New York State

DEC

Division of Lands and Forests

OVERLOOK MOUNTAIN WILD FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

May 1999

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

George E. Pataki, *Governor*

John P. Cahill, *Commissioner*

OVERLOOK MOUNTAIN WILD FOREST UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN

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John P. Cahill
Commissioner

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Record SEP 16 1999

FROM: Commissioner Cahill

SUBJECT: Unit Management Plan (UMP)
Overlook Wild Forest

A UMP for the Overlook Wild Forest has been completed. The UMP is consistent with the guidelines and criteria of the Catskill Park State Land Master Plan, the State Constitution, Environmental Conservation Law, and Department rules, regulations and policies. The UMP includes management objectives for a five year period and is hereby approved and adopted.

For Deputy Commissioner
Gavin I. Donohue

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Area Description

The Overlook Wild Forest is a small area of approximately 590 acres in the Town of Woodstock, Ulster County, bordering the 16,800 acre Indian Head Wilderness Area (mostly located in nearby Greene County). A location map is provided on page iii. These lands are part of the almost 300,000 acre Catskill Forest Preserve managed by the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). A Unit Management Plan was completed for the Indian Head Wilderness (formerly known as the Plateau Mountain-Indian Head Mountain Wilderness Area) in October, 1992 by the DEC's Region 4 Bureau of Public Lands in Stamford.

The Overlook Wild Forest is being managed separately from the adjacent Wilderness area since it contains a parking lot, four towers (three private, one fire tower), several buildings, mountain house ruins and several roads. The summit of Overlook Mountain is one of the top three most visited locations in the Catskill Forest Preserve (After Slide Mountain and North-South Lake).

The Overlook Wild Forest is reached from a parking lot at Meads Mountain Road, north of the Village of Woodstock or via a hiking trail from the Indian Head Wilderness.

The biggest issues dealt with in this Plan are:

1. The need to improve public access and provide parking along Meads Mountain Road.
2. Decide the fate of the Mountain House ruins.
3. Restore and open the fire tower and observer's cabin on the summit.
4. Set priorities and limits for land acquisition.

Other issues identified and discussed are:

1. Removal of two dilapidated cabins and dump areas.
2. Enhance vistas.
3. Protect sensitive natural areas.
4. Provide access for people with disabilities.
5. Provide information about Forest Preserve through brochures and displays.
6. Funding and maintenance.
7. Tourism.

A public scoping session on the Overlook Wild Forest Unit Management Plan was held on December 4, 1996 at the Woodstock Town Offices. A public meeting on the Draft Unit Management Plan was held on December 2, 1998 at the Woodstock Community Center. This plan reflects the comments and ideas received throughout the review process. For more information contact George Profous at (914) 256-3082 or at gvprofou@gw.dec.state.ny.us, write to NYS DEC, 21 South Putt Corners Road, New Paltz, New York 12561-1696, or fax us at (914) 255-4659.

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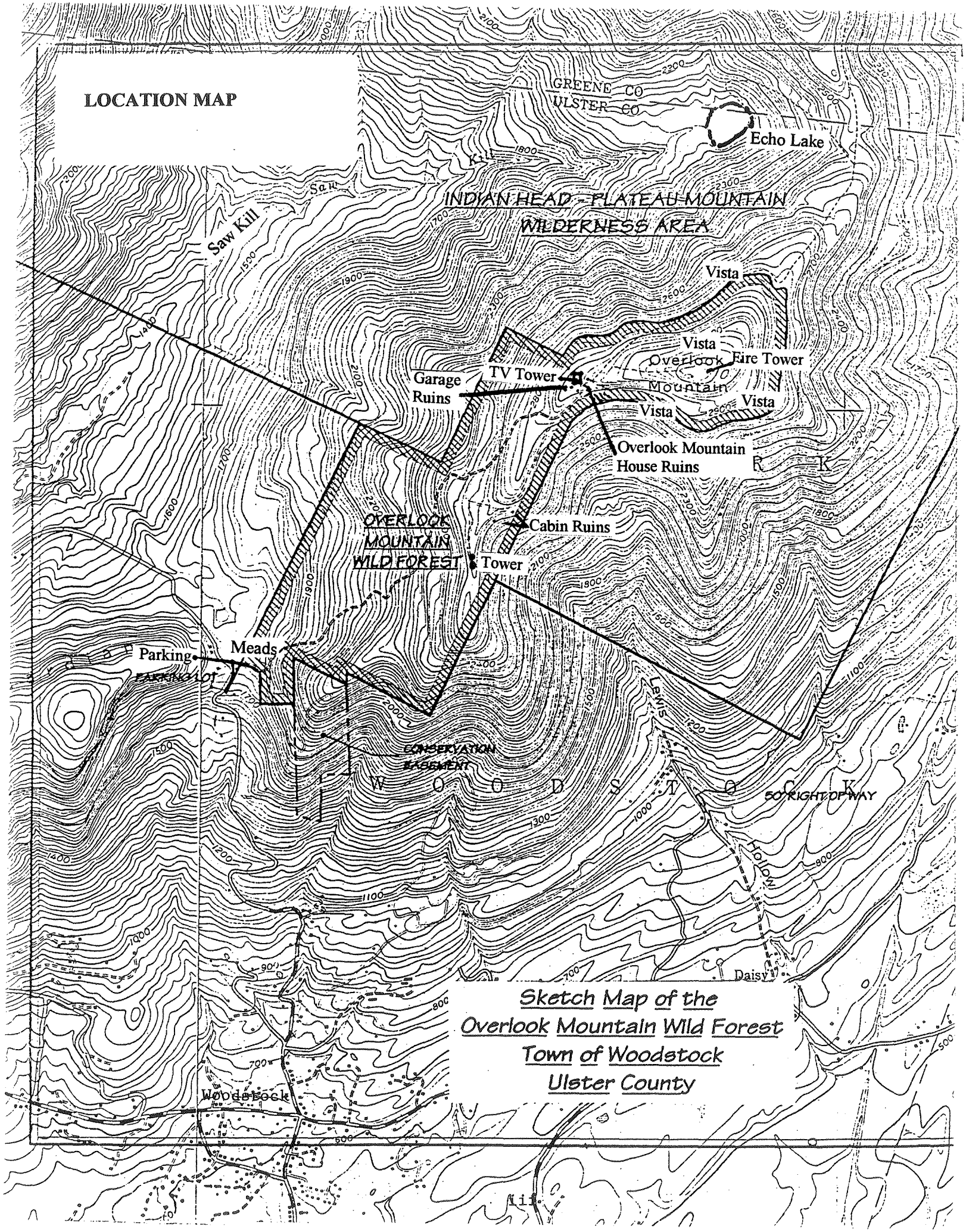


Sketch Map of the
Overlook Mountain Wild Forest
Town of Woodstock
Ulster County

B. History And Past Management

This historical perspective was added to, but adapted from information supplied in the Indian Head/Plateau UMP (NYS DEC, 1992).

- Irene Caldwell with input from Alf Evers and James Morton.
- John Sencabaugh, with input from Daniel Showers, Edward G. West and Michael Kudish.

The Indian Head-Plateau Mountain Wilderness Area and Overlook Mountain Wild Forest evolved through three distinct and different historical periods. These are:

1. The Indian Period
2. Time of European Settlement and Industrial Development
3. The Aesthetic, Scientific and Resort Periods of Exploration and Development

A fourth period, although not considered as an historical or development period, occurred when the land unit was included in the New York State Forest Preserve. This use continues to the present.

1. The Indian Period

The terrain of the mountains presented a physical barrier to the native Americans and may have presented a spiritual one as well. It is known that the Esopus division of the Munsee Indians inhabited the lower elevations of the nearby Esopus Creek to the south and used the mountain areas sparingly and primarily for hunting. Documentation of Indian use is limited to several sites outside the State-owned lands of the Wilderness Area, but geographically part of the same mountain area. Primary examples are:

a. Schrabisch's Cave at the base of Overlook Mountain near Woodstock. It is the largest of several caves found at areas of 1000' elevation or below on the eastern portion of the nearby Indian Head Wilderness Area. The earliest recorded excavation was in 1917 and the site has since given up many Indian artifacts including ceramic work. The site has been proposed for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Sites.

b. There is evidence that Indians infrequently utilized the Echo Lake area (in the adjacent Indian Head Wilderness Area) as a summer hunting ground and fishing site. It is believed that Indians used the mountain area for late spring maple sugar production, for hunting and for trapping. Use of the Mink Hollow area as a travel corridor was also recorded. Indian incursions into the lands incorporating the fringes of the present Wilderness Area increased after the settlement of Esopus (later called Kingston) in the 1650's and the village of Catskill (around 1690) due in part to a new demand for beaver pelts in European settlements. The chief factor in sending the Esopus Indians to living at the base of mountains like Overlook and Plattekill was the breaking up of their way of valley life caused by the two Esopus Wars ending in 1664.

2. European Settlement and Industrial Development

This area served as a wild frontier to the European settlements along the Esopus, Schoharie and Catskill Creeks and the Hudson River. The area was not tillable and was inhabited by wild animals. The French and Indian war further put off any planned settlement of this frontier. But the end of that

War in 1759 gave stability to white settlements and Woodstock was settled a year later, in 1760.

Echo Lake was once named Shew's (Shue's) Pond in honor of Tunis Shew (various spellings, including Schue's) who farmed close to the eastern base of Overlook Mountain; local lore says that he used the Pond as a hunting and fishing base in the mid-eighteenth century.

In 1793, Peter DeLabigarre, an agent of the French Republic, climbed Overlook from the east, camped in Echo Lake, then crossed Plattekill Mountain and returned to the Hudson Valley by way of Plattekill Clove. He wrote an account of his trip including much detail about vegetation and topography. The account, "Excursions on our Blue Mountain" was published in the Transaction of New York's Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, Arts and Manufacture for 1794. It remains the earliest and best account of the east part of the present Wilderness Area and adjacent land.

The first significant incursions of white men into this mountain area was spurred by the search for mineral wealth. Only one small vein of anthracite coal was ever discovered and it was never developed. Legends of gold and silver abounded here as in all other parts of the Catskills, but never were substantiated by discovery.

The earliest settlement of individual frontiersmen in areas like the Sawkill, Platte Clove and Mink Hollow were never officially recorded. The later settlers who left a greater impact on the land were duly recorded and a few old building foundations still exist in places along the Saw Kill and Mink Hollow. The gentle and moderate mountain slopes were farmed by tenant farmers and squatters through the War of Independence.

Agriculture came to the mountains much later than to the Hudson Valley. Even by the early nineteenth century, agriculture had affected only the lower valleys and, to a lesser extent, the upper slope valleys. Very little of the land which is now Forest Preserve was ever cleared and farmed. Mink Hollow and some of the tributaries to the Saw Kill in the Plateau Mt. Wilderness are the only nearby Forest Preserve areas where past agricultural disturbance can be readily determined.

Early lumbering was species-selective and was concentrated in the valleys where the timber was more accessible and where transportation was available.

Charcoal was a bartering tool for early settlers and farmers. While it was illegal for the tenants of the Hardenburgh Patent to clear land for charcoal production or fuelwood at the lower elevations, they had permission to use the wooden upper slopes of the mountains as they deemed necessary. Charcoal pits and kilns were erected throughout the mountains and some existed until late in the 19th century. Charcoal was transported to homes and industries along the Saw Kill and to West Saugerties through the Platte Clove. A charcoal kiln existed near the present location of the Devil's Kitchen lean-to (Indian Head Wilderness, Town of Hunter); remnants of a retaining wall erected against the mountain slopes is still in existence.

Sawmilling has gone through two distinct periods. The first was at the time of settlement through the 18th Century. Small, family-oriented mills predominated in conjunction with land clearing and sporadic farm building construction. Lack of accessibility, lack of good transportation and lack of convenient markets deferred the cutting of timber in the deeper mountain areas.

But as markets developed and roads were improved, the wilder wooded areas became more accessible. After the War of Independence and through the expansionist period of American history in the 19th Century, demand for wood increased considerably. Milling and timber cutting expanded here until a leveling-off about 1900. There were so many sawmills in the Catskills in the 19th Century that no official census was taken; one unsubstantiated record says that from 1870 to 1900 there were over 200 sawmills in the Catskill Mountains. Hardwoods were the main source of timber during this period.

Furniture manufacturing complemented the sawmilling in the last three decades of the 19th Century and lingered somewhat through 35 years of the 20th. Sugar Maple, Black Cherry and Yellow Birch were the high valued hardwoods.

Three successive waves of industrial development intruded into this mountain area which eventually led to some major deforestation by land-clearing or from forest fires emanating from logging or charcoal pits. These waves of development were: tanning, glass manufacturing and bluestone quarrying.

2a. The Tanning Industry

Tanning was the first extensive human disturbance in the mountain area. Hemlock was cut, its bark peeled; the bark was then used to tan leather. Tanning began on a small scale around 1800, but the period 1820 through 1860 saw a huge industry that had a great impact on the forests of the Catskills and the economic growth of local communities.

A bark peeler's hut was on Echo Lake before the Civil War; it belonged to the Booth-McDaniel Family. Fifty-nine tanneries operated in the Catskill Mountains in 1835.

The last tanneries in the Schoharie Valley closed in the 1860's and, in the upper Esopus, in the 1870's. The hemlock logs were usually a glut on the market and often were left to rot in the woods. Much of the cut area was burned, some accidentally and some deliberately.

Although the harvesting of hemlock trees for bark used in the tanning of hides and timber cutting for local use undoubtedly contributed to the area's economy, it was more important in other parts of the Catskills. The closest tannery to the area was the Van Devort Tannery along the Saw Kill (kill = river), which was operating in 1871 (Kudish, 1971).

For a more complete discussion of forest industry in the Catskills, see NYS DEC (1992, 1996, 1997).

2b. Glass Manufacturing

Several glass factories, encouraged by available fuel in the form of extensive hardwoods forests of the south-facing slopes of the mountains, were founded in Woodstock and its vicinity beginning in 1809 and lasted until 1857. The factories required vast amounts of hardwood fuelwood and, though no factory was ever located on what is now Forest Preserve land, their collective impact was locally considerable. The forests of Overlook and Plattekill Mountains were used for fuel.

2c. Bluestone Quarrying

Bluestone, a fine grained sandstone, is common to the eastern portion of the area. This bluestone was used for early gravestones, in some houses and many of the sidewalks in local communities, as well as in the larger cities of Albany, Kingston and New York. Bluestone quarrying began in earnest around 1840 and lasted until the turn of the century when Portland cement became a cheap and

aggressive competitor. Quarrying removed localized but large amounts of forest cover to get to the stone. Heavy-duty travel roads were built for wagons to haul the stone. Several quarry remnants are visible on the slopes of Overlook. The industry attracted as labor many of the Irish immigrants of the time.

The quarries slowly revegetated and then only to light demanding pioneer tree species like white birch. From a distance, a discerning eye can determine the extent of the differing vegetation that still marks the old quarry sites.

Most of the following excerpts are from "*The Catskills - From Wilderness to Woodstock*" by Alf Evers (1972). For more detail, see the Chapters, "Bluestone Quarries" and "Quarrymen and Quarry Lore."

Tons of bluestone were quarried in places like Quarryville (in the Town of Saugerties), Hurley Woods, Jockey Hill, the banks of the lower Sawkill and Moray Hill. The stone was loaded onto iron rimmed wagons pulled by teams of horses, often in convoys, and sent to the trading towns along the river. There, the stone dealers would cut and shape them into what would become steps, curbing and sidewalks for cities all over the country. By 1850, bluestone was being shipped by river sloop to Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Charleston, San Francisco, Milwaukee, St. Louis and Havana, Cuba. The stone was prized because it was hard and long lasting, dried very quickly after a shower, and did not become slippery with wear.

