

## **Supplemental Alternative Analysis of Snowmobile Trails in Arietta and Lake Pleasant**

Following the release of the Draft Jessup River Wild Forest UMP and public meeting on June 30, 2005, numerous letters, emails, and faxes were received by the Department. A large number of comments related to snowmobiling and snowmobile trails. Comments expressed by some individuals and clubs related to trail safety, condition of existing trails, need for trail widening, need for removing rocks, necessary relocations, and highway-type signs. Other concerns involved the relationship of proposals to the Draft Comprehensive Snowmobile Plan and the foot trail character requirements of the APSLMP. Public input over some of the proposed snowmobile trails ranged from support to opposition, with the majority of comments involving the proposed corridor connection between Speculator and Indian Lake. A few comments included support for a speed limit on snowmobile trails.

Public comments received by the APA on the proposed final Draft Jessup River Wild Forest UMP, consisted of a few letters, a jointly signed letter from seven environmental groups and a rebuttal letter from the NYS Snowmobile Association. Public concerns, recent purchase of recreational rights on adjacent International Paper Company lands, and the desire to insure the best possible future snowmobile trail system for the area, led the Department to consider various snowmobile trail configurations for the southern portion of the JRWF.

The Department prepared a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement to the Proposed Final JRWF UMP/FEIS to address proposed changes to the snowmobile trail network in the towns of Lake Pleasant and Arietta. To further clarify the alternative analysis and receive public input, DEC held an informational meeting in Northville on March 22, 2006. The results of the meeting, along with other forms of public input received by the comment deadline of April 7, 2006, was used to refine the alternative analysis and the preferred alternative. Additional public comments and DEC responses were added to Appendix 11.

### **Existing Conditions and Assumptions**

Portions of two different NYS Snowmobile Corridors (C4 and C8) traverse through JRWF and private lands linking the communities of Piseco and Morehouse with Lake Pleasant and Speculator. These corridor trails merge into one shared trail for a short distance within the unit. Snowmobile trails over IP lands in the vicinity of Perkins Clearing allow for connections to Speculator or Indian Lake. Snowmobile trails across IP lands in the Speculator Tree Farm tract not only enhance trail access to individual local businesses, but in addition, provide an important snowmobile trail links to the community of Wells to the south and distant communities farther to the east.

These trails are believed to receive moderate to heavy use in the winter. Public use data from trail registers on snowmobile trails is not accurate since it is estimated that only 5 percent of the snowmobilers on area trails register in the day time with an almost 0 percent registration occurring at night. As mentioned in Section IV-D-2, DEC proposes to undertake a visitor use survey. State of the art technology will be used when necessary and combined with traditional methods to inventory the type and extent of actual public use.

A detailed description of unit trails (Mileage distance is the portion of the trail over JRWF lands) follows:

Town of Lake Pleasant

**Fawn Lake Trail** (Class A Funded Corridor - C4) - 4.2 mi.

The trail has an average width of eight feet, with several bridges and numerous sections of corduroy, and wet spots connecting Sacandaga Lake to the Piseco-Perkins Clearing trail. This trail has had some work performed in the Town of Lake Pleasant portion, consisting of earth moving work to address projecting rocks, side hill slope, and bridge repairs. Groomed under TRP to Town of Lake Pleasant with a Thiokal Imp having a drag 75 inches in width.

While the trail itself receives a range of 1,600 to 2,600 people a year, register data for the winter is not accurate, since very few snowmobilers sign-in at the kiosk location. This trail is believed to be heavily used in the winter. This trail is also popular as a hiking trail to the beach at the north end of Fawn Lake.

**Lawrence Farm Trail** (Class A Funded Corridor - C4) - .4 mi.

The trail has an average width of seven feet and follows a portion of the Lawrence Farm Road and another old woods road before re-entering IP lands. A rock barrier prevents snowmobile travel to NYS Route 30. Groomed under TRP to Town of Lake Pleasant with a Bombardier BR-110 having a drag 84 inches in width.

This trail is believed to be heavily used in the winter and is an important link within the snowmobile trail system on IP lands. Lack of a trail register prevents an accurate estimate of public use.

**Oxbow-Sacandaga Lake Trail** (Class A Funded Corridor - C4) - .8 mi.

The trail has an average width of eight feet, and connects Oxbow Lake to Sacandaga Lake. The trail is partly located on an old woods road with some damp areas. The average width is slightly wider (up to 10') on the 1.8 mile private land portions of the trail. This trail has had some previous work performed

by the Town of Lake Pleasant, consisting of earthmoving work to address projecting rocks and side hill slope. A portion of this trail was used in the past for access on an administrative road to an adjoining private gravel pit. Groomed under AANR to Pleasant Riders Snowmobilers who groom using a snowmobile with drag, when conditions are suitable. Occasionally groomed under TRP to Town of Lake Pleasant with a Thiokal Imp having a drag 75 inches in width. The use of a tracked groomer is desired to remove the large number of moguls created by snowmobile use on this popular trail that cannot adequately be addressed by a snowmobile with drag.

The trail is a very heavily used snowmobile trail connecting these two waterbodies and associated amenities. Lack of a trail register prevents an accurate estimate of public use in the winter.

