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Division of Lands and Forests

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# Canisteo River Basin Unit Management Plan

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June 2003

New York State  
Department of Environmental Conservation

# **Canisteo River Basin Unit Management Plan**

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**June, 2003**

**NYS Department of Environmental Conservation  
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# **PREFACE**

It is the policy of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to manage state lands for multiple benefits to serve the people of New York State. This Unit Management Plan is the first step in carrying out that policy. The plan has been developed to address management activities on this unit for the next 10 year period, with a review due in 5 years. Some management recommendations may extend beyond the 10 year period.

Factors such as available funds, wood product markets, and forest health problems may necessitate deviations from the scheduled management activities.

## **THE UNIT MANAGEMENT PLANNING PROCESS**

New York State's management policy for public lands follow a multiple use concept established by New York's Environmental Conservation Law. This allows for diverse enjoyment of state lands by the people of the state. Multiple use management addresses all of the demands placed on these lands: watershed management, timber management, wildlife management, rare plant and community protection, recreational use, and aesthetic appreciation.

In this plan, an initial resource inventory and other information is provided, followed by an assessment of existing and anticipated uses and demands. This information is used to set goals and management objectives. Management actions tables provide an estimated cost and timetable for accomplishing these objectives.

# Table of Contents

PREFACE .....	ii
THE UNIT MANAGEMENT PLANNING PROCESS .....	ii
CANISTEO RIVER BASIN UNIT LOCATION MAP .....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	2
HISTORY OF STATE FORESTS AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS .....	2
HISTORY OF CANISTEO RIVER BASIN UNIT MANAGEMENT AREA .....	3
STATE FORESTS .....	3
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS .....	3
INFORMATION ON THE UNIT .....	4
IDENTIFICATION .....	4
GEOGRAPHY .....	4
CLIMATE .....	5
ADJACENT LAND - EXISTING USES .....	6
GEOLOGY .....	6
SURFACE GEOLOGY .....	6
SOILS .....	6
BEDROCK GEOLOGY .....	8
MINERAL RESOURCES .....	9
OIL AND GAS .....	9
MINING .....	10
VEGETATIVE TYPES AND STAGES .....	11
WILDLIFE AND WILDLIFE HABITAT .....	11
WETLANDS AND WATER RESOURCES .....	12
AQUIFERS .....	12
WETLANDS .....	12
STREAMS .....	12
PONDED WATERS .....	12
SIGNIFICANT PLANTS AND PLANT COMMUNITIES .....	13
ROADS .....	13
RECREATION .....	14
HUNTING .....	14
FISHING .....	15
SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS .....	15
HIKING TRAILS .....	15
ATV TRAILS / PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ACCESS .....	15
ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES .....	15
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE PROTECTION .....	15
ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH .....	16
HISTORIC SITES .....	16
NEEDS, ISSUES AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS .....	17
FUNDING .....	17
CURRENT KNOWN ILLEGAL USE .....	18

SUMMARY OF IDENTIFIED ISSUES .....	18
ACCESS .....	18
TIMBER MANAGEMENT .....	18
WATER RESOURCES .....	19
WILDLIFE AND WILDLIFE HABITAT .....	19
FISH MANAGEMENT .....	19
PUBLIC RECREATION AND USE .....	19
OIL AND GAS LEASING .....	19
COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS .....	20
OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION .....	20
AESTHETICS .....	20
CULTURAL RESOURCES AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION .....	21
POLICY CONSIDERATIONS .....	21
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION LAW (ECL) .....	21
NEW YORK CODE RULES AND REGULATIONS (6NYCRR) .....	21
DEPARTMENT POLICIES .....	21
FEDERAL LAW .....	22
 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES .....	 23
VISION .....	23
ACCESS .....	23
TIMBER AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT .....	24
WATERSHED AND WETLANDS PROTECTION .....	26
FISH AND WILDLIFE AND HABITAT .....	27
PUBLIC RECREATION AND USE .....	29
UNIT MAINTENANCE AND FACILITIES MANAGEMENT .....	32
LAND ACQUISITION .....	33
MINERAL RESOURCES .....	34
 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT .....	 38
INITIAL MAILING .....	38
SECOND MAILING .....	38
PUBLIC MEETING .....	38
FINAL NOTICE .....	38
 MANAGEMENT ACTIONS SUMMARY .....	 39
 APPENDICES .....	 48
APPENDIX A : ANIMALS ON CANISTEO RIVER BASIN UNIT .....	48
BIRDS .....	48
MAMMALS .....	53
REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS .....	55
RESIDENT FISH SPECIES .....	57
APPENDIX B : PUBLIC COMMENT .....	58
PUBLIC MEETING RESPONSES .....	58
INITIAL MAILING RESPONSES .....	61
APPENDIX C : TAXES .....	65
APPENDIX D : FACILITIES .....	66
APPENDIX E : TIMBER MANAGEMENT .....	68
STANDS DESIGNATED PROTECTION MANAGEMENT .....	68

