STATE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY REVIEW ACT

FINAL SCOPE

Essex Chain Lake Management Complex Draft Plan/

Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)

Name of Action: Essex Chain Lakes Management Complex Revised Draft Unit Management Plan/DEIS

SEQR Status: Type 1

Lead Agency: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC)

I. Introduction

Purpose

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement ("DEIS") is being prepared pursuant to the State Environmental Quality Review Act ("SEQRA") to analyze the relevant areas of environmental concern resulting from the adoption of the Essex Chain Lakes Management Complex (ECLMC) Unit Management Plan (UMP).

This Scoping Document is intended to define the scope of information to be included in the DEIS, to be prepared in accordance with the New York State Environmental Conservation Law [ECL § 8-0101 et seq.], and its implementing regulations found in Part 617 of Title 6 of the Official Codes, Rules and Regulations (6 NYCRR Part 617).

II. Description of Proposed Project

Project Background

In February 2014, Governor Cuomo approved a State Land classification package for approximately 42,000 acres, including several tracts that have been recently added to the Forest Preserve. Approximately 19,900 acres of that area have been designated as the Essex Chain Lakes Management Complex (ECLMC). Lands within the ECLMC include the Essex Chain Lakes Primitive Area, Pine Lake Primitive Area and portions of the Blue Mountain Wild Forest Area.

To facilitate appropriate public access and use of the ECLMC prior to the adoption of a full UMP, the Department issued an Interim Access Plan on October 1, 2013, and a Stewardship Plan on December 8 2014. These two documents proposed the establishment of trails and campsites to allow certain public

uses in a manner that will have the least impact to the natural resources of the area while a full UMP is still being developed.

The Department also released a Draft UMP/DEIS for public review on June 18, 2014, but determined that revisions to the Draft UMP/DEIS were necessary to sufficiently address the issues identified during the public comment period. The March 24, 2015 Draft Scope was the first step in that process. The scoping process allows the Draft Environmental Impact Statement to be focused on the potential adverse environmental impacts of the proposed action that staff determine to be significant.

Comments received during the comment period for the Draft Scoping document are incorporated into this Final Scope for the Essex Chain Lakes Management Complex Revised Draft Unit Management Plan/DEIS (ECLMC UMP/DEIS).

This Final Scoping Document details that the ECLMC UMP/DEIS will describe the ECLMC, identify any potential significant impacts associated with the action, describe the extent and quality of information needed to address the impacts, identify mitigation measures, and describe reasonable alternatives. Discussion of the short-term impacts, long-term impacts, cumulative impacts, unavoidable adverse impacts, irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources and potential for growth inducement from implementation of the management actions that are proposed is provided.

Project Summary

The proposed action consists of the adoption of a UMP that will address management objectives concerning public access and use of the ECLMC. Currently, major topics under consideration for discussion in the UMP/EIS will include:

- Purpose and Need for the Project;
- Existing and Projected Public Use of the management area, including an assessment of the carrying capacity of the area;
- Designation/creation of recreational trails (for uses that include snowmobiling, hiking, skiing, mountain biking, equestrian, and paddling [canoe carries]);
- Designation/creation of primitive tent sites and lean-tos;
- Designation/creation of water access sites;
- Disposition of the Polaris Bridge;
- Construction of a bridge over the Cedar River;
- Description of any related proposed reclassification;
- Floatplane access to the Essex Chain Lakes;
- Designation/construction of facilities for persons with disabilities;
- Evaluation of the camping permit system for the Essex Chain Lakes;
- Evaluation and disposition of historic structures (Outer Gooley structures, Inner Gooley structures).