Town of Arietta

**Fall Lake Trail** (Class A Funded Corridor - C4) - 1.1 mi.

The trail has an average width of six to eight feet, connecting Oxbow Lake to the Piseco-Perkins Clearing trail. Several rocks, hummocks and damp sections. Floating bog mat adjacent to the Fall Lake crossing on the south side of the lake. Groomed under TRP to Town of Arietta. Town contracts out work to individuals who groom using a snowmobile with drag.

While the trail itself receives a range of 900 to 1,800 people a year, a large portion of registered use occurs in the winter. This trail is moderately used with a range of approximately 700 to 900 winter users registering between January and March for the last two years. February is the month with the greatest registered use consisting of between 400 and 600 people. The number of people who snowmobile only to Fall Lake each winter season is not known. It is not uncommon to see people ice fishing there on a weekend, conditions permitting. Most people who ice fish use their snowmobiles for access with some related parking at the Piseco Airport.

**Rudeston Hill Trail** (Class B Funded Corridor - C8 ) - 1.2 mi. [Additional .6 mile on private lands]#

The trail has an average width of six to eight feet, connecting Oxbow Lake to the Piseco Airport/Piseco Lake area. The eastern part of trail has a couple of side hills. The western portion of this trail was relocated in 2000 in consultation with the APA to avoid a hazardous sand pit. Parts of the trail have trail obstacles consisting mainly of hummocks and rocks that impede the ability to enjoy this trail safely. Minor rehabilitation work is a high priority. Some of the existing bridges will have to be rebuilt to an 8-foot width to meet DEC standards. Mud spots may need bridging, trail relocation, or hardening. Groomed under TRP to Town of Arietta. Town contracts out work to individuals who groom using a snowmobile with drag.

This trail is fairly heavily used in the winter. Lack of a trail register prevents an accurate estimate of public use.

Towns of Arietta and Lake Pleasant

**Piseco-Perkins Clearing Trail** (Class A Funded Corridor - C4/C8) - 8.5 mi. Mileage includes additional 1.5 mile trail spur to the I.P. boundary line near Mossy Vly.

The trail has an average width of seven to eight feet, connecting the Piseco Airport to the snowmobile trails on IP lands. The trail contains 28 snowmobile bridges, corduroy, and hummocks. The largest bridge over Fall Stream is six feet wide and 35 feet long (62 feet with ramps). Scattered damp areas. Southern part of trail to Vly Lake is located primarily on an old woods road. The northern Town of Lake Pleasant portion of the trail has had some work performed. Southern part groomed under TRP to Town of Arietta. Town contracts out work to individuals who groom using a snowmobile with drag. Northern portion groomed under TRP to Town of Lake Pleasant with a Thiokal Imp having a drag 75 inches in width.

This trail is believed to be moderately used in the winter with the poor trail conditions between the Fall Lake junction and Fawn Lake junction tending to discourage use, causing many snowmobilers to use the Oxbow to Sacandaga trail and connecting lakes.

One public comment on the draft plan questioned the amount of money proposed to rehabilitate this trail and the lack of any supporting accident information to justify the work. It was stated that straightening and smoothing the trail would permit riders to travel at higher speeds, potentially making the trail more dangerous. Other public comments from snowmobilers mentioned that this corridor trail is very narrow from Fawn Lake outhouse to Piseco Lake with long stretches of trail preventing snowmobilers from passing safely.

Snowmobile Trail Grooming - DEC will continue to allow grooming by small tracked groomers on trails where this activity has occurred in the past in the JRWF in the interim period while the Comprehensive Snowmobile Plan for the Adirondacks is being finalized and adopted. . In the event that the Comprehensive Snowmobile Plan for the Adirondacks is not finalized at the end of the 2-year period, APSLMP compliance with tracked grooming on JRWF trails will be resolved by the Department and the APA.

#### Lake Crossings

Snowmobile activity occurs on the frozen water surface of Fawn Lake, Oxbow Lake, Piseco Lake, Sacandaga Lake and Lake Pleasant. These lakes are used as an integral part of the current trail system,

which can sometimes be dangerous early and late in the winter riding season. A few incidents of snowmobilers breaking through the ice on Lake Pleasant and other area waters have occurred within recent years. While some of these accidents involve reckless behavior in close proximity to lake outlets or near open water, ice crossings can be a safety concern, especially early and late in the season. It has been reported that some people prefer not to ride in this area because they do not have confidence in the safety of the lakes.

### **Proposed JRWF snowmobile trail changes\***

The improvement of snowmobile trail systems facilitating access between communities has the potential to provide a net benefit to the Forest Preserve by moving trails from interior areas in the Unit, promote a safer riding experience, lessen trail maintenance concerns, reduce impacts to adjoining private landowners, and increase economic benefits for local communities. One important snowmobile trail relocation proposal identified in the JRWF Draft UMP involved the Fish Mountain trail that would replace the Oxbow-Sacandaga Lake trail in the future, in the event that private land subdivision forces the closure of the existing trail. The primary benefit of providing a snowmobile trail wholly over State lands would be to provide a land based route giving snowmobilers the opportunity to avoid ice crossings.