As the demand grew, stone dealers took advantage of the newly constructed railroads, such as the Ulster and Delaware Railroad, and older quarries that were farther from the railroad were closed and replaced by quarries in places like Margaretville, Roxbury and Phoenicia. The quarries near the railroad and today's Route 28 corridor continued to flourish.

By the 1860's more and more machinery was being used, requiring fewer and fewer men. River sloops gave way to two masted schooners which needed fewer sailors. Quarrying work continued to be very dangerous, resulting in broken limbs, smashed hands, dust induced lung disease, and deaths caused by blasting powder.

Quarrying took its toll on the landscape, leaving scars on the earth and great piles of leftover rubble which can still be seen throughout the wild forest. In Kingston, courthouse proceedings on Wall Street would often stop as the convoys of bluestone wagons came down the street on the way to the stone yards at Wilbur (southwest Kingston).

The industry collapsed in 1880 with the discovery of Portland cement, bringing the 60 year era to a close. Today, several surface mines on adjacent private lands continue to use the area to produce crushed stone construction aggregates.

2d. How Quarrying was Done

Quarrymen would remove a few feet of topsoil and cut a chasm about thirty feet deep by twenty feet wide. This cut revealed the layered bluestone on either side (Figure 1). Bluestone mining was a great gamble and many a small operator lost everything from the big investment needed to get to this point if the stone quality was poor.

They would then mark off the surface area needed and drill a series of holes which they plugged with what were called "feathers"(two pieces of iron half-rounds) which were driven into the holes and then separated by a wedge forced between them (Figures 2 and 3). The resulting pressure moved the bluestone slab.

As they cut straight forward into the vertical wall, lifting off layers of stone beginning at the top, and throwing unusable fragments and refuse behind them, a huge pile of rubble would rise where they had been. When each piece was cut from the face, it was swung by horse drawn derrick to the top of the rubble pile where stonecutters would shape it and send it away for use (Figure 4).

The quarries today are a result of this process. In places the vertical excavation is so deep that as many as fifteen layers of geological strata are visible and the vertical grooves of the drill holes cover many surfaces. Old diggings are everywhere in the surrounding forest and the deep working spaces between sheer cliffs and rubble piles can still be seen.

Bluestone Quarrying

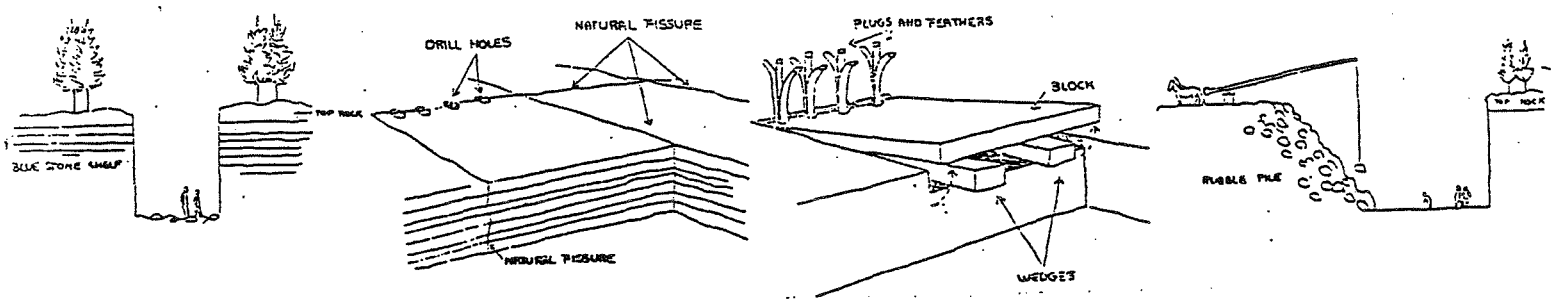


Figure 1-4
Excerpts primarily from Ralph Moseley, Masters Thesis "Opus 40" (1961). Also from John Moree, Masters Thesis "Bluestone Quarry." Figures from Moseley (1961). For more information, see also Quarryman's Museum, High Woods, Saugerties, New York.

3. Aesthetic, Scientific and Resort Period

An excellent source of information on the history and landscape of Overlook Mountain is Frederick Steuding's "Woodstock's Overlook Mountain: Preserving the American Heritage" (1996).

South Peak, as Overlook Mountain was then known, was described in detail by Charles Lanman in magazine articles and his book Letters of a Landscape Painter published in 1845. Lanman was a great admirer of the artist Thomas Cole and for some time tried to persuade him to explore the mountain. Although Thomas Cole included the mountain in several of his paintings. It was not until 1846 that he visited — and played a part in replacing the name South Peak with Overlook Mountain (Steuding, 1996). Evers (1987) writes:

> *"Up to the day of Cole's visit and for many years afterwards a distinction had been made between 'the Overlook Cliff,' also known as 'the Overlook,' and the mountain itself. Cole, as far as is known, was the first person to set down in writing 'the Overlook' as the name of the entire mountain. Later 'Overlook Mountain' came into use. [1987:256]"*

They hiked to the summit and camped overnight in a lean-to made of balsam boughs. Cole wrote of the view:

> *The vast valley of the Hudson lies like a Sea before and beneath you while the base of the mountain on which you stand rises abrupt and definitely from its misty bosom & seems like the prow of a stupendous vessel ploughing the great deep . . . . [1846, cited in Evers, 1987: 259]*

According to Cole's biographer, Louis Noble, in *The Course of Empire* (1858), Cole was aware that he was approaching the end of his life when he chose to hike the Overlook Cliffs in October of 1847: "From this dizzy crag Cole took a long and silent look up and down the beloved valley of the Hudson. He had gazed upon it, from other points unnumbered times, alone and with companions . . . it had filled his heart for years. This was his last look" [1858, cited in Evers, 1972: 448]. Cole died a few months later.

To the end of his life, Cole was drawn to the upper elevations of the Catskills. It was however, Overlook, to which he returned for a final visit (Steuding 1986).

Tourism began as early as the 1830's when visitors were lured by game and fish in the Saw Kill, Plattekill and Stony Clove Valleys and Echo Lake. Bear, bobcat, wolf and deer were very common in the area. The Overlook Mountain House operated a "refreshment saloon" at Echo Lake the last two decades of the 19th Century; foundation stones are still evident on the south shore of the Lake.

Overlook Mountain's prominence to the Hudson Valley was a natural invitation to resort development. An earlier visitor to its peak stated, "If there is anything between heaven and earth that can regale the romantic imagination, it is here." (Evers, The Catskills, From Wilderness to Woodstock). Writers, poets, scientists and wilderness romanticists frequented this area as they did the Kaaterskill area to the north. Evers (1972) writes:

> *"The upper slopes and summit of Overlook had changed but little since Peter DeLabigarre described the mountain in 1793. Its lower parts had been denuded of their forests by tanners and glassmakers; the tanners had taken oak and hemlock bark from the southeastern slope, and the glassmakers had used the hardwoods of the northern and western slopes. But the summit was still well covered, largely with spruce and balsam fir trees.... (The first) guests were favorably impressed with the site."*

The Overlook Mountain Houses

The first of a long series of efforts to build a hotel on the mountain began in 1833, when Overlook Mountain was still known as South Peak or Woodstock Mountain. Nearby was Schue's Pond, today Echo Lake. James Booth built a horseback - hiking trail that year to what he called a "temporary mountain house," which he proposed to expand into a large structure, like the popular Catskill Mountain House. However, this venture did not survive the economic turmoil of 1833. Booth was followed by other disappointed Overlook dreamers - William Scobie, Nicholas Elmendorf, Robert Livingston Pell and Isaac N. Secor. Finally, a corporation with large stockholders, William Brinkerhoff (a Woodstock hotel owner) and Charles H. Krack

(a summer homeowner who owned a floating bathhouse in New York City), succeeded.

The first Overlook Mountain House was built in 1871 by designer and builder Lewis B. Wagonen of Kingston; but by then, the solitude, peace and beauty that had attracted the early visitors was in competition with the bluestone and charcoal industries. Tourism eventually prevailed. By the early 1900's, Overlook Mountain was well known to the art community and nearby Woodstock's reputation as an art colony was growing thanks to Ralph Radcliffe Whitehead's arts and crafts colony Byrdcliffe.

The original Overlook Mountain House accommodated 300 guests by 1873. Destroyed by a chimney fire in 1875, it was rebuilt in 1878 by the Kiersted Brothers of Saugerties ("becoming a symbol for the Saugerties bid for dominance of the Catskills' summer visitor business", Evers [1972]). In its early seasons, the Mountain House resembled a sanitarium for lung and tuberculosis patients especially since it was the highest elevation mountain house in the State. Anchored to the mountain by cables, the second mountain house stood three stories high and was 200 feet long. However, between the years 1887 and 1917 it operated irregularly.

In 1917 it was sold to financier Morris Newgold, but was again destroyed by fire in 1924. Resurrected in concrete to become a grand hotel, it was never completed - a victim of changing public tastes and the automobile. Since 1940, when it was boarded up, theft, vandalism and the elements have brought it to its present condition. For more information on the Mountain House, see Bill Newgold (1976), "My Grandfather and the Mountain: A Profile of Morris Newgold and the Overlook Mountain House" in the Conservationist, pp.27-29, 45, Published by the State of New York Department of Environmental Conservation. Also see the 1992 Indian Head Mountain Wilderness Area Unit Management Plan (DEC) and Alf Evers (1972), The Catskills-From Wilderness to Woodstock.

The Overlook Mountain House gave Echo Lake its name. The Lake's earlier names included Schue's, Shew's and Athen's. Guests, driven down to the lake from the house, would be rowed to the center of the Lake and treated to the echo generated by a hotel employee blowing a horn. The echo effect is still discovered today by hikers and campers who learn that voices carry easily in the lake basin and some conversations can be clearly and distinctly heard around the lake.

As in all tourist areas of the eastern Catskills in the 1800's, all local geologic points of interest were given names to entice visitation by tourists. Some of these romantic spots on Overlook Mountain are Rip Van Winkle's Cave, President's Rock (named after the visiting President Grant), Bishop's Rock and Turtle Rock. This parallels the commercial tourism sponsored by the Catskill Mountain House to the north in the Kaaterskill area.

The Overlook Turnpike, an early toll road, was built from Meads to the newly opened Overlook Mountain Hotel in 1871. The road connecting Overlook Mountain to Platte Clove was built in 1880. The road went down the north ridge of Overlook and around the face of Plattekill at about 2550 feet in elevation. A toll house is still present in Platte Clove on the property of the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development.

A large boarding house in Meads, Ulster County, accommodated guests who used the nearby mountain areas. Platte Clove and Stony Clove were other areas with many smaller boarding houses.

The opening of the mountains as a resort/recreation area also nurtured the

evolvement of scientific, literary and aesthetic interest in wild lands in the early 19th Century. Overlook and the Kaaterskill area to the north, had a great influence on these interests. Thomas Cole, John Burroughs and Charles Lanman, among others, were strongly influenced by this area; the writings, paintings and poetry of these men find much of their basis in these mountains. This eastern escarpment of the Catskill Mountains played a part in the development of the concept of wilderness and of a wilderness ethic in America.

Viewed from the Hudson River travel corridor in the early 1800's, the eastern escarpment, and Overlook Mountain in particular, projected an aura of mystery, solitude, danger and excitement. These mountains, as interpreted through the thoughts and perceptions of writers like Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, William Cullen Bryant and the artists of the Hudson River School, attracted and appealed to those in search of a symbol of wildness. Through novels, poetry, paintings, prints and lithographs, and newspapers and magazines, a larger audience could participate, though indirectly, in the romantic view of wilderness.

The imposing view that the Catskill escarpment presented to the Hudson Valley captivated residents and travelers alike. The mountains were a constant and looming presence and a physical barrier that represented a wilderness to a growing urban society. And, because of its proximity to a burgeoning society, it was the first of America's mountain ranges to be scientifically explored.

Spectacular scenery and solitude attracted writers and painters who sought release of their talent in these mountains.

This interaction between a wild and scenic landscape and the people attracted to scientific study and literary and artistic interpretation laid the earliest foundation for a wilderness concept and ethic in the United States.

4. The Forest Preserve and State Development

The establishment of the Forest Preserve in 1885 was for practical reasons of land and water conservation. Though wildland preservation and the concept of wilderness had nothing to do with the original Forest Preserve, they have been nurtured in the medium of the Preserve and its "forever wild" mandate.

New York State's acquisition of lands for Forest Preserve in this Unit didn't begin until the 20th Century. Some original Forest Preserve lands did exist in the vicinity of Twin Mountain, Sugarloaf Mountain, eastern Platte Clove and Silver Hollow. Almost all of the present lands were purchased by 1940. Overlook and Plattekill Mountains were first purchased in 1921 and 1922 (Kudish, 1985).

In 1929, the first section of the Devil's Path Trail was built from the Overlook Turnpike westerly over Indian Head, through Jimmy Dolan's Notch, over Twin, through Pecoy Notch and over Sugarloaf to Mink Hollow. Robert Tuttle was the Forest Ranger in charge. A lean-to was first built at Echo Lake (Indian Head Wilderness) in 1967 and rebuilt in 1997.

Indian Head was named for the profile the mountain presents to the Hudson Valley perspective. Jimmy Dolan was a tavern keeper in Platte Clove and in the heyday of the glass factory in the Sawkill Valley, workers would walk through the notch between Indian Head and Twin on a payday Saturday to visit with Jimmy Dolan and return home on Sunday night; this notch was simply named on behalf of the tavern keeper. Twin Mountain has a double peak and thus, its name; its earlier name was Schoharie Peaks. Pecoy Notch has no

known historical background. Sugarloaf was called Mink Mountain in the 19th Century; why it was originally called Mink and why it was changed to Sugarloaf cannot be determined. Mink Hollow retains its original name and was probably named for the animal that must have been a common resident of its wild area. Plateau Mountain is aptly named for its long, flat summit; it was earlier called Stony Mountain.

4a. Overlook Mountain Fire Tower

The tower on Overlook Mountain (el. 3,140 feet) is the youngest of the five remaining Catskill fire towers, having been at its present location since 1950. However, parts of the tower are much older since it was originally constructed in 1927 on Gallis Hill, just west of Kingston. Along with the Balsam Lake Mountain Fire Tower, Overlook closed in 1989. The other Catskill towers, Red Hill and Hunter, were closed in 1990. Mt. Tremper has been closed since 1971. Also see article "Going - Going - Gone Forever" by Robert M. Marrone in *Kaatskill Life* 8 (1): 77-80 (Spring 1993) and "Trained Spotters"by Marty Podskoch in the *Woodstock Times* (July 23, 1998).

The 60 foot Aermotor steel tower with seven foot by seven foot metal cab was placed on the National Historic Lookout Register in October of 1997 (US #224, NY #19, American Resources Group, 374 Maple Avenue, Vienna, VA 22180).

4b. Communication Towers

In 1990, DEC acquired 312 acres of land on Overlook Mountain for addition to the Catskill Forest Preserve. The lands acquired are subject to two two-acre leases between the landowner, C. Powers Taylor, and two private parties. The former landowner receives all income from the leases.

The first lease, entered into on July 18, 1982, with WTZA TV Associates, is for an initial term of thirty (30) years and six (6) months, commencing July 1, 1982 and ending on December 31, 2013. The lease provides "for the purpose of constructing, operating and maintaining television antennae and transmission towers, together with such related structure, equipment, machinery and devices required for transmitting and receiving television signals." The lease includes a provision "to extend the lease for up to a total of six (6) successive renewal terms of ten (10) years each." The lease may thus run for a total of 90 years, until 2073. The Lessee may "purchase the leasehold from Lessor at the expiration of the sixth and final renewal term." The TV Tower and facilities are currently operated by Regional News Network (RNN).