STANDS DESIGNATED EVEN AGED .....	69
STANDS DESIGNATED UNEVEN AGED .....	71
STANDS DESIGNATED PLANTATION MANAGEMENT .....	72
STANDS DESIGNATED OPEN LAND .....	73
STANDS DESIGNATED SEEDLING / SAPLING .....	73
APPENDIX F : WATER RESOURCES .....	75
STREAMS .....	75
PONDED WATERS .....	75
APPENDIX G: MAPS .....	76
ACCESS / LOCATION AND STREAMS, PONDS AND WETLANDS .....	76
RECOMMENDED EXCLUSIONS FROM SURFACE OCCUPANCY .....	80
APPENDIX H: WILDLIFE HARVEST .....	84
BLACK BEAR HARVEST .....	84
1998-99 SUMMARY OF LICENSE SALES FOR STEUBEN COUNTY .....	84
Historical Deer Harvest in the Towns within the Canisteo River Basin .....	84
APPENDIX I: SEQR NEGATIVE DECLARATION .....	85
GLOSSARY .....	89

## List of Tables and Figures

ACREAGE OF STATE LAND .....	4
TOWNS OF THE CANISTEO RIVER BASIN UNIT .....	5
SURFACE GEOLOGIC MATERIAL FOR THE INDIVIDUAL UNITS .....	7
VEGETATIVE TYPES AND STAGES .....	11
MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS FOR ACCESS .....	23
MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS FOR VEGETATION .....	26
MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS FOR WATERSHED AND WETLANDS .....	27
MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS FOR WILDLIFE .....	29
MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS FOR RECREATION .....	31
MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS FOR MAINTENANCE AND FACILITIES .....	33
MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS FOR LAND ACQUISITION .....	33
MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS FOR HISTORICAL SITES .....	37
MANAGEMENT ACTIONS SUMMARY .....	39



GEORGE E. PATAKI  
GOVERNOR

ERIN M. CROTTY  
COMMISSIONER

STATE OF NEW YORK  
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION  
ALBANY, NEW YORK, 12233-1010

MEMORANDUM

**TO:** The Record

**SUBJECT:** Canisteo River Basin Unit Management Plan

**DATE:** JUL 0 2 2003

The unit management plan for the Canisteo River Basin State Forest unit has been completed. The Plan is consistent with Department policy and procedure, involved public participation and is consistent with the Environmental Conservation Law, Rules and Regulations. The plan includes management objectives for a ten year period and is hereby approved and adopted.