After the release of the proposed final Draft JRWF UMP, the Department reviewed a number of alternative trail configurations\*\*. Since this proposal would involve new trail construction over JRWF lands and a significant change to existing snowmobile trails, the planning team weighed various alternatives. Alternatives were reviewed with the objective of minimizing the total trail mileage increase, minimizing snowmobile travel in interior portions of the Unit, minimizing ice crossing, maintaining important linkages between communities, and connecting access points. Concerns over water crossings, rough existing trail conditions on some JRWF trails, redundant trails, existing heavy use of the Oxbow - Sacandaga Lake trail, and ways to improve community connections led to the identification of Alternative E, Option 3 as the preferred snowmobile trail alternative for the southern portion of the JRWF.

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\*This represents a change from the May 2005 JRWF Draft UMP for Public Review and November 2005 JRWF Proposed Final Draft UMP, which proposed Alternatives B as the preferred route.

\*\*This analysis did not include a discussion of the Page Street relocation or the Rudeston Hill Access trail since these proposals are along the periphery of the unit, do not involve any trail closures, and are discussed in other parts of the UMP.

### Arietta-Lake Pleasant/Speculator Connection - Alternatives Discussion

The following is a discussion of existing and alternative snowmobile trail routes, which could connect local communities. Each alternative route is an assemblage of trail segments. The various alternatives may contain some of the same trail segments with the goal of connecting the same points. A discussion of the positive and negative aspects of each trail alternative is set forth below, along with a determination of overall net loss or gain of snowmobile trail mileage\* in the unit. Each alternative begins on JRWF lands near Oxbow and Piseco lakes and ends in Speculator. The mileage estimates are based on map measurements and correspond to information in Table XVIII. They were developed for planning purposes only and differ in some cases with actual trail length measured in the field by rolatape. (See accompanying maps).

**Alternative A** (No Action Alternative) - Close Oxbow-Sacandaga Lake trail. Close Mossy Vly spur. No new trail construction or relocation. Use a combination of private (Piseco Company), town (Piseco Airport), JRWF, and IP lands or area lakes and private lands to Speculator. Snowmobilers would have to use the Rudeston Hill, Piseco-Perkins Clearing, and Fawn Lake trails to ride from Oxbow Lake to Sacandaga Lake. **To the best of our knowledge, this alternative would result in a net loss of 2.2 miles of snowmobile trails in the entire unit, by comparing pre-1972 mileage with post-UMP mileage.**

**Alternative B** - Close Oxbow-Sacandaga Lake trail. Close Mossy Vly spur. Construct new Fish Mountain trail to replace the Oxbow-Sacandaga Lake trail. Use a combination of private (Piseco Company), town (Piseco Airport), JRWF, and IP lands or area lake/private land to Speculator. **To the best of our knowledge, this alternative would result in a net gain of 1.8 miles of snowmobile trails in the entire unit, by comparing pre-1972 mileage with post-UMP mileage.**

**Alternative C** - Close Oxbow-Sacandaga Lake trail. Close Mossy Vly spur. Close Piseco-Perkins Clearing trail. Close northern portion of Fawn Lake trail. Close Fall Lake trail. Construct new Fish Mountain trail to replace the Oxbow-Sacandaga Lake trail, extending the trail to CR 24. Construct new trail between Fawn Lake and Mud Lake, with spur to IP lands. From Mud Lake the proposed route would follow an old snowmobile trail then turning west ending at a public parking facility in the Moffit Beach Campground. Use a combination of private (Piseco Company), town (Piseco Airport), JRWF,

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*\*For all of alternatives B through E, the development of a snowmobile trail across private lands to connect the Piseco Community Center and the Rudeston Hill Trail would eliminate the need to construct 0.5 miles of proposed snowmobile trail between County Highway 24 (Old Piseco Road) and the existing trail near Oxbow Lake. While the Rudeston Hill Access Trail is proposed in the UMP, terrain constraints (steep slopes) or withdrawal of landowner permission could prevent its actual construction in the future.*

and IP lands to Speculator. **To the best of our knowledge, this alternative would result in a net loss of 1.8 miles of snowmobile trails in the entire unit, by comparing pre-1972 mileage with post-UMP mileage.**

**Alternative D** - Similar to alternative C with the addition of a new trail parallel to Brister Brook ending at Page Street near NYS Route 30. **To the best of our knowledge, this alternative would result in a net loss of 0.1 miles of snowmobile trails in the entire unit, by comparing pre-1972 mileage with post-UMP mileage.**

**Alternative E** - Similar to alternative D with the addition of keeping all or a portion of the existing snowmobile trails in the vicinity of Fall Lake and the Oxbow-Sacandaga Lake trail. Alternative E, Option 1 allows snowmobile access to the southern side of Fall Lake from Oxbow Lake. Alternative E, Option 2 allows snowmobile access to the northern side Fall Lake from the Piseco Airport area. Alternative E, Option 3 allows existing snowmobile trails to remain open allowing for a snowmobile loop trail from Oxbow Lake. **These options would result in a net gain of 1.6, 1.7, and 2.8 miles respectively of snowmobile trails in the entire unit, by comparing pre-1972 mileage with post-UMP mileage.**

### **Trail Siting Criteria**

When considering snowmobile routes, criteria must be developed to help guide decision making. Important criteria to consider are environmental protection and degradation and rider safety and enjoyment. At times these two are at odds with one another. For example, the least environmentally destructive route is to follow the shoulder of the State highway connecting the hamlets of Arietta and Lake Pleasant. Physical constraints within the highway ROW and impacts to adjoining landowners make this alternative the least desirable. A balance must be struck to limit impacts to natural resources and wildlife (See Section II-G-2, Guidelines for Protection of Deer Wintering Areas), by the proper siting of trail corridors by utilizing existing snowmobile trails when possible and minimizing the amount of new trail construction. For all alternatives there are no known endangered or threatened plants or animals.

