protective of the historic resources. Many of the Park Preserve's other historic structures require further investigation and consultation with FSB. The Plan proposes to restore many of the scenic viewing points for hikers and replacing several of the gazebos. In addition, any project that could result in ground disturbance and thus potentially affect the cultural resources of the Park Preserve will be reviewed by FSB.
 - Significant scenic resources in the Park Preserve will be protected and maintained through the actions recommended in the Plan.
 - Public health and safety are an important element in Park operations and facility. Design and development of the Park Preserve will meet all applicable health and safety codes as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act.
18. The Plan describes the process for supplemental environmental review. The Plan also provides for guidance as to when additional environmental review may be required and identifies the types of actions that are likely to require additional review. These include new actions not addressed within the Master Plan that are not Type II actions within Part 617, any change from the preferred alternative for recreational and facility elements of the Plan that would result in significant adverse environmental impacts and any leases, easements or other agreements between OPRHP and other entities that would affect resources in a manner that is not adequately addressed in the Master Plan.