

State Lands in Central New York

map and guide



New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

Overview



Hiker at Nelson Swamp Unique Area

DEC's Region 7 in Central New York includes nine counties—Broome, Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, Oswego, Tioga and Tompkins—covering 6,775 square miles. It stretches from the Pennsylvania border to Lake Ontario, and includes cities such as Syracuse, Binghamton, Cortland and Ithaca.

One-hundred-seventeen state forests and multiple-use areas, totaling 195,111 acres, are located in the region. These lands generally sit on hill-tops and other areas that were once farmed, but proved unsuitable due to thin soils. DEC manages them for many uses, including timber harvesting and recreational pursuits, like hunting, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing.

The region also has seven designated unique areas totaling 3,027 acres: Labrador Hollow, Nelson Swamp, Camillus Forest, Salmon River Falls, Sandy Island Beach, Sandy Pond Beach, and Split Rock. They are called unique because they were acquired for their unusual characteristics, such as having rare plants or unusual landscape features. Unique areas are not managed for timber, though trees may occasionally be cut to improve habitat for plants and wildlife.

State Forests Today

Today, state forests provide more benefits for New York's citizens than ever before. Central New York's forests contribute toward clean air and protect the water quality of countless ponds, wetlands, aquifers, streams and rivers. Many streams once degraded by poor agricultural practices can now, once again, support wild trout populations.

Open space for public use and enjoyment is increasingly valuable as private lands are developed and posted. Development in rural areas is causing long-term changes in the landscape. State forests in Central New York preserve open space and the environmental integrity of undeveloped areas.

The management of state forests provides a wide variety of habitat conditions not often found on private lands. State forests offer the kind of large, relatively undisturbed habitat required by many wildlife species. These often include open grassy areas which provide habitat for grassland bird species.

State forests offer opportunities for the kind of recreational activities that are best enjoyed in remote natural areas—activities that typically require a minimum of facility development or site disturbance. Hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, horseback riding and nature observation continue to be popular attractions.



Autumn at Charles Baker State Forest

State Forest Highlights

Here are a few highlights of the diverse and exciting activities that await outdoor enthusiasts in Central New York's 117 state forests:



Horseback riders at Brookfield State Forest

Exploring Trails

Among the 113 miles of long distance, linear foot trails to be found in the region's state forests, James Kennedy State Forest in Cortland offers 11.5 miles of hiking and is part of the Finger Lakes Trail. Similarly, Morgan Hill State Forest, in Cortland and Onondaga counties, offers 10 miles of the Finger Lakes Trail for those who want a full day's hike.

Loop trails, which are often multi-purpose, are popular with hikers and cross-country skiers. About 93 miles of loop trails are located in the region's state forests. Oakley Corners State Forest in Tioga County offers 16 miles of loop trails and Bear Swamp State Forest in Cayuga County offers 15 miles.

Destination trails are linear trails that serve as pathways for people to access popular destinations or other points of interest such as natural features. Two popular trails of this type are the Salmon River Falls Unique Area trail (1.5 miles), leading to the Salmon River Falls, and the 0.2-mile trail that leads to Tinker Falls in Labrador Hollow Unique Area.

Six trails are designated as horseback-riding trail systems in Central New York's state forests. The Brookfield Trail System is the largest and most popular and has a total of 130 miles of trails. It is located in Madison County in Charles E. Baker State Forest, Beaver Creek State Forest and Brookfield Railroad State Forest. The Brookfield Trail System is also designated for snowmobiling.

Along with the 130 miles of the Brookfield Trail System, snowmobilers also have more than 78 miles of snowmobile corridor trails; that is, trails that serve as corridors through state forests. Such trails utilize unplowed portions of town roads, public forest access roads, and woodland trails. Most corridor trails are located in state forests in Chenango, Oswego, Cortland and Madison counties.

Cross-country skiing is allowed anywhere on state forests. State forests in the region offer 129 miles of designated trails for cross-country skiing. Stoney Pond State Forest, in Madison County, with 13 miles of trails, is popular with skiers, as is Whaupanaucaw State Forest in Chenango County, with another 13 miles.

In recent years, mountain biking has become a popular sport. Several state forest trails are designated for mountain biking and other uses. These include 16 miles in Oakley Corners State Forest, and 12 miles in Jenksville State Forest, both in Tioga County.

Camping



Camping at Charles Baker State Forest

Primitive camping is available on state forests at both designated sites and at dispersed locations. Only a few, if any, amenities are offered for camping on state forests. Running water, heated facilities and electricity are not available, however, there is no fee for camping on state forests.

