

Forest Stewardship in the Adirondack Park  
2024 Proposed Amendments to the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan.

The Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (APSLMP) is subject to periodic review and The Adirondack Park Agency in 2024 has proposed amendments to the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (APSLMP), which include adding language addressing accessibility, climate change, and visitor use management in the Forest Preserve.

The Adirondack Park is one of the largest intact temperate forest ecosystems left in the world. It is also the largest park in the contiguous United States. It contains almost six million acres of interspersed public and private lands and covers one-fifth of New York State. More than half of the Park is private land, devoted principally to hamlets, forestry, agriculture and open-space recreation. The Park is home for 130,000 permanent and 200,000 seasonal residents in 120 hamlets and 9 villages. The Park hosts 12.4 million visitors yearly. It is comprised of 2.9 million acres of public land and 2.6 million acres of private land. Most of the public lands exist as Forest Preserve, protected as “Forever Wild” by the NYS Constitution. About 1.1 million acres of these public lands are protected as Wilderness. Old growth forests cover more than 100,000 acres. Surface waters encompass over 350,000 acres. The Adirondacks include the headwaters of five major drainage basins. Lake Champlain and the Hudson, Black, St. Lawrence, and Mohawk Rivers. Within the Park are more than 2,800 large lakes and ponds, and more than 1,500 miles of rivers, fed by roughly 30,000 miles of brooks and streams.

Since forests are critical tools for adapting to climate change, mitigating its effects, and achieving New York’s Climate Act goals, there is an added importance in maintaining and/or expanding forest cover in the Adirondack Park through public land ownership and supporting responsible management of other private forestlands in the Park. As forests face stresses from climate change, the latter also brings additional threats and challenges for forest management and conservation. Changes in climate and extreme weather events are expected to amplify all other stressors on forests. They are also expected to affect infrastructure on forestlands such roads, bridges, and culverts, and will require an adaptive approach. Proposed amendments (attached) to current land conservation planning in the Park include more emphasis on climate adaptation strategies related to carbon mitigation, refugia for at-risk species and habitats, landscape connectivity for migration pathways, and water supply protection.

Your group has been assembled as an advisory board of environmental planning experts reporting directly to the Governor’s office. Governor Hochul has directed you to review the proposed amendments and propose new climate adaptation forest management policies for the Adirondack Park to protect public safety and the long-term health of the ecosystem, without creating significant barriers to the continuous recreation use of its resources that sustain the economic vitality of its communities.

As with any broad-based plan of action, your team will have to account for competing stakeholder priorities (residents, developers, preservationists, etc.) when addressing the following major Areas of Concern:

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**Forest Health** (issues include forest composition, pests and diseases, impacts to soils, wildfire prevention education, firefighting planning and response).

**Water Quality** (issues include drinking water quality and supply for residents, protecting aquatic habitat quality for fish and wildlife).

**Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat** (issues include wildlife management goals/policies, public access/use).

You must assess and inventory public/private capital, labor, and financial resources available to Adirondack Park managers who will be charged with implementing your recommendations to meet this challenge. Keep in mind that the policies you devise may not be successfully implemented on both public and private forestland. Some initiatives may be applicable to both while others may need to be targeted to a specific forest type. Familiarity with the missions critical to the key stakeholders will inform the policies you recommend. Your team will review the current policy and formulate new proposals to address the most significant issue in the three Areas of Concern.

You report will include the following:

1. Identify the most important issue in each Area of Concern to address first and list the remaining issues in order of future legislative action. Justify your priorities with the findings of your team's resource inventory.
2. For each Area of Concern identify the following:
  - a. Address short-term/immediate management needs for the most pressing issue your team identifies in your assessment.
    - i. Provide additional detail to identify specific locations within the Park where intervention will target the most pressing issue (for each Area of Concern). (*mapping exercise*)
  - b. Long-term policy directives that will enable forest managers to address identified issues requiring attention.
    - i. Provide additional detail to identify how long-term measures will provide protections to the majority of the Park's imperiled forest resources. (*mapping exercise*)

Here are 2 links for interactive mappers to assist with your tasks. You can utilize Snip and Sketch to create graphics from your queries.

<https://apa.ny.gov/gis/index.html>

[Interactive Maps - NYSDEC](#)

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- c. Identify sustainable funding sources to support the long-term policies identified in Item b.

