



**SHERMAN CRAIG**  
Chairman

**TERRY MARTINO**  
Executive Director

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Terry Martino

FROM: Kathy Regan

DATE: July 5, 2018

RE: Final Draft Amendment to the 2005 Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest Unit Management Plan (UMP)

Staff have completed review of the final draft amendment to the 2005 Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest (VMWF) UMP and believe it to be in compliance with guidelines and criteria of the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (APSLMP).

Both the Vanderwhacker Mountain and High Peaks UMP amendments discuss the Boreas Ponds Primitive Area to highlight the interface between the units, however authorizations for management actions within the Boreas Ponds Primitive Area occur in this Vanderwhacker Mountain UMP amendment. In addition to sections of the Boreas Ponds and MacIntyre East Tracts, eight smaller tracts have also been recently added to the Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest, and this amendment proposes minor access-related improvements to several of them.

The purpose of this amendment is to propose additional recreational opportunities and facilities within and adjacent to the recently-classified wild forest and primitive lands of the Boreas Ponds and MacIntyre East Tracts in a manner that maximizes enjoyment and appreciation of the Forest Preserve while continuing to preserve and protect its natural resources.

Management actions proposed include:

- Establishing mountain bike, equestrian, hiking and skiing opportunities within the tracts;
- Designating parking and routes for public motor vehicle access;
- Selecting a preferred alternative for the community connection discussed in the 2015 Community Connector Trail Plan for the multiple-use trail that connects North Hudson and Newcomb;

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- Maintaining 9.0 miles of Forest Preserve roads for motor vehicle access opportunities;
- Maintaining 3.4 miles of additional Forest Preserve roads for seasonal access and camping during big game hunting season;
- Providing access for persons with disabilities to hand-carry launches, equestrian facilities, and at designated tent sites along several roads;
- Enhancing paddling opportunities, including providing a hand-carry launch on LaBier Flow and along the Hudson River;
- Designating various camping opportunities throughout the tract including roadside, primitive, and water access;
- A proposal to maintain the historic cabin at the Four Corners and evaluate potential future administrative uses until a final disposition for the structure is determined; and
- Designating singletrack mountain bike trail networks.

In the proposed VMWF UMP Amendment, the Department has made a significant effort to address carrying capacity and over-use in this popular region of the Park. As described on pages 43 and 44:

*This Unit Management Plan Amendment proposes the development of wildland recreational facilities in the Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest, working in concert with the High Peaks Wilderness Complex UMP Amendment. Each section below builds on the planning process as well as the recreational experience of the user. In addition to official documents, which inform the UMP process, the Planning Team applied principles and strategies that are currently considered norms in the field of Wildland Recreation Management.*

*There are 6 best management practices that are identified as essential in successful wildland management. Essentials for Wildlands Management include:*

- 1. Planning- Includes the UMP Process (with public participation), Work Planning, development of guidelines and other supportive materials and process and building partnerships with stakeholders.*
- 2. Education and Outreach- Includes providing effective education and outreach for visitors, local government and communities and partners. Utilizing all mediums available and covering topics from preparedness to stewardship.*
- 3. Front country infrastructure- Includes roadside access points, human waste facilities, visitor information and other support facilities.*

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4. *Backcountry infrastructure- Includes trails, campsites and support facilities appropriate to educate and protect the natural resource*
5. *Limits on use when all else fails- When education and outreach along with appropriate infrastructure improvements cannot support the carrying capacity, different methods of permits, limits on use or fees should be utilized*
6. *Resources both personnel and funding- Includes staff to facilitate management, maintenance and safety concerns and appropriate funds to maintain and educate and expand opportunities for partnerships.*

*As part of the comprehensive process of managing the Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest and adjacent units, many of the proposals in this amendment will follow a process of conditional implementation, which is done through a data-based phasing process. Where these conditional management actions are listed, the Department will evaluate current conditions as part of considering the implementation of these proposals. While authorization for these conditional proposals is being sought at this time, some may never move forward if the natural resource conditions or human use patterns don't support their implementation. The Department will adhere to the 6 Wildland Management BMPs and successfully build and manage recreation facilities that don't negatively impact the natural resources or wild experience of the user.*

The Agency would like to commend the Department on this significant addition to the planning process.

