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COMMISSIONER

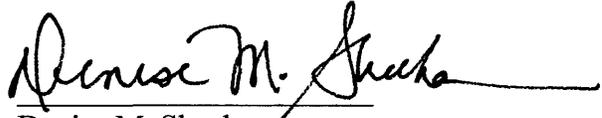
MEMORANDUM

APR 20 2006

TO: The Record

RE: Adoption of Willowemoc Wild Forest Final UMP Amendment

The Unit Management Plan (UMP) Amendment for Willowemoc Wild Forest has been completed. It is consistent with the guidelines and criteria of the Catskill Park State Land Masterplan. The UMP involved citizen notification, is consistent with the State Constitution, the Environmental Conservation Law, rules, regulations and Department policy. The plan includes management objectives for a projected management period and is hereby approved and adopted.


Denise M. Sheehan
Commissioner

**Willowemoc Wild Forest
Unit Management Plan Amendment
April 2006**

This is an amendment to the Willowemoc - Long Pond Wild Forest Unit Management Plan(UMP) which was adopted in October 1991. The UMP provides the area description and history; information on the inventory, use and capacity to withstand use; management and policy; projected use and management proposed and a schedule for implementation and budget. Several parcels have been acquired and added to this unit after the adoption of the UMP. The unit now contains approximately 15,872 acres of land.

The Willowemoc Wild Forest is a management unit in the southwestern portion of the Catskill Park made up of Forest Preserve lands in the Towns of Neversink and Rockland in Sullivan County and the Towns of Denning and Hardenburgh in Ulster County.

Although the majority of the unit is located within one large contiguous parcel, it also includes several smaller "detached" parcels.

The unit is bordered on the northeast by the Big Indian Wilderness Area and also abuts(nearly surrounds) the Mongaup Pond Campground, a unit of Forest Preserve land classified as an Intensive Use Area.

This amendment proposes three projects to be implemented within the Willowemoc Wild Forest. An Environmental Assessment Form(EAF) has been completed and a Negative Declaration has been issued(see attached).

Project 1

Objective: Relocation of Power Line and Telephone Service for Mongaup Pond Campground

Mongaup Pond Campground (MPC) is a Public Campground and day-use facility on Forest Preserve land, operated by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. MPC is located off Mongaup Pond Road, 3 miles North of the Hamlet of DeBruce, in Sullivan County and is classified as an Intensive Use Area by the Catskill Park State Land Master Plan.

Project 1 of this amendment proposes to remove the existing overhead power line and

poles that begin near the intersection of Mongaup Road and Beech Mountain Road. The power line traverses an approximate one mile section of forested area, including two wetlands, and ends near the caretaker's cabin at MPC. This power line is owned and maintained by the NYS DEC for campground purposes only. The current location of the power line runs through an interior portion of the Willowemoc Wild Forest and requires a significant amount of maintenance due to continual blowdown and mortality of trees adjacent to the cleared line. Many times sections of the line have been found on the ground during inspection, causing concern for both the environment, due to the potential for fire, and for public health and safety of the recreationists utilizing the public campground.

The power line and poles would then be re-routed alongside Mongaup Road (see Map 1), a public highway maintained by the Town of Rockland, Sullivan County. The relocated line would begin at the intersection of Mongaup Road and Beech Mountain Road and continue along Mongaup Road for approximately one and one-half miles to the entrance of Mongaup Pond Campground. The line will be routed along the road clearing in such a way as to reduce the amount of tree cutting necessary for line clearances. Approximately 300 trees with a diameter at breast height(dbh) of 3 inches or greater will be cut or limbed to provide the necessary clearances for installation of the new overhead line. All tree cutting will be made in conformance with Commissioner's Delegation Memorandum No. 84-06 and Lands and Forest Policy No. 91-2 concerning the cutting and removal of trees on the Forest Preserve.

By relocating the power line and poles, the need for a significant amount of annual tree cutting and the use of motorized equipment for maintenance purposes within this interior portion of the Willowemoc Wild Forest will be eliminated. In addition, the removal of the existing power line and poles will allow the cleared area to re-vegetate and return to a more natural forested state.