Trail siting goals for snowmobile trails include the following:

- For safety reasons, trails should be kept off highways (especially major highways) and waterbodies whenever possible.
- Trails should be free of dangerous obstructions, such as trees and boulders.
- Trails must also be sited with environmental considerations in mind:
  - rare and endangered plant and animal species and their habitats should be avoided;

- deer wintering yards should be avoided;
  - vegetative disturbance should be minimized;
  - wetlands, areas with poor drainage and steep slopes should be avoided;
  - tree cutting should be minimized and the trail canopy preserved; and
  - user group conflicts should be avoided.
- The Department will not place snowmobile trails on private land without the owner's permission.

### **Evaluation of Segments**

In describing and comparing the alternative routes included for discussion, the planning team benefitted from the extensive knowledge of field conditions provided by DEC staff, town employees and members of local snowmobile clubs. Portions of these alternatives have been scouted in the field. The alternative analysis includes consideration of hypothetical locations of route segments and involves a comparison of recreational characteristics, practical considerations such as land ownership, and available ecological information, such as information about rare species and significant habitats from the records of the Natural Heritage Program, regional mapping of deer wintering areas, and wetlands.

#### **Alternative A (No Action Alternative)**

- pros**
- keep open majority of trails currently designated for snowmobile use
  - use of existing trails eliminates the need for new trail construction
  - takes advantage of previous trail rehabilitation work and bridging
  - result in the smallest change to existing snowmobile network
  - trail rehabilitation would solve public complaints over existing trail conditions and benefit other recreational users throughout the year
  - access by snowmobile to Fall Lake and Fawn Lake
  - least potential disturbance to area wetlands
- cons**
- continued snowmobile use close to the West Canada Lake Wilderness boundary and through the middle of this JRWF tract could diminish the wild forest experience of other members of the public.
  - safety concerns; trail system relies on water crossings
  - trail system relies on private land crossing at its southern end
  - would require a moderate amount of tree cutting, trail rehabilitation, and large number of bridges to new engineering design standards to meet corridor trail specifications
  - longer snowmobile distance between Oxbow Lake and Sacandaga Lake

**Discussion** - The closure of the Oxbow-Sacandaga Lake trail (if permission to cross private land is revoked), with no replacement trail would shift snowmobile use from two trails to one trail. C4 and C8 corridor snowmobile trails would be merged for a greater distance over JRWF lands. Existing trails may be unable to safely accommodate increased use levels given their present condition. The five-mile section of the existing Piseco-Perkins Clearing trail between the airport and the Fall Stream bridge has numerous unsafe trail obstacles such as stumps or rocks that protrude into the trail surface. At a minimum, improvements to this section of trail would be necessary to address the anticipated increased use. The trail would need to be cleared to its original eight-foot width to conform with current trail standards. A total of 203 trees have been identified for removal. Numerous small bridges and trail hardening would be needed.

While this alternative requires a more circuitous route between Arietta and Speculator, this is not necessarily negative. For many riders, snowmobiling is essentially a means of recreation first and transportation second. The recreational snowmobiler is often more interested in the experience of traveling than in the destination itself. Therefore, a somewhat longer route covering a more varied terrain may enhance the rider's enjoyment of the route. While this alternative would utilize the largest amount of existing snowmobile trail, there are some private land crossings. An agreement with the Piseco Company to secure a trail easement over private land near County Route 24 (Old Piseco Road) would help insure a more stable long term trail system. Without a secured easement, this permission could be revoked, requiring closure of the section of trail between Oxbow Lake and the Piseco Airport. In addition, this alternative does not avoid existing water crossings, requiring riders to utilize parts of Sacandaga Lake and Lake Pleasant to access the trail system.

