


# Great South Woods Complex Planning

An aerial photograph of a large, deep blue lake with several forested islands and peninsulas. The surrounding land is covered in dense forest with autumn-colored foliage in shades of orange, yellow, and green. In the far distance, rolling mountains are visible under a clear blue sky.

## Strategy & Recommendations

May 2016



# GREAT SOUTH WOODS COMPLEX PLANNING

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## STRATEGY & RECOMMENDATIONS



State University of New York  
College of Environmental Science and Forestry

Prepared by the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry project team, with input and guidance provided by Core Team representatives, including NYS DEC Lands & Forests, Adirondack Park Agency and Hamilton County Board of Supervisors.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The State of New York’s most important, long-term land acquisition goals in the Adirondack Park have largely been achieved, yet the development of outdoor recreational opportunities within the Park that connect State lands with local communities still requires much attention. A new approach was undertaken to conduct recreation planning at a landscape scale, beyond the boundaries of individual management units, and to engage communities and stakeholders in the design of a destination-based system of trails and infrastructure that could stimulate economic activity while protecting the Adirondack Park’s ecosystems and wild character.

The Great South Woods project is the first of a series of planning exercises to be conducted on a much larger scale than that of individual State land management units. The Great South Woods (GSW) planning area (or Complex) is roughly one-third of the Adirondack Park, covering two million acres and 20 Forest Preserve management units. The process used to develop the GSW Strategy and Recommendations emphasized **public participation** and prioritized **local knowledge and community-generated ideas** to inform recreation planning at multiple scales. The GSW process was designed and led by SUNY ESF in collaboration with representatives from DEC Lands & Forests, the Adirondack Park Agency and the Hamilton County Board of Supervisors.

Development of the GSW Strategy was guided by the core themes of **Access, Connectivity, High-Quality Recreation Destinations, Public-Private Partnerships and Ecosystem Stewardship**. The Strategy is based on an 18-month participatory process that included over 300 individuals that attended public workshops and meetings held across the GSW planning area. By engaging local residents, town leaders, recreation experts, DEC Forest Rangers, agency planners, and representatives from several NGOs, the GSW process generated a **comprehensive GIS (digital map) inventory** of existing and proposed land and water trails, recreation assets such as campgrounds and boat launches, and points of natural, cultural and historical interest. All of this information was used to develop the **GSW Recommendations** central to this Strategy.

The GSW Recommendations include a detailed **Maps & Narratives section** (pages R-1 to R-59) that describe Local and Regional Networks of trails with more than 50 conceptual designs for recreation “features” that seek to meet the multiple objectives of the GSW effort. Ecosystem Stewardship recommendations in the GSW Strategy address long-standing issues such as protection of ‘remote core’ wilderness, as well as emerging issues, such as invasive species.

All components of the GSW Recommendations and Strategy are conceptual and are based on a landscape-scale approach to the region, meaning that routes and locations depicted on maps are approximate. The GSW Strategy is intended for planning purposes only, is subject to revision, and does not necessarily represent current or future planning priorities for DEC or APA.

Next steps will require further engagement with communities to identify priority projects and engage in further design work as well as internal consideration of the GSW Recommendations by DEC and APA. This report also outlines lessons learned from the GSW process, and discusses potential implications of the GSW Strategy for the DEC UMP process, and State Land Master Plan revisions. The GSW Recommendations described in the Maps and Narratives section (R-1 to R-59) may also be interactively explored at the GSW web map online here:

**<http://greatsouthwoods.adirondackatlas.org>**



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## GLOSSARY OF MAJOR CONCEPTS

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### ADIRONDACK PARK WILD LANDS COMPLEX

A mixture of public and private lands that includes multiple Forest Preserve units classified as wilderness, wild forest and primitive areas, as well as working forests with DEC conservation easements and other private lands, including adjacent hamlets and villages. By ‘stitching together’ adjacent units of the Forest Preserve, it is possible to conceptualize extensive trail networks for wild lands complexes, by creating land and water routes with connections to lodging, outfitters and other amenities in local communities. By consolidating Forest Preserve units, conservation easements and other private lands, landscape planning can occur at scales relevant for stewardship of ecosystems, natural resources and sensitive species and habitats.

### DESTINATION-BASED RECREATION

National and international tourists are increasingly seeking vacation destinations that offer unique and high-quality recreation opportunities. Design of destination-based recreation assets, such as mountain bike trails, should prioritize quality over quantity to attract visitors. Destinations also connect recreation activities in natural settings with amenities and activities in nearby communities, and typically offer many different options to encourage return visitation.

### TRAIL NETWORK

A group of interconnected trails that enable multiple routes of travel between origins and destinations, which feature junctions (intersections between two routes) and nodes or ‘hubs’ (areas where three or more routes create an interchange), that overall enhances connectivity and creates a variety of options for moving recreation users around a region. Portions of the network can be highlighted at different geographic scales, from local trail systems surrounding a town, to the larger-scale routes that connect the local trails together and provide region-wide travel routes. Networked trails contrast with spur or ‘dead-end’ trails that require users to retrace their steps.

### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

An approach that relies on active engagement with members of the public, including representatives of stakeholder groups, to guide and inform planning and decision-making at multiple stages of a process. Benefits of public participation include: increased information and understanding, improved long-term support for the decision or management practice, improved management practices, improved quality of the decision, reduced conflict, citizen empowerment, enhanced stewardship, and providing a public space for deliberation and opinion formation.



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## GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND TERMS

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**AATV:** Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages

**ACTLS Project:** Adirondack Community-based Trail and Lodging System Project

**APA:** Adirondack Park Agency

**NYSDEC or DEC:** New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

**NCNST:** North Country National Scenic Trail

**NPT:** Northville-Placid Trail

**SUNY-ESF:** State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry

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**Adirondack Regional Geographic Information System (ARGIS):** A web-mapping portal ([www.argis.org](http://www.argis.org)) that serves regional data in support of DEC unit management planning. ARGIS contains ecosystem, biodiversity, and natural resource inventories, as well as State land classifications and other data, in partnership with DEC, APA, The Nature Conservancy, The Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program, and NY Natural Heritage, among others.

**Back-country:** Remote or core interior areas, at significant distance from human settlements and areas where motorized use is allowed, which typically pose logistical challenges to access.

**'Construction Required':** Trail segments proposed as components of the GSW Regional and Local Networks. These sections do not currently exist and will require field-validation and other suitability assessments by DEC authorities prior to implementation.

**DEC Existing Assets:** All of the known recreation infrastructure (man-made) located on Forest Preserve and DEC easement lands, including trails, unpaved roads, boat launches, campgrounds, parking areas, trail registers, primitive campsites, fire towers, scenic vistas, etc. The GSW process added significantly to DEC's inventory of existing assets.

**Easement:** A legal agreement between a landowner and another party, such as a government agency or nonprofit organization, that involves the sale or forfeiture of certain rights associated with the parcel. Easements provide a mechanism for public authorities to influence land use and access permissions on private lands without requiring fee ownership. Currently NYS DEC owns conservation easements, some of which include recreation access rights, on over 800,000 acres of private land across the Adirondack Park.

**Ecosystem Stewardship:** The science and practice of natural resource management to promote ecological integrity and human well-being in a world increasingly defined by rapid change and uncertainty. The ecosystem stewardship framework recognizes the fundamental dependence of human well-being on functioning ecosystems and biodiversity; and embraces landscape-scale, data-driven and participatory approaches to planning and decision-making.

**Front-country:** Areas near human settlements and transportation corridors, accessed easily by day users and a wider range of recreationists, including motorized modes of travel.

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**Geographic Information System (GIS):** A software application that uses geographic data to create maps and conduct spatial analysis, GIS has become an essential tool in land use planning as well as conservation science. Online GIS applications are commonly known as ‘web maps’.

**GSW Feature:** A discrete component of the GSW Network (see below) that is recommended as part of the GSW Strategy (see R-1 to R-59); a trail that may be described as a loop/circuit, nested loop, connector or spur (see R-16 for a glossary of feature types). Most contain trail segments that require construction to complete the feature from the existing trail network.

**GSW Network:** A functional network for moving recreation users around the GSW region that incorporates all GSW Features recommended in the Strategy. The conceptual GSW Network is presented at two scales, with the Local Network nested within the Regional network, and consists of existing and proposed, or 'construction required' segments (See Trail Network in Glossary of Main Concepts Section).

**Multi-modal:** A trail designed to incorporate different modes of recreation along different sections, such as hiking a segment, biking a segment, and paddling a third segment.

**Unit Management Plan (UMP):** A document that provides an assessment of the permissible public uses, existing natural resources, and the ability of those resources to support use, for a defined area (Unit) of the NYS Forest Preserve. Twelve (12) management units are located entirely, and 8 additional units partially, within the GSW Complex (Table 2; Figure 2).



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## INTRODUCTION

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### PRINCIPLES OF COMPLEX PLANNING

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The Great South Woods represents a new model and opportunity for recreation planning that:

- **Facilitates a high degree of public engagement to gather local knowledge and community ideas to inform planning, design, and implementation steps.**
- **Expands the geographic scope of planning efforts from small units to larger landscapes, allowing for a more holistic perspective and the design of high-quality recreation infrastructure that meets multiple objectives.**

### PROJECT JUSTIFICATION AND OBJECTIVES

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New York State's most important, long-term land acquisition objectives for the Adirondack Park – once considered by many to be unrealistically optimistic – have largely been achieved. However, the development of outdoor recreational opportunities within the Park requires additional attention. A creative, new approach was needed to address this situation: one that integrates long-term planning (responsibility of the Adirondack Park Agency) and recreation management on Forest Preserve and conservation easement lands (responsibility of NYS DEC) on a broader landscape level, in order to benefit both the economy of Adirondack communities as well as wild land protections required by longstanding law and public demand.

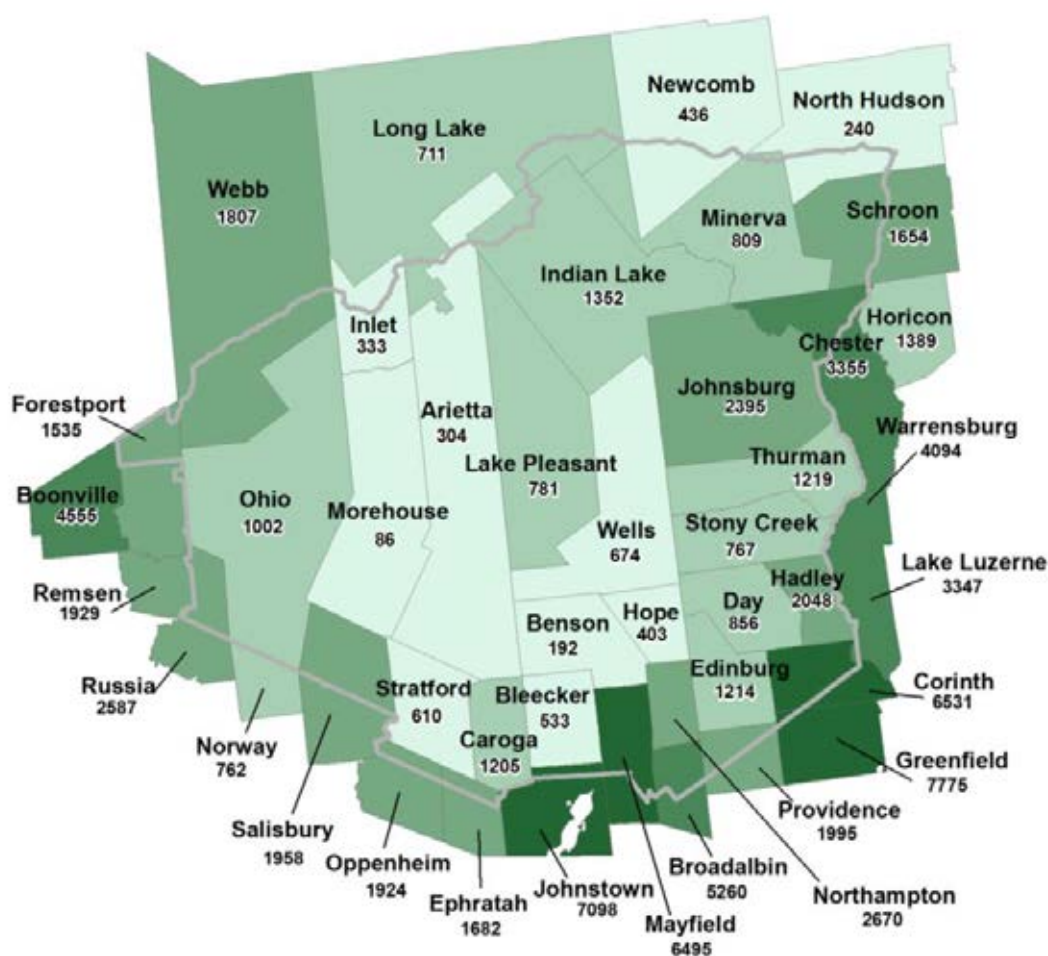
The Great South Woods project is intended to be the first of five such planning exercises to be conducted on a much larger scale than individual State land units. With the GSW project serving as a model, and after DEC has evaluated the process and outputs of this Strategy, subsequent planning efforts may focus on the remaining complexes in the Adirondack Park: Battleground Lakes, Cloudsplitter Summits, Northern River Highlands and Oswegatchie-Black Waters (Figure 2). The Great South Woods (GSW) is by far the largest of the proposed planning complexes, with the highest percentage of State land (2 of every 3 acres), the most towns and hamlets, and nearly 900 miles of existing trails (Table 1, Figure 1). Despite the large trail mileage, the GSW has more State land per trail mile than any other complex and has significant untapped potential for multiple modes of recreation and ecotourism that link communities and State lands. The GSW region is managed as 20 separate units, each with its own unit management plan (UMP), including 7 UMPs which have not yet been completed (Table 2), which can limit the capacity to design and implement larger-scale projects, such as long-distance trails. The GSW landscape is largely forested (86%), with approximately 6% wetlands and 5% open water (Appendix I). These conditions identified the GSW as an ideal candidate for complex planning.

Through focused collaboration with various stakeholders and the employment of professional expertise in outdoor recreation and geographic information systems (GIS), the GSW Strategy

sought to identify opportunities to develop community-based trail and lodging systems that can help revitalize communities as gateways, waypoints and destinations for outdoor recreation. An outline of steps necessary for development and stewardship of these opportunities is provided.

**Table 1: Description of DEC proposed planning complexes for the Adirondack Park. Towns may be counted in more than one complex.**

Planning Complex	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	% Wilderness	% State Land	% Easement	Trail Miles	Towns
Cloudsplitter Summits	2,802	51	60	6	468	18
Battleground Lakes	3,259	6	35	9	244	31
Great South Woods	8,127	26	64	7	885	43
Northern River Highlands	5,465	0	27	28	247	36
Oswegatchie-Black Waters	3,905	26	55	15	509	19



**Figure 1: GSW resident populations (2010). Totals are reported for towns on the GSW boundary, although only a portion of those populations reside in the GSW planning region.**



**Table 2: DEC management units in the GSW complex. The following management units contain <1% State Land area inside the GSW: Hammond Pond, Lake George, and Sargent Ponds. The '--' indicates the lack of a final UMP.**

Unit Name	UMP Year	State Land Area in GSW (acres)	% State Land Area in GSW	Existing Trails in GSW (mi)
Black River	1996	127,698	100	158
Blue Mountain	1995	31,366	97	35
Blue Ridge	2006	46,931	100	37
Essex Chain Lakes Complex	2016	18,805	100	39
Ferris Lake	--	146,232	100	131
Fulton Chain	1990	3,743	24	3
Hoffman Notch	2012	38,141	100	23
Hudson Gorge	--	23,725	100	21
Jessup River	2006	49,022	100	56
Little Moose	--	12,258	100	8
Moose River Plains	2011	58,052	86	139
Shaker Mountain	2006	41,726	100	29
Siamese Ponds	2005	112,839	100	92
Silver Lake	2006	107,374	100	51
Vanderwhacker Mtn.	2005	76,268	86	58
West Canada Lake	--	172,193	100	103
Wilcox Lake	--	127,500	100	109

The complex planning process is expected to provide a new opportunity to involve various stakeholders, including Adirondack communities, in planning for the development of recreation within the Adirondack Park. It is also expected to contribute to building cooperation between these various stakeholders as scenarios are explored in which the value of recreation is better captured, while protection of the Park's natural resources for future generations is also enhanced.

The GSW project's main objectives were to identify opportunities and feasible means to:

- **Optimize the potential of the Great South Woods to provide a wide spectrum of outdoor recreational activities available on Forest Preserve, conservation easement, municipal and private lands across the region;**
- **Establish a new community-based land-and-water trail and lodging system that would strengthen community linkages to each other and to nearby Forest Preserve and conservation easement lands;**

- Better develop front-country areas of State lands for improved access and greater enjoyment of diverse – including motorized – recreational activities;
- Improve protection of back-country areas of State lands in their primitive, wild condition while improving their trail systems for heightened enjoyment of self-powered recreation.



**Figure 2: DEC proposed boundaries for Adirondack Park complexes, for large-scale planning efforts. The map identifies the most visited trailhead in each complex, providing the total count of visitors per trailhead from 2012. Trail use estimates are provided by the Adirondack Trail Registry Database (ADK-TReD), developed by ESF and NYS DEC.**

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## WORKING ASSUMPTIONS OF THE GSW EFFORT

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All efforts to achieve the GSW objectives will necessarily satisfy and support the long-standing ecosystem stewardship mandates of the Adirondack Park. Constitutional protections of the Forest Preserve as ‘forever wild’ forest land, as well as the mandate of the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (SLMP) to guide the preservation, management and use of all Forest Preserve lands according to their classification, remain fully in effect. These statutory requirements are recognized as remaining critical to long-term, successful achievement of the project’s objectives. To this end, the GSW Strategy follows principles of ecosystem stewardship – which recognizes the fundamental dependence of human well-being on functioning ecosystems – to address the balance between increased recreational access and maintenance of ecological integrity.