A stay of longer than three days in one location, or camping in groups larger than 10 persons requires a permit. Campsites are located at 20 different locations on state forests, providing 95 designated sites (10 lean-tos and 85 open sites). Three of the 20 locations are: Charles E. Baker State Forest in Madison County with 14 campsites at Moscow Hill;

Stoney Pond State Forest in Madison County with 12 campsites, and Taylor Valley State Forest in Cortland County with 12 campsites.

Hunting and Trapping

Hunting is allowed on all state forests, except where and when restricted or forbidden by regulation. Similarly, trapping is allowed, except where and when prohibited.

Fishing

Fishing opportunities on state forests are varied. Many ponds, creeks, streams and some rivers in state forests offer excellent fishing. Watercourses range from deep and cool to shallow with warmer water. Some waters contain native fish populations and others are stocked.

Observing Nature and Cultural Resources

State forests offer wonderful opportunities for viewing natural and cultural resources. These activities include: birding, nature photography, wildlife observation, and viewing of cultural or historic resources, such as stone walls, cemeteries, or old foundations. These activities can be enjoyed on all state forests, but may be restricted for safety reasons during hunting seasons.

Boating

For those with small watercraft, state forests offer locations to launch small boats, canoes and kayaks. Twelve ponds, lakes and reservoirs in the region are at least 25 acres in size and located, either entirely or partially, on DEC managed lands. The Salmon River Reservoir in Oswego County is more than 2,000 acres and flows through Hall Island State Forest. North Pond in Klondike State Forest, which is also in Oswego County, is 75 acres. Long Pond in Chenango County's Long Pond State Forest is 117 acres, and Balsam Pond in Balsam Swamp State Forest, Chenango County, is 146 acres.



State Forests...a brief history

Reforestation in New York has its roots in the development of the state's rail and canal systems, as well as the severe impact of the Great Depression on the state's economy. In the 1800s, it is estimated that 91 percent of New York's woodlands were cleared for cultivation and pasture by settlers. An exodus of farmers began as rail and canal routes created an easier way for farmers to travel from the poor hilltop farms of Central New York to the vast prairies of the Midwest, which offered better soils and farming conditions. Before leaving, farmers usually cleared all the removable forest products from their land. The Great Depression forced many of the remaining farmers off their land as they searched for some other way to survive.

As more and more farms were abandoned, it became obvious that New York had a serious problem. In response, the New York State Reforestation Law was passed in 1929 and amended in 1931. The main objective of the law and its amendment was to permanently retire farmland from agricultural use and reforest it, providing a wide range of uses from timber to public recreational areas. The program mainly attempted to acquire lands that were at least 50 percent cleared and suitable for reforestation.

Both the State Reforestation Law and the Hewitt Amendment of 1931 authorized the Conservation Department, now the Department of Environmental Conservation, to acquire land by gift or purchase for reforestation. These lands had to consist of at least 500 contiguous acres that would forever be devoted to "reforestation and the establishment and maintenance thereon of forests for watershed protection, the production of timber, and for recreation and kindred purposes." These reforestation areas became the nucleus of our present day state forest system.



CCC workers build a fire tower in Central New York



CCC workers build a bridge in Central New York

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in response to the economic hardships of the Great Depression. The CCC was a work relief program for young men ages 18 to 25 from unemployed families. Operated by the army, each CCC camp consisted of about 200 men who did paid outdoor construction work for six months. Thousands of young men planted millions of trees on the newly acquired state forests. They also worked on roads, trails, campgrounds, parks, erosion control, watershed restoration, forest protection, and other projects. The CCC also provided the first organized wildland fire suppression crews. Nationwide, more than 4,000 CCC camps were eventually established. By the time the CCC disbanded in 1942, more than three million men had participated in the program, including 200,000 African Americans.

Since 1942, New York State has been engaged in reforestation projects on public and private land throughout the state and the effect has been profound. New York has gone from about 20 to 25 percent forest cover in 1890, to 62 percent forest cover in 2008.