## 2024 Proposed Amendments to the APSL Master Plan

### UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Section 816 of the Act directs the Department of Environmental Conservation to develop, in consultation with the Agency, individual unit management plans for each unit of land under its jurisdiction classified in the master plan. Due to the widely dispersed nature of certain wild forest areas, the Department may establish for unit management planning purposes, individual sub-units of wild forest units which because of location, physical features, ecological systems and use patterns can be managed as an individual unit. In accordance with statutory mandate, all plans will conform to the guidelines and criteria set forth in the master plan and cannot amend the master plan itself. Unit management plans will contain:

- an inventory, at a level of detail appropriate to the area, of the natural, scenic, cultural, fish and wildlife (including game and non-game species) and other appropriate resources of the area and an analysis of the area's ecosystems;
- an inventory of all existing facilities for public or administrative use;
- an inventory of the types and extent of actual and projected public use of the area;
- an inventory of existing structures and improvements that are consistent with the applicable federal accessibility standards for buildings, sites, and outdoor recreation facilities
- an assessment of the impact of actual and projected public use on the resources, ecosystems and public enjoyment of the area with particular attention to portions of the area threatened by overuse; and,
- an assessment of the physical, biological and social carrying capacity of the area with particular attention to portions of the area threatened by overuse in light of its resource limitations and its classification under the master plan. Carrying capacity assessments are prescribed throughout this document.

Fulfilling this requirement must include establishing desired conditions; indicators; thresholds for resource, social and managerial conditions; monitoring; and adaptive management. Levels of time and resources to fulfill this commitment should be proportional to the significance of impacts.

Carrying capacity has been a concept for determining how many people could use a given recreational setting before impacts are unacceptable. However, establishing a number of visitors is only one strategy to protect resources and experiences, while allowing for recreational use. Additional visitor use management strategies exist, including, but not

limited to, changing visitor behavior, modifying where and when use occurs, or building facilities that can accommodate heavy use.

Each unit management plan will also set forth a statement of the management objectives for the protection and rehabilitation of the area's resources and ecosystems and for public use of the area consistent with its carrying capacity.

These management objectives will address, on a site-specific- basis as may be pertinent to the area, such issues as:

- actions to minimize adverse impacts on the resources of the area;
- the rehabilitation of such portions of the area as may suffer from overuse or resource degradation;
- the regulation or limitation of public use such that the carrying capacity of the area is not exceeded and the types of measures necessary to achieve that objective;
- the preservation of aquatic and terrestrial habitats of the area;
- the preservation and management of the fish and wildlife resources (including game and non-game species) of the area;
- the preservation and management of the lakes, ponds, rivers and streams of the area, with particular attention to all proposed or designated wild, scenic and recreational rivers;
- the preservation and management of special interest areas such as the habitats of rare, threatened or endangered species and areas with the potential for the reintroduction of extirpated species, unique geological areas and historic areas or structures;
- the identification of needed additions or improvements to, and plans for providing for further appropriate public use of, the area consistent with its carrying capacity;
- the removal of such non-conforming uses as may remain; and,
- the identification of management actions to improve access to and enjoyment of the unit's lands and waters by persons with disabilities; and
- a description of how the proposed management actions and alternatives, when considered together, assess and plan for climate change vulnerabilities specific to the unit.

Unit management plans will also address the administrative actions and the minimum facilities necessary on a site-specific basis, as may be pertinent to the area to attain the stated management objectives of such area.

Schedules for achievement of such objectives will be included in each unit management plan. The land characteristics and the recommended objectives for each area will be

related to and integrated with the characteristics and management objectives for adjacent public and private land areas.

General recommendations for future acquisition will be included as appropriate.

An initial draft of the unit management plan for each state land area including alternative management objectives, where appropriate, will be submitted to the Agency for review and comment, prior to the preparation of the final draft plan for public review.

Opportunity will be made for review and comment on the draft unit management plans by the public and other interested parties, and a public meeting or meetings will be convened as appropriate for that purpose. Final unit management plans will be prepared by the Department of Environmental Conservation after due consideration of all comments and recommendations made on the public review draft. The Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Conservation will adopt each final unit management plan which will then be filed with the Agency. The Department of Environmental Conservation will report annually to the Agency on progress made toward the implementation of each adopted unit management plan.

Any material modification in adopted unit management plans will be made following the procedure for original unit plan preparation. The Department of Environmental Conservation has made significant progress in unit management planning. This progress should be continued. The Department of Environmental Conservation should commit the necessary resources so that all unit management plans are completed.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

In the 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (Climate Act), New York State committed to reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and ultimately achieving net zero emissions in the state. The Climate Act requires all state agencies to consider whether the issuance of permits or other approvals are “inconsistent with or will interfere with the attainment of the statewide greenhouse gas emissions limits established in Article 75 of the Environmental Conservation Law (ECL).” CLCPA, Ch. 106, Laws of 2019 §7(2).