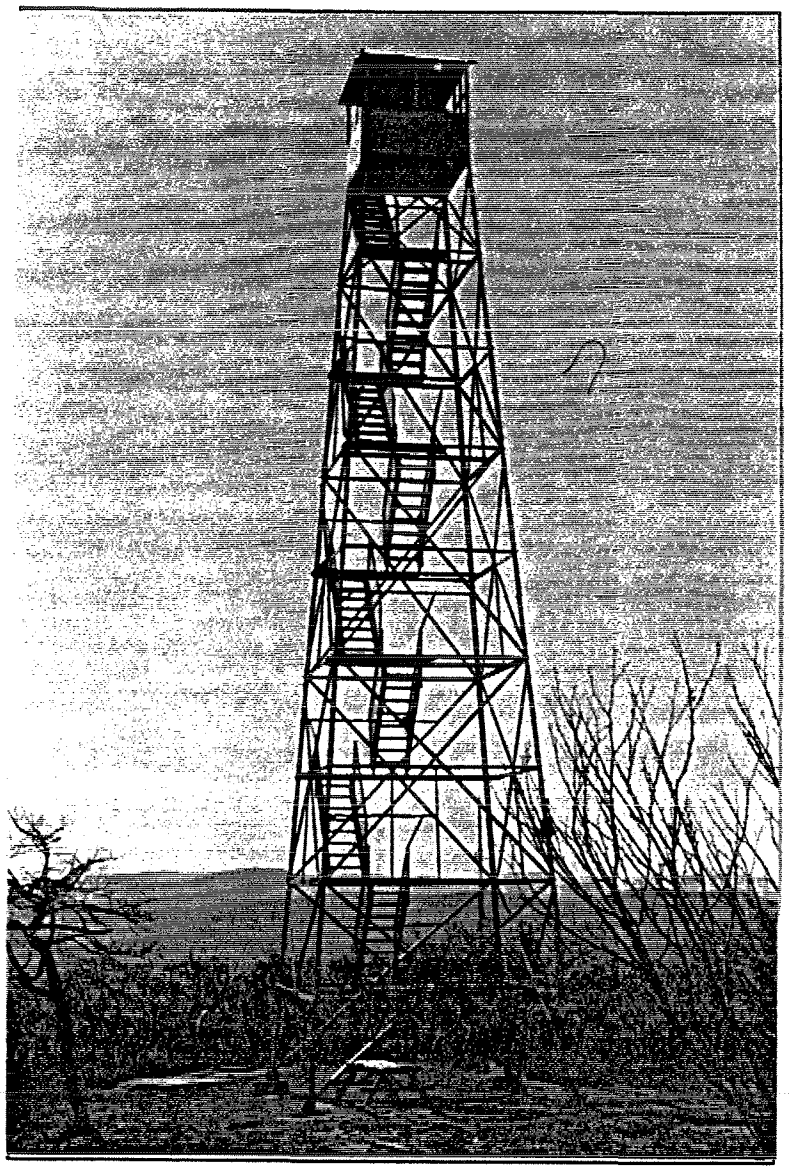
"The second lease, entered into on January 25, 1985, with Peter Moncure for an initial term of 30 years, provides "for the purpose of constructing, operating and maintaining radio and television antennae and transmission towers together with such structures, equipment, machinery and devices required for transmitting and receiving radio, television and other broadcast signals as well as for personal recreational and/or residential purposes."

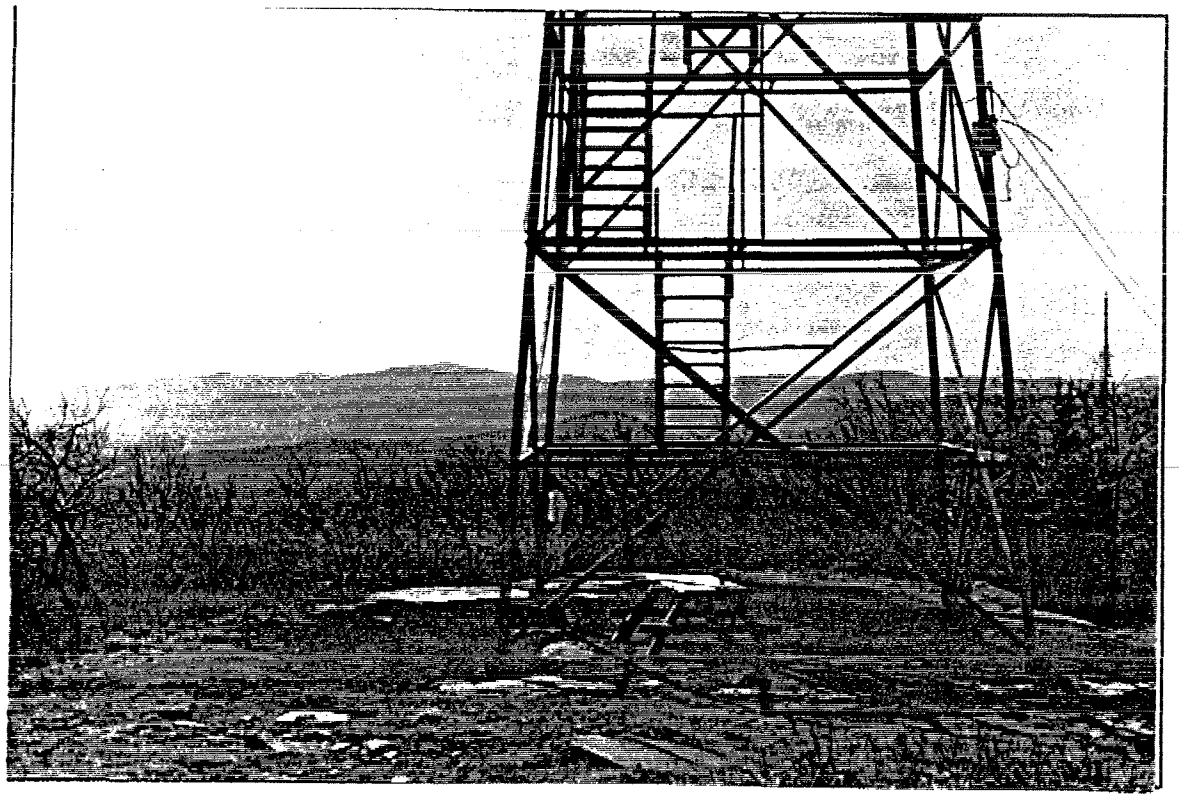
The lease includes a provision "to extend the term for up to three (3) successive renewal terms of thirty (30) years each." Thus, the lease may run for a total of 120 years, until 2105.

In 1995, DEC received notice from the second leaseholder, Peter Moncure, of his request to replace an existing 120 foot tower with a new self supporting tower 139 feet high, for cellular telephone communications. DEC litigated the proposal and subsequently lost in Supreme Court and in the Appellate Division. The matter reverted to the Woodstock Planning Board.

In 1997, Cellular One withdrew the application and it was dropped from consideration by the Woodstock Planning Board.

Overlook Mountain
Fire Tower
June 6, 1998





II. INVENTORY

A. Natural Resources

1. Forests/Vegetation

The Overlook Mountain Wild Forest and the adjoining Indian Head Wilderness Area are entirely forested with a wide diversity of plant species determined by soils, topography, climate, man's use, natural disturbance and by chance distribution of seeds and spores.

The Catskill Mountain Region contains the southernmost outpost of boreal coniferous forest (red spruce-balsam fir-paper birch) in glaciated eastern North America. In great contrast to this very northern forest type is the coastal plain temperate Carolinian Zone forest (oak-hickory) that abuts against the very base of the Catskills on the east and south. Kudish in the Vegetational History of the Catskill High Peaks (1971), calls it "this telescoping compression of the forest zones." Kudish further describes the Catskills in stating: "The proximity of the Carolinian and Canadian zones, especially in the eastern Catskills, together with the effects of man over two centuries, produces a rich, diverse flora, and creates a vegetation so complex that it nearly defies explanation."

The east slope of Plattekill and the east and south slopes of Overlook are influenced by the Hudson Valley and are of the Carolinian oak-hickory forest. Fire has been a primary influence on the establishment of oak and related species on these slopes; Overlook Mountain has been repeatedly burned over the past 200 years and an 1891 fire on Plattekill Mountain burned 300 acres up its east slope. Kudish states that Overlook and Plattekill "have a long and complex history of burns, logging and bark peeling; this area is the most severely disturbed in the Catskills." The burn line on the northwest shoulder of Overlook Mountain is a classic textbook example of a vegetation boundary caused by human activities (Kudish, personal communication, 1996).

A few balsam firs and red spruce trees grow on top of Overlook. The spruce and fir are survivors of fires and other human disturbances - and are today inter mixed with red oak and other hardwoods. Before disturbance Overlook was high enough for a small crown of primeval spruce fir (Evers, 1972).

The sugar maple-beech-yellow birch forest (northern hardwoods) inhabits the upper slopes and especially northwest, north and northeast aspects on slopes. It is the most widespread forest type on all of this Unit's mountains and inhabits all aspects provided that the slope was not burned. (NYS DEC, 1992)

Moist cloves and ravines harbor mixtures of hemlock and northern hardwoods. Hemlock also often occurs here in small pure stands.

The Canadian boreal forest occurs on Indian Head Mountain, both peaks of Twin Mountain, Sugarloaf Mountain and Plateau Mountain. Kudish's research of records shows that the eastern Catskills receive 55 to 60 inches average precipitation per year; it is an eastern wet belt. This high precipitation is explained by the juxtaposition of a low elevation moist air mass (Hudson Valley) with a sharply-rising high mountain mass (Catskill Mountains) to the immediate west. Precipitation is formed in the lifting of humid air. The distribution of red spruce, balsam fir and white and yellow birch at high elevations closely follows this wet belt. However, Kudish considers this species distribution and rainfall to be only coincidental.

Torrey (1930) reported Potentilla tridentata (Three-toothed Cinquefoil) from Overlook (NYS DEC, 1992). In the Catskills it is found in few other places like Dry Brook Ridge and Artist's Rock. Although it is not protected it is rare in the Catskills. It has been observed in a half dozen places in the region, usually marking sites that have never been forested since deglaciation (the last arctic-alpine remnant) (Kudish, 1996).

Bluebell or Harebell (Campanula rotundifolia), a protected, but not rare plant in New York State, is located near the summit (Kudish, 1996).

This boreal forest is also prone to wind and water stress. Rainfall here is heavier but so is wind velocity and trees are frequently under water stress conditions. The hurricane of November 25, 1950 (the most severe recorded storm in the Catskills) did great damage to spruce and fir on the south peak of Twin Mountain, and severe, if lesser, damage on Indian Head and Sugarloaf. Much of the remaining residual red spruce is badly exposed and suffering effects of exposure and drought. But on these same peaks, balsam fir reproduction has been strong and has formed an almost impenetrable tangle of vegetation. Red spruce and white birch have regenerated in lesser amounts than fir. Incidentally, the south peak of Twin suffered an earlier blowdown dating back to the late 19th Century. The boreal forest on Plateau, Sugarloaf, Twin and Indian Head is considered virgin forest and is of ecological interest. (NYS DEC, 1992)

Major man-made disturbances have somewhat altered the original forest. The valley portions of forest and all the mid-slopes were disturbed first by the leather tanning industry. Hemlock was removed in this Unit between 1820 and 1860; cutting was heaviest in Stony Clove, Platte Clove and the slopes toward the Schoharie. At nearly the same time, the glass factories of Ulster County needed vast amounts of hardwood for fuel for glass-making. Between 1809 and 1857, the head waters of the Sawkill, south slope of Twin Mountain and much of Overlook and Plattekill Mountains were heavily cut for fuel (Kudish, 1985); the even-aged hardwood forests of the area are a result of this cutting. Bluestone quarrying was a localized industry and large blocks of forest were removed in the late 19th century to get at the stone; blocks of young, light-demanding tree species, like white and black birch and chestnut oak, are common on the old quarries. General heavy lumbering followed the other industries into the first quarter of the 20th Century.

"The burn line on the northwest shoulder of the mountain is a real classic textbook example of a vegetation boundary caused by human activities. The old Carriage Road — hiking trail to Platte Clove crosses the line at about the 2850 foot level. Above is a fire disclimax forest, shaped by probably hundreds of fires over thousands of years, of northern red oak, chestnut oak, American chestnut, black birch, rough-leaved dogwood, mountain laurel, maple-leaf viburnum and sweet fern. Below to the northwest is a relatively undisturbed, only logged, northern hardwoods stand of sugar maple, beech and yellow birch. The contrast across the line is striking and could be used for interpretive walks" (Kudish, pers. comm., 1996.)

The highest elevation station for black birch is here on Overlook, along the road climbing from Meads at 2650 feet (Kudish, pers. comm., 1996).

In spite of the many climatic and man-made disturbances, the overall composition of the forest in the Forest Preserve hasn't changed much from the forest at the time of European settlement. This fact is backed by records of early historians, botanists and surveyors. (NYS DEC, 1992)

2a. Wildlife

The "forever wild" clause of Article XIV of the New York State Constitution and its implementing regulations constrain wildlife management of the unit, which is part of the New York State Forest Preserve. The passive management results in mature to old growth forest and wildlife habitat conditions. The natural processes of the forest preserve do not favor any particular wildlife species or group of species, except for those favored by natural succession.

The bird and animal species in this area are similar to those found in the rest of the Catskill region. For more information, please refer to Chambers (1983), Andrle and Caroll (1988) and Robbins et. al. (1989). No endangered, threatened or rare species have been identified in the Unit, except for the threatened Timber Rattlesnake (Crotalus horridus). Rattlesnakes have been sighted in the area, but no special trail relocations or management actions are needed to protect them. The old road and trail to the fire tower, used by most visitors, is well placed to avoid significant impacts to the rattlesnakes. Hikers should stay on the trails and exercise extra caution, especially near rock outcrops.

The Overlook Mountain Wild Forest and the surrounding Indian Head Wilderness within the Catskill Peaks ecozone. The extensive northern hardwood forest lands of the area provide habitat for a variety of wildlife species. In general, species which require open land and early successional forest stages would be less abundant in the Unit than species using the older age forest. (NYS DEC, 1992)

There has never been a formal inventory of animal life for this area. Chambers, in his handbook, Integrating Timber and Wildlife Management, 1983, (available at Region 4 Wildlife Offices in Stamford, Schenectady and New Paltz) compiled an extensive list of wildlife presumed to live within the Catskill Peaks ecozone, and further qualified his listing by categorizing species by forest type, forest stage and special habitat needs. Based on Chamber's criteria, 43 species of mammals, 65 species of birds, and 32 species of amphibians and reptiles are likely to be found within the Overlook Mountain Wild Forest/Indian Head Wilderness Area.

Records compiled from 1985 for The Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State (1988), list 116 bird species for the area which includes Indian Head-Plateau Mountain Wilderness. Seventy-nine species are listed as confirmed breeders, 21 as probable breeders and 16 as possible breeders.

Fishers were transferred into the Catskills throughout a five year (1976-1980) trap and transfer program with the goal of establishing a self-perpetuating fisher population. Since the inception of a limited-bag trapping season in 1985, several fisher have been taken adjacent to the area. Sightings of fisher in the Towns of Hunter and Woodstock suggest that fisher presently inhabit the Unit. (NYS DEC, 1992)

2b. Big Game

The Overlook Mountain Wild Forest is frequently used for deer, turkey and occasionally bear hunting. Squirrel, grouse, turkeys and other small game are also hunted.

The Wild Forest is within Wildlife Management Unit 3A, (formerly Deer Management Unit 551) a transitional unit between the Catskill Mountains (Peaks) and Hudson Valley Ecozones. The area has a higher carrying capacity and therefore a higher recommended deer population than the Catskill Mountains, but lower than the Hudson Valley. There is no special deer management specific to the Unit. Wildlife management is constrained

by the laws establishing, and the regulations governing the New York State Forest Preserve.