The Agency held a concurrent public comment period with the Department from May 10 through June 27, 2018. The Department conducted three public meetings to receive oral comments in Albany, Newcomb and Lake Placid. During this period, the public provided several thousand written comments, including a resolution from the Local Government Review Board. The majority of the comments received were concerning management actions proposed by the Department. Comments specifically addressing APSLMP conformance included:

- Process
- Overuse Issues
- Community Connector Trail
- Day Use Area Terminology
- Forest Preserve Road Mileage
- Mountain Bicycles and the Guidance
- Fixed Anchors

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## Process

Several comments were received stating that there was not enough time to respond to these amendments and that the Department and Agency should not have held concurrent public comment periods.

The Agency believes that the 45-day concurrent public comment period was appropriate. These amendments were made available to the public on May 4, 2018. The first public presentation of these amendments occurred on May 10, 2018 at the Agency's monthly meeting. Additionally, three public meetings were hosted by the Department where the public had these documents presented to them and could ask staff for additional clarification and provide comments. Finally, the Department has made responsive changes to the draft amendments after receiving public comment and the Agency has provided responses on conformance-related comments.

## Overuse Issues

As stated earlier in this memo, the amendment begins to address carrying capacity and overuse issues. The amendment does not purport to resolve these issues, but that developing a Wildland Management Plan is an important and significant step.

## Community Connector Trail

Comments were received that stated the section of the Community Connector trail between Newcomb and North Hudson that uses Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest should be placed closer to the Blue Ridge Road.

The analysis for the placement of this section of trail was conducted in the 2015 UMP amendment. The Department has determined that the alternative that utilizes the Boreas Ponds and Gulf Brook Roads is their preferred alternative. This alternative uses existing roads and lessens new trail construction. This alternative conforms to the 2009 Snowmobile Management Guidance: Snowmobile Trail Siting, Construction and Maintenance on Forest Preserve Lands in the Adirondack Park.

## Day Use Area Terminology

Some commenters objected to the use of the term "Day Use Area" in the UMP. In the proposed UMP, the term "day use area" is only used to clarify to the public that overnight uses will not be allowed. The term "day use area" is NOT used as it is defined in the APSLMP which identifies an area within an Intensive Use Area. No management actions are proposed in the UMP amendment which would be inconsistent with management and use guidelines. The Department believes this term is less confusing than "Special Management Area."

### Forest Preserve Road Mileage

This UMP amendment adds approximately 9 miles of Forest Preserve Roads to lands classified as Wild Forest. Comments were submitted stating that this new mileage may not be conforming to the APSLMP Basic Guideline 4. Wild Forest Basic Guideline 4 states:

*4. Public use of motor vehicles will not be encouraged and there will not be any material increase in the mileage of roads and snowmobile trails open to motorized use by the public in wild forest areas that conformed to the master plan at the time of its original adoption in 1972. (APSLMP, Page 36)*

The proposed UMP amendment does not propose construction of any new roads, and the existing roads will be managed in conformance with APSLMP guidelines. The Agency, in consultation with the Department, is engaged in a process that will lead to an Agency APSLMP interpretation regarding road mileage in Wild Forest Areas of the Forest Preserve. This interpretation, once made by the Agency, will apply to all Wild Forest UMPs.

### Mountain Bicycles and the Guidance

Comments were received suggesting the proposed mountain bike trail system should be phased in starting with the proposed "Blue Ridge Trails" off of Elk Lake Road. The system proposed off of Gulf Brook Road should not be built until several years of usage of the Blue Ridge Trails have been assessed, and the impacts on the surrounding wild lands has been analyzed. The Department has modified the amendment to include this recommendation.

An additional comment was received that suggested the two proposed mountain bike trail systems violate the new Mountain bike Trail Siting and Maintenance "Guidance" with regards to choosing the location of a trail network and working with local partner organizations for trail maintenance. Agency staff believe the proposed mountain bike trail systems substantially conform with the Agency's guidance for the siting and construction of mountain bike trails, protecting the natural resources while offering new recreational opportunities. Further, the proposed system will be initiated with the Blue Ridge Trail network off Elk Lake Road, the area closest to the Hamlet of North Hudson.

### Fixed Anchors

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Past UMPs have stated that a working group will be formed to determine where or if fixed anchors can be used. Public comment criticized the Agency and the Department for not initiating this working group. The Department and the Agency have recommitted to move forward with this working group.

Agency staff have reviewed all the public comments concerning APSLMP conformance and believe that the UMP amendment complies with the guidelines and criteria of the APSLMP.