

An aerial photograph of a large, winding lake system, likely in the Great South Woods area. The water is a deep blue, and the surrounding forest is in full autumn foliage, with trees displaying vibrant shades of orange, yellow, and red. The landscape is hilly and densely wooded, with several small islands and peninsulas extending into the water. The sky is clear and blue.

# Great South Woods Complex Planning

## **Strategy & Recommendations**

May 2016



# GREAT SOUTH WOODS COMPLEX PLANNING

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## STRATEGY & RECOMMENDATIONS



State University of New York  
College of Environmental Science and Forestry

Prepared by the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry project team, with input and guidance provided by Core Team representatives, including NYS DEC Lands & Forests, Adirondack Park Agency and Hamilton County Board of Supervisors.

May 2016

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The State of New York’s most important, long-term land acquisition goals in the Adirondack Park have largely been achieved, yet the development of outdoor recreational opportunities within the Park that connect State lands with local communities still requires much attention. A new approach was undertaken to conduct recreation planning at a landscape scale, beyond the boundaries of individual management units, and to engage communities and stakeholders in the design of a destination-based system of trails and infrastructure that could stimulate economic activity while protecting the Adirondack Park’s ecosystems and wild character.

The Great South Woods project is the first of a series of planning exercises to be conducted on a much larger scale than that of individual State land management units. The Great South Woods (GSW) planning area (or Complex) is roughly one-third of the Adirondack Park, covering two million acres and 20 Forest Preserve management units. The process used to develop the GSW Strategy and Recommendations emphasized **public participation** and prioritized **local knowledge and community-generated ideas** to inform recreation planning at multiple scales. The GSW process was designed and led by SUNY ESF in collaboration with representatives from DEC Lands & Forests, the Adirondack Park Agency and the Hamilton County Board of Supervisors.

Development of the GSW Strategy was guided by the core themes of **Access, Connectivity, High-Quality Recreation Destinations, Public-Private Partnerships and Ecosystem Stewardship**. The Strategy is based on an 18-month participatory process that included over 300 individuals that attended public workshops and meetings held across the GSW planning area. By engaging local residents, town leaders, recreation experts, DEC Forest Rangers, agency planners, and representatives from several NGOs, the GSW process generated a **comprehensive GIS (digital map) inventory** of existing and proposed land and water trails, recreation assets such as campgrounds and boat launches, and points of natural, cultural and historical interest. All of this information was used to develop the **GSW Recommendations** central to this Strategy.

The GSW Recommendations include a detailed **Maps & Narratives** section (pages R-1 to R-59) that describe Local and Regional Networks of trails with more than 50 conceptual designs for recreation “features” that seek to meet the multiple objectives of the GSW effort. Ecosystem Stewardship recommendations in the GSW Strategy address long-standing issues such as protection of ‘remote core’ wilderness, as well as emerging issues, such as invasive species.

All components of the GSW Recommendations and Strategy are conceptual and are based on a landscape-scale approach to the region, meaning that routes and locations depicted on maps are approximate. The GSW Strategy is intended for planning purposes only, is subject to revision, and does not necessarily represent current or future planning priorities for DEC or APA.

Next steps will require further engagement with communities to identify priority projects and engage in further design work as well as internal consideration of the GSW Recommendations by DEC and APA. This report also outlines lessons learned from the GSW process, and discusses potential implications of the GSW Strategy for the DEC UMP process, and State Land Master Plan revisions. The GSW Recommendations described in the Maps and Narratives section (R-1 to R-59) may also be interactively explored at the GSW web map online here:

<http://greatsouthwoods.adirondackatlas.org>

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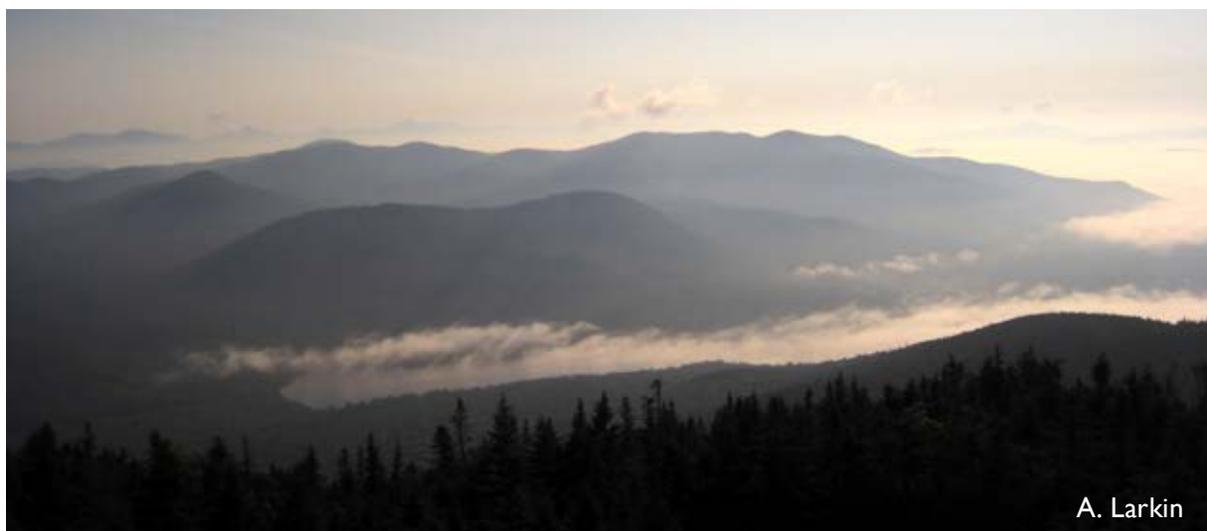
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## GLOSSARY OF MAJOR CONCEPTS

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### ADIRONDACK PARK WILD LANDS COMPLEX

A mixture of public and private lands that includes multiple Forest Preserve units classified as wilderness, wild forest and primitive areas, as well as working forests with DEC conservation easements and other private lands, including adjacent hamlets and villages. By ‘stitching together’ adjacent units of the Forest Preserve, it is possible to conceptualize extensive trail networks for wild lands complexes, by creating land and water routes with connections to lodging, outfitters and other amenities in local communities. By consolidating Forest Preserve units, conservation easements and other private lands, landscape planning can occur at scales relevant for stewardship of ecosystems, natural resources and sensitive species and habitats.

### DESTINATION-BASED RECREATION

National and international tourists are increasingly seeking vacation destinations that offer unique and high-quality recreation opportunities. Design of destination-based recreation assets, such as mountain bike trails, should prioritize quality over quantity to attract visitors. Destinations also connect recreation activities in natural settings with amenities and activities in nearby communities, and typically offer many different options to encourage return visitation.

### TRAIL NETWORK

A group of interconnected trails that enable multiple routes of travel between origins and destinations, which feature junctions (intersections between two routes) and nodes or ‘hubs’ (areas where three or more routes create an interchange), that overall enhances connectivity and creates a variety of options for moving recreation users around a region. Portions of the network can be highlighted at different geographic scales, from local trail systems surrounding a town, to the larger-scale routes that connect the local trails together and provide region-wide travel routes. Networked trails contrast with spur or ‘dead-end’ trails that require users to retrace their steps.

### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

An approach that relies on active engagement with members of the public, including representatives of stakeholder groups, to guide and inform planning and decision-making at multiple stages of a process. Benefits of public participation include: increased information and understanding, improved long-term support for the decision or management practice, improved management practices, improved quality of the decision, reduced conflict, citizen empowerment, enhanced stewardship, and providing a public space for deliberation and opinion formation.



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## GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND TERMS

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**AATV:** Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages

**ACTLS Project:** Adirondack Community-based Trail and Lodging System Project

**APA:** Adirondack Park Agency

**NYSDEC or DEC:** New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

**NCNST:** North Country National Scenic Trail

**NPT:** Northville-Placid Trail

**SUNY-ESF:** State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry

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**Adirondack Regional Geographic Information System (ARGIS):** A web-mapping portal ([www.argis.org](http://www.argis.org)) that serves regional data in support of DEC unit management planning. ARGIS contains ecosystem, biodiversity, and natural resource inventories, as well as State land classifications and other data, in partnership with DEC, APA, The Nature Conservancy, The Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program, and NY Natural Heritage, among others.

**Back-country:** Remote or core interior areas, at significant distance from human settlements and areas where motorized use is allowed, which typically pose logistical challenges to access.

**'Construction Required':** Trail segments proposed as components of the GSW Regional and Local Networks. These sections do not currently exist and will require field-validation and other suitability assessments by DEC authorities prior to implementation.

**DEC Existing Assets:** All of the known recreation infrastructure (man-made) located on Forest Preserve and DEC easement lands, including trails, unpaved roads, boat launches, campgrounds, parking areas, trail registers, primitive campsites, fire towers, scenic vistas, etc. The GSW process added significantly to DEC's inventory of existing assets.

**Easement:** A legal agreement between a landowner and another party, such as a government agency or nonprofit organization, that involves the sale or forfeiture of certain rights associated with the parcel. Easements provide a mechanism for public authorities to influence land use and access permissions on private lands without requiring fee ownership. Currently NYS DEC owns conservation easements, some of which include recreation access rights, on over 800,000 acres of private land across the Adirondack Park.

**Ecosystem Stewardship:** The science and practice of natural resource management to promote ecological integrity and human well-being in a world increasingly defined by rapid change and uncertainty. The ecosystem stewardship framework recognizes the fundamental dependence of human well-being on functioning ecosystems and biodiversity; and embraces landscape-scale, data-driven and participatory approaches to planning and decision-making.

**Front-country:** Areas near human settlements and transportation corridors, accessed easily by day users and a wider range of recreationists, including motorized modes of travel.

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**Geographic Information System (GIS):** A software application that uses geographic data to create maps and conduct spatial analysis, GIS has become an essential tool in land use planning as well as conservation science. Online GIS applications are commonly known as ‘web maps’.

**GSW Feature:** A discrete component of the GSW Network (see below) that is recommended as part of the GSW Strategy (see R-1 to R-59); a trail that may be described as a loop/circuit, nested loop, connector or spur (see R-16 for a glossary of feature types). Most contain trail segments that require construction to complete the feature from the existing trail network.

**GSW Network:** A functional network for moving recreation users around the GSW region that incorporates all GSW Features recommended in the Strategy. The conceptual GSW Network is presented at two scales, with the Local Network nested within the Regional network, and consists of existing and proposed, or 'construction required' segments (See Trail Network in Glossary of Main Concepts Section).

**Multi-modal:** A trail designed to incorporate different modes of recreation along different sections, such as hiking a segment, biking a segment, and paddling a third segment.

**Unit Management Plan (UMP):** A document that provides an assessment of the permissible public uses, existing natural resources, and the ability of those resources to support use, for a defined area (Unit) of the NYS Forest Preserve. Twelve (12) management units are located entirely, and 8 additional units partially, within the GSW Complex (Table 2; Figure 2).



A. Larkin

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## INTRODUCTION

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### PRINCIPLES OF COMPLEX PLANNING

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The Great South Woods represents a new model and opportunity for recreation planning that:

- **Facilitates a high degree of public engagement to gather local knowledge and community ideas to inform planning, design, and implementation steps.**
- **Expands the geographic scope of planning efforts from small units to larger landscapes, allowing for a more holistic perspective and the design of high-quality recreation infrastructure that meets multiple objectives.**

### PROJECT JUSTIFICATION AND OBJECTIVES

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New York State's most important, long-term land acquisition objectives for the Adirondack Park – once considered by many to be unrealistically optimistic – have largely been achieved. However, the development of outdoor recreational opportunities within the Park requires additional attention. A creative, new approach was needed to address this situation: one that integrates long-term planning (responsibility of the Adirondack Park Agency) and recreation management on Forest Preserve and conservation easement lands (responsibility of NYS DEC) on a broader landscape level, in order to benefit both the economy of Adirondack communities as well as wild land protections required by longstanding law and public demand.

