



**Department of
Environmental
Conservation**

Division of Lands & Forests
Region 3

Bluestone Wild Forest Unit Management Plan Amendment

**Towns of Kingston, Woodstock, Ulster and Hurley
Ulster County**

May 2015

Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor

Joseph J. Martens, Commissioner

For further information contact:

Jeff Rider, Supervising Forester
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
21 South Putt Corners
New Paltz, NY 12561
(845) 256-3000

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OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

625 Broadway, 14th Floor, Albany, New York 12233-1010


P: (518) 402-8545 | F: (518) 402-8541

www.dec.ny.gov

MAY 19 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Record

From: Joseph J. Martens 

SUBJECT: Bluestone Wild Forest

The Final Amendment to the Bluestone Wild Forest Unit Management Plan has been completed.

The Final UMP Amendment is consistent with Environmental Conservation Law and Department Rules, Regulations and Policies and is hereby approved and adopted.



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

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Introduction

This amendment to the Bluestone Wild Forest Unit Management Plan (UMP), initially adopted by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) in May 1997, proposes four projects to be implemented within the Bluestone Wild Forest.

The Bluestone Wild Forest encompasses approximately 3,018 acres of Forest Preserve land (upon approval of this plan) within the Catskill Park and is located in Ulster County just west of the City of Kingston. The majority of the unit lies within the Towns of Kingston, Ulster and Woodstock along with several smaller detached parcels located in the Town of Hurley.

The 1997 UMP called for several access improvements to the unit, most of which have been implemented. These include: the completion of two parking areas, three multi-use loop trails, and an accessible fishing pier in the vicinity of Onteora Lake, and the construction of a parking area and multi-use trail in the vicinity of Jockey Hill Road.

Several conditions have changed since the 1997 UMP that warrant a new evaluation of recreational opportunities in the unit: 1) In 2013, the Department received a request from the Ulster County Federation of Sportsmen to increase fishing opportunities at Onteora Lake through the stocking of warmwater fish species, 2) the rise in popularity of mountain biking has led to both a higher demand for riding opportunities and an increase in illegal trail building within the unit, and 3) in recent years two additional parcels of land have been acquired by the Department adjacent to lands currently classified as Bluestone Wild Forest.

The four projects proposed in this amendment address the issues listed above and provide for increased recreational opportunities within the Bluestone Wild Forest.

Project 1

Objective: Classify two recently acquired parcels as wild forest to be added to the Bluestone Wild Forest.

Pursuant to the 2008 Catskill Park State Land Master Plan (CPSLMP), state land within the Catskill Park may be classified either through the development, revision or amendment of a UMP, or through an amendment or revision to the CPSLMP itself. Through this amendment the Department proposes to classify two parcels of land recently acquired as an addition to the Catskill Forest Preserve as wild forest.

The two parcels are to be added to the Bluestone Wild Forest and are described as follows:

