



North Country National Scenic Trail **Draft Adirondack Park Trail Plan/ Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement**

November 2007

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State of New York

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Draft GEIS accepted by lead Agency: *November 2007*
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Executive Summary

Setting

In March 1980, federal legislation authorized the establishment of the North Country National Scenic Trail (NST) as a component of the National Trails System (16 U.S.C. 1241 *et seq.*). To date, Congress has authorized the establishment of eight National Scenic Trails – long distance, non-motorized trails that follow major geographic features or pass through scenic areas. National Scenic Trails are patterned after the renowned Appalachian NST.

The North Country NST's projected length is approximately 4,600 miles, stretching across the northern tier of the United States with some 2,000 miles completed to date. The legislation that established the North Country NST requires that it be developed and managed through a federal-state-local-private partnership with the National Park Service providing overall administration and coordination. Only through the cooperation of many agencies, organizations, landowners, and individuals will the North Country NST become a reality.

As overall administrator of the North Country NST, the National Park Service (NPS) provides limited financial assistance to public and private partners, including Challenge Cost Share project assistance and, when appropriated by Congress, matching grants for land acquisition (currently only in Wisconsin). Membership dues paid to the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) help to support the efforts of the hundreds of volunteers who build and maintain the trail. In addition, many agencies whose lands are traversed by the trail invest financial and staff resources in managing their segments of the trail. The continued development and completion of this trail depends on cooperation between municipal officials, private landowners, partner organizations, volunteer chapters of the NCTA and several state and federal agencies.

“The Comprehensive Plan for Management and Use of the North Country Trail – 1982” presented a very general route for the trail across the Adirondack Park. The route was developed and provided to the NPS by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) as a starting point for future discussions about where to eventually establish the trail. Various discussions and meetings since 1982 have identified some concerns about the initial route. These concerns and the progress on unit management planning have led to this current effort to reassess the North Country NST's route across the Park.

The development, maintenance, and use of the North Country NST in the Adirondack Park is subject to legal guidance from:

- Article XIV, Section 1 of the New York State Constitution
- The Adirondack Park Agency Act
- The Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan
- New York State Environmental Conservation Law
- The New York State Historic Preservation Act
- The National Trails System Act

In addition, various policy and guidance documents influence the development and management of the trail, such as the *North Country National Scenic Trail Handbook for Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance*, (herein referred to as the *Handbook*) published in 1997 by the NPS.

Trail Plan Content

This Draft Adirondack Park Trail Plan for the North Country NST describes a proposed route for the North Country NST across the central region of the Adirondack Park. The Plan presented herein, once approved, will be integrated into the Unit Management Plans (UMPs) for each respective unit traversed by the trail. This Plan is conceptual in nature and offers a comprehensive analysis of the preferred route and alternative options within an overall route corridor. The guidelines and standards for developing and maintaining the North Country NST within the context of the existing Park trail system; within the context of current constitutional requirements, statutes, rules, regulations and policies, and within the context of this Plan includes the following sections:

- History of the planning process of the North Country NST in Adirondack Park
- Explanation of the planning process used in the development of the Plan and an explanation of how the Plan relates to Unit Management Plans
- Common questions that public officials, the general public, and various groups have asked during informational meetings, and answers to those questions
- Visions and goals for the development and management of the North Country NST in the Park
- Background information about the North Country NST and the existing Adirondack Park long-distance trail system
- Analysis of the routing options for the North Country NST and standards and guidelines for design, construction, and maintenance within the Park

Trail Plan Recommendations

This Plan recommends the incorporation of the North Country NST into the Adirondack Park trail system and recommends that this NST be developed and managed in accordance with applicable federal and state laws, policies, and guidelines. The Plan outlines a viable trail route for the North Country NST across the central region of the Park and recommends that this Plan be incorporated into affected current and future unit management planning and UMPs.

This Plan recommends following approximately 70 miles of existing foot trail within the Park. The Plan recommends approximately 47 miles of new trail construction within the Park. It is estimated that 27 miles of Temporary Connectors will be initially utilized to make connections along this route. It is estimated that the North Country NST, within the Park, will be approximately 144 total miles in length when complete. (It should be noted that this proposed route requires less new construction than other alternatives.) The ultimate goal is a North Country NST route that is completely off-road and non-motorized, but this Plan does suggest temporary road-walking connections for use by long-distance hikers until the off-road route can be completed.

This Plan also recommends that the North Country NST be signed in accordance with the NPS minimum trail signing standards presented in the *Handbook*. It is anticipated that the trail will be marked with blue DEC nail-up trail discs with the official North Country NST trail emblem at all road crossings. The NPS is responsible for providing trail signing outside of federal lands. The NPS signage standards have been developed over the past 25 years in order to establish a “thread of continuity” across the many and varying public and private lands crossed by the trail. The DEC will provide overall trail management within the Forest Preserve and adapt the NPS standards to ensure the wild character of the Forest Preserve is maintained.

Environmental Review

The North Country NST planning process is subject to the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). All reasonable alternatives concerning the various recommendations found herein will be analyzed and the potential environmental impacts assessed. All of the recommendations will be subject to DEC approval and Adirondack Park Agency (APA) review and implementation will depend on guidance from these agencies. Because the Secretary of the Interior has delegated to the NPS the responsibility of route selection for the North Country NST under section 7(c) of the National Trails System Act, the selected route will also have to concur with NPS recommendations.

This plan has been reviewed under the SEQRA. Because the plan makes recommendations for management across multiple units, it was determined that a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) should be prepared. This document includes the Plan and the GEIS for the trail project. Pursuant to the criteria and thresholds established in this GEIS, site specific SEQRA review of trail segments will be accomplished within the Unit Management Plan (UMP) wherein the segment is located. All environmental reviews concerning this route will be coordinated with NPS staff to ensure that such work also meets NPS compliance responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and similar legislation.

Implementation

Final approval of this Plan will be a decision made by the DEC, after consultation with the APA. The Plan will be distributed for public review and comment and public meetings will be held to solicit public input. Implementation of the Plan on Forest Preserve land will require UMP authorization or authorization through a UMP amendment. Sections of this Plan may be directly incorporated into UMP planning documents that are slotted for revision or are being drafted for the first time.

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Section I: Introduction

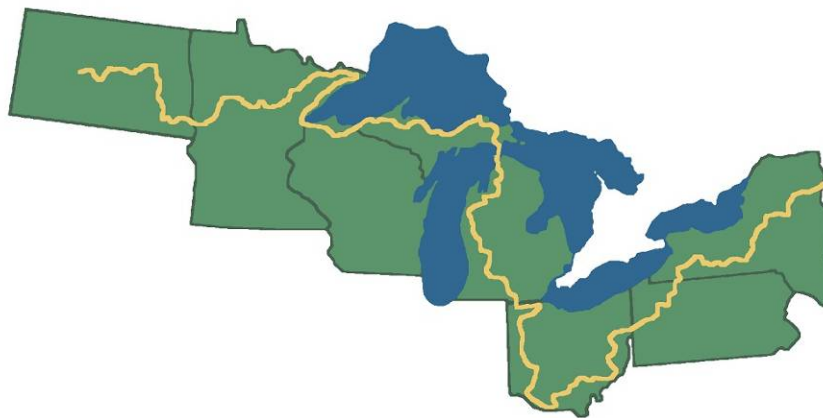
Introduction and Background Information

National Scenic Trails (NSTs) are long distance, non-motorized trails that follow major geographic features or pass through scenic areas. The North Country NST was originally conceived in the mid-1960s as a trail to connect National Forests and other nationally significant resources in eight northern states, from the Lewis and Clark Trail (on the Missouri River in North Dakota) to the Appalachian Trail (in the Green Mountains of Vermont). Congress passed the National Trails System Act in 1968, immediately designating two trails (the Appalachian Trail and the Pacific Crest Trail) as the first NSTs in the system. The Act also named the North Country Trail as one of fourteen other trail routes to be studied as potential later additions to the system.

The responsibility for completing the studies was assigned to the former Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, which was reorganized as the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service in 1978 and consolidated into the National Park Service in 1981. The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation coordinated input from a variety of federal, state, local, and private sector trail representatives, and completed a final conceptual study report in 1975. The study identified a 10-mile wide planning corridor within which an actual North Country NST route could be feasibly located.

In March 1980, Congress passed legislation amending the National Trails System Act to authorize the establishment of the North Country NST (16 U.S.C. 1241 *et seq.*). It is one of only eight trails authorized by Congress as a National Scenic Trail.

In many ways, the North Country NST is similar in concept to the Appalachian NST. However, it is uniquely different as it takes the visitor through a diverse series of landscapes rather than following a mountain range or other distinct geographic feature. When completed, the North Country NST will extend from the vicinity of Crown Point, New York, to Lake Sakakawea State Park in North Dakota, where it joins the route of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.



While it was originally thought that the distance required to span these two extremities was roughly 3,200 miles, as work progresses to complete the North Country NST, a total length of 4,600 miles is now anticipated. Currently, more than 1,700 miles of the North Country NST are in place and certified to meet the National Park Service standards of a NST. Another 300 off-road miles of trail are walk-able as part of the route, but not certified because local management allows some motorized or other non-compatible use.

The National Park Service is responsible for overall administration of the North Country NST. The North Country Trail Association is the primary non-profit partner of the NPS. The North Country NST is a private-public partnership project where the actual development and management of the trail is intended to be accomplished through many cooperating federal, state, and local agencies, and private trail organizations. When viewed in this manner, the North Country NST is truly a broad-based cooperative endeavor.

NPS Mission Statement for the North Country NST

The mission of the National Park Service is to acquire, develop, operate, maintain, and protect, through public and private partnerships, the North Country NST a trail that meanders for approximately 4,600 miles across seven northern states, from eastern New York to the Missouri River in North Dakota for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

NPS Statement of Purpose for the North Country NST

The purpose of the North Country NST is:

- To establish a trail within scenic areas of the Nation to provide increased outdoor recreation opportunities and promote the preservation of, public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of, national scenic and historic resources
- To provide for superlative outdoor recreation opportunities and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, and cultural qualities of the areas through which the trail passes
- To provide a premier hiking trail facility and an experience consistent with preserving the landscape in which the trail is established
- To encourage and assist volunteer citizen involvement in the planning, development, maintenance, and management of the trail, wherever appropriate

NCTA Mission Statement

The mission of the NCTA is to develop, maintain, preserve, and promote the North Country NST by empowering and coordinating a national network of volunteers and partners.

The Association achieves this mission through programs of trail construction and enhancement, public and membership services, and resource and corridor protection in keeping with its Vision of the Trail.

