NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. | Department of Environmental Conservation

BLUE RIDGE WILDERNESS

Draft Amendment

to the

2006 Blue Ridge Wilderness Unit Management Plan

NYS DEC, REGION 5, DIVISION OF LANDS AND FORESTS

701 South Main St., Northville, NY 12134

r5.ump@dec.ny.gov

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Introduction

The Blue Ridge Wilderness Area (BRWA) is located in the towns of Indian Lake, Long Lake, Arietta, and Lake Pleasant and the Village of Speculator within Hamilton County. The unit is 48,242 acres in size. A Unit Management Plan (UMP) for this area was completed in 2006.

This UMP Amendment contains one proposal: Construction of the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail.

Management Proposal

Construction of the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail

Background:

During the planning efforts that led to the drafting and adoption of the Moose River Plains Wild Forest (MRPWF) UMP, it was realized that there is a great need for new, land-based snowmobile trail connections in the area. As a result, the 2011 MRPWF UMP put forth a conceptual proposal for a snowmobile trail leading eastward and north of MRPWF that would connect to the Sargent Ponds Wild Forest (SPWF) trail system—pending the adoption of a SPWF UMP. Ultimately, the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail will provide a land-based connection between the communities of Indian Lake, Raquette Lake, Inlet, and Long Lake. The proposed trail system will greatly reduce rider's risk associated with lake crossings and traveling along and crossing major roads.

Management Action:

This UMP amendment proposes construction of a portion of the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail and its maintenance as a Class II Community Connector Trail. Starting at the South Inlet Bridge, a route parallel to the south side of New York State Route 28 (NY 28) approximately four miles in length will continue eastward until reaching private property near Bear Brook.

West from the South Inlet Bridge, with South Inlet representing the border between BRWA and MRPWF, the proposed trail will connect with the Seventh-Eighth Lake Trail (Community Connector—Class II), as proposed by the 2011 MRPWF UMP. The implementation of the trail will be facilitated by construction of a new highway bridge across South Inlet, with a separate adjacent bridge constructed for snowmobile, bicycle, and pedestrian use. Both bridges are expected to be completed in 2021. As approved in the 2011 MRPWF UMP, parking will be improved at an existing pull off along NY 28 approximately 550 feet west of the South Inlet Bridge. At the eastern end of the trail, approximately 0.6 miles to the west of Bear Brook, the trail will cross on to private property currently owned by the Marion River Carry Railroad Company. The trail will continue through private property, cross NY 28, cross the Marion River using an existing, private motor vehicle bridge, and continue until reaching SPWF. Currently, no UMP has been adopted for SPWF, but ultimately the trail will traverse through SPWF and provide a connection to the Town of Long Lake. A formal agreement between the Department of Environmental Conservation (the Department) and the land owner will be made that will set guidance for the snowmobile trail across the parcel.

While it may seem more feasible to place the trail in the less restrictive lands of Golden Beach Campground and SPWF, as opposed to the periphery of BRWA, the hydrology and topography to the north of NY 28 make this an unviable option. Placing the trail to the north of NY 28 would require

extensive alterations to wetlands and a portion of it would routinely be flooded during high pool on Raquette Lake and during moderate rainfall events.

In accordance with the 2016 Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (APSLMP), the trail will remain within 500 feet of the public highway right-of-way of NY 28.

> ***WILDERNESS***
> ***Boundary structures and improvements and boundary marking***
> 1. *Where a wilderness boundary abuts a public highway, the Department of Environmental Conservation will be permitted, in conformity with a duly adopted unit management plan, to locate within 500 feet from a public highway right-of-way, on a site-specific basis, trailheads, parking areas, fishing and waterway access sites, picnic areas, ranger stations or other facilities for peripheral control of public use, and, in limited instances, snowmobile trails. (APSLMP 2016)*

The construction of the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail will further advance and support the plans envisioned by the 2006 Snowmobile Plan for the Adirondack Park (Snowmobile Plan) and the 2009 Management Guidance: Snowmobile Trail Siting, Construction, and Maintenance on Forest Preserve in the Adirondack Park(Management Guidance) in creating a system of snowmobile trails between communities within the Adirondack Park. Additionally, the trail will establish a portion of the Hamilton County Trail as proposed in the 2016 Great South Woods Complex Planning Report.