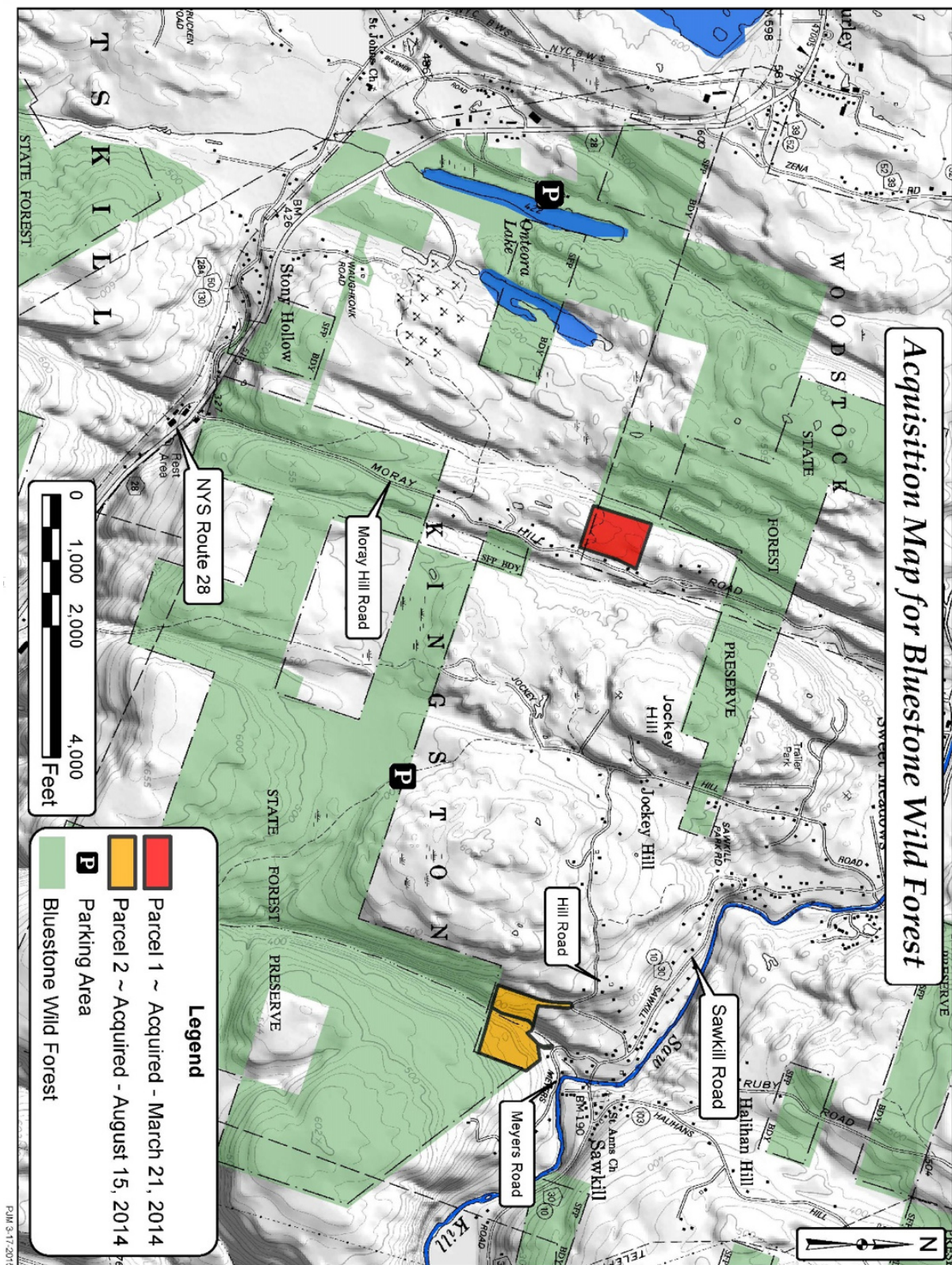
Parcel 1 consists of 13.773 acres of land adjacent to the Bluestone Wild Forest and is located off of Moray Hill Road in the Town of Woodstock (see figure 1). This parcel was initially gifted from the landowner to the Woodstock Land Conservancy who then re-gifted it to the State of New York for inclusion in the Catskill Forest Preserve. This parcel became State lands by recording of deed filed on March 21, 2014

Parcel 2 is located in the Town of Kingston and consists of two adjoining parcels of land adjacent to the Bluestone Wild Forest which total 19.52 acres (see figure 1). This parcel was purchased from the Open Space Conservancy for inclusion in the Catskill Forest Preserve.

This parcel contains frontage on both Meyers and Hill roads and was described by the mountain bike community as a key parcel for public access to the eastern portion of the Bluestone Wild Forest. This parcel became State lands by recording of deed filed on August 15, 2014.

The addition of the two parcels described above adds approximately 33.29 acres to the Bluestone Wild Forest, resulting in an overall acreage of approximately 3,018 acres. The addition of these new parcels into the unit does not alter the factors considered when the lands currently in the Bluestone Wild Forest were originally classified.

Figure 1



Project 2

Objective: Construct and mark a new 2.5 mile mountain bike trail to be located within the Jockey Hill section of the Bluestone Wild Forest.

Project 2 proposes the construction of a mountain bike trail to be accessed through lands recently acquired by the NYS DEC (identified as “parcel 2” under Project 1), located adjacent to Myers Road in the Town of Kingston. The proposed trail will consist of approximately 2.5 miles and will connect Myers Road with the existing yellow marked “Wintergreen” trail.