III. Potential Impacts and Mitigation

Background and context

The 2006 Snowmobile Plan for the Adirondack Park/Final Environmental Impact Statement which contains significant detailed information on the operational phase of multi-use trails and the potential impact on air quality, water quality, noise effects from snowmobiling on mammals/wildlife, plant communities, soils and economic impacts, and describes appropriate proposed mitigation measures (primarily Appendices E, F and H in that document) will be referenced. The 2009 Management Guidance of Snowmobile Trail Siting, Construction and Maintenance on Forest Preserve Lands in the Adirondack Park will also be cited. These documents will be incorporated by reference. Short term impacts on natural resources of the construction phase of the multi-use trails and other proposed management actions will be addressed in the Essex Chain Lakes Management Complex Revised Draft Unit Management Plan/DEIS.

The potential impacts on natural and human resources will be assessed in the context of the immediate impact area, adjacent management areas and the Adirondack Park as a whole.

Public use and the carrying capacity of the management area will be discussed in relation to the proposed management actions, within the context of the relatively intense use of the area over many years by the lessees.

A. Soils, Wetlands, and Drainage

Existing Conditions: The DEIS will describe the existing conditions of the topography, soils, wetlands and geography of the ECLMC. The Department will use available GIS data bases and on the ground assessments to examine and inventory soil conditions, wetlands, and other water resources in the impacted area.

Potential Impacts:

- Erosion caused by construction-related activities and use of steep trails;
- Soil compaction caused by construction-related activities such as use of heavy equipment; and
- Increased sedimentation and turbidity caused by runoff and erosion during construction.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: The Department will use soil surveys and GIS data to analyze the durability of soils on the multiple-use and single-use trails. On-the-ground data and observations collected by field staff will also be used to assess the soil conditions.

Initial List of Potential Mitigation Measures:

- For multi-use or non-winter use trails, whenever possible locate trails on well drained and stable soils. Harden any trail surfaces susceptible to rutting, and install bridges to allow water passage under the trail;
- Do not locate trails on steep slopes or steep uphill grades. Maximum slope on trails should be 15% (20% for snowmobile-only trails);

- Use soil stabilization practices on exposed soil around bridges after construction;
- For multi-use or non-winter use trails, whenever possible, provide buffer strips of undisturbed vegetation between trails and any streams or wetlands
- Minimize or eliminate stream crossings;
- Trail monitoring should be initiated to identify and correct trail erosion, illegal trail building, identification of the presence of invasive species, and other similar problems before becoming permanent; and
- The Department will work with willing partners and outside groups to help maintain the trail system through the issuance of Temporary Revocable Permits (TRP's) or Volunteer Stewardship Agreements (VSA's).

B. Noise

Existing Conditions: The DEIS will describe the existing noise conditions in and around the ECLMC.

Potential Impacts:

- Impact to non-motorized recreational users from noise created by snowmobiles and temporary construction and/or demolition activities;
- Impact to nearby properties from noise created by snowmobiles and temporary construction and/or demolition activities; and
- Impact to wildlife from noise created by snowmobiles and temporary construction and/or demolition activities.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: The Department will use current GIS data to locate potentially affected wildlife and adjacent properties that may be affected by noise as a result of the action.

Initial List of Potential Mitigation Measures:

- Site trails in a manner that minimizes impacts to adjacent landowners through consideration of proximity, terrain and vegetative cover;
- Site trails in locations where local terrain will block sound from traveling; and
- Separate snowmobile use from other winter uses to the extent possible.

C. Wildlife and Habitat

Existing Conditions: The DEIS will inventory the existing wildlife and wildlife habitat located in the ECLMC. A discussion of the April 1, 2015 listing of the northern long-eared bat as a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be provided, along with an analysis of the potential impact to this species from implementation of the proposed management actions and identification of proposed mitigation measures as appropriate.

Potential Impacts:

- Damage to habitat caused by trail and bridge construction.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: The Department will use existing wildlife information, Natural Heritage biologists and databases, and existing reports documenting the locations of rare, threatened, or endangered species to examine the potential impacts of operation and construction activities in the ECLMC.