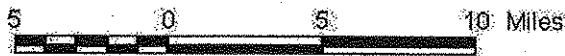
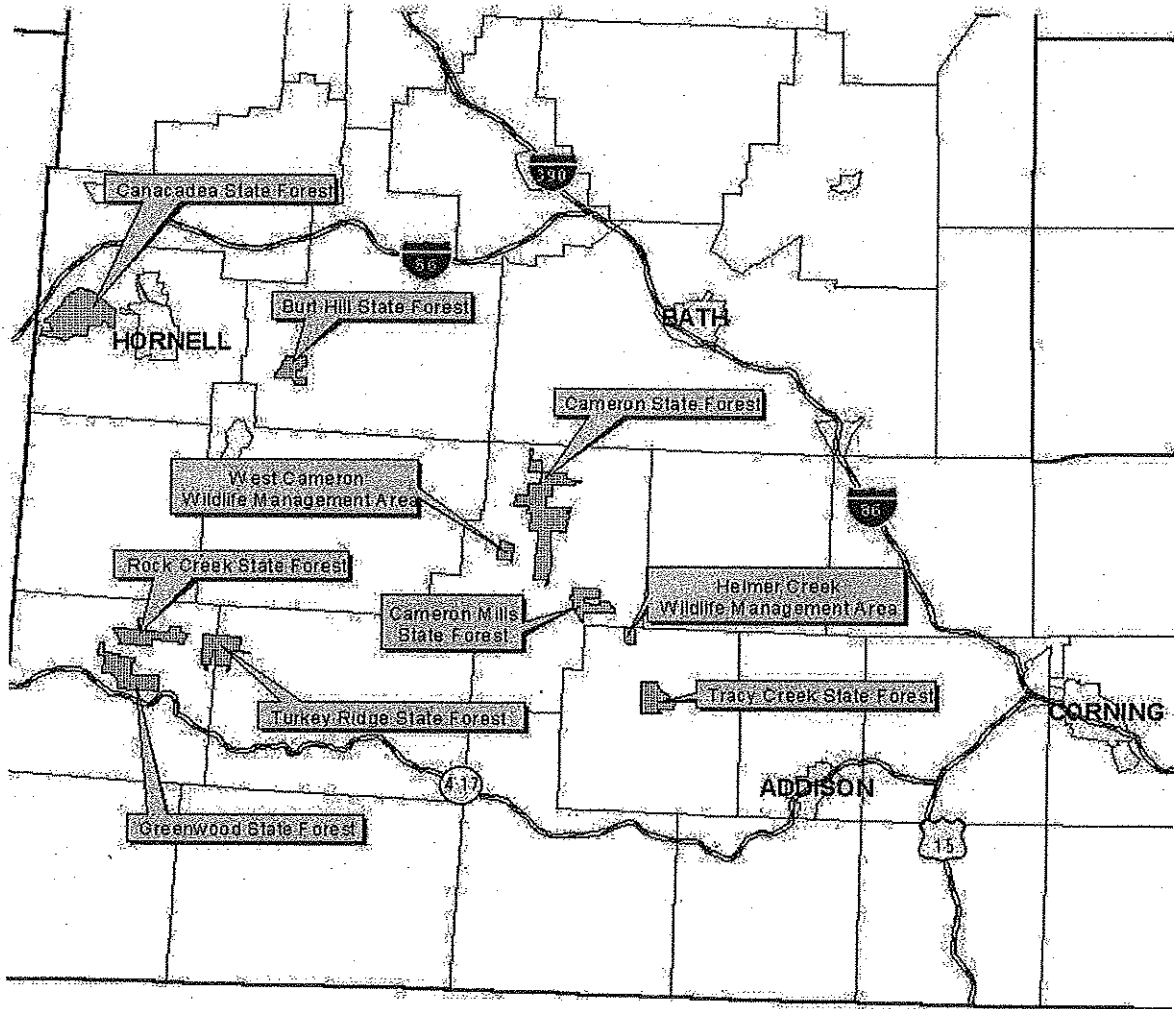
A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Erin M. Crotty".

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Erin M. Crotty, Commissioner



# CANISTEO RIVER BASIN UNIT LOCATION MAP



State Land  
Major Road



June 2001

# INTRODUCTION

## HISTORY OF STATE FORESTS AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

Forest lands outside the Adirondack and Catskill regions owe their present character, in large part, to the impact of pioneer settlement. Following the close of the Revolutionary War, increased pressure for land encouraged westward expansion. Up to 91% of New York woodlands were cleared for cultivation and forage.

Early farming efforts met with limited success. As the less fertile soils proved unproductive, they were abandoned, and settlement was attempted elsewhere. The stage of succession was set and new forests of young saplings reoccupied the ground once cleared.