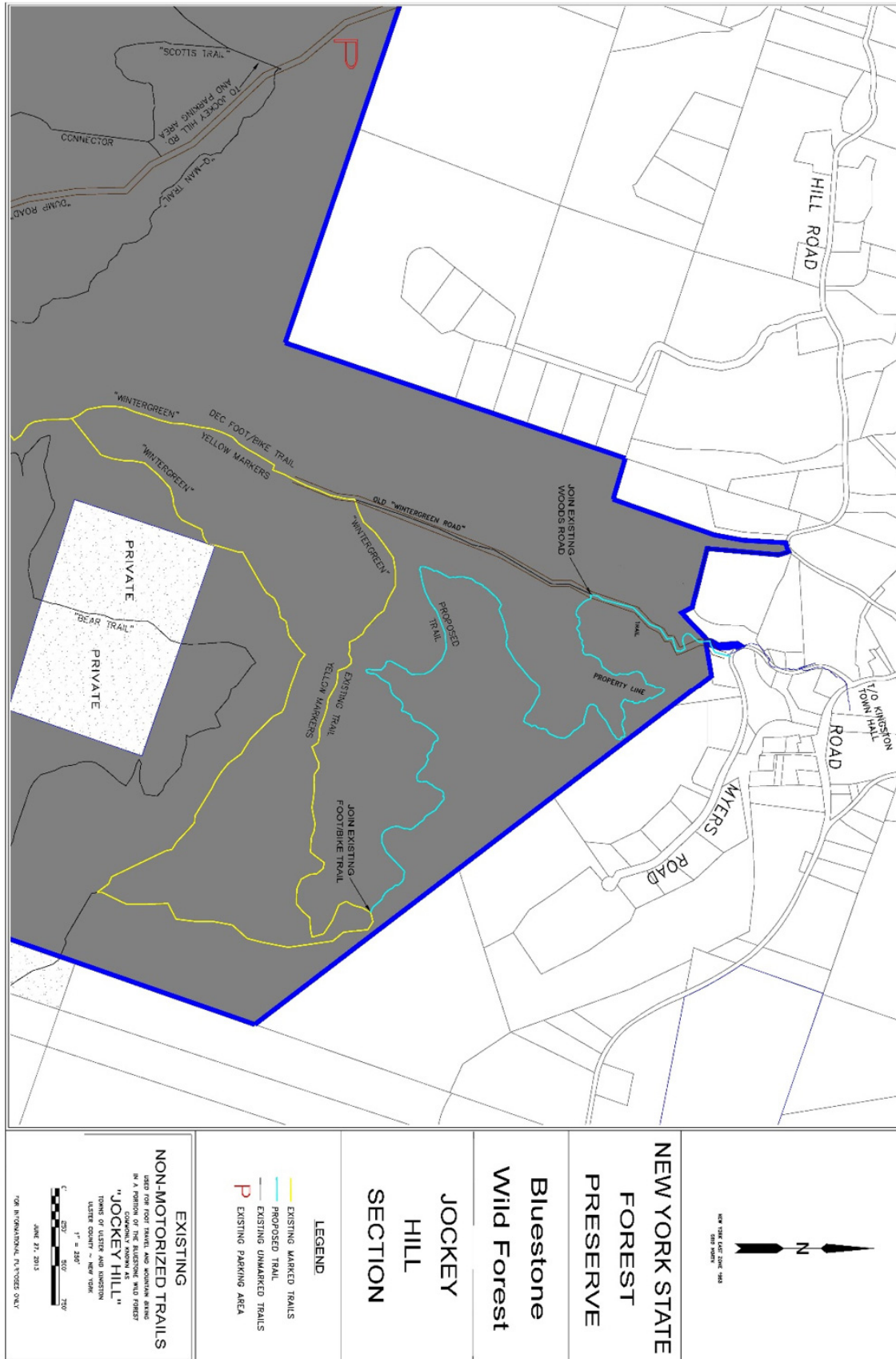
The proposed trail will begin at Myers Road and will follow an existing forest road, known as “Old Wintergreen Road”, south for approximately 1/3 of a mile. It will then become a “single track” trail as it leaves the existing road and turns northeast for approximately 1/3 of a mile back through the eastern portion of the property before once again turning south. The proposed trail will continue south for approximately 3/4 of a mile, then turn east for approximately 1 mile where it eventually intersects the yellow marked “Wintergreen” trail. The proposed trail will be constructed following New York State Forestry Best Management Practices for protecting water quality and will be routed to minimize tree cutting to the extent possible.