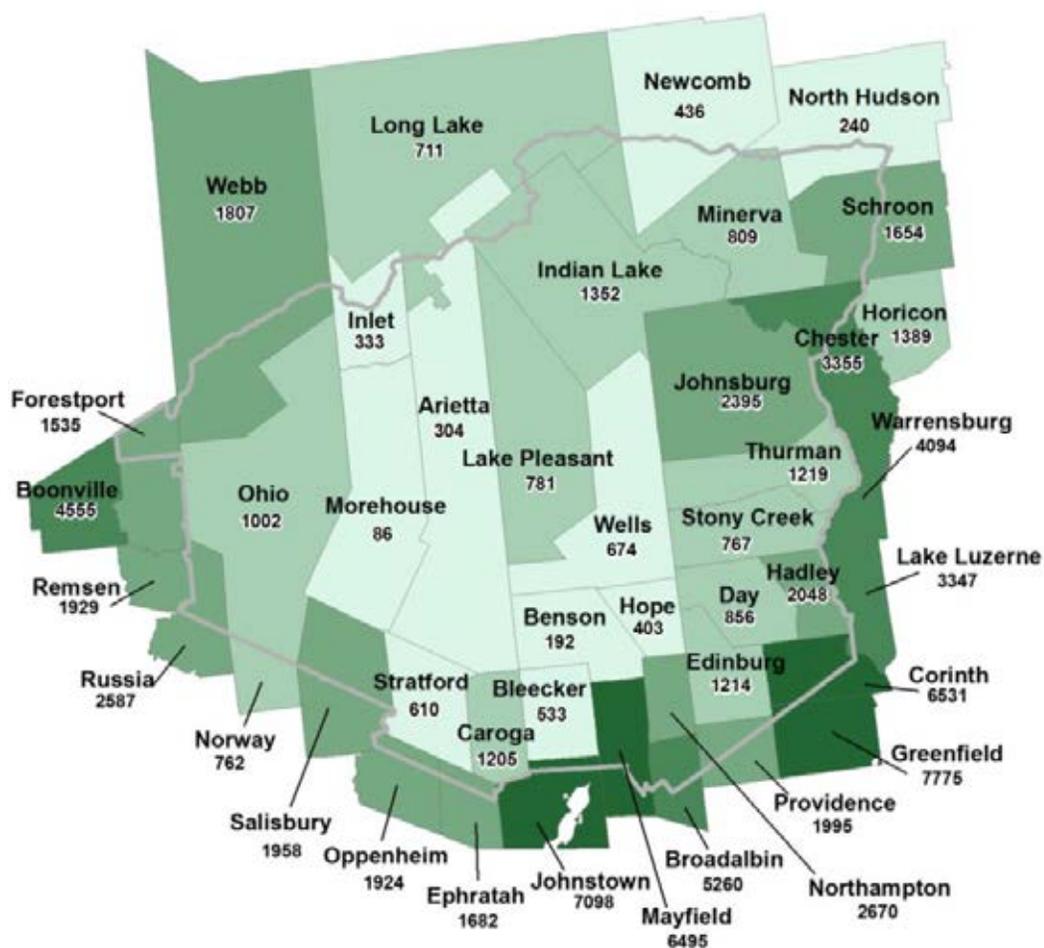
The Great South Woods project is intended to be the first of five such planning exercises to be conducted on a much larger scale than individual State land units. With the GSW project serving as a model, and after DEC has evaluated the process and outputs of this Strategy, subsequent planning efforts may focus on the remaining complexes in the Adirondack Park: Battleground Lakes, Cloudsplitter Summits, Northern River Highlands and Oswegatchie-Black Waters (Figure 2). The Great South Woods (GSW) is by far the largest of the proposed planning complexes, with the highest percentage of State land (2 of every 3 acres), the most towns and hamlets, and nearly 900 miles of existing trails (Table 1, Figure 1). Despite the large trail mileage, the GSW has more State land per trail mile than any other complex and has significant untapped potential for multiple modes of recreation and ecotourism that link communities and State lands. The GSW region is managed as 20 separate units, each with its own unit management plan (UMP), including 7 UMPs which have not yet been completed (Table 2), which can limit the capacity to design and implement larger-scale projects, such as long-distance trails. The GSW landscape is largely forested (86%), with approximately 6% wetlands and 5% open water (Appendix I). These conditions identified the GSW as an ideal candidate for complex planning.

Through focused collaboration with various stakeholders and the employment of professional expertise in outdoor recreation and geographic information systems (GIS), the GSW Strategy

sought to identify opportunities to develop community-based trail and lodging systems that can help revitalize communities as gateways, waypoints and destinations for outdoor recreation. An outline of steps necessary for development and stewardship of these opportunities is provided.

**Table 1: Description of DEC proposed planning complexes for the Adirondack Park. Towns may be counted in more than one complex.**

Planning Complex	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	% Wilderness	% State Land	% Easement	Trail Miles	Towns
Cloudsplitter Summits	2,802	51	60	6	468	18
Battleground Lakes	3,259	6	35	9	244	31
Great South Woods	8,127	26	64	7	885	43
Northern River Highlands	5,465	0	27	28	247	36
Oswegatchie-Black Waters	3,905	26	55	15	509	19



**Figure 1: GSW resident populations (2010). Totals are reported for towns on the GSW boundary, although only a portion of those populations reside in the GSW planning region.**

**Table 2: DEC management units in the GSW complex. The following management units contain <1% State Land area inside the GSW: Hammond Pond, Lake George, and Sargent Ponds. The '--' indicates the lack of a final UMP.**

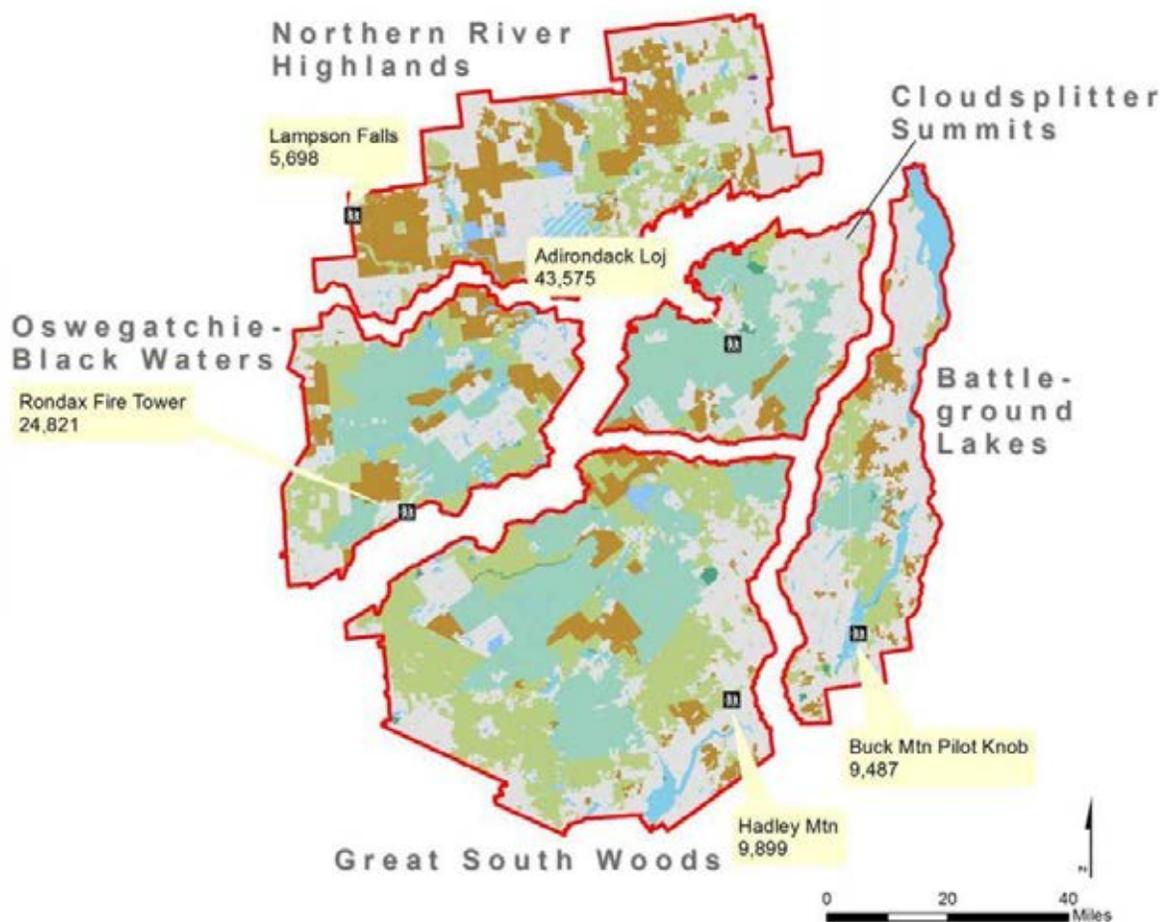
Unit Name	UMP Year	State Land Area in GSW (acres)	% State Land Area in GSW	Existing Trails in GSW (mi)
Black River	1996	127,698	100	158
Blue Mountain	1995	31,366	97	35
Blue Ridge	2006	46,931	100	37
Essex Chain Lakes Complex	2016	18,805	100	39
Ferris Lake	--	146,232	100	131
Fulton Chain	1990	3,743	24	3
Hoffman Notch	2012	38,141	100	23
Hudson Gorge	--	23,725	100	21
Jessup River	2006	49,022	100	56
Little Moose	--	12,258	100	8
Moose River Plains	2011	58,052	86	139
Shaker Mountain	2006	41,726	100	29
Siamese Ponds	2005	112,839	100	92
Silver Lake	2006	107,374	100	51
Vanderwhacker Mtn.	2005	76,268	86	58
West Canada Lake	--	172,193	100	103
Wilcox Lake	--	127,500	100	109

The complex planning process is expected to provide a new opportunity to involve various stakeholders, including Adirondack communities, in planning for the development of recreation within the Adirondack Park. It is also expected to contribute to building cooperation between these various stakeholders as scenarios are explored in which the value of recreation is better captured, while protection of the Park's natural resources for future generations is also enhanced.

The GSW project's main objectives were to identify opportunities and feasible means to:

- **Optimize the potential of the Great South Woods to provide a wide spectrum of outdoor recreational activities available on Forest Preserve, conservation easement, municipal and private lands across the region;**
- **Establish a new community-based land-and-water trail and lodging system that would strengthen community linkages to each other and to nearby Forest Preserve and conservation easement lands;**

- Better develop front-country areas of State lands for improved access and greater enjoyment of diverse – including motorized – recreational activities;
- Improve protection of back-country areas of State lands in their primitive, wild condition while improving their trail systems for heightened enjoyment of self-powered recreation.



**Figure 2: DEC proposed boundaries for Adirondack Park complexes, for large-scale planning efforts. The map identifies the most visited trailhead in each complex, providing the total count of visitors per trailhead from 2012. Trail use estimates are provided by the Adirondack Trail Registry Database (ADK-TReD), developed by ESF and NYS DEC.**

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## WORKING ASSUMPTIONS OF THE GSW EFFORT

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All efforts to achieve the GSW objectives will necessarily satisfy and support the long-standing ecosystem stewardship mandates of the Adirondack Park. Constitutional protections of the Forest Preserve as ‘forever wild’ forest land, as well as the mandate of the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (SLMP) to guide the preservation, management and use of all Forest Preserve lands according to their classification, remain fully in effect. These statutory requirements are recognized as remaining critical to long-term, successful achievement of the project’s objectives. To this end, the GSW Strategy follows principles of ecosystem stewardship – which recognizes the fundamental dependence of human well-being on functioning ecosystems – to address the balance between increased recreational access and maintenance of ecological integrity.