NCTA Vision of the Trail

The vision for the North Country NST is that of a premier footpath of national significance that offers a superb experience for hikers in a permanently protected corridor that traverses and interprets the richly diverse environmental, cultural, and historic features of the northern United States.

To meet this vision, our goals are for the trail to become:

- A continuous hiking trail of the highest caliber with foot travel accorded the highest priority to the exclusion of other uses except in short, specifically designated sections
- A corridor of consistently and clearly marked treadways, blending with local character as appropriate and permanently protected, whenever possible, as a public hiking trail
- Unique among National Trails in showcasing the rich variety of historical, cultural, and environmental features in the northern United States
- A model of resource protection and quality recreational opportunity of national significance with emphasis on identifying, interpreting and promoting features for educational and recreational benefit
- An example of highly successful partnerships among the various entities providing funding, management of and service to, the trail

North Country NST Route in New York State

Through western New York, the North Country NST route generally follows the Finger Lakes Trail (FLT), and is maintained by the Finger Lakes Trail Conference as part of its trail system. About 253 miles of the FLT are now certified by the NPS as official sections of the North Country NST.

Southeast of Cuyler, the FLT turns southeastward to the Catskills and the North Country NST departs from the main FLT and continues northeastward along the Onondaga Trail extension of the FLT (built and maintained by the Onondaga Chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club). The Central New York Chapter of the NCTA is the local steward for the North Country NST from the end of the Onondaga Trail to the western edge of Adirondack Park.

The Central New York Chapter is also responsible for the 12.3-mile Link Trail, part of which serves as the North Country NST route. The southward extension of the Link Trail

from the Tioughnioga Wildlife Management Area provides another connection to the main FLT in Chenango County, creating a grand loop trail opportunity. The Link Trail is an integral part of the Genny Geene-Link Trail project included in the Open Space Plan for DEC Region 7. This segment may eventually be designated an official side trail of the North Country NST in the National Trails System.

Major North Country NST route points in central New York include the northern edge of the Tioughnioga Wildlife Management Area, Morgan Hill State Forest, DeRuyter State Forest, Cuyler State Forest, Highland Forest County Park, the Nelson Swamp Unique Area southeast of Cazenovia, the Stone Quarry Hill Art Park, the Village of Cazenovia, the Gorge Trail (owned by the Cazenovia Preservation Foundation), sections of the long-abandoned Lehigh Valley Railroad (owned by New York State Parks), the Village of Canastota, the Old Erie Canal Towpath Historic Park between Canastota and Rome, and Fort Stanwix National Monument within the city of Rome.

The North Country NST is being developed northward from Rome to the Village of Boonville on routes now being explored between the city of Rome and Pixley Falls State Park. The Black River Environmental Improvement Association (BREIA) Trail System to the Boonville area, the Boonville area trail system, and the Black River Feeder Canal to the Hamlet of Forestport are also being examined as potential routes to reach Adirondack Park. The projected total distance for this route is 79.2 miles. Certified trail mileage for the Central New York Chapter section is currently 11.7 miles. 271.5 miles of the North Country NST have been certified in New York State by the NPS.

The Hamlet of Forestport will be the springboard for the North Country NST's entrance into the Adirondack Park. By following the North Lake Road, the proposed route will cross the "Blue Line" boundary of Adirondack Park. Once inside the Park, a new off-road route will need to be established to reach the trailhead of the first existing trail proposed to be part of the North Country NST route – the Stone Dam Trail.

Planning History

The Congressionally-authorized route of the North Country NST begins in the vicinity of Crown Point, New York. The current preferred eastern terminus for the North Country NST is the Crown Point State Historic Site on Lake Champlain. From this point, the North Country NST heads west and southwest across the 6-million acre Adirondack Park to the Hamlet of Forestport.

The route for the North Country NST through the Adirondack Park has been a subject of debate since the trail was first proposed. The Interior Department's 1975 feasibility study, developed with input from public agencies and private interests, recommended a northern route for the trail, but one that specifically avoided the High Peaks Region because of concern for its fragile resources. After the North Country NST was authorized in 1980, the NPS was directed to prepare a comprehensive management plan for the trail. The concern over a northern route led the DEC to specify a general location

route through Adirondack Park as a starting point from which to begin the “unit management planning” process as it affected the North Country NST. In a letter dated April 27, 1982 DEC, recommended that the NPS adopt this route for presentation on the maps in its comprehensive plan. These recommendations were incorporated in the NPS “Comprehensive Plan for the Management and Use of the North Country National Scenic Trail – 1982.”

Although no efforts were undertaken to establish the North Country NST east of Rome during the 1980s and early 1990s, the New York State Trails Council debated the routing through Adirondack Park on several occasions and in May 1993 issued a Resolution opposing a northern routing for the North Country NST (see Appendix 11). The Council recommended that the NPS abandon the Adirondack route and follow the FLT to the Catskill Forest Preserve, and thence the Long Trail for a connection with the Appalachian NST in Bear Mountain State Park. Such a significant change would have required Congressional approval and the NPS declined to initiate any steps in that direction without an official request from the governor or a state official acting on the governor’s behalf. No such request was made.

Timeline of North Country NST Adirondack Route Planning (1992-2007)

December 1992 – A North Country NST summit meeting, held in Albany, is attended by potential partners with an interest in the routing of the trail in eastern New York. Participants agree on the need to pursue a “study” to resolve the impasse over the northern route.

August 1994 – Irene Szabo, then President of the Finger Lakes Trail Conference (FLTC), calls a meeting to identify some tentative alternatives for a North Country NST route. This meeting, held in Utica, is attended by representatives of most of the key agencies and organizations involved with the Adirondack Park routing issue.

1995 – The NPS Madison office provides funding to the NPS Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (RTCA) located in Hyde Park, New York to conduct an additional study, *The North Country Trail in New York- Alternative Routes and the Issues that go with them* (Karl Beard, 1995), to identify alternative routing options in eastern New York.

April 1996 – Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) celebrates its 75th anniversary by hosting a trail symposium entitled “Trails for the 21st Century.” Representatives of the NCTA, ADK, FLTC, DEC, NPS, and others gather and discuss ways to cooperate in finding a route for the North Country NST through the Park.

May 1996 – Bill Menke, then NPS Manager of the North Country NST, travels to the Park to work with planners, collect data, and record routing options for the *National Park Service NCNST Issue Paper: Analysis of Preliminary Alternatives for a Trail Route across the Adirondack Park* (1996).

March 1998 – NPS, NCTA, DEC, and ADK staff and volunteers convene in Albany to discuss potential route options through the Park.

August 2001 – Barbara McMartin distributes her proposal paper for the routing of the North Country NST through the Park at the NCTA annual conference in Cazenovia.

January 2005 – NPS, NCTA, and DEC staff meet to revitalize the route-planning project.

May 2005 – NPS, NCTA, DEC staff and volunteers meet to discuss potential trail

corridors for the North Country NST in the Park. On-the-ground trail reconnaissance is performed.

June 2005 – Unit maps, displaying potential North Country NST trail corridors, are distributed by the NCTA to DEC planners, NPS staff, and volunteers for feedback.

July 2005 – NCTA Trail Management and Cartography staff, with NPS funding, create map books for a route analysis of potential central and southern routes through the Park.

July 2005 – A roundtable meeting, attended by DEC, NPS, and NCTA staff and volunteers, is held in Warrensburg. The central route is unanimously selected as the most viable route to pursue for the North Country NST in the Park.

August 2005 – NCTA officially agrees to write the Trail Plan for the North Country NST in the Adirondack Park.

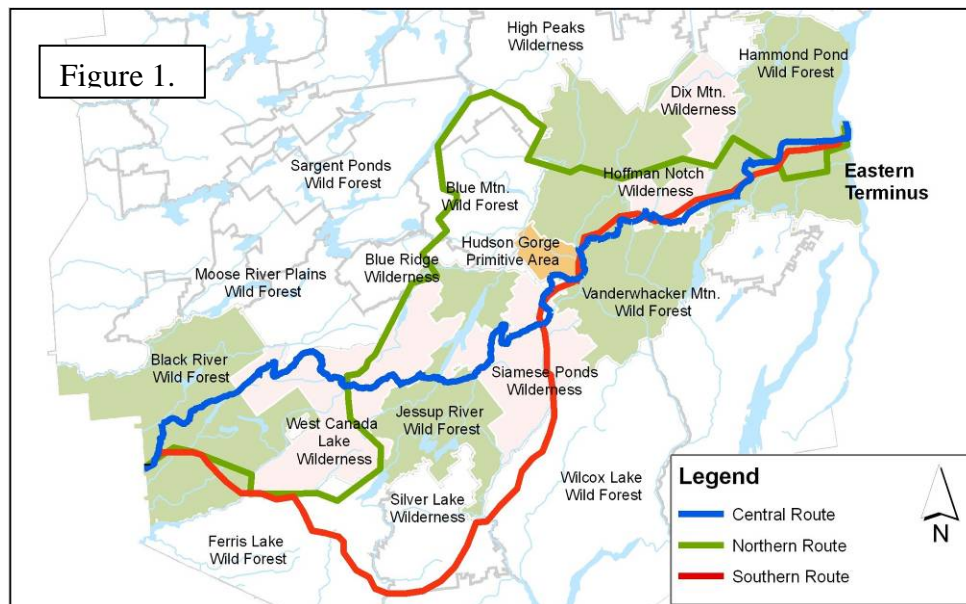
November 2005 – Clare Cain, NCTA Director of Trail Management, meets with DEC, APA, ADK staff, interested volunteers, and other associated groups to gather information and consensus on the potential central route for the North Country NST. Trail scouting and ground-truthing is performed.

January 2006 – Clare Cain gives a Power Point presentation to the APA State Lands Committee in Ray Brook.

April 2006 – NCTA, NPS, and DEC staff meet in Albany to discuss a *Draft Trail Plan* and discuss management concerns for the trail.

February 2007– A *Draft Trail Plan* is circulated to DEC planners, staff and the NPS for feedback.

Route History of the North Country NST in the Adirondack Park



Routing of the North Country NST through the Adirondack Park has been the crux issue for trail planning in New York. Three routes have been considered for the route of the North Country NST in the Park: the Northern Route, the Southern Route, and the Central Route.

The Northern Route

The Northern Route was the initial route designated by Congress, with DEC input, for the North Country NST in the Adirondack Park. The Northern Route passes primarily across the northern half of the Park traveling westerly from Crown Point to Goodnow Mountain. The route turns north from Goodnow Mountain briefly crossing into the High Peaks Area, traveling for approximately 20 miles to Long Lake. The route cut south from Long Lake out of the High Peaks area for approximately 30 miles to the town of Nobleboro. From Nobleboro the route turns northwest toward the Park boundary and Boonville. The Northern route travels through Hammond Pond Wild Forest, Dix Mountain Wilderness, Vanderhacker Mountain Wild Forest, High Peaks Wilderness, Blue Mountain Wild Forest, Blue Ridge Wilderness, West Canada Lake Wilderness, and Black River Wild Forest.