This proposed trail will allow for improved access and recreational opportunities within the eastern portion of the Jockey Hill section of the Bluestone Wild Forest. It is anticipated that overall use of the Bluestone Wild Forest will not increase significantly as a result of this proposed trail.

No significant adverse environmental impacts will result from the implementation of this project (refer to Appendix A).

The proposed trail is marked in blue on the attached map (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Proposed 2.5 mile mountain bike trail.



Project 3

Objective: To Update the Official Trail Network of the Bluestone Wild Forest

Project 3 proposes to update the official trail network on the Bluestone Wild Forest. An inventory of the trail system was conducted and a map was produced in the fall of 2012 (see figure 3).

Currently, there are many unofficial trails found throughout the Bluestone Wild Forest that were created through public use. Unofficial trails can often lead to adverse impacts to the environment and can cause potential conflict with neighboring land owners if located incorrectly. Trails or trail sections that are deemed inappropriate, such as those crossing private lands with no official agreement or trails located in areas unable to support them, will be relocated to a more suitable location or eliminated entirely.

Two popular unofficial trails located on the Bluestone WF are the locally named “Close to the Edge” and “Bear”. Both trails currently cross private property and are popular single track trails for mountain bike enthusiasts. Both trails cross properties designated Priority 1 under the Land Acquisition section of the original Bluestone Wild Forest Unit Management Plan adopted in May 1997. Although there have been no apparent conflicts with neighboring landowners, the Department requires its partner organizations (in this case a mountain bike club) to secure agreements with private landowners to allow public use of these trails before connecting trails on state land will be officially designated. If agreements cannot be reached with private landowners, the trails will be rerouted on state lands where feasible. In cases where no practical alternate route exists, the trails will be closed to public use. In the vicinity of Bluestone Wild Forest, no private landowner agreements have been sought at this time.

The long term goal of the Department would be to acquire these private land inholdings in fee from willing sellers.

In addition to the above listed trails, there are many more unofficial trails popular with outdoor enthusiasts that through design and layout, lend themselves well to official NYSDEC designation. Some of the trails come in close proximity to or cross corners of private lands. Opportunities exist for rerouting the majority of these trails to bring them within the boundaries of the Bluestone Wild Forest.

Upon adoption of this amendment, official recognition will be granted to the trails once the necessary reroutes and marking with NYSDEC trail markers has been completed. The trail unofficially named “Q-man trail” will become part of the official NYSDEC Wintergreen Trail marked with yellow trail markers. Other trails will be marked with official NYSDEC red, blue and yellow trail markers depending on their location and general geographic direction. Care will be taken during the marking process in order to keep trails marked with the same color separated as much as possible to prevent user confusion.

The table below lists the unofficial trail names; whether or not the trail crosses private property and the actions proposed for each trail.

