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Proposed Land Acquisition & Boundary Adjustments to the Intensive Use Area

2.1 Proposed Land Acquisition and Classification of the Site of the Former Highmount Ski Center

This UMP Revision/DEIS proposes the acquisition by the Department of the real property which is the site of the former Highmount Ski Center, and once acquired, the land is proposed to be classified as an addition to the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center Intensive Use Area.

The land proposed for acquisition is located on the slopes of Belleayre Mountain in the Town of Shandaken, Ulster County, within the boundaries of the Catskill Park and New York City's Catskill and Delaware Watersheds. Once acquired, this draft UMP Revision provides for the classification of this parcel as an addition to the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center's intensive use area. Furthermore, this UMP Revision/DEIS proposes a development plan for this parcel consistent with the Amendments to Article 14 of the New York State Constitution. A map of the proposed acquisition detailed above can be found in UMP Drawing G3 in Appendix A entitled "Proposed Land Acquisition and Boundary Adjustment Map".

The acquisition of this parcel is an important component of this UMP Revision due to its location and terrain. First, it is located directly adjacent to the western boundary of the Ski Center, and therefore, would provide a seamless addition of skiable terrain to the Ski Center. Additionally, this land was formerly developed as a ski center, and therefore, the necessary work of clearing the land of trees and brush to create the ski trails has already been done, thereby reducing the level of clearing which would be needed to implement the proposed planned development of this parcel. This land also contains expert-level skiable terrain. With the addition of all or a portion of this parcel to the Ski Center, the balance of all levels of skiable terrain will improve at the Ski Center.

2.1.1 Environmental Setting

The environmental setting of the parcel of land proposed for acquisition consists of a small amount of forest, both mature and early successional, with existing infrastructure that was originally installed for use in conjunction with the historical operation of the former ski center. This former ski center site is no longer in use, having closed in 1984. However, the infrastructure still exists on the

site. The parcel is identified in the Ulster County tax maps as tax map identification number 3.-1-10, and the entire parcel is approximately 104.50 acres in size. This mostly cleared parcel is contiguous to existing state lands, located immediately west of the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center Intensive Use Area. The existing infrastructure includes; i) the former ski slopes; ii) ten (10) mixed-use buildings including: two (2) one-story buildings, one (1) two-story building; iii) two (2) one-story ski lift structures; iv) five (5) one-story operator stations; v), and one (1) covered reservoir. Additional infrastructure necessary to operate the former ski center including chairs, lifts, poles and cable and necessary infrastructure for the buildings, is located on site.

Ideally situated and sited to continue the historic public recreational ski use of this parcel, planned development will focus on improving public recreational skiing opportunities. Tree cutting for infrastructure development and to reclaim former ski slopes will follow existing Department policy and procedures for such activities. Rehabilitation and improvements to this parcel to provide greater public skiing opportunities are compatible with uses associated with the existing, contiguous Belleayre Mountain Ski Center Intensive Use Area.

This proposed acquisition is generally located in a rural, forested setting interspersed with private, commercial, and residential parcels and is contiguous to existing State lands within the Catskill Park, specifically the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center Intensive Use Area. Other existing State lands in close proximity to the proposed acquisition include the Shandaken Wild Forest and the Big Indian Wilderness, which are management units of Forest Preserve lands within the Catskill Park.

2.2 Adjustment to the Existing Boundaries of the Intensive Use Area

The 2008 CPSLMP set forth the boundaries of the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center Intensive Use Area as shown on the Land Acquisition and Boundary Adjustment Map attached to this UMP Revision/DEIS as Map G3 in Appendix A. This draft UMP Revision proposes an adjustment to the existing boundaries to provide for the addition of approximately 263 acres (acquired from the 1,200+/- acre Big Indian acquisition in 2011; see discussion below regarding the classification process for the balance of the Big Indian parcel consisting of approximately 937 acres) to the Ski Center's intensive use area, and the reclassification of approximately 149 acres of the Ski Center's intensive use area located in the southwest corner of the management unit, to a wilderness classification, resulting in a net addition of approximately 114 acres to this intensive use area.

2.2.1 Background

The current edition of the Catskill Park State Land Master Plan (the “Master Plan”) was completed and approved in August of 2008 (a revision of the first plan completed in 1985). The Master Plan implements the forever wild mandate provided in Article XIV of the New York State Constitution and provides additional guidance for management of the forest preserve lands in the four forest preserve counties in the Catskills as described in Environmental Conservation Law (Delaware, Greene, Sullivan and Ulster), the majority of which lie within the Catskill Park.