Notes on the Proposed Northern Route of the North Country NST:

The Northern Route was met by opposition in the 1980s. The High Peaks area was already being heavily impacted by visitors and the installment of the North Country NST, was feared to increase this use. The Northern Route was abandoned as a viable route for the North Country NST in the early 1990s.

The Southern Route

The Southern Route of the North Country NST enters the Adirondack Park on its western border in the vicinity of the North Lake Road near the Hamlet of Forestport. The route travels in a southeasterly direction toward the Ferris Lake Wild Forest and the Silver Lake Wilderness. The route turns in a northeasterly direction near the Wilcox Lake Wild Forest and Silver Lake Wilderness boundary. The Southern Route then travels north through Siamese Ponds Wilderness and the Hudson Gorge Primitive Area where it intersects the proposed Central Route. The route turns easterly in Vanderhacker Mountain Wild Forest and crosses through Hoffman Notch Wilderness and Hammond Pond Wild Forest.

Notes on the Proposed Southern Route of the North Country NST:

The Southern Route dips into the lower half of the Adirondack Park. A Southern Route was proposed by Barbara McMartin and others as a viable route for the Trail. While this route has several major road and river crossings that pose serious obstacles, the route does have the advantage of taking in some of the unique features of the Southern Wilderness areas and Wild Forests. This route is considerably longer than both the Northern and Central routes and has the greatest potential to receive greatest pressure from motorized uses. This route would also require extensive new trail construction.

The Central Route

The proposed Central Route of the North Country NST enters the Adirondack Park on its western border in the vicinity of North Lake Road near the Hamlet of Forestport. The Central Route travels across the central region of the Park intersecting existing trails in West Canada Lake Wilderness, Siamese Ponds Wilderness and Hoffman Notch Wilderness. This route has its eastern terminus at Crown Point Historic Site on Lake Champlain.

Notes on the Proposed Central Route of the North Country NST:

The Central Route is the most linear route of the three explored routes. The Central Route incorporates the most mileage of existing trails and would require the least amount of new trail construction. The Central Route was the unanimous preference of the DEC planners, the Adirondack Mtn. Club (ADK), the NCTA and the NPS representatives in attendance at the July 2005 meeting in Warrensburg.

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Section II: Planning

Vision and Goals

Vision

The vision of the North Country NST Trail Plan is to provide an east to west linear, long-distance trail offering scenic and recreational opportunities befitting a NST and highlighting the outstanding natural resources of Adirondack Park. Additionally, the Trail Plan aims to develop and maintain the North Country NST in the Adirondack Park utilizing existing pedestrian trails wherever possible.

Goals

- Provide a high quality long distance hiking and backpacking experience through the Adirondack Park on a singular, well-maintained, well-located pedestrian trail on public land in keeping with the “Best Management Practices” of the DEC, and the NPS *Handbook*
- Protect natural resources and the Wild Forest character of public lands in the Adirondack Park
- Partner with local communities to promote the Trail and provide services to hikers
- Provide a critical connection to the North Country NST’s eastern terminus at Crown Point and to the developing section of the North Country NST west of the Park in Forestport
- Suggest marked temporary connecting routes for hikers to use while permanent off-road hiking routes are being developed
- Provide DEC unit planners with an overarching Park-wide Trail Plan that can be incorporated, by unit, into affected UMPs

Planning Process

Phase I: Gathering Information (Route Possibilities)

The NCTA Trail Management and Cartography staff prepared large unit maps for DEC unit planners, NPS staff, and volunteers highlighting potential North Country NST route corridors in the Park. (See Appendix 1 for the NCTA letter that accompanied these maps.) These maps were returned to the NCTA with comments and suggestions. The NCTA used this map feedback to create a map book entitled *North Country NST Potential Trail Concept Plan for the Adirondack Park* for the Southern and Central routes.

Phase II: Route Assessment (Central and Southern Route Analysis)

NCTA, NPS, and DEC staff and volunteers gathered at a roundtable meeting in

Warrensburg to comprehensively compare the proposed Southern and Central Routes of the North Country NST in the Park. Challenges and opportunities were identified for both routes. The Central Route was selected as the preferred corridor for further investigation for routing of the North Country NST.

Phase III: Central Route (Defining the Route)

The NCTA Trail Management and Cartography staff, with NPS and DEC input, began writing and mapping a proposed route corridor for the North Country NST through the Park. Wetlands, sensitive areas, critical habitats, and private ownership GIS data layers, DEC management policies, existing trails, and terrain scouting were all utilized to identify the best possible route for the North Country NST.

Phase IV: First Draft of the North Country NST Trail Plan

The NCTA Trail Management and Cartography staff produced the first draft of the North Country NST Trail Plan for the Adirondack Park on February 1, 2006. The draft was sent to NPS, DEC, and NCTA staff and directors for review.

Phase V: Final North Country NST Draft Trail Plan

The NCTA Trail Management and Cartography staff produced the Final *North Country NST Draft Trail Plan for the Adirondack Park* on February 1, 2007. The Plan was sent to NPS and DEC for review.

Public Involvement

Letters and maps were sent to DEC managers and stakeholders in the Park in an effort to solicit feedback on the proposed routes of the North Country NST through the Adirondacks.

The following groups requested and received maps of the North Country NST's proposed routes and were invited to comment. (See Appendix 2 for the NCTA letter that accompanied these maps.):

- Adirondack Mountain Club
- New York State Snowmobile Association
- Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks
- Town of Keene
- New York State Conservation Council, Inc.

There have been **two** informational meetings on the North Country NST Trail Plan planning:

- *July 22, 2005, Old Forge, New York*
Forest Preserve Advisory Committee (FPAC)
- *February 9, 2006, Ray Brook, New York*
APA Board of Directors

One official public comment period and two public meetings (December 2007) will allow the public to make comments on this Trail Plan.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will there be substantially more hikers using the Park and these trails?

It is not likely that there will be a substantial amount of increased use on existing Park trails that are included in the route of the North Country NST. Currently, there are no “hard” numbers for long-distance use on NST’s or on the increase in use when a NST overlaps an existing trail. It is expected that there will be some increased use because the North Country NST route will be linking numerous existing trails into a single long distance trail. It is expected that trails that normally get minimal to no use will see a small increase in use.

When will the trail be completed?

This Plan estimates that approximately 47 miles of new trail will need to be constructed to create a continuous long-distance trail, linking existing trails in the Park. Once this Trail Plan is completed and adopted by the DEC, NPS, APA, and the citizens of New York as an integral part of the trail management regime of the management units through which the North Country NST passes, it is estimated that, with the cooperation of the DEC, APA, ADK, NPS, NCTA and other organizations the trail will be completed within 10 years.

Who will build and maintain the North Country NST in the Park?

The North Country NST is built and maintained primarily by volunteers. The NCTA depends on its national network of volunteers to provide the labor needed by local managers of segments of the trail. The NCTA and NPS work closely with local managing agencies and other trail and conservation organizations to develop plans for accomplishing the work envisioned in this Plan.

Labor for the construction of new trail is expected to be a mix of professional and volunteer trail crews. Many of the existing trails that the North Country NST route will utilize are in need of maintenance. DEC planners and managers are responsible for prioritizing the necessary new construction needed for the North Country NST, as well as rehabilitation and maintenance of existing trails, in their individual units. The NCTA and NPS will work closely with DEC to develop appropriate Work Plans to address maintenance and construction of the North Country NST.

How will the North Country NST be managed?

The North Country NST in the Forest Preserve will be managed by the DEC with cooperative guidance from the APA, NCTA and NPS. On private lands within the Park the North Country NST will be managed by volunteers. The NPS, as the lead administrator for the trail, will work closely with the DEC and volunteer groups to assure that the North Country NST is managed in accordance with the requirements of the National Trail System Act, the NPS *Comprehensive Management Plan*, and the NPS *Handbook*.

Who will pay for the maintenance and management of the North Country NST in the Park?

The cost of building and maintaining the North Country NST is shared by all of the public and private partners cooperating in its development and management. Annual Federal appropriations enable the NPS to provide some limited financial assistance to public and private partners through cooperative agreements, Challenge Cost Share projects, and in some cases land acquisition matching grants. Each land-managing agency that hosts segments of the trail makes some commitment to allow the trail to become part of their management operations, often depending partially or nearly completely on local volunteers to do this work. The NCTA provides staff support and limited grants through its membership dues and private grants it receives. It is expected that the NCTA and the NPS will work closely with the DEC to make resources readily available to build and maintain the North Country NST to be of the quality befitting a NST.

Relationship to the DEC Unit Management Plans

Unit Management Plans (UMPs) are developed pursuant to, and consistent with, relevant provisions of the New York State Constitution, the Environmental Conservation Law (ECL), the Executive Law, the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, Department of Environmental Conservation (Department) rules and regulations, Department policies and procedures and the State Environmental Quality and Review Act (SEQRA).

Public lands referenced in this Trail Plan, and subject to Unit Management Planning, are Forest Preserve lands protected by Article XIV, Section 1 of the New York State Constitution. This Constitutional provision, which became effective on January 1, 1895 provides in relevant part:

The lands of the state, now owned or hereafter acquired, constituting the Forest Preserve as now fixed by law, shall be forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be leased, sold or exchanged, or be taken by any corporation, public or private, or shall the timber thereon be sold, removed or destroyed.

ECL §3-0301(1)(d) and §9-0105(1) provide the Department with jurisdiction to manage Forest Preserve lands.

The Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (Master Plan) was initially adopted in 1972 by the Adirondack Park Agency (APA), with advice from and in consultation with the Department, pursuant to Executive Law §807, now recodified as Executive Law §816. The Master Plan provides the overall general framework for the development and management of State lands in the Adirondack Park.

The Master Plan places State land within the Adirondack Park into the following classifications: Wilderness, Primitive, Canoe, Wild Forest, Intensive Use, Historic, State Administrative, Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers, and Travel Corridors, and sets forth management guidelines for the lands falling within each major classification. The Master Plan sets forth Guidelines for such matters as: structures and improvements; ranger stations; the use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment and aircraft; roads, jeep trails and state truck trails; flora and fauna; recreation use and overuse; boundary structures and improvements and boundary markings.

