

CARPENTER FALLS UNIQUE AREA



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Public Access Improvement Project

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why is the project needed?

A: Benefits include improved family-friendly universal access for people of all abilities and minimized soil erosion and compaction at the site.

Q: Why does the project include a boardwalk and viewing platform?

A: The boardwalk, viewing platform, and bridge connecting to the parking lot meet ADA standards. The boardwalk offers railings and elevates site visitors for an enhanced vantage. The proposed design will reduce the amount of tree cutting, soil grading, and fill needed. Additionally, the design will require less long-term maintenance since trail surfaces will not require repairs following heavy storm events.

Q: Why is DEC the State Environmental Review Act (SEQR) lead agency for the project?

A: DEC and the people of New York State own the 37-acre project site that includes Carpenter Falls. DEC's Division of Lands and Forests staff are the land managers and have experience with similar projects in Region 7 and across the state. DEC is conducting an environmental impact assessment under SEQR.

Q: Did DEC previously reach out to the public about the project and were comments incorporated in the proposed design?

A: Yes, DEC held two sessions inviting public input for updating the Cayuga-Hewitt Highlands Unit Management Plan, which includes the unique area. Approximately 40 people attended the June 7, 2018, sessions at the Niles Town Hall. Comments received influenced DEC's selection of the proposed design.

Q: Is DEC still accepting feedback on the project?

A: Yes, additional thoughts and ideas will continue to be heard and considered until September 23, 2019.

Q: Are local officials aware of the project concept?

A: Yes, DEC is working with the Cayuga High Angle Rescue Team, Three Town Fire District, and town of Niles.

Q: During heavy rain events the site can be very wet. How is DEC addressing that issue?

A: DEC engineers conducted a topographic survey of the entire project area to support the bridge, boardwalk, and platform design. All trail components will be raised to allow runoff to flow beneath during heavy storm events. DEC engineers are developing a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) to ensure that soil and water resources are protected before, during, and after construction.

Q: Will the project negatively impact water quality?

A: No, the project will stabilize drainage to Bear Swamp Creek. All stormwater originating from the parking lot will be managed on site using green infrastructure techniques to promote capture and infiltration.

Q: I've noticed DEC equipment and people on the site. What is going on?

A: To develop plan options, DEC conducted a topographic survey, soil engineering studies, and an archeological survey. The project team has also consulted with the Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District, New York Natural Heritage Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and regional DEC Bureau of Ecosystem Health.

Q: Will the facility be open during construction?

A: DEC anticipates temporary closures during construction.

Q: Why did DEC select the proposed parking lot size and location?

A: DEC team members have surveyed the site, conducted vehicle counts under various conditions, and determined the current 5-car parking lot is inadequate to meet the interest of the public. During summer weekends, cars commonly park along the road shoulder when the lot is full. After careful consideration and analysis of similar facilities on other state lands, DEC determined the proposed 20-car lot is appropriately sized and suited for this site, in addition to providing opportunity for universal public access. The lot entrance and exit location is designed to improve visibility.

An improved parking lot will help prevent vehicles from parking on the shoulder of the road. The property shoulder will be signed with no parking signs, and DEC will continue to work with the town of Niles regarding enforcement of vehicles parking illegally. The current parking lot will be closed after a new parking lot is available for use, and the ground returned to a natural state.

Q: Will the parking lot be paved?

A: The final design details are under consideration, but at least a portion of the parking lot will be paved to welcome people with mobility impairments.

Q: Will the public be able to access the base of the upper falls?

A: The project proposes development of a set of stone steps to provide a viewing area for the base of the falls. DEC does not plan to provide public access behind or immediately below the upper waterfall.

Q: How will DEC communicate with the public to encourage shared stewardship of the site?

A: DEC will install an informational kiosk to describe the history of the site and provide information to site visitors about using the boardwalk, viewing platform, and stone steps to access the site. DEC Forest Rangers, foresters, and seasonal stewards will routinely visit the site.

Q: How do I contact the New York State Forest Rangers?

A: For emergencies, by calling (518) 408-5850 or 911. For non-emergencies, please contact Forest Ranger Chester Lunt at chester.lunt@dec.ny.gov or (315) 256-8893. The DEC Region 7 Forester Ranger Roster is available at: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/about/681.html>.

Q: Will there be public restrooms?

A: The proposed plan calls for a chemical toilet with a screened enclosure. The chemical toilet would be serviced by an independent contractor.

Q: How is the project funded? Will the project require local government funding?

A: Funding is from the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). No funds from local government are required.

Q: What are the next steps?

A: Accept additional feedback from the public, finalize the design, and complete the SEQR process.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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