

FIVE PONDS WILDERNESS AREA UNIT MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT

High Falls Loop Trail

Proposal

To replace the western part of the High Falls Loop Foot Trail, known as the Leary Trail, with the roadbed of the former High Falls Truck Trail west of the Leary Trail and renamed the High Falls Trail.

Background

The former High Falls Truck Trail was constructed on an abandoned railroad bed of the Rich Lumber Company by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC's) for fire protection and administrative access. The Conservation Department maintained it for administrative motor vehicle use until 1972 when the original Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan prohibited the continued use of motor vehicles on it except for "cases of sudden, actual and ongoing emergencies." The area was classified in the State Land Master Plan as a wilderness area, so the purpose for limiting motor vehicle use was to minimize intrusions on the wilderness character of the area. It continued to be maintained as a trail until the original UMP for the area in 1987 called for closure of most of the trail. The Leary Trail became the main route to High Falls at that time primarily because it was shorter than the east end of the High Falls Loop (the Plains Trail).

At the western end of the High Falls Loop Foot Trail, the first ½ mile of the former High Falls Truck Trail is still being maintained as a road because, as the Wanakena Primitive Corridor, it must be available for this use by the Wanakena Water Company. It has been maintained as a foot trail a short distance further to the beginning of the former Leary Trail and again from the end of this trail to High Falls. The 5.75 mile segment between the ends of the former Leary Trail has not been maintained for many years, and is obstructed by three beaver ponds (see Map A).

The severe blowdown of July 15, 1995, has severely impacted the Leary Trail and to a lesser extent, the former High Falls Truck Trail. The effort needed to reopen the Leary has lead us to reconsider which route to High Falls would be the preferable long-term trail.

Public Guidelines

The Adirondack Storm Report prepared by the Department of Environmental Conservation in March 1996, contains several recommendations developed through cooperation between the agencies, organizations and people who care about the management and protection of the Adirondack Park. Those which relate directly to this proposal include:

- #24 Re-establish DEC trails blocked by the storm to allow for continued public use
- #25 In the Five Ponds Wilderness Area, reopen the trail network impacted by storm, constructing alternate routes or instituting trail closure where downed trees prevent re-

establishment of trails. The extent of a cleanup may be affected by ability to establish safe working conditions.

- #26 Use the unit management planning process, including full public participation, to decide on trail closing or major trail relocations.
- #27 Consider fire suppression and search and rescue needs in trail reopening decisions.
- #28 Make available appropriate motorized equipment for worker evacuation. Maintain the current policy of having vehicles available at trailheads or parking areas for evacuation purposes, and allowing evacuation equipment to be brought to the work site only after an injury has occurred.
- #29 Provide additional safety equipment, such as radios, and extra training for cleanup workers
- #30 Leave untouched any areas judged to be too hazardous to clean up without motorized logging equipment.

Rationale

The following factors contribute to the preference for the former truck trail route:

- 1) Base - The Leary Trail is located on soils and slopes unable to withstand sustained use as evidenced by 400 feet of mud flat and 374 feet of severe erosion. The former truck trail is hardened for all of this section except for the three beaver ponds which cross it. The first pond will need some minor drytread to protect it and to provide a relatively safe foot crossing along its 114 foot dam, while the others can be easily bypassed.
- 2) Blowdown Damage - The Leary Trail has heavy blowdown for nearly all of its 3.0 miles, while the former High Falls Truck Trail has suffered much less damage both as a percentage of the 5.25 miles and in total miles of heavy blowdown.
- 3) Public Safety - Although foot access to High Falls, the area most likely to need emergency assistance, is shorter along the Leary Trail, an even shorter route exists from the eastern part of the loop on the New Plains Trail, when boat or snowmobile access to Dead Creek is available. The proposed new route also provides emergency foot egress from the river.
- 4) Structures - While the Leary Trail needed three bridges for a total of 51 feet, the former truck trail will only need very minor drytread across the first beaver dam.
- 5) Planned Reopening - The relocation of the current Sand Pond Trail Bridge downstream to a better location for crossing the Oswegatchie River will require reopening a section of the former High Falls Truck Trail, so this relocation is complemented by the reopening of the entire trail.

- 6) Distance - Although the former truck trail is 2.75 miles longer than the Leary Trail, this additional distance is desirable because it would contribute to a 51 mile route around Cranberry Lake (see Map B) when the South Bay Trail is completed (page 43 of Five Ponds UMP attached). This distance is significant to some user groups, such as Boy Scouts, who regularly take trips of this approximate distance.
- 7) Camping - The availability of designated campsites 28, 29, 41 & 42 (see map A) for hiker use will be provided by the use of the former truck trail.

Constraints

Three Department policies will guide the development of the High Falls Trail as follows:

- 1) *Foot Trail Policy*. This policy states (p.8 Forest Preserve Policy Manual, Foot Trails)) that “in wilderness areas, the level of maintenance will be minimal and carried out so as not to impair or detract from the wilderness character of the area.” Also, the following specific requirements are stipulated:
 - a. The removal of blowdown will be only to the extent that it can be stepped over (this stipulation must be disregarded in the initial blowdown removal effort to allow for the possible evacuation (motorized or otherwise) of injured workers in conformance with Recommendation # 28). It will be implemented in future years, however, to comply with this policy and to provide the indirect user control mandated in the unit management plan (p. 39 of Five Ponds UMP attached) of anticipated illegal bicycle use of this route.
 - b. The clearing of brush will be only to the extent that the track of the foot trail is kept discernable (this stipulation will also be disregarded in the initial blowdown removal effort to allow for possible evacuation (motorized or otherwise) of injured workers in conformance with Recommendation # 28).
 - c. Total cleared width should not exceed 6 feet and should be contained in one wheel track. In future years, the trail will be allowed to brush in to be in conformity with current policy for wilderness foot trails.
- 2) *Motorized Vehicle/Equipment Policy*. The reclamation of this trail will require the use of chainsaws and, possibly, the use of ATV’s and/or motorboats for a quick means of egress in the event of an accident. These uses will be in conformance with Commissioner’s Directive 8411.3.
- 3) *Cutting and Removal of Trees*. The cutting of live trees must conform with the requirements of Lands & Forests policy statement LF-91-2.