All components of the GSW Recommendations and Strategy are conceptual, and derived from a landscape-scale approach to the complex and surrounding region as a whole. As such, all aspects of this Strategy are presented and intended for planning purposes only, are subject to revision, and do not necessarily represent current or future planning priorities of the DEC, APA or local communities. The recommended and proposed features depicted as products of the GSW Complex Planning Project are based on feedback received at public workshops and expert input, and are best viewed in the interactive web map included as a deliverable of this project.

This Strategy and its Recommendations serve as a guide, or a point of departure based on our process thus far. Any further development efforts and implementation decisions will be made by the appropriate authorities, including DEC and APA, in partnership with local governments, community leaders and various stakeholder organizations. Although considerable efforts have been made to validate and verify existing features, the routes and other recreational features portrayed in the GSW Recommendations (pages R-1 through R-59) are spatially approximate and have not been thoroughly field-validated. As such, careful consideration of on-the-ground conditions through field-validation will be critical in future planning, design and implementation. This validation will typically occur through the DEC Unit Management Planning (UMP) process (See [Linking GSW Planning to Ongoing UMP Efforts Section](#)). In addition, the DEC will assess all GSW Recommendations for universal access opportunities, and will make it a top agency priority to address landowner concerns regarding recreation opportunities on private land – which may be included in GSW Recommendations due to the project’s large-scale approach. Finally, the GSW Complex Planning Project is an experimental model, and will be more fully evaluated by ESF and its partners prior to its future implementation in other planning complexes.

Any steps to improve outdoor recreation opportunities by constructing new infrastructure or improving existing assets should include careful monitoring and management of recreation usage and its impacts on adjacent natural and built environments. Providing destination-caliber recreational experiences while protecting environmental quality and fostering economic growth in local communities will require additional investments and mechanisms for implementation from State, local, and private organizations, as well as close cooperation among these entities.

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## CORE THEMES OF GSW STRATEGY

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The GSW Strategy is organized around five Core Themes that encompass the multiple objectives, desired outcomes and legal mandates involved in this complex planning effort (Figure 3). All five themes are related and may be thought of as a hierarchy of objectives, in which *Access* and *Connectivity* are improved via *Public-Private Partnerships* that design, create and promote *High Quality Recreation Destinations*. All of these goals rely upon *Ecosystem Stewardship* as the fundamental criteria for all recreation management and State land planning in the Adirondack Park (Figure 3). The Core Themes of the GSW Strategy are described in detail in the following section.



**Figure 3: Core Themes of the GSW Strategy**

### ACCESS

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**The GSW Strategy seeks to both increase and diversify recreation access in one of the least accessible landscapes of the Adirondack Park (and the US Northeast).**

Increasing access to the lands and waters of the Forest Preserve across the GSW means creating more miles of trails and additional forms of infrastructure, such as (but not limited to) lean-tos, campsites and boat launches, at key strategic locations that improve their usefulness for a variety of recreationists. It also means leveraging existing infrastructure to its maximum utility and identifying opportunities and needs for improving current assets to support increased or different patterns of recreation usage, using a landscape-scale approach that prioritizes efficient design.

A greater diversity of recreation opportunities, natural settings and experiences is equally vital to the goal of improving access in the GSW Complex. To create spaces for many types of recreation and for recreation users with a range of physical capabilities and desired experiences, the GSW Strategy considers both self-powered and motorized forms of recreation, and specifically encourages the identification of trail opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Although the diversification of access can be achieved in part by creating multiple-use trails, such multi-purpose infrastructure often does not provide the high-quality recreation experiences that are sought as a core objective of the GSW Strategy (as described below).

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## CONNECTIVITY

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**The GSW Strategy seeks to improve trail-based connections among Adirondack communities and with points of natural and cultural interest in the Forest Preserve.**

In the GSW Strategy, improving connectivity goes directly hand-in-hand with improving and diversifying recreation access. A critical step in achieving this goal requires developing a more comprehensive inventory of the features on the landscape that should be connected together via one or more types of recreation activity. In this project, ESF and its partners facilitated a public, community-based participatory process to gather and validate information on important features, and transferred these data to computer-based maps that enable the visualization of an entire landscape and its overlapping natural (e.g., terrain, ecosystem types, natural resources) and societal (e.g., political and administrative boundaries, land ownership) features.

By linking together communities and adjacent points of interest along the road system (e.g., lodging, restaurants, recreation outfitters) with recreation destinations of natural and cultural interest in the Forest Preserve (e.g., summits, scenic vistas, waterfalls, fishing and hunting areas), the GSW Strategy seeks to build a **functional network for moving recreation users around the region**. This network would allow visitors and local residents to access trailheads and other entry points directly from locations within the communities. As envisioned, such a network would provide a number of other advantages, including: increased visitation of local communities and patronage of tourism-related businesses, reduced demand for roadside parking and camping adjacent to trailheads, and closer community engagement in project design and implementation.

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## PUBLIC – PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

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**To support implementation, the GSW Strategy emphasizes the necessity to develop public-private partnerships that can mobilize the funds, expertise, labor, planning processes and stakeholder engagement needed to make projects a reality.**

The GSW Strategy recognizes that current State funding levels will not support development of the new recreation infrastructure or expanded ecosystem stewardship efforts recommended here. Building on recent successes with public-private cooperation to maintain recreation access, such as in the Moose River Plains Wild Forest with the Towns of Inlet and Indian Lake, the GSW process has emphasized from the start that partnerships among communities, private sector and agency officials will be fundamental to design and implementation of the GSW Recommendations. In several cases, access through private lands is often required in order to develop linkages within communities. Future design and implementation of the GSW Recommendations will directly hinge on partnerships that can successfully engage landowners and local businesses. Local communities stand to gain from such partnerships by influencing the design of recreation assets to support local visitor-dependent businesses and events. The GSW Strategy does not directly address local Town planning, but has been developed to create synergies with existing initiatives and local partnerships to support economic development.

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## HIGH QUALITY RECREATION DESTINATIONS

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**To draw visitors to the Great South Woods for recreation and tourism, the GSW Strategy prioritizes the establishment of trails and other infrastructure that create high-quality and unique recreation experiences.**

Creating a functional network of trails for moving recreation users around the region, across the Forest Preserve and among communities and tourism, was our primary and large-scale approach for enhancing the GSW as a recreation destination. We aimed to connect existing 'dead end' trail segments, and design new access routes, to form a network of opportunities. Such a network affords a broad spectrum of users a near-infinite amount of desirable experiences, tailored by the user's specific needs such as group size, level of skill / exertion, or mode of use, at a specific point in time. Not all opportunities would be desirable to all users, but such a network would demonstrate the potential to support and create a variety of experiences, and to allow communities and agency officials to customize the types of opportunities that are offered nearby.

Although many ideas are proposed here, the GSW Strategy prioritizes the *quality* of the destination over the *quantity* of destinations. A trail network on its own is not necessarily a destination, but requires careful design to attract users interested in high quality recreation opportunities. Networks can serve as the 'skeleton' upon which customized infrastructure can be designed, such as technical single-track trails over varying terrain for mountain biking, or by simply moving hiking trails off of roads. Designing a quality destination often involves clear trade-offs with compatibility or multiple-use infrastructure. In lieu of multiple-use routes, we emphasize multi-modal (or hybrid) opportunities, where different segments or routes are designed to support different modes of use, such as a 'pack-and-paddle' or 'hike and bike' destination. Overall, designing high quality recreation destinations requires a strong understanding of the expectations and desires of recreationists, as well as the opportunities provided by the natural environment, land use regulations and local community engagement.

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## ECOSYSTEM STEWARDSHIP

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**The GSW Strategy recognizes that healthy and functioning ecosystems are the fundamental basis of human well-being, including all recreation activities, and that careful stewardship of Adirondack ecosystems is both a legal and ethical responsibility.**

Ecosystem stewardship is fundamental to the design, implementation, and management of all recreation development throughout the Adirondack Park. The GSW Strategy embraces the existing legal mandates established by New York State's Constitution and the SLMP, and is further guided by ESF's mission to advance the stewardship of natural and designed environments. The GSW Strategy puts forward guidelines for ecosystem stewardship at both local and regional scales, to address both long-standing issues, such as back-country protection, as well as emerging threats, such as invasive species. Many of these guidelines, such as: considering impacts on wetlands, shorelines and sensitive habitats; careful monitoring of

recreation use; deployment of new informational and educational signage; limiting new trail construction in remote core backcountry areas; and proactively managing for invasive species; are most relevant to planners and should be considered during design and implementation stages.

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## OVERVIEW OF PROJECT METHODS

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The role of SUNY ESF as the GSW project lead was to design and implement a participatory planning process, create an expanded and improved GIS inventory for the GSW Complex, and work with the GSW Core Team to develop the GSW Strategy. [Appendix II](#) provides details on the GSW process, its participants, and a discussion of outputs and outcomes of the GSW effort.

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## PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PROCESS

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In order to engage in participatory, collaborative planning with the public and among the GSW project partners, ESF designed and facilitated multiple rounds of public meetings and workshops, beginning with a project Kickoff Meeting in December 2014, followed by a series of five Local Knowledge Workshops (LKW) in January-March 2015. ESF digitized the map data collected during LKW, and worked with DEC regional staff from April through June 2015 on data validation. ESF used the validated data to generate preliminary recommendations, which were reviewed by project partners during Joint Planning Sessions in May and September 2015, and presented during three Public Strategy Meetings in November 2015, and at the Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages Membership Meeting in December 2015. The Recommendations and Strategy presented in this document reflect the feedback received December 2014 through December 2015 from various project partners and the public.

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## PROJECT DELIVERABLES

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At project completion, ESF has produced the following principal outputs and products:

- **A comprehensive, web-accessible GIS inventory of land-and-water trails and associated recreational infrastructure that currently exist for public use across the region's lands; and lodging facilities and other significant amenities that are currently available to visiting recreationists.**
- **A set of Recommendations concerning development of new trails and associated recreational infrastructure that could result in enhanced outdoor experiences for visiting recreationists to enjoy (including projects already approved and those yet to be proposed in draft management plans); and opportunities to assist with the development of new lodging facilities and other amenities for these visitors.**
- **A proposed Strategy that sets forth a path for establishing these new recreational and lodging opportunities and for "making it all work" – for both the economic benefit of communities and the State's protection of the GSW's ecosystems and natural resources from potential impacts of increased outdoor recreation.**

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The GSW Strategy recommends the design and implementation of a network of recreation infrastructure across the GSW Complex that meets the multiple objectives of the planning effort. The GSW Recommendations are based directly on the information collected in community workshops, which was then evaluated by ESF staff and members of the Core Team. Portions of these recommendations were presented at three Public Strategy Meetings ([Appendix II](#)) and feedback from these sessions has been incorporated into the current set of recommendations.

In this Strategy, GSW Recommendations are presented primarily in the form of maps that highlight features along a network of trails and related infrastructure. Maps contain a limited amount of information selected to highlight key features, and are not exhaustive in terms of the information available in the GIS Inventory or other map-based information available to the GSW effort. Narratives have been developed to describe each map.

We note that although these recommendations have resulted from a lengthy participatory process that iteratively engaged local communities and agency staff, they primarily represent efforts of the ESF team to synthesize a large amount of information into a planning document. The ESF team recognizes their limitations in State land planning, both in terms of expertise and authority, and is providing these results to inform an ongoing planning process executed by DEC and APA.