All components of the GSW Recommendations and Strategy are conceptual, and derived from a landscape-scale approach to the complex and surrounding region as a whole. As such, all aspects of this Strategy are presented and intended for planning purposes only, are subject to revision, and do not necessarily represent current or future planning priorities of the DEC, APA or local communities. The recommended and proposed features depicted as products of the GSW Complex Planning Project are based on feedback received at public workshops and expert input, and are best viewed in the interactive web map included as a deliverable of this project.

This Strategy and its Recommendations serve as a guide, or a point of departure based on our process thus far. Any further development efforts and implementation decisions will be made by the appropriate authorities, including DEC and APA, in partnership with local governments, community leaders and various stakeholder organizations. Although considerable efforts have been made to validate and verify existing features, the routes and other recreational features portrayed in the GSW Recommendations (pages R-1 through R-59) are spatially approximate and have not been thoroughly field-validated. As such, careful consideration of on-the-ground conditions through field-validation will be critical in future planning, design and implementation. This validation will typically occur through the DEC Unit Management Planning (UMP) process (See [Linking GSW Planning to Ongoing UMP Efforts Section](#)). In addition, the DEC will assess all GSW Recommendations for universal access opportunities, and will make it a top agency priority to address landowner concerns regarding recreation opportunities on private land – which may be included in GSW Recommendations due to the project’s large-scale approach. Finally, the GSW Complex Planning Project is an experimental model, and will be more fully evaluated by ESF and its partners prior to its future implementation in other planning complexes.

Any steps to improve outdoor recreation opportunities by constructing new infrastructure or improving existing assets should include careful monitoring and management of recreation usage and its impacts on adjacent natural and built environments. Providing destination-caliber recreational experiences while protecting environmental quality and fostering economic growth in local communities will require additional investments and mechanisms for implementation from State, local, and private organizations, as well as close cooperation among these entities.

## CORE THEMES OF GSW STRATEGY

The GSW Strategy is organized around five Core Themes that encompass the multiple objectives, desired outcomes and legal mandates involved in this complex planning effort (Figure 3). All five themes are related and may be thought of as a hierarchy of objectives, in which *Access* and *Connectivity* are improved via *Public-Private Partnerships* that design, create and promote *High Quality Recreation Destinations*. All of these goals rely upon *Ecosystem Stewardship* as the fundamental criteria for all recreation management and State land planning in the Adirondack Park (Figure 3). The Core Themes of the GSW Strategy are described in detail in the following section.



Figure 3: Core Themes of the GSW Strategy

### ACCESS

**The GSW Strategy seeks to both increase and diversify recreation access in one of the least accessible landscapes of the Adirondack Park (and the US Northeast).**

Increasing access to the lands and waters of the Forest Preserve across the GSW means creating more miles of trails and additional forms of infrastructure, such as (but not limited to) lean-tos, campsites and boat launches, at key strategic locations that improve their usefulness for a variety of recreationists. It also means leveraging existing infrastructure to its maximum utility and identifying opportunities and needs for improving current assets to support increased or different patterns of recreation usage, using a landscape-scale approach that prioritizes efficient design.

A greater diversity of recreation opportunities, natural settings and experiences is equally vital to the goal of improving access in the GSW Complex. To create spaces for many types of recreation and for recreation users with a range of physical capabilities and desired experiences, the GSW Strategy considers both self-powered and motorized forms of recreation, and specifically encourages the identification of trail opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Although the diversification of access can be achieved in part by creating multiple-use trails, such multi-purpose infrastructure often does not provide the high-quality recreation experiences that are sought as a core objective of the GSW Strategy (as described below).



## CONNECTIVITY

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**The GSW Strategy seeks to improve trail-based connections among Adirondack communities and with points of natural and cultural interest in the Forest Preserve.**

In the GSW Strategy, improving connectivity goes directly hand-in-hand with improving and diversifying recreation access. A critical step in achieving this goal requires developing a more comprehensive inventory of the features on the landscape that should be connected together via one or more types of recreation activity. In this project, ESF and its partners facilitated a public, community-based participatory process to gather and validate information on important features, and transferred these data to computer-based maps that enable the visualization of an entire landscape and its overlapping natural (e.g., terrain, ecosystem types, natural resources) and societal (e.g., political and administrative boundaries, land ownership) features.

By linking together communities and adjacent points of interest along the road system (e.g., lodging, restaurants, recreation outfitters) with recreation destinations of natural and cultural interest in the Forest Preserve (e.g., summits, scenic vistas, waterfalls, fishing and hunting areas), the GSW Strategy seeks to build a **functional network for moving recreation users around the region**. This network would allow visitors and local residents to access trailheads and other entry points directly from locations within the communities. As envisioned, such a network would provide a number of other advantages, including: increased visitation of local communities and patronage of tourism-related businesses, reduced demand for roadside parking and camping adjacent to trailheads, and closer community engagement in project design and implementation.

## PUBLIC – PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

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**To support implementation, the GSW Strategy emphasizes the necessity to develop public-private partnerships that can mobilize the funds, expertise, labor, planning processes and stakeholder engagement needed to make projects a reality.**

The GSW Strategy recognizes that current State funding levels will not support development of the new recreation infrastructure or expanded ecosystem stewardship efforts recommended here. Building on recent successes with public-private cooperation to maintain recreation access, such as in the Moose River Plains Wild Forest with the Towns of Inlet and Indian Lake, the GSW process has emphasized from the start that partnerships among communities, private sector and agency officials will be fundamental to design and implementation of the GSW Recommendations. In several cases, access through private lands is often required in order to develop linkages within communities. Future design and implementation of the GSW Recommendations will directly hinge on partnerships that can successfully engage landowners and local businesses. Local communities stand to gain from such partnerships by influencing the design of recreation assets to support local visitor-dependent businesses and events. The GSW Strategy does not directly address local Town planning, but has been developed to create synergies with existing initiatives and local partnerships to support economic development.

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## HIGH QUALITY RECREATION DESTINATIONS

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**To draw visitors to the Great South Woods for recreation and tourism, the GSW Strategy prioritizes the establishment of trails and other infrastructure that create high-quality and unique recreation experiences.**

Creating a functional network of trails for moving recreation users around the region, across the Forest Preserve and among communities and tourism, was our primary and large-scale approach for enhancing the GSW as a recreation destination. We aimed to connect existing 'dead end' trail segments, and design new access routes, to form a network of opportunities. Such a network affords a broad spectrum of users a near-infinite amount of desirable experiences, tailored by the user's specific needs such as group size, level of skill / exertion, or mode of use, at a specific point in time. Not all opportunities would be desirable to all users, but such a network would demonstrate the potential to support and create a variety of experiences, and to allow communities and agency officials to customize the types of opportunities that are offered nearby.

Although many ideas are proposed here, the GSW Strategy prioritizes the *quality* of the destination over the *quantity* of destinations. A trail network on its own is not necessarily a destination, but requires careful design to attract users interested in high quality recreation opportunities. Networks can serve as the 'skeleton' upon which customized infrastructure can be designed, such as technical single-track trails over varying terrain for mountain biking, or by simply moving hiking trails off of roads. Designing a quality destination often involves clear trade-offs with compatibility or multiple-use infrastructure. In lieu of multiple-use routes, we emphasize multi-modal (or hybrid) opportunities, where different segments or routes are designed to support different modes of use, such as a 'pack-and-paddle' or 'hike and bike' destination. Overall, designing high quality recreation destinations requires a strong understanding of the expectations and desires of recreationists, as well as the opportunities provided by the natural environment, land use regulations and local community engagement.

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## ECOSYSTEM STEWARDSHIP

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**The GSW Strategy recognizes that healthy and functioning ecosystems are the fundamental basis of human well-being, including all recreation activities, and that careful stewardship of Adirondack ecosystems is both a legal and ethical responsibility.**

Ecosystem stewardship is fundamental to the design, implementation, and management of all recreation development throughout the Adirondack Park. The GSW Strategy embraces the existing legal mandates established by New York State's Constitution and the SLMP, and is further guided by ESF's mission to advance the stewardship of natural and designed environments. The GSW Strategy puts forward guidelines for ecosystem stewardship at both local and regional scales, to address both long-standing issues, such as back-country protection, as well as emerging threats, such as invasive species. Many of these guidelines, such as: considering impacts on wetlands, shorelines and sensitive habitats; careful monitoring of

recreation use; deployment of new informational and educational signage; limiting new trail construction in remote core backcountry areas; and proactively managing for invasive species; are most relevant to planners and should be considered during design and implementation stages.

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## OVERVIEW OF PROJECT METHODS

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The role of SUNY ESF as the GSW project lead was to design and implement a participatory planning process, create an expanded and improved GIS inventory for the GSW Complex, and work with the GSW Core Team to develop the GSW Strategy. [Appendix II](#) provides details on the GSW process, its participants, and a discussion of outputs and outcomes of the GSW effort.

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## PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PROCESS

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In order to engage in participatory, collaborative planning with the public and among the GSW project partners, ESF designed and facilitated multiple rounds of public meetings and workshops, beginning with a project Kickoff Meeting in December 2014, followed by a series of five Local Knowledge Workshops (LKW) in January-March 2015. ESF digitized the map data collected during LKW, and worked with DEC regional staff from April through June 2015 on data validation. ESF used the validated data to generate preliminary recommendations, which were reviewed by project partners during Joint Planning Sessions in May and September 2015, and presented during three Public Strategy Meetings in November 2015, and at the Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages Membership Meeting in December 2015. The Recommendations and Strategy presented in this document reflect the feedback received December 2014 through December 2015 from various project partners and the public.

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## PROJECT DELIVERABLES

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At project completion, ESF has produced the following principal outputs and products:

- **A comprehensive, web-accessible GIS inventory of land-and-water trails and associated recreational infrastructure that currently exist for public use across the region's lands; and lodging facilities and other significant amenities that are currently available to visiting recreationists.**
- **A set of Recommendations concerning development of new trails and associated recreational infrastructure that could result in enhanced outdoor experiences for visiting recreationists to enjoy (including projects already approved and those yet to be proposed in draft management plans); and opportunities to assist with the development of new lodging facilities and other amenities for these visitors.**
- **A proposed Strategy that sets forth a path for establishing these new recreational and lodging opportunities and for "making it all work" – for both the economic benefit of communities and the State's protection of the GSW's ecosystems and natural resources from potential impacts of increased outdoor recreation.**

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The GSW Strategy recommends the design and implementation of a network of recreation infrastructure across the GSW Complex that meets the multiple objectives of the planning effort. The GSW Recommendations are based directly on the information collected in community workshops, which was then evaluated by ESF staff and members of the Core Team. Portions of these recommendations were presented at three Public Strategy Meetings ([Appendix II](#)) and feedback from these sessions has been incorporated into the current set of recommendations.

In this Strategy, GSW Recommendations are presented primarily in the form of maps that highlight features along a network of trails and related infrastructure. Maps contain a limited amount of information selected to highlight key features, and are not exhaustive in terms of the information available in the GIS Inventory or other map-based information available to the GSW effort. Narratives have been developed to describe each map.

We note that although these recommendations have resulted from a lengthy participatory process that iteratively engaged local communities and agency staff, they primarily represent efforts of the ESF team to synthesize a large amount of information into a planning document. The ESF team recognizes their limitations in State land planning, both in terms of expertise and authority, and is providing these results to inform an ongoing planning process executed by DEC and APA.

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### GSW RECOMMENDATIONS: REGIONAL NETWORK

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The GSW Regional Network represents an attempt to link together communities and destinations on and through the Forest Preserve, using existing and proposed routes that provide circuits (or loops) and long-distance traverses (or thru-hikes) across the region (see [GSW Regional Network maps and descriptions R-1 through R-13](#)). The Regional Network intersects with key long-distance travel routes, including the unique Hudson River Corridor, existing Northville-Placid Trail, and officially proposed North Country National Scenic Trail ([R-1](#)). Each Regional Network feature shares a trail segment with as many as seven additional features, while connecting up to seven communities in the GSW planning area (i.e., Infinite North). Features vary in length from 12.4 to 116.9 miles, average 71 miles per feature. Two-thirds of the features require some degree of construction, but overall the Regional Network is 83% complete and existing. Regional Network features provide a framework of trails and linkages, creating recreation opportunities that span the GSW planning area, and allowing for the creation of Local Network features focused on communities and opportunities at a smaller scale.



## GSW RECOMMENDATIONS: LOCAL NETWORK

The GSW Local Network is nested within the GSW Regional Network (R-14), and provides recreation-based connections among communities and local points of interest on the Forest Preserve, based on existing and proposed routes. The GSW Recommendations and Strategy highlights 32 features, varying in length from 7.7 miles (Potter Bike Trail) to 64.4 miles (West Indian Lake Network), averaging 25.5 miles per feature. Seven features are complete and existing, while the remaining features are 74% composed of existing trail infrastructure. The Local Network features are described in individual narratives according to the Core Themes of the GSW Strategy: *Access, Connectivity, Ecosystem Stewardship, High Quality Recreation Destinations, and Public-Private Partnerships*. Use the Map Extent guide provided on R-15 to locate individual features or specific areas within the Map Narrative text.



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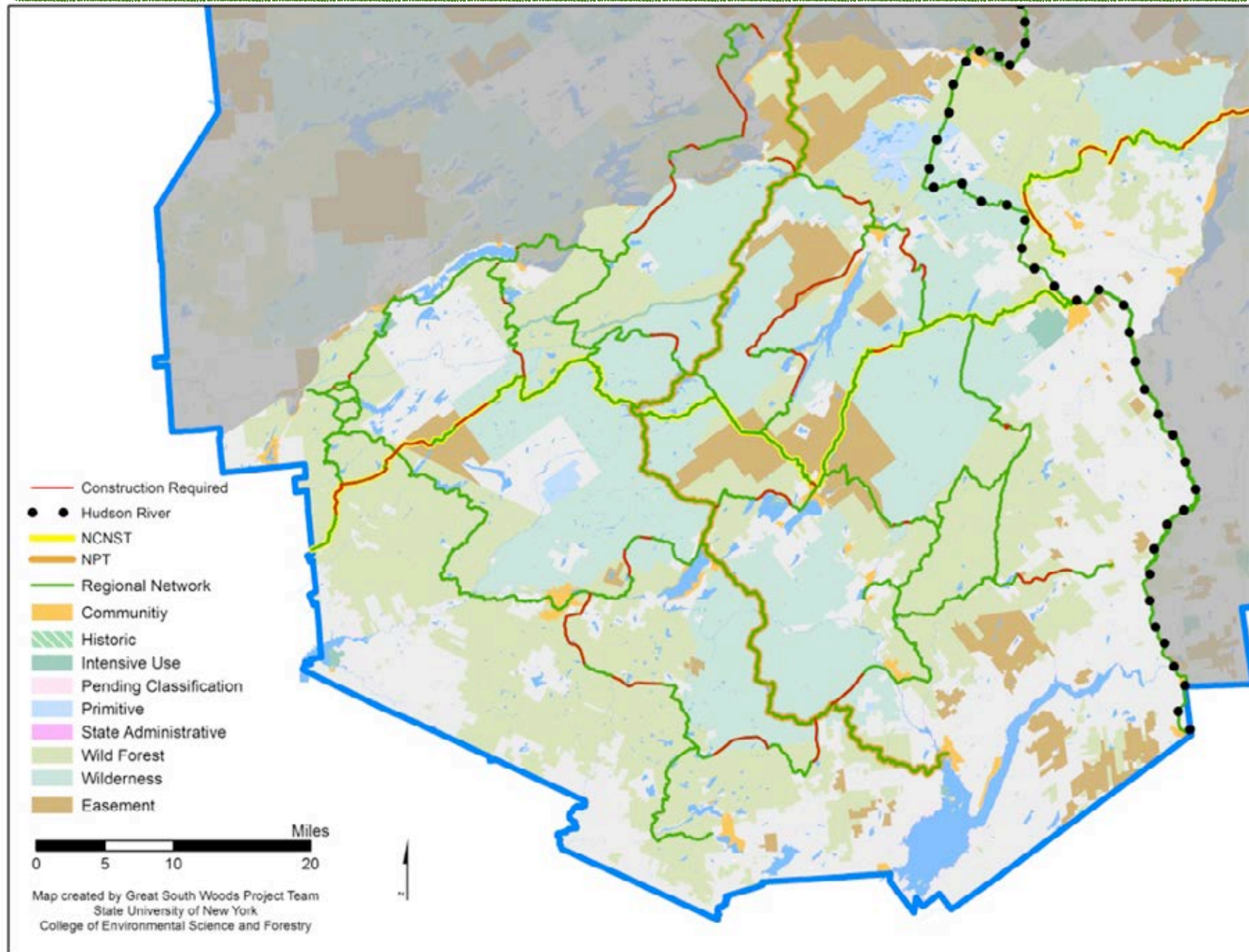
MAPS AND NARRATIVES (PAGES R-1 TO R-59)