Projected Use and Potential Impacts:

Trail Construction and Post-Construction Monitoring:

Before trail construction, a detailed Snowmobile Trail Work Plan will be developed in accordance with the Management Guidance. Development of the work plan will occur in consultation with the Adirondack Park Agency (APA), as per the DEC/APA MOU, with notices published in the Environmental Notice Bulletin (ENB).

In compliance with the APSLMP, the trail will remain within 500 feet of the public highway right-of-way of NY 28. When feasible, the trail will make use of existing skid roads, trails, and natural openings. Wetlands permits will be obtained as necessary from APA prior to trail construction. All trail construction will conform to current snowmobile trail policy standards and guidelines. During construction, tree cutting, removal of other vegetation, bench cutting to address topographic challenges, rock removal, temporary disturbance to streams and wetlands, and minor noise impacts will occur. Potential environmental impacts will be minimized through the application of best management practices.

After construction is completed, the Department will monitor the condition of the trail to ensure that environmental degradation is minimized. Due to the combination of the close proximity of NY 28 and the lack of spur trails or other snowmobile trails that connect to the portion of the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail within BRWA, monitoring use impacts will not be difficult to accomplish. If degradation occurs, the Department will take appropriate action to mitigate and rectify the issues.

Projected Use:

Establishment and maintenance of suitable snowmobile trails linking communities is an important goal of the Department as set forth by the 2006 Snowmobile Plan and 2009 Management Guidance. Currently, BRWA does not have snowmobile trails due to its Wilderness classification, therefore the creation of the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail can be expected to increase use levels. The ability of snowmobile users to ride greater distances, reach new destinations, and access more of the Park-wide trail network will lead to increased use compared to current levels. Use of the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail is expected to be moderate to high after its construction, but mainly as a result of existing use in the surrounding area being redirected to the new trail. Use levels are expected to increase again once the land-based connection is completely established and continues through SPWF to the Town of Long Lake. A detailed examination and discussion of potential impacts associated with snowmobile use can be found in Appendix E of the 2006 Snowmobile Plan.

Snowmobile Trail Grooming:

Snowmobile trail grooming of the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail within BRWA will be accomplished under TRP agreements with the Town of Long Lake. The trail will be maintained and groomed as a Class II (Community Connector Trail) as set forth by the 2009 Management Guidance.

Impacts to Surrounding State and Private Lands:

Development of the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail has the potential to affect the impacts of snowmobiling on Uncas Road – Browns Tract Road, between Raquette Lake and Inlet, which is the southern boundary for Pigeon Lake Wilderness Area (PLWA). Most of the snowmobile trail is not a Department snowmobile trail, but is a town road and receives considerable use. While it may appear that the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail and Uncas Road – Browns Tract Road are parallel and redundant routes, they serve to connect different communities. The Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail is a completely land-based trail that will not provide access to the Raquette Lake waterbody. However, access to the lake can still be gained via use of the Tioga Point Trail, the Uncas Road—Browns Tract Road, and the access point along North Point Road. The Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail provides a connection between Indian Lake eastward to Raquette Lake and Inlet and northward to Long Lake, while Uncas Road – Browns Tract Road provides a connection from the Old Forge-Big Moose area to trails heading north. After the construction of the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail, use of Uncas Road – Browns Tract Road has the potential to increase as there would be a new opportunity to travel greater distances in the nearby vicinity. The potential increase in use along Uncas Road – Browns Tract Road may have impacts on the southern periphery of PLWA and the surrounding private land owners. Impacts of this use typically include those related to late-night and high-speed travel, as well as exhaust emissions. However, given that this route has been established and used for many years, potential impacts associated with increased use should be minimal.