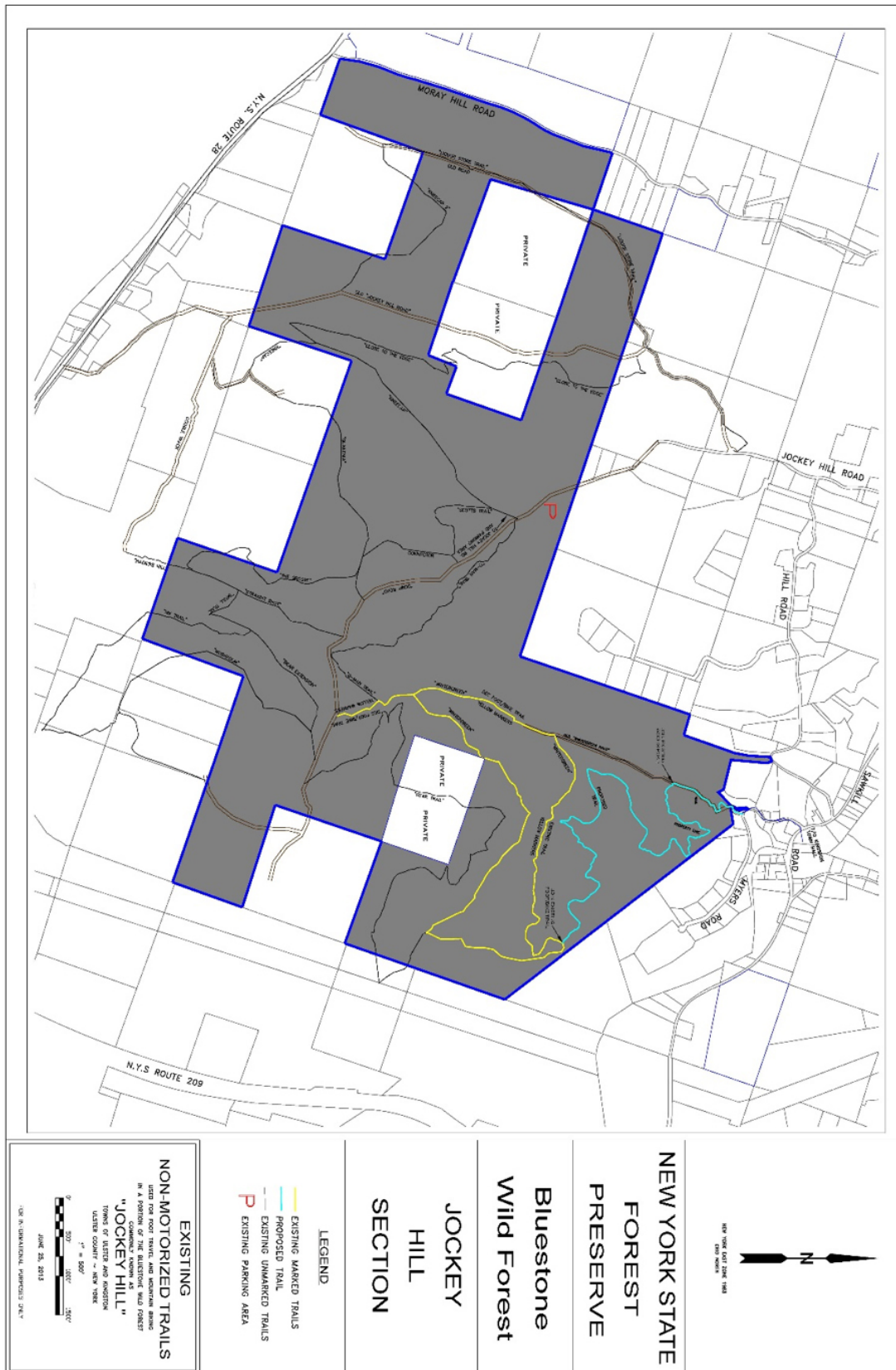
Jockey Hill Bike Trails		
Un-Official Trail Name	Crosses Private Property Y/N	Proposed Actions
Kneecap 2	Y	Reroute and designate
Close to the Edge	Y	Seek landowner permission or reroute and designate
Kneecap	N	Reroute (due to wet, poorly drained trail sections) and designate
Guanenia	Y	Seek landowner permission
Scott's Trail	N	designate
The Groove	Y	Reroute and designate
Q-Man Trail	N	designate
Straight Shot	N	designate
Hainers Hill	Y	Reroute and designate
Skull Trail	N	designate

MK Trail	Y	Reroute, connect to Mushroom Trail and designate
Bear Extension	N	designate
Mushroom	Y	Reroute and connect to MK trail and designate
Bear Trail	Y	Reroute and designate

Best Management Practices for preserving water quality will be implemented to minimize erosion. The Natural Heritage data base has been reviewed to ensure trail locations do not impact threatened or endangered species or significant habitats.

The Department has determined that no significant adverse environmental impacts will result from this project (see Appendix A).

Figure 3: Map with the locations of official NYSDEC trails as well as unofficial trails that are located within the bounds of the Bluestone Wild Forest's Jockey Hill section.