The Climate Action Council’s Scoping Plan lays out a roadmap to meet the Climate Act’s nation-leading goals and requirements. The Plan describes strategies across various sectors, including cross-cutting policies concerning land use, adaptation, and resilience. Such strategies include maintaining intact forests and wetlands as carbon sinks and ensuring resilient and connected landscapes for species whose ranges are shifting. For the lands subject to the guidelines and criteria of the State Land Master Plan, it is imperative to view all policy and planning decisions through the lens of climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience. The Park includes abundant sources of clean freshwater and

wetland habitats, as well as millions of acres of intact, Constitutionally-protected Forest Preserve to capture GHG emissions and offer resilience against extreme weather events. Wild lands and open space provide connectivity to combat habitat fragmentation, protect water quality, and provide habitat for numerous species including those whose ranges may be shifting due to climate change. Unit management plans should describe how the proposed management actions and alternatives analyses assess and plan for climate change vulnerabilities. For instance, right-sizing bridges and culverts and sustainable trail construction can help to safeguard investments in recreational infrastructure and prevent future environmental degradation. Green infrastructure and appropriate storm water management improvements can help to mitigate onsite flooding at public facilities as well as protect water quality

### INVASIVE SPECIES

The negative impacts of invasive species on natural forest and aquatic communities are well documented. Colonization and unrestrained growth of invasive species cause the loss of biodiversity, interruption of normal hydrology, suppression of native vegetation, and significant aesthetic, human safety and economic impacts.

Terrestrial and aquatic invasive species have been identified at increasing rates of colonization along roadsides in campgrounds, and in water bodies of the Forest Preserve. Some of these species have the potential to colonize backcountry lands, lakes and ponds and degrade natural resources of the Forest Preserve. Efforts should be made to restore and protect the native ecological communities through early detection and rapid response efforts to eradicate or control existing or newly identified invasive species populations. Subject to existing policy and guidelines, the Department will use the basic tools needed to preserve, protect and restore the natural native ecosystems of the Forest Preserve.

### SPECIAL HISTORIC AREA UNIT MANAGEMENT PLANS

This master plan also provides for special historic area unit management plans for the development and management of state historic sites. This special procedure is designed to address the unique problems associated with these types of facilities. Such special historic area unit management plans will be the subject of public hearings and will be submitted to the agency for its approval as being consistent with the master plan prior to their implementation

### INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION OF THE MASTER PLAN

Decades of experience under the master plan have confirmed that questions of interpretation of the master plan as applied to a given activity or land use arise from time to

time. This is particularly the case in the context of those guidelines that are quite general in character. During the public hearings and consultations preceding the 1978/79 revision of the master plan, there was considerable public comment on the need to clarify the relationship of the Agency to the Department of Environmental Conservation and other state agencies on matters of interpretation and application of the guidelines of the master plan.

In this regard, it is well to remember that the legislature has established a two-tiered structure regarding state lands in the Adirondack Park. The Agency is responsible for long-range planning and the establishment of basic policy for state lands in the Park, in consultation with the Department of Environmental Conservation. Via the master plan, the Agency has the authority to establish general guidelines and criteria for the management of state lands, subject, of course, to the approval of the Governor. On the other hand, the Department of Environmental Conservation and other state agencies with respect to the more modest acreage of land under their jurisdictions, have responsibility for the administration and management of these lands in compliance with the guidelines and criteria laid down by the master plan.

In accordance with its administrative and management responsibilities, the Department of Environmental Conservation is charged with the duty to prepare, in consultation with the Agency, individual unit management plans for the units of land classified in the master plan. The unit management plans must apply the general guidelines and criteria in the master plan and cannot amend the master plan itself.

Unit management plans shall be regarded as a mechanism to refine and apply the general guidelines and criteria in the master plan to specific conditions on the ground, at a level of detail appropriate to administration and management. When finally adopted by the Department, these unit management plans will assist significantly in resolving questions of interpretation and application of the master plan.

The 1979 revision of the master plan expressly extended the unit management plan concept to the special case of historic areas. In addition, neither the Act nor the master plan excludes the possibility of preparation of individual unit management plans for other land classifications such as state administrative areas – an approach which would be fully consistent with the basic structure of the Act.

In light of the above principles, the following guidelines will apply to questions of interpretation and application of the master plan:

-- The Agency will be responsible, as a policy matter, for general interpretations of the master plan itself either on its own initiative, at the request of any interested state agency,

or, for state agencies other than the Department of Environmental Conservation, in connection with its review of state projects under Section 814 of the Act.

-- The Agency will be responsible for determining whether a proposed individual unit management plan complies with the general guidelines and criteria set forth in the master plan.

-- The Department of Environmental Conservation (or other appropriate state agencies) will be responsible for the application of the master plan and individual unit management plans with respect to administration and management of the state lands under its jurisdiction.

-- The Agency and the Department of Environmental Conservation (or other appropriate state agencies) will enter into memoranda of understanding designed to implement these guidelines in actual practice. The Agency and the Department of Environmental Conservation have operated under such a memorandum of understanding since 1982.