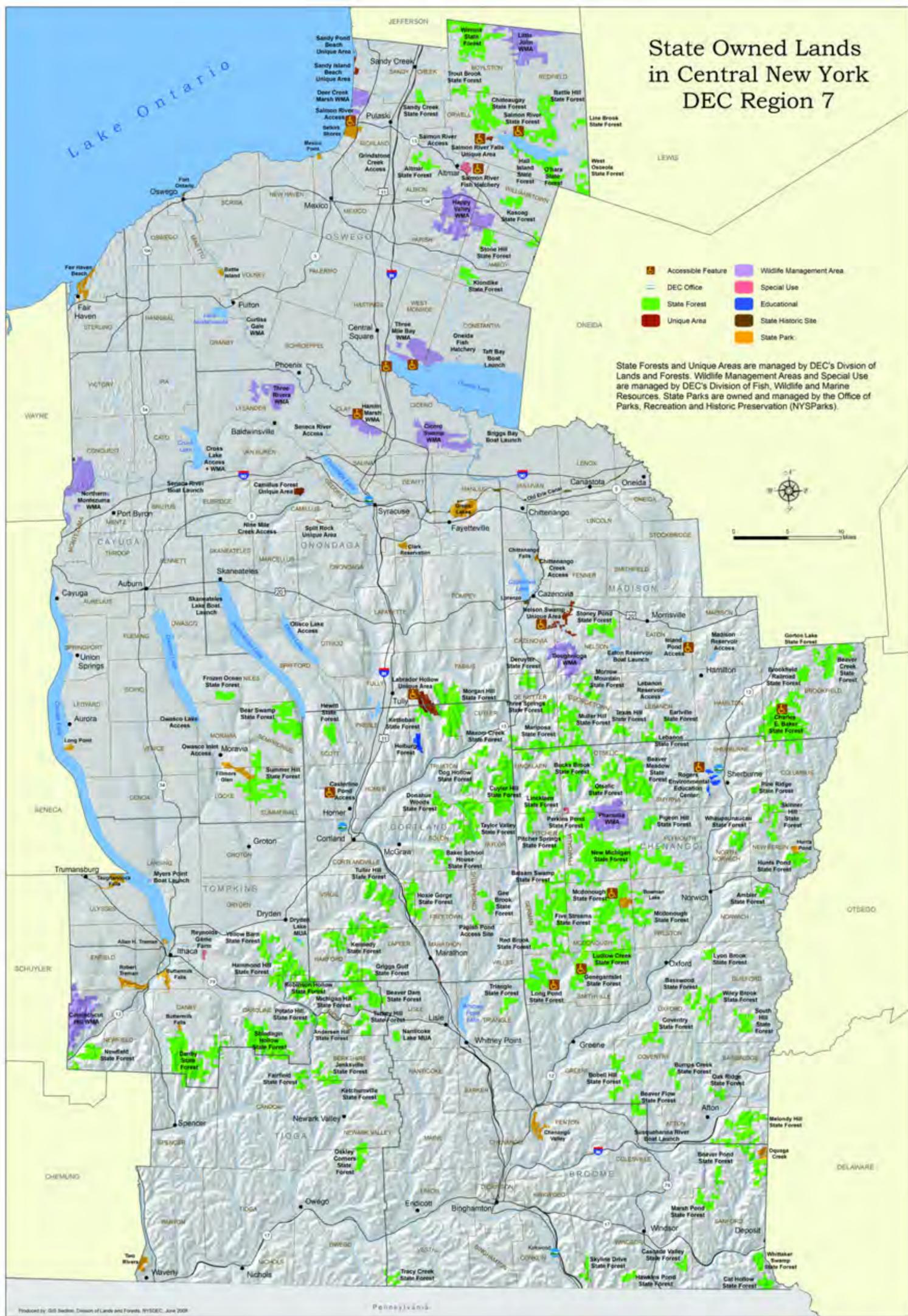


CCC African-American work crew



CCC work crew

State Owned Lands in Central New York DEC Region 7



Access road into Stony Pond State Forest



Hikers on Link Trail



Spreading Dogbane at Muller Hill State Forest



Road at Charles Baker State Forest



Christmas ferns at Oak Ridge State Forest



Madison County State Forest



Pink Lady Slipper

Visit DEC on the web at:
www.dec.ny.gov

Accessible fishing, boat launches, interpretive sites and hiking/horse trails are in abundance on Central New York State lands. These sites provide opportunities for persons of all abilities to enjoy outdoor activities. Of particular note is the wheelchair accessible trail at Nelson Swamp Unique Area in Madison County. See the Accessible Recreation page on DEC's website for more information.

- State Forest Regulations**
- Check the forest fire danger level before building a fire. During times of extreme fire danger, campfires are prohibited. If you build a fire, use wood from dead and downed trees only, not firewood from home as it may carry insects or diseases that could infest and kill forest trees. And never leave a fire unattended.
 - All motorized vehicles are restricted to access roads posted as motor vehicle trails. Off-road use of motorized vehicles, such as ATVs, trail bikes and four-wheel drives, is not allowed, except where specifically permitted by signs, posted notice, or DEC permit.
 - Camping for more than three nights or in a group of 10 or more requires a permit from a forest ranger. Camping is prohibited within 150 feet of water, roads or trails.
 - No permanent structures should be established, including tree stands or blinds.
 - Check for special hunting or trapping regulations before engaging in these activities on state forests. While hunting or trapping, all usual seasonal regulations must be observed. Improper camping, illegal off-road vehicle use, littering, indiscriminate shooting of trees, and illegal taking of wildlife are prohibited.