NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY | Department of Environmental Conservation

Kaaterskill Wild Forest

Unit Management Plan Amendment

for the

Kaaterskill Falls Area

Andrew Cuomo, *Governor*

Joseph J. Martens, *Commissioner*

June 2015

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OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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JUN 30 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Record

FROM: Joseph J. Martens JM

SUBJECT: Kaaterskill Wild Forest

The amendment to the Kaaterskill Wild Forest Unit Management Plan has been completed. The UMP is consistent with the Catskill Park State Land Master Plan, Environmental Conservation Law, and Department Rules, Regulations and Policies and is hereby approved and adopted.

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Background

The Kaaterskill Falls is a two-tier waterfall located in the Kaaterskill Wild Forest unit of the Catskill Forest Preserve on the north side of NY Route 23A, between the hamlets of Haines Falls and Palenville in Greene County's Town of Hunter. A Unit Management Plan (UMP) for the Kaaterskill Wild Forest was written and approved in 1987. This UMP identified all the issues that are current today. Numerous items were proposed in the vicinity of Kaaterskill Falls including parking improvements, increased signage, construction of an observation deck, hiring of a seasonal caretaker, implementing special regulations, and closing trails. Management actions implemented from the UMP include the closure of a poorly designed connector trail from the top to the bottom of the falls, increased signage, and the hiring of a seasonal employee to act as steward at the site during the fall of 2014.

In May 2013, an amendment to the Kaaterskill Wild Forest UMP was approved. That amendment proposed the addition of approximately .8 miles to the Kaaterskill Rail Trail (KRT) as well as constructing a pedestrian bridge over Spruce Creek. The Kaaterskill Rail Trail Committee (KRT) is sponsoring an initiative to complete a 1.8-mile trail connection between the community of Haines Falls and the existing trail system in the Kaaterskill Wild Forest and North/South Lake Campground. The primary component to this linkage is an abandoned Ulster and Delaware railroad bed between Haines Falls and Laurel House Road, of which 0.6 miles are in the Kaaterskill Wild Forest. An additional 0.2 miles of trail on an abandoned town road and a new bridge crossing over Spruce Creek would complete the connection to the existing Escarpment Trail. The 0.6 mile section of the old railroad bed from the western boundary of Kaaterskill Wild Forest to Laurel House Road has been improved and was designated as a part of the KRT and opened in the summer of 2013. The construction of the bridge over Spruce Creek is scheduled for the 2015 construction season.

Since 1998 DEC Forest Rangers have reported 39 incidents at Kaaterskill Falls. The majority of incidents were injuries requiring rescue, with 5 incidents resulting in death. One of the deaths was attributed to a suicide. Two fatalities occurred in the summer of 2014. In light of these most recent tragedies the DEC installed approximately 500 feet of split rail fencing at both the upper and lower falls in the fall of 2014. The fencing serves as both a physical and visual barrier to the public to alert them to the potential dangers of proceeding further. In addition to the fencing, additional signage was installed in more conspicuous locations to warn the public of the potential danger.

In the coming years, the Department will be implementing the proposals from the 2013 UMP amendment as well as two proposals from the 1987 UMP: 1) the construction of an observation deck and associated spur trail at the top of the falls, and 2) the hiring of a seasonal steward to educate and interact with visitors at the falls. The

steward will also gather information about user numbers, peak days, peak times, and user preferences and behavior that will be helpful for managers.

The following preferred management actions outlined in this current amendment will complement the previously identified approved actions in the 1987 UMP and 2013 UMP amendment, and will also be implemented in the coming years. When considered in their entirety, the actions are designed to provide a safer, more environmentally sustainable user experience at Kaaterskill Falls. While parking and pedestrian access along Route 23A have also been identified as an issue by stakeholders and the public, the Department has no jurisdiction over those areas and therefore are not addressing them in this UMP amendment.

Photo - potential view from observation platform.

Proposed Management Actions

A. Trail Expansion

Current Situation

Currently there is a 0.5 mile trail (Kaaterskill Falls Trail) from Route 23A that terminates at the base of Kaaterskill Falls. Many visitors continue past the official end of the trail and scramble up the steep bank, consisting mostly of loose rock and shallow soils, in order to gain access to the middle pool of the falls by way of an eroded catwalk. Currently, this bank is severely eroded. Over the years a number of herd paths have developed resulting in severe erosion and degradation of this bank as well as denuding the bank of vegetation. The steep slopes in this area continue to be prone to erosion from foot traffic and runoff. The area receives a high volume of foot traffic despite efforts to close the area.

Kaaterskill Falls is a popular destination with locals and tourists. During the fall of 2014 the site steward counted 4,900 visitors. On Columbus Day weekend alone there were 2,035 visitors to the falls. Kaaterskill Falls has become widely advertised on social media as a destination for thrill seekers. Numerous video clips are posted on the internet showing people behaving in a dangerous manner and encouraging others to ignore the warnings and proceed beyond the end of the trail, up the eroded slopes to the middle pool. Regardless of efforts to contain visitors to the top and bottom of the falls many visitors make the choice to proceed beyond the end of the trail and risk injury in order to reach the middle pool.

The lack of a designated trail causes visitors to choose their own routes up the slope. Some are climbing up the east side while others choose to cross the creek and scramble up the west side. This activity has resulted in numerous herd paths leading up the slope, eventually the vegetation becomes trampled, dies and the slope erodes. The eroding slopes are difficult to climb leading visitors to look for a new more stable route to scramble up. The current situation is a bare, eroded, slope with a surface of loose rocks. Efforts to discourage climbing the slopes beyond the end of the trail have failed. To prevent further damage and reclaim the site the following alternatives were considered.