Executive Law §816 requires the Department to develop, in consultation with the APA, individual UMPs for each unit of land under the Department's jurisdiction which is classified in one of the nine classifications set forth in the Master Plan. The UMPs must conform to the guidelines and criteria set forth in the Master Plan. Thus, UMPs implement and apply the Master Plan's general guidelines for particular areas of land within the Adirondack Park.

Executive Law §816(1) provides in part that until amended, the Master Plan for management of state lands and the individual management plans shall guide the development and management of state lands in the Adirondack Park. Thus, the Master Plan has the force of law in guiding Department actions.

This Plan proposes a route for the North Country NST that intersects nine units of the Adirondack Park Forest Preserve:

- Black River Wild Forest
- West Canada Lake Wilderness
- Moose River Plains Wild Forest
- Jessup River Wild Forest
- Siamese Ponds Wilderness
- Hudson Gorge Primitive Area
- Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest
- Hoffman Notch Wilderness
- Hammond Pond Wild Forest

This Trail Plan suggests that, as UMPs are finalized and adopted that the route of the North Country NST be researched within the UMP process and amended to existing UMPs as appropriate (See Appendix 3 for current UMP language referring to the North Country NST).

This Trail Plan is designed to provide guidance for the routing of the North Country NST and is designed to be easily folded into or attached as amendments to UMPs. Incorporation and integration of this Plan into the UMPs, future Forest Preserve documents, and future management of the North Country NST in the Park will be the responsibility of the DEC.

This Trail Plan recommends the implementation of the route for the North Country NST as set forth herein, and to be further field-researched by area managers to avoid any

sensitive habitats, management issues, or landowner issues when DEC Work Plans are prepared for new trail construction or for relocating existing trail to improve its character and design.

The North Country NST is intended to be a premier hiking and backpacking trail and should be managed in concert with this designation. In some instances, the proposed route of the North Country NST in this Plan overlaps trails of other use designations. The North Country NST and this Plan have no intention of displacing existing uses, but to temporarily share use of these routes until the North Country NST can be viably routed onto newly established trails. If, at any time, conflict arises between user groups or the resource becomes too heavily impacted, area managers will explore alternative trail locations in the general area to bypass the situation and to improve the quality of all users' experience.

Relationship to the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan

The Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (Master Plan) is authorized by the Adirondack Park Agency Act, §816 (originally § 807) of Article 27 of the Executive Law, and was prepared by the APA in consultation with the DEC, and approved by the Governor of New York. The Master Plan establishes a classification system for state lands within the Adirondack Park, and “Guidelines for Management and Use” of lands in each classification. The Master Plan has the force of legislative enactment, as determined by the case of *Helms v. Reid* 394 N.Y.S. and 987 (Hamilton County Supreme Court, 1977).

The Master Plan classifies the state lands in the Park according to their “characteristics and capacity to withstand use” (Master Plan, 14). The North Country NST route passes through three different classifications – Wild Forest, Wilderness, and Primitive Area. Foot trails, and their construction and maintenance, are consistent with the “Guidelines for Management and Use” for each of these three classifications. Hiking, backpacking, and other forms of foot travel are considered compatible with Wilderness, Wild Forest, and Primitive Areas as long as the “degree and intensity of such use” (Master Plan, pp 24) does not endanger the resource.

Relevant definitions from the Master Plan include:

Foot Trail- *a marked and maintained path or way for foot travel located and designed to provide for reasonable access in a manner causing the least effect on the surrounding environment.* (Master Plan, 17)

The recreational use of the North Country NST, within the Park and along the trail's entire length, is low impact and has proven to have minimal impact on existing resources. Overuse of this trail is not anticipated. The North Country NST is in compliance with the management guidelines for Wilderness, Wild Forest, and Primitive Areas that the proposed route of the North Country NST passes through. The use of this trail is not expected to be detrimental to the existing natural resources of the Park.

Note: The Master Plan is not included in this Plan's Appendix, it is available online at www.apa.state.ny.us.

Partners Working Together

Completion of a continuous North Country NST across the Adirondack Park and long-term management of the trail will be a cooperative effort of many partners, primarily the DEC, the NCTA, and the NPS.

Department of Environmental Conservation Responsibilities

- Provide overall supervision of the effort to establish the trail, including the final decisions on which existing trail will be incorporated into the route and where new trail segments will be located
- Develop and amend UMPs to incorporate the trail route
- Serve as lead agency for SEQRA compliance
- Manage the trail on DEC lands with assistance from partners
- Coordinate the work of volunteers, DEC staff, and contractors involved in scouting and constructing new trail segments, and the work of volunteers involved in maintaining the trail
- Work with the Adirondack Park Agency and other public agencies and jurisdictions to ensure their involvement in decisions relating to the trail
- Work with the Lyme Timber Company to secure recreational access across their holdings
- Work with NPS to define a mutually agreeable set of trail marking standards across the various categories of lands within the Park, taking into account DEC's trail marking standards and the standards in the NPS *Handbook*
- Acquire needed lands or easements from private landowners

It is important to note that the trail route proposed in this Plan has made maximum use of existing publicly-owned lands. Placement of the trail on any private lands will only be done with the permission of the landowner. No significant amount of land acquisition is anticipated. In the few cases where lands may be needed, it is important to note that it is the policy of the DEC to only negotiate land or easement purchases on a willing seller, willing buyer basis.

North Country Trail Association Responsibilities

- Work with the DEC to organize and provide volunteers to assist with maintenance and any needed rehabilitation of existing trails that are part of the North Country NST route through the Park.
- As requested and directed by the DEC, scout on the ground locations for new trail segments as opportunities to establish new segments of the route arise.
- Organize and provide volunteers to construct new segments of trail that have been approved for construction.
- Establish a long-term working relationship with the DEC for maintenance of the trail.

- Advocate at the state and national level for resources that may be needed to establish and maintain the trail.
- Develop and print up to date maps of the trail route as it evolves.
- Develop an NCTA chapter in the Park area to adopt and steward local sections of trail and to promote the North Country NST in the Park.

National Park Service Responsibilities

- Continue to provide technical and financial assistance to the NCTA to support their activities on behalf of the trail. Expand such assistance as needs and opportunities to do so arise.
- Accept for consideration project proposals related to the trail from the DEC, or from the NCTA on behalf of DEC, for funding through the NPS Challenge Cost Share program.
- Work with DEC to define a mutually agreeable set of trail marking standards across the various categories of lands within Adirondack Park, taking into account DEC's trail marking standards and the standards in the NPS *Handbook*.
- To the extent desired by DEC, provide trail markers and signs to the DEC in fulfillment of NPS' responsibilities under the National Trails System Act to provide trail markers to non-federal partners.
- Provide financial assistance for land acquisition to the DEC, should appropriations and granting authority for this purpose be made available by Congress.

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Section III: Environmental Setting

Long Distance Trails in the Adirondack Park

“Where appropriate, development of long-distance trails that cross management units and DEC regions will be encouraged. Routes of long-distance trails will incorporate existing trails where feasible and appropriate. However, long-distance trails will not be located where anticipated levels of use on new or existing trails or increased access to adjacent areas will have unacceptable impacts on natural resources, the recreational experiences of visitors, or lands outside the Forest Preserve. Because most long-distance trails cross both public and private lands, the Area Manager will coordinate with private landowners, the managers of other involved public lands and trail organizations in the development and management of long-distance trails.”

– DEC Best Management Practices for Trail Development

Currently there is one long-distance trail within the Adirondack Park – the Northville-Placid Trail (NPT). This 133-mile long NPT travels from south to north through the Park and receives moderate use. The NPT’s southern terminus is in the Village of Northville and the northern terminus is near the Village of Lake Placid.

The North Country NST will be the second designated long-distance hiking trail spanning the length of the Adirondack Forest Preserve. Routing of the North Country NST will be accomplished by connecting, on the Park’s eastern boundary, Crown Point State Historic Site to the Hamlet of Forestport on the Park’s western boundary via the most direct and feasible route. The route for the North Country NST will intersect the NPT in the West Canada Lake Wilderness. The development of a second long distance, linear trail will offer the quiet sports’ community a second resource for exploring remote sections of the Park.

Visitor Use

Trail registers provide a means by which managers can monitor recreational use in a particular area by gathering information about group size, length of stay, and trip destinations. Trail register data is a tool for determining visitor use but is not comprehensive. To date, trail register data has been accumulated for a few of the existing trails that the North Country NST would ideally utilize in the Park. Because this data is inconclusive it will not be documented in this Plan. Cornell University and SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry have studied visitor use in the Forest Preserve on specific units, but no comprehensive visitor use survey has ever been undertaken for the entire Park.

Once the North Country NST is designated and existing foot trails are connected into a continuous, long-distance trail, visitor use should be actively monitored to determine if the use of the trail is having an adverse impact on the trail or surrounding area. DEC managers will be able to use these statistics to determine how best to manage the North Country NST and protect the Park’s natural resources and Park facilities along its route.

Through the UMP process, the DEC has implemented the Limits of Acceptable Change model to monitor conditions, minimize resource impacts and maintain the quality of the visitors experiences.

Trail Maintenance and Construction

Development and maintenance of the North Country NST will be a shared responsibility between the NPS, the NCTA and its volunteers, the DEC and other partnering groups interested in the stewardship of a long distance NST in the Park. Maintenance and construction of the North Country NST will be executed in keeping with the DEC's *Best Management Practices* (outlined below) and the NPS *Handbook*.

DEC Best Management Practices for Trail Development

Trails

Trails to be designated and constructed will increase the access, enjoyment, and understanding of these lands. In locating trails, preference will be given to places where the land through which the trail passes or the destination of the trail has high scenic, ecological, or historical interest. All trail construction and relocation projects will be developed in accordance with the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, and will incorporate the use of Best Management Practices, including but not limited to such considerations as:

1. Locating trails to minimize necessary cut and fill;
2. Wherever possible, lay out trails on existing old roads or clear or partially cleared areas;
3. Locating trails away from streams, wetlands, and unstable slopes wherever possible;
4. Use of proper drainage devices such as water bars and broad-based dips;
5. Locating trails to minimize grade;
6. Using stream crossings with low, stable banks, firm stream bottom and gentle approach slopes;
7. Constructing stream crossings at right angles to the stream;
8. Limiting stream crossing construction to periods of low or normal flow;
9. Using stream bank stabilizing structures made of natural materials such as rock or wooden timbers;
10. Using natural materials to blend the structure into the natural surroundings;
11. Accessibility to those with disabilities.

Trails will be easily identified from the road/trailhead, clearly marked, and well maintained. Sufficient parking will be provided at the trailhead to accommodate anticipated use and in accordance with that area's resource capacity to withstand use. Where possible, trails will be developed and maintained in partnership with local governments, organizations, and residents.