Project 4

Objective: To Manage Ontario Lake as a Warm Water Recreational Fishery

Project 4 recommends the management of Ontario Lake as a warm water fishery to improve recreational opportunities. Managing Ontario Lake as a warm water recreational fishery could include stocking on an annual basis with naturalized fish species which are commonly found in southeastern New York State. Many species of fish commonly stocked in the southeastern part of New York State are not necessarily native to the area but are native to New York State.

Ontario Lake is a shallow, warm water lake which has had tiger muskellunge stocked in the past. Though not a native species, tiger muskellunge is a species often stocked throughout southeastern New York State. The most recent stocking of Ontario Lake with tiger muskellunge was in 2003.

Fisheries management will include periodic checks on the status of the fisheries populations and may include changes in fishing regulations or stocking of species commonly found and stocked in southeastern New York State. Decisions concerning stocking levels will be made by the Regional Inland Fisheries Manager.

The management of Ontario Lake as a warm water fishery will significantly improve public recreational fishing opportunities.

State Environmental Quality Review:

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation as lead agency has undertaken an environmental assessment of the projects proposed and concluded that they will not result in any significant environmental impacts. A Negative Declaration has been issued and is attached in appendix A.

APPENDIX A

Negative Declaration

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

State Environmental Quality Review
NEGATIVE DECLARATION
Notice of Determination of Non-Significance

Project Number:

Date: 3/16/2015

This notice is issued pursuant to Part 617 of the implementing regulations pertaining to Article 8 (State Environmental Quality Review Act) of the Environmental Conservation Law.

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), as lead agency, has determined that the proposed action described below will not have a significant effect on the environment and a Draft Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

Name of Action:

Implementation of the Bluestone Wild Forest Unit Management Plan Amendment

SEQR Status:

☒ **Type I Action** ☐ **Unlisted Action**

Conditioned Negative Declaration:

☐ **Yes** ☒ **No**

Description of Action:

Implementing of the Bluestone Wild Forest Unit Management Plan Amendment, located within the Towns of Hurley, Kingston, Ulster, and Woodstock, Ulster County. These lands are located within the Catskill Park and designated as Forest Preserve. Proposed Management Actions are described in the Unit Management Plan Amendment.

Location:

Bluestone Wild Forest, Towns of Hurley, Kingston, Ulster, and Woodstock, Ulster County

NEGATIVE DECLARATION

BLUESTONE WILD FOREST UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT

Description of the Actions:

This Amendment calls for the implementation of four projects on the Bluestone Wild Forest, a 2,985 acre unit of land classified as forest preserve, located within the Catskill Park. The four projects proposed include:

1. Classify two recently acquired parcels as wild forest to be added to the Bluestone Wild Forest.
2. Construct and mark a new 2.5 mile mountain bike trail to be located within the Jockey Hill section of the Bluestone Wild Forest.
3. Update the official trail network of the Bluestone Wild Forest.
4. Manage Onteora Lake as a warm water recreational fishery.

Reasons Supporting This Determination:

The Bluestone Wild Forest will continue to be managed under the Wild Forest guidelines established in the Catskill Park State Land Master Plan as well as within the constraints set forth in Article XIV of the New York State Constitution and Section 9 of the Environmental Conservation Law.

Implementation of this Amendment to the Bluestone Wild Forest Unit Management Plan will increase public recreational opportunities within the unit in several ways:

1. The classification of two recently acquired lands as wild forest to be added to the Bluestone Wild Forest provides additional opportunities for public access to the eastern portion of this unit.
2. Construction of the proposed 2.5 miles of new multi-use trail at Jockey Hill will provide the public with additional mileage added to the trail system, greatly enhancing the recreational opportunities for this area. During construction of the new trail, Best Management Practices for protecting water quality will be followed. The new trail route was sited in to avoid wetlands and other sensitive habitats and to minimize erosion. The new trail will be limited to a width of 6 feet and routed to minimize tree cutting.