The implementation of the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail, in its proposed layout, would require the use of private lands owned by Marion River Carry Railroad Company near the confluence of the Marion River, Bear Brook, and Utowana Lake. A formal agreement between the Department and the private landowner will provide use of the land for the trail. In addition to impacts associated with trail construction, maintenance, and use, this portion of the trail could potentially be impacted by late-night travel and exhaust emissions as well. The use of the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail as a whole could be impacted should the private landowner revoke the public's rights to the trail.

Safety Impacts:

Enhancing snowmobiling safety is an important focus of this UMP amendment and the 2009 Management Guidance, which precludes designation of State trails leading across lakes when alternative, land-based trails are available. Much effort was devoted to determining a feasible route for the proposed Community Connector Trail that will link the communities of Indian Lake, Raquette Lake, Inlet, and Long Lake without the need for snowmobilers to risk crossing the ice of Raquette Lake. However, the Department recognizes that frozen lakes can provide an enjoyable experience for snowmobilers, along with important access to other recreational activities such as ice fishing. Access points to Raquette Lake such as Tioga Point, Uncas Road – Browns Tract Road, and Sagamore Rd to NY 28 will remain open.

Economic Impacts:

Economic impacts have also been considered in the development of this UMP amendment. Many Adirondack businesses depend on winter visitors to supplement income generated during the warmer, peak-tourist season. The establishment of the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail, with adequate snowfall and cooperating weather and climate, will help boost the local business economies. By constructing the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail for multiple recreational uses and siting it almost entirely on State land, with links to other trails, the year-round recreational opportunities should result in additional economic benefit to the area. A detailed discussion of the economic benefits of snowmobile trails can be found in Appendix F of the 2006 Snowmobile Plan.

Snowmobile Trail Objectives:

- Provide a snowmobiling opportunity in the unit that is consistent with the APSLMP, the 2009 Management Guidance, other Department Policies and Guidelines, and that does not infringe on the resource protection objective of the unit.
- Provide a land-based snowmobiling opportunity through the unit which connects neighboring communities and further develop the Park-wide trail network.

Snowmobile Trail Management Actions:

- Construct the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail as proposed.
- Maintain and groom the Seventh Lake Mountain – Sargent Ponds Multiple-Use Trail as a Class II Community Connector Trail to accepted standards as set forth by the Department.
- Work with New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) to plan and construct the new snowmobile bridge across South Inlet.
- Work with NYSDOT to provide snowmobile parking and unloading to the west of South Inlet and to provide parking and canoe hand launching to the east of South Inlet.

Guiding Documents:

Statewide Context:

In 1985, the New York State Legislature required the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) to plan for and establish the means to fund a statewide snowmobile trail system. In 1989, the plan was completed and the Snowmobile Trail Development and Maintenance Fund was established. Today, many Department snowmobile trails are included in the OPRHP statewide snowmobile trail network. Trails designated by OPRHP as "corridor" or "secondary" trails are eligible for OPRHP funding to support maintenance and grooming, which is typically carried out by local governments and snowmobile clubs.

2006 Snowmobile Plan for the Adirondack Park:

The 2006 Adirondack Snowmobile Plan provided a concept for creating a system of snowmobile trails between communities in the Adirondack Park, thereby allowing communities to take advantage of the many economic benefits of snowmobiling. The Plan also identified key concepts that would ensure the creation of these trails would be a net benefit to the Forest Preserve. This includes shifting snowmobile trails to the periphery of the Forest Preserve and re-designating interior trails for non-motorized uses.