The Unit will be linked with nearby communities and trail systems through trail connections where feasible, appropriate, and supported by local governments, residents, and landowners. Priority will be given to trail linkages that tie into existing public transportation, reduce the need for new structures and improvements within the unit, support local economic development plans, and foster the development of interpretive and educational programs.

Conflicts between different types of trail use will be minimized, and if necessary, use will be separated. Often, separating use occurs with the changing season (e.g. snowmobiling and mountain bicycling). If demand exists for a type of trail use in an area where it is appropriate but cannot be separated from other trail uses, the use will be allowed on existing trails where shared use will not lead to unacceptable conflicts between trail users or unacceptable physical impacts. On shared-use trails, the Department will inform visitors about the types of trail uses allowed and will promote the principles of trail-sharing etiquette through trailhead signs and publications. Trail use will be monitored. Should monitoring reveal that the addition of a new type of trail use has caused unacceptable levels of conflict between trail users or unacceptable physical impacts to a trail, appropriate action will be taken to reduce such conflicts or impacts. Action may include elimination of a type of trail use from the trail.

Where appropriate, development of long-distance trails that cross management units and DEC regions will be encouraged. Routes of long-distance trails will incorporate existing trails where feasible and appropriate. However, long-distance trails will not be located where anticipated levels of use on new or existing trails or increased access to adjacent areas will have unacceptable impacts on natural resources, the recreational experiences of visitors, or lands outside the Forest Preserve. Because most long-distance trails cross both public and private lands, the Area Manager will coordinate with private landowners, the managers of other involved public lands and trail organizations in the development and management of long-distance trails. The Area Manager may close trails at any time when necessary to protect natural resources or the safety of the public.

Trailheads and Parking Areas

Points of access throughout the unit provide valuable locations for providing information and orienting visitors. Visitors receive their first impression of the area from the nature and condition of the trailhead/parking facility. For highway travelers, trailheads and/or parking areas are often the only indication that they are passing through public lands. Access points also provide trailhead registration data that can be utilized in quantifying the public's use of a particular area, and for providing crucial information that may assist in search and rescue operations. Accordingly, DEC will consider the design and maintenance of trailheads, fishing access sites and general access parking areas a matter of prime importance.

Trailhead designs will be standardized to allow visitors to identify the many separate parcels of the Forest Preserve as parts of a single entity and provide complete information in a consistent format. A limited number of standard designs will be developed to make necessary information available to visitors, provide a trail register where needed, and eliminate the problems of supplementary signs and informational clutter.

All parking lot construction and relocation projects will incorporate the use of Best Management Practices, including but not limited to such considerations as:

12. Locating parking lots to minimize necessary cut and fill;
13. Locating parking lots away from streams, wetlands, and unstable slopes wherever possible;
14. Locating parking lots on flat, stable, well-drained sites;
15. Using gravel or other appropriate materials to avoid runoff and erosion problems;
16. Locating parking lots in areas that require a minimum amount of tree cutting;
17. Limiting construction to periods of low or normal rainfall;

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18. Wherever possible, using wooded buffers to screen parking lots from roads;
19. Limiting the size of the parking lot to the minimum necessary to address the intended use.

General Construction

All construction projects will be developed in accordance with the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, and will incorporate the use of Best Management Practices, including such considerations as:

20. Locating improvements to minimize necessary cut and fill;
21. Locating improvements away from streams, wetlands, and unstable slopes;
22. Use of proper drainage devices such as water bars and broad-based dips;
23. Locating trails to minimize grade;
24. Using stream crossings with low, stable banks, firm stream bottom and gentle approach slopes;
25. Constructing stream crossings at right angles to the stream;
26. Limiting stream crossing construction to periods of low or normal flow;
27. Avoiding areas where habitats of threatened and endangered species are known to exist;
28. Using natural materials to blend the structure into the natural surroundings;
29. Reducing or eliminating the introduction and spread of invasive species.

Directional and Informational Signs

The Department produces and posts a variety of signs that provide information about regulations, recommendations, directions and distances to destinations, and resource conditions to those who visit the unit. These signs are posted at trailheads as well as interior locations.

To maintain a consistent and recognizable appearance, the dimensions, materials, colors, and wording of DEC signs will be standardized. To ensure the public's ability to locate the unit's lands and facilities easily, the following guidelines will apply to the design and erection of signs:

30. All roadside directional signs, trailhead identification signs and interior guide boards will be made of wood and will be brown with yellow lettering.
31. Informational "posters" may be made of metal or plastic and generally will be brown with yellow lettering, although other unobtrusive color combinations may be used, such as yellow or white with dark green lettering, or white with black lettering. Posters or signs intended to draw attention to obstacles or hazardous conditions may be red and white.
32. Lettering clearly indicating the unit name and classification will be given in all roadside directional signs and trailhead identification signs.
33. Standard boundary signs indicating the classification will be posted every one-tenth mile along all highways that pass through or adjacent to the unit and at other strategic locations, such as points on trails where they pass from private onto state lands.
34. All signs removed through vandalism or other causes will be promptly replaced.
35. Signs will carry a positive message. Rather than simply citing a regulation, a sign should explain the reasons behind the message.
36. Managers will use the smallest number of signs necessary to accomplish an informational or regulatory objective.
37. Signs will be clustered on a single sign post or bulletin board placed where they are most likely to be seen by visitors.
38. The posting of signs by all DEC divisions will be coordinated through the Area Manager.

39. As a general rule, informational signs will be posted on the periphery of a management unit rather than in the interior.
40. Signs will be constructed of rustic materials and will be limited in number.
41. Only signs that conform to Department rules and regulations and policy will be placed within the unit.

Design Standards

It is useful and desirable to have consistent design standards for all Forest Preserve facilities, structures and improvements. This assists users in quickly recognizing state facilities and obtaining information on services, destinations, etc. Forest Preserve design standards will be developed. Since no formal Forest Preserve design standards exist at this time, the Area Manager will refer to existing documents such as the "Interior Use Manual" and the "Adirondack lean-to plan," when designing or rehabilitating structures. If no specific guidance is available for a structure, it will be designed to incorporate the use of natural materials such as round wood, wood shingles and native stone. The appearance of structures within the unit will conform to the natural environment through the use of colors such as subdued greens, browns and other "earthtones."

New Trail Construction

New trail construction will be scouted by DEC planners, NCTA staff and volunteers. A DEC Work Plan will be developed. New trail construction will be a priority of NCTA staff and volunteers and the NPS to initiate the creation of this continuous trail through the Park. It is envisioned that professional DEC, Adirondack Mountain Club, and Student Conservation Association trail crews will be engaged and supplemented with volunteer labor from the NCTA and other national and local volunteer-based organizations. The NCTA will take a lead role in recruiting labor, partnering with other organizations and securing the necessary funding to rehabilitate existing trails that the North Country NST will overlap and to build new trail to create necessary connections.

The North Country NST will require approximately 47 miles of new trail construction to connect existing trails to create this continuous, long-distance linear foot trail. New trail construction mileage was a key factor in determining the route of the North Country NST in the Park. The fewest miles of new trail construction have been presented. Wherever feasible, the route of the North Country NST follows existing foot trails, and utilizes other trails, herdpaths, railroad beds, and roads as temporary connectors to create connections across the Park. It is expected that all temporary connector mileage will be moved off of any conflicting-use trail or road to new trail in the future.

The first priority for new trail construction will be building new trail where no temporary connectors exist. The second priority will be to move the North Country NST off of temporary connectors and onto new foot trail wherever feasible.

Within the management units that will require new trail construction, the NCTA, DEC, and NPS staff will work together to determine the most attractive and feasible route for the North Country NST. This will require on-the-ground field reconnaissance. In most areas where new trail is suggested within this Trail Plan, ground-truthing has already been executed to determine the viability of trail placement.

New trail construction will require a DEC Work Plan. Within that Work Plan, the North Country NST will be routed and constructed to assure that it does not disturb sensitive habitats, wetlands and low areas are avoided, natural resources are protected (BMPs for Trail Development Section III, Environmental Setting) . Maps of the proposed route of the North Country NST highlight areas of new trail construction within a “corridor of opportunity.” These maps display existing known wetlands and route opportunities for the North Country NST (Section IV). No wetlands are in danger of being adversely affected by new trail construction for this trail.

Table 1. Approximate mileage of New Trail Construction

DEC Unit	New Trail Mileage
Black River Wild Forest	9
West Canada Lake Wilderness	5
Moose River Plains Wild Forest	0
Jessup River Wild Forest	4
Siamese Ponds Wilderness	4
Hudson Gorge Primitive Area	1
Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest	4
Hoffman Notch Wilderness Area	7
Hammond Pond Wild Forest	13
TOTAL	~47 miles

Herdpaths

The North Country NST has been routed to utilize existing foot trails wherever possible. In connecting these foot trails, the proposed North Country NST route has also utilized existing herdpaths as temporary connectors wherever possible to make critical connections. *Herdpath* is a colloquial term for a user-created trail in the Forest Preserve and is recognized as a Primitive Trail under the DEC Non-motorized Trail Classification System (see Appendix 5). Herdpaths play an important role in the proposed North Country NST route by serving as critical trail connectors. These herdpaths can be, in time, improved to meet quality trail standards. By incorporating these user trails, this Plan aims to reduce new trail construction mileage and designate these paths as official trail.