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***SEE NEXT PAGE***

# GSW Regional Network

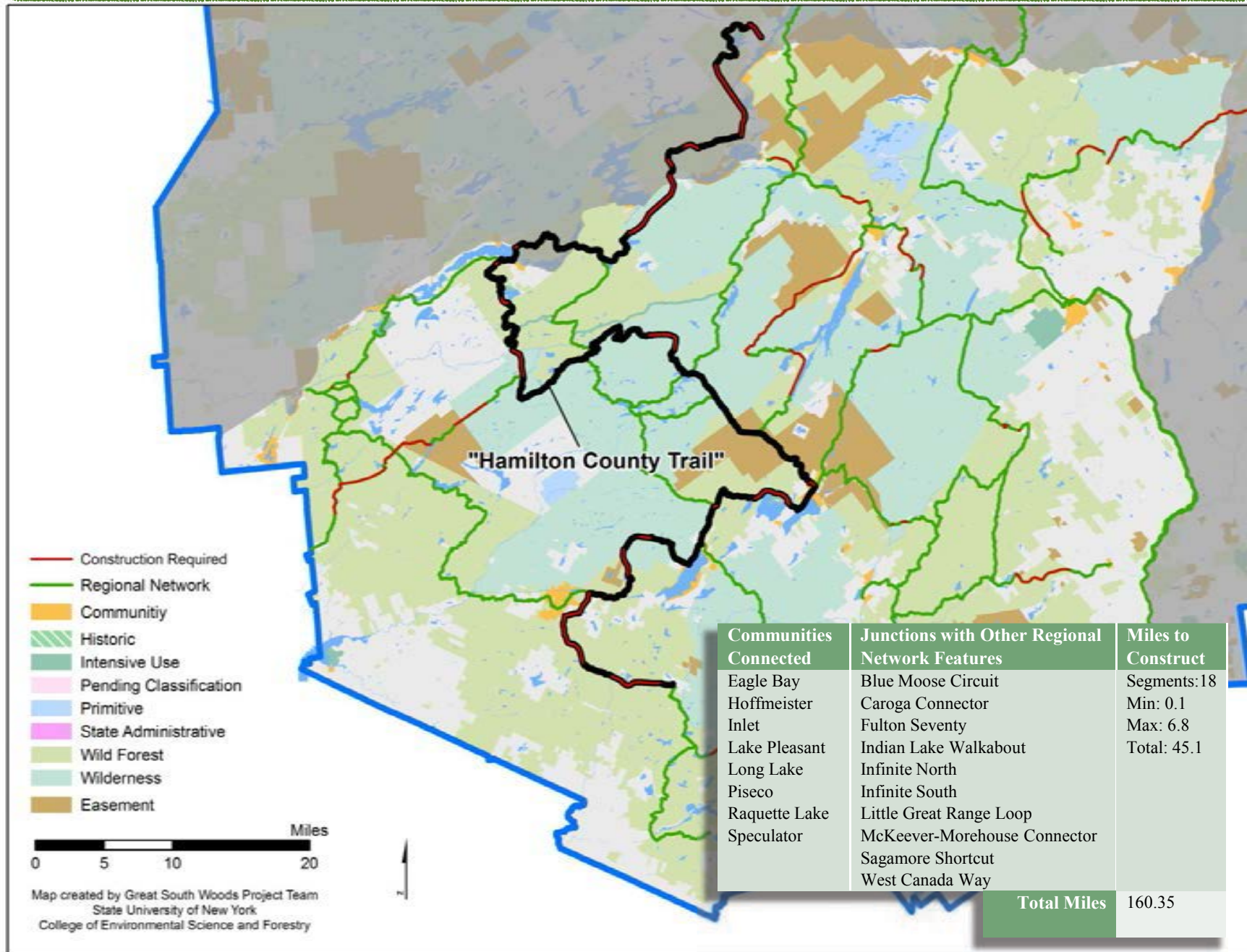
featuring Northville-Placid Trail (NPT), North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) and Hudson River corridor





# GSW Regional Network

## Hamilton County Trail (proposed)





# GSW Regional Network

## Bluestone Trail (proposed)

Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
Blue Mtn Lake Indian Lake Stony Creek	Infinite North Blue Moose Circuit Little Great Range Loop Indian Lake Walkabout Wells-Wilcox Circuit	Segments: 7 Min: 0.1 Max: 4.6 Total: 14.3	66

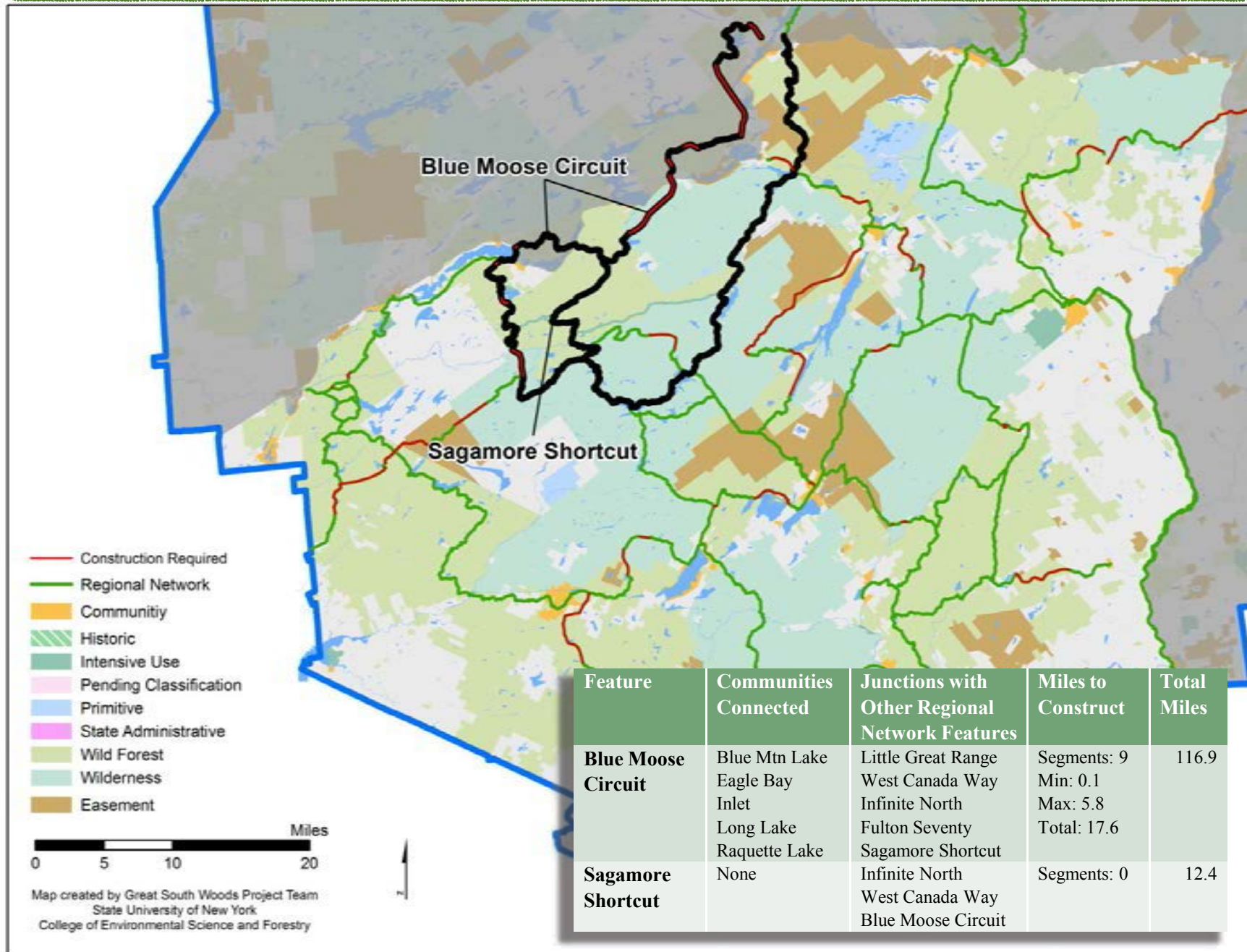
- Construction Required
- Regional Network
- Community
- Historic
- Intensive Use
- Pending Classification
- Primitive
- State Administrative
- Wild Forest
- Wilderness
- Easement

0 5 10 20 Miles

Map created by Great South Woods Project Team  
State University of New York  
College of Environmental Science and Forestry

# GSW Regional Network

## Blue Moose Circuit & Sagamore Shortcut





# GSW Regional Network

## Fulton Seventy

Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
McKeever Old Forge Inlet Thendara	Infinite North McKeever-Morehouse Connector Blue Moose Circuit	Segments: 8 Min: 0.1 Max: 4.6 Total: 14.5	70.6

Fulton Seventy

- Construction Required
- Regional Network
- Community
- Historic
- Intensive Use
- Pending Classification
- Primitive
- State Administrative
- Wild Forest
- Wilderness
- Easement

0 5 10 20 Miles

Map created by Great South Woods Project Team  
State University of New York  
College of Environmental Science and Forestry

# GSW Regional Network

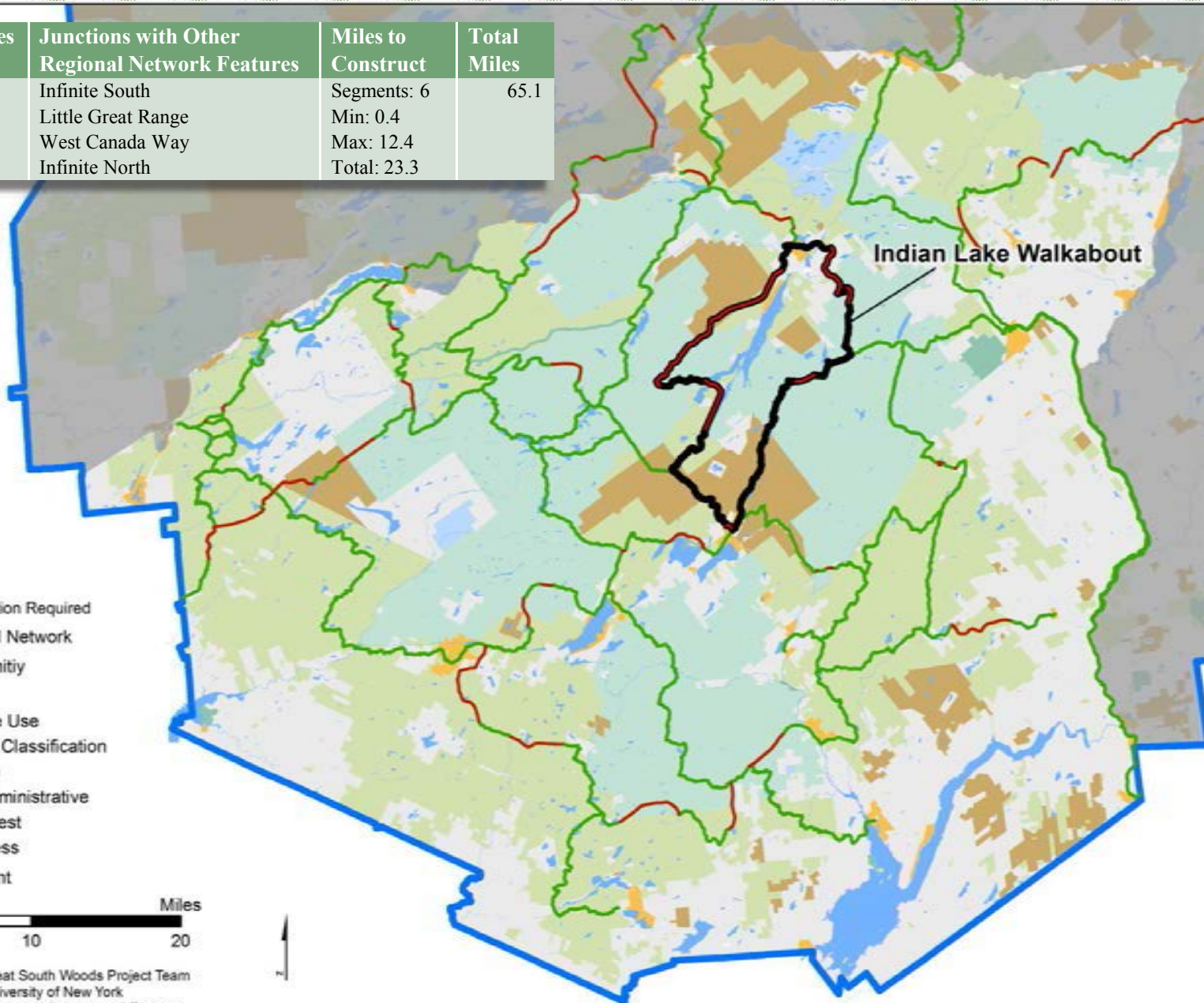
## Indian Lake Walkabout

Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
Indian Lake Sabael Speculator	Infinite South Little Great Range West Canada Way Infinite North	Segments: 6 Min: 0.4 Max: 12.4 Total: 23.3	65.1

- Construction Required
- Regional Network
- Community
- Historic
- Intensive Use
- Pending Classification
- Primitive
- State Administrative
- Wild Forest
- Wilderness
- Easement

Miles  
0 5 10 20

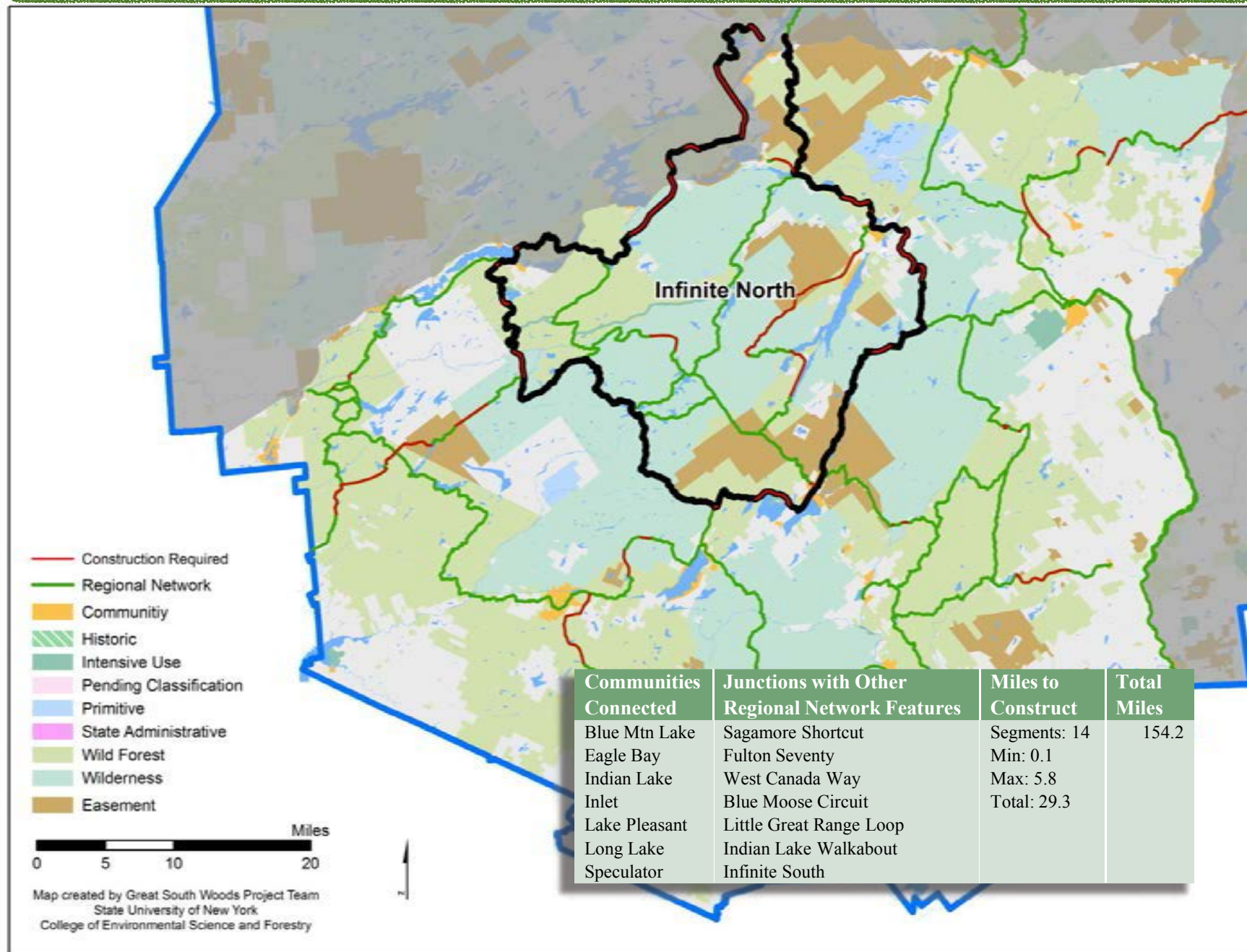
Map created by Great South Woods Project Team  
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College of Environmental Science and Forestry





# GSW Regional Network

## Infinite Loop North



# GSW Regional Network

## Infinite Loop South & Caroga Connector

Feature	Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
<b>Caroga Connector</b>	Caroga Lake	Infinite South	Segments: 0	15.3
<b>Infinite South</b>	Hoffmeister Hope Lake Pleasant Piseco Speculator Wells	Indian Lake Walkabout Blue Moose Circuit West Canada Way Infinite North	Segments: 12 Min: <0.1 Max: 6.8 Total: 28.6	106.5

- Construction Required
- Regional Network
- Community
- Historic
- Intensive Use
- Pending Classification
- Primitive
- State Administrative
- Wild Forest
- Wilderness
- Easement