Proposed Management Actions (Preferred)

1. Installation of a new foot trail and reclamation of the slope leading from the end of the Kaaterskill Falls Trail upslope to intersect with the Escarpment Trail on the east side of Kaaterskill Falls. The proposed trail would be approximately 0.2 miles in length. Construction of this trail would include the installation of a stone staircase at the end of the current trail, upslope to a

potential viewing area, and then proceed upwards to the new connector trail leading to the Escarpment Trail. The staircase would be approximately 260 feet long and contain approximately 200 stone steps. Also proposed is an approximately 300 foot spur trail leading from the staircase, along a “herd path” that will be improved, to a point above the middle pool of the falls. At the end of this trail another shorter set of stone stairs would be installed to provide access to the middle pool area. The stone staircase would be designed to blend is with the natural stone of the area and located to limit its visibility from below.

This is the only alternative that creates a designated trail from the bottom of the falls to the top and a side trail to the middle pool. Visitor curiosity continually draws visitors up the slope to the middle pool and beyond to the top of the falls. Efforts to stop the activity have not been successful. This alternative addresses the public’s interest in having a better view and access to the falls.

Photo – looking down from top of falls at herd paths leading to middle pool area

Photo – looking up from end of trail at herd path leading up slope to the middle pool area

Alternative Actions

2. Installation of a new foot trail and reclamation of the slope leading from the end of the Kaaterskill Falls Trail upslope to intersect with the Escarpment Trail on the east side of Kaaterskill Falls. The proposed trail would be approximately 0.2 miles in length. Construction of this trail would include the installation of a stone staircase at the end of the current trail, upslope to a potential viewing area, and then proceed upwards to the new connector trail leading to the Escarpment Trail. The staircase would be approximately 260 feet long and contain approximately 200 stone steps. Access to the middle pool area from trail would be discouraged.

   This alternative creates a designated trail from the bottom of the falls to the top, but does not provide a side trail to the middle pool. Visitor curiosity continually draws visitors up the slope to the middle pool and beyond to the top of the falls. Efforts to stop the activity have not been successful. Because this alternative doesn't address the public's interest in having a better view and access to the falls it was not chosen as the preferred alternative.

3. Leave the trail system as is. The area will continue to operate as is. It is likely that visitors will continue to access the middle pool via the steep bank at the end of the Kaaterskill Falls Trail resulting in increased erosion of the site.

4. Install metal or wooden staircase from the bottom of the falls to the top. This would help solve the erosion problem, but would be aesthetically unappealing to visitors to the waterfall.

B. Parking Lot Expansion

Current Situation

Currently there are three parking lots that provide access to Kaaterskill Falls. The Molly Smith parking lot located on Route 23A managed by DOT, provides parking to access the Kaaterskill Falls trail bringing visitors to the base of the falls. Another parking lot at the end of Laurel House Road provides parking to access the top of Kaaterskill Falls. A third parking lot to the east of the Laurel House parking lot, located on Schutt Rd, provides access to a trailhead for the Escarpment Trail. The DEC parking areas are not large enough to accommodate the amount of visitors that Kaaterskill Falls receives. Visitors are parking illegal and causing a hazard to other motorists and pedestrians.

Proposed Management Actions (Preferred)

1. The Laurel House Rd parking lot can be easily improved and expanded in size to the west of the existing lot to accommodate the current approximate 12 vehicle capacity. The proposal is to increase the parking lot size to accommodate approximately 50 vehicles with eight parking spaces designated as accessible parking spaces.

2. The Schutt Rd parking area can be easily improved and expanded to the north and west of the existing lot to accommodate more than the current 9 vehicle capacity. The proposal is to increase the parking lot size to accommodate approximately 50 vehicles with eight parking spaces designated as accessible parking spaces.

Alternative Actions

1. Leave parking lots as they are. The parking situation will remain unchanged and undersized to accommodate the amount of visitors Kaaterskill Falls receives. People will continue to park along roadways creating hazardous traffic conditions, and improperly parked vehicles would potentially cause erosion and damage to vegetation along roadsides.

C. Fencing

Current Situation

In the fall of 2014 approximately 500 feet of fencing was installed at the bottom and top of the falls. The fencing is a wooden three rail, split rail style fence.

The fencing the west side of the top of the falls runs from the informational kiosk on the old walking path near the Laurel House site, southwest to near the top of the falls. It then runs back up northeast along the side of the same path terminating upslope from the top of the falls. An additional 100 feet or so of fencing was installed on the east side of the falls set back from the steep cliff overlooking the falls.

The fencing at the bottom of the falls is situated at the current end of the Kaaterskill Falls trail near the base of the falls. It is located approximately 75 to 100 feet upslope on the east side of the trail. It was installed here to deter visitors from continuing to scramble up the step bank and continue to cause erosion issues.

Proposed Management Actions (Preferred)

1. The fencing will be allowed to remain and additional informational signage installed. This will serve as a physical and visual barrier to the public to alert them to the potential dangers of proceeding further. The additional signage will also serve to inform and warn the public of the potential dangers of the falls.

Alternative Actions

1. Fencing will be removed. The historical use of the facility will remain unchanged and the public will be able to readily access the top of the falls with no barrier (physical or visual) in place.