Table 2. Approximate mileage of Herdpaths

DEC Unit	Herdpath Mileage	New Trail Mileage
Black River Wild Forest	2	9
West Canada Lake Wilderness	4	5
Moose River Plains Wild Forest	0	0
Jessup River Wild Forest	0	4
Siamese Ponds Wilderness	0	4
Hudson Gorge Primitive Area	0	1

Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest	2	4
Hoffman Notch Wilderness Area	3	7
Hammond Pond Wild Forest	0	13
TOTAL	~11 miles	~47 miles

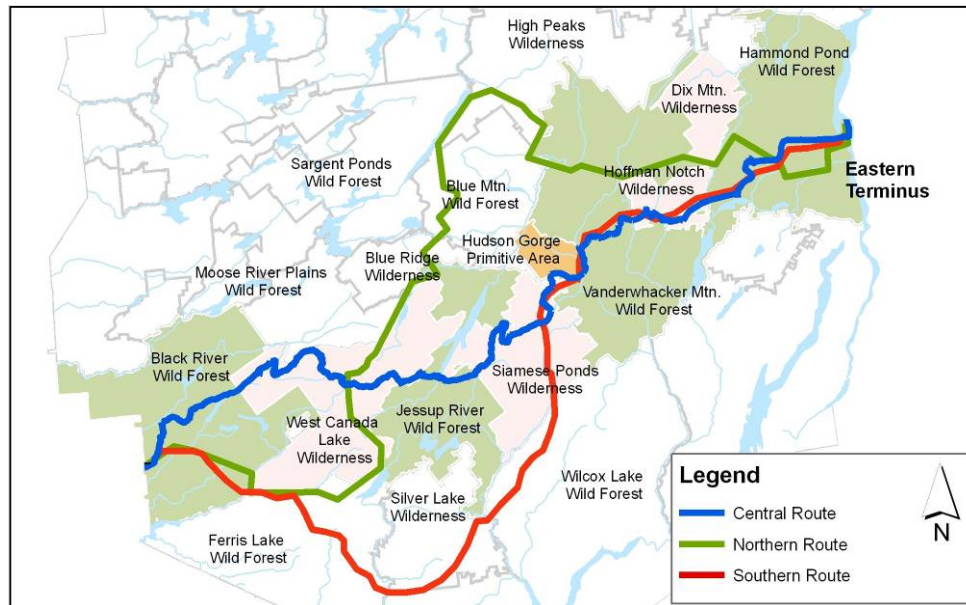
Facilities Infrastructure

This Trail Plan does not comprehensively address existing trail facilities along the proposed North Country NST route. The DEC is currently involved in a comprehensive Facilities Inventory and Analysis of the entire Park. This Plan does highlight some existing facilities where they are known, but does not address their current condition. Current facility conditions are addressed in UMPs. Trail facilities, such as lean-tos, bridges, trail registers, signs, kiosks, trailheads, etc. undoubtedly enhance the trail users experience. The route for the North Country NST was not determined based on the existence of existing facilities. It is expected that the North Country NST will require more facility infrastructure in the future. This will be determined by area managers as the need arises.

Section IV: The Adirondack Trail Plan/ Preferred Alternative

Analysis of Alternatives

Trail routing for the North Country NST through the Adirondack Park has been the crux issue for trail planning in New York. Three Alternatives and a “No Action” Alternative have been considered for the route of the North Country NST in the Park: Alternative 1 (Northern Route), Alternative 2 (Southern Route), and Alternative 3 (Central Route).



Evaluation Process

After the North Country NST was authorized by Congress in 1980, the NPS was directed to prepare a comprehensive management plan for the trail. Between 1975, when the feasibility study was completed, and 1980 when the NPS was preparing the comprehensive management plan, public concerns began to arise about the routing of the Trail in the Park. Most of the concerns focused on the Trail passing through the heavily used High Peaks Area of the Park. In response to these legitimate concerns, no significant efforts were made to identify or complete a trail route through the Adirondacks between 1982 and the mid 1990's. In December of 1992 at a stakeholders meeting in Albany, participants agreed on the need to pursue a study to resolve this impasse.

In 1995, the NPS provided funding to the River, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program in Hyde Park to conduct an additional study to identify North Country NST route alternatives in the eastern third of the State. The RTCA report, finalized in 1995, identified the pros and cons of the various alternatives and recommended additional study. In 1996, the Adirondack Mountain Club sponsored a trail symposium entitled “Trails for the 21st Century”. At a pre-conference meeting on the North Country NST, the participants reached a unilateral consensus that there should be a North Country NST route through the Adirondacks but outside the High Peaks Wilderness Area.

Planning for the Adirondack route proceeded slowly while other portions of the North Country NST were being developed in the State.

In 2005, a meeting was held between the NPS, DEC and the NCTA to revitalize the route planning project. Subsequently unit maps, displaying potential North Country NST trail corridors, were developed by the NCTA to generate input for potential routes. NCTA Trail Management and Cartography staff created map books for an analysis of potential routes south of the High Peaks through the Park. Route books were distributed to DEC planners and interested groups and individuals to gather information on the alternatives. Through feedback received on the routes, modifications were made as necessary. In July of 2005, a meeting (attended by DEC, NPS, and NCTA staff and volunteers) was held in Warrensburg to review the alternatives and go over feedback received from DEC planners and others who had commented on the alternatives.

Based on comments received on the pros and cons of the routes and trail segments, the Central Route was proposed as the most viable route to pursue for the North Country NST in the Park. The NCTA agreed to write a Trail Plan and develop an Environmental Impact Statement for the North Country NST route through the Adirondack Park. Through ground-truthing and discussions with DEC planners, the Central Route was further refined and modified to minimize impacts to the resource, ensure public safety, and provide for an interesting and scenic route through the Park.

The following criteria were used to evaluate the three Alternatives that were identified as the most feasible alternatives for the route of the North Country NST.

- Incorporation of existing foot trails
- Maximize the use of public land
- Minimize road walking
- Avoid crossing large lakes & rivers
- Suitability of the terrain
- Identification of any management barriers to a foot trail in the units the route crosses
- Avoidance of wetlands
- Identification of existing unit management guidelines that may impact the routing of a National Scenic Trail
- Quality of experience
- Stakeholder support or opposition
- Minimization of new trail construction required to link existing trails
- Analysis from DEC unit planners
- Avoidance of user conflicts

Alternative 1 (Northern Route)

Alternative 1 was the initial route designated by Congress, with DEC input, for the North Country NST in the Adirondack Park. Alternative 1 passes primarily across the northern half of the Park traveling westerly from Crown Point to Goodnow Mountain. The route turns north from Goodnow Mountain briefly crossing into the High Peaks Wilderness Area, traveling for approximately 20 miles to Long Lake. The route cuts south from

Long Lake out of the High Peaks area for approximately 30 miles to the town of Nobleboro. From Nobleboro the route turns northwest toward the Park boundary and Boonville.

Advantages

- This route would incorporate the incredible scenic qualities of the High Peaks region of the Adirondack Park.
- This route was the original proposed route for the North Country NST in eastern New York.

Disadvantages

- The UMP for the High Peaks Wilderness Area prescribes routing the North Country NST to the south of the unit (see Appendix 3).
- The New York State Trails Council passed a resolution opposing this route through the High Peaks, May 1993 (see Appendix 11).
- The Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) passed a resolution opposing a route through the High Peaks area.
- Stakeholders have unanimously supported a route be explored south of the High Peaks region of the Park that would not impact the already heavily subscribed High Peaks area.

Alternative 2 (Southern Route)

Alternative 2 enters the Adirondack Park on its western border in the vicinity of the North Lake Road near the Hamlet of Forestport. The route travels in a southeasterly direction toward the Ferris Lake Wild Forest and the Silver Lake Wilderness. The route turns in a northeasterly direction near the Wilcox Lake Wild Forest and Silver Lake Wilderness boundary. Alternative 2 travels north through Siamese Ponds Wilderness and the Hudson Gorge Primitive Area where it intersects Alternative 3, the Central Route. The route turns easterly in Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest and crosses through Hoffman Notch Wilderness and Hammond Pond Wild Forest.

Advantages

- This route would provide more hiking opportunities in the lesser used southern part of the Park.
- This route would provide more trail mileage in Wild Forest.
- This route incorporates a number of existing herdpaths.
- There are a number of scenic overlooks along this route.
- There is potential for a spur trail to Pigeon Mountain, the highest point in Fulton County.
- This proposed route creates new hiking opportunities to take pressure off the High Peaks Wilderness Area and the Northville- Placid Trail.
- No new parking or access points would be developed.

Disadvantages

- This proposed route creates a new trail in the Silver Lake Wilderness.
- This proposed route would overlap many miles of motorized trail.
- The section of this route in Ferris Lake Wild Forest has the potential to receive heavy pressure from motorized uses.
- This route has several major road and river crossings that present serious obstacles.
- This route would require extensive new trail construction.
- There is a desire for the south-western section of the West Canada Lake Wilderness to remain trail-less.
- There is a significant amount of non-public land in Black River Wild Forest south of the North Lake Road that this route would intersect.
- There is greater potential for conflict with motorized uses.

Alternative 3 (Preferred Route- Central Route)

Alternative 3 enters the Adirondack Park on its western border in the vicinity of North Lake Road near the Hamlet of Forestport. The route travels across the central region of the Park intersecting existing trails in West Canada Lake Wilderness, Siamese Ponds Wilderness and Hoffman Notch Wilderness. This route has its eastern terminus at Crown Point Historic Site on Lake Champlain.

Advantages

- This route does not directly intersect any wetlands.
- This route utilizes many existing foot trails, limiting the amount of construction of new trail required.
- This route offers a more direct crossing of the Park when compared to the other routes.
- This route incorporates a number of existing herdpaths and proposes adopting and maintaining them to avoid resource damage.
- This route requires the least amount of new trail construction of the three proposed routes.
- This proposed route has minimal road walking mileage.
- This proposed route has no major management barriers.
- There are many existing trail facilities that this route utilizes.
- This proposed route can utilize an abandoned railroad bridge to cross the Hudson River, a major obstacle.
- This route utilizes DEC recreational easement lands.

Disadvantages

- This proposed route differs from the original route proposed in the NPS Comprehensive Management Plan.
- This proposed route requires some road walking.

- This proposed route will require difficult routing south of, or across (via boat ferry) Indian Lake.

Alternative 4 (No- Action)

Taking no- action at this time would prevent or delay establishment of the North Country NST in the Adirondack Forest Preserve. No new trail would be constructed avoiding the impact associated with establishing and maintaining trails. Other routes would have to be sought on private lands, public roads or the route would have to be changed to go around the Adirondack Park. The route for the North Country NST, anchored at an eastern terminus in Crown Point, was authorized by Congress in 1980.

Without this Trail Plan, investigation of a route could continue through a unit by unit planning process creating a disjointed approach to planning and creating SEQRA segmentation issues. This comprehensive Trail Plan allows assessment of the overall route and determines which DEC management units are most appropriate for the trail's location. This Trail Plan will allow the Department to focus its planning efforts, better mitigate impacts and administer effective development of a National Scenic Trail within the Park boundary.

Selection of Preferred Alternative

Four Alternatives were identified and considered for the route of the North Country NST in the Adirondack Park.

From an analysis of all the potential impacts and the pros and cons of each Alternative, it is evident that Alternative 3 (Central Route) has the greatest potential for creating a National Scenic Trail in the Park with minimal impacts. The Central Route enters the Adirondack Park on its western border in the vicinity of North Lake Road near the Hamlet of Forestport. The route travels across the central region of the Park intersecting existing trails in West Canada Lake Wilderness, Siamese Ponds Wilderness and Hoffman Notch Wilderness. This route has its eastern terminus at Crown Point State Historic Site on Lake Champlain. This is the shortest route through the Park, therefore requiring the least mileage of trail and, consequently, trail construction and maintenance.