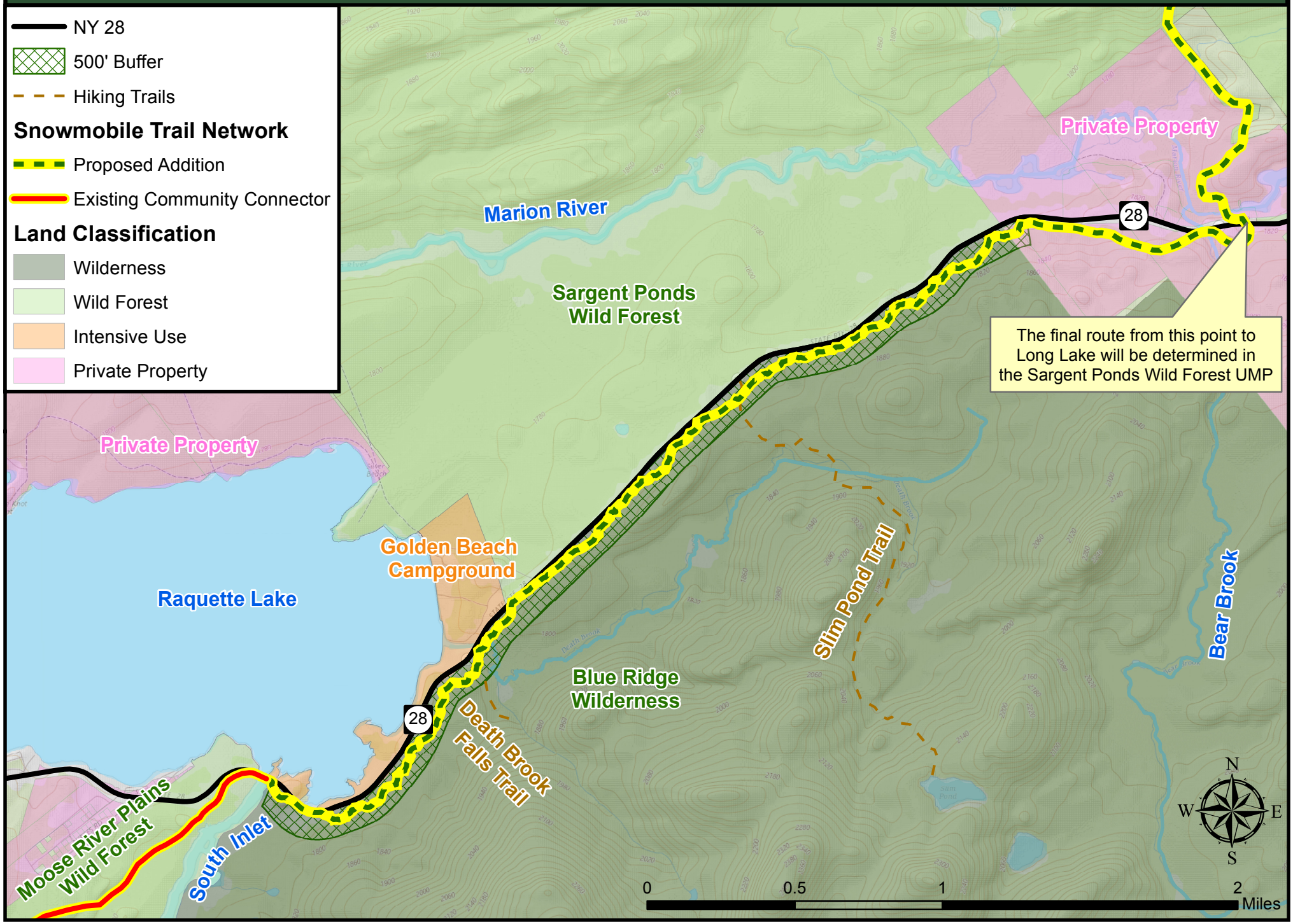
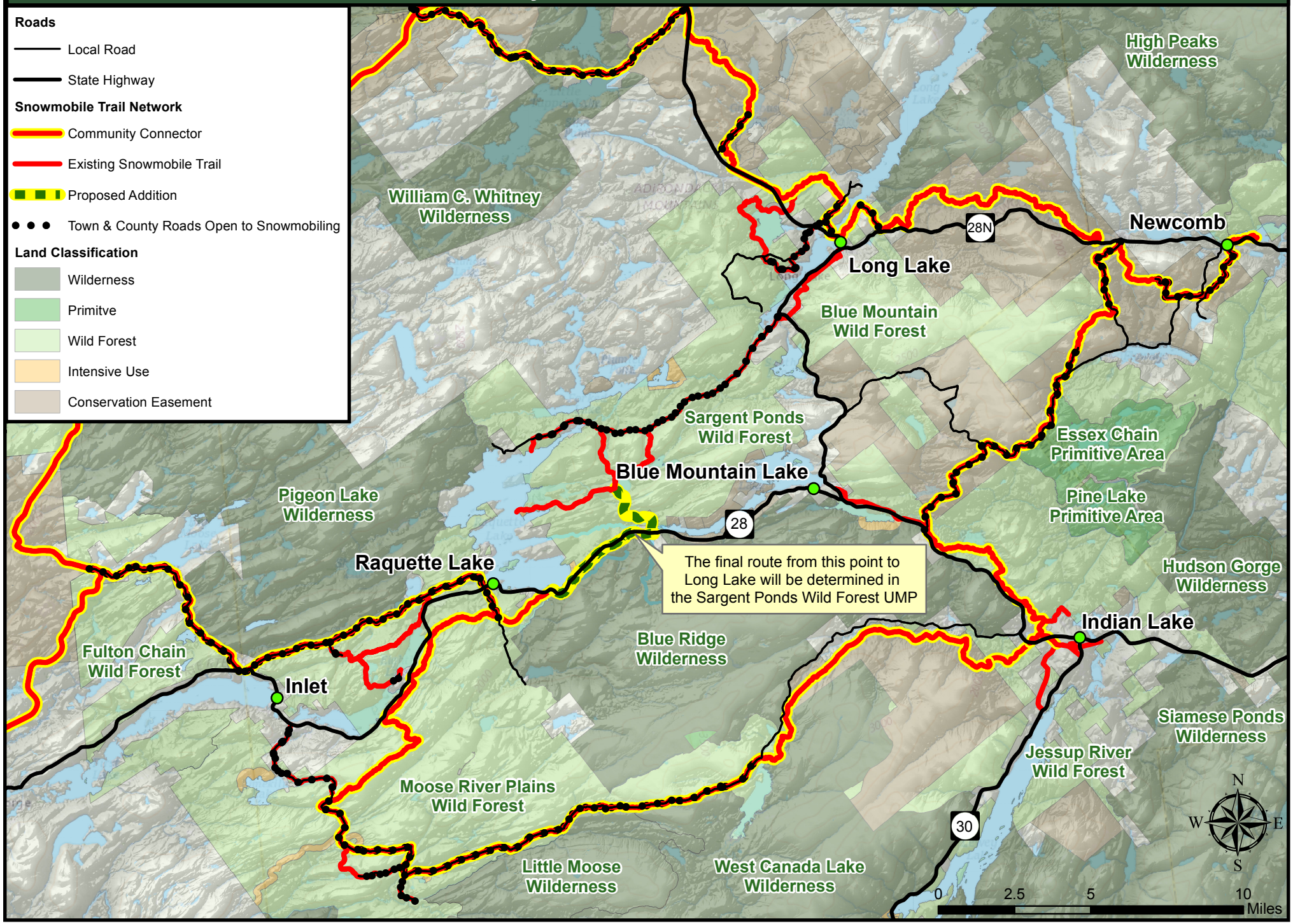
2009 Snowmobile Management Guidance

As a way of more specifically defining the broad recommendations of the 2006 Snowmobile Plan and clarifying several key provisions of the APSLMP, in 2009 the Department drafted the Management Guidance: Snowmobile Trail Siting, Construction and Maintenance on Forest Preserve Lands in the Adirondack Park. This Management Guidance was found to be compliant with the APSLMP by APA at that time.

The 2009 Management Guidance established a trail classification system, which described Class II (Community Connector Trails) as follows:

> Class II (Community Connector Trails) - Snowmobile trails or trail segments that serve to connect communities and provide the main travel routes for snowmobiles within a unit are Community Connector Trails. These trails are located in the periphery of wild forest or other Forest Preserve areas. They are always located as close as possible to motorized travel corridors, given safety, terrain and environmental constraints, and only rarely are any segments of them located further than one mile away from the nearest of these corridors. They are not duplicated or paralleled by other snowmobile trails. Some can be short, linking communities to longer Class II trails that connect two or more other communities.

Seventh Lake Mountain - Sargent Ponds Trail



Central Adirondack
Community Connector Snowmobile Trails