

APPENDIX N

DEC CUSTODIAL PLAN

Custodial Plan

For

The ROME SAND PLAINS

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation acquired the area known as the Rome Sand Plains to protect the unique qualities and habitat of this area. Of the original proposal to purchase 1004 acres, only 597 acres have actually been acquired. The land was purchased with funds from the 1972 and 1986 Environmental Quality Bond Acts.

Interest in this area peaked as a result of a permit application to mine the sand dunes. It was recognized that there was a need to protect these unique geologic formations and the unusual habitat surrounding them.

FORMATION AND HISTORY

The Rome Sand Plains were created from sand deposits left when glacial Lake Iroquois receded. Sand from the lake bed was moved by wind and deposited in numerous dunes. These sand dunes exhibit a crescent shape with steep slopes on the lee side and more gradual slopes on the windward side. The existence of dunes of this formation is rare in New York State today.

Throughout the Sand Plains and often located between the sand dunes are extensive wetlands. Included in these wetlands is an open water bog. The proximity of water loving plants and animals with species on the dunes requiring xeric habitat is an unusual combination and contributes to the uniqueness of this area.

The potential exists for rare and endangered species to be found in this area. Possible species include the Karner Blue Butterfly, and the Buck Moth. A community of wild lupine exists in at least one location of the Sand Plains area.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Wood Creek flows along the southern edge of the Sand Plains. This creek was used as part of the Albany to Oswego Navigation Route during the period 1790 to 1820. Along this section of the creek is one of a number of cuts across meandering loops of the creek. These "neck cuts" represent some of the earliest artificial waterways in North America. The Sand Plains area of the creek has been described as having the best preserved and most significant neck cut sites on all of

Wood Creek. It is possible that a worker's camp was established near one of these neck cut sites, and consequently the area may have additional archeological significance as well. Although these sites do not exist on the land presently owned by NYS, they are within the area originally proposed for purchase.

MANAGEMENT GOALS

1. Preserve areas of geologic significance, specifically the sand dunes.
2. Preserve ecologically significant areas especially the bog and other wetlands. Areas that are identified as habitat for rare or endangered plants or animals should also be protected from influences that would alter that habitat.
3. Wood Creek should be maintained in as near its original form as possible
4. Maintain the Pitch Pine cover type. Allowed to grow unmanaged hardwood species may encroach and eventually overtake the site. The use of prescribed fire in maintaining the pitch pine habitat should be further investigated.
5. Increase public awareness of the Sand Plains. Promote the recreational opportunities on this area. Use existing roads and develop additional trails that will encompass the areas unique features. Avoid putting trails in sensitive areas such as in rare or endangered habitat. A trail brochure could be developed that would explain the area and increase an understanding of the significance of the Sand Plains.

NEEDS AND CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING GOALS

1. Continue to acquire additional land when funding allows and as land becomes available until the full acreage goal is reached.
 - a. The present state ownership does not include some significant areas. A large portion of the sand dune field lies east of the state owned area. The neck cut and possible worker camp on Wood Creek are also located just outside of the state owned area. These parcels should receive a high priority for future purchases to protect these unique geologic and historic features.
 - b. Wood Creek offers potential as a canoe route. Access to the creek through existing state land would require a lengthy carry. Additional ownership along Wood Creek, especially in the vicinity Oswego Road, would provide an area for easier access to the creek.

- c. Development pressure has affected the sand plains area. Acquiring additional land will provide protection to the core area of the Sand Plains from further development.
2. Investigate, identify and compile a list of plants and animals peculiar to the sand plains area. Rare or endangered species that may be found in this habitat should be included.

3. Survey and Mark Property Lines

In an effort to promote public awareness of the Sand Plains and to protect adjacent landowners from encroachment by the public property lines should be identified. The original intent was to delay boundary identification until all land targeted for acquisition had been purchased. This decision should be reviewed considering the lack of available funds for buying more land and the availability of desirable parcels. It could be a lengthy process before the additional land can be purchased. As a minimum the boundaries that will not be affected by future purchases should be marked and signed. Boundaries will also make it easier for forest rangers to protect the area from timber trespass and dumping violations.

4. Management of Pitch Pine Forest Type

To maintain or re-establish the pitch pine it is suggested that prescribed fire would have to be used. The need for prescribed fire and the chances for successful establishment of pitch pine should be investigated. The purpose for using fire would be to control the competing hardwood understory, and to expose the mineral soil by removing the litter layer. Heat from fire is also necessary to open some cones allowing seed dispersal.

At the present time the Rome fire department does not allow the use of prescribed fire as a tool for forest management. The Department should work with the Rome fire department toward gaining acceptance in the use of fire to achieve forestry objectives. Small blocks of pitch pine could be treated at intervals to minimize the least desirable impacts of a prescribed burn. Treating small blocks over the course of many years would result in several different age classes of the pitch pine.

5. Interior Roads

The existing woods roads through the Sand Plains area should be gated to prevent vehicular access. These roads can be incorporated in a trail system. The size of the area and the amount of frontage on maintained roads makes the interior of this area readily accessible to the public. Limiting access to these roads will also help reduce the incidence of dumping.

6. Work with other agencies and interest groups with similar land holdings in the sand plains area. The City of Rome, the Nature Conservancy, the Isaac Walton League and the Mohawk Chapter of the Audubon Society are landowners of parts of the unique sand plains. Common goals should be identified.

7. Respond to and encourage efforts by volunteer groups. Volunteer efforts of individuals and interest groups can achieve many of the goals identified here as well as assist with cleaning up the area, identifying rare and endangered plants and animals, or trail layout

and maintenance.