**Alternative B** (Original proposal in the draft UMP)

- pros**
- keep open majority of trails currently designated for snowmobile use
  - takes advantage of previous trail rehabilitation work and bridging
  - trail rehabilitation would solve public complaints over existing trail conditions and benefit other recreational users throughout the year
  - existing trail network allows for various snowmobile loop rides
  - access to Fall Lake and Fawn Lake by snowmobilers
  - proposed Fish Mountain trail will be designed to comply with the APSLMP foot trail character requirement, providing a Forest Preserve snowmobile experience
  - proposed Fish Mountain trail would be completely on JRWF land and would enhance year round access in this part of the unit
  - proposed Fish Mountain trail would utilize an old woods road between Sacandaga Lake and Fish Mountain

- cons**
- would require approximately 4 miles of new trail construction
  - would require a greater amount of tree cutting, trail rehabilitation, and larger number of bridges to new engineering design standards to meet corridor trail specifications, for existing trails and the proposed Fish Mountain trail
  - safety concerns; does not solve water crossings over Fall Lake, Sacandaga Lake, and Lake Pleasant
  - trail system relies on private land crossing at its southern end
  - continued snowmobile use near the West Canada Lake Wilderness and through the middle of this JRWF tract.
  - increase in miles of snowmobile trail over JRWF lands

**Discussion** - The proposed trail relocation would begin near the existing Fawn Lake trailhead. The new trail would be approximately four miles long utilizing, where possible, portions of an old logging road on the north side of Fish Mountain. The trail would intersect the existing Fall Lake snowmobile trail just to the south of Fall Lake. The need for bridging or other trail hardening techniques is unknown at this time. The amount of necessary tree cutting is unknown but could be reduced by the use of the existing old road bed, when possible. The general location of the trail has been investigated in the field and the terrain is considered passable. With the rehabilitation of the Piseco - Perkins Clearing trail and its maintenance as a community connector, the relocated Fish Mountain trail would serve as a secondary snowmobile trail providing additional access and links to services. As in alternative A, an agreement with the Piseco Company to secure a trail easement over private land crossing would be desirable.

**Alternative C** (Proposal developed after release of proposed final draft)

- pros**
- reduction in snowmobile trail redundancy
  - decrease of overall miles of snowmobile trail in this tract to provide mileage for critical snowmobile trail relocations
  - new snowmobile trails will be designed to comply with the APSLMP foot trail character requirement, providing a Forest Preserve snowmobile experience
  - decreased annual maintenance due to less total trail mileage
  - eliminate the cost to rehabilitate the Piseco-Perkins Clearing trail and reconstruct large number of bridges to new engineering design standards
  - allows a more direct, land-based route between Arietta and Speculator, avoiding the unsafe water crossings of Fall Lake, Fawn Lake, and Sacandaga Lake
  - relocates snowmobile use away from the boundary of the West Canada Lake Wilderness and from the interior of this JRWF tract to the periphery of the unit

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- snowmobile noise will be concentrated closer to the NYS Route 8 corridor
  - minimize conflicts with skiers/snowshoers by providing separate trails for each user group. This was identified as an important goal by members of the town.
  - trail rehabilitation as a snowmobile corridor trail accommodates use during the other seasons of the year
- cons**
- loss of existing JRWF snowmobile trail opportunities in the vicinity of Fawn Lake and north of Piseco Airport
  - would require approximately 10.4 miles of new trail construction in wild forest some of it not on old roads, not preferred according to APSLMP
  - snowmobile use levels would increase significantly, since all snowmobile activity from both corridor trails would be funneled onto one trail.
  - would require a greater amount of tree cutting than alternative B since there are more miles of new snowmobile trail
  - new trail sections have the potential to go through wetlands for short distances, permits may be necessary; any potential impacts will be mitigated through the permitting process
  - need for large bridge to cross Mud Lake outlet and adjacent wetlands
  - loss of recreational snowmobile opportunities to Fall Lake
  - requires riders to cross Lake Pleasant, when the snowmobile trails over IP lands are closed due to winter logging in the vicinity of Mud Lake

**Discussion** - The trail proposal would consolidate parallel portions of NYS Snowmobile Corridors 4 and 8 located between Piseco and IP lands in the vicinity of Perkins Clearing, using a combination of existing, old, and new snowmobile trails. By consolidating trails, this alternative would eliminate the need for 8.7 miles of existing snowmobile trails (Piseco-Perkins Clearing trail and Fall Lake trail) and 2.5 miles of the western part of the Fawn Lake trail. While these trails would remain open for other public recreational uses, closure to snowmobiles will make it harder for less physically able people to access Fall Lake for ice fishing purposes.

The center portion of this alternative follows the same route between Sacandaga Lake and the Fall Lake trail proposed in alternative B. In addition to the four miles mentioned above, this proposal will also require 2.1 miles of completely new snowmobile trail construction between Mud Lake and Fawn Lake, and 1.5 miles for two new short trails north of Oxbow Lake. The eastern end of the trail would generally follow the route of an old snowmobile trail, then turn west for 0.6 miles within the Moffitt Beach Campground to end at a plowed winter parking area near Sacandaga Lake. This section of trail

would have to be rehabilitated to corridor trail specifications. A 0.4 mile spur trail to the IP boundary near Mud Lake would provide access to the snowmobile trail network on these adjacent private lands.

The new trail system would provide a trail off of the lakes onto solid ground. Given adequate snowfall, this would enable the snowmobile season to start earlier and end later. With the exception of Fawn and Fall lakes, the other lakes will still accommodate snowmobile use, partly reducing the traffic on the proposed trail.

While this alternative would route the trail over dry ground as much as possible, wetland crossings are likely, in particular near Mud Lake Outlet. Snowmobiles generally cross wetlands under frozen conditions and will be unlikely to cause degradation. Furthermore, 6 NYCRR Part 196.2(a) provides that snowmobiles may be used on designated trails “when the trail traveled is completely covered by snow and ice.” APA wetlands permits would be required before such work may be undertaken. Bridges could also be placed, where appropriate, to protect wetlands and streambanks.