### GSW RECOMMENDATIONS: REGIONAL NETWORK

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The GSW Regional Network represents an attempt to link together communities and destinations on and through the Forest Preserve, using existing and proposed routes that provide circuits (or loops) and long-distance traverses (or thru-hikes) across the region (see [GSW Regional Network maps and descriptions R-1 through R-13](#)). The Regional Network intersects with key long-distance travel routes, including the unique Hudson River Corridor, existing Northville-Placid Trail, and officially proposed North Country National Scenic Trail ([R-1](#)). Each Regional Network feature shares a trail segment with as many as seven additional features, while connecting up to seven communities in the GSW planning area (i.e., Infinite North). Features vary in length from 12.4 to 116.9 miles, average 71 miles per feature. Two-thirds of the features require some degree of construction, but overall the Regional Network is 83% complete and existing. Regional Network features provide a framework of trails and linkages, creating recreation opportunities that span the GSW planning area, and allowing for the creation of Local Network features focused on communities and opportunities at a smaller scale.

## GSW RECOMMENDATIONS: LOCAL NETWORK

The GSW Local Network is nested within the GSW Regional Network (R-14), and provides recreation-based connections among communities and local points of interest on the Forest Preserve, based on existing and proposed routes. The GSW Recommendations and Strategy highlights 32 features, varying in length from 7.7 miles (Potter Bike Trail) to 64.4 miles (West Indian Lake Network), averaging 25.5 miles per feature. Seven features are complete and existing, while the remaining features are 74% composed of existing trail infrastructure. The Local Network features are described in individual narratives according to the Core Themes of the GSW Strategy: Access, Connectivity, Ecosystem Stewardship, High Quality Recreation Destinations, and Public-Private Partnerships. Use the Map Extent guide provided on R-15 to locate individual features or specific areas within the Map Narrative text.



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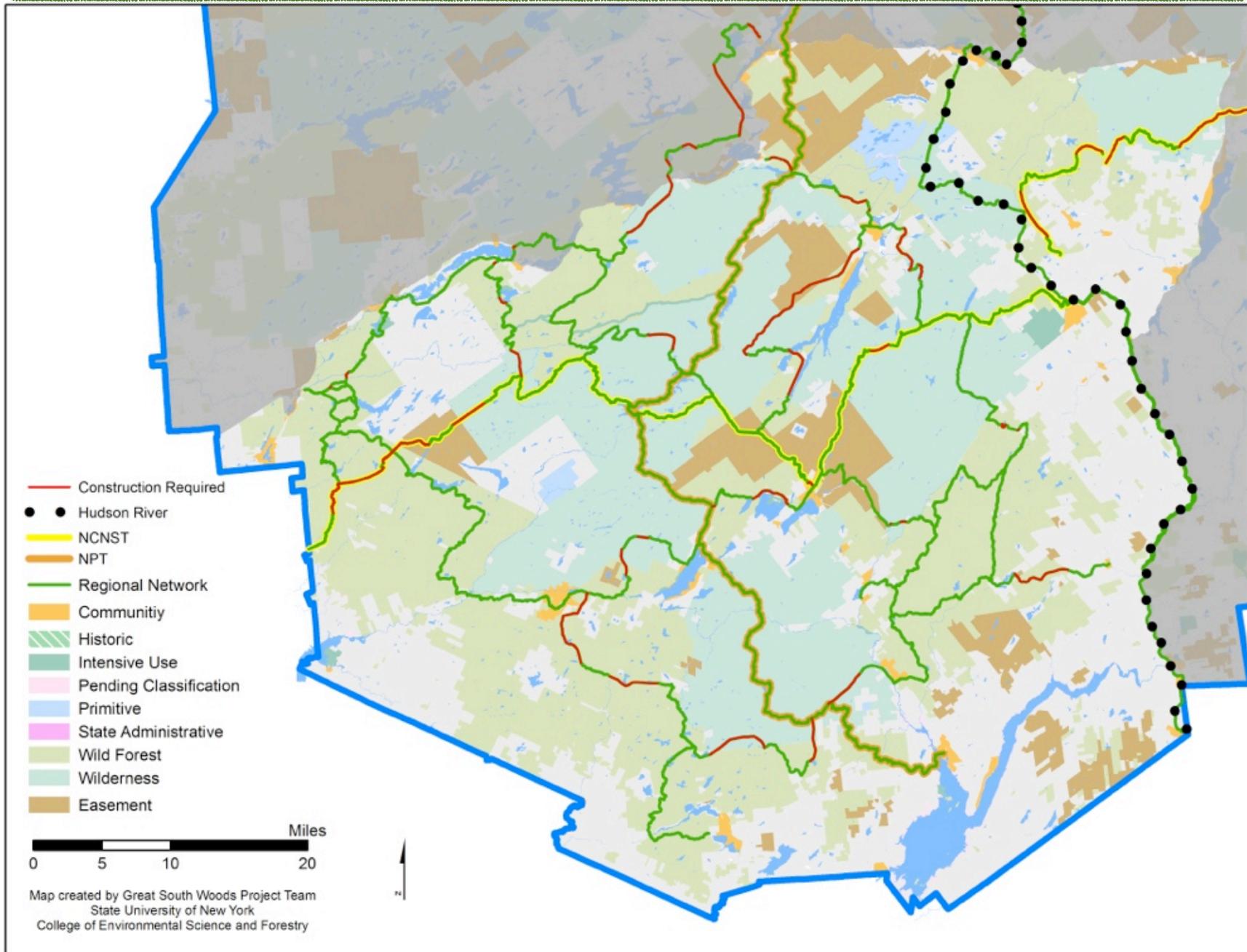
MAPS AND NARRATIVES (PAGES R-1 TO R-59)

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**SEE NEXT PAGE**

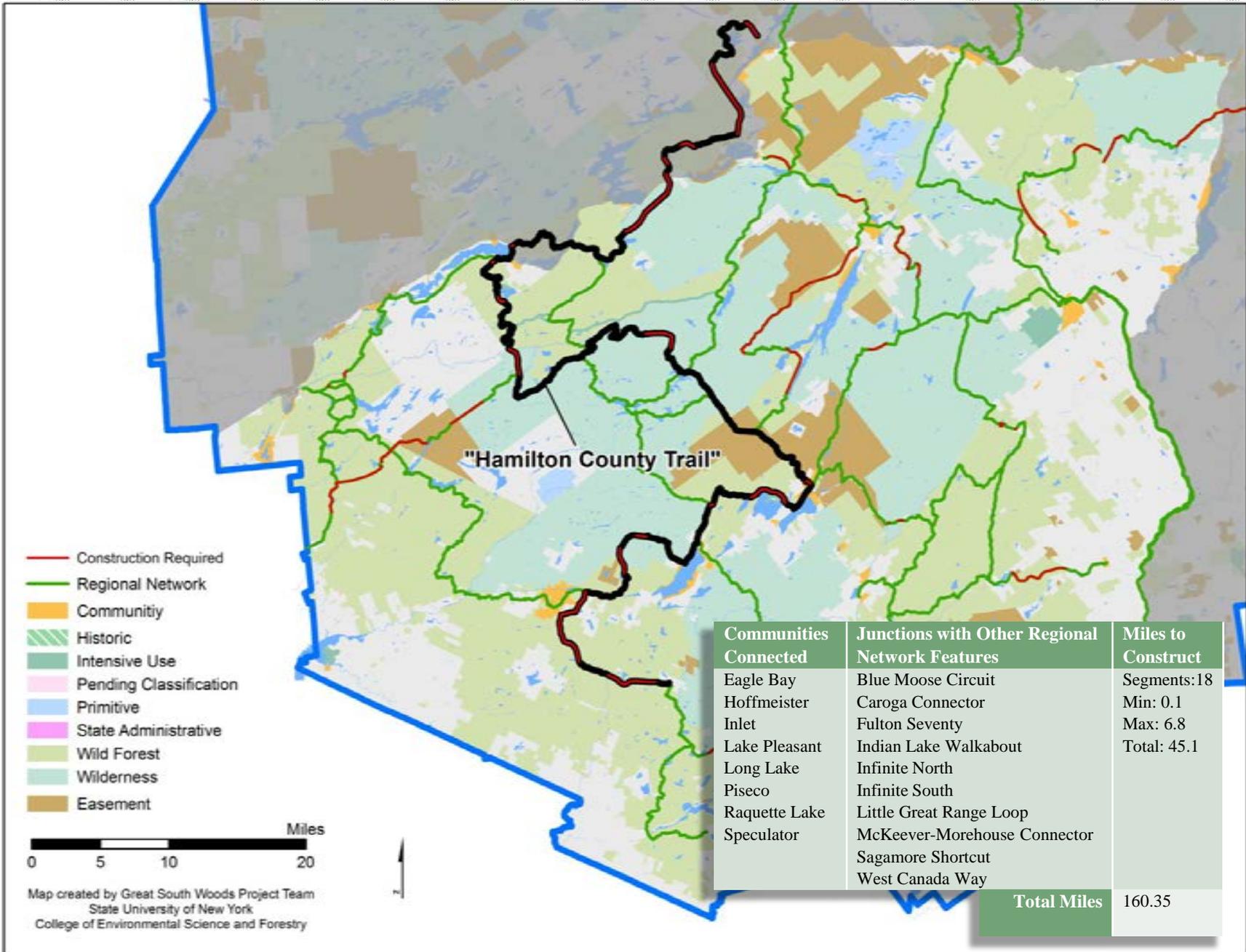
# GSW Regional Network

featuring Northville-Placid Trail (NPT), North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) and Hudson River corridor



# GSW Regional Network

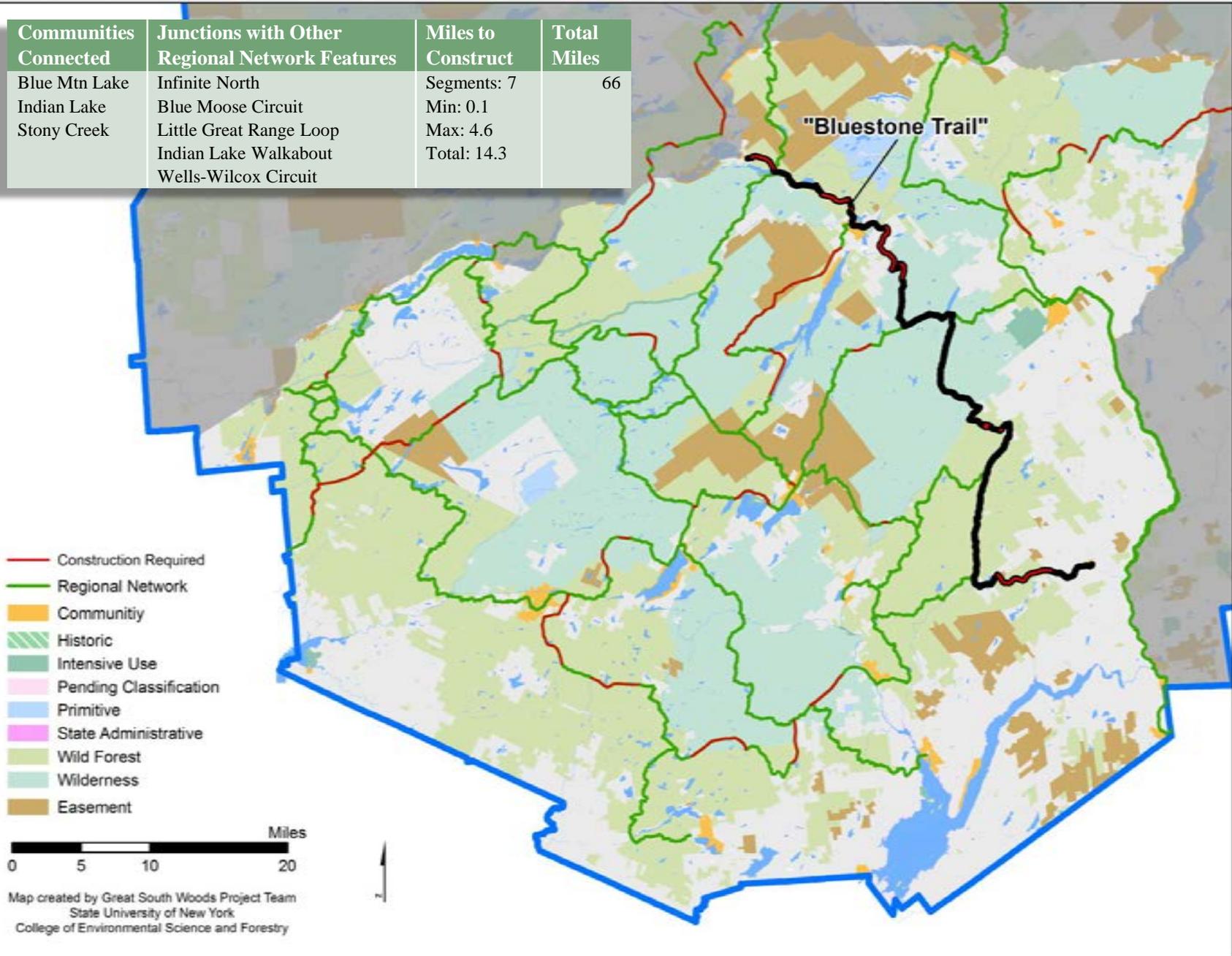
## Hamilton County Trail (proposed)



