

MEMORANDUM

TO: Barbara Rice, Executive Director

FROM: Mitchell Jones, Environmental Program Specialist 1 Trainee

DATE: January 2nd, 2025

RE: Staff Review of the January 2025 Proposed Final UMP Amendment for the Mt. Van Hoevenberg Intensive Use Area.

Staff have completed review of the January 2025 Proposed Final Unit Management Plan Amendment for the Mt Van Hoevenberg Intensive Use Area (2025 UMP Amendment). The 2025 UMP Amendment proposes management actions to modernize sliding complex infrastructure, create a Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) sanctioned mountain bike course for future UCI Mountain Bike World Series events, and recognize the wax cabins located in an existing parking lot as permanent conforming structures.

The Adirondack Park Agency Board found the Mt Van Hoevenberg Unit Management Plan to be in conformance with the general guidelines and criteria of the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (APSLMP) in December 1986. Amendments to the 1986 Mt Van Hoevenberg Unit Management Plan were subsequently adopted by the Agency in January 1999 (1999 UMP Amendment) and August 2018 (2018 UMP Amendment). The 2025 UMP Amendment's proposed management actions can be divided into three main categories: Sliding Sports Complex Developments, World Cup Mountain Biking Developments, and the Wax Cabins.

Sliding Sports Complex Developments

One goal of the 2025 UMP Amendment is to facilitate the modernization of the outdated sliding complex infrastructure and improve the overall experience for athletes, spectators, and staff. To fulfill this goal, the 2025 UMP Amendment proposes the following 12 construction activities within four management action categories:

Repair/Maintenance

1. Repair Track Curves 6, 7, and 8

Expansion/Extension of Existing Facilities

2. Expand Elevated Walkways for Track Maintenance and Spectator Access
3. Extend/Upgrade Water and Sewer Services

4. Alpine Coaster Spectator Improvements

Rehabilitation or Replacement of Existing Facilities

5. Upgrade Existing Track Shading
6. Start 1 Building Improvements
7. Replace Start 3 Building
8. Replace Refrigeration Building/Infrastructure

New Facility Construction

9. New Consolidated Timing/Operations Building
10. Site Improvements in The Heart
11. Site Improvements at Curve 10
12. Install People Mover Between Lodge Area and Curve 10 and Between Curve 10 and Start 1

World Cup Mountain Biking Developments

The 2025 UMP Amendment proposes management actions for features and trail sections to create a UCI sanctioned mountain bike course for future UCI Mountain Bike World Series events. The course will be approximately 4-km. Course length on Mt. Van Hoevenberg Intensive Use Area's town easement lands will be about 2.7km and the course length through the stadium section (Forest Preserve) will be 1.3km. The stadium section is an existing cleared space and no new construction is proposed in this area. This section of the course will mainly utilize preexisting cross-country ski trails which are seasonally managed for mountain bike use (1999 UMP Amendment and 2018 UMP Amendment). Detailed specifications for features and trail segments are provided in Exhibit 8 of the 2025 UMP Amendment.

Wax Cabins

The approved 2018 UMP Amendment proposed as a management action the construction of a new biathlon stadium. As part of the new biathlon stadium, the 2018 UMP Amendment stated, "existing parking lots would be used for the temporary waxing cabins". After the adoption of the 2018 UMP Amendment by the Agency Board, the Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA) constructed temporary wax cabins in Parking Lot 1. Because ORDA intends to retain the wax cabins for the foreseeable future, the 2025 UMP Amendment intends to inventory them, and their electrical supply, as structures currently conforming to intensive use area guidelines.

APSLMP Conformance

Agency staff worked with ORDA and Department staff to assure compliance with the APSLMP.

The Agency has interpreted the term “state lands” found in the Adirondack Park Agency Act to mean land held in the name of, owned by, or under long-term lease to the State of New York or a state agency. The APSLMP states “due to the extensive State control in the form of a permanent easement over the North Elba Park District lands on Mt. Van Hoevenberg, these lands have also been considered State lands for the purposes of the Plan” (APSLMP at 1-2).

Mt. Van Hoevenberg is classified as an Intensive Use Area (IUA). IUAs are facilities for intensive forms of outdoor recreation. Two types of IUAs are identified in the APSLMP: day use areas and campgrounds. Mt. Van Hoevenberg is listed as a day use area and includes 1,593.8 acres according to the 1986 UMP.

The APSLMP recognizes Mt. Van Hoevenberg Recreation Area as a unique IUA and states it “should be maintained as a year-round sports facility meeting international standards for such sports as bobsled, luge, biathlon and cross-country skiing on improved cross country ski trails under developed, competitive conditions” (APSLMP at 45).

The APSLMP requires that construction and development activities in IUAs avoid material alteration of wetlands, minimize extensive topographic alterations, limit vegetative clearing, and preserve the scenic, natural, and open space resources of the area (APSLMP at 41-42). The proposed construction activities conform to these requirements. The most extensive alterations proposed are for the new refrigeration plant adjacent to the existing refrigeration plant. The site is currently forested and contains minor elevation changes. Although some vegetative clearing and leveling will be necessary, the proposed alterations will be minimal. Other than the proposed new refrigeration plant location, the 2025 UMP Amendment proposes little to no vegetative clearing. The mountain bike trails through sections of forested town easement lands will require the removal of duff and debris from the forest floor to define the course. These forest corridors will return to their natural state after race events and are not for public use. Vegetation in most areas of the proposed management actions mainly consist of maintained vegetation (e.g. mowed grass). Other construction locations consist mainly of dirt/gravel roadways or have existing structures (e.g. start buildings). Almost all construction locations are proposed in areas that already contain some level of development; with the exception of the previously discussed refrigeration plant and the mountain bike trails through forested easement lands. ORDA has also considered potential negative impacts from new sliding complex lighting infrastructure and will be implementing measures to reduce light pollution (e.g. downward facing shielded lights). These considerations help preserve the area’s scenic, natural and open space resources.

The APA’s wetland data are included in the 2025 UMP Amendment. The proposed actions in this amendment appear to avoid material alterations of wetlands. An Agency permit must be obtained for activities involving wetlands per the Adirondack Park Agency Act and the Freshwater Wetlands Act.

On October 17th, 2024, the Agency Board authorized staff to proceed with a joint public comment period with ORDA for the proposed 2025 UMP Amendment. The public comment period ran from October 23rd, 2024, through November 25th, 2024. ORDA and the Agency received 10 written comments during this period. Responses to public comments are attached to the 2025 UMP Amendment as Exhibit 11.

It is the opinion of staff that the proposed final draft of the 2025 UMP Amendment for the Mt Van Hoevenberg IUA conforms to the general guidelines and criteria of the APSLMP.