White-tailed deer are a major component of the Unit's fauna. Deer hunting is a key use during fall hunting seasons and hunters using the Overlook Mountain Wild Forest are more likely to be the more dedicated individuals rather than the novice. Deer habitat within the unit is typical of the mature Catskill Forest and deer are less abundant than in the periphery. Winter habitat is a limiting factor and any deer typically move to lower, eastern facing slopes during the peak of winter conditions. Browse surveys in the area during the mid 90's have shown limited availability of preferred browse species and over utilization is common.

The deer population objective for WMU 3A currently calls for a population which can produce a hunter take of 3.0 bucks per square mile. The 1997 buck take for the entire Town of Woodstock was 2.2 bucks per square mile and is probably slightly less for Overlook Mountain Wild Forest. Management efforts currently call for no harvest of adult females by regular big game hunters. However, as the objective is approached it may be necessary to remove a small number of females in an effort to maintain a satisfactory buck to doe ratio.

The Unit is also situated within the occupied portion of the Northern Catskill Black Bear range and has good fall habitat for bears. Black bears in this range have fairly large home ranges and greater numbers of bears are likely to use the Unit during the fall and winter period, and denning sites are abundant. Research has shown that northern Catskill den sites are usually selected in elevations above 2300 feet. Over harvest is prevented by season timing and duration, however several bears are taken from the region each year. An average of seven bears a year have been taken in the Town of Woodstock during the period from 1991 through 1997. Bear claw markings, a form of territorial identification, are routinely noted on the utility poles on the road up to Overlook Mountain. Information will be provided at the trailhead bulletin boards regarding bear behavior and what to do if you encounter a bear.

Bear are regularly harvested by big game hunters, especially in the portions accessible from Mink Hollow and Keefe Hollow. Large tracts of state-owned land such as the adjacent Indian Head Mountain Wilderness Unit are becoming more important to black bears as other areas become increasingly developed. (NYS DEC, 1992)

3. Geology, Terrain and Soils

Lower and Middle Devonian Age rocks (dating back 410 million years) make up the Towns of Kingston, Hurley (Bluestone Wild Forest) and Woodstock (Overlook Wild Forest). To the west the Catskills are made of primarily Middle or Upper Devonian rock (360-387 million years old). Much of the rock in the Catskill Mountains was formed by sediments deposited in layers by rivers near sea level rather than by seawater. This rock usually has reddish or greenish colors. The remains of land plants, a few clams, rare mites, ticks and spiders are the only fossils in this area. In the rest of New York (from the western Catskills westward) the Devonian beds were deposited in a sea environment, and have a remarkable abundance of fossils (Isachsen et. al., 1991)

Bluestone, which dominates this area is a course, usually bluish gray to green, clay rich sandstone (called graywacke) or fine grained conglomerate, which splits easily into thin slabs. It has few, if any fossils (Isachsen et. al., 1991).

In summary, the Catskills were once a large, slowly sinking, delta formed by several thousand feet of gravel, sand and mud spread by the eroding high mountains which formerly existed to their east. Then, about two hundred million years ago, the area began to rise. A long period of uplift and erosion - modified by the Wisconsin Glacier 21,750 to 12,000 years ago - lead to the present-day Catskills (Isachsen et al., 1991).

The soils in this area are boulder strewn silt loams, full of rock outcrops and remnants of bluestone mines (Arnot and Lordstown Rock Outcrop Complexes). Soil ranges from 2 to 32 inches thick above thick beds of gray and silt sandstone. Water is occasionally held above the bedrock, but only briefly during strong rains and in spring. The ponded water drains rapidly, with wetlands remaining only in areas which gather water from nearby uplands and hold it, often due to solid bedrock zero to seventeen inches below the ground (Oquaga Arnot Rock Outcrop). The area is best suited for paths and trails, with poor potential for farming and community development (US Dept. of Agriculture, 1979).

B. Cultural Resources

Multiple archaeological sites have been identified in the Town as indicated by the New York State Historic Preservation Office Archaeological Site File (Revised Map of March 1992), but are not located in this Unit. Trails and parking facilities will not disturb below the surface and will be located on pre-existing woods roads or disturbed lands (such as the access and parking areas on Meads Mountain Road). Archaeological resources will be identified and considered before any proposed project commences.

C. Man-Made Facilities (See Map)

1. Two metal gates (adjacent to Meads Mt. Road and on Fire Tower dirt road/trail)

2. One parking lot (Meads Mt. Road) with sign standard

3. Bulletin board, trail register and three signs (fire tower closed, parking instructions and trail directions)

4. Sign standard and direction signs to Echo Lake, Plateau Mt. Wilderness and Overlook Summit.

5. One - 60 foot fire tower with ground observer's cabin, privy, storage shed, two picnic tables.

6. Concrete shell ruins of four ± story Overlook Mountain House, two-story administrative building, garage, and scattered foundations and debris from smaller structures which once supported the Mountain House.

7. Two dilapidated wooden two-story hunting cabins (surplused).

8. One access road/trail from Meads Mountain Road to Overlook Mountain Fire Tower (2.4 miles).

9. Three vistas (off the last ½ mile of trail from the Echo Lake Trail junction to the Overlook Mountain Fire Tower).

10. Three privately owned communication towers: one 300 feet tall, with a chain link fence surrounding the tower and associated structures; a 120 foot guyed tower, with equipment building and chain link fence and fuel tanks; and a 40 foot pole antenna with two eight foot square panels.

11. Privately owned utility poles and lines along Overlook Mountain Road serving the communication towers and buildings.

D. Public Use and Resource Impacts

The management of this Wild Forest Unit, as for other lands within the Forest Preserve, is aimed to allow public access and recreation which does not significantly damage the resources for which the area is protected by the State Constitution.

The Overlook Wild Forest has one trail register. The area is used for hiking and hunting by local residents. Access to the Unit for people with disabilities is currently limited. Disabled users will be accommodated in the redesigned Meads Mountain Road Trailhead. Mobility impaired users will have access to the mountain on the dirt road as provided in the Department's policy.

III. MANAGEMENT AND POLICY

Since 1885, management of Forest Preserve lands within the Overlook Wild Forest have been guided by the "forever wild" clause (Article XIV) of the New York State Constitution.

Article XIV, Section 1 of the New York State Constitution states:

> *"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, nor shall the timber thereon be sold, removed, or destroyed..."*

In 1975, a Temporary Commission to Study the Catskills recommended Forest Preserve lands in the Catskills be classified into management units. In 1985 the Department completed a Catskill State Land Master Plan which implemented the recommendations. The Master Plan, currently being revised, directs the Department to complete management plans which include specific objectives for each unit. This management plan is consistent with the 1985 Master Plan in effect at this time.

Forest Preserve lands within the Catskill Mountains are classified into categories by the Catskill Park State Land Master Plan ("the Master Plan"), adopted by the Department as a means of fulfilling its statutory responsibility under Environmental Conservation Law §9-0301 to exercise the care, custody and control of the Forest Preserves. The Plan classifies the lands which are the subject of this Unit Management Plan ("UMP") within the wild forest category.

The Master Plan provides overall guidance for consistent and uniform management of State lands administered by the Department within the Catskills. Guidelines for the management and use of lands classified as Wild Forest are set forth on pages 34-41 of the Master Plan. This UMP implements those general guidelines in the Overlook Wild Forest, providing specific management objectives and actions needed to meet those objectives.

This unit management plan has been developed within the constraints set forth by Article XIV of the State Constitution, Article 9 of the Environmental Conservation Law, Title 6 of the Codes, Rules and Regulations of the State of New York, The Catskill Park State Land Master Plan and established policies for the administration of Forest Preserve lands developed by the Division of Lands and Forests.

A. Goals and Objectives

1. Goals

First and foremost, the primary goal of Forest Preserve management is to preserve and protect the wild forest character and integrity of the unit, with its natural plant and animal communities, and allow natural processes to proceed essentially unhindered.

A second goal is to provide opportunities for a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities without degrading the resources or impairing the wild forest setting and the experiences unique to the Region's wild forest lands.

2. Objectives

a. Land Management Objectives

1a) **MOTOR VEHICLE TRESPASS.** Maintain boundary lines of the Wild Forest, with special emphasis along roads and private right-of-ways. Maintain 0.5 miles of boundary lines each year on a seven year cycle (three {3} miles total). This discourages trespass on private lands and encroachment on State lands. Clearly mark all public right-of-ways through private lands with signs informing the public to stay on the roads, to reduce or eliminate public trespass on adjacent private lands.

2a) **ACCESS.** Access to the unit is via Meads Mountain Road. The trailhead parking lot presently can hold 16-17 cars. Among several alternatives, we propose to redesign the lot and increase its capacity up to 34 cars. Overflow parking is also proposed, contingent upon the interest and cooperation of neighbors. Provide a high level of access for the disabled consistent with the recreational setting of the Overlook Wild Forest to the extent that it does not require modification of the natural environment. The existing road provides a good opportunity for disabled access to one of the most well known and scenic sites of the Catskills.

3a) **TRAIL MANAGEMENT/ MAINTENANCE.** Eliminate incompatible uses which detract from the wild forest character of the unit, such as the illegal use of snowmobiles and motor vehicles. Increase patrols and work with local user groups to self police and educate their members and visitors and curtail use of unauthorized trails. Signs will be added and informational displays installed at various points identified in this Plan. Maintain existing trails or monitor and reroute to better, less impacting locations.

4a) **FIRE PROTECTION.** Protect the wild forest from fire as required by legal mandates (Article 9 ECL). Department policy is to extinguish all fires, regardless of cause, land classification or ownership. Fire protection, detection, and suppression is the responsibility of forest rangers. Fire could be a useful tool given special, carefully applied and limited circumstances, and thorough public notification. Recognize that although most fires are man caused, the elimination of natural fires which once occurred can cause changes in the native woodland composition. Review policy to consider the importance of fire or measures imitating fires in special circumstances where endangered or threatened plant species or communities are identified and would be destroyed by inaction.

The validity of fire control from natural causes in a wild forest is questionable. Natural fires, though rare, are a part of the wilderness ecosystem. The difficulty arises in identifying naturally caused fires from set fires. Any changes to current fire management techniques will depend upon the finalizing and implementing of a wilderness fire management policy. DEC's responsibility for public safety, risk level determination and emergency response is paramount. The Town of Woodstock is a fire town (Environmental Conservation Law, Article 9).

4b) Restore and reopen the closed Overlook Fire Tower to provide information about forest protection, the Catskill Forest Preserve, the cultural heritage of the area, and for possible use in emergencies.

5a) **NATURAL COMMUNITIES.** DEC will protect rare plants, animals and habitats and archaeological resources, as well as any sensitive areas (steep slopes, streamsides) within the Wild Forest. Locate any new recreational facilities, such as trails, camping areas, and parking areas to avoid these areas and monitor existing facilities. Work with

Natural Heritage Program to help identify possible locations of rare species.

5b) Eliminate nonconforming, man-made facilities and incompatible uses which detract from the wild forest character of the unit or adversely impact the natural resources.

6) **WILDLIFE**. Maintain all native wildlife species at levels compatible with their natural environment.

7) **LAND ACQUISITION/ EASEMENTS**. Selectively acquire key inholdings, lands contiguous to State land on at least three sides, lands contiguous to State lands containing or used by endangered or threatened species, limited parcels needed for improved access and effective management of public use (reducing nearby private land problems) and places where modified boundary lines would markedly enhance the management or integrity of State lands. Prioritizing of these lands is provided in this plan. Any such acquisitions will be governed by the New York State Open Space Plan (NYS DEC, 1995).

b. Public Use Management Objectives

1a) **Monitor the intensity of public use.** Take appropriate steps to prevent overuse leading to degradation, such as rebuilding trails to modern standards. If unsuccessful, curtail uses that damage natural resources, such as hiking, horseback riding or mountain biking.

1b) **Regulate camping** within this unit through 6 NYCRR Part 190. Groups of ten or more may camp by permit only. Encourage the use of portable gas stoves to reduce fire ring proliferation.

2a) **Educate visitors** to use and enjoy the Wild Forest without adversely affecting its character and natural resources. Provide bulletin boards with maps and other interpretive information at the Meads Mountain Road Trailhead, Mountain House ruins, fire tower observer's cabin and the tower cab (once opened). Hire a summit steward to staff the Overlook Fire Tower and interpret its history, the areas culture and the forest preserve (late Spring through early Fall).

Educate landowners and visitors about the benefits of forested lands in watershed management and encourage conservation activities in their lives.

Include the unit and its location and highlights on a map, part of a proposed interpretive folder on the Catskill Park.

2b) **Control use or eliminate trails** if erosion, vandalism, water quality, rare species, and the natural character of the forest lands is imperiled by continued use. Close segments of the herd path trail paralleling the main trail on the escarpment edge.

2c) **Access to the Unit for people with disabilities** is being reviewed with the assistance of the New York State Office of Advocate for Persons with Disabilities, Albany. Access is currently limited but DEC will work with the disabled within State guidelines to allow access up to the 2700 foot elevation. In the future the Catskill Park State Land Master Plan, currently being revised, may allow expanded opportunities for disabled access in this unit. Access will follow DEC Revised Policy NR 96-1, and the information will be publicized. Disabled access will not require new trail construction.

Handicapped access, under permit, is anticipated by two or four-wheel drive vehicles or ATVs. The road is too long, steep, and rocky to be practical for smaller motorized vehicles, though other mechanical aids may be used by persons with disability at their discretion.

2d) **Control adverse and illegal uses**

through enforcement of the Environmental Conservation Law and Department Rules and Regulations. Enhance the Forest Ranger and Seasonal Assistant Forest Ranger Program to patrol, monitor, and provide public education. An assistant forest ranger used the ground observer's cabin as a base in 1997 and 1998.

3) **Maintain hunting, trapping, and other wildlife related recreational activities** and provide limited, but clearly marked Forest Preserve access.

B. Proposed Projects and Management

1. Overlook Mountain House

The massive concrete mountain house ruins on Overlook today date back to between 1927 and 1939. Currently only the shell remains with several open doorways and windows leading into debris filled cellar dropoffs. A stairway ends in mid air. Brush and weeds overgrow and surround the walls and stairways.

As a man-made, non-conforming structure, DEC considered several alternatives to deal with potential hazards which remain. The following <u>four alternatives</u> were investigated:

1) Removal of the old hotel ruins.

1) Installation of perimeter chain link fencing restricting entry to the hotel ruins, and its subsequent maintenance.

2) Install iron fencing or grates to close off accessible stair and window openings, and drop offs.

4) "Do nothing." (Not acceptable since the hotel ruins constitute a potential hazard).

Complete removal, which could allow the site to eventually return to a natural condition, is most in keeping with the "forever wild" concept of the Forest Preserve. However, recognizing the limited fiscal resources available to the department, the formidable challenge to remove the thick concrete walls present, public preference to save the structure, and the hazard to nearby communication facilities blasting or wrecking would present, such a course of action is impractical.

With the presence of the TV tower and other man-made structures nearby, the "quasi-historic" hotel ruins visitors find interesting will remain for the time being, if obvious hazards can be eliminated.

While a perimeter fence would continue to permit viewing the ruins, in all likelihood it would continually be cut or breached, exposing visitors to the open dropoffs and other potential hazards present in the hotel.

Comments strongly favored maintaining some public access to parts of the complex. Therefore, DEC prefers the third alternative. The most cost effective of the scenarios appears to be partial fencing while retaining some access – Closing doors to nowhere and windows with dangerous dropoffs, closing off or removing stairs to nowhere and flattening timbers to the ground. However there is an increasing danger of falling debris, and a full engineering assessment must be completed quickly to determine what parts of the ruin need to be closed, and which, if any, should be demolished or removed to prevent injury from falling stone or brick. Cost of closing all dangerous areas with iron fencing is roughly equivalent to the perimeter fencing alternative, with an anticipated cost of $50,000.00 (includes a cleanup around the structure and of the beams inside its easterly end). Stone walls may be used to close off some ground level openings. Yearly inspection and stabilization of the top floor

walls and window arches may add another $2,000 per year. This would include restricting access to the building under segments of the upper walls in danger of imminent collapse until they fall or are knocked down by using a cherry picker or other means.