# GSW Regional Network

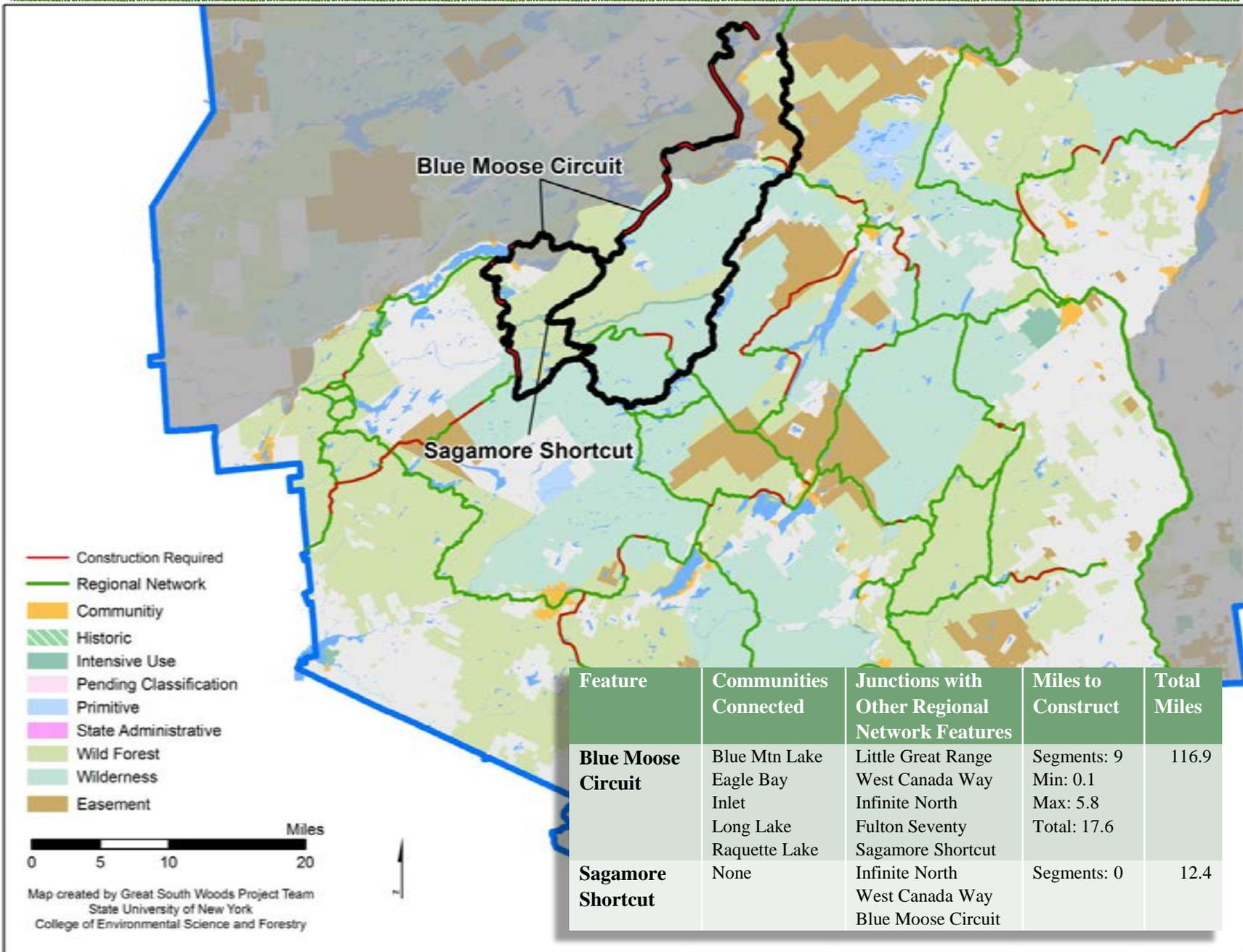
## Bluestone Trail (proposed)

Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
Blue Mtn Lake Indian Lake Stony Creek	Infinite North Blue Moose Circuit Little Great Range Loop Indian Lake Walkabout Wells-Wilcox Circuit	Segments: 7 Min: 0.1 Max: 4.6 Total: 14.3	66



# GSW Regional Network

## Blue Moose Circuit & Sagamore Shortcut



# GSW Regional Network

## Fulton Seventy

Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
McKeever Old Forge Inlet Thendara	Infinite North McKeever-Morehouse Connector Blue Moose Circuit	Segments: 8 Min: 0.1 Max: 4.6 Total: 14.5	70.6

Fulton Seventy

- Construction Required
- Regional Network
- Community
- Historic
- Intensive Use
- Pending Classification
- Primitive
- State Administrative
- Wild Forest
- Wilderness
- Easement

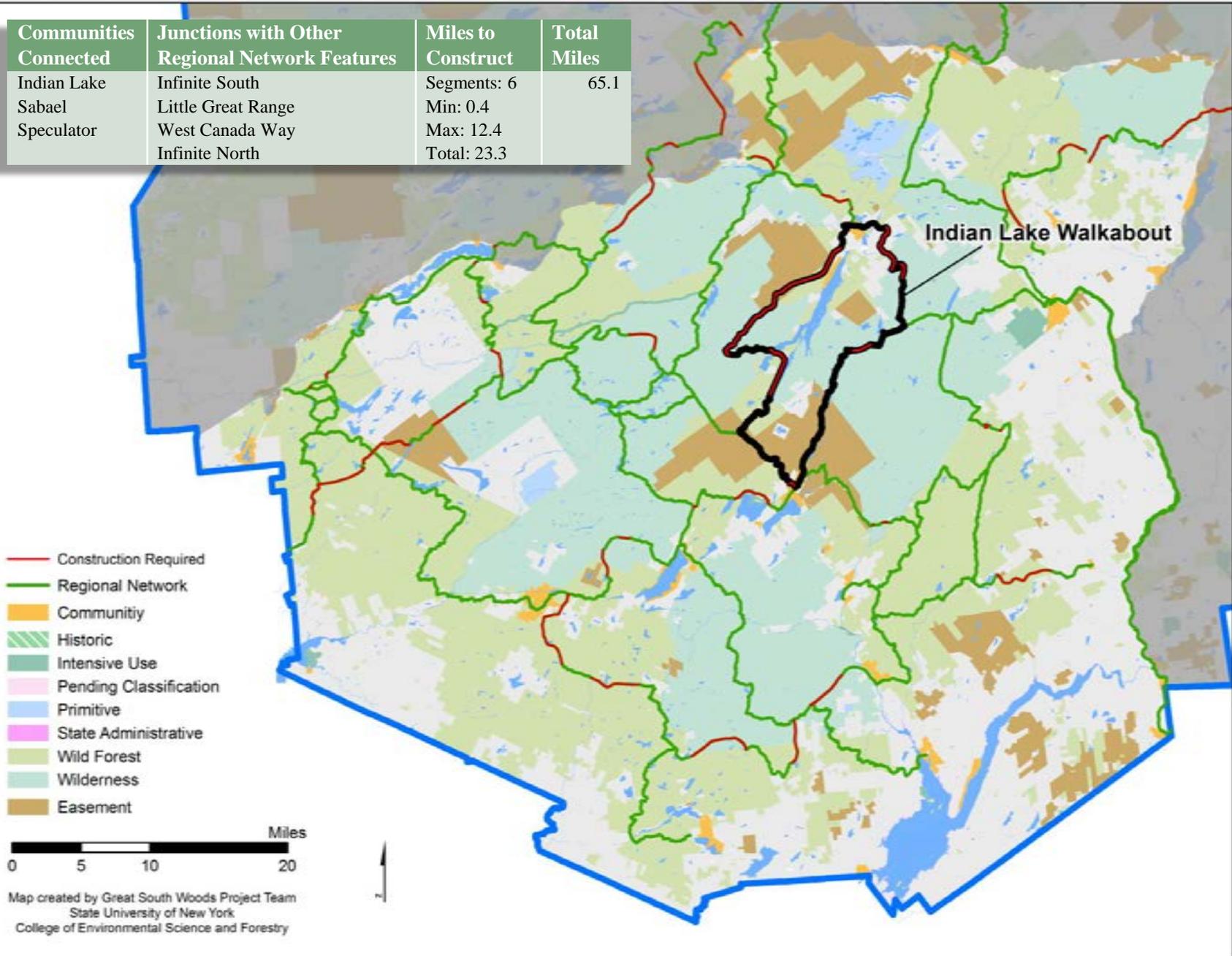


Map created by Great South Woods Project Team  
State University of New York  
College of Environmental Science and Forestry