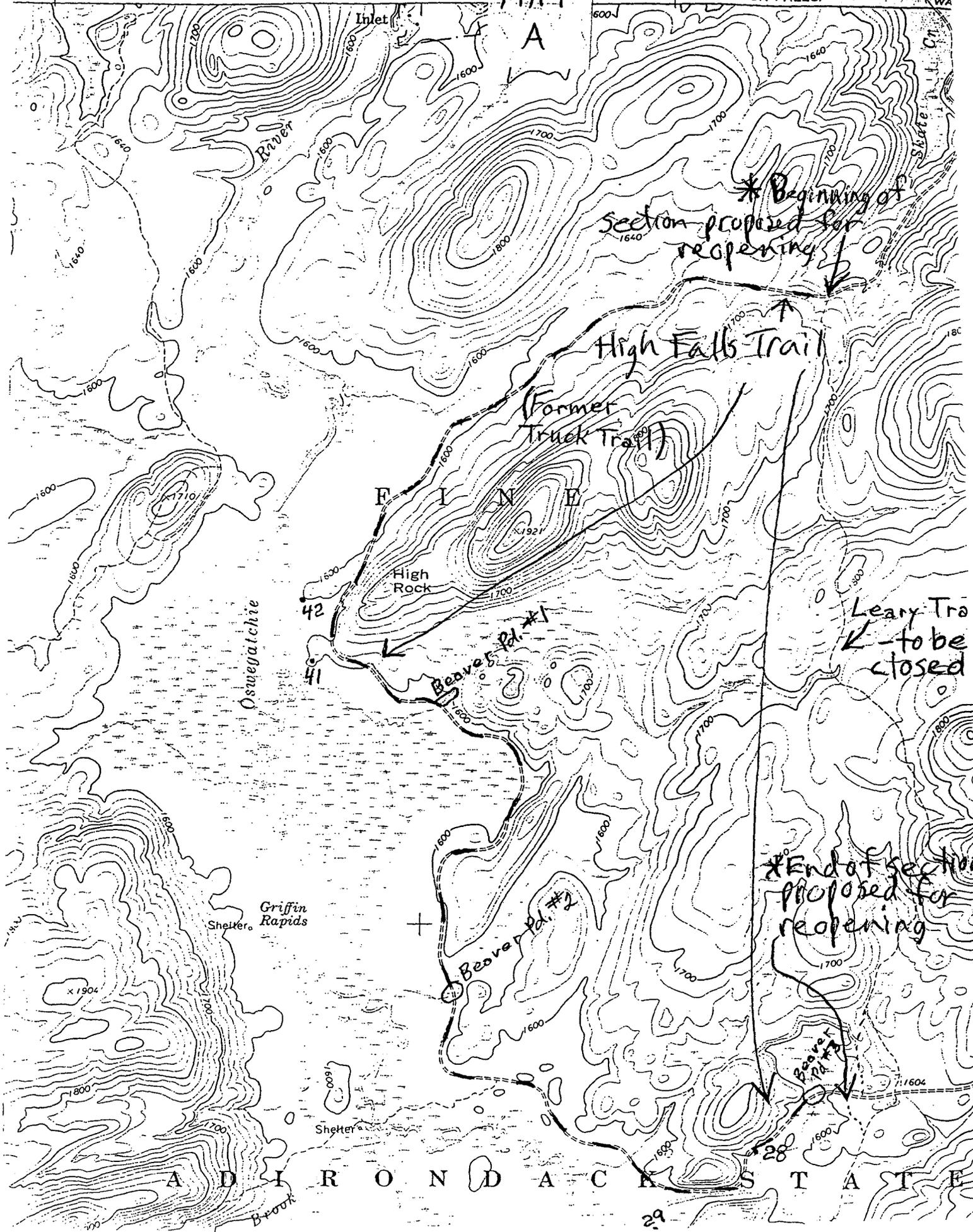
Trail Completion

Barricade - Upon completion of the High Falls Trail, the boulder barricade at the end of the Wanakena Primitive Corridor (which was removed for a rescue attempt after the July 15 blowdown) must be replaced to conform with the State Land Master Plan.

502

503 57'30"

MAP
A



ADIRONDACK STATE

THE E REGION

MAP B

Begin

- USGS Topographic Maps
- 1 Oswegatchie 7.5'
 - 2 Newton Falls 7.5'
 - 3 Cranberry Lake 7.5'
 - 4 Piercefield 7.5'x15' or Tupper Lake 15'
 - 5 Oswegatchie SE 7.5'
 - 6 Five Ponds 7.5'
 - 7 Wolf Mountain 7.5'
 - 8 Little Tupper Lake 7.5'x15' or Tupper Lake 15'
- 0 .5 1
MILES