The minimum disturbance necessary will be used to remove and stabilize the buildings. Material movements should, whenever practical, be limited to the building sites and adjacent areas.

Natural revegetation of the site with native plants will be encouraged. Hazardous building signs will be placed.

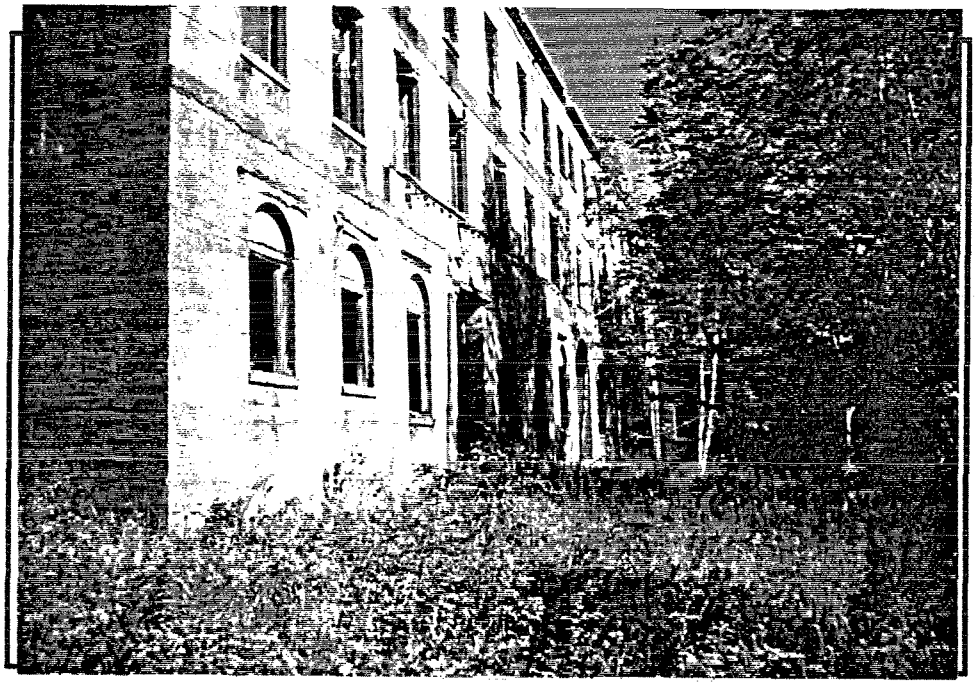
2. Other Ruins

a. Comments received indicate a public preference to retain the larger of the two "hotel" structures in the complex. The smaller of the two structures is located on lands owned by the State of New York subject to a preexisting lease. This two-story concrete and brick structure with basement will be taken down and disposed of on-site if possible, in order to match the surrounding grade. This proposal is subject to all applicable State regulations. An interpretive kiosk will be placed at the site of the ruins with information about the mountain's history, hotels and cultural significance.

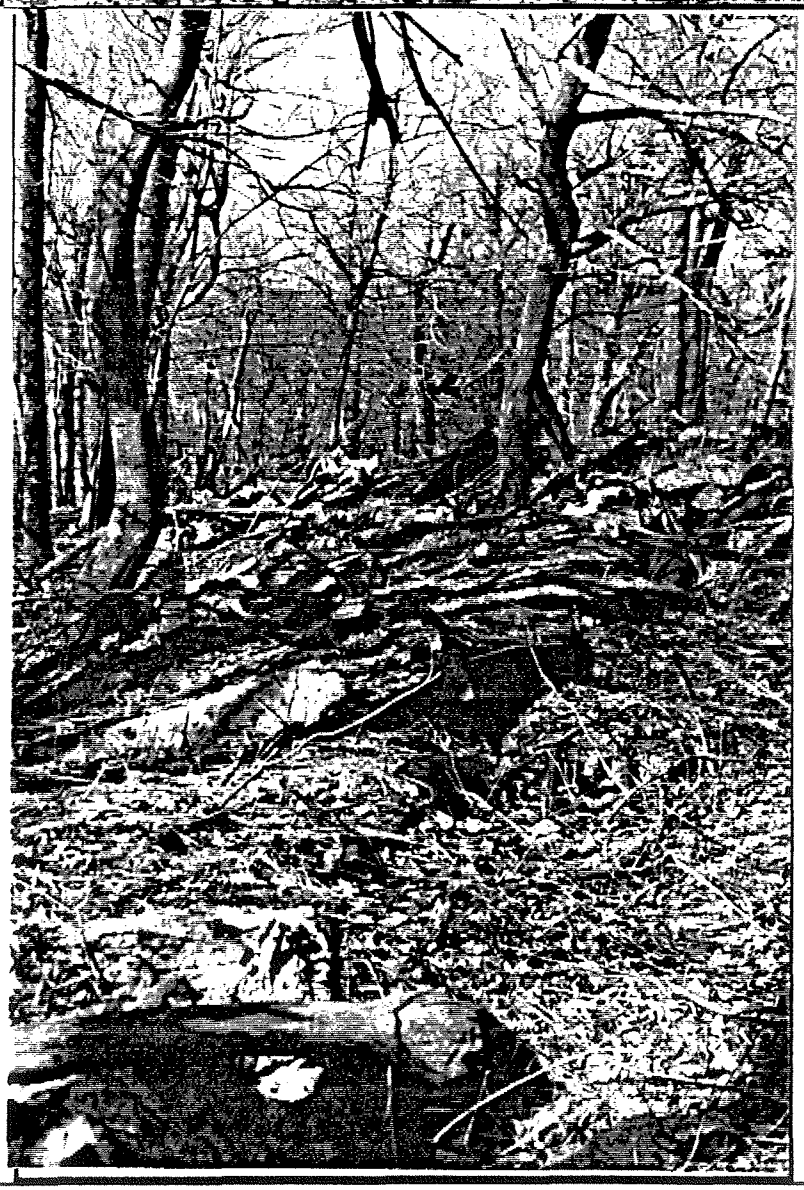
b. (1) A deteriorated concrete garage or shed to the west of the main hotel and southwest of the TV tower contains drums and other materials which must be removed after a thorough analysis for hazardous materials (in addition to the asbestos). Appropriate disposal will be determined by the materials found. Estimated cost $20,000-30,000. Nearby ruins (mostly stone walls) will be checked for safety concerns.

(2) To the north of the main hotel is a spring with reservoir, with nearby ruins of the "bowling alley". The spring will be cleaned out. The wood and debris in the area will be leveled and disposed of. However, the other stone foundations and remnants dotted throughout the area will be left for nature to take its course.

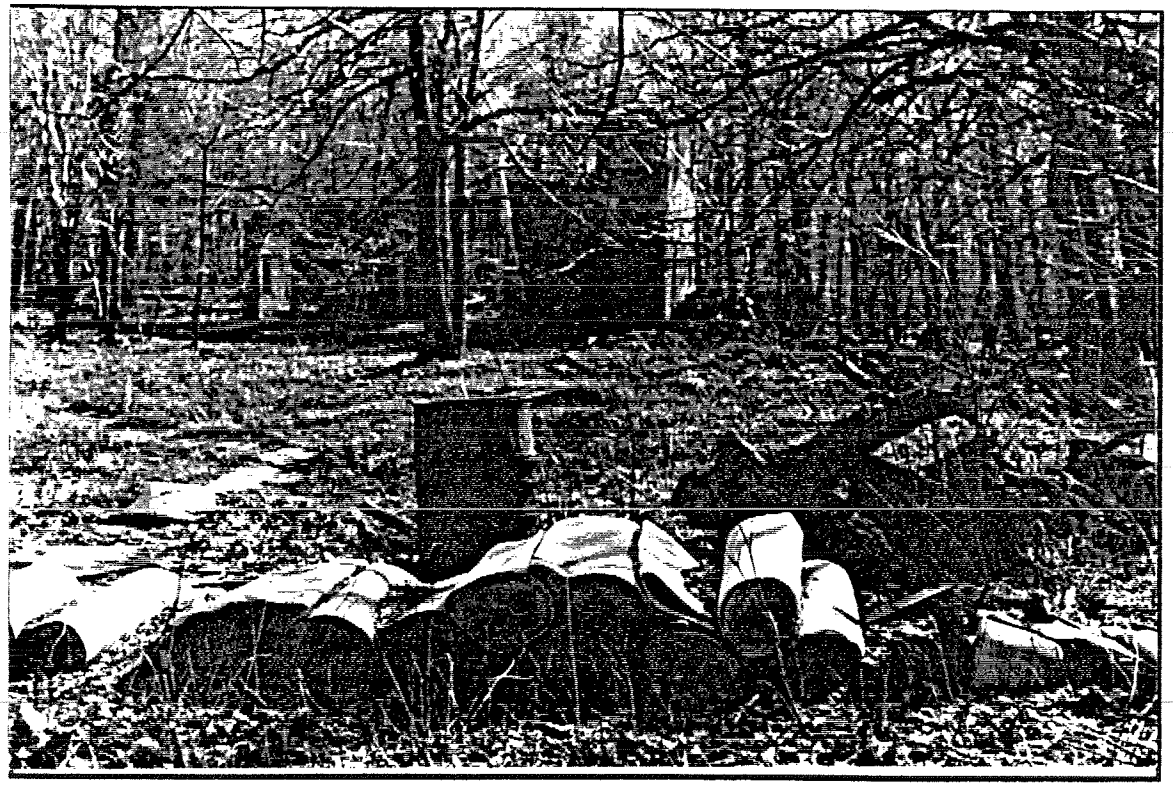
c. Two deteriorating buildings, once privately-owned hunting camps, were purchased by the state as part of a December 1991 land acquisition (from C. Powers Taylor). The decrepit buildings have been surplused and will be removed as soon as funding is available. The cost to tear down these structures, remove the construction debris and regrade the site will be approximately $20,000 apiece. Burning is not considered an option due to the prominent location high on the mountain.



The Overlook Mountain House



Overlook Mountain
House Garage - Maintenance
Building and Debris
June 6, 1998



Overlook Mountain House
Garage - Maintenance Building and Debris
June 6, 1998

2. **The Overlook Mountain Road - The Department's Position on Maintenance:**

a. The State owns the land underlying the road. The lease-holders of the WRNN TV tower and the Moncure radio tower have a ROW over the road which they may maintain to its existing width for their existing uses, in consultation with and under permit from DEC. The Department limits work to the minimum necessary guided by the conditions at the time of DEC acquisition.

b. If the lease holders no longer need to maintain the road for their activities, the DEC will maintain the road to the minimal condition needed for maintaining the Overlook fire tower and observer's cabin. However, the Department's position is not to maintain the road to the higher standard which is needed for the radio/TV towers. The road will not be paved by DEC.

c. The Department has allowed local landowner (Patricia Fere) to reopen existing blocked drainage culverts under the road to reroute only that runoff directly attributable to altered flows caused by the road onto her property. The Department will work with adjacent landowners to correct drainage problems exacerbated by the road where it partially crosses private lands. A 20 foot, 18 inch culvert will be installed at the first turn in the road to channel runoff.

3. **Meads Mountain Road Parking**

Access to Overlook Mountain is by trail from this 16-17 car parking lot. There is a need to provide additional parking, but it is not practical, or DEC's intention, to provide for the maximum visitor use experienced on major weekends and holidays. The Department supports a permanent cap of 60 cars for parking in the Meads Mt. Road area. For the next three to five years, DEC proposes to provide parking for a maximum of 34 cars within the redesigned footprint of the existing parking lot (Alternative 2). The reason for the flexible time period is the Departments inability to predict when funding will become available for the parking lot redesign. The Department will then monitor and study any new impacts. Limits on allowable parking will be done in conjunction with the Town of Woodstock which controls parking along Meads Mountain Road.

Garbage cans will not be provided and the area will be clearly signed as Carry-In, Carry-Out, with the threat of fines. However, from May through October, the Department will ensure a weekly visit to the parking lot, preferably just after a weekend, to remove any illegally left garbage.

The following **<u>five alternatives</u>** were proposed at the December 1998 public meeting. Locations are shown on the map (Figure A).

1) Alternate trail route from the Magic Meadow area linking to the existing Overlook road - trail on land currently owned by the Woodstock Guild of Craftsmen, Inc.

2) Redesign the parking lot within its existing footprint by moving the access road gate (See sketch). This alternative would add space for about fifteen more cars. The proposal will be implemented with ongoing reviews by the Woodstock Highway Department: [(914)679-2805, Bill Harder, Supt.] and will be amended as needed to comply with local roadway needs, provide proper drainage, upgrade the fencing and clearly mark the parking lot boundary.

3a) Provide parking on State land to the left (facing east) of the Overlook access road just past the kiosk (See map). A small lot could add 10 spaces, but would require much regrading.

3b) A quarry near the State land boundary would hold 20 cars, but access is by narrow road. Most of the flat area suitable for a lot is on state land, the remainder is on Karma Triyana Dharmachkra (KTD) Monastery lands. Providing a two lane road or a one lane road with shoulders at intervals, so cars can get out of each others way will be difficult due to rock outcrops, topography and winter conditions. Hidden parking lots also cause garbage problems which must be addressed.

4) Develop, via an agreement with the KTD Monasters, a parking lot of approximately 60 feet x 100 feet (¼-½ acre) which would allow for twenty cars (10 feet x 20 feet per space), to be used to provide overflow parking on busy weekends and days for both the Monastery and the Overlook Trailhead. Provisions can be made for a gate to close the overflow lot when not needed.

5) Purchase one to two acres of land on the easterly border of the existing parking lot, if owner is willing.