# GSW Regional Network

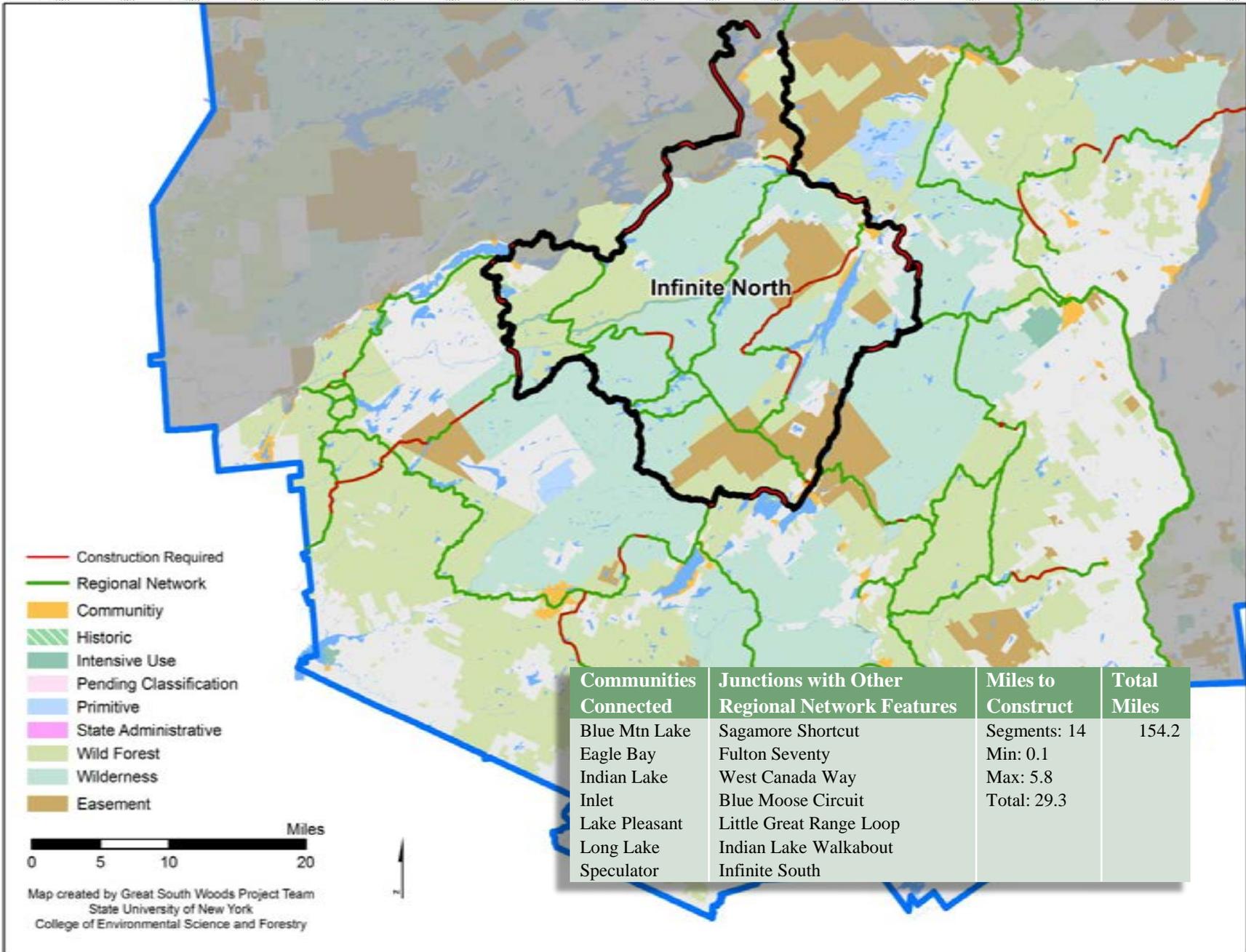
## Indian Lake Walkabout

Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
Indian Lake Sabael Speculator	Infinite South Little Great Range West Canada Way Infinite North	Segments: 6 Min: 0.4 Max: 12.4 Total: 23.3	65.1



# GSW Regional Network

## Infinite Loop North

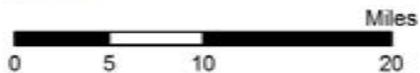


# GSW Regional Network

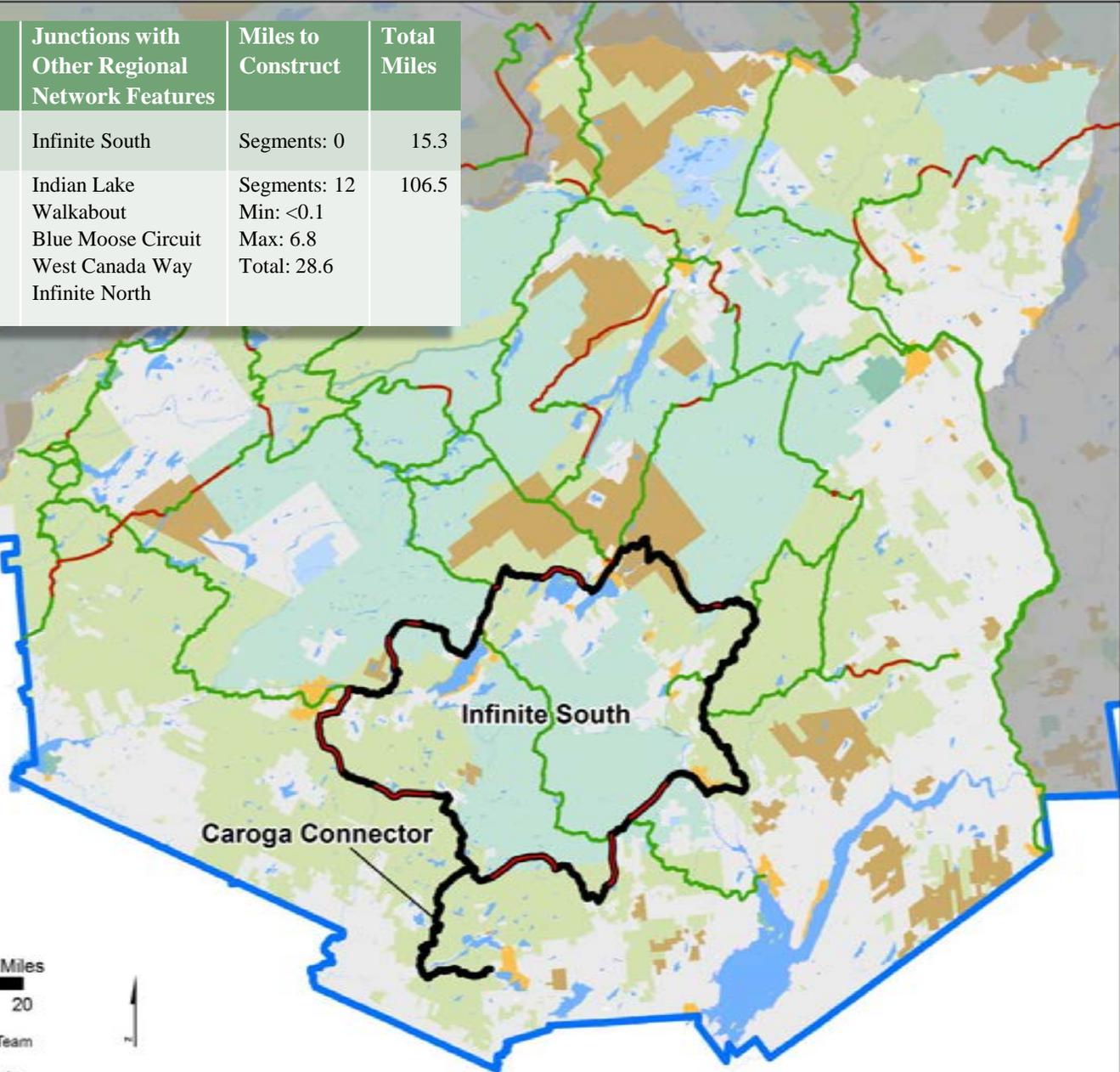
## Infinite Loop South & Caroga Connector

Feature	Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
<b>Caroga Connector</b>	Caroga Lake	Infinite South	Segments: 0	15.3
<b>Infinite South</b>	Hoffmeister Hope Lake Pleasant Piseco Speculator Wells	Indian Lake Walkabout Blue Moose Circuit West Canada Way Infinite North	Segments: 12 Min: <0.1 Max: 6.8 Total: 28.6	106.5

- Construction Required
- Regional Network
- Community
- Historic
- Intensive Use
- Pending Classification
- Primitive
- State Administrative
- Wild Forest
- Wilderness
- Easement



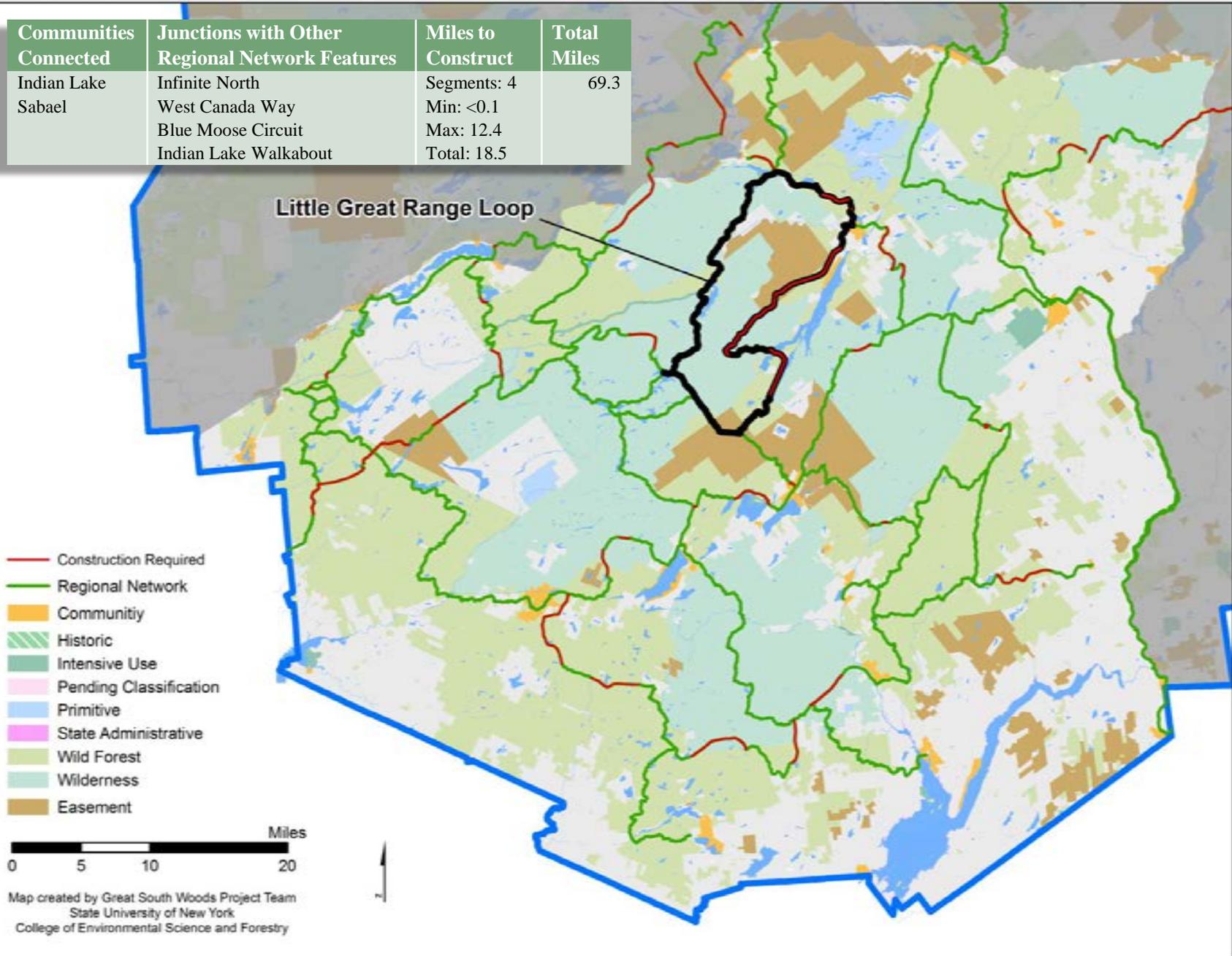
Map created by Great South Woods Project Team  
State University of New York  
College of Environmental Science and Forestry