D. Rescue Climbing Anchors

Current Situation

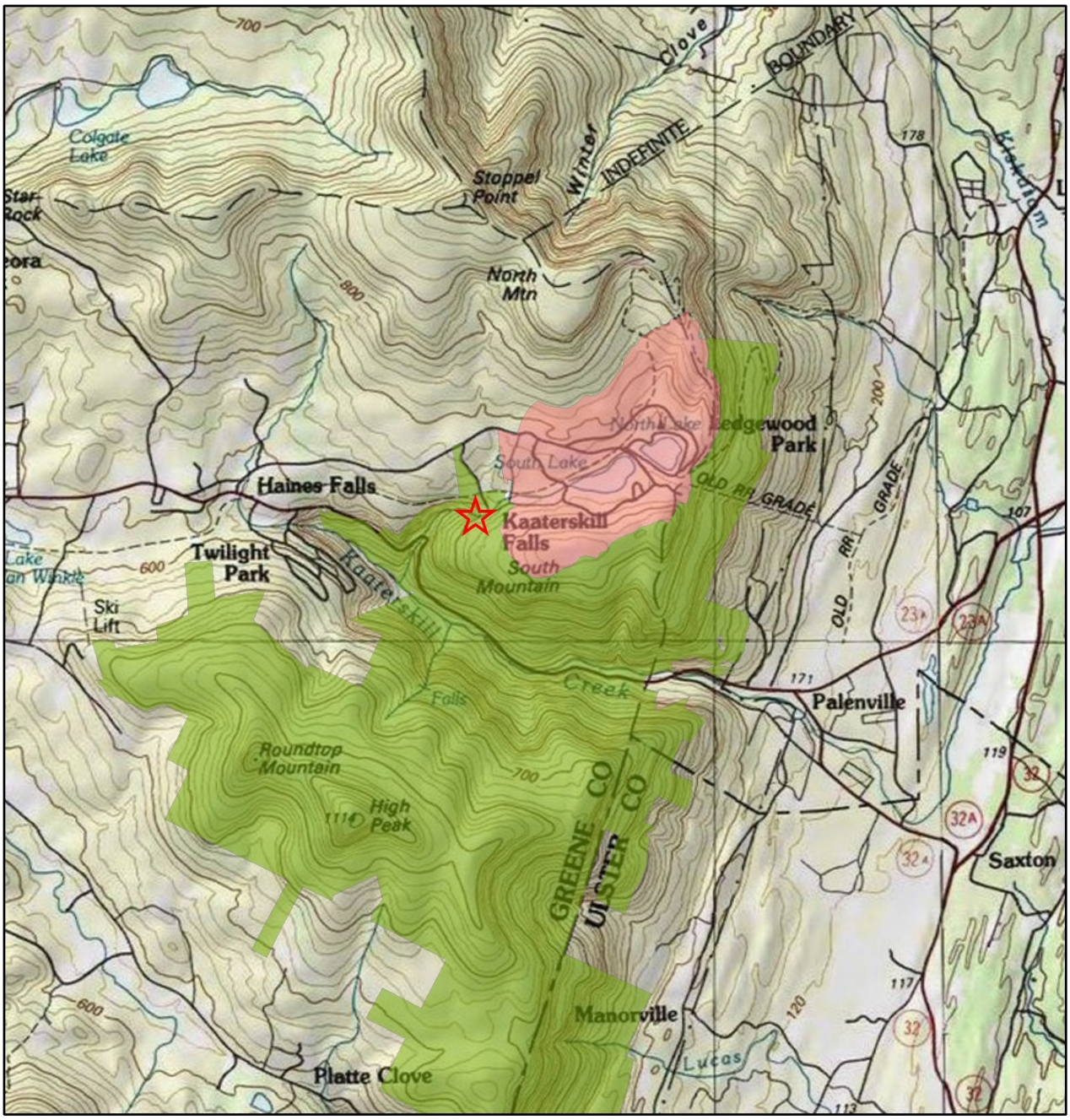
Since 1998 DEC Forest Rangers have reported 39 incidents at Kaaterskill Falls. The majority of incidents were injuries requiring rescue, with 5 incidents resulting in death. When rescuing or recovering individuals from Kaaterskill Falls, particularly from the middle pool, there are no permanent anchor points to tie safety ropes to in order to protect rescuers, and those being rescued, from potential falls and injury.

Proposed Management Actions (Preferred)

Install up to ten permanent anchor points located in the middle pool area. The anchors should be as inconspicuous and as small as practically possible to safely protect rescue personnel and those being rescued. The anchor locations should be determined by Forest Rangers who best understand where they should be.

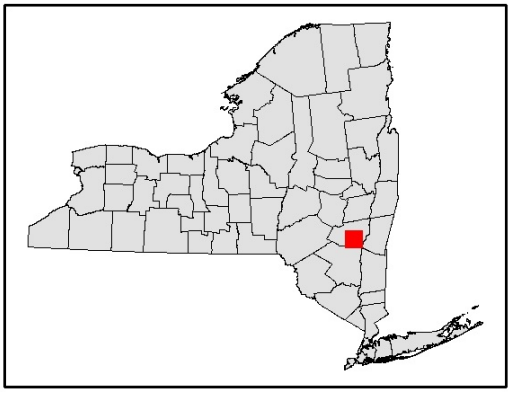
Alternative Actions

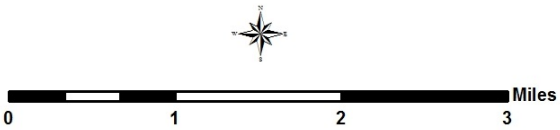
Do not install anchors. The historical use of the facility will remain unchanged and emergency personnel and those being rescued will not have additional anchor points with which to protect themselves from potential falls and injury.