Alternative 1 (Northern Route) was eliminated from consideration because it passed through the High Peaks Wilderness Area. Although the High Peaks are arguably the most scenic area in the Park, they are crowded in summer months and have met their social carrying capacity. The UMP for the High Peaks Wilderness Area, approved by both the APA and DEC, prescribes that the North Country NST not be routed through this unit.

Alternative 2 (Southern Route) is similar to the Central Route in many ways however it is a longer route and would require more trail to be constructed. The Southern Route has many obstacles that would make trail layout problematic including crossing large water bodies and routing of trail over more private lands. The Southern Route also has the greater potential for conflicts with motorized uses.

Alternative 4 (No- Action), while having the least impact on the Park's resources, does nothing to help achieve the goal of finding a feasible route for the North Country NST through the Adirondack Park. Furthermore, the No- Action Alternative does nothing to help create new recreational opportunities in the Park and direct use away from its more heavily used areas.

NCTA, NPS, and DEC staff and volunteers gathered at a roundtable meeting in Warrensburg to comprehensively compare Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 (the proposed Southern and Central Routes) of the North Country NST in the Park. Challenges and opportunities were identified for both routes. The Central Route was selected as the preferred corridor for further investigation for routing of the North Country NST.

Trail Plan Overview Maps

The NCTA Cartography staff created the Overview Maps and Map Figures used in this Trail Plan. The Shared Adirondack Park Geographic Information CD-ROM version 7/2001 provided by the DEC was utilized. NCTA staff employed ARC Info, ESRI's GIS software, for mapping the North Country NST route in the Adirondack Park. The Overview Maps are included in Appendix 13 of this Trail Plan.

The Overview Maps and Map Figures display a "corridor of opportunity" for the North Country NST represented by a variable width overlay across the maps (at its maximum width representing one mile). This corridor of opportunity is used to symbolize the generic route for the North Country NST. Where the corridor overlaps existing foot trails, it is recommended that these trails be utilized for the North Country NST. Placement of the trail on private land will only be done with the approval of the landowner.

In areas where no trail exists, new trail is recommended and its exact location on the ground will be determined by DEC planners and managers after the construction of the trail is approved in the appropriate UMP and a project Work Plan is approved in consultation with the APA. All new trail opportunities are not limited to the corridor shown on the map. Opportunities outside the corridor are also viable and should be researched by area managers. However, the final route should follow the conceptual route as closely as possible.

The maximum width of a one- mile corridor was chosen to display the North Country NST route because it is specific enough to illustrate a general preferred flow for the trail route around features and obstacles. It is also generic enough to permit the capturing of other opportunities that were not considered at this stage of the planning process. (Overview Map scale: one inch = one mile)

Opportunities and Challenges

Within the Route Section, the route of the North Country NST is analyzed by identifying both Opportunities and Challenges within each DEC unit:

Opportunities- These are the currently identified benefits associated with this route.

Challenges- These are the currently identified limiting factors associated with this route.

Mileage Graph Explanation

The graph below is used throughout *The Route* section of this Plan. Below is a definition of each heading used in the Mileage Graph.

DEC Unit	Foot Trail	New Trail	Temporary Connector	Total Miles
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DEC Unit- DEC land unit the North Country NST is passing through

Foot Trail- Existing foot trail mileage in the Unit that the route utilizes

New Trail- Approximate mileage of new trail required for this route

Temporary Connector- Estimate of temporary trail connector mileage along roads, motorized trails, herdpaths, and abandoned railbeds *

Total Miles- Approximate mileage for the proposed route of the North Country NST route in the unit

* Replacing temporary connectors (not herdpaths) will result in an increase in **New Trail**, greater than or equal to, the current stated mileage of **Temporary Connector** within this Trail Plan.

Black River Wild Forest

The route of the North Country NST enters the Black River Wild Forest (BRWF) in Herkimer County on the Park's western boundary.

The North Lake Road will serve as a temporary connector to reach the existing trailhead of the *Stone Dam Trail*, located approximately 5-miles east of Forestport, until new off-road trail can be established. The North Country NST route progresses northeasterly along the well-maintained Stone Dam Trail and crosses Little Woodhull Creek on an existing bridge. Somewhere between Stone Dam Lake and Chub Pond, the route leaves the existing trail, crosses Stone Dam Creek, and continues in a northeasterly direction remaining on the hills north of little Woodhull Creek. Approximately 3.6 miles of new trail is required.

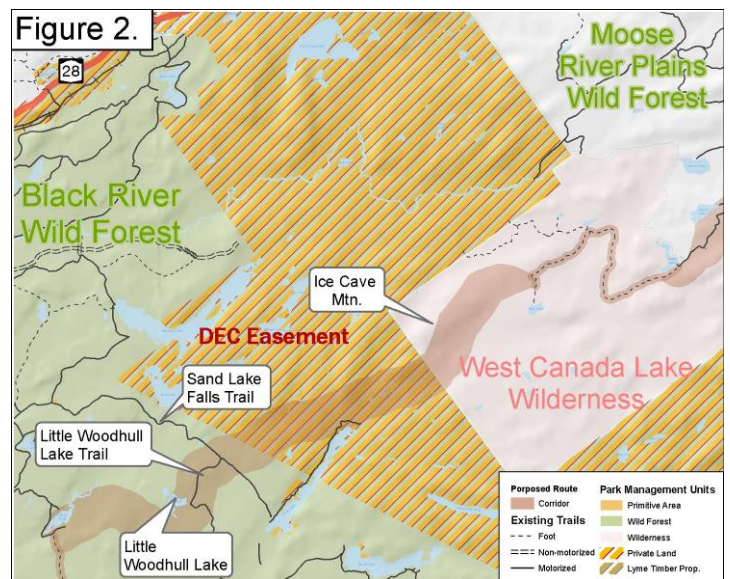
The route crosses Little Woodhull Creek near the south end of the long south arm of Little Woodhull Lake. The North Country NST continues east and northeast until it reaches the *Little Woodhull Lake Trail*.

The North Country NST will utilize the Little Woodhull Lake Trail as a temporary connector heading northeast for approximately 1.6 miles. At this point, the North Country NST intersects the *Sand Lake Falls Trail*. The North Country NST route crosses the Sand Lake Falls Trail and continues east on new trail across DEC Easement Lands.

There are a number of existing herdpaths and old roads (not shown) on the eastern boundary of BRWF that could be easily utilized. The North Country NST would hook into this network, where appropriate, to cross into the West Canada Lake Wilderness on the south side of Ice Cave Mountain.

Opportunities:

1. There are a number of herdpaths and abandoned old roads in the eastern part of the unit (north of North Lake) that can be utilized to reduce new trail construction.
2. This route will introduce more pedestrian traffic into the BRWF.
3. This route officially incorporates herdpaths that are being used to access Ice Cave Mountain.
4. This route utilizes the Stone Dam Trail, which has been recently rehabilitated.
5. The Stone Dam Trail has an accessible trailhead.
6. Parking exists at the end of the North Lake Road to access the trail via herdpaths.



7. This route utilizes a section of the Little Woodhull Lake Trail that is currently overgrown and not being used by snowmobilers.

Challenges:

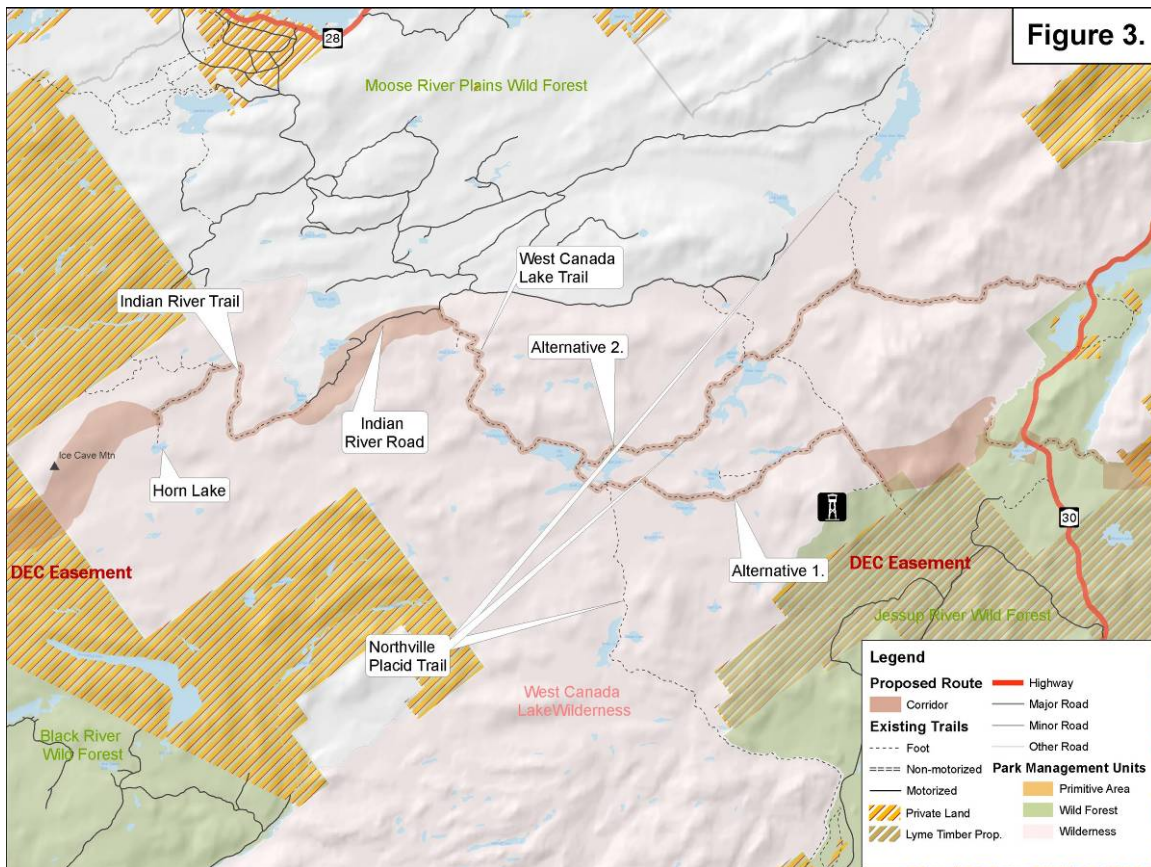
1. There are no identified challenges associated with the route in BRWF.

Table 3. Black River Wild Forest

DEC Unit	Foot Trail	New Trail	Temporary Connector	Total Miles
Black River Wild Forest	5.1	8.9	2.5	16.5

Current Status of BRWF UMP- New Plan anticipated for 2008.