# GSW Regional Network

## Little Great Range Loop

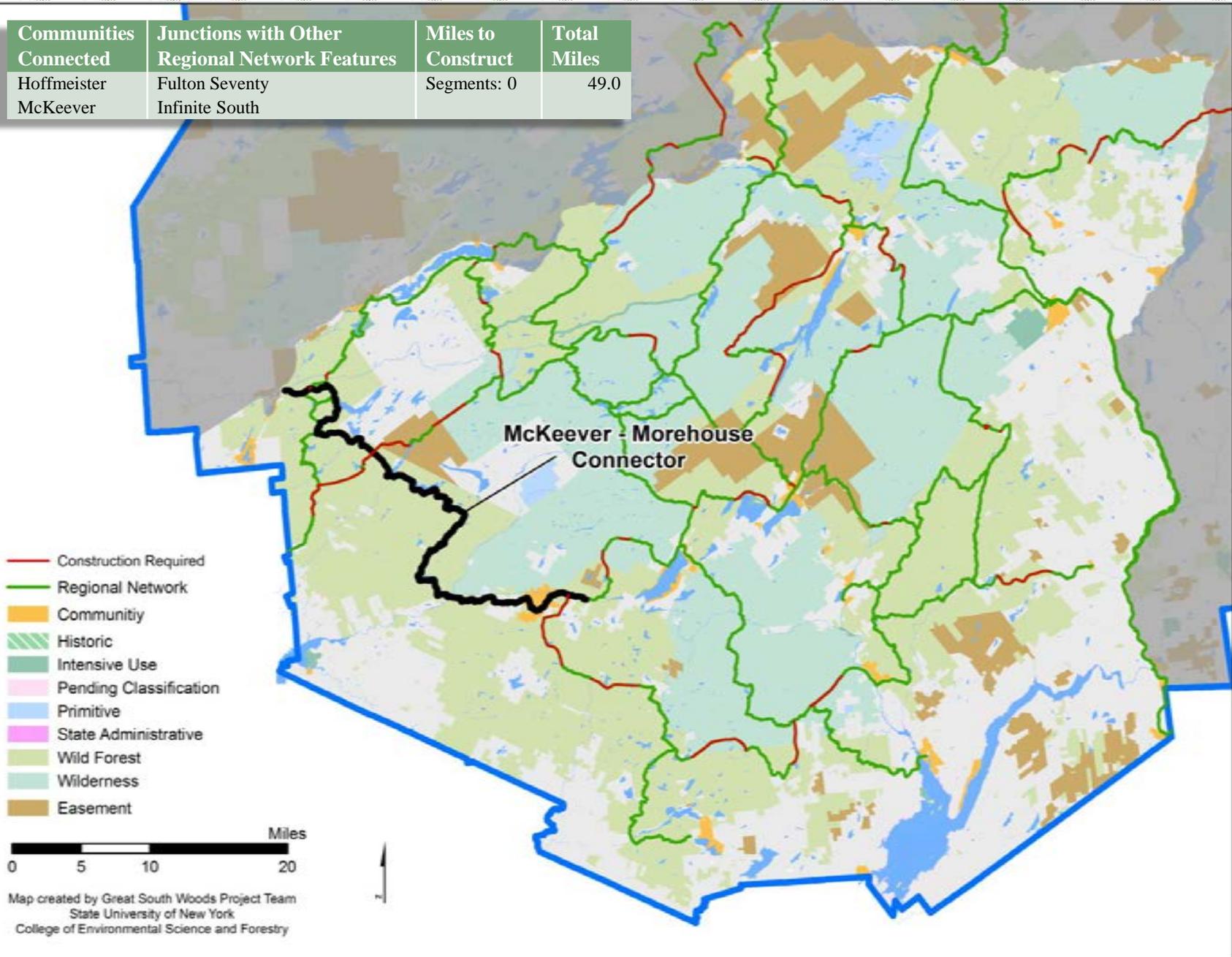
Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
Indian Lake Sabael	Infinite North West Canada Way Blue Moose Circuit Indian Lake Walkabout	Segments: 4 Min: <0.1 Max: 12.4 Total: 18.5	69.3



# GSW Regional Network

## McKeever-Morehouse Connector

Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
Hoffmeister McKeever	Fulton Seventy Infinite South	Segments: 0	49.0



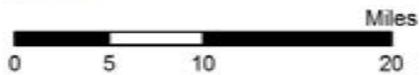
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# GSW Regional Network

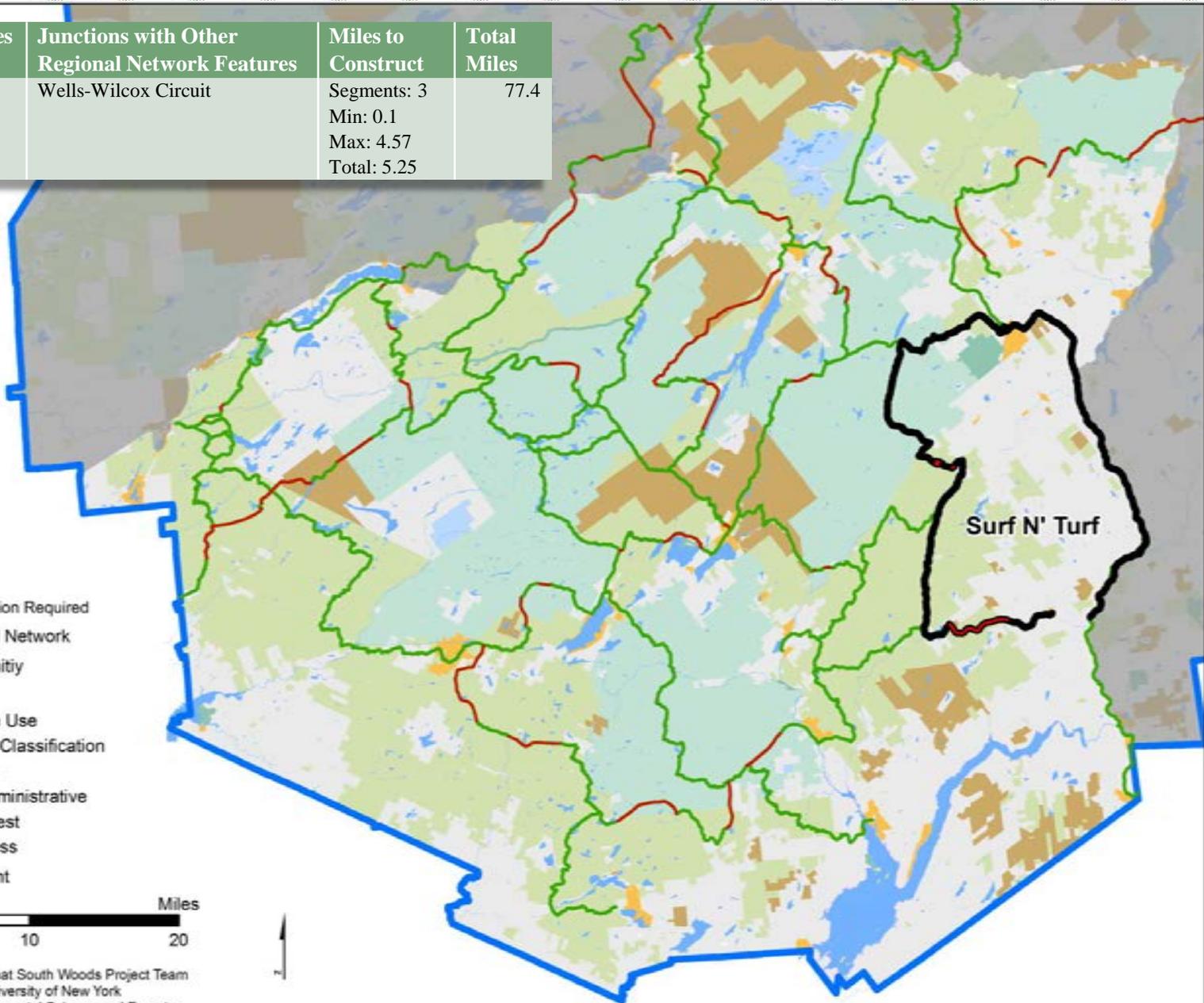
## Surf N' Turf

Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
North Creek Riparius Stony Creek	Wells-Wilcox Circuit	Segments: 3 Min: 0.1 Max: 4.57 Total: 5.25	77.4

- Construction Required
- Regional Network
- Community
- Historic
- Intensive Use
- Pending Classification
- Primitive
- State Administrative
- Wild Forest
- Wilderness
- Easement



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# GSW Regional Network

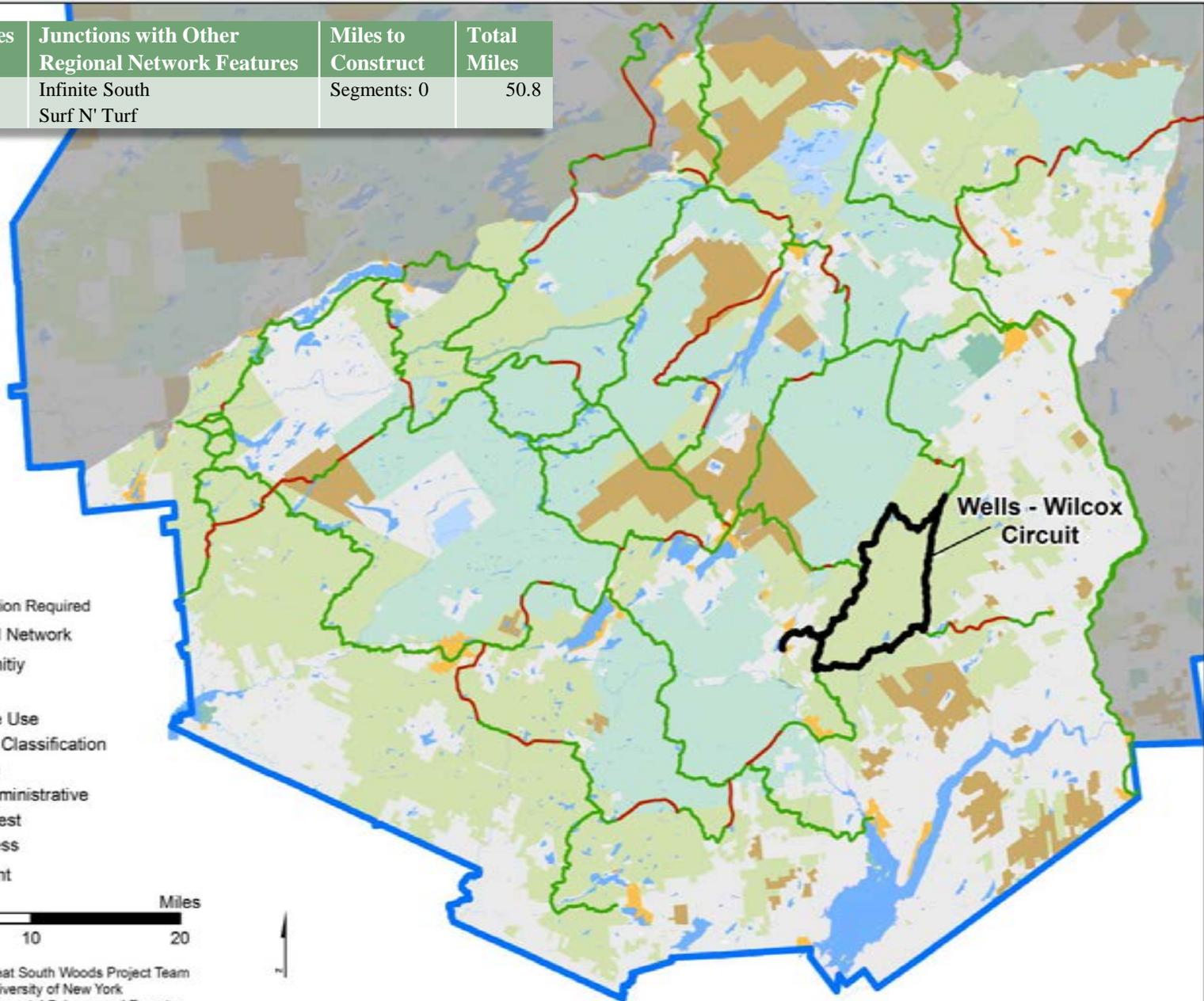
## Wells-Wilcox Circuit

Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
Wells	Infinite South Surf N' Turf	Segments: 0	50.8

- Construction Required
- Regional Network
- Community
- Historic
- Intensive Use
- Pending Classification
- Primitive
- State Administrative
- Wild Forest
- Wilderness
- Easement