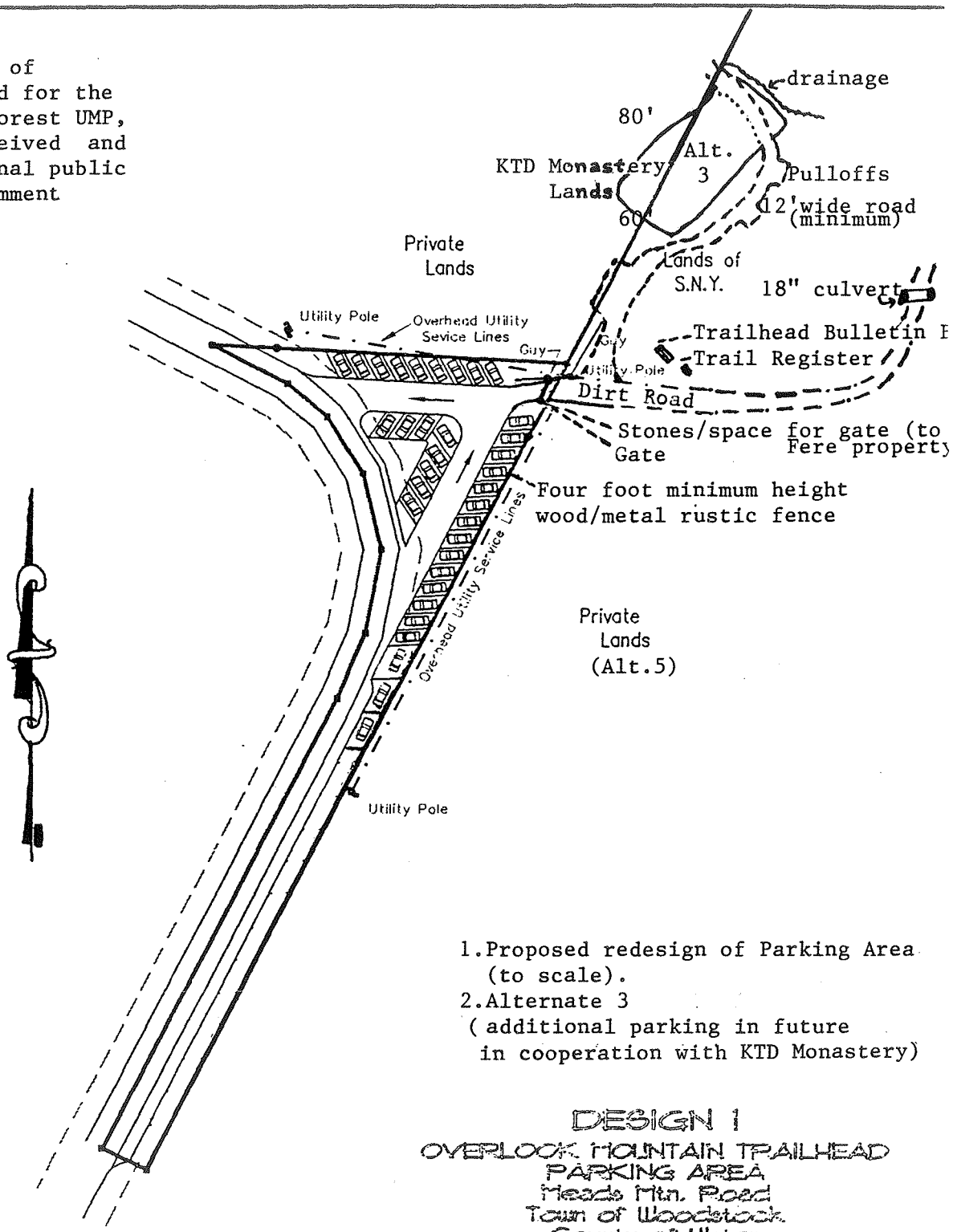
Based on comments received, Alternative 2 was chosen. When the parking lot is redesigned, the gate currently near Meads Mt. Road will be relocated to the newly created entry. A means to allow access past the gate by persons with disability will be provided. The final gate location and design will attempt to provide independent access to the Feré property. (Placement of a gate to make this possible may require a cooperative agreement with the private landowner.)A new trailhead bulletin board will be located and the trail register relocated (See map on page 27, Bulletin Board on page 28). A good quality rustic wood/wire fence, at least 4 feet high will be installed along the parking lot perimeter to eliminate trespass onto adjacent lands. Signs will be placed, clearly warning people to "Stay on the path – public right of way through private lands."

Subsequently, alternative 3 will be studied if more parking is needed. Alternative 3 received notable support during the December, 1998 public meeting. However, concerns about overuse were expressed by several people. The expansion will need a redesigned and enlarged entry road, relocated entry gate and more fencing to the new gate.

The Alternative 3 overflow lot is roughly 60' X 80' in length and will hold between 14 and 20 cars. A small segment of the lot and access road would be on KTD Monastery lands (approximately 1200 sq. feet). KTD Monastery has indicated that an agreement with DEC spelling out the use and rights of each party is the best way to go, rather than a sale. The lot may be closed in winter, open only on weekends and major holidays, or may be restricted to major holidays if abuse and maintenance becomes a problem. Another gate would be installed to allow for the closing of this lot (with a shared lock for DEC and KTD). KTD would use the lot as spelled out in the agreement.

Any expansion to alternative 3 will not take place till Alternative 2, the initial parking lot redesign, is complete and use and impacts are observed over several seasons. An upper limit on the number of parking spaces provided is a good idea and should be set once the impacts of Alternative 2 are observed for several years. Alternative 5 is preferable, but is only an option if the landowner is willing to sell at least some portion of the lot to the east.

March, 1999 - Summary of alternatives preferred for the Final Overlook Wild Forest UMP, based on comments received and views expressed at final public meeting and during comment period.



1. Proposed redesign of Parking Area (to scale).
2. Alternate 3 (additional parking in future in cooperation with KTD Monastery)

DESIGN 1
OVERLOOK MOUNTAIN TRAILHEAD PARKING AREA
Meads Mtn. Road
Town of Woodstock
County of Ulster

GRAPHIC SCALE

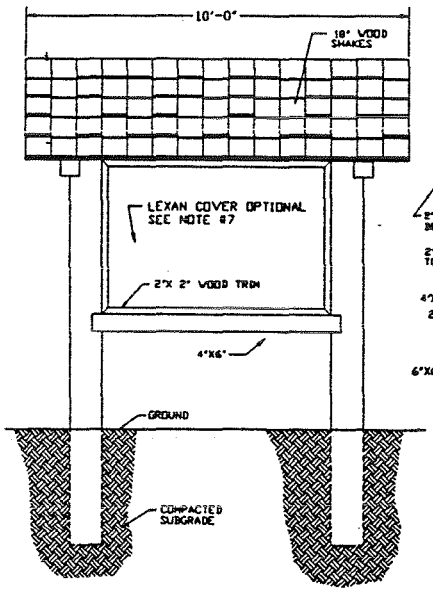
100 0 50 100 200

(IN FEET)
1 inch = 100 ft.

RECOMMENDED BY:
APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONFERENCE
NPS APPALACHIAN TRAIL PROJECT OFFICE

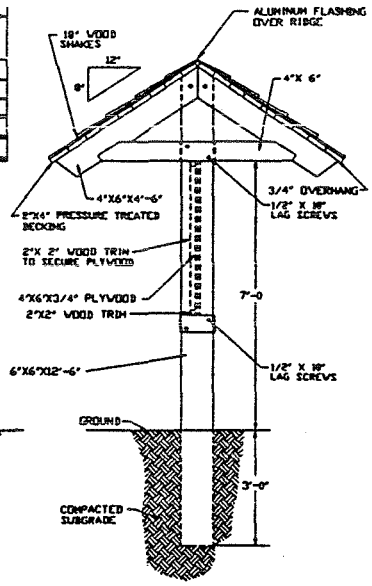
DESIGN #2
ECONOMIC
BULLETIN BOARD

PRODUCTION



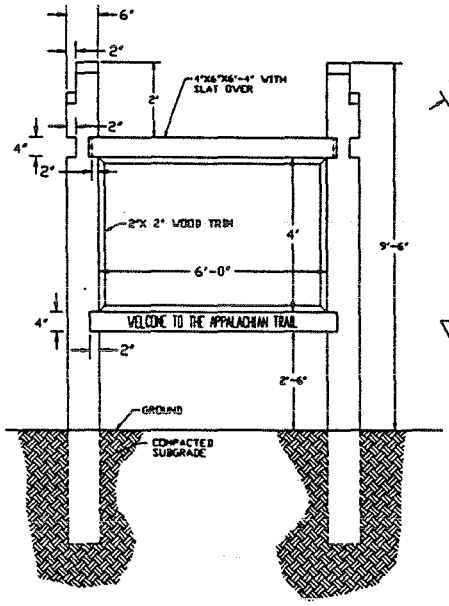
FRONT ELEVATION

SCALE: 3/4" = 1'-0"



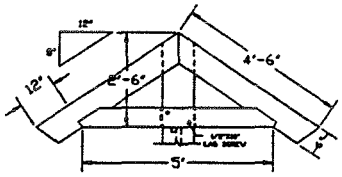
END ELEVATION

SCALE: 3/4" = 1'-0"



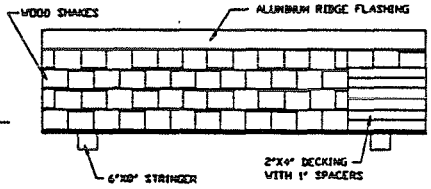
FRAMING DETAIL

SCALE: 3/4" = 1'-0"



SIDE FRAMING DETAIL

SCALE: 3/4" = 1'-0"



ROOF ASSEMBLY

SCALE: 3/4" = 1'-0"

(NOT TO SCALE)

NOTES:

1. ALL WOOD SHOULD BE PRESSURE TREATED.
2. ALL HARDWARE AND NAILS SHALL BE GALVANIZED
3. CEDAR WOOD SHAKES SHOULD BE APPROXIMATELY 18" X 1/2" HANDSPLIT WITH A 5 1/2" EXPOSURE.
4. FINISH SHOULD BE NATURAL.
5. STANDARD SLAT SIGN SHOULD HAVE APPROXIMATELY 2" LETTERS - "WELCOME TO THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL", WOOD ROUTED OR WHITE REFLECTIVE PAINT.
6. EASE ALL EXPOSED EDGES.
7. LEXAN COVER FOR PLYWOOD IS OPTIONAL. ATTACH 2" X 2" WOOD TRIM WITH 1/4" LAG SCREWS.
8. OPTIONAL: 5/8" REBAR MAY BE ATTACHED TO BACK OF 10"X10" SUPPORT POSTS TO DETER VANDALS.

Trail Gateway Bulletin Board

4. Overlook Mountain Fire Tower

In December of 1996, plans to restore and reopen the fire tower were described at the Overlook Wild Forest Unit Management Plan scoping session held at the Woodstock Town Hall. The general consensus at this meeting, which was taped for broadcast on public access television, was support for the tower if it were used for educating visitors about the forest preserve and fire tower history. Engineering studies have been completed for several towers by Department engineers. Impetus for the project has accelerated as the Catskill Fire Tower Restoration Project gains momentum. The structural repairs needed for the Overlook Tower will be similar to the other Catskill towers. However, the Overlook Fire tower is in the best condition of the five remaining Catskill towers and will thus need the least amount of work to reopen. The Overlook Committee has set June 5, 1999 as a tentative opening date for the tower.

In February, 1997, the Catskill Fire Tower Restoration Project was born at a meeting uniting the Department, The Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, local and regional organizations and individuals in an effort to save the 5 remaining fire towers in the Catskills. Overlook Mountain Fire Tower is one of the five towers remaining within the Catskill Park boundary (See pages 32 and 33).

Thanks to a September 28, 1997 article in the *Kingston Daily Freeman* (pg. 29), a meeting was held on November 5, 1997 and the Overlook Fire Tower Committee was formed. The committee is raising funds for the restoration and reopening of the tower and coordinating the work which needs to be done on the tower and ground cabin with the Department. The cost to stabilize and reopen the tower is estimated at $15,000, plus a fund for long term maintenance. All donations will go toward stabilizing, restoring and maintaining the fire tower.

To date, October 1998, about $6,000 has been raised for the Overlook tower restoration. The Catskill Fire Tower Restoration Project has as its goal "Five Towers for 2000." The project is urgently spurred on as costs of the unmaintained structures escalate every passing year until their restoration becomes uneconomical. It is the Committee's intent that the tower will be open in the Year 2000. Contact The Overlook Fire Tower Committee at PO Box 402, Woodstock, NY 12498 or call George Profous, NYS DEC at 914-256-3082 or Helen Budrock, CCCD at 914-586-2611 for information on this project.

When the tower was closed, the first flight of stairs was removed. Replacement steps have been found and will be installed when restoration work is underway. The stairs will be removed when work is not underway and the tower remains closed until permanently open. The observer's ground cabin is in good condition, although some foundation work is needed. For the second year, the cabin is being used as a base of operations by an assistant forest ranger, a precursor to a summit/fire tower steward program planned for the peak tourist season. When a volunteer or steward is not available, the fire tower ground cabin will be closed. The tower cab may also be closed, if vandalism occurs without a steward. It will be double locked. This is needed for exhibits which may be provided. Visitors will still be allowed to climb the tower for a great view just below the cab.

Overlook Mountain is one of the most popular destinations in the Catskills. Based on the trail register and observations, more than 10,000 persons visit annually. This makes the fire tower a very promising location for tourism enhancement and a small interpretive exhibit at the observer's cabin. The Catskill Park/Forest Preserve and its history and protection, in which the fire towers have played a big part will be featured here.

You Can Help Restore the Overlook Mountain Fire Tower

Observers once watched the forests of New York State and the Catskill Mountains from 108 towers, searching for the dangerous telltale signs of forest fires. In the 300,000 acre Catskill Park, only 5 steel towers built between 1917 and 1927 remain. One of these remaining towers is located at the summit of Overlook Mountain in Woodstock.

The tower on Overlook Mountain (el. 3,140 feet) is the newest of the five remaining fire towers in the Catskills, having been at it's present location since 1950. However, the tower itself is much older as it was originally constructed in 1927 on Gallis Hill, just west of Kingston. Along with the Balsam Lake Mountain Tower, Overlook ceased operations in 1989. The remaining towers were closed in 1990 and, along with Overlook, have been steadily deteriorating since then.

A group of local residents has formed a committee to raise money for the restoration of the fire tower. You can help restore the Fire Tower by making a tax-deductible donation to the ***Overlook Fire Tower Committee.***

Your donation will go toward stabilization, restoration and maintenance of the fire tower, and will augment ongoing fundraising efforts.

Checks should be made payable to:
"CCCD/Overlook Fire Tower"
c/o Overlook Fire Tower Committee
PO Box 402
Woodstock, NY 12498

Thank you for your Support!

The Catskill Fire Tower Restoration Project

Observers once watched the forests of New York State and the Catskill Mountains from 108 fire towers, searching for the dangerous telltale signs of forest fires. In the 300,000 acre Catskill Park, only 5 steel towers built between 1917 and 1927 remain. From west to east in the Catskills they are:

- **Balsam Lake Mountain** (Town of Hardenburgh), el. 3723 feet
- **Red Hill** (Town of Denning), el. 2990 feet
- **Tremper Mountain** (Phoenicia/Town of Shandaken), el. 2740 feet
- **Hunter Mountain** (Town of Hunter), el. 4040 feet
- **Overlook Mountain** (Town of Woodstock), el. 3140 feet

The last fire tower observer ended his watch on Red Hill in 1989, and today all five towers are closed to the public and in need of repair. Each tower affords magnificent scenic views of the surrounding landscape, and since 4 of the 5 towers have observers cabins, there is also an opportunity to provide environmental and historical educational programs in the future.

The goal of **The Catskill Fire Tower Restoration Project** is to make these towers safe, then open them to the public. To raise money to first stabilize and then restore these towers, the **New York State Department of Environmental Conservation** and **The Catskill Center for Conservation and Development,** with the help of citizen groups, private industry and individuals, are selling patches and T-shirts (see reverse for more details). At the same time, local groups are forming around each fire tower to address the details and special local concerns and to help raise awareness and support for the towers.

WE NEED YOUR HELP to make this project a success!

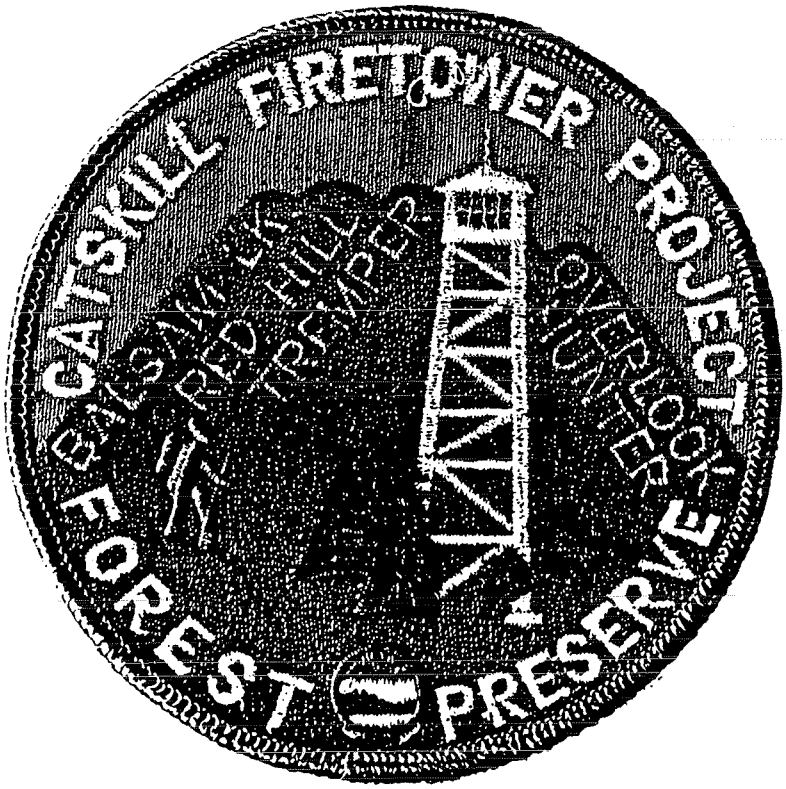
For more information, or to get involved please call or write to:

New York State Department of
Environmental Conservation
Bureau of Public Lands
21 South Putt Corners Road
New Paltz, NY 12561-1696
(914) 256-3082

The Catskill Center for Conservation
and Development, Inc.
Route 28
Arkville, NY 12406
(914) 586-2611

THE CATSKILL FIRE TOWER RESTORATION PROJECT

You can help restore the fire towers of the Catskills by purchasing a custom-made "Catskill Firetower Project" patch for only **$5.00**. Measuring four inches in diameter, the patch is decorated with a red border, yellow lettering, and proudly displays the names of the five towers in red*. With a silhouette of the Catskill Mountains in the background, and a silver fire tower in the foreground, the patch is attractively designed and produced locally.