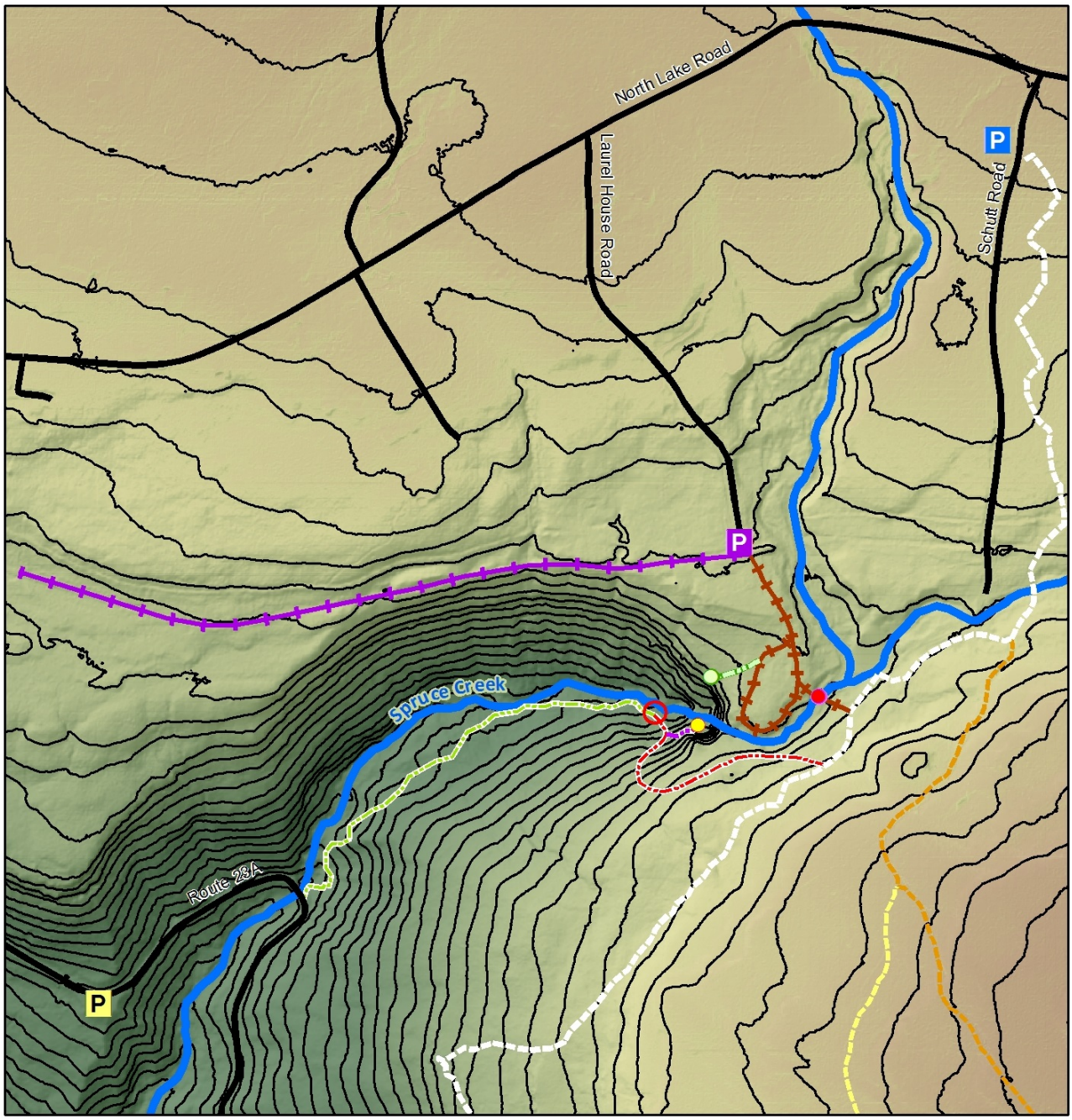


KAATERSKILL WILD FOREST

NORTH/SOUTH LAKE CAMPGROUND





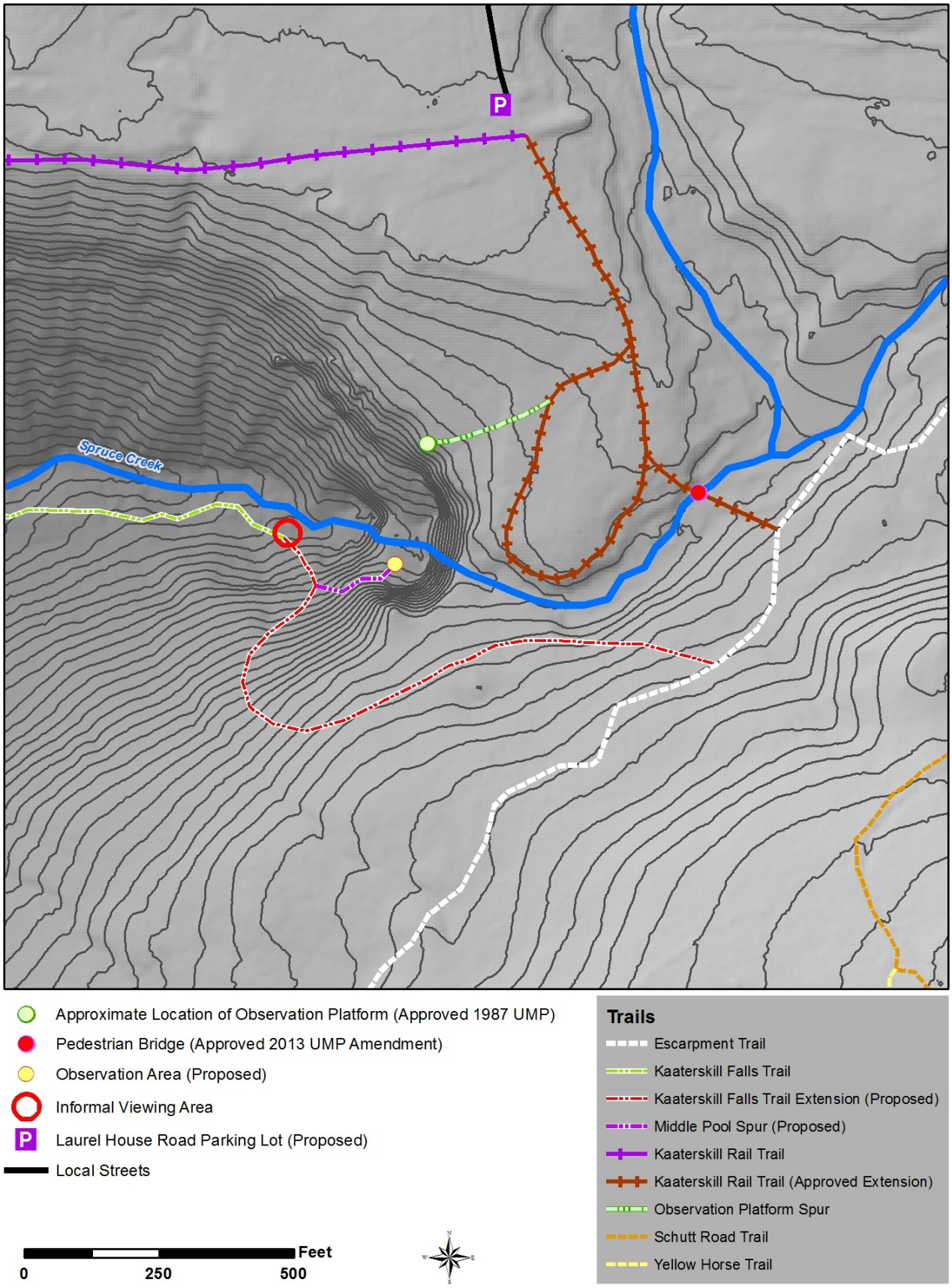


- Approximate Location of Observation Platform (Approved 1987 UMP)
- Pedestrian Bridge (Approved 2013 UMP Amendment)
- Observation Area (Proposed)
- Informal Viewing Area
- Laurel House Road Parking Lot (Proposed)
- Molly Smith Parking Lot (NYS DOT)
- Schutt Road Parking Lot (NYS DEC)
- Local Streets

0 0.1 0.2 0.3 Miles

Trails

- Escarpment Trail
- Kaaterskill Falls Trail
- Kaaterskill Falls Trail Extension (Proposed)
- Middle Pool Spur (Proposed)
- Kaaterskill Rail Trail
- Kaaterskill Rail Trail (Approved Extension)
- Observation Platform Spur
- Schutt Road Trail
- Yellow Horse Trail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Spruce Creek
Approximate Location of Observation Platform (Approved 1987 UMP)