The APSLMP states that “existing roads or abandoned wood roads... [will form the basis of] new snowmobile trail construction, except in rare circumstances requiring the cutting of new trails.” To minimize impacts, this alternative utilizes sections of old road north of Fish Mountain, snowmobile trails, and an old snowmobile trail to Mud Lake as much as possible. While the new proposed trail sections are not entirely on “existing roads or abandoned wood roads” efforts would be made to layout the trail on relatively dry ground through open hardwoods, when possible, with the idea of minimizing the amount of tree cutting needed.

**Alternative D** Pros and Cons identical to alternative C. In addition:

- pros** -spur trail to NYS Route 30 would allow a backup snowmobile trail when portions of IP lands north of Mud Lake are closed due to winter logging
- new trail could be used to accommodate all terrain bicycle use and hikers, avoiding the need for the public to enter and pay a day use fee at the Moffit Beach Campground.
- cons** -would require approximately 12.1 miles of new trail construction in wild forest some of it not on old roads, not preferred according to APSLMP

**Discussion** - This alternative follows the same route proposed in alternative C with the exception of an additional new spur trail. The purpose of this trail would be to provide a backup land-based snowmobile trail connection to and from Speculator without requiring the use of the frozen surface of Lake Pleasant. Discussion with IP staff indicated that snowmobile use on IP roads is not allowed during

winter logging operations. Since a large portion of the southeast part of the Perkins Clearing tract is reached by the Mud Lake Road, under alternative C, use of the snowmobile spur trail to IP lands would not be possible when IP lands north of Mud Lake were being logged. The presence of wetlands and unsuitable steep terrain would prevent the ability to develop an alternative trail on IP lands in the event that the Mud Lake Road is closed to snowmobiles.

This 1.6 mile trail would be located parallel to Brister Brook ending on Old Indian Lake Road (Page Street Spur). The trail would follow the town road shoulder for a short distance before crossing NYS Route 30 to enter JRWF lands. Some steep terrain and area wetlands will be limiting factors for the final trail location. From NYS Route 30 the trail would follow 0.1 miles of an existing old road to intersect the Lawrence Farm trail and network of snowmobile trails on IP lands.

**Alternative E, Option 1** Pros and Cons identical to alternative D with the exception of continued snowmobile use of the Oxbow - Sacandaga Lake trail. In addition:

- pros**
- allows continued use of Oxbow - Sacandaga Lake trail
  - utilizes southern part of existing snowmobile trail from Oxbow Lake to Fall Lake
  - continues snowmobile access to Fall Lake for ice fishing.
  - allow access to Fall Lake from Oxbow Lake.

- cons**
- to the best of our knowledge, results in approximately 1.6 mile of additional snowmobile trail mileage from 1972 levels.
  - eliminates existing snowmobile loop trail to Piseco Airport

**Alternative E, Option 2** Pros and Cons identical to alternative D with the exception of continued snowmobile use of the Oxbow - Sacandaga Lake trail. In addition:

- pros**
- allows continued use of Oxbow - Sacandaga Lake trail
  - utilizes existing snowmobile trail from Piseco Airport to Fall Lake
  - continues snowmobile access to Fall Lake for ice fishing.
  - provides snowmobile access to Fall Lake without having to cross Oxbow Lake
  - provides snowmobile access to Piseco Airport area

- cons**
- to the best of our knowledge, results in approximately 1.7 mile of additional snowmobile trail mileage from 1972 levels.
  - eliminates existing snowmobile loop trail to Piseco Airport
  - portion of trail crosses private lands and is subject to landowner permission
  - inadequate snowmobile trailer parking at Piseco Airport

**Alternative E, Option 3** Pros and Cons identical to alternative D with the exception of continued snowmobile use of the Oxbow - Sacandaga Lake trail. In addition:

- pros**
- allows continued use of Oxbow - Sacandaga Lake trail
  - utilizes existing snowmobile trail between Piseco Airport and Oxbow Lake
  - continues snowmobile access to Fall Lake for ice fishing.
  - provides snowmobile access to Piseco Airport area
  - continues existing snowmobile loop trail to Piseco Airport
- cons**
- to the best of our knowledge, results in approximately 2.8 miles of additional snowmobile trail mileage from 1972 levels.
  - portion of trail crosses private lands and is subject to landowner permission
  - loop trail would require crossing of the frozen surface of Fall Lake

**Discussion** - All of these alternative options would enable existing snowmobile access to continue to Fall Lake and on the existing trail between Oxbow and Sacandaga Lake. As a result of discussions with local government representatives, the local snowmobile club, and interested individuals, it was felt that the large volume of existing snowmobile traffic could not safely be accommodated on a single eight foot wide trail over State lands. The increased snowmobile activity would make the trail more difficult to maintain, likely resulting in adverse impacts to the ground surface and a reduced recreational experience to the snowmobiler. Providing alternative routes and keeping the Oxbow-Sacandaga Lake trail open, was considered essential to protecting the resource, the safety of snowmobilers and to help maintain the winter economy in this part of the Adirondacks. The Oxbow-Sacandaga Lake trail also serves as an access point for town residents in the Fish Mountain road area.