Miles  
0 5 10 20

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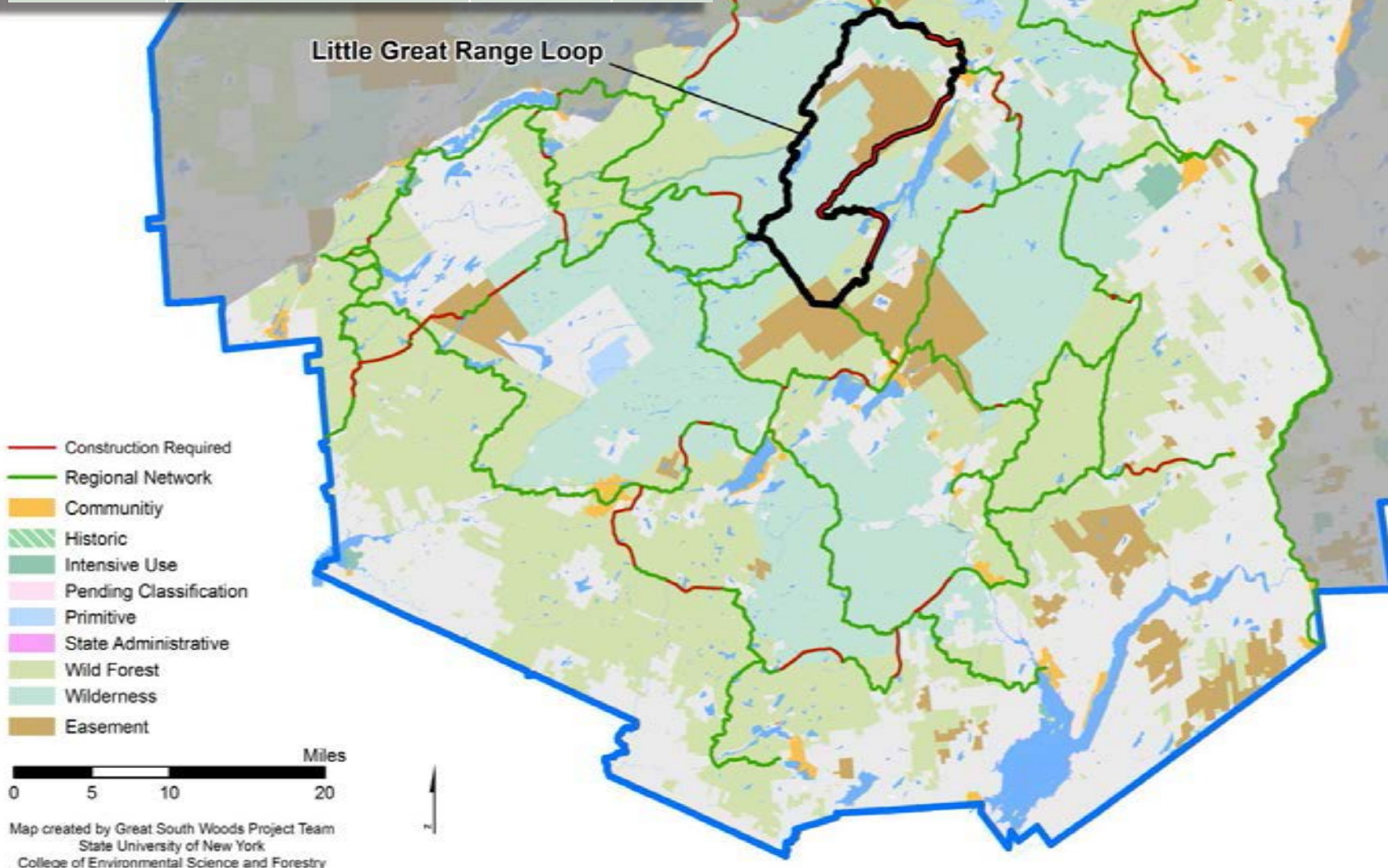




# GSW Regional Network

## Little Great Range Loop

Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
Indian Lake Sabael	Infinite North West Canada Way Blue Moose Circuit Indian Lake Walkabout	Segments: 4 Min: <0.1 Max: 12.4 Total: 18.5	69.3



# GSW Regional Network

## McKeever-Morehouse Connector

Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
Hoffmeister McKeever	Fulton Seventy Infinite South	Segments: 0	49.0

- Construction Required
- Regional Network
- Community
- Historic
- Intensive Use
- Pending Classification
- Primitive
- State Administrative
- Wild Forest
- Wilderness
- Easement

Miles  
0 5 10 20

Map created by Great South Woods Project Team  
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McKeever - Morehouse  
Connector



# GSW Regional Network

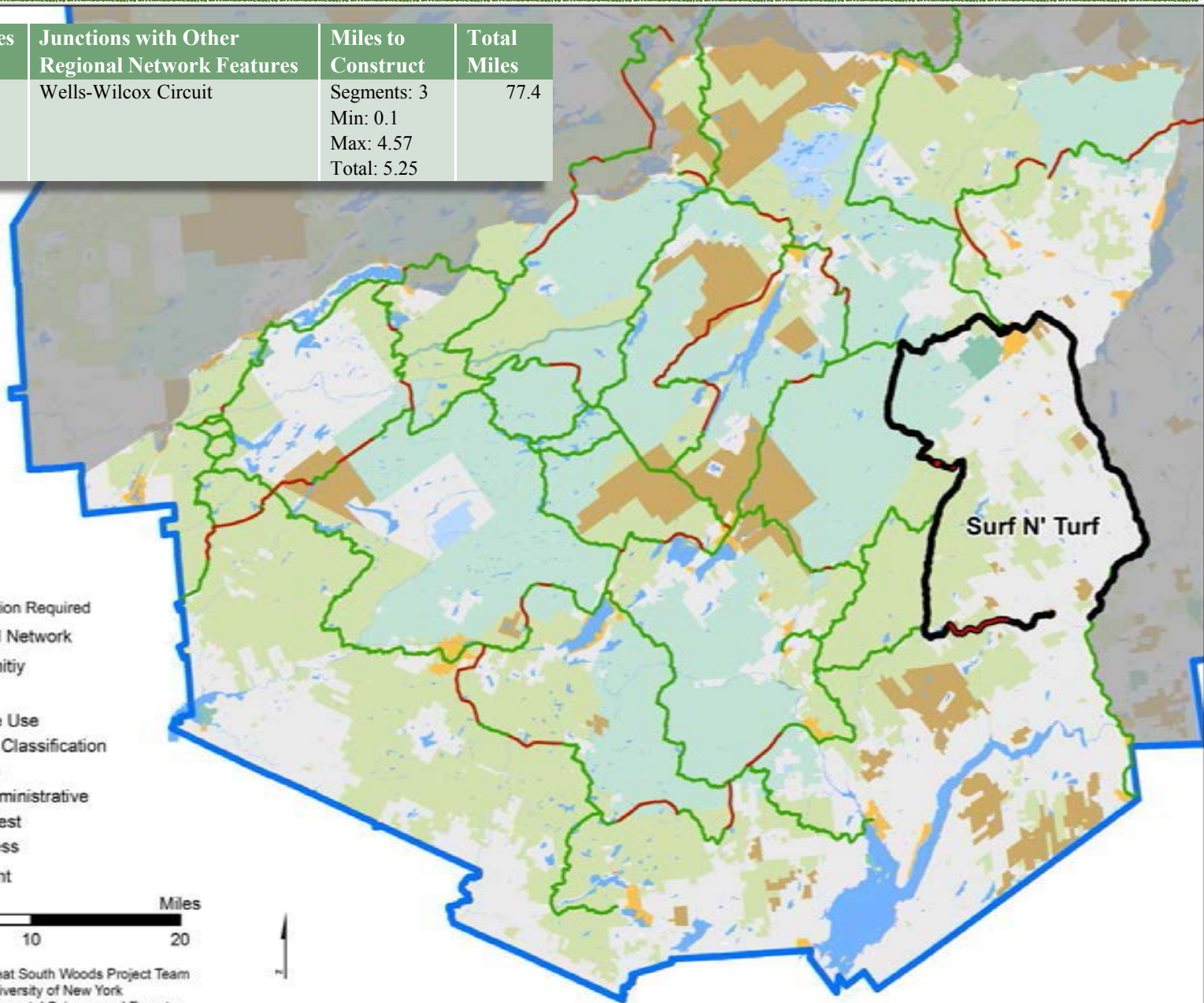
## Surf N' Turf

Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
North Creek Riparius Stony Creek	Wells-Wilcox Circuit	Segments: 3 Min: 0.1 Max: 4.57 Total: 5.25	77.4

- Construction Required
- Regional Network
- Community
- Historic
- Intensive Use
- Pending Classification
- Primitive
- State Administrative
- Wild Forest
- Wilderness
- Easement

Miles  
0 5 10 20

Map created by Great South Woods Project Team  
State University of New York  
College of Environmental Science and Forestry





# GSW Regional Network

## Wells-Wilcox Circuit

Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
Wells	Infinite South Surf N' Turf	Segments: 0	50.8

- Construction Required
- Regional Network
- Community
- Historic
- Intensive Use
- Pending Classification
- Primitive
- State Administrative
- Wild Forest
- Wilderness
- Easement

Miles  
0 5 10 20

Map created by Great South Woods Project Team  
State University of New York  
College of Environmental Science and Forestry

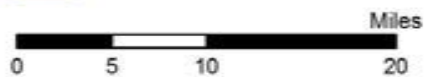
Wells - Wilcox  
Circuit

# GSW Regional Network

## West Canada Way

Communities Connected	Junctions with Other Regional Network Features	Miles to Construct	Total Miles
Speculator	Infinite North Blue Moose Circuit Little Great Range Loop Indian Lake Walkabout Infinite South Sagamore Shortcut	Segments: 4 Min: 0.2 Max: 3.2 Total: 6.7	64.3

- Construction Required
- Regional Network
- Community
- Historic
- Intensive Use
- Pending Classification
- Primitive
- State Administrative
- Wild Forest
- Wilderness
- Easement



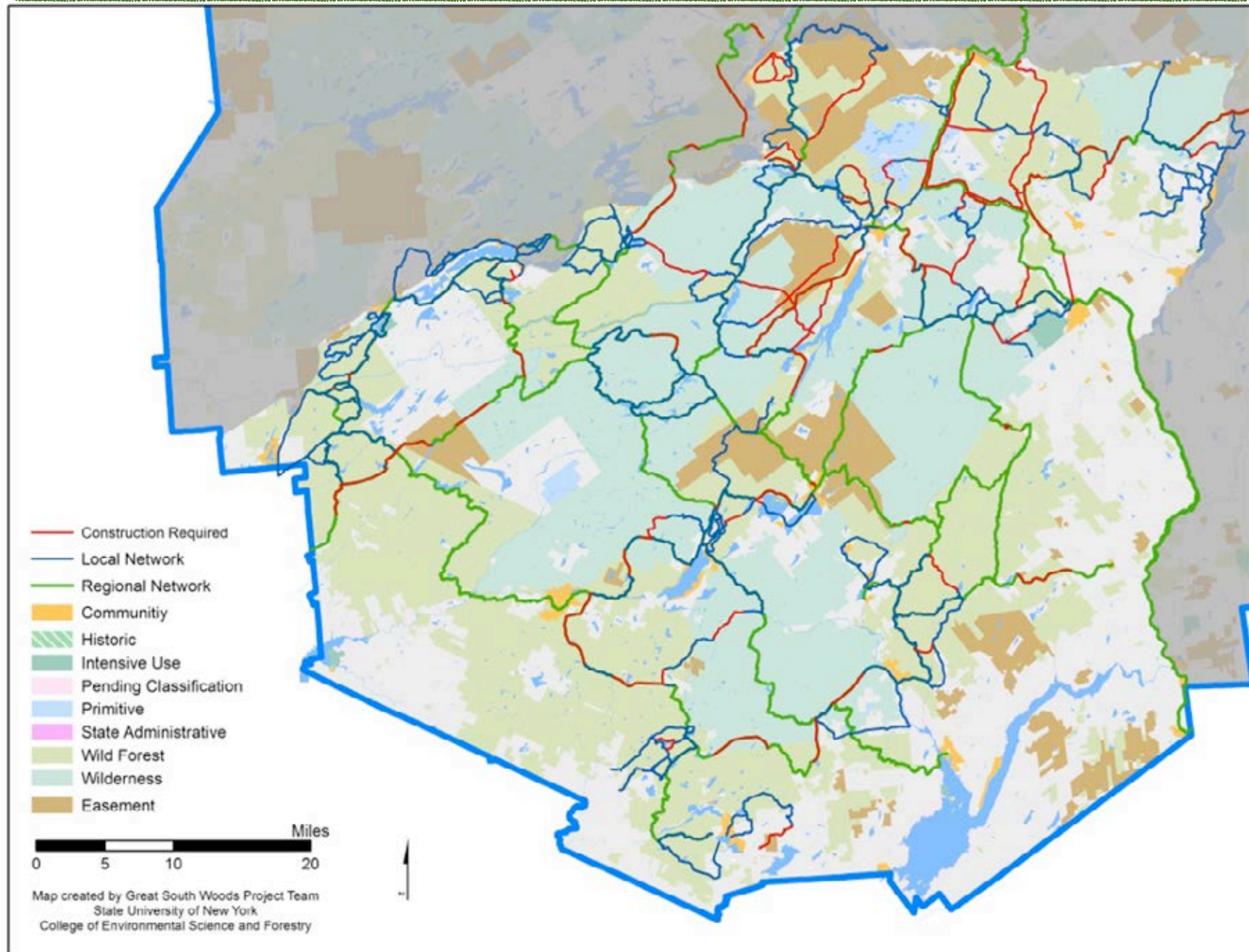
Map created by Great South Woods Project Team  
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West Canada  
Way



# GSW Regional Network

## Local Networks



# GSW Recommendations

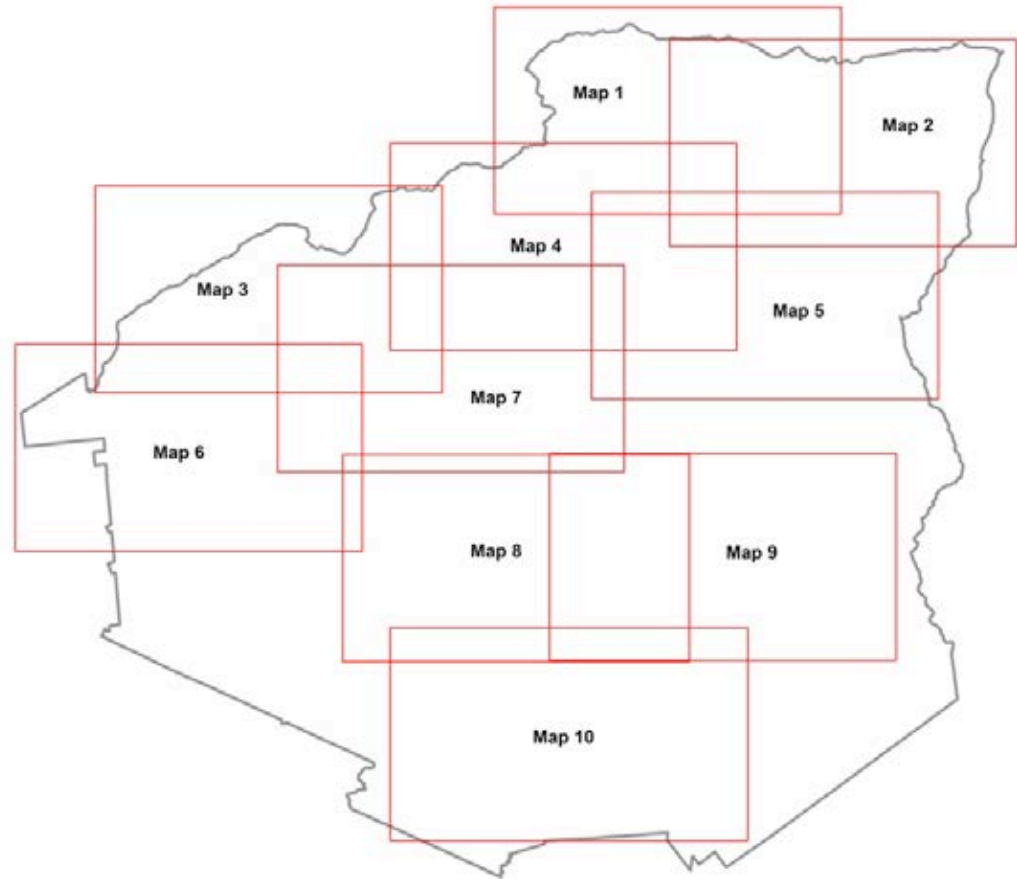
## Local area maps

## Map Extent & Locator Guide

The following section contains a series of smaller-scale maps that describe our **preliminary recommendations for recreation planning in the Great South Woods Strategy**. Maps were organized by dividing the GSW into ten (10) overlapping areas, as shown in red boxes to the right. ➡

Each of the ten maps is followed by detailed descriptions of **local features**. All local features are based on information and ideas developed through the **GSW process**, which included **community members, town leaders, interest groups, recreation experts and State agency officials**.

Maps are intended to inform future planning, will be subject to revision, and do not necessarily represent current or future priorities. The ideas presented here are **conceptual** and locations of points and routes are **approximate**.



Map	Locations	Pages
1	Five Towns Area	R17-R24
2	Minerva, North Hudson, Schroon Lake	R25-R29
3	Fulton Chain Area	R30-R36
4	Indian Lake & Cedar River Flow	R37-R40
5	North Creek, North River, Indian Lake	R41-R43





















Map	Locations	Pages
6	Black River (Woodgate & Otter Creek)	R44-R46
7	West Canada Lake Wilderness	R47-R49
8	Lake Pleasant, Piseco, Speculator	R50-R53
9	Wells, Hope, Gilmantown, Stony Creek	R54-R55
10	Northville & Caroga Lake	R56-R59



# GSW Recommendations

## Symbol legends & glossary

	Hiking		Fishing		Town Beach
	Mtn. Biking		Downhill ski		Lean-to
	Road Biking		X-Country ski		Camping
	Paddling		Snowshoe		Fire Tower
	Kayaking		Snowmobile		Hand Launch
	Rafting		Winter Sports		Scenic View
	Climbing		Horse Trail		Boat Launch

	ADA Accessible		Fire Tower		Day Use Area
	Lodging		Historic Site		Rock Climbing
	Boat Launch		Lean-to		Scenic Area
	Natural Feature		Paddling Access		Great Camp
	State Campground		Parking		Fishing Access
	Primitive Campsite		Scenic Area		Cross-Country Ski Center
	Downhill Ski Center		Proposed Feature		

**Regional Network:** a system of routes designed to interconnect communities across the GSW

**Local Network:** trail systems that connect one or more communities with destinations on the Forest Preserve or DEC easement lands

**Loop or Circuit:** a trail that brings travelers back directly to (or near) their starting point

**Nested Loop:** trail feature in which two or more connected loop routes can be traveled

**Connector:** a route designed to directly link communities to the regional or local networks in the area

**Multi-Modal:** a route designed to incorporate different modes of recreation along different sections

**Spur** - simple out-and-back trail, usually to a specific point of interest

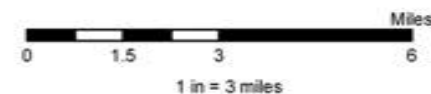


# Map 1 ► Five Towns Area

(portions of Newcomb, Long Lake, Indian Lake, Blue Mountain Lake and Minerva)



## Long Lake, Newcomb

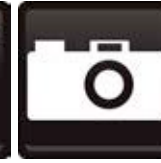
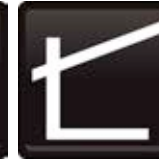


Map produced by the Great South Woods Project Team  
at the State University of New York College of Environmental  
Science and Forestry





## Map 1 ► Five Towns Area Lake Durant Loop



**Lake Durant Loop** is an 8.2-mile circuit, comprised entirely of existing trails and infrastructure, that connects hikers from the DEC Lake Durant Campground and the NPT with the Blue Ridge Wilderness backcountry and the western end of Lake Durant. Guided hiking-paddling trips may be developed with a local outfitter, lodges, ADK Museum and Arts Center in hamlet of BML. Access from highways and via Blue Mountain Circuit (proposed) provide opportunities for weekend excursions to multiple points of interest.