West Canada Lake Wilderness



The North Country NST enters the West Canada Lake Wilderness (WCLW) on the south side of Ice Cave Mountain via abandoned roads and herdpaths (not shown). The North Country NST follows these trails until intersecting the *Indian River Trail*, 1 mile north of Horn Lake. The North Country NST overlaps the Indian River Trail for 6.2 miles to its trailhead at the western end of Indian River Road.

The North Country NST utilizes the Indian River Road as a temporary connector for 4.2 miles in the Moose River Plains Wild Forest. (see Moose River Plains Wild Forest, Page 46)

At the *West Canada Lake Trail* trailhead the North Country NST turns south back into the WCLW. The North Country NST continues on the West Canada Lake Trail to its intersection with the *Northville- Placid Trail (NPT)*. From this trail intersection two possible routes exist: Alternative 1 and Alternative 2.

Opportunities:

1. This route utilizes a number of existing foot trails.
2. This route offers a remote hiking experience.
3. There are existing lean-tos along this route.

- This route can utilize existing herdpaths west of Horn Lake as temporary connectors to reduce new trail construction.

Challenges:

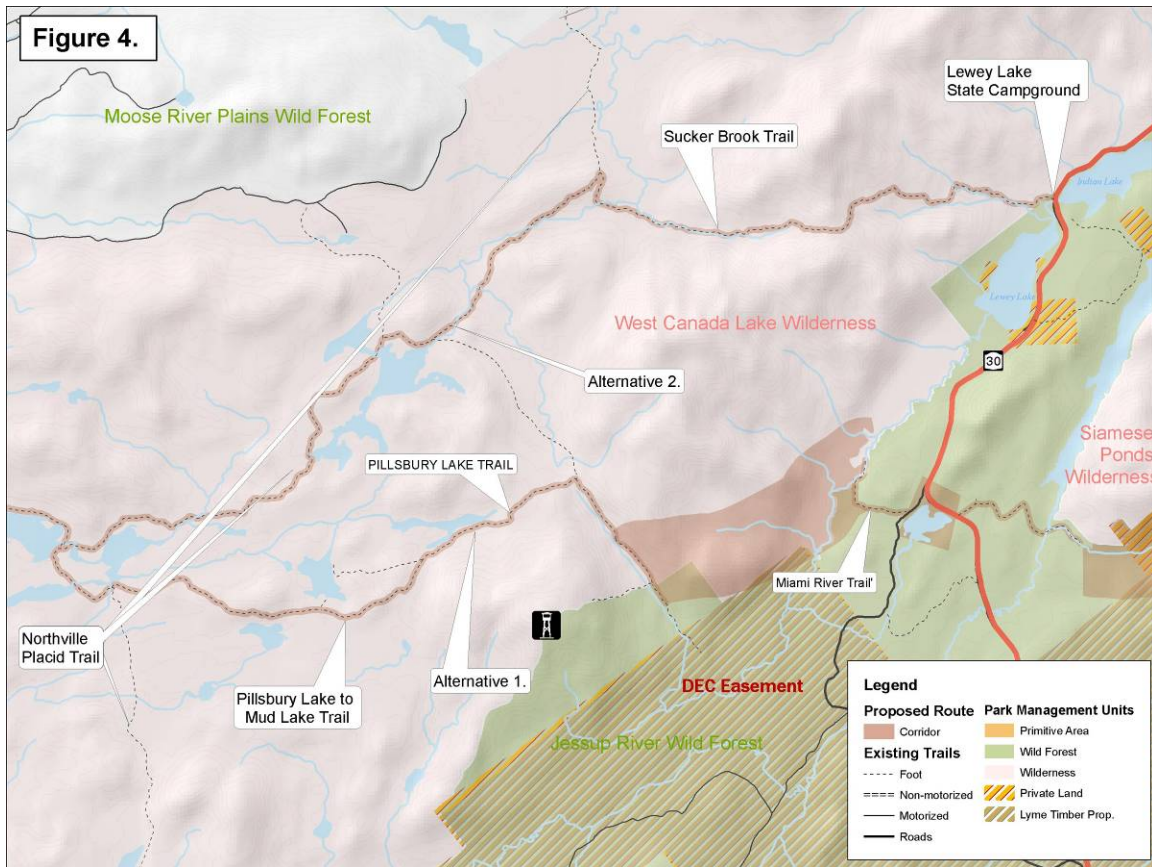
- There are no identified challenges associated with the route in WCLW.

Table 4. West Canada Lake Wilderness

DEC Unit	Foot Trail	New Trail	Temporary Connector	Total Miles
West Canada Lake Wilderness	13.2	1.2	2.0	16.4

Current Status of WCLW UMP- New Plan anticipated for 2008.

*From this point, there are two possible routes for the North Country NST: **Alternative 1** and **Alternative 2**.



Alternative 1. The North Country NST follows the *Northville-Placid Trail (NPT)* south to the junction of the NPT and the *Pillsbury Lake to Mud Lake Trail*. The North Country NST turns southeast and follows the Pillsbury Lake to Mud Lake Trail for 4.0 miles. The Pillsbury Lake to Mud Lake Trail becomes the *Pillsbury Lake Trail* at Pillsbury Lake.

The North Country NST follows the Pillsbury Lake Trail south. On the WCLW boundary the North Country NST follows new trail northeast to the *Miami River Trail* where it enters the Jessup River Wild Forest.

Opportunities:

1. This route will utilize existing foot trails in the southern part of the unit.
2. This route will bring the hiker close to the Pillsbury Mountain fire tower.

Challenges:

3. There are no identified challenges associated with the route in WCLW.

Table 5. West Canada Lake Wilderness: Alternative 1

DEC Unit	Foot Trail	New Trail	Temporary Connector	Total Miles
West Canada Lake Wilderness	9.4	3.5	0	12.9

Alternative 2. The North Country NST continues to follow the NPT north for approximately 8.2 miles to intersect with the *Sucker Brook Trail*. At this trail intersection, the North Country NST turns east and follows the Sucker Brook Trail for approximately 7.0 miles to its trailhead at Lewey Lake State Campground.

From the Lewey Lake State Campground a 1.5-mile water crossing is required to reach the next section of trail in the Siamese Ponds Wilderness.

Opportunities:

1. This route will connect to a state-run campground.
2. This route will receive healthy visitation.
3. This route will enrich the hiking experience in the Park by incorporating a water crossing.
4. This route will connect over 50 miles of continuous existing foot trail in the West Canada Lake Wilderness and the Siamese Ponds Wilderness.
5. This route will utilize a section of the well-known NPT.

Challenges:

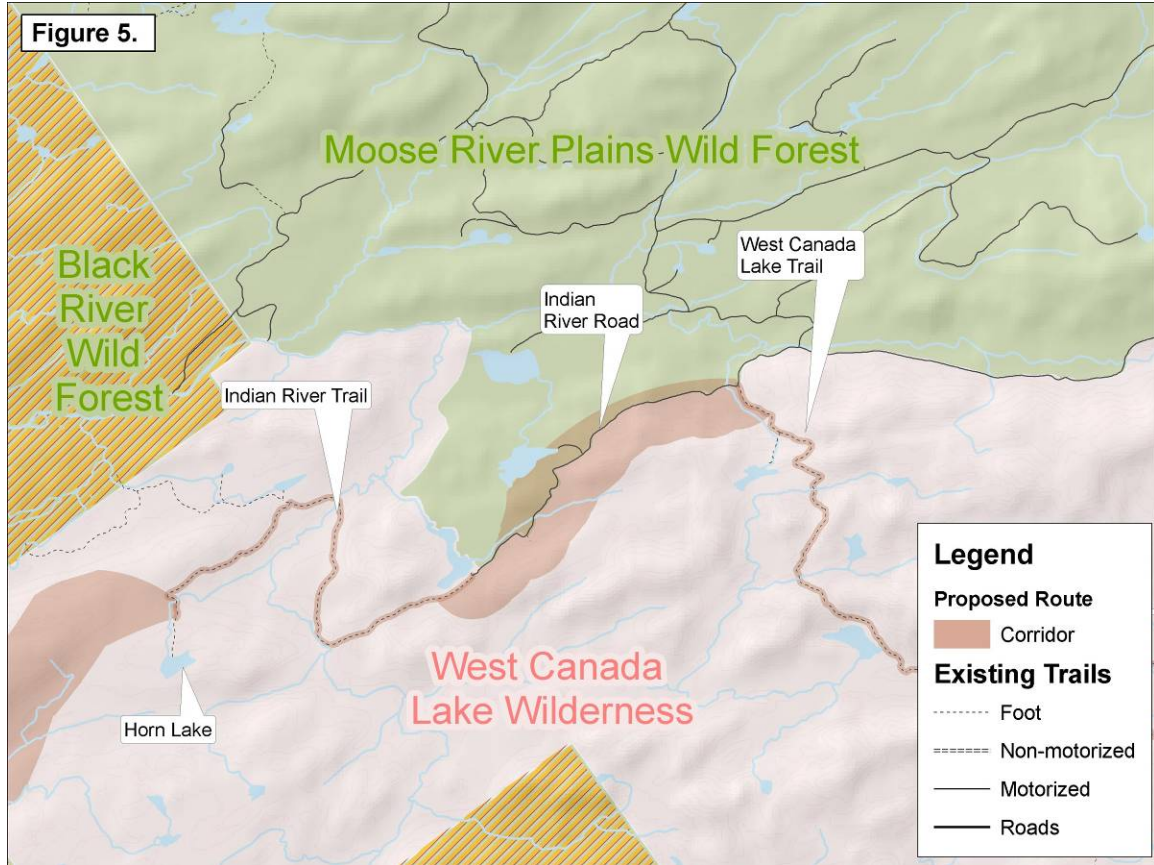
1. This route will require a water crossing of Indian Lake to reach the Siamese Ponds Wilderness.

Table 6. West Canada Lake Wilderness: Alternative 2

DEC Unit	Foot Trail	New Trail	Temporary Connector	Total Miles
West Canada Lake Wilderness	15.2	0	0	15.2

Moose River Plains Wild Forest

The North Country NST enters the Moose River Plains Wild Forest (MRPWF) on its southern boundary on the Indian River Road. The North Country NST utilizes the Indian River Road as a temporary connector for 4.2 miles before turning south and returning into West Canada Lake Wilderness.



Opportunities:

1. Indian River Road provides a critical connection between the Indian River Trail in West Canada Lake Wilderness and the West Canada Lake Trail.

Challenges:

1. There are no identified challenges associated with the route in MRPWF.

Table 7. Moose River Plains Wild Forest

DEC Unit	Foot Trail	New Trail	Temporary Connector	Total Miles
Moose River Plains Wild Forest	0	0	4.2	4.2

Current Status of MRPWF UMP- Re-write of Plan anticipated for Spring 2008.