Pedestrian Bridge (Approved 2013 UMP Amendment)
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Kaaterskill Rail Trail
Kaaterskill Rail Trail (Approved Extension)
Observation Platform Spur
Schutt Road Trail
Yellow Horse Trail
Feet
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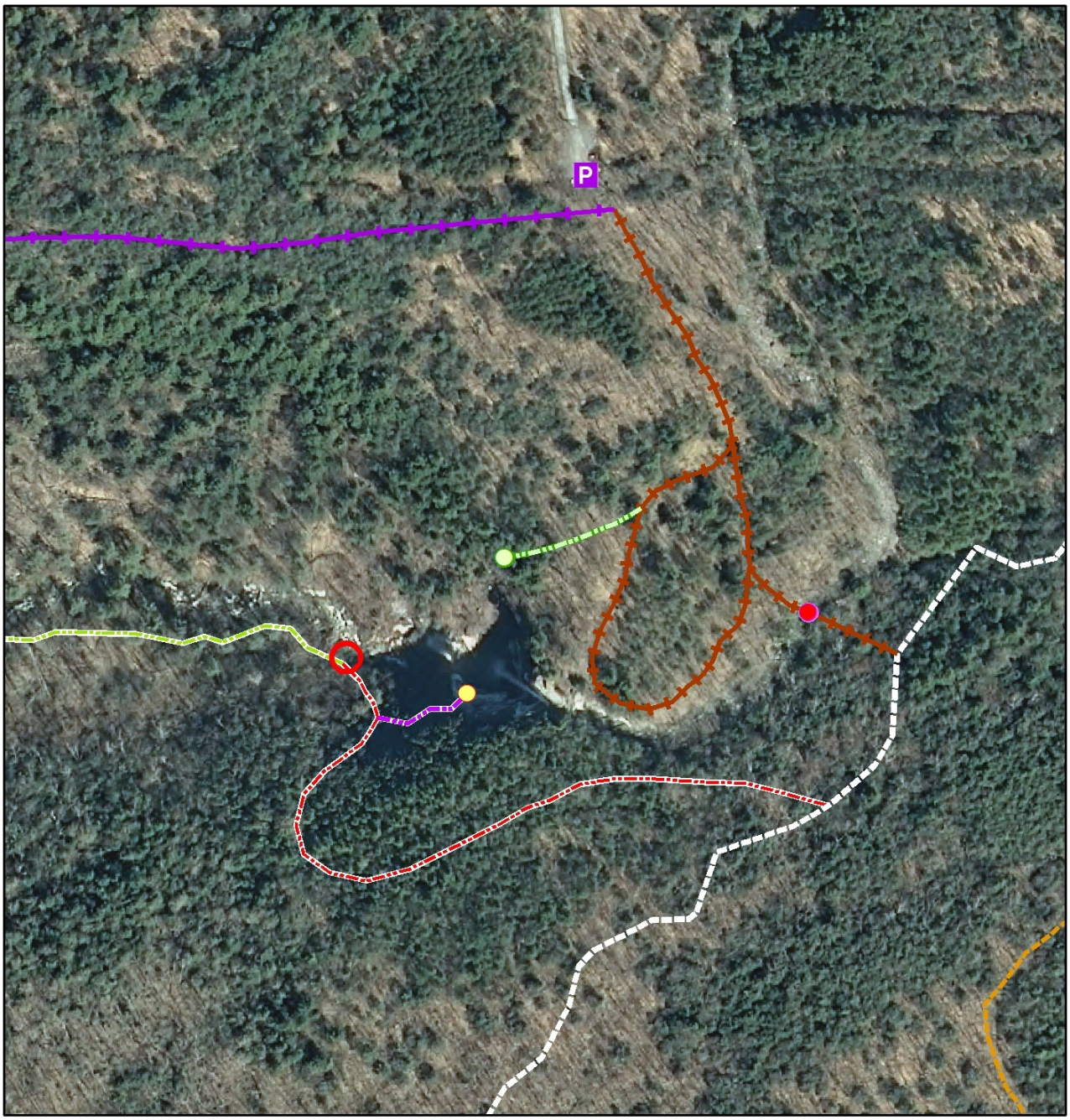
250
500



Approximate Location of Observation Platform (Approved 1987 UMP)

Pedestrian Bridge (Approved 2013 UMP Amendment)

Observation Area (Proposed)

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0 250 500 Feet

Summary of Public Comments

2015 Kaaterskill Wild Forest

Draft Unit Management Plan Amendment

The Department held a public comment period from May 6 to June 5, 2015 on the Draft UMP Amendment. Comments are summarized in bold below, followed by the Department's response.