Shown Actual Size

* A limited supply of patches with a brown border and lettering are also available.

ORDER FORM

Yes! I would like to order a "Catskill Firetower Project" patch. Enclosed is my check in the amount of $_____ for _____ patches ($5.00 per patch). I would also like to donate an additional $_____ to further restoration efforts.

Color Choice: _____ Red _____ Brown _____ No preference

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Street Address: _____

Town/City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: ( ) _____ Fax: ( ) _____ E-mail: _____

Please make checks payable to "The Catskill Center" and mail with this form to:

The Catskill Center for Conservation and Development
Route 28, Arkville, NY 12406

The fire tower steward and interpretive exhibit will be funded through private and corporate donations, foundation grants and funds available from New York State (for public education and tourism). The interpretive exhibit will include information on the Forest Preserve, the role of fire towers, Overlook's place in America's history, and will explain the presence of the other man-made structures (ie. tower leases, hotel ruins). The towers will, of course, be available for emergencies, though the State has no plans to use them for this purpose at this time.

Due to the seasonal nature of the use of the observer's cabin, electricity or telephone lines will not be installed. However, amenities can be provided through the use of off-the-grid solar panels which would generate enough power for lights and energy efficient appliances. Power will be supplemented by propane which was used before for cooking, lighting and a refrigerator. The solar panels will be removed for the winter months. A propane stove will be added, but will direct vent outside. The original stove will be kept to preserve the period flavor of the cabin.

Radios or cellular phones can provide communication eliminating the need for telephone wires.

The outhouse will be maintained yearly and relocated as needed.

This proposal, because of the existing access road and the off-the-grid design of the observer's ground cabin information center, will have no new impacts on the environment. One picnic table will be provided near the observer's cabin, and up to two on the ridge between the tower and the cabin, but if lack of compliance with carry in - carry out of garbage becomes a problem, they will be removed.

The Five Catskill Fire Towers are located within the constitutionally protected New York State Forest Preserve. They can be used for education and fire protection. Commercial uses of the Forest Preserve lands are not constitutionally allowable.

5. Vistas

Several vistas have been identified from comments and field observations. The following vistas are identified and should be maintained:

a. Maintain the view toward the west at the rock outcrops on which the tower stands. Particularly important for disabled persons and others who cannot climb the tower.

b. Maintain the famous Hudson River, Ashokan Reservoir, Woodstock view. People have been visiting this breath-taking view for over 100 years. Carvings in the stones date back to the 1800's.

c. Maintain the vista on the herd path to the south of the fire tower road. A spur trail from the main road will be marked to this vista. However, the herd path which currently runs along the cliff edge through this vista will be discouraged since it is eroded in several places, too close to the edge, and thus dangerous.

d. Maintain view from the old Overlook Road near the boundary with the Indian Head Wilderness Area. Looks across to Plattekill and Indian Head Mountains as well as down to Echo Lake.

6a. Gate on Fire Tower Road

This gate will remain locked to prohibit unauthorized motor vehicle use of the Overlook Mountain Road.

6b. Where the trail/road goes from the Overlook Wild Forest toward the Indian Head Wilderness, signs "No Motor Vehicles" should be installed. On the road entering the Wilderness area, another sign "No Motor Vehicles" and "Entering Wilderness Area" will be installed. This is important for illegal use, but more important since access to the Overlook summit is permitted for volunteers and sometimes unsanctioned use occurs from neighboring lands. Bicycles will be prohibited on the spur trails to vistas and the dangerous herd path along the southerly flank.

7. New Trails

Lewis Hollow and Other Trails

The feasibility of a new trail leading up Overlook Mountain was considered on DEC's right-of-way from Lewis Hollow Road, or paralleling the existing road – trail. Two comments were also received at the public meeting calling for a more esthetic route to the summit roughly paralleling the existing road/trail. However, several persons expressed concerns about damage to rare species and the natural environment of the mountain. Since the existing trail is well hardened and used by over 10,000 people per year, great caution is advised in creating a new trail. Impacts on the natural resources are presently low since the vast majority of people stay on the road. Opening up new trails into previously undisturbed areas would increase erosion and disturb new areas, increase the need for expanded parking, possibly cause trespass conflicts with adjacent landowners, impact rattlesnake dens and travel routes on the mountain, and increase erosion, and thus the need for increased trail maintenance.

A "shared use" concept will be promoted on the Overlook trail road to continue the tolerant and positive attitudes of different users and interests seen so far.

Magic Meadow Trail

A possible trail route from Magic Meadow through the Woodstock Guild of Craftsmen, Inc. lands was checked. However, this route greatly increases the length of the trail while replacing very little of the old road walk currently used. DEC will not pursue this option.

C. Land Acquisition

Completing a Viable Overlook Wild Forest

Land acquisition is important in this unit to create a usable and viable wild forest. The mosaic of publicly and privately owned lands limits opportunities for area residents and visitors. However, due to limited funding, priorities must be set for acquisitions. These priorities help explain where DEC, as the manager of the Overlook Mountain Wild Forest, is headed and help set limits on land acquisition. Land acquisition, whether easement or fee, is from willing sellers.

As noted before, funding for land acquisition is very limited. The Environmental Protection Fund and the 1996 Environmental Bond Act may provide a source for land acquisition through annual appropriations to DEC. Intense competition for limited funds may limit acquisitions in any particular year. This discussion is provided as guidance should funding become available.

All land acquisitions must meet the criteria and "resource value rating systems" in the Conserving Open Space in New York State Plan (1998). Notification will be made to the affected Town of the State's intent to acquire land which is not specifically listed in the Open Space Plan (all proposed acquisitions in the Overlook Mountain Wild Forest are in this category). Overlook is not on the Statewide Priority List of 131, but is listed in the Region 3 Advisory Committee's List of Additional

Priority Projects (NYS DEC/OPRHP, 1998). A Town has ninety days from notification to reject a proposed acquisition. For more information on land acquisition proposed for New York State, please consult the 1998 "Conserving Open Space in New York State Plan." The Open Space Plan is updated every three years. Additional guidelines are provided in the Catskill State Land Master Plan, currently being revised.

The Overlook Wild Forest is a small part of the Forest Preserve, but an extraordinary part of American history. The area has long influenced painters, writers and musicians, and played a prominent role in creating America's perspective on nature and wilderness. Overlook is very visible from Woodstock, but also from throughout the eastern Catskills and Kingston. Overlook Mountain is the start of the escarpment which is prominently visible from the Hudson Valley north of Kingston. With this background, the protection of Overlook Mountain is of state-wide significance and should have been included in the NYS Open Space Plan on the list of priority projects.

The sense of place so prominent in Woodstock's Overlook Mountain comes from its geography, folklore and history (Steuding 1996; Rider, 1993), leading for many people to an emotional attachment. Here, nature and history come together and the State lands, present and future, are very important in preserving a "sense of place."

The Department, in addition to its in-fee holdings, holds a conservation easement on the Illijes property (See location map). This easement precludes further development on this property.

The Department has received a list of properties within the Overlook Mt. viewshed from the **Woodstock Land Trust**, **No Lights on the Mountain** and the **Rondout - Esopus Land Conservancy** (lands above 1200 feet on the south shoulder). However, the large number of properties were not prioritized as of December, 1998. Without a relative prioritization, the Department and State government is less effective in evaluating parcels for possible acquisition as they, and funding, becomes available. Thus, high priority lands have been identified to maximize the effectiveness of the NYS Open Space Plan for the Region.

The following priorities are established for land acquisition (see map):

Priority 1

Undeveloped lands higher than 1200 feet on the flanks of the mountain with a high regional visibility. Lands to the south and east of the mountain have the greatest potential to impact the viewshed. Also, lands needed to avoid future tower impacts and minimize the impacts of existing towers on State lands. The State will remain interested and involved to ensure the removal or reduction of the towers at some point in the future when they are not needed due to changing technology or their being rendered obsolete.

Within Priority 1, the properties are ranked as follows:

Rank 1 - On the south side of Overlook (facing Woodstock), there are several large parcels near the uppermost reaches and a number of lots that are part of a 25-year-old subdivision that stands out on much of the mountain's upper elevations. These include the parcels that abut State land and the building lots at the highest elevations that, if developed, would irreparably damage the aesthetics of the

Overlook Mountain Acquisition Priorities Map

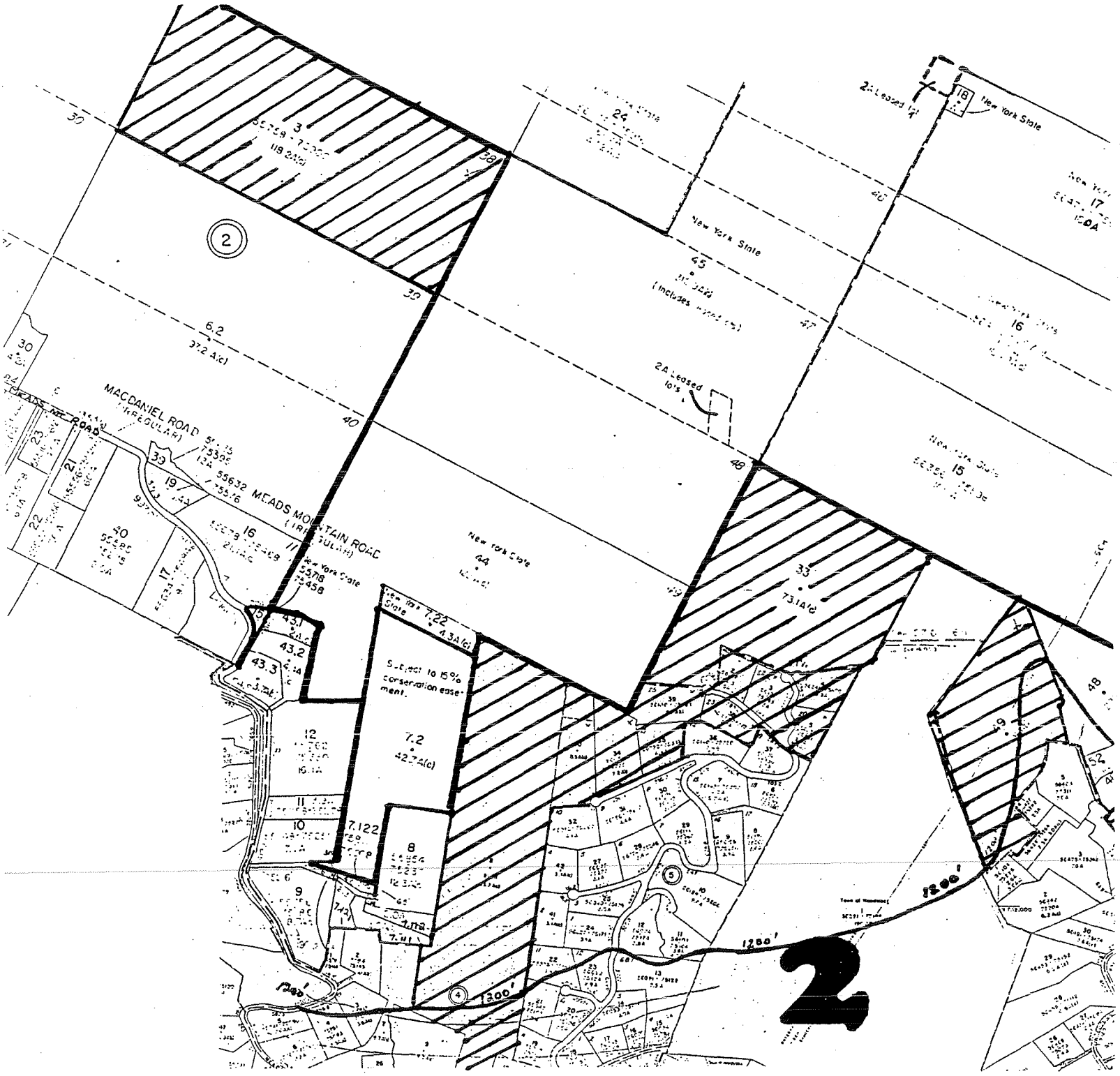
Priority 1 - Proposed Land Acquisitions:*

Rank 1

Rank 2
- SW flanks of Overlook Mt.
- Parcels above 1200 feet
- very visible parcels below 1200 feet

Rank 3
- Easterly Overlook Mt. - Raycliffe Drive

* Undeveloped lots. All land acquisition is from willing sellers and subject to available funding. All properties identified will be considered if offered for sale.