While detailed estimates of how many people snowmobile to Fall Lake each winter season are not available, the local forest ranger reports that the lake is not only used by individual ice anglers but also by small family groups. The ability to bring in ice fishing equipment such as ice augers, wind tent, and other assorted gear is enhanced by the ability to snowmobile to the lake.

**Conclusion:**

Some people assert that improving and expanding recreational opportunities in the Adirondack Park, in particular through a snowmobile trail network, has the potential to increase tourism in local communities. On the other hand, some believe snowmobiles degrade plant and animal habitats and impinge on the “wilderness experience” of other users, and should not be allowed on the Forest Preserve.

JRWF trails offer different types of snowmobiling experience. Some snowmobilers have expressed an interest in keeping trails like the Fawn Lake and Piseco - Perkins Clearing trails open to snowmobiles, because they offer a scenic, slow-going, almost remote experience, versus the flatter, faster, groomed road of the Oxbow-Sacandaga Lake trail. There were questions over the need to close any existing trails in order to develop new replacement trails and a concern whether changes to the existing trail system could negatively impact the local economy.

When contemplating the issue of snowmobile trails on Forest Preserve, the Department considers a number of factors. The following discussion builds upon information from staff discussions, and concludes with the selection of a preferred alternative.

**No Action Alternative** - Taking no action would allow trails to remain in use that are inadequate community connector trails or not as environmentally sound as the proposed trails. This alternative, while possible, would not be a viable solution, since the poor condition of the existing Piseco-Perkins Clearing trail would have to be addressed in order to accommodate the anticipated increased snowmobile use of merging two corridor trails into one. Therefore, this alternative will not be supported by this UMP.

**Alternative B** - This alternative, while possible, does not solve existing water crossings, requiring riders to utilize parts of Sacandaga Lake and Lake Pleasant to access the trail system. In light of previous discussion, this alternative would not be the best choice for a stable long term community connector snowmobile trail. While the cons are surmountable, better alternatives exist.

**Alternative C** - Due to the amount of new trail construction and rehabilitation, the completion of the project is likely to be more time consuming and expensive than the previous alternatives. However, considering the benefits mentioned previously, over the long term this alternative is considered preferable to A and B.

**Alternative D** - While similar to alternative C, this alternative has the advantage of enabling snowmobile activity to occur when important trail linkages on adjacent private lands are closed during winter logging. This alternative is considered better than alternative C, however the overall mileage reduction is not considered sufficiently important to justify the closure of trails in the Fall Lake area, given their benefits to the local community.

**Alternatives E, Options 1, 2 and 3** - While similar to alternative D, these alternatives have the important advantage of allowing the existing trail between Oxbow and Sacandaga Lake to remain open

to snowmobiling while maintaining a small popular local network in the vicinity of Fall Lake for snowmobiling. Even though alternative E, Options 1 and 2 would allow snowmobile access to Fall Lake, the trail would officially end at the edge of the lake. Alternatives E, Option 3 would continue the existing trail across the lake. The feasibility of relocating the trail to avoid crossing Fall Lake has been investigated. A large extensive wetland system lies to the north of Fall Lake and would need a significant amount of wetland bridging along with a large inlet bridge to cross. A trail crossing to the south of Fall Lake would also involve wetlands and a major bridge over Fall Stream. Since the existing crossing over the ice of Fall Lake has been in existence for many years, and in the opinion of local riders, freezes adequately during most winters, no attempt will be made to relocate the trail.

The **preferred alternative (E, Option 3)** will maintain important existing snowmobile trails and officially designate some new replacement snowmobile trails. Most of that new construction would be generally parallel to NYS Route 8 and along the periphery of the JRWF boundary. Alternative E, Option 3 would be located almost entirely on Forest Preserve lands between County Route 24 and NYS Route 30, north of Speculator. The overall route takes advantage of a portion of old road north of Fish Mountain, the existing Fawn Lake Snowmobile trail, and would require re-opening of the old Mud Lake snowmobile trail.

While Alternative E, Option 3 will require tree cutting and may involve some work to remove obstacles from the trail surface, efforts will be made to mitigate any environmental impacts. While new snowmobile trails will result in an increase of approximately 2.8 miles in overall unit mileage from pre-1972 snowmobile trail levels, this would be partially offset by the removal of snowmobile designation on unsuitable trails and trail segments. This alternative is preferred since it will close an existing snowmobile trail in the interior of this Wild Forest that will no longer be needed since the proposed new trails will provide an alternative route as a substitute for the closed mileage. This action will help prevent user conflicts by allowing separate trails for different users, while protecting the “wild forest experience” in the interior of the JRWF by moving one corridor snowmobile trail closer to the periphery of the State boundary.

The Department will develop a work plan in consultation with the APA to determine the most appropriate location for the proposed new snowmobile trail segments. The trail will be marked with red trail markers. It will be designed and constructed to provide for a more primitive experience with curves and hilly sections to accommodate more leisurely riding and slower speeds. This new trail system will provide a substitute Forest Preserve snowmobiling experience similar to the portions of the Fawn Lake and Piseco - Perkins Clearing trails that will be closed. The trail will be laid out in the field so as to avoid significant impacts to deer wintering yards. It is expected to receive moderate to heavy

use and will also accommodate occasional use by other types of recreation, including hikers.