1. **Several comments called for creating a new parking area below Horseshoe Bend and the S turns on the left side as you go down 23A and creating a connector trail from here to the Kaaterskill Falls trail and an additional trail leading to Layman's Monument. This parking area then would have access to a footpath that would run parallel to 23A tying into the trail at/to Kaaterskill from 23A. That footpath would be in the wooded area, keeping sightseers off of 23A.**

   Response: Consideration of this parking area and new trail development here is beyond the scope of this amendment. In addition, preliminary review by DOT determined there may be insufficient sight distances in this area for a parking lot.

2. **You presently have the dead end trail with signage as it stands from 23A in to the base of the falls. If not monitored those signs end up in someone's house or destroyed. People still try to make their way to the top. Stewards are at least a deterrent part of the time.**

   Response: This amendment proposes new trail construction from the end of the Kaaterskill Falls trail upslope to connect with the Escarpment Trail at the top of Kaaterskill Falls. Since it would no longer be a dead end trail these signs would be removed.

3. **Several comments in supported constructing an observation platform at the top of Kaaterskill Falls as well as an accessible trail to Laurel House Rd or Schutt Rd parking lots.**

   Response: The approved 1987 Kaaterskill Wild Forest UMP called for the construction of an observation deck in this area and a trail from Laurel House Rd to access it. An approved 2013 amendment to this UMP called for the construction of an additional 0.2 miles of old walking paths and roads around the Laurel House site be designated as a multi-use trail. That amendment also called for the construction of a bridge over Spruce Creek and extending the trail to intersect the Escarpment Trail just south of Schutt Rd.

4. **Several comments supported posting an educational steward (either a paid positions or volunteers, or a combination) at Kaaterskill Falls, especially on holidays and weekends.**

Response: The approved 1987 Kaaterskill Wild Forest UMP proposed hiring of a seasonal employee as a caretaker for Kaaterskill Falls. This is still being considered and is dependent on current budget funding.

5. **We advocate removing the KRT sign from the junction of North Lake Road and Laurel House Road. The main KRT sign should be limited to the Mountain Top Historical Society property. At least the sign at Laurel House Road, if left there, should be very clear that 'KRT' means Kaaterskill Rail Trail—but any sign posted prominently at Laurel House Road with the word "Kaaterskill" will entice many people to enter and then find the path to the top of the falls.**

   Response: The 2013 Kaaterskill Wild Forest UMP amendment proposed an additional 0.2 miles of old walking paths and roads around the Laurel House site to be designated as a multi-use trail. This area already sees a significant amount of use because it goes near the top of Kaaterskill Falls, which provides an impressive vista. To better control the use, a single trail will be clearly marked and any unauthorized herd paths that develop will be brushed in. The Laurel House Rd will be a trailhead for the KRT and signed as such. This trail will also access the new observation platform(s), providing for an enhanced user experience at the top of the falls.

6. **The DEC should eliminate the top of the falls paths altogether so that no trace of it exists. If legal, mark that land "DEC Personnel Only" or "Restricted to DEC Personnel," with notices that fines will be levied, should anyone go in. This may deter many.**

   Response: Official trails will be designated and signed appropriately per the 2013 Kaaterskill Wild Forest UMP amendment; any unauthorized herd paths that develop will be brushed in. Also see response to comments 3 and 5.

7. **To prepare these comments, we hiked in again on December 21st to look at the new fencing and we noted myriad footprints of sightseers who scale the fence in various places and walk down by the stream. Obviously, this fence with the sign "Trail Ends" is totally inadequate.**

   Response: The fencing serves as both a physical and visual barrier to the public to alert them to the potential dangers of proceeding further. There are no regulations prohibiting the public from proceeding beyond the fence.

8. **I understand the concerns with safety however prefer you not put fencing around such a beautiful natural scenic view.**

   Response: The fencing was installed in such a way as to minimize any visual impacts to the natural surroundings. The fencing does not impede the view of the falls themselves, arguably the focal point of the area.

9. **Several comments were received concerning that the UMP amendment should consider the construction of a cantilevered walkway, or other appropriate facility, along Route 23A, from the Molly Smith parking lot to the trail head at Kaaterskill Clove, to improve the safety of pedestrians accessing the trail head.**

   Response: Consideration of this issue is not within the scope of this amendment.

10. **Several comments indicated that the UMP amendment should consider the closing of the Molly Smith parking area on Route 23A.**

    Response: The Molly Smith parking is owned by the NYS DOT. Closing this parking area is not under the jurisdiction of DEC nor is it within the scope of this amendment.

11. **Establish a connector trail from the lower parking lot to the old Harding Rd (formerly Kaaterskill Rd.) and to the blue escarpment trail at Layman's Monument.**

    Response: Consideration of this issue is not within the scope of this amendment.

12. **Efforts should be made to improve communications for both emergency services providers and trail users. Many hiker location and rescue efforts are facilitated by cell phones. Where coverage is lacking, emergency response has been hampered. Construction of a communications tower and other communications facilities should be considered to improve coverage. Improved broadband coverage should also be considered since broadband facilitates access to many modem communications devices. DEC should work with Greene County Emergency Services and Greene County Economic Development, Tourism & Planning to identify areas for improved coverage and develop strategies to improve coverage.**

    Response: DEC has erected a radio on a building in the North-South Lake Campground to address this issue.