**Access:** All existing infrastructure -- now linked into regional network. Hybrid hiking-paddling opportunities could be developed or expanded on Lake Durant, linking with DEC campground. Joins with Blue Mountain Circuit (proposed) from shared parking area on Rt 30.

**Connectivity:** An existing local circuit for Blue Mountain Lake that uses sections of the NPT and Bluestone Trail (proposed) in the GSW regional network, which connects multiple communities. Good location for vehicle traffic at intersection of NYS 28 and 30.

**Stewardship:** Mostly located in Blue Ridge Wilderness and could require additional infrastructure and maintenance efforts with potential increased use. Backcountry trail areas along ponds may become degraded through erosion. If 'pack and paddle' trips are implemented, boat washing stations could be installed at DEC campground. Otherwise nominal concern for invasives, but campground visitors should be mindful of firewood regulations to reduce spread of insect pests. Could be a good place to educate public about invasive species.

**Destination:** Day-hike into the Blue Ridge Wilderness from Lake Durant Campground or parking areas on NYS 28, passing by backcountry Stephen's and Cascade Ponds, with overnight opportunities at lean-tos. Hike or paddle back to DEC campground on Lake Durant, head south into the heart of Blue Ridge Wilderness on the NPT, into Blue Mountain Lake for a day at the ADK Museum, or hike up to scenic views on the summit of Blue Mountain. In winter, backcountry skiing and snowshoeing.

**Partnerships:** Highlight and build upon existing local circuit for guided trips / local outfitters. May be good opportunities for multi-modal 'pack and paddle' trips based out of Blue Mountain Lake village. Snowshoeing and nordic skiing trips in winter. Also opportunities for local residents and visitors to support stewardship for back-country lean-tos and trail sections.

## Map 1 ► Five Towns Area Sabattis Mtn. Ski Circuit



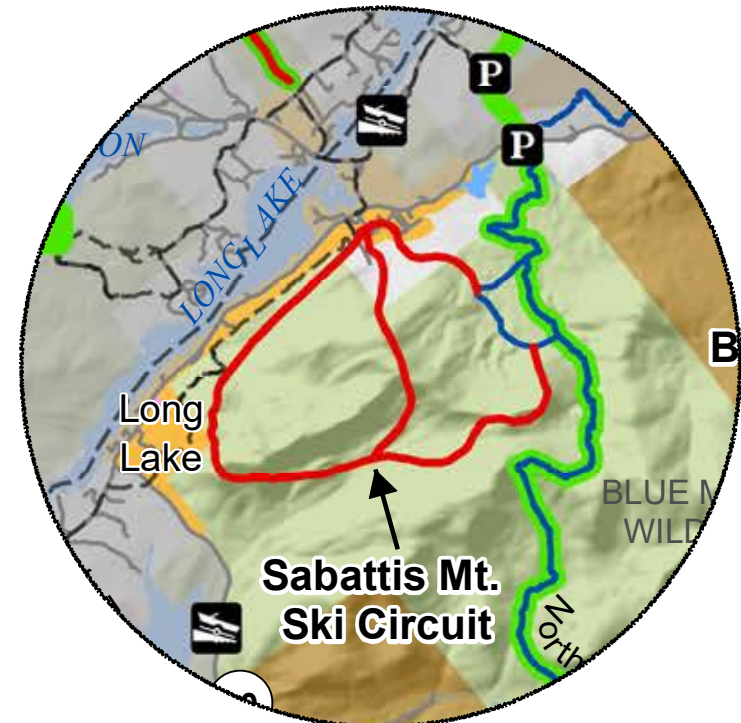
**Access:** New winter and summer recreation opportunities in currently trail-less Blue Mountain Wild Forest directly adjacent to hamlet of Long Lake. Connects NPT directly to popular year-round community pavilion in center of town.

**Connectivity:** Easily accessible in and out of Long Lake. Access off the NPT via a quarter-mile existing connector trail. Connects the NPT directly to hamlet of Long Lake instead of 1.5 miles east on NYS 28N.

**Stewardship:** 93% of loop requires route planning and construction. Western loop may be preferable for grooming, while eastern loop - which connects with NPT - should be designed as a backcountry ski trail. Increased exposure to invasive plants based on proximity to town and junction of NYS 28N and 30.

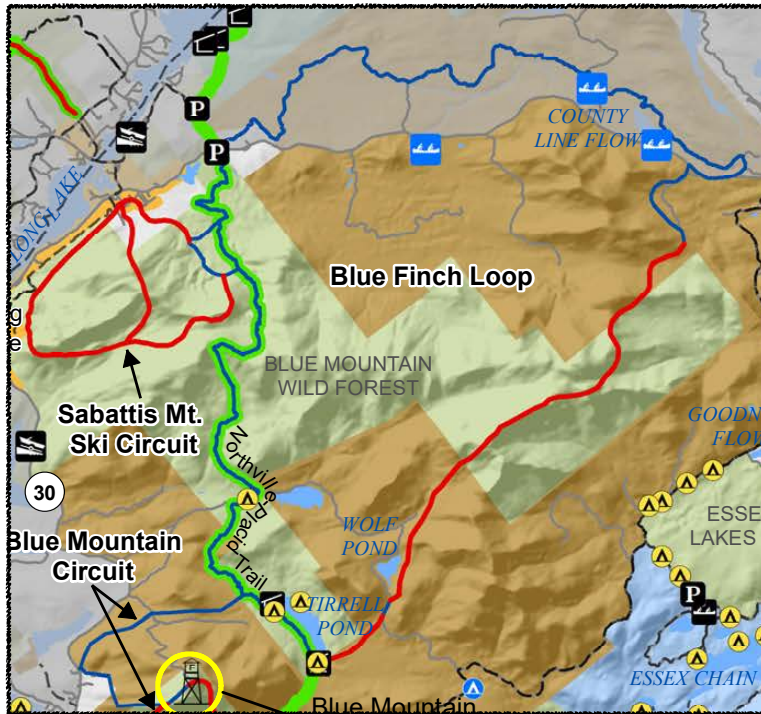
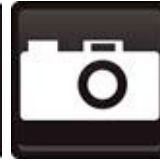
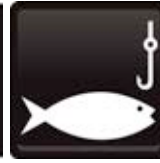
**Destination:** One and only skiing opportunity in scenic village of Long Lake, multiple grades of skiing and route-options along the loop, including groomed and backcountry trails. Day-hiking and mountain biking in summer.

**Partnerships:** Circuit was proposed at public meeting in Long Lake. Will require coordination with town government, private landowners and state agencies to draft plans. Races and community events at Sabattis Pavilion could be developed around using the circuit. Engage local expertise and the Town of Long Lake Parks & Rec Office in all implementation phases.



The **Sabattis Mountain Ski Circuit** is a 10 mile ‘double-loop’ trail system designed primarily for cross-country skiing on both groomed and backcountry paths, which connects directly with both the Sabattis Pavilion in the heart of Long Lake village and the Northville-Placid Trail as it runs south through Blue Mountain Wild Forest. One loop may be designed for groomed trails, the other for nordic skiing, but with a shared access point near town amenities, including outfitters. It provides new access to a large area of Forest Preserve directly adjacent to the destination community of Long Lake, and could bring more NPT hikers into town (without requiring a road walk). The circuit could also support day-hiking and mountain biking in summer. Nearly all (93%) of the circuit, based on approximate routes, will require design and construction. Local capacity for recreation planning and community engagement is strong and should be leveraged.

## Map 1 ► Five Towns Area Blue Finch Loop



The **Blue Finch Loop** is a 32.2-mile foot trail circuit that incorporates a long segment of the Northville-Placid Trail for a 4-6 day backpacking trip, with several angling opportunities in ponds and streams, through Blue Mountain Wild Forest and working forest parcels with DEC conservation easements, including the former Finch-Pruyn lands. Proposed new trail provides access to Wolf Pond, scenic views of the Essex Chain Lakes Complex along a ridge traverse, and connection to existing snowmobile trails along Fishing Brook and NYS 28, where DEC has proposed several parking areas and boat launches for fishing access. Winter access for nordic skiers and snowshoers into Tirrell and Wolf Ponds from parking areas on NYS 28 near Lake Durant.

**Access:** The proposed new 6.9-mile trail segment along the loop accesses Wolf Pond from NPT, into currently trail-less areas of Blue Mountain Wild Forest and former Finch-Pruyn DEC easement lands. Proposed hand launches for boats along Fishing Brook.

**Connectivity:** Builds on existing connection via NPT from Blue Mountain Lake to Long Lake. Also connected to proposed Sabbatis Mountain Ski Circuit, which originates directly in the hamlet of Long Lake.

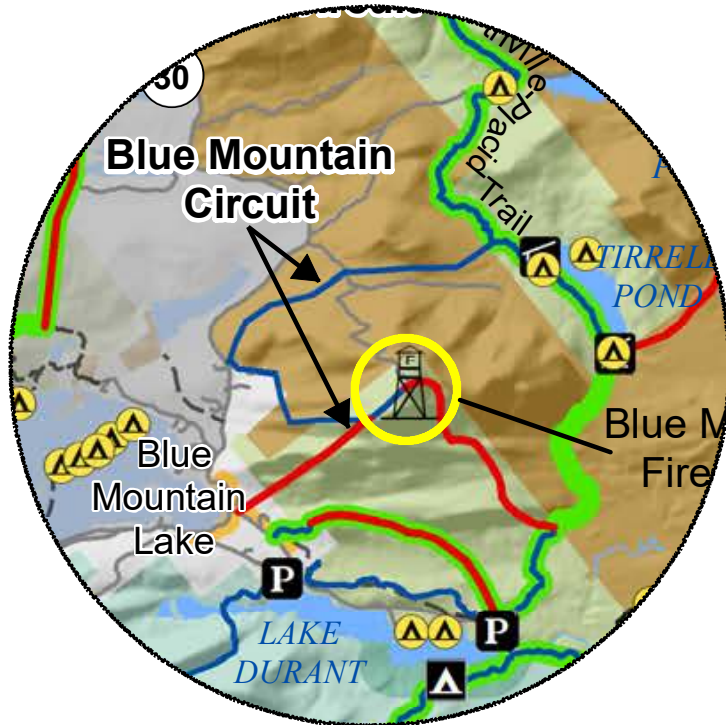
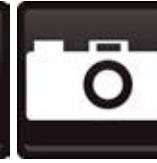
**Stewardship:** Additional parking and signage required near County Line Flow/28N. Likely will need additional lean-tos or campsites along the new trail section in Blue Mtn WF. Trailhead parking and registers needed at intersection with 28N. Boat wash stations and invasive species prevention signage needed at proposed hand launch sites. Increased Ranger monitoring of use along some portions that are long and isolated. New trail along ridgeline should be designed with care and attention to ecological impacts as well as safety.

**Destination:** A multi-day backpacking trip that brings hikers and anglers to several ponds exploring recently acquired Finch easements.

**Partnerships:** Will require establishment of recreation rights on easement lands, including negotiation of fishing rights on Wolf Pond and hiking access on northern end of trail in easement; opportunities for community participation as trail and lean-to stewards.



## Map 1 ► Five Towns Area Blue Mountain Circuit



**Access:** Brings a trailhead for Blue Mountain summit into the BML hamlet area, also provides quick access to summit from NPT. Parking areas in the village and at Lake Durant provide different options for day-hike routes.

**Connectivity:** Uses sections of NPT and Bluestone Trail (proposed) to connect hamlet of BML with summit and NPT. Links to Lake Durant Loop via shared parking area just west of Lake Durant Campground on NYS 30.

**Stewardship:** Trail construction should follow best management practices, several steep and rocky sections along route. Continue 'Summit Guide/Steward' program in the cabin/tower during summer and could coordinate more with local communities (i.e., recruit a local community member as, or in addition to, the guide/steward).

**Destination:** The destination is the journey - two new approaches to the iconic Blue Mountain Fire Tower with a direct start from the Hamlet, and a loop hike accessed from either NPT or the NYS Lake Durant Campground.

**Partnerships:** Public parking in hamlet would be required, as well as construction of roughly 75% of the loop. All Fire Towers should have accurate, readable observation maps which could be produced in partnership with local government, historical societies or interested citizens.

The **Blue Mountain Circuit** is a 11.8-mile foot trail system that connects the lakefront to the iconic summit. New proposed trails provide local access to NPT from the hamlet of Blue Mountain Lake, via new and challenging routes to the Blue Mtn summit and fire tower. The circuit originates along the lakefront in the village of Blue Mountain Lake and creates an alternate route from the Northville-Placid Trail to Blue Mtn summit that eliminates the need for thru-hikers to retrace their footsteps. NPT hikers can take the existing Tirrell Pond Trail to the Blue Mountain Trail (which share a trailhead and parking area adjacent to NYS 30), ascend to the summit and fire tower, and return to the NPT using the proposed trail heading southeast from the summit.

## Map 1 ► Five Towns Area Three Rivers Circuit



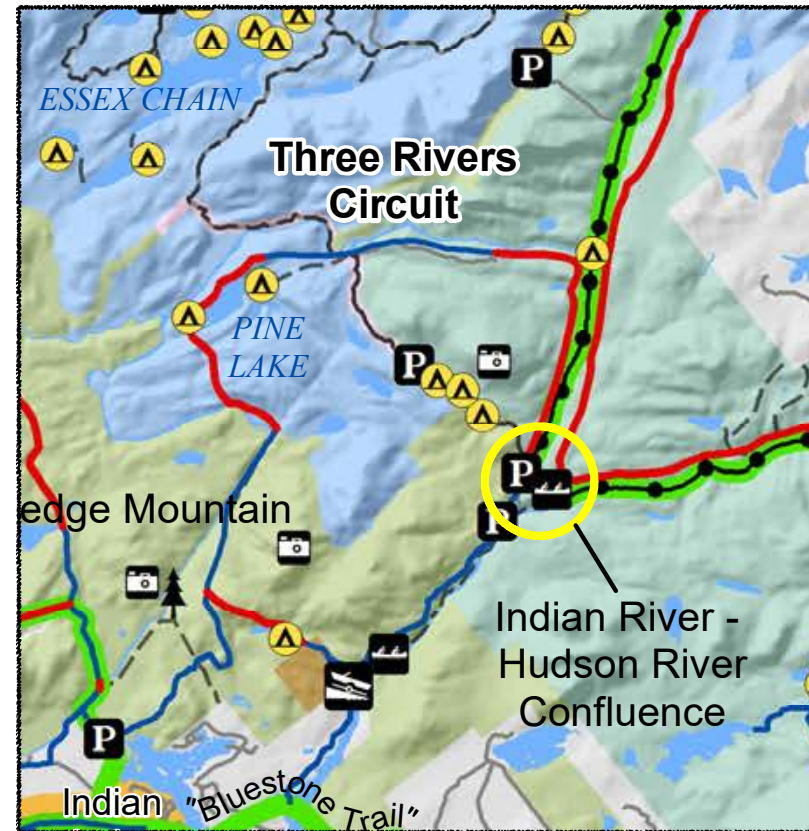
**Access:** New access to west bank of Hudson and western shore of Pine Lake and southernmost Essex Chain complex, approximate route allows short bushwhacks to McGinn Mtn and Big Pisgah Mtn.

**Connectivity:** Connects Indian Lake with Essex Chain Complex via foot trail; links Indian-Hudson and Cedar-Hudson confluence via trail along west bank of Hudson River.

**Stewardship:** Three segments totaling 6.7 miles need construction. Trail construction and management must safeguard *Wild and Scenic* character of Hudson River and be designed to minimize risk of erosion or damage to riparian areas. Same environmental protections should be implemented for confluence of Hudson and Indian Rivers. Live bait should be prohibited; if live bait is allowed, discourage dumping of bait worms, which are invasive and can damage nearby forests.

**Destination:** A backcountry weekend for hikers, anglers and river enthusiasts, leaving from Indian Lake, with primitive camping on Pine Lake and whitewater rafting through the scenic Hudson Gorge.