The approximate cost of this project will be \$62,800.00 for the installation of the new overhead line and \$5,000 for the removal of the existing line. Both New York State Electric and Gas(NYSEG) and Verizon will be providing services through use of this new equipment. The new line will be maintained by NYSEG and will only service Mongaup Pond Campground.

No significant adverse environmental impact will result from the implementation of this project.

Project 2

Objective: Provide Access to Waneta Lake for Persons with Disabilities

The Department is striving to expand opportunities for persons with disabilities to access the Catskill Forest Preserve, including opportunities for access to water. Access to water in the Catskills is a challenge, due to the limited amount of ponded waters found on Catskill Forest Preserve lands.

Waneta Lake is located along and immediately adjacent to County Route 151 outside of Livingston Manor in Sullivan County, just off Route 17(future I-86). The lake consists of approximately 30 acres and is contained by a concrete impoundment. The lake is noted to contain several species of fish which include largemouth bass, chain pickerel, pumpkinseed, yellow perch, brown bullhead and golden shiner. A parking area containing an information kiosk is located on the northwest corner of the lake, adjacent to the dam.

Project 2 of this amendment proposes to create an approximate 150 foot long accessible path leading from the parking area and across the maintained lawn area adjacent to the dam, where it will branch into three short trails. The left trail will provide access to the dam for both observation and fishing purposes. The center trail will lead to an accessible rock shelf, which will be improved to meet accessibility guidelines for utilization as a fishing pier. These improvements will include creating a curb to prevent wheel chairs from accidentally rolling past the edge of the rock shelf, creating a level, firm and stable surface, and removing or reducing the size of obstructions over one inch high. The right trail will provide access to an accessible picnic area overlooking the lake. An accessible picnic table and privy or port-a-john will be installed. The parking area and information kiosk will be upgraded to comply with accessibility guidelines as part of this project. This will include resurfacing of the parking area with gravel, designating an accessible parking space and lowering the height of the information board in the kiosk so it can be seen and read by wheelchair users. All proposed facilities as listed will be in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines(ADAAG).

This proposal has been offered as a substitution for a similar project required under a settlement agreement requiring the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation(NYS DEC) to provide certain specific accessible facilities [Galusha et al. v. NYS DEC et al, Consent Decree, U.S. District Court of N.Y., 7/5/01]. A portion of the settlement calls for an accessible trail, fishing pier, picnic tables, port-a-john, information kiosk and parking area to be constructed at Alder Lake, near Turnwood. Alder lake is an approximate 44 acre man-made lake on the former Samuel Coykendal estate located within the Balsam Lake Mountain Wild Forest. Based on terrain, distance from population centers, roads, facilities, and NYS DEC Bureau of Fisheries recommendations, Alder Lake was not as favorable a location as Waneta Lake for accessibility and fishing opportunity.

This project will provide the necessary facilities for program access required by the settlement agreement but provide a better opportunity for persons with disabilities to access Department programs, such as nature observation, picnicking and fishing.

The approximate cost of this project is \$35,000.

No significant adverse environmental impact will result from the implementation of this project.

Project 3

Objective: Provide Loop Opportunities within the Quick Lake Snowmobile Trail System

Currently, the snowmobile trail system within the Willowemoc Wild Forest consists of approximately 27.35 miles of trail, with an additional 3.1 miles approved in the 1991 UMP but not yet built. A major portion of the existing trail consists of a one-way trip from Mongaup Pond Campground out to a dead end at Quick Lake. In addition to the snowmobile trail, many miles of cross country ski/hiking trails exist which loop across and sometimes join with the snowmobile trail. These trails are located on old logging roads which traverse the property.

The Willowemoc Wild Forest UMP which was adopted and approved in October of 1991 proposed a lean-to and outhouse(Section IV(A) -project #8) to be located on the ridge between Frick Pond and Quick Lake. The UMP also called for an additional 3.1 miles of snowmobile trail(Section IV(C)-project #7) to be constructed/designated to provide an alternative route to Quick Lake. Neither project has been completed to date. Currently, the lean-to logs and necessary construction materials have been acquired with an anticipated construction date of early spring of 2006. The lean-to and outhouse will be constructed at Quick Lake.