13. **The UMP should consider both interpretive and directional signage and appropriate trail signage that will clearly indicate the level of experience that each hiking trail requires and the hazards of walking trails without proper equipment, including proper shoes.**

    Response: Appropriate additional signage will be installed.

14. **I understand the wish to protect visitors to the Falls but I had to blink when confronted with the huge, ugly warning signs. Whatever happened to self-responsibility? Wouldn't it be adequate to have a wooden sign advising people to explore at their own risk?**

    Response: The signs referred to emphasize the hazards of the area stating “Warning: Hazardous Gorge Area: Sheer Cliffs, Swift Water, Slippery Footing”.
    These signs were designed to be highly visible to the public in order to alert them to the potential dangers in the immediate area around Kaaterskill Falls.

15. **One comment advocated for the development of a Catskill Park-wide recreation plan. This type of plan would allow for both local and regional solutions to issues such as access, safety, trail development, and natural resource protection.**

    Response: Consideration of this issue is not within the scope of this amendment.

16. **Extra effort should be made in the Draft UMP process to address issues related to communication and collaboration between local communities, and organizations, including the Town of Hunter, the DEC, DOT, nearby landowners, non-profit organizations like the Trail Conference, and local businesses.**

    Response: The public comment period for the draft UMP affords all individuals, organizations and municipalities the opportunity to offer input regarding the management of this public land. Communication and collaboration between the DEC and local interest groups will be assessed based on the scope of a particular management action to be undertaken.

17. **Redevelopment and relocation of the current Kaaterskill Falls Trail to create a safer and more environmentally sustainable means of public access to the base of Kaaterskill Falls. Given the popularity of this trail, conservatively measured at several hundred people a day by the DEC Resource Steward in October of 2014, this trail must be constructed to a higher standard than the typical backcountry trail found in the majority of the Catskill Park and Forest Preserve.**

    Response: This amendment is dealing with the most serious issues in the unit, which includes public safety and resource protection in the immediate vicinity of Kaaterskill Falls. The trail from Route 23A to the base of the falls is not scheduled for maintenance during the 2015 field season. This trail was constructed and is maintained consistent with the Department's Forest Preserve Policy manual and the Trail Construction and Maintenance manual.

18. **The development of a new trail that connects the existing Escarpment Trail and the Kaaterskill Falls Trail in a safe and efficient manner. For a connector trail between the Kaaterskill Falls Trail and the Escarpment Trail, we would suggest a trail connection that brings hikers from the Kaaterskill Falls area to Layman's Monument on the Escarpment Trail.**

    Response: The draft UMP amendment proposes the installation of a new foot trail leading from the end of the Kaaterskill Falls Trail upslope to intersect with the Escarpment Trail on the east side of Kaaterskill Falls. Development of a trail here will result in establishing the connector trail from the bottom to the top of the falls and establish a sustainable trail in an area where many visitors currently (and very likely will continue in the future) access the middle pool of the falls and are causing serious erosion.

19. **Careful consideration and review of the value of developing a new trail that would bring visitors to the upper level of Kaaterskill Falls from the Kaaterskill Falls Trail's current end. The trail's current end, before the base of the lower falls,**

provides the public with a safe viewing area of Kaaterskill Falls. Site conditions beyond this point would make the construction of a safe, sustainable, and environmentally friendly trail from this location to the upper falls difficult.

Response: Careful consideration has been given regarding the creation of this new connector trail. The current situation in this area is that many visitors continue past the official end of the trail and scramble up the steep bank, consisting mostly of loose rock and shallow soils, in order to gain access to the middle pool of the falls by way of an eroded catwalk. This bank is currently severely eroded. Over the years a number of herd paths have developed resulting in severe erosion and degradation of this bank as well as denuding the bank of vegetation. The steep slopes in this area continue to be prone to erosion issues and with the high volume of foot traffic this area receives greater protection of the resource is needed. Installation of a stone staircase and careful layout of a connector trail will have several benefits. It will establish one main trail for users and help to eliminate the number of herd paths that have developed over the years, thereby reducing future erosion issues. It will also allow users easier, safer, and improved access up the steep slope that they have historically been climbing up with no defined trail.

20. **In addition, for a trail behind the falls, there is the danger of a catastrophic rock collapse from the overhanging amphitheater roof. There would need to be a detailed study of the safety hazards and stability of the area before a trail should be considered.**

    Response: The proposed trial is to access the middle pool and will end before going behind the falls, although the public would not be prohibited from the amphitheater area. The amphitheater has been stable for hundreds of years, it is extremely unlikely it would collapse.

21. **Completion of the Kaaterskill Rail Trail (KRT) near the top of the Kaaterskill Falls through the construction of a pedestrian bridge over Lake Creek, which will provide a safe crossing for visitors above Kaaterskill Falls and facilitate hiker traffic along the KRT, the Escarpment Trail, and any future Escarpment/Kaaterskill Falls Trails connections.**

    Response: This proposal was approved in the 2013 Kaaterskill Wild Forest UMP amendment.

22. **Using the extended Kaaterskill Rail Trail and reworking the existing unmarked trails at the top of Kaaterskill Falls to create a small interpretive trail network that brings visitors to the proposed viewing platform/area.**

    Response: The 2013 Kaaterskill Wild Forest UMP amendment proposed the development designation of these trails designated as a multi-use trail. The 1987 UMP proposed the construction of a new trail to an observation deck at the top of the falls. These actions are supported by DEC.

23. **We feel whatever type of observation platform is constructed should be within the Forever Wild designation of the Forest Preserve in this area and should be constructed with natural materials to the greatest extent possible and not be highly visible from other areas.**

    Response: The platform should not be highly visible from other areas based on the proposed location. Construction of the observation platform will be undertaken consistent with Department policy.

24. **We support the creation of a weekend shuttle service between Palenville and Hunter to reduce parking pressure in the clove, move visitors into the villages, and provide an outlet for public information about areas to visit, including Kaaterskill Falls.**

    Response: Consideration of this issue is not within the scope of this amendment nor within the jurisdiction of the Department.