### **Other Alternatives**

NYS Route 8 Roadside Trail - Generally, the APSLMP encourages placement of new snowmobile trails within travel corridors and along edges rather than in interior portions of state land. The feasibility of a NYS Route 8 roadside trail between Speculator and Piseco was considered, to replace the anticipated closure of the existing Oxbow-Sacandaga Lake trail. While snowmobilers can legally ride the outside scraper banks of a public highway, there would be many disadvantages to this shoulder riding alternative. Trails alongside highways do not provide the most interesting scenery to users and can be difficult to maintain. The shoulders are not wide enough for safe travel for some of the road between Speculator and Piseco and problem areas such as entrance driveways, sidehill and other physical constraints could require a snowmobiler to cross the highway multiple times. Impacts to adjoining landowners private property may be significant. Since this alternative could impact private land (where the landowners do not want snowmobiles) and would involve road shoulder riding where unsafe, it fails to provide an adequate connecting snowmobile trail between the two communities. Therefore, this alternative is not viable.

### **Projected Use and Potential Impacts of the Preferred Alternative**

Although hard data are unavailable, much of the current winter public recreational use probably comes from snowmobilers. The ability to maintain suitable snowmobile trail links between area communities is an important concern. It is believed that snowmobile use levels would increase due to the option of riding between communities with fewer lake crossings. However, it is difficult to predict how large the increase will be. When area lakes are frozen, use of the existing Oxbow - Sacandaga Lake trail will help spread out snowmobile use between both trails.

DEC is committed to developing and implementing a system to improve tracking of existing and future uses of area trails. The **preferred alternative (E, Option 3)** will be a part of a larger system of snowmobile trails connecting trails in southern Hamilton County with trails to the north, east and south, and ultimately with the rest of the Park. This will certainly lead to increased snowmobile use in the area, but it will not be the only route connecting Hamilton, Fulton, and Warren Counties. Any increase in use of JRWF snowmobile trails will be limited by a number of factors, including the number of hotel rooms, restaurants, attractions, and other services (including gas) available in the area.

Monitoring will be important to ensure that environmental degradation as a result of overuse of the trail is minimized. If degradation occurs, the Department will take appropriate actions to mitigate the

degradation, including increased maintenance activities, temporary trail closures, education, and other management actions. The Department will work with local snowmobile clubs and the towns to monitor use and possible overuse of the trail and to coordinate maintenance activities through the use of TRPs or Adopt-a-Natural-Resource Stewardship Agreements, when possible.

Many of the deleterious effects of snowmobile trails can be mitigated through proper design and layout and by observing best management practices during construction. For instance, in the ranking of the alternatives, preference has been given to those alternatives which avoid deer wintering yards, steep slopes and areas with poor drainage, interior locations, long distances through wetlands, minimize vegetative disturbance, tree cutting and new trail construction; and minimize user group conflicts, but at the same time provide a safe and useable trail for facilitating access between communities. In those cases where these goals were not entirely achievable, measures have been suggested which should provide sufficient mitigation. This will insure the most suitable snowmobile trail system that minimizes new mileage over JRWF lands while accommodating snowmobiling.

Environmental - The amount of actual wetland crossing and identification of terrain constraints will require further field investigation. Tree cutting will be minimized. The utilization of existing trails and old roads will limit the amount of tree cutting necessary. Public use of the existing Oxbow - Sacandaga Lake trail will help spread out snowmobile use between both trails. By having alternate routes its less likely the protective snow cover will be degraded, thereby helping to limit impacts to the underlying ground surface or vegetation, while providing for a more enjoyable and safe riding experience.

Prior to any construction work, a work plan will be completed, including a tree tally. Disturbance of wetlands and water quality will be mitigated through the use of BMPs and proper trail layout. Wetlands work will require consultation with APA, to determine whether wetland permits will be required. Effects on fish and wildlife populations are expected to be minor, with new trails routed to avoid known deer wintering yards, whenever possible.

Social and Economic - Since the current snowmobile trail system relies on ice crossings, if the lakes are not frozen or are unsafe to ride, the local economy suffers. The land-based preferred alternative E, Option 3 will provide the opportunity for a safer snowmobile experience to people who visit the area, potentially helping local businesses. Localized increases in traffic and highway use are anticipated to be minor. Safety hazards on area snowmobile trails will be reduced by proper trail layout and construction, thereby enhancing the recreational experience with the potential to bring more snowmobiles into to the local community. To address any concern over isolating the local area from

Appendix 25 - Supplemental Alternative Analysis of Snowmobile Trails in Arietta and Lake Pleasant

snowmobile access even for one season, existing trail segments to be closed to snowmobiles will remain open until the proposed new replacement trails are completely built and ready for use.

**Other benefits**

Grades will be kept below 10 percent if possible, as recommended by the International Mountain Biking Association. Portions of the new and relocated trail system required in Alternative E, Option 3 will be designed and constructed for all terrain bicycle use.