The Sullivan County Trails Association has been maintaining the snowmobile trail system under an Adopt-a-Natural Resource(AANR) agreement for many years. The Association as well as the Department have concerns regarding the increased use of the Quick Lake trail where all users have to travel both ways on the trail due to a lack of alternatives. Specifically, snowmobile trail widths under current DEC policy do not allow for much margin for error when two snowmobiles pass while traveling in opposite directions.

Page 39 of the CPSLMP authorizes the expansion of the snowmobile trail system in Wild Forest units below 2700 ft. in elevation where the impact on the wild forest environment will be minimized, and so long as such trails will not run through important areas of ecological significance, such as endangered species habitat or deer wintering yards. The CPSLMP further directs that any such trails must be designated and located in a manner which will not adversely affect adjoining private landowners or the wild forest environment.

In compliance with CPSLMP guidance, the proposed snowmobile trails do not run

through important areas of ecological significance, such as deer wintering yards. Further, since the trails are located on old roads that are currently designated as both foot and cross country ski trails, little must be done to open the trails to snowmobiles, other than trail marking. Thus the trails will have little impact on the environment except for the temporary noise and air emissions generated during times when snowmobiles pass over them. Furthermore, there are no adjoining private land owners who should be impacted by new trails, as the trails are located a comfortable distance from adjoining private property.

The CPSLMP on page 35 states the Basic Guideline that “incompatible uses such as snowmobiling and ski touring...will be located in separate areas.” Thus the Department would not normally propose to allow snowmobile use on the existing cross country ski trails in this unit. However, in this unit there are sound reasons for the Department to depart from the general policy set forth in the CPSLMP. Public use of the unit for cross country skiing is light, and therefore there should be no significant conflict between cross country skiers and snowmobilers over trail use. The Department will monitor the situation to ensure that user group conflicts do not develop on these trails.

Project 3 of this amendment calls for the remarking of three cross country ski/hiking trail loops to include the use of snowmobiles. This will eliminate the need for creating the 3.1 miles of new trail as authorized in the 1991 UMP while providing several opportunities for the snowmobiling public to choose for the return trip to and from Quick Lake. This will significantly reduce the numbers of users traveling both ways on the single existing trail to Quick Lake. This will not only reduce the number of users at any one time on the existing section of trail but will also reduce the impacts the trail has been receiving due to having to sustain all of the users for both ways of travel. In particular, during times of reduced snowfall the snow cover on the trail can be reduced to sufficiently low levels that soil is displaced from the trail. Also, trail side vegetation can be damaged at “choke points” where narrow spots in the trail cause passing snowmobiles to momentarily leave the traveled surface of the trail.

The three loops proposed for remarking include portions of the red marked foot trail/cross country ski trail beginning near Quick Lake where the red trail loops north of the snowmobile trail and crosses at Flat Rock Junction, then loops south of the snowmobile trail and re-enters at Bobcat Junction, the trails then run together to Coyote Junction where the red trail then traverses east of the snowmobile trail until rejoining at Iron Wheel Junction(see Map 1). The total amount of trail proposed for remarking is approximately 4.3 miles.

Interviews with several of the past and present Forest Rangers indicate that cross country ski and hiking usage of these three loops are virtually non-existent during the winter months. In fact, the ten year average derived from trail register tallies for both the Frick Pond and Flynn trails show that for the period of December through March, less than twenty users per month sign in at the registers, confirming that usage is very low during this period. Conflict between users is not expected due to the above

information and that currently, most cross country ski activity has been observed on the packed snowmobile trails.

In most cases, marking is all that is necessary to allow passage of snowmobiles on these proposed loops. Some sections of trail may require the removal of blowdown and minor culvert and tread repair due to the recent flood events experienced in the area. None of the existing ski trail to be designated for snowmobile travel will need to be re-routed.

The approximate cost of this project is \$1,000.

No significant adverse environmental impact will result from the implementation of this project. Snowmobile traffic on the unit's trail system is not anticipated to increase significantly, so any current noise or exhaust emissions will be further dissipated throughout the area.