25. **We strongly urge the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to construct a rock staircase from the base of the falls to a viewing area and then upward to meet up with the Escarpment Trail. There is simply no other alternative than to provide a safe and sustainable access route for visitors. The erosion that has occurred in the area is deplorable and will continue unless a hardened route is provided.**

    Response: The Department supports this comment. This amendment proposes the construction of a stone staircase and connector trail to the Escarpment Trail.

26. **We recommend re-vegetating and covering the exposed slope with organic material adjacent to a staircase to reduce future erosion from occurring.**

    Response: The Department supports this comment and recommends, in addition to covering the slope with organic material, planting native shrubs and/or trees obtained from the NY State Saratoga Tree Nursery.

27. **I am totally against the possible reclassification of this land so that it may be policed.**

    Response: The Department is not planning to re-classify this area at this time.

28. **I believe funds should be directed towards educating hikers as to the dangers of the area, more elaborate signage that better conveys the message of danger with imagery for those who don't read and for rescue equipment and training to local emergency workers and volunteers.**

    Response: The Department has committed to hiring a trail steward for the 2015 season, whose job will be to educate the public. Signage has been used and will continue to be used to as well. This includes internationally recognizable symbols. New York State pays taxes on this property, which are used in part for funding local emergency services.

29. **If steps are to be constructed they should be of naturally found rock like the ones at the current trailhead and not some elaborate shaped and squared off steps found at some tourist attraction.**

    Response: The Department is considering using rectangular "squared off" steps for the staircase. The quarry cut steps will allow the stairs to be built with the consistent rise and run and will be easier to build and maintain and be safer and easier for the public to negotiate them.

30. **There is a serious litter problem in the Kaaterskill Clove that has been going on for the past 5 to 10 years. Something needs to be done to better police the Kaaterskill Clove from Palenville to the top of Kaaterskill Falls and the surrounding area. There are no provisions for garbage disposal (we have experienced the failure of carry it in /carry it out). Our local highway dept. and volunteers have cleaned up the existing parking areas along 23A several weekends last summer**

    Response: The Department recognizes that litter has historically been a problem for many years in Kaaterskill Clove. This area is both patrolled and cleaned up as time and resources permit. Additional management actions are beyond the scope of this amendment.

31. **Close the Kaaterskill Falls trailhead on the Horseshoe Curve. No one should be walking on that road.**

    Response: The Department is not planning on closing the trailhead on Route 23A.

32. **The Mountain Top Historical Society is the perfect spot for a Visitors' Center to be manned by the State and run like the ones we have all visited at our National Parks.**

    Response: This is outside the scope of this amendment.

33. **Close the access to the top of Kaaterskill Falls from the Rail Trail. Do not build a bridge across the creek there. If people want to visit the Falls themselves, they should then drive to North Lake, pay the entry fee, park in a new, expanded parking lot at South Lake, and hike down A NEW TRAIL that should be built down to the old trail, ideally bypassing Bastion Falls, then up the old trail to K Falls.**

    Response: An approved 2013 amendment to this UMP called for the construction of an additional 0.2 miles of old walking paths and roads around the Laurel House site be designated as a multi-use trail. That amendment also called for the construction of a bridge over Spruce Creek and extending the trail to intersect the Escarpment Trail just south of Schutt Rd. This amendment was subject to public comment and these projects were approved.

34. **The DEC proposal to build bigger parking lots along 23A, or in Palenville, will only exacerbate the pedestrian problem, the garbage problem, and the danger level on the road.**

    Response: This amendment does not propose any parking expansion on Route 23A. The proposed parking expansion would be at the Laurel House Rd parking area and the Schutt Rd parking area.

35. **Given the additional trail mileage and parking lot capacity that is proposed, the Trail Conference would like to see a discussion of a carrying capacity for the Kaaterskill Falls area with regards to recreational development.**

    Response: Trail construction and parking expansion are not intended to increase the number of visitors to the site, they are intended better manage current use levels. A discussion of recreational carrying capacity will be addressed when the entire Kaaterskill Wild Forest Unit Management Plan is revised.

36. **The background section should include a detailed explanation of Article XIV, the Catskill Park State Land Management Plan and the Wild Forest classification of the area to educate the general public of the constraints that are placed on any recreational development within the Forest Preserve.**

    Response: Detailed information on Article XIV, the Catskill Park State Land Master Plan, and the land classifications of the forest preserve can be found at the NYSDEC website: http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4960.html .

37. **As the land manager of Kaaterskill Falls which is driving traffic and pedestrians, the DEC is a significant stakeholder with a direct interest in finding a solution to improve parking and pedestrian safety. The DEC should engage with local communities, the County, the NYSDOT, regional organizations such as the Trail Conference, and others to tackle issues of parking and pedestrian safety. Two of many options that deserve further study are:**

    i. The creation of a weekend shuttle service between Palenville and Hunter to reduce parking pressure in the clove, move visitors into the villages, and provide an outlet for public information about areas to visit, including Kaaterskill Falls; and

    ii. Improvements to pedestrian safety along Route 23A that provide a separate path for pedestrians to reach the trailhead. Those improvements could include changes to Route 23A or new trail from the parking lots to the Kaaterskill Falls Trail.

    Response: Consideration of these issues are not within the scope of this amendment.

38. **Several comments were received supporting the expansion of the Laurel House Road and the Schutt Road parking areas to provide the ability to accommodate**

significantly more vehicles. In addition, these comments included requests for installing privies (composting or other) at these parking areas.

Response: The installation of privies at the Laurel House Road and Schutt Road parking areas will be considered based on the evaluation of use.

39. **We support leaving the existing installed fencing and adding additional signage.**

    Response: Comment noted.

40. **We support the installation of up to ten permanent anchor points to facilitate rescue operations.**

    Response: Comment noted.

41. **Numerous comments supported of the proposed actions in this UMP amendment.**

    Response: Comments noted.