Overlook Mountain Acquisition Priorities Map

Priority 1 - Proposed Land Acquisitions:*

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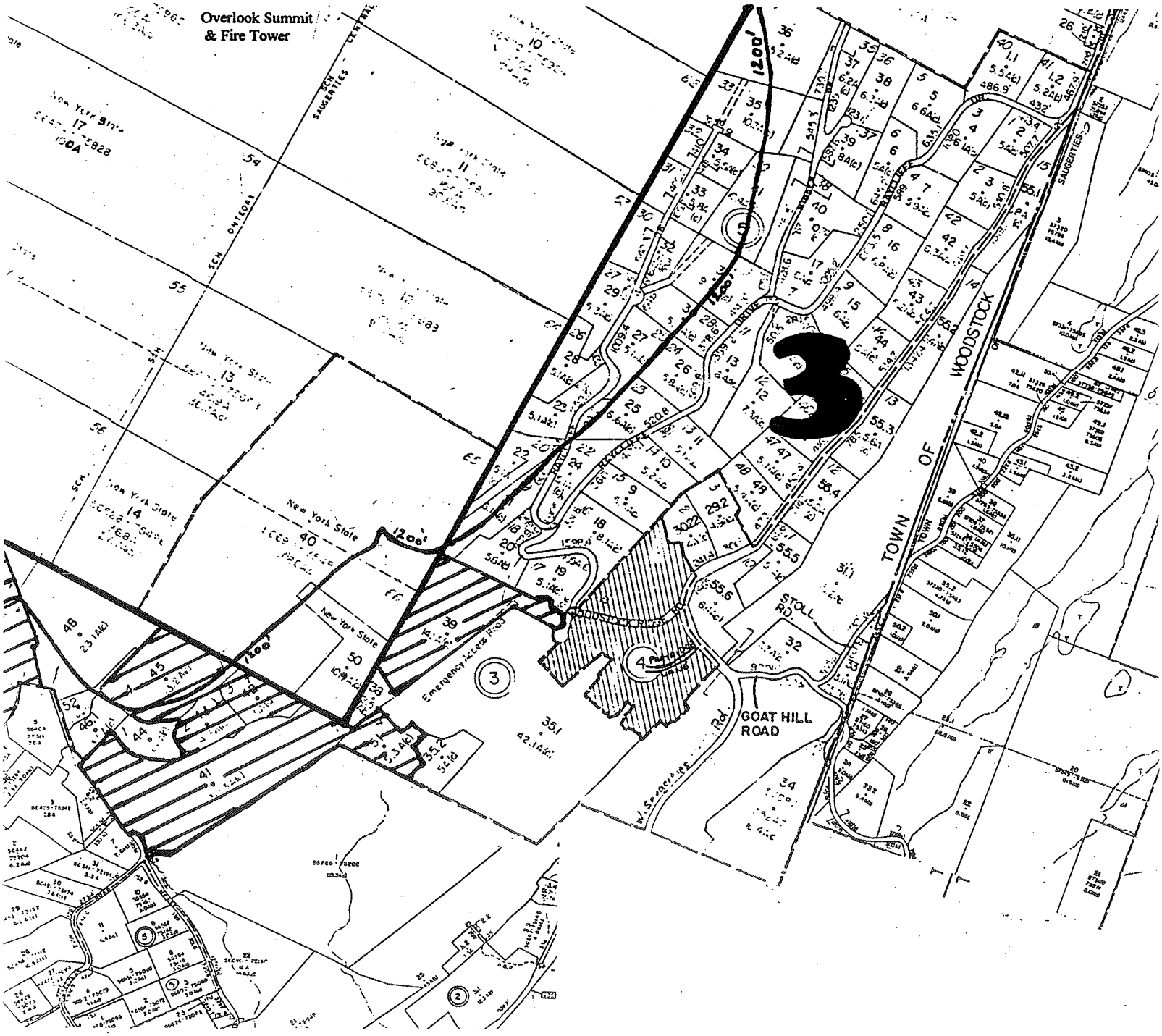
Rank 3
- Easterly Overlook Mt. - Raycliffe Drive

* Undeveloped lots. All land acquisition is from willing sellers and subject to available funding. All properties identified will be considered if offered for sale.



mountain and degrade the views for miles around. Development of these parcels could cause significant environmental damage given the extreme fragility of these steep slopes with little topsoil and could endanger rattlesnake habitat. The Section, Block and Lot numbers of these parcels, all of which are within the Town of Woodstock, are: 27.001-Block 4-Lot 8; Section 27.001-Block 5-Lots 2, 3, 4, 5, 34, 35, 38, 39 and 40; Section 16.000-Block 1-Lot 33; Section 16.000-Block 2-Lot 3 and Section 16.000-Block 3-Lots 39.3, 41, 42, 43, 45, 49 and 51.

Rank 2: Other undeveloped parcels on the upper reaches of the southern and southwestern flanks of the mountain above 1200 feet. Select properties below 1200 feet identified as highly visible through professional planning efforts may be added. Other areas above 1200 feet and highly visible on the easterly flanks.

Rank 3: On the east face of Overlook, most visible to greater Kingston, the Hudson River and beyond, there are a number of undeveloped tax lots on the uppermost reaches of the Raycliffe subdivision and along the western side of Saugerties Road. Some of these parcels are in the Town of Woodstock, others are in the Town of Saugerties. Views are from a farther distance so priority is lower.

Priority 2

Lands needed to avoid or minimize development near trails while providing trailhead access parking.

Goals

The goal of land acquisition in this management plan is to encourage long-term ecological stability on lands already owned by the State, and maximize access and use compatible with the natural resources and communities in the region. The Department views land acquisition conservatively - preserving existing conditions and avoiding large future impacts.

D. Administration

A fire tower summit steward and an Assistant Forest Ranger are needed for the summer months, May through October. The Assistant Forest Ranger will also patrol adjacent Units.

A Forest Preserve Manager position, vacant since 1990, would provide needed coordination, supervision, and administration of the Catskill Forest Preserve in both Region 3 and 4. The position should be reauthorized and filled. Funding is included in other UMP's previously prepared.

About two weeks of Surveyor/Real Property staff time will be needed to research and successfully conclude access, trespass and boundary line clarifications each year. Costs estimates are not provided for concluding negotiations and purchase of land acquisitions, since they are determined by many factors, including the interest of a willing seller and available funding.

Other DEC staff is adequate to manage this area.

The Overlook Wild Forest has 2.7 miles of exterior perimeter boundaries in need of boundary line maintenance. Interior boundaries (including leased parcels) will not be marked.

Any facility or trail without adequate maintenance or staffing may be closed if it is being vandalized or damage is occurring to natural resources.

E. Catskill Park State Land Master Plan Amendments and Constitutional Considerations of Certain Management Decisions

The shell of the mountain house, which is proposed for "retention" in this final plan, until nature takes its course , is inconsistent with the 1985 Catskill Park State Land Master Plan in effect at this time. The building is a nonconforming structure under the Master Plan. However, in time, the structure will deteriorate and the area will be consistent with the plan. Because of the high costs of demolition and a lack of funds, some stabilization and fencing for safety reasons will be required, but the structure will not be maintained in any way. All other nonconforming structures on the mountain are scheduled for removal. The fire tower is a conforming structure because it is used for education and protection of the Catskill Forest Preserve.

F. State Environmental Quality Review Act Requirements

The provisions of the State Environmental Quality Review Act have been met. Actions proposed in this unit management plan are designed so they will not result in significant environmental impacts. A negative declaration has been filed and a notice printed in the Environmental Notice Bulletin (Issue No. 35, page 8, September 2, 1998). A copy of the Environmental Assessment Form and the Negative Declaration is available from the Bureau of Preserve Protection and Management, NYSDEC, Region 3, 21 South Putt Corners Road, New Paltz, New York 12561-1696 [Telephone (914-256-3082)].

617.21
State Environmental Quality Review
NEGATIVE DECLARATION
Notice of Determination of Non-Significance

Project Number: Date: July 15, 1998

ID# 98-PL/FP-3-19

This notice is issued pursuant to Part 617 of the implementing regulations pertaining to Article 8 (State Environmental Quality Review Act) of the Environmental Conservation Law.

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), as lead agency, has determined that the proposed action described below will not have a significant effect on the environment and a Draft Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

Name of Action: OVERLOOK MOUNTAIN WILD FOREST UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN

SEQR Status: **Type I** ☒
Unlisted ☐

Conditioned Negative Declaration: ☐ **Yes**
☒ **No**

Description of Action:
The plan identifies the various resources of the 590 acre Overlook Mt. Wild Forest, part of the Catskill Forest Preserve. It also identifies issues and constraints, goals and objectives, proposed facilities and management, and proposed land acquisition priorities which will govern the area's future management. Specific projects are proposed, including:

1. Demolition/removal of two dilapidated cabins.
2. Demolition and Removal of Overlook Mt. House garage and asbestos dump.
3. Demolition/removal of ruins of smaller support building of the Overlook Mt. House (on lease land for TV tower, but owned by State)
4. Deciding on courses of action for fencing and/or removal of Overlook Mt. House ruins and interpretive station/kiosk.
5. Three vistas - recommended for maintenance .
6. Improve parking at Meads Mt. Road Trailhead by deciding on options and alternatives. Recommend redesign of Lot from 17 to a maximum of 34 cars. Overflow lot with additional 20 car capacity also proposed. Providing access for people with disabilities.
7. Restoring and opening the fire tower and observer's cabin on the summit, and staffing.

CONT.

Location:

Town of Woodstock, Ulster County (Map attached)

Reasons Supporting This Determination:
The area will be managed under Wild Forest guidelines established in the Catskill State Land Master Plan, as well as within the constraints set forth in Article XIV of the New York State Constitution and
Section 9 of the Environmental Conservation Law.

Although implementation of this Unit Management Plan is expected to increase recreational demands, particularly when the fire tower is opened, this plan will not have a significant impact since the proposed projects will manage and reduce potential recreational user impacts. This will be done by maintaining existing trails, concentrating use on maintained trails to reduce impacts, limiting access to a redesigned, well-maintained and patrolled Meads Mt. Road Parking Lot; educating users through brochures and bulletin boards and identifying the lands needed to ensure that, in the long run, the Wild Forest will remain a viable natural environment.

The following sections are keyed to the eleven project areas identified under "Description of Action" above and provide further support for the determination.

1-4. Removal of the ruins will return the area to a semi-natural state. None of the structures are historic in nature. Although the Mountain House, completed in 1939, wasnever opened, and was quickly vandalized and burned, it holds a special place in the hearts of many residents and visitors. The ruins are impressive and castle-like. The smaller structures (1-3) include much debris, including asbestos and metal drums, which should be removed to an appropriate disposal site as soon as possible. Options for the main building of the Mountain House, include stabilization and interpretation will be discussed and considered.

CONTINUED

For Further Information:

Contact Person: **George Profous, Forester I/Fred Gerty, Regional Forester**

Address: NYS DEC
21 South Putt Corners Road
New Paltz, NY 12561-1696

Telephone Number: (914) 256-3082, 3084

A Copy of This Notice Sent to:

Commissioner, NYSDEC, 50 Wolf Road, Albany NY 12233-0001
Chief Executive Officer of the municipality in which the action will be principally located.
Town of Woodstock
Applicant (if any)

Description of Action Continued

8. Setting priorities for land acquisition.
9. Providing information about Forest Preserve and history through brochures, displays, bulletin boards, trail registers, signs.
10. Removal of gate, options for new trails.
11. Funding and maintenance options and costs.

Reasons Supporting This Determination - Continued

5. Several vistas are identified. They exist and may be maintained for public benefit and enjoyment.

6. Usage of the Meads Mt. Road Overlook Mountain Trailhead exceeds parking capacity on many weekends. Options to ameliorate a roadside parking problem will be considered. However, redesigning the existing parking lot will increase available parking by 15-17 cars with a small expansion of the paved area. The expansion incorporates the existing Overlook gravel road, thus minimizing disturbance of vegetated area. No more than about a dozen trees will need to be cut. The proposed overflow parking lot, if implemented by agreement with neighboring landowner, would be built on a grassy area. All expansions are limited to areas where runoff is easily absorbed into well vegetated areas. Construction will be minimal and will not impact water bodies and aesthetic resources, and noise and odor will be temporary - lasting only a few days during construction.

7-9. Restoring and opening the Overlook Mtn. Fire Tower will probably increase visitation to the area. However, the woods road which serves as a trail can easily accommodate any increased public use. Currently approximately 10,000 persons a year use this popular trail. Redesigning and improving trailhead parking and educating the public through new bulletin boards and visitor information at the trailhead, at the Mountain House ruins, and the fire tower, will greatly improve the visitor experience. The limited development proposed will complement the careful growth of the local tourist economy in an area where the natural resources of the Forest Preserve can sustain long-term public recreational use on a well hardened trail.

8. Critical parcels are prioritized for possible future acquisition from willing sellers, pending available funding. The proposed acquisitions are conservative, based on minimizing encroachments and impacts of right-of-ways and developments in the heart of the unit, protecting natural resources and watershed integrity and, in more limited areas, improving public access. All proposed purchases

rely on willing sellers and must comply with the criteria and "resource value rating systems" in the 1995 Conserving Open Space in New York State Plan and the Catskill State Land Master Plan guidelines. Also, notification must always be made to affected towns of the State's intent to acquire land which is not specifically listed in the Open Space Plan. (All proposed acquisitions in this Unit are in this category.) The Town has 90 days from notification to reject a proposed acquisition.

10. Gate is no longer needed. All unnecessary structures are removed from the Forest Preserve.

11. Appropriate and timely funding and maintenance is the key to good management and care of the Forest Preserve .

Management of the Wild Forest is guided by two paramount goals:

1. To preserve and protect the Wild Forest character and integrity of the unit, with its natural plant and animal communities, and allow natural processes to proceed essentially unhindered, and

2. To provide opportunities for a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities (Point #7) without degrading the resources or impairing the Wild Forest setting and the experiences unique to the Region's Wild Forest lands.

All proposed facilities comply with these goals.

IV. PROJECT SCHEDULES AND BUDGET ESTIMATE

The following schedule will be implemented over the life of the plan. Estimated costs are in addition to normal program funding. Funding for projects needed to protect the environment (not including land acquisition) are first priority, recreational enhancement are second priority. The projects are prioritized, with those considered most important in the first year, less important or only after other projects are completed in subsequent years. Projects will be completed as funding and staffing becomes available. Five year cost is estimated at $389,050. Annual maintenance and one Assistant Forest Ranger assigned to area will cost about $13,500 per year after the first two years of construction are completed.

PROJECT SCHEDULES AND BUDGET ESTIMATES

YEAR 1: 1999-2000

Meads Mountain Road Trailhead Facilities

• Replace entrance sign/direction signs	$ 300
• Trailhead bulletin board and trail register	$ 1,000
• Construct redesigned parking lot and relocate gate (to include 30-34 spaces, perimeter railing and fence with parking spaces delineated), landscaped island (triangle), signs for traffic flow and carry-in/ carry out, and handicapped parking.	$ 20,000
• Demolish two hunting camp buildings and dispose of demolition debris as required @ $20,000 each.	$ 40,000
• Conduct assessment of old hotel, the structures stability, and decide where grates and/or fencing is needed. Remove debris around structure and to the east of the trail and television tower. Restrict entry to openings in the old Mountain House ruins via iron gates. (Tentatively, 27 windows and 11 doors need grates, 1 flight of stairs to be removed and facade crumbling in three locations). Whatever safety steps are necessary must be implemented.	$ 50,000

Year 1 Continued

•	Demolish Mountain House administration building and dispose of demolition debris as required.	$150,000
•	Demolish garage buildings and remove debris as required. Also remove the asbestos rolls, drums, and debris scattered around and in the field to the north of the structure. Clean out spring reservoir, and remove chimney and cistern remains for safety	$ 35,000
•	Restore and reopen the Overlook Mountain Fire Tower.	$ 15,000
•	Install 20' long, 18" culvert for runoff control at first turn in the road from the trailhead parking lot.	$ 500
•	Restore the fire tower observer's ground cabin and storage shed, paint and maintain all structures (add solar power system). Install new propane stove and pipe venting directly to the outside with a 100 lb. propane tank ($32). In the future, the company will deliver the refilled tank to the trailhead parking lot. DEC will complete delivery. Old stove will be retained for interpretation.	$ 5,000 ($2,500) ($900)
•	Build an Interpretive Wayside Exhibit at Overlook Mountain House site.	$ 5,000
•	Seasonal Assistant Forest Ranger	$ 11,000
•	Annual maintenance.	$ 750
	Total Year 1	$336,850

Year 2

•	Paint and maintain fire tower.	$ 2,000
•	Yearly inspection of Overlook ruins	$ 2,000
•	Install interpretive exhibit about fire towers in general and Overlook specifically, and the view from the tower.	$ 5,000
•	Interpretive exhibit at observer's ground cabin. 3,000	$
•	Maintain Overlook Mountain Road	$ 1,000
•	Fire Tower/Summit Steward	$ 5,000
•	Seasonal Assistant Forest Ranger	$ 11,000
•	Annual maintenance.	$ 1,000
	Total Year 2	$ 30,000

Year 3

•	Overflow parking (est. cost not including land)	($15,000)
•	Yearly inspection of Overlook Mountain ruins	$ 2,000
•	Seasonal Assistant Forest Ranger	$ 11,500
•	Fire Tower/Summit Steward	$ 5,000
•	Annual maintenance.	$ 1,500
	Total Year 3	$ 35,000

Years 4-5

•	Annual maintenance, including garbage removal, trail maintenance/ stabilization, parking lot, bulletin board, privy and trail register upkeep, blocking of problem areas with boulders, upkeep of road to minimum standard, particularly the Fire Tower spur, vista upkeep, boundary line maintenance, winter snow removal and mowing - Meads Mountain Road Lot.	$ 1,500
•	Yearly inspection of Overlook Mountain house ruins	$ 2,000
•	Fire Tower/Summit Steward	$ 5,000
•	Seasonal Assistant Forest Ranger	$ 11,500
	Total Each Year	$ 20,000
	Estimated Five Year Total	**$441,950**

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