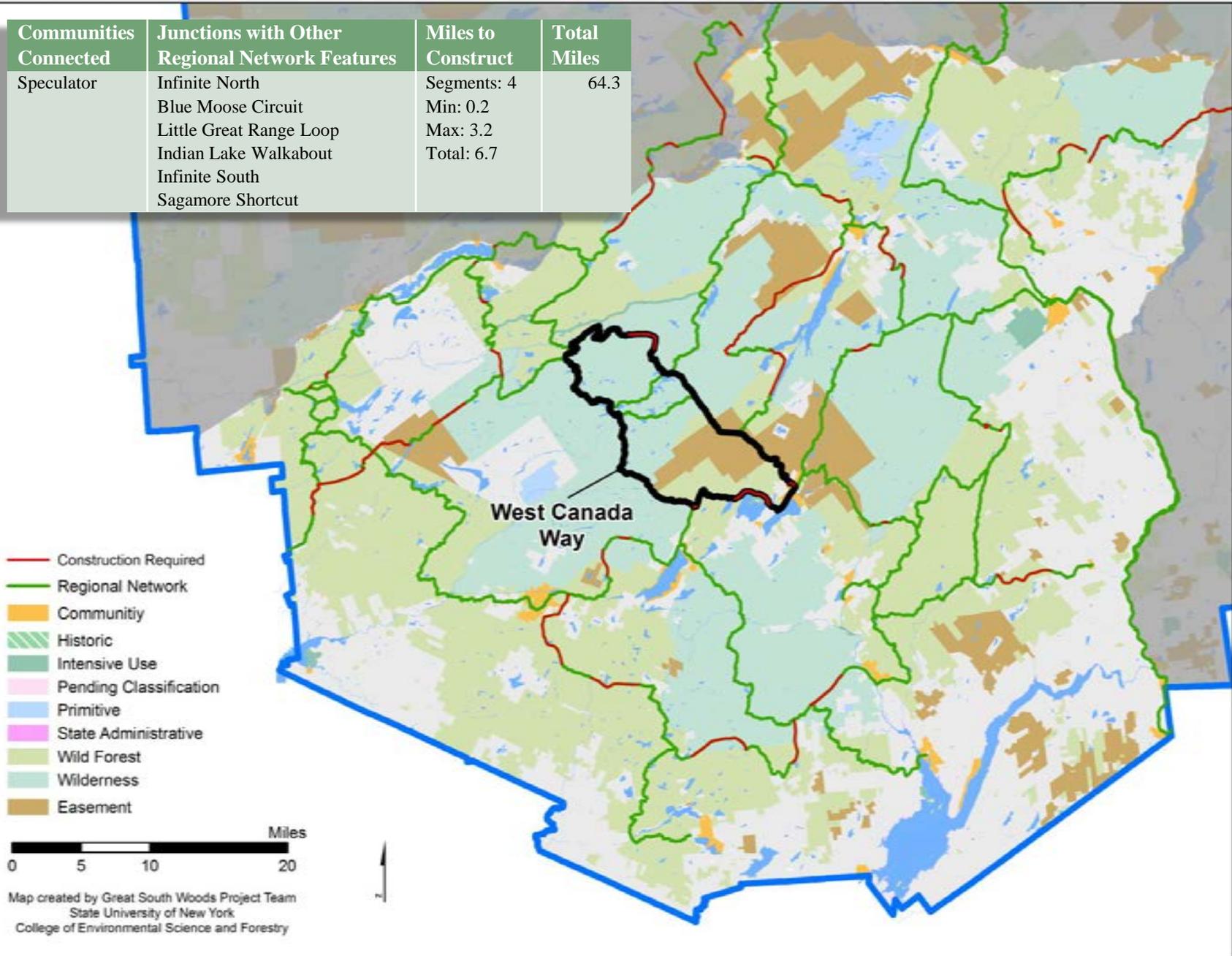
Map created by Great South Woods Project Team  
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# GSW Regional Network

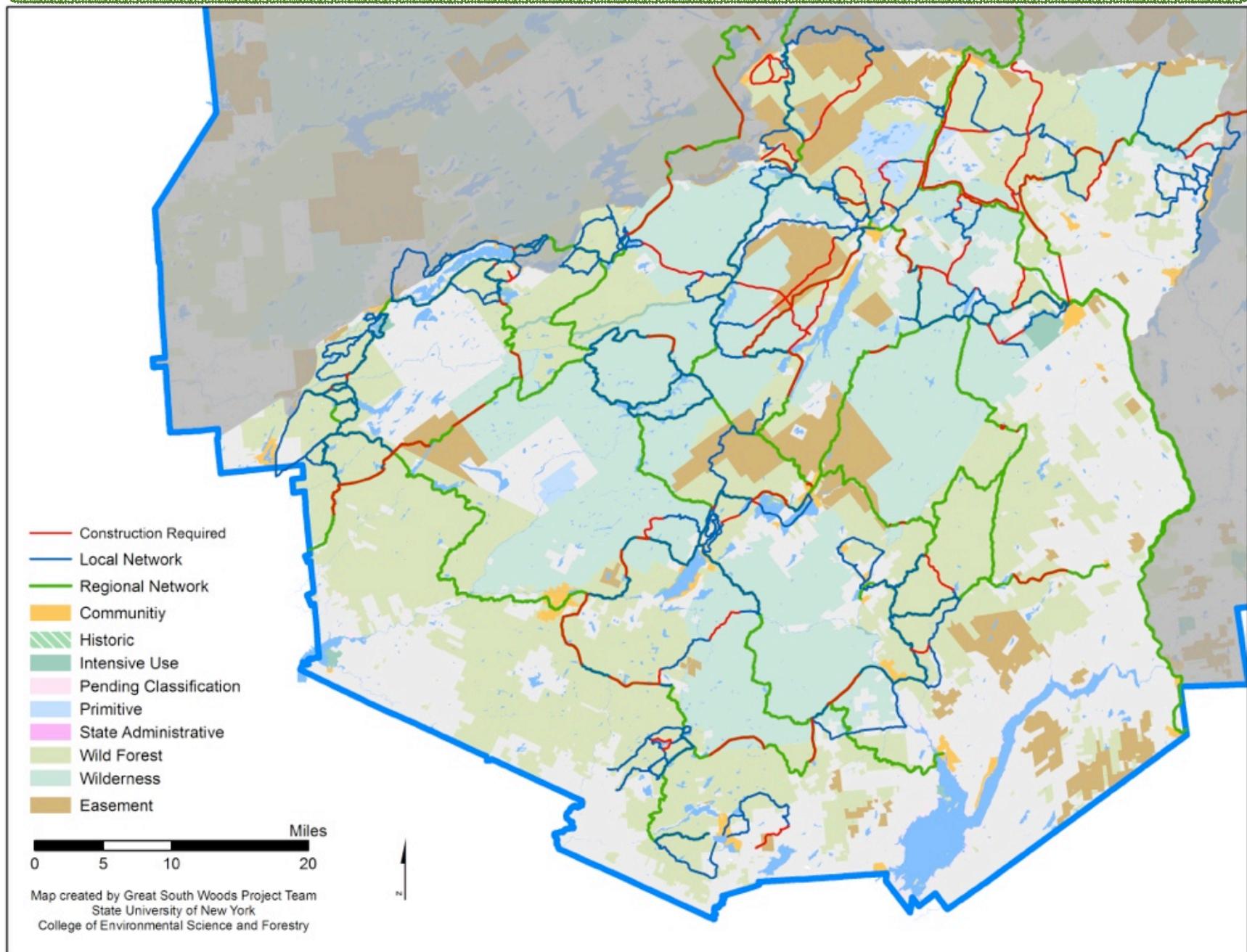
## West Canada Way

Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
Speculator	Infinite North Blue Moose Circuit Little Great Range Loop Indian Lake Walkabout Infinite South Sagamore Shortcut	Segments: 4 Min: 0.2 Max: 3.2 Total: 6.7	64.3



# GSW Regional Network

## Local Networks



# GSW Recommendations

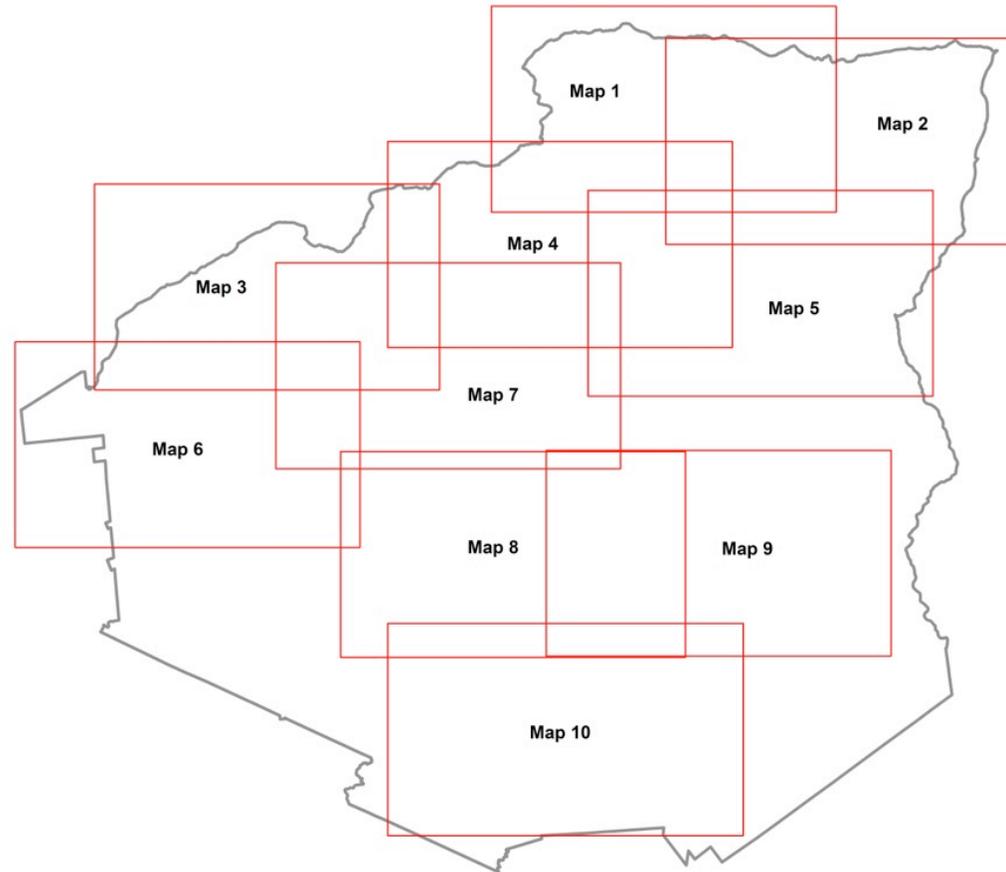
## Local area maps

## Map Extent & Locator Guide

The following section contains a series of smaller-scale maps that describe our **preliminary recommendations for recreation planning in the Great South Woods Strategy**. Maps were organized by dividing the GSW into ten (10) overlapping areas, as shown in red boxes to the right. ➡

Each of the ten maps is followed by detailed descriptions of **local features**. All local features are based on information and ideas developed through the **GSW process**, which included **community members, town leaders, interest groups, recreation experts and State agency officials**.

Maps are intended to inform future planning, will be subject to revision, and do not necessarily represent current or future priorities. The ideas presented here are **conceptual** and locations of points and routes are **approximate**.



Map	Locations	Pages
1	Five Towns Area	R17-R24
2	Minerva, North Hudson, Schroon Lake	R25-R29
3	Fulton Chain Area	R30-R36
4	Indian Lake & Cedar River Flow	R37-R40
5	North Creek, North River, Indian Lake	R41-R43

Map	Locations	Pages
6	Black River (Woodgate & Otter Creek)	R44-R46
7	West Canada Lake Wilderness	R47-R49
8	Lake Pleasant, Piseco, Speculator	R50-R53
9	Wells, Hope, Gilmantown, Stony Creek	R54-R55
10	Northville & Caroga Lake	R56-R59