3. Updating the official trail system of the Bluestone Wild Forest will provide the Department the opportunity to inventory all of the trails that exist on the ground. Trails or trail sections which are found to be poorly located or cross private property can be relocated to more appropriate locations or closed if necessary to protect the natural resource. Trails inventoried which meet Department standards can be adopted as official trails and will be marked with official markers and added to the annual trail maintenance schedule. During construction of new trails or trail reroutes, Best Management Practices (BMP's) for protecting water quality will be followed. Any new trails or rerouted sections of existing trails will be sited to avoid wetland and other sensitive habitats and to minimize tree cutting.
4. Managing Onteora Lake as a warm water recreational fishery will vastly improve the recreational opportunities for the public by enabling the Department to improve the fishery through stocking of naturalized fish species which are commonly found in southeastern New York State. Onteora Lake has been stocked with tiger muskellunge in the past, with the most recent stocking taking place in 2003. It is expected that the proposed management of Onteora Lake as a warm water fishery will not have a significant impact on the environment. Onteora Lake will only be stocked with fish that are either native or already commonly occur (naturalized) in New York State and are proven to not be detrimental to native fish species. By enhancing the fishery, the public will likely have a more satisfying angling experience.

Management of the Bluestone Wild Forest will continue to be guided by two principal goals:

1. To preserve and protect the Wild Forest character and integrity of the unit of the Catskill Forest Preserve.
2. To provide outdoor recreational opportunities without damaging or degrading the resources or impairing the Wild Forest character of the unit.

Implementation of the proposed amendment to the Bluestone Wild Forest Unit Management Plan will fulfill these goals.

For Further Information:

Contact Person: Jeff Rider, Supervising Forester
Address: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Division of Lands and Forests
21 South Putt Corners Road
New Paltz, NY 12561-1620
Telephone Number: (845)256-3004

APPENDIX B

Responsiveness Summary

APPENDIX B - RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY

We endorse the specific goal of Project 2 (now project 3) pertaining to the trails *Close to the Edge* and *Bear Trail*...These are signature BSWF trails that go a long way in making “Jockey Hill, Jockey Hill.” The loss of either or both to the BSWF trail network and riders would be truly significant and likely result in reduced ridership and usage.

Portions of both the Close to the Edge and Bear Trails currently cross private property with no official public use easement or agreement. The Department will seek to obtain official easements with the private land owners which allow for public use of these trails. In cases where the private lands are offered for sale from willing sellers, the Department will seek to acquire those lands to provide appropriate trail protections. In cases where the Department fails to obtain a public easement or fee acquisition, the trails will either be relocated onto public lands where terrain and conditions allow, or closed to public use if a suitable relocation is unavailable.

We recommend DEC consider expanding the goals section of Project 2 (now project 3), to give the consideration to an overarching goal to maintain and, where possible, enhance and expand what has evolved into a premier and popular destination for mountain biking and a local resource for many local towns and the City of Kingston.

The Department will seek to improve and enhance the existing trail system as funding, staffing and terrain allow.

We recommend an additional trail connectivity project be considered for addition to the proposed UMP amendment. If feasible, we recommend the amendment identify potential land acquisitions that would provide ready trail connectivity to BSWF from the proposed Ulster County Rail Trail Project (Catskill Mountain Rail Trail).

Potential connections between the Bluestone Wild Forest and the Ulster County Rail Trail Project will be identified and sought, pending approval of the Rail Trail.

I do not support the management of Onteora Lake as a warm watery fishery and the stocking of Onteora Lake with non-native fish at the present time.

Consideration should be given to enhanced management aimed at improving swimming, canoeing, and kayaking opportunities during warm seasons and ice-skating and cross-country skiing in winter. I support expanded fishing opportunities that do not conflict with these other recreational uses and that do not involve stocking of non-native fish.

Many of the species currently inhabiting Ontario Lake are not native to Southeastern New York. These popular species, such as largemouth bass, bluegill and crappie, have been providing anglers who visit the lake with a good fishing experience during all seasons of the year. Other species, such as trout, are not well suited to the warm water environment that exists in Ontario Lake. DEC Fisheries staff will continue to monitor the fisheries found in Ontario Lake and look to maintain or improve the quality of the fishing experience without impacting other uses of the lake. Stocking is only one of many fisheries management techniques available to the Department for maintaining or enhancing the fishing experience found at Ontario Lake.