Included in the Master Plan is a land classification system that reflects the varying degrees of wild land ranging from remote, trail-less mountain peaks to extensively used camping areas and a developed ski center. Five basic land classifications are established in the plan: Wilderness, Wild Forest, Primitive Bicycle Corridor, Intensive Use and Administrative Use. The Master Plan classified all of the forest preserve lands in the Catskills owned by the People of the State of New York at the time of the completion of the latest edition of the Master Plan in 2008. Since that time the State has acquired additional lands, such as the Big Indian acquisition, that have been added to the forest preserve. The Master Plan prescribes two alternatives for the classification of newly acquired forest preserve land. Either the unit management plan (UMP) for the unit the newly acquired property will be added to may be amended to classify the land, or the Master Plan can be amended to classify the land. This draft UMP Revision proposes to classify certain forest preserve lands as additions to the Intensive Use Area, and reclassify a portion of the Intensive Use Area to a more protective classification, wilderness.

2.2.2 Description of property to be classified as an addition to the Intensive Use Area

This draft UMP Revision includes the proposal to classify approximately 263 acres of land from the Big Indian acquisition which is generally located east of the existing Belleayre Mountain Ski Center and west of Giggie Hollow Brook and the Pine Hill Lake Day Use Area, as set forth on the UMP Drawing Map G3 in Appendix A. This addition directly adjoins the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center intensive use area (Belleayre Mountain itself on the west side and the Pine Hill Lake Day Use Area on the east). This proposed addition to the Ski Center shall provide additional terrain for use within the intensive use area for passive recreational use, such as hiking, biking and cross country skiing. The parcel is in close proximity to existing trails on Belleayre Mountain, as well as the Ulster & Delaware Rail line, which could accommodate additional trail development that would complement the existing trail network. For example, the current parking lot and infrastructure at the adjoining Pine Hill Lake Day Use Area could provide parking for a trail system that could be expanded from the day use area to Belleayre Mountain. The proposed addition of this land to the Belleayre Mountain

Ski Center Intensive Use Area will allow for future consideration of groomed cross-country ski trails, as well as a possible alpine (downhill) ski trail connection with the hamlet of Pine Hill. Actual trail lay out or related development plans would be considered through a future amendment to the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center Unit Management Plan.

The proposal for the addition on the portion of the Big Indian parcel which lies west of Giggle Hollow Brook as shown on UMP Drawing Map G3 was based upon the following basis: 1) its shared boundary with the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center Intensive Use Area and the Pine Hill Day Use area; 2) the addition provides a seamless connection between the Ski Center and the Pine Hill Day Use Area; 3) the road network and terrain within this proposed addition may provide for future uses consistent with an Intensive Use classification; 4) greater efficiencies in the management and planning by the Facility Manager in the future for the Intensive Use Area; and 5) the use of Giggle Hollow Brook, a natural feature, as a boundary line. This proposal was developed by DEC staff with input received from key stakeholders in a public scoping session held in 2012 related to the classification of the Big Indian parcel. Department staff met with stakeholders, who generally agreed that a combination of classifications (some intensive use, some wild forest, and some wilderness) would provide the best balance of resource protection and recreational opportunities. The portions of the Big Indian acquisition proposed as an addition to the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center Intensive Use Area are considered as part of this draft UMP Revision/DEIS.

2.2.3 Environmental Setting

The 2011 acquisition of the approximately 1,200 acre Big Indian parcel encompasses a ridge on the eastern slopes of Belleayre Mountain. The Big Indian parcel lies completely within the City of New York's Ashokan watershed and includes a few segments of headwater streams to Birch and Esopus Creeks. Elevations range from 1,260 feet above sea level near the hamlet of Big Indian to 2,820 feet above sea level on the eastern ridge of Belleayre Mountain. It adjoins the inactive Ulster & Delaware Railroad bed on the north side, portions of Woodchuck Hollow Road on the west side and portions of Lost Clove Road on the south side.

The Big Indian parcel was never developed, and past management included periodic timber harvesting as well as hunting by past owners and their guests. A network of wood roads and skid trails exist on some of the property, generally on the ridge itself, where slopes are modest. The property is dominated by northern hardwoods, including maple beech, birch and oak, with some significant stands of eastern hemlock present in some of the steeper ravines.

A private 31 acre inholding known as the Brisbane Estate is located within the Big Indian acquisition and is located at the end of Woodchuck Hollow Road. A

conservation easement acquired by the state (in addition to the estimated 1,200 acres acquired in fee) limits further development of this property. This private in holding is located wholly within the acreage proposed to be added to the intensive use area.

2.3 Reclassification of approximately 149 acres

As mentioned above, in addition to the classification of the previously described land, the Department proposes to reclassify approximately 149 acres from the Intensive Use classification to a wilderness classification. The subject land is located within the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center Intensive Use Area and generally 100 feet southerly from the Pine Hill – West Branch (also known as the Belleayre Mt) hiking trail that is located along the ridge of Belleayre Mountain and leads towards the former site of Lookout Tower as shown on UMP Drawing Map G3 in Appendix A. These lands encompass steep, south and southeast facing slopes that have never been developed for uses within the intensive use area. These lands adjoin the Big Indian Wilderness and DEC proposes to add this area to the Big Indian Wilderness.