The State Reforestation Law of 1929 and the Hewitt Amendment of 1931 set forth the legislation which authorized the Conservation Department to acquire land by gift or purchase for reforestation purposes. These state forests consisting of not less than 500 acres of contiguous land, were to be forever devoted to "reforestation and the establishment and maintenance thereon of forests for watershed protection, the production of timber, and for recreation and kindred purposes". This broad program is presently authorized under Article 9, Title 5, of the NYS Environmental Conservation Law.

In 1930, Forest Districts were established, and the tasks of land acquisition and reforestation were started. In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was begun. Thousands of young men were assigned to plant millions of trees on the newly acquired state forests. In addition to

tree planting, these men were engaged in road and trail building, erosion control, watershed restoration, forest protection, and other projects.

During the war years of 1941-1945, little was accomplished on the reforestation areas. Plans for further planting, construction, facility maintenance, and similar tasks had to be curtailed. However, through postwar funding, conservation projects once again received needed attention.

The Park and Recreation Land Acquisition Act of 1960 and the Environmental Quality Bond Acts of 1972 and 1986 contained provisions for the acquisition of state forest lands, these lands would serve multiple purposes involving the conservation and development of natural resources, including the preservation of scenic areas, watershed protection, forestry, and recreation.

Wildlife management areas in New York, like state forests, have a varied history of acquisition. Many were gifted to the New York State by the Federal Government or other cooperating public or private organization. Some parcels were purchased with Bond Act funds or Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program funds. The latter which is commonly called the Pittman-Robertson Act is a federal fund supported by hunters from their purchase of hunting licenses, firearms and ammunition.

Today there are nearly 720,000 acres of state forests and over 200,000 acres of wildlife management areas throughout the state. The use of these lands is important to the economy and to the health and well-being of the people of the state.

# **HISTORY OF CANISTEO RIVER BASIN UNIT MANAGEMENT AREA**

## **STATE FORESTS**

The lands of the Canisteo River Basin Unit were inhabited prior to the Revolutionary War by the Seneca Indians. The Senecas were nomadic hunters and farmers. During the Revolutionary War, General John Sullivan was commissioned to open western New York Valley to people of European descent. This began a series of skirmishes between Sullivans' troops and the Senecas that eventually led to the removal of the Senecas from the valley. Many of Sullivan's soldiers, having observed the potential for agriculture from the Senecas, eventually settled in the valley and became farmers.

It is known that the upland portion of the Canisteo River Basin Unit was almost completely forested in 1779. By the late 1800's only 30% of the land area was forested, the remainder having been cleared for agriculture. The Industrial Revolution combined with soils poorly suited to long-term agriculture, began another change. By 1900, many agricultural farms in the upland areas of Steuben County were abandoned. Over time these areas reverted back to forest land. Oak/chestnut forests were dominant in Steuben County.

In 1904, a fungal disease called chestnut blight was discovered in New York, having been accidentally imported from Europe. Within 30 years, it spread across the nation and virtually eliminated the American Chestnut. Evidence of American Chestnut can still be seen in the form of stumps and sprouts from root systems of chestnut. Overhead, the holes left by the death of the chestnuts has been filled by Red Maple, White Ash, hickories, beech and oaks.

In response to the decline of agriculture and the demand that the abandoned and eroding farmlands be returned to productive activity, the New York State legislature passed the "Reforestation Law of 1929". Shortly afterwards, the nation plunged into the Great Depression, accelerating the abandonment of agricultural lands.

## **WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS**

### **West Cameron Wildlife Management Area**

The lands constituting the West Cameron Wildlife Management Area (WMA) were deeded to the State of New York in 1947 to satisfy a mortgage loan against the property. At that point the land was administered by the Office of General Services until 1980 when the property was considered for possible public sale. The Bureau of Wildlife requested a transfer of jurisdiction at that time and said transfer was completed in May 1982. An additional 4 acre parcel was subsequently purchased to provide public access to the area. The area is currently used by the public for hunting, trapping, hiking, cross-country skiing, etc.

### **Helmer Creek Wildlife Management Area**

The lands comprising the Helmer Creek Wildlife Management Area was acquired in 1993 by the United States Government, Farmers Home Administration, as a foreclosure and the land was then transferred to New York State because it provides significant habitat for a state threatened species, the timber rattlesnake. The area is open for public use and provides recreation for hunters, trappers and hikers.