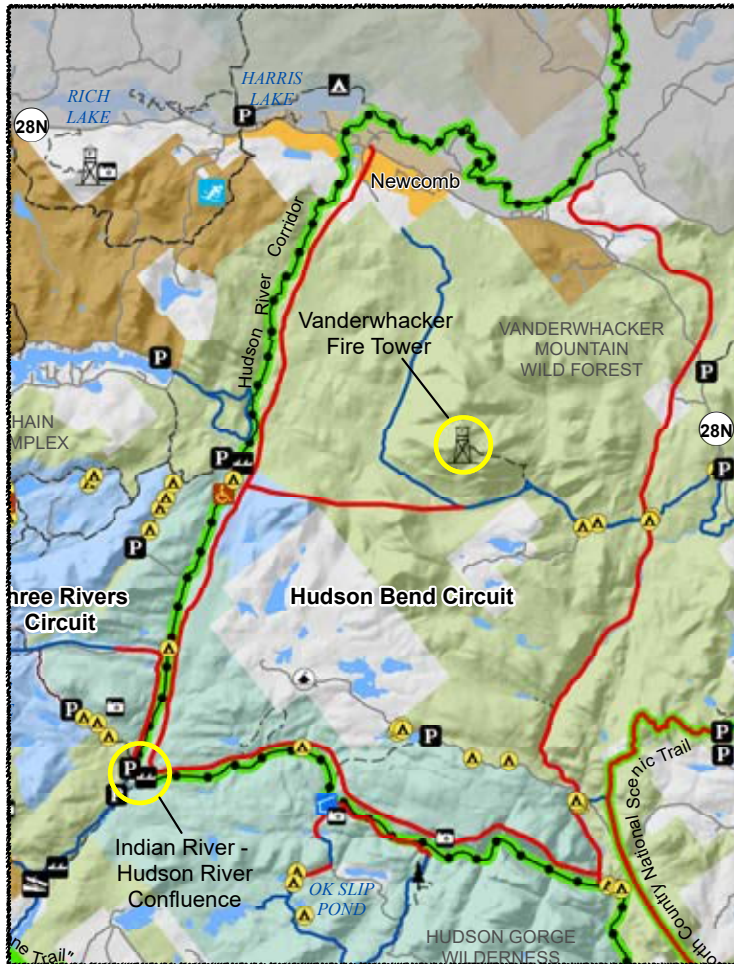
**Partnerships:** Increased use of short trail segment through easement may require negotiation with landowner. Trail and campsite stewards could come from Indian Lake or Newcomb. River guides / outfitters using Indian River access may design guided hiking-boating trips with return shuttles from North River back to Indian Lake.



The **Three Rivers Circuit** is a 15.7-mile loop designed for backcountry and river enthusiasts, providing a weekend trip with opportunities for camping, fishing, kayaking and whitewater rafting on the Indian and Hudson Rivers. Using a section of unpaved road from parking area to the Hudson-Indian River confluence, the circuit can be accessed from Indian Lake via two popular parking areas with raft/kayak launches, and provides access into southernmost portions of the Essex Chain Complex, including campsites on Pine Lake. It is also accessible from Newcomb via the existing road in Essex Chain Complex and a proposed trail on the west bank of the Hudson River.



## Map 1 ► Five Towns Area Hudson Bend Circuit



**Access:** New hiking along 20 miles of the Wild and Scenic Hudson River, 6+ miles along the Scenic Boreas River; access to Borough's Cave; alternate access to Vanderwhacker Mtn. Trail. May need to develop more campsites along Hudson and Boreas, and boat take-outs at several points on Hudson.

**Connectivity:** Access from Newcomb to Minerva and North Creek along the Hudson River Corridor, junctions with Vanderwhacker Circuit, North Country National Scenic Trail.

**Stewardship:** Significant trail construction along river corridors poses environmental and logistical challenges. Trail design, construction and maintenance must safeguard *Wild and Scenic* status of these reaches and the protection of rare and sensitive ecosystems, including calcareous cliffs at Blue Ledges and ice meadows along the Hudson River. Hiking trail along Gorge rim will likely require hand rails and signage. Will need registers and signage in Newcomb, NYS 28N, and along Northwoods Club Road.

**Destination:** Multi-modal circuit potential, starting from Newcomb with the option of hiking to-be-constructed trail, or floating down the Hudson River, exiting the water at a take-out and heading east at the Indian River. Hike through the Hudson Gorge past Blue Ledges to Boreas River, hiking or biking north back toward Newcomb. Alternatively, Hudson/Boreas junction can be reached from North Creek and taken up to Newcomb.

**Partnerships:** Negotiate access with Northwoods Club. Ample opportunities for local engagement with trail construction and stewardship. East leg could be constructed for biking on old railroad bed, supporting bike rentals/ outfitters in North Creek, Newcomb and/or Minerva. Numerous workshop participants highlighted needs and opportunities for hiking along Hudson.

The **Hudson Bend Circuit** is a 39-mile loop of almost entirely new construction along the Hudson and Boreas rivers, providing access to the east banks of the Hudson River and the north rim of the Hudson Gorge. Circuit also connects with existing Vanderwhacker Mtn summit trail and fire tower. With potential opportunities for multi-modal hiking-paddling or paddling-biking trips, the circuit can be accessed from the trailhead on NYS 28N, via Northwoods Club Road, or from Newcomb via existing and proposed trails.

## Map 1 ► Five Towns Area Stark Hills Circuit



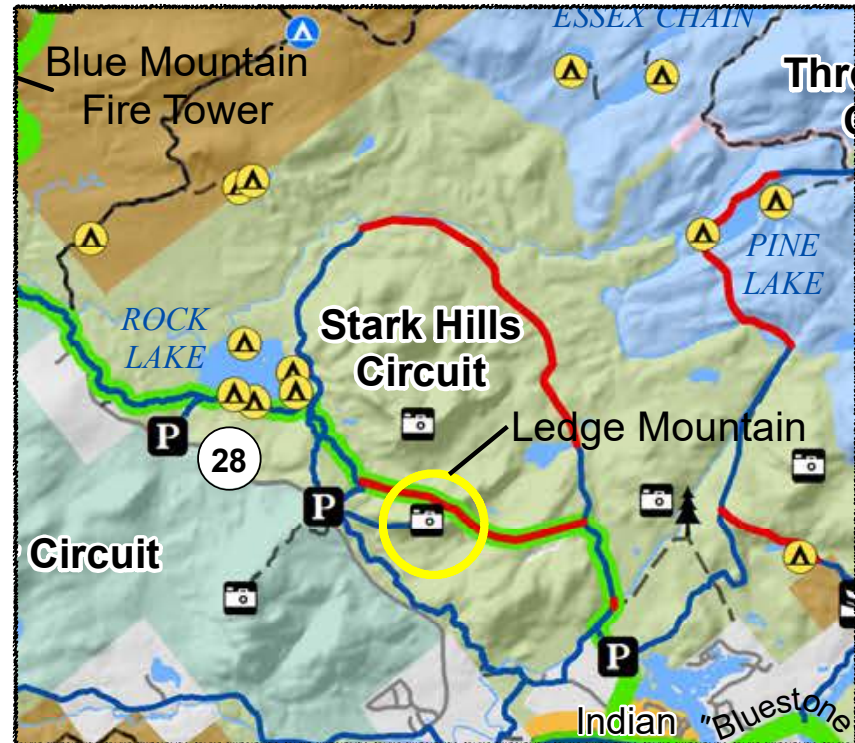
**Access:** New segments of trail connects together existing, dead-end segments to create alternate (loop) hiking routes to Rock Lake, Ledge Mtn scenic views, and short bushwhacks to Stark Hills and Rock River. Southernmost leg is snowmobile trail along NYS 28.

**Connectivity:** Loop in and out of hamlet of Indian Lake; circuit is bisected by Bluestone Trail (proposed) regional route, which connects with Blue Mountain Lake to the northwest, and several communities to the southeast, including Stony Creek.

**Stewardship:** Maintenance on snowmobile sections to provide for hikers. Lakefront campsites (Rock Lake) need regular monitoring and maintenance. Footbridge across Cedar River should be designed and constructed to minimize impacts on riparian habitats.

**Destination:** A weekend backcountry hiking or skiing trip, along Rock River and to Rock Lake with ample camping opportunities and scenic views from multiple mountain tops. For a more challenging day hike, tackle the full outer loop in the wild forest.

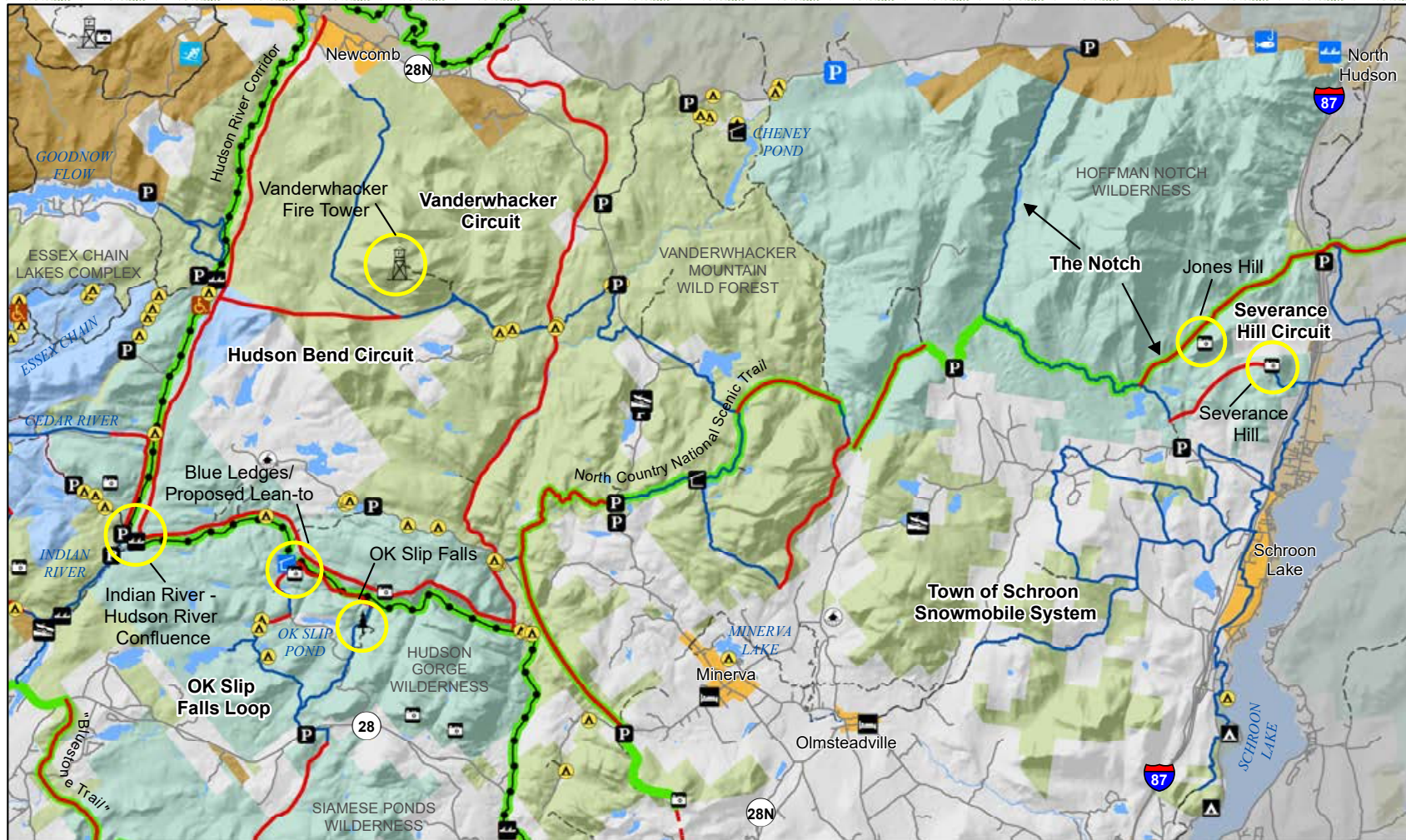
**Partnerships:** Indian Lake outfitters and restaurants; community assistance with trail and foot bridge construction over Cedar River.



The **Stark Hills Circuit** is a 11.7-mile network of loop trails that explores the backcountry of Blue Mountain Wild Forest, with waterfront camping opportunities on Rock Lake, and scenic views from the summit of Ledge Mountain. Hikers can head off-trail to explore the Stark Hills and Rock River. Southern portions of the circuit are currently used for snowmobiling in winter, but other portions of loop are suitable for nordic skiing. Boats may be portaged from adjacent parking area on NYS 28 into Rock Lake, providing paddling opportunities with lakefront campsites that are located along hiking circuit. Addition of a foot bridge across Cedar River provides more convenient access to the Stark Hills Circuit from the hamlet of Indian Lake.

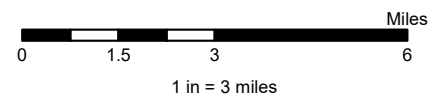


## Map 2 ► Minerva, North Hudson, Schroon Lake



	ADA Accessible		Fire Tower		Local Network		Community
	Lodging		Historic Site		Regional Network		Intensive Use
	Boat Launch		Lean-to		DEC Trail		Pending Classification
	Natural Feature		Paddling Access		Road		Primitive
	State Campground		Parking		State Administrative		Wild Forest
	Primitive Campsite		Scenic Area		Wilderness		Easement
	Downhill Ski Center		Proposed Feature				

### Minerva, North Hudson, Schroon Lake



Map produced by the Great South Woods Project Team  
at the State University of New York College of Environmental  
Science and Forestry



## Map 2 ► Minerva-North Hudson OK Slip Falls Loop



**Access:** Connects two dead-end trails into a circuit with a proposed lean-to near Blue Ledges on south rim of Hudson Gorge.

**Connectivity:** No direct connections with communities.

**Stewardship:** Design, construction and management of new trails and other infrastructure, such as proposed lean-to near Blue Ledges, must safeguard *Wild and Scenic* character of Hudson River. Protection of rare, unique and exemplary natural communities along Hudson River corridor, including several calcareous ecosystems (which support many rare species), including cliffs at Blue Ledges and talus slope woodlands. If lean-to at Blue Ledges is developed, a full-time River Steward should be 'installed' to ensure proper use and protection of area.

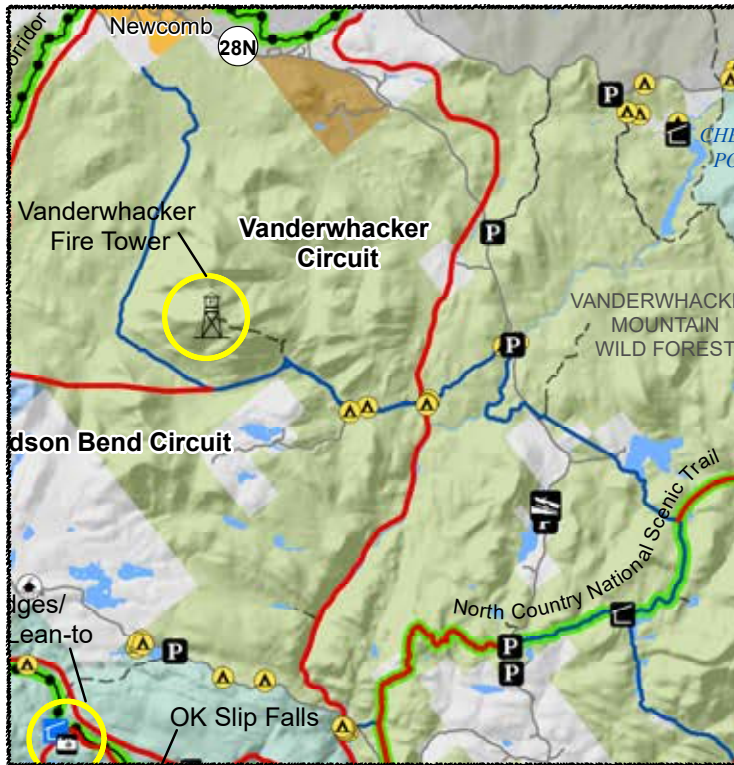
**Destination:** Pack in the best sights the Hudson Gorge has to offer for a day-long or overnight hike / snowshoe to OK Slip Falls, Blue Ledges, Whortleberry Pond, Ross Pond, Carter Pond, and the Hudson River.

**Partnerships:** River Steward and related education opportunities could involve local communities, leveraging cooperation across the Five Towns. Could engage local guide services for interpretation of natural features along the way, and even photography or nature-writing sessions, based on the abundance of unique natural features accessible along this loop.

The **OK Slip Falls Loop** enhances access to one of the best-loved backcountry destinations in the Adirondacks, by closing a circuit from existing trails, and potentially building a lean-to at the unique Blue Ledges. As one of the most ecologically unique and sensitive locations in the Great South Woods, our strategy **recommends a careful and adaptively-managed balance between access and stewardship**, especially at Blue Ledges and along the south rim of the Hudson Gorge. Location and construction of proposed lean-to will require consideration of Wild and Scenic River designation guidelines and/or modification of SLMP Wilderness regulations.



## Map 2 ► Minerva-North Hudson Vanderwhacker Circuit



The **Vanderwhacker Circuit** is a 35.4-mile 'double loop' trail system - shaped like a slanted figure 8 - that creates alternative hiking approaches to the trail for the summit and fire tower at Vanderwhacker Mtn, provides access to multiple ponds and campsites, and connects Newcomb with the North Country National Scenic Trail (including proposed routes) and the Hudson Bend Circuit (proposed), which follows the Hudson corridor. Mountain biking courses could be developed at points along the circuit, and the central segment of new trail could be developed on old rail bed for multi-purpose uses. Not including the missing sections of NCNST, 12.7 miles of this circuit needs construction, but this proposed new trail will also support the creation of the Hudson Bend Circuit, bringing hikers to the north rim of Hudson Gorge.

**Access:** New loop in-and-out of Newcomb through Vanderwhacker Wild Forest; or a thru-hike to Minerva via to-be-constructed segments of NCNST. Circuit's southern loop passes by Hewitt Pond, Stony Pond and 29th Pond.

**Connectivity:** Newcomb to Minerva using planned segment of NCNST; shares east stretch of Hudson Bend Circuit along Boreas River.

**Stewardship:** Camping opportunities to be developed along Boreas. Keep in mind the designated and protected status of this stretch of river. Junction signs at middle of circuit, and where circuit joins with NCNST from existing trail and at the Boreas River area. Requires bridge or careful crossing of Boreas River. Signage needed at trail junctions.

