

# TRAIL CONSTRUCTION STARTS AT ZOAR VALLEY UNIQUE AREA



Department of Environmental Conservation

## Site Enhancements to Improve Public Safety & Access

November 2023

### Introduction

Site improvement efforts and construction activities to create a new accessible trail at the Zoar Valley Unique Area will begin this month. As part of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) comprehensive efforts to enhance public safety and improve accessibility, the new **Memorial Trail** will enable visitors of all abilities to enjoy Zoar Valley's beautiful vistas from a safe distance.

### Upcoming Site Improvement Work

#### Project Details and Location

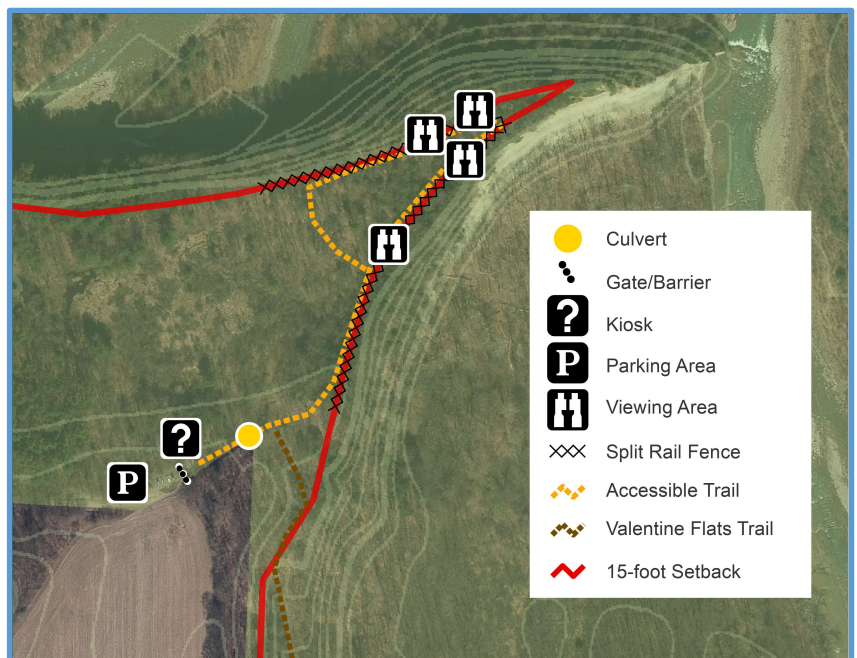
Development of the new and accessible Memorial Trail will occur in two phases.

Phase 1 project and construction activities are underway and will include:

- Replacing the existing Overlook Trail with the new accessible Memorial Trail, located at the end of Valentine Flats Road and parking area.
- Building the new trail to meet federal accessibility standards, with a design to keep visitors on the trail and a safe distance from the gorge at all times.
- Creating a firm and stable trail surface of crushed gravel on a six-foot-wide path for accessibility.
- Constructing four viewing areas at