Summary of changes in Acreage due to Proposed Boundary Adjustments

Belleayre Mountain Ski Center Intensive Use Area	Current Size	Change	Proposed Size
Addition due to Classification of portion of Big Indian Acquisition	2,211 acres	+263+/- acres	2,474 acres
Addition due to Acquisition of new lands	2,211 acres	+90+/- acres	2,301 acres
Reduction in Acreage due to Reclassification of from Intensive Use to Wilderness	2,211 acres	-149+/- acres	2,026 acres
Summary of the Totals	2,211 acres	+ 204 +/- acres	2,415 +/- acres

2.4 Unclassified Portions of the Big Indian Acquisition

In addition to the lands identified above and proposed for classification as an addition to the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center intensive use area, the classification of the remaining lands acquired as part of the Big Indian acquisition which totals approximately 937 acres shall be the subject of an amendment to the Catskill Park State Land Master Plan and is not proposed for classification in this draft UMP Revision for the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center Intensive Use Area. The proposals included in this UMP Revision have independent utility and do not dictate the classification of the remaining Forest Preserve lands acquired as part of the Big Indian acquisition. Separate consideration of the classification of the remaining Big Indian lands is no less protective of the environment. Under the CPSLMP, the two options being considered for classification, Wilderness or Wild Forest, are the most protective classification options pursuant to the CPSLMP.

Figure 2-1 below depicts the conceptual classification of remaining lands acquired from the Big Indian acquisition. The Department intends to propose the classification of these lands as either a Wilderness or Wild Forest classification through an amendment to the Catskill State Land Master Plan.

The Wilderness classification is generally described as a wilderness area of state land or water having a primeval character, without significant improvement or protected and managed so as to preserve, enhance and restore, where necessary, its natural conditions.

A wild forest area is an area of Forest Preserve land whose character as a natural plant and animal community receives the same degree of protection under Article XIV of the Constitution as in areas classified as wilderness, but which differs from wilderness in that generally:

1. The physical characteristics of wild forest areas are capable of withstanding higher levels of recreational use;
2. Wild forest areas convey less of a sense of remoteness and provide fewer outstanding opportunities for solitude for visitors, and therefore;
3. Wild forest areas are managed to provide opportunities for a greater variety of recreational activities and a higher intensity of recreational use.

After the lands are classified, any future management actions, such as the development of public recreational opportunities, shall be subject to amendments to the respective unit management plans for the management units to which these lands are added.

The conceptual plan for the classification of the remaining 937 acres from the Big Indian acquisition lands at this time is as follows:

Lost Clove Lands: Approximately 361 acres in Lost Clove, inclusive of the Lost Clove Trail will be classified wilderness and added to the Big Indian Wilderness Area. The northern boundary would be along a line 500 feet north of and parallel to the Lost Clove trail. This is in part proposed in anticipation of the state acquiring adjoining lands on the slopes and summit of Balsam Mountain from the Nature Conservancy. We anticipate that those lands, which directly adjoin the Big Indian Wilderness, would be acquired as an addition to the Big Indian Wilderness. See Figure 2-1 below.

Belleayre Ridge Lands: The bulk of the lands making up this new acquisition, approximately 542 acres on the eastern ridge of Belleayre Mountain, to include all lands acquired east of Giggle Hollow Brook and north of the Lost Clove Trail will be classified wild forest and added to the Shandaken Wild Forest. This is proposed because of its ability to accommodate a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities including hiking, cross-country skiing, mountain bicycling and hunting as well as the property's lack of wilderness character due to an existing wood road network and regular (including recent) timber harvesting. The current road and skid trail network will lend itself to improvements to facilitate these uses. In addition, these uses are compatible and will enhance similar recreational opportunities provided at the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center. Access to this property can be gained from the current parking lot at the adjoining Pine Hill Lake Day Use Area, as well as from Winding Mountain Road, Lasher Road and Lost Clove Road. Conversion of the Ulster & Delaware Rail Line to a pedestrian trail could improve access. See Figure 2-1 below.

The following chart provides a summary of the alternative proposals for changes to the respective acreage for individual Management Units located in and around Belleayre Mountain (as proposed in both the draft Belleayre Mountain Ski Center UMP Revision and draft amendment to the 2008 CPSLMP):

Management Unit	Current Size	Change	Proposed Size
Belleayre Mtn Ski Center Intensive Use Area - Addition from Big Indian parcel (see above)	2,211 acres	+ 204 +/- acres	2,415 +/- acres
Shandaken Wild Forest – Addition from Big Indian parcel	5,375 acres	+ 542 acres	5,917 acres
Big Indian Wilderness– Addition from Big Indian parcel	33,500 acres	+ 361 acres	33,861 acres
Big Indian Wilderness - Reclassification from Intensive Use Area	33,500 acres	+ 149 acres	33,649 acres
Big Indian Wilderness - Subtotal	33,500 acres	+ 510 acres	34,010 acres