Initial List of Potential Mitigation Measures:

- Avoid deer wintering yards when siting and constructing snowmobile trails; and
- Limit construction activities so that the nesting/breeding periods of any potential rare, threatened or endangered species are not affected.

D. Water

Existing Conditions: The DEIS will inventory the current conditions of waterbodies, wetlands and watercourses in the ECLMC. The existing fishery and fishery management recommendations will be considered.

Potential Impacts:

- Temporary sedimentation during bridge and trail construction; and
- Sedimentation caused by soil erosion of trails and at water access sites.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: The Department will use soils and wetland data bases, trail construction guidance, bridge design plans, water quality classification data, fisheries inventory and use of water resources by recreationists to examine the potential impacts to water within the ECLMC.

Initial List of Potential Mitigation Measures:

- Minimize cut and fill during construction;
- Locate trails away from waterbodies and watercourses where possible in locations susceptible to erosion;
- Limit construction to periods of low or normal rainfall;
- Use waterbars and broad-based dips to divert water;
- Locate trails to minimize grade;
- Where possible, leave wooded buffers between trails and waterbodies/watercourses; and
- Use of silt fence on bridge construction projects.

E. Vegetation

Existing Conditions: The DEIS will describe the current conditions of vegetation in the ECLMC.

Potential Impacts:

- Tree and brush cutting during construction of trails and bridge; and
- Impacts to rare, threatened or endangered species during construction projects.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: The Department will use current landcover information, tree tallies, Natural Heritage biologists and databases, and existing reports documenting the locations of rare, threatened, or endangered species to examine the potential impacts to vegetation within the ECLMC.

Initial List of Potential Mitigation Measures:

- Locate trails so as to avoid tree cutting where possible; and
- Avoid siting trails and bridges in locations known to have rare, threatened, or endangered species.

F. Historic Resources

Existing Conditions: The DEIS will describe the current conditions of historic resources in the ECLMC.

Potential Impacts:

- Loss of historic structures from demolition.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: Full inventory of historic structures within the ECLMC.

Initial List of Potential Mitigation Measures:

- Thorough documentation of historic attributes prior to disposition.

G. River Resources (As Classified Under the Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers System Act)

Existing Conditions: The DEIS will describe the inventory of currently classified rivers in the project area. The historic use of existing trails and bridges within the management area will be documented and any proposed continued use, including maintenance of improvements, will be discussed in the context of the Wild, Scenic and Recreational River Systems Act and the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan. A Rivers Area Management Plan will be incorporated into the ECLMC UMP/DEIS document. The potential utilization of the variance provisions of the WSRR Act will be addressed as appropriate.

Potential Impacts:

- Negative impacts to Scenic River areas from construction of bridges and trails;
- Negative impacts to Scenic River areas from use of trails by motor vehicles; and
- Negative impacts to the Hudson River, a Wild River area, from use of motor vehicles.

Anticipated Information Necessary to Address the Impact: Delimitation of River Areas, assessment of terrain within River Areas, analysis of previous use of roads and bridges within River Areas.

Initial List of Potential Mitigation Measures:

- Siting of trails in locations where terrain prevents negative impacts to river resources;

- Use of pre-existing roads where possible; and
- Locating trails near pre-existing motorized use where possible.

IV. Alternatives

The alternatives analysis section of the DEIS will examine a number of alternatives for the construction of snowmobile trails and for the location and design of a bridge over the Cedar River. This analysis will discuss different alternatives and a "no action" alternative. The discussion of the pros and cons of trail alternatives will align with the siting guidelines in the 2006 and 2009 snowmobile management plans and include the preference to maintain the integrity of remote interior areas of the forest preserve.

Information on the potential beneficial and adverse environmental impacts associated with each option will be presented. This section will provide a clear and thorough explanation of the alternatives and explain why the recommended alternative is the most appropriate choice.

V. Appendices to Accompany DEIS

The following elements will be included in the Appendices to the DEIS

References

Maps

Studies

Reports