**Destination:** Opportunities to overnight in the middle of the circuit and at the NCNST junction. Multiple parking options along the circuit. Great hiking all along the circuit, and potential for mountain biking (requires further design and development).

**Partnerships:** Almost 13 miles need to be constructed, same stretch as the Hudson River Circuit along the Boreas River. East leg could be constructed for biking on old railroad bed, supporting bike rentals/pick-up/drop-off out of North Creek, Newcomb, or Minerva.



## Map 2 ► Minerva-North Hudson Severance Hill Circuit



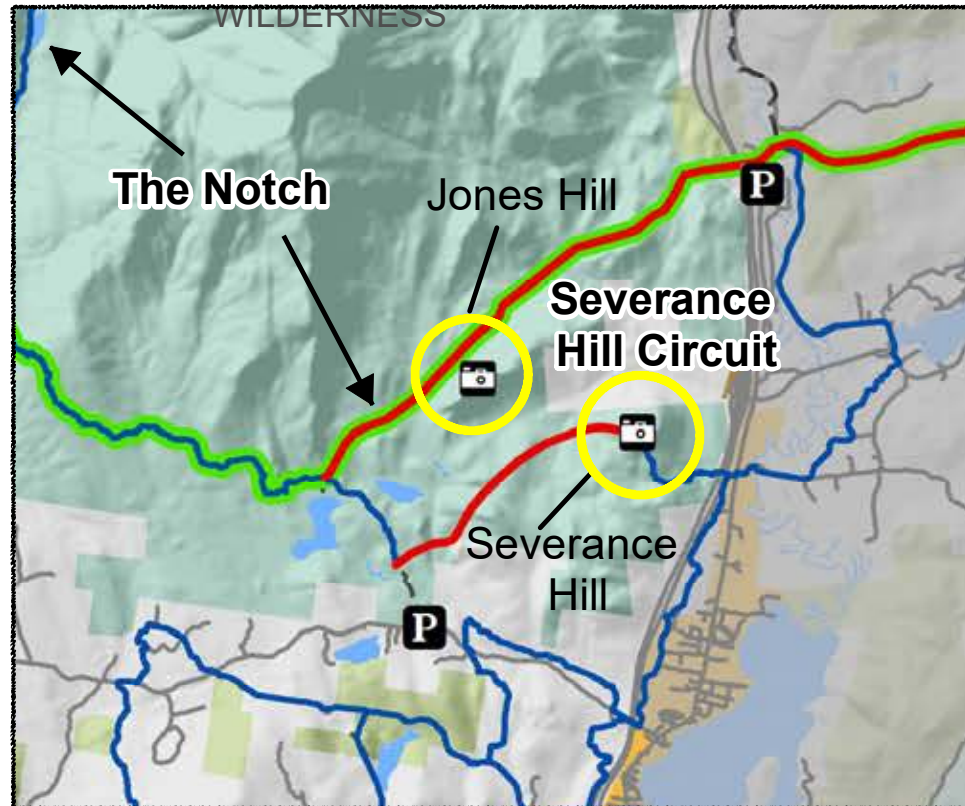
**Access:** Loop hike over Severance Hill, between North and Big Ponds, and back past the shoulder of Jones Hill. Circuit runs through Hammond Notch Wilderness, an area with few trails particularly on its east half, using the proposed route for the North Country National Scenic Trail. Potential to develop bushwhack up Jones Hill. Accessible from Dirgy lot.

**Connectivity:** Circuit based in Schroon Lake; connects via The Notch (proposed) to Blue Ridge Rd (near Elk Lake turnoff and Buffalo farm) between North Hudson and Newcomb.

**Stewardship:** Monitor impacts if trail(s) are developed to ascend Jones Hill; carefully design and construct new trails through Wilderness; need junction signs where circuit intersects with NCNST and The Notch.

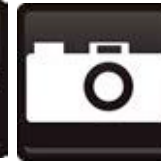
**Destination:** A wilderness day hike in and out of Schroon Lake that packs in scenic views and backcountry ponds.

**Partnerships:** Requires significant design and construction which may be done in conjunction with local partners in Schroon Lake and Paradox.

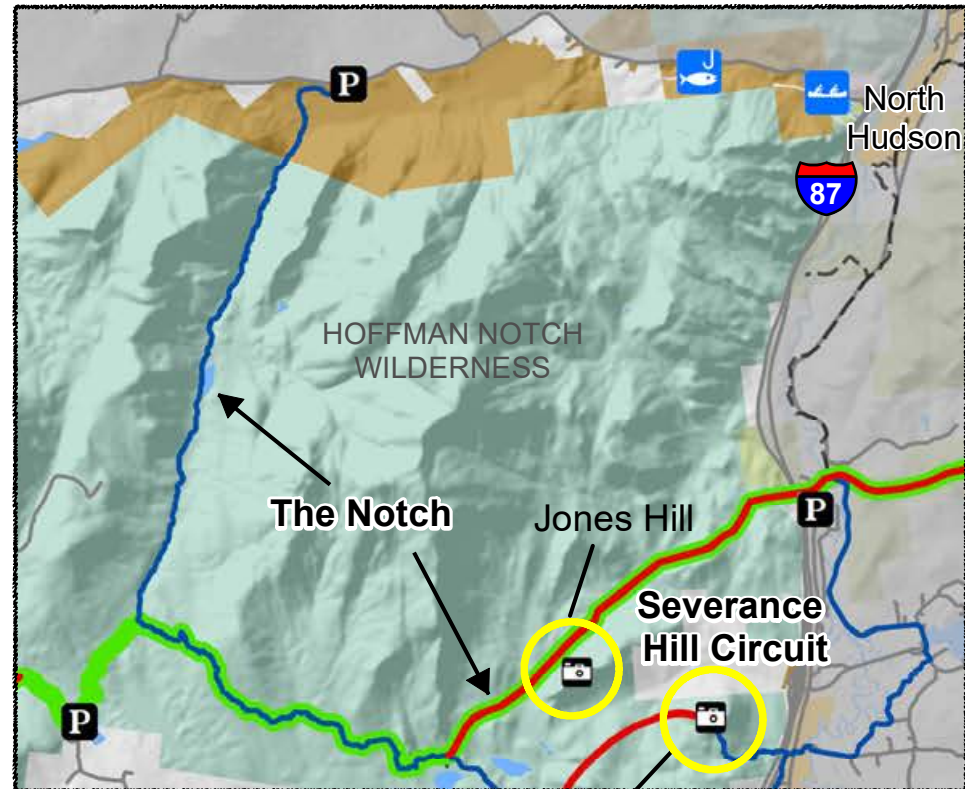


**Severance Hill Circuit** is a 13.8 mile loop in and out of the north end of Schroon Lake through Hoffman Notch Wilderness. Starting at the Dirgy Lot parking and traveling outside of GSW, this loop crosses the Schroon River in the northeast. Using a snowmobile trail to turn south, this loop meets up with the western shore of Paradox Lake before arriving at the Severance Hill trailhead. The trail then heads into Wilderness and ascends to a scenic viewpoint on Severance Hill, then requires new trail to join Big Pond trail, and turns east on the NCNST back to Dirgy Lot parking. Side attractions along the Severance Hill Circuit include fishing in Schroon River, Paradox Lake, North and Big Ponds, and a bushwack up Jones Hill. Multi-modal option to paddle down the Schroon River and avoid most of the snowmobile trail, then hike the remainder of the loop.

## Map 2 ► Minerva-North Hudson The Notch



**The Notch** is a 14.5-mile backcountry traverse through the actual 'Notch' in the Hoffman Notch Wilderness area, using mostly existing trails and a planned 6.6-mile section of the NCNST that has not been constructed, but could provide access to scenic views on Jones Hill. The Notch traverse can be accessed via Hoffman Notch Brook parking or the Dirgy Lot parking, a short drive from North Hudson or Newcomb. The Notch connects to the Severance Hill Circuit, allowing the traverse to detour into Schroon Lake and Paradox Lake. This is a rather long day hike with options for overnight camping that follows 'leave-no-trace' regulations in Wilderness.



**Access:** Extends existing trail through Hoffman Notch Wilderness that passes Big Marsh Pond, past Jones Hill, and out near Schroon Lake, via proposed route for North Country National Scenic Trail. Additional spur trails could be built to Hoffman Mtn and Wyman Pond.

**Connectivity:** Circuit connects to Blue Ridge Rd (near Elk Lake turnoff and Buffalo farm) between North Hudson and Newcomb; with secondary connections to Schroon Lake and Paradox (via proposed Severance Hill Circuit).

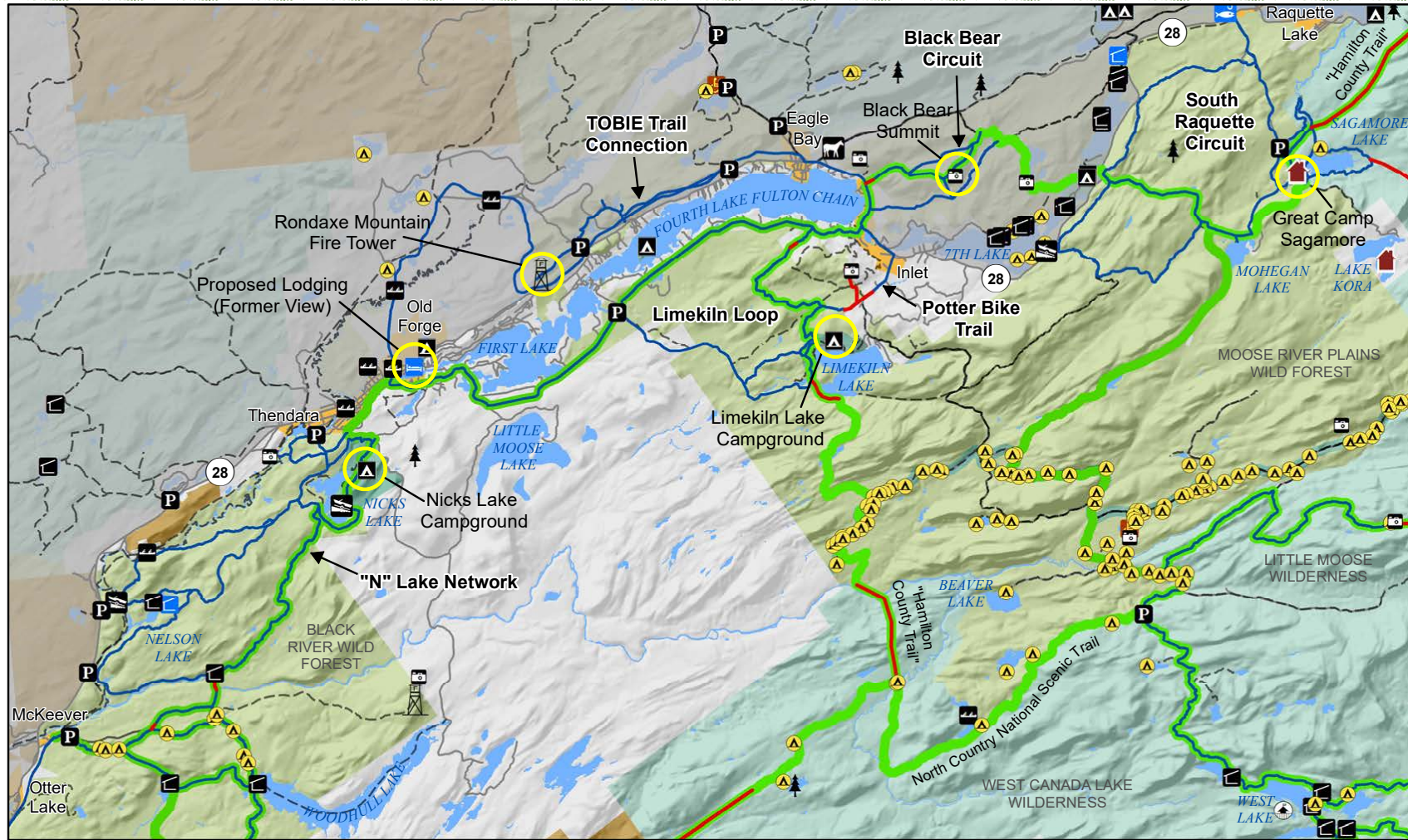
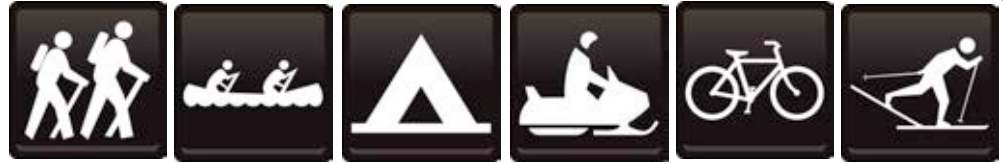
**Stewardship:** Carefully locate new trails through Wilderness and potentially an overnight location; construct junction signs where feature intersects with NCNST and Severance Hill Circuit.

**Destination:** Bisect Hoffman Notch Wilderness, join NCNST, and exit near Schroon Lake. Parking is available at either terminus.

**Partnerships:** Just over 4 miles to construct, but those miles are part of the NCNST anyways; existing start from 28N passes through Boreas Ponds easement. Might benefit from a shuttle service, and a developed overnight location along the trail (none currently exist).

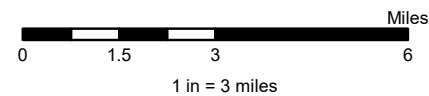


# Map 3 ► Fulton Chain & Raquette Lake

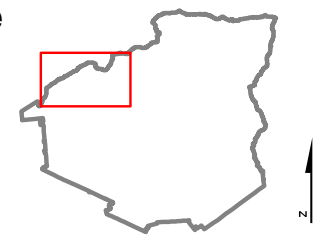


	ADA Accessible		Great Camp		Proposed Feature		Community
	Boat Launch		Historic Site		Local Network		Intensive Use
	Natural Feature		Horse Facility		Regional Network		State Administrative
	State Campground		Lean-to		Construction Required		Wild Forest
	Primitive Campsite		Paddling Access		DEC Trail		Wilderness
	Fire Tower		Parking		Road		Easement
			Campground				
			Scenic Area				

## Fulton Chain, Raquette Lake

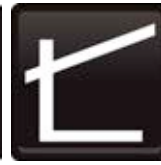


Map produced by the Great South Woods Project Team  
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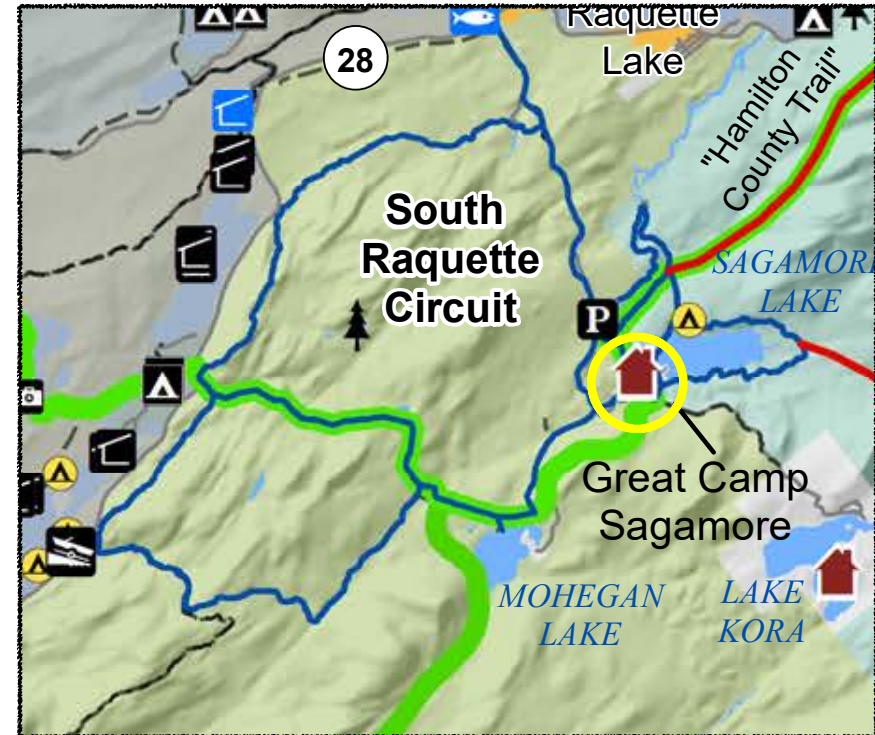




## Map 3 ► Fulton Chain South Raquette Circuit



The **South Raquette Circuit** highlights existing access to a historically and culturally rich region of the Great South Woods. The circuit is a 'triangle of opportunity,' including Raquette Lake, Great Camp Sagamore, and the Eighth Lake Public Campground. Consisting of 28.4 miles of multiple loop trail options, this circuit supports multiple uses, including biking on the unpaved road from the hamlet of Raquette Lake to Great Camp Sagamore, and Mohegan Lake, and continuing to the Eighth Lake Campground via the Old Uncas Road. Bikers may complete a loop by continuing north along Rt. 28 returning to Raquette Lake. This offers campers at the Eighth Lake Campground the opportunity to experience one of the Adirondack's legendary Great Camps with a relatively easy biking daytrip similar to the Lake Harris Campground - Great Camp Santanoni bike trip. Hikers can use the Great Camp Sagamore trail system which includes a scenic loop trail around Sagamore Lake.



**Access:** Existing circuit is now connected with regional network, including to-be-built sections of Hamilton Co Trail (proposed). At least one campsite on Eighth Lake is ADA accessible. Southwestern loop might be developed further for mountain biking or groomed ski trails.

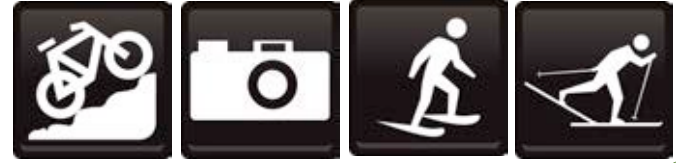
**Connectivity:** Multiple loops linking Eighth Lake camping opportunities to Great Camp Sagamore and the village of Raquette Lake. Circuit is bisected by Hamilton County Trail (proposed) which connects Long Lake with Fulton Chain area. This circuit also helps to link Hamilton Co Trail with village of Raquette Lake and DEC-proposed fishing area near the hamlet.

**Stewardship:** Special management considerations across the network, part on Wild Forest and part Wilderness, and passes through balsam flats exemplary natural community near Great Camp Sagamore. Junction signs needed with Hamilton County Trail (proposed).

**Destination:** From camp on Eighth Lake, trek through Wild Forest to Mohegan Lake, visit Great Camp Sagamore on Sagamore Lake, and return along a new path through wild forests. Overnights at 8th Lake (campsites, campground), also at Sagamore Lake (one is ADA).

**Partnerships:** Raquette Lake and Great Camp Sagamore can promote this existing circuit, which has flexibility of potential uses. Potential opportunity to travel loop on NYS 28 and a portion of this network between 8th Lake and Raquette Lake, half-marathon distance.

## Map 3 ► Fulton Chain Potter Bike Trail



**Access:** New trail segments close circuit and provide access to scenic view on hilltop, via spur trail up to 4th Lake Lookout.

**Connectivity:** Uses part of South Shore Rd, snowmobile trails (also Hamilton County Trail), and the start of the Black Fly Challenge trail out of Inlet. Junction with Limekiln Loop Trail (proposed).

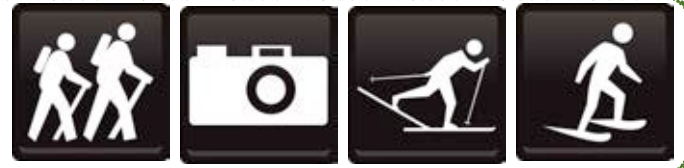
**Stewardship:** Field-validate suitability of snowmobile trails for biking, assess potential impacts on wetland areas. Bike tracks may need to be established to connect main loop with portion of Hamilton Co Trail (proposed) that runs south to Limekiln Lake Campground. Install bike-washing stations for invasives and junction signage at trail crossings. Foot traffic on shared portions of route may require alternative tracks for hikers.

**Destination:** Bike from camp on Limekiln Lake along wooded trails to Fulton Chain scenic views and good eats in Inlet, then follow the circuit back to camp. Suitable for beginner/intermediate bikers (and families). Needs to be designed to ensure high-quality mountain biking experience.

**Partnerships:** Just over a mile of construction to close the circuit, some of which is located on private land, requiring negotiation with landowners; potential to organize mountain bike trail stewardship organization, and coordinate with bike rental businesses in Inlet (likely already using this area) and Old Forge. Design specialized trails for advanced bikers.

The **Potter Bike Trail** is a 7.73 mile mountain bike loop that originates in the hamlet of Inlet and encircles Fern Park, a popular community recreation area. The Trail takes advantage of existing roads and trails, only requiring 1.78 miles of newly constructed trail. Spur trail affords a view at 4th Lake Overlook. Potter Bike Trail links to the TOBIE, which is also bike-able around the Fulton Chain of Lakes. Bikes can be rented from the local outfitter in Inlet.

## Map 3 ► Fulton Chain Black Bear Circuit



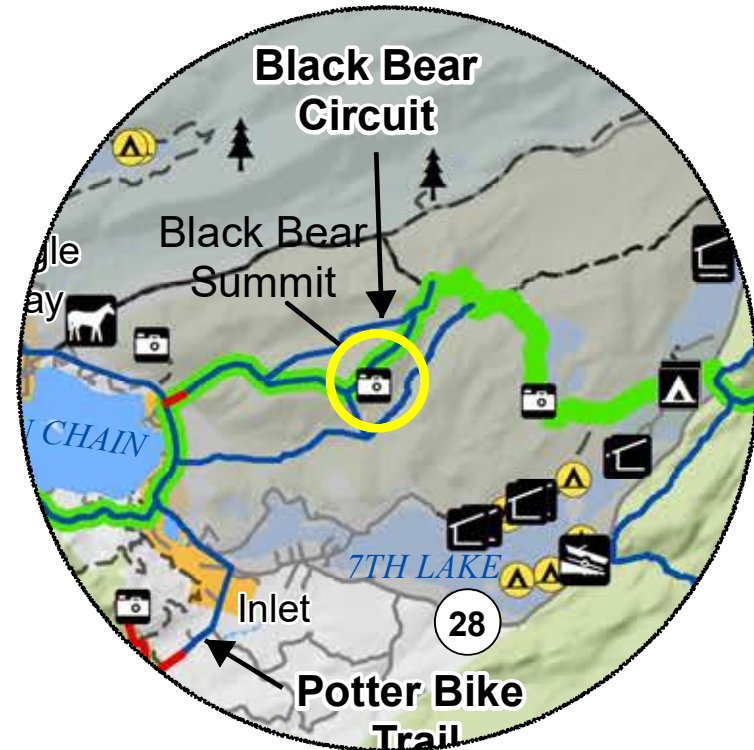
**Access:** Small trail network offers hikers / skiers multiple alternative routes up a summit that is a traditional family favorite in the Fulton Chain area.

**Connectivity:** Hamilton County Trail (proposed) runs up and over Black Bear's summit. To the east, HamCo provides a route from the Black Bear Circuit into 7th Lake Campground (overnight option) and onto the South Raquette Circuit. To the west, HamCo grounds this circuit in Inlet, with the TOBIE Connection, Potter Bike Trail, and Limekiln Lake Loops.

**Stewardship:** Needs assessment to identify suitable segments for skiing (portions already marked/designated). Clear signage would be important to understand the circuit and hiking options.

**Destination:** 'Choose your own adventure to the top' with multiple routes up and down Black Bear Summit, leaving directly from Inlet village. For more of a challenge, tack on the short hike up Rocky Point Mtn.

**Partnerships:** Education opportunity on summit; could encourage hikers to start from the Rocky Pt/Black Bear parking lot, head up the mountain, and back landing in the town center. Then they must walk Inlet's main street back to their vehicle, and have the opportunity to enjoy tourism amenities along the way (including public restrooms, department store, grocery, bakery, coffee, etc.).



Jump on the **Black Bear Circuit** (completely constructed) from the main streets of Inlet. Choose between 2 access points in town (approach of 1.9 or 2.3 mi), or start the trail from the Uncas Rd (approach is 1.4 mi), or even Eighth Lake Campgrounds (approach is 3.6 mi)-- all trails lead to the summit with views of Seventh Lake. On a clear day and a high rock, you might catch a glimpse of the High Peaks. Some trail segments are designated for skiing.



## Map 3 ► Fulton Chain TOBIE Trail Connection



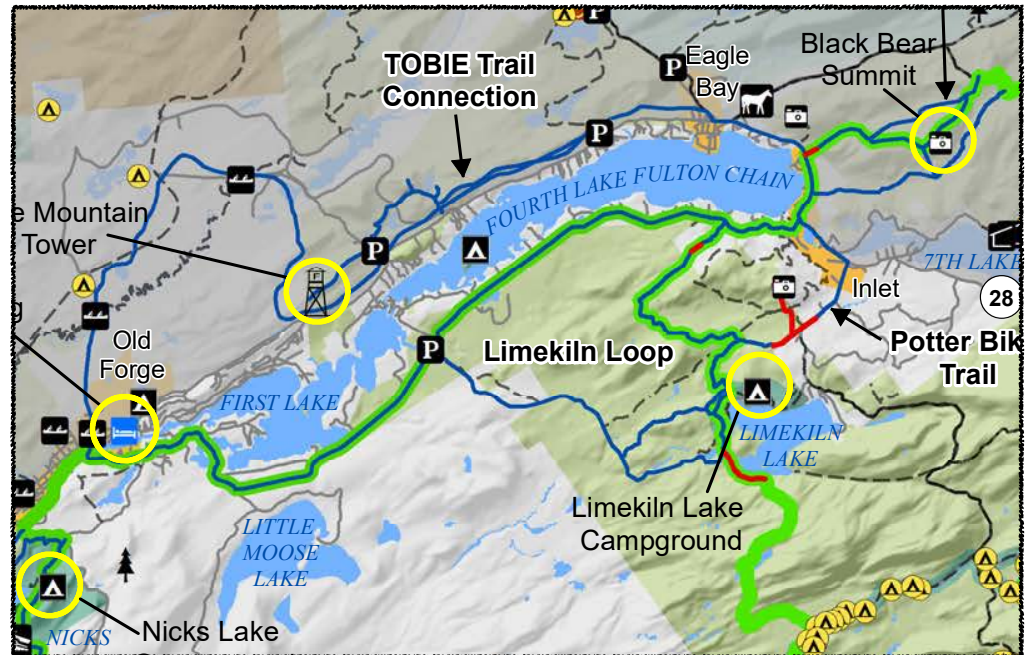
**Access:** Sections of TOBIE trail are well-known and widely used by locals and visitors - we highlight its potential as a circuit that connects front-country features and hamlets in the Fulton Chain area: e.g., the Scenic Mountain Trail, access to Mountain and Fly Ponds, Moose River, Siss and Bubb Lakes, Rondaxe/Bald Mtn, South Shore scenic views of Fulton Chain, Quiver and Twin Ponds.

**Connectivity:** Existing connection of Thendara, Old Forge, Big Moose, Inlet, and Eagle Bay. Overlaps with a section of the Hamilton County Trail (proposed) through Inlet, where it also links with the Potter Bike Trail, Limekiln Loop, and Black Bear Circuit.

**Stewardship:** Scenic Mountain Trail is often challenging to find and follow, better signage and interpretation could be helpful. Signage at Rondaxe could encourage users to head east instead up the Scenic Mountain Trail to reduce congestion on the popular Fire Tower trail. Requires management across 3 units and between 2 complexes.

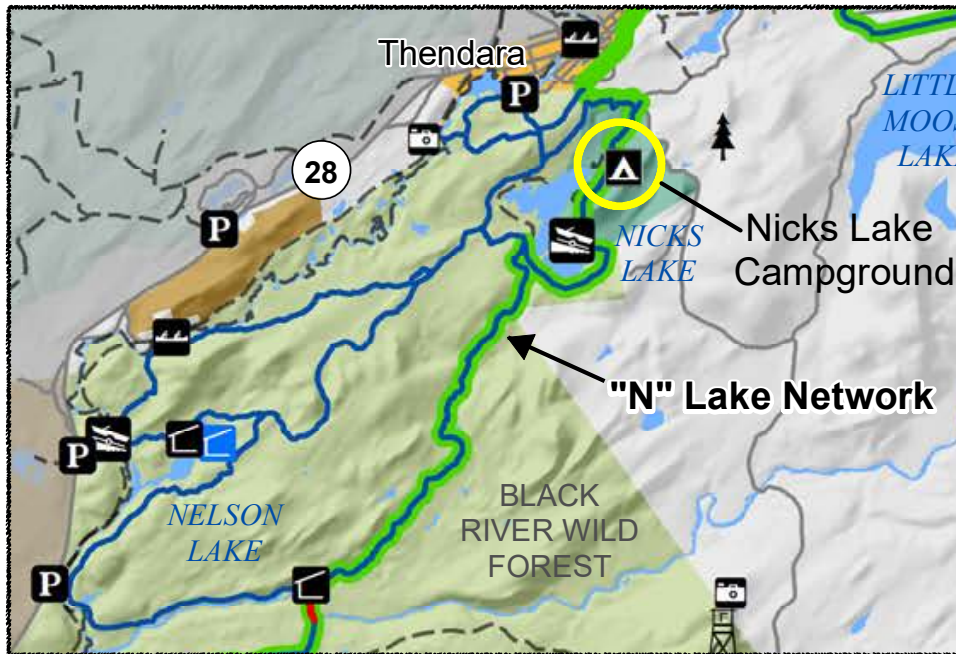
**Destination:** This trail is heavily used by locals for short walks, bike rides, runs, and snowmobiling. Can be divided into sections: road bike 28 and South Shore, hike from Bubb & Siss Parking up the Scenic Mountain Trail and to the Rondaxe Mtn. Parking, then back to your start along the TOBIE.

**Partnerships:** Opportunities to sponsor/maintain sections for specific uses; represents unity among 5 local communities that can be leveraged for events. Could offer scenic photography opportunities off South Shore at Quiver or Twin Pond -- easy access. Opportunity for "hike and beat your float" challenge, put-in to put-in on a stretch of the Moose River.



The **TOBIE Trail Connection** is a classic route north of the Lower Fulton Chain, but becomes a circuit by adding the South Shore Rd. It becomes even more appealing by connecting to the Scenic Mountain Trail/Vista Trail, which follows a ridge from Bubb & Siss Lake trailhead to the Rondaxe/Bald parking area -- making it easy to add this iconic fire tower summit onto the day's itinerary as well. All aspects of this 32.2 mile circuit are constructed, and support hiking, biking, dog walking, snowmobiling, scenic photography, and paddling where it crosses the North Branch of the Moose River. Take advantage of town amenities along the way, including bakeries, public restrooms, public beaches, and visitor centers.

## Map 3 ► Fulton Chain “N” Lake Network



The **“N” Lake Network** envisions a 27.6 mile hiking experience from Nicks Lake to Nelson Lake and along the South and North Branch of the Moose River. Combine hiking and paddling along multiple loops, with many overnight options in the Black River Wild Forest including Nick’s Lake Campground.

**Access:** Existing foot and snowmobile trails featured as a network for hikers and bikers to access Nelson Lake, Nicks Lake and the Nicks Lake Campground via multiple pathways through Black River Wild Forest and along the Moose River. Proposed second lean-to on Nelson Lake.

**Connectivity:** Links Thendara and Old Forge with McKeever and Otter Lake via its connection with the Black River Loop trails (proposed, see Map 6), which require a proposed bridge over the Moose River.

**Stewardship:** Several segments are snowmobile trail that will need field validation and special management efforts to become suitable for hiking or biking. Additional paths / tracks may be desirable along certain segments. Invasive species education and boat washing stations at Nick’s Lake and Nelson Lake boat launches, at Nick’s Lake Campground, and at hand launch on Moose River. Primitive campsite or lean-to might be needed for overnight stay along Nick’s Lake Outlet Trail (via eastern leg from Nicks Lake down to Moose River). Signage required at internal junctions, directing to the Black River Loop, and through the Fulton Seventy to TOBIE.

**Destination:** 3-5 days exploring lakes and remote reaches of the Moose River in Black River Wild Forest.

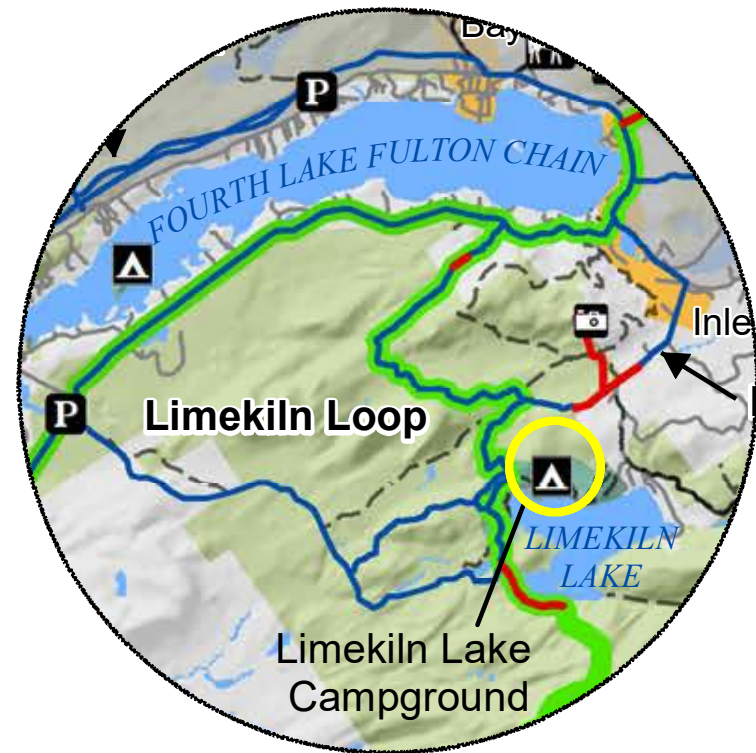
**Partnerships:** Potential to combine hiking and paddling stretches, with shuttles/outfitters provided by community.



## Map 3 ► Fulton Chain Limekiln Loop Trail



The **Limekiln Loop Trail** runs along the South Shore Rd before heading southeast through the Fulton Chain Wild Forest to access Limekiln Lake and Public Campground, before heading north and east into Inlet, totaling 17 miles. A key trail connection of 0.6 miles needs to be constructed as the loop heads north into Inlet (same section as Potter Bike Trail). This loop offers a smaller day-loop option from the Campground around ponds to the west of Limekiln Lake. Biking and hiking multi-modal opportunity takes advantage of town roads and the Potter Bike Trail, and the potential to provide and shuttle bikes from the Campground.



**Access:** Fern Park, Inlet, Scenic South Shore Rd, Limekiln Lake and Campground. The 'new' element is hiking access out of Inlet (alternatively one can drive to the campground)

**Connectivity:** Uses part of HamCo, Potter Bike Trail, TOBIE trail system.

**Stewardship:** Construction of new trail, signage off of TOBIE and HamCo, marking internal loop options.

**Destination:** Can combine activities: road biking on South Shore, Mtn. Biking Potter Bike Trail, hike the rest through the Campground (or rest for the night) and back to South Shore.

**Partnerships:** Small section (0.64) to construct connecting the loop between the campground and Inlet (might involve private land). Campground could take more ownership of the loop, that's where hikers would likely stay or pass through. Shuttles or bike rentals could be provided to finish the TOBIE/South Shore section. Improved parking may be required out of Inlet.