Six trails are designated as horseback-riding trail systems in Central New York’s state Forest in Cayuga County offers 15 miles. Loop trails, which are often multi-purpose, are popular with hikers and cross-country skiers. The region also has seven designated unique areas totaling 2,027 acres. Labrador Hollow, Nelson Swamp, Corriella Forest, Salmon River Falls, Sandy Island Beach, Sandy Pond Beach, and Split Rock. They are called unique because they were acquired for their unusual characteristics, such as having rare plants or unusual landscape features. Unique areas are not managed for timber, though trees may occasionally be cut to improve habitat for plants and wildlife.

State Forest Highlights

Here are a few highlights of the diverse and exciting activities that await outdoor enthusiasts in Central New York’s 173 state forests:

Exploring Trails

Among the 133 miles of long-distance, leisure foot trails to be found in the region’s state forests, James Kennedy State Forest in Cortland offers 1.5 miles of hiking and a part of the Finger Lakes Trail. Similarly, Morgan Hill State Forest, in Cortland and Onondaga counties, offers 10 miles of the Finger Lakes Trail for those who want a full day’s hike. Loop trails, which are often multi-purpose, are popular with hikers and cross-country skiers. About 92 miles of loop trails are located in the region’s state forests. Osage Corners State Forest in Tioga County offers 16 miles of loop trails and Bear Swamp State Forest in Cayuga County offers 15 miles. Destination trails are linear trails that serve as pathways for people to access popular destinations or other points of interest such as natural features. Two popular trails of this type are the Salmon River Falls Unique Area trail (5 miles), leading to the Salmon River Falls and the 0.3-mile trail that leads to Tinker Falls in Labrador Hollow Unique Area. Six trails are designated as horseback-riding trail systems in Central New York’s state forests. The Brookfield Trail System is the largest and most popular and has a total of 130 miles of trails. It is located in Madison County in Charles E. Baker State Forest, Beaver Creek State Forest and Brookfield Railroad State Forest. The Brookfield Trail System is also designated for snowmobiling.

Along with the 130 miles of the Brookfield Trail System, snowmobilers also have more than 78 miles of snowmobile corridor trails; that is, trails that serve as corridors through state forests. Such trails utilize unplowed portions of town roads, public forest access roads, and woodland trails. Most corridor trails are located in state forests in Chenango, Oswego, Cortland and Madison counties. Cross-country skiing is allowed anywhere on state forests. State forests in the region offer 129 miles of designated trails for cross-country skiing. Stoney Pond State Forest, in Madison County, with 13 miles of trails, is popular with skiers, as is Whippoorwill State Forest in Chenango County, with another 13 miles.

In recent years, mountain biking has become a popular sport. Several state forest trails are designated for mountain biking and other uses. These include 18 miles in Oakley Corners State Forest, and 12 miles in Jewett State Forest, both in Tioga County

State Forests...a brief history

Reforestation in New York has its roots in the development of the state’s rail and canal systems, as well as the severe impact of the Great Depression on the state’s economy. In the 1800s, it is estimated that 91 percent of New York’s woodlands were cleared for cultivation and pasture by settlers. As a result, farmers began to use rail and canal routes created an easier way for farmers to travel from the poor hilltop farms of Central New York to the vast prairies of the Midwest, which offered better soil and farming conditions. Before leaving, farmers usually cleared all the removable forest products from their land. The Great Depression forced many of the remaining farmers off their land as they searched for some other way to survive.

As more and more farms were abandoned, it became obvious that New York had a serious problem. In response, the New York State Reforestation Law of 1913 was passed. This law provided for reforestation and the establishment and maintenance of forests for watershed protection, the production of timber, and for recreation and kindred purposes. The State Forest Law and the Hewitt Amendment of 1931 authorized the Conservation Department, now the Department of Environmental Conservation, to acquire land by gift or purchase for reforestation. These lands had to consist of at least 500 contiguous acres that would forever be devoted to “reforestation and the establishment and maintenance thereon of forests for watershed protection, the production of timber, and for recreation and kindred purposes.” These reforestation areas became the nucleus of our present day state forest system.

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in response to the economic hardships of the Great Depression. The CCC was a work relief program for young men ages 18 to 25 from unemployed families. Operated by the army, each CCC camp consisted of about 200 men who did paid outdoor construction work for six months. Thousands of young men planned millions of trees on the newly acquired state forests. They also worked on roads, trails, campgrounds, parks, erosion control, watershed restoration, forest protection, and other projects. The CCC also provided the first organized wildlfire suppression crews in the nation, more than 6,000 CCC camps were eventually established. By the time the CCC disbanded in 1942, more than three million men had participated in the program, including 200,000 African Americans. Since 1942, New York State has been engaged in reforestation projects on public and private land throughout the state and the effect has been profound. New York has gone from about 20 to 25 percent forest cover in 1890, to 62 percent forest cover in 2008.
State Owned Lands in Central New York
DEC Region 7

State Forests and Unique Areas are managed by DEC's Division of Lands and Forests. Wildlife Management Areas and Special Use areas are managed by DEC's Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources. State Parks are owned and managed by the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NY State Parks).

State Forest Regulations

- Check the forest fire danger level before building a fire. During times of extreme fire danger, campfires are prohibited. If you build a fire, use wood from dead and down trees from home as it may carry insects or diseases that could infest and kill forest trees. And never leave a fire unattended.
- All motorized vehicles are restricted to access roads posted as motor vehicle trails. Off-road use of motorized vehicles, such as ATVs, trail bikes and four-wheel drives, is not allowed, except where specifically permitted by signs, posted notice, or DEC permit.
- Camping for more than three nights or in a group of 10 or more requires a permit from a forest ranger. Camping is prohibited within 150 feet of water, roads or trails.
- No permanent structures should be established, including tree stands or blinds.
- Check for special hunting or trapping regulations before engaging in these activities on state forests. While hunting or trapping, all usual season regulations apply, except where otherwise indicated or permitted by sign, posted notice, or DEC permit.
- All permanent enclosures or structures should be removed before leaving the area.
- Other prohibited activities include: illegal off-road vehicle use, littering, indiscriminate shooting of trees, and illegal taking of wildlife.

Accessible fishing, boat launches, interpretive sites and hiking/horse trails are in abundance on Central New York State lands. These sites provide opportunities for persons of all ages and abilities. For information about the accessible fishing sites in Madison County, see the Accessible Recreation page on DEC's website for more information.

Visit DEC on the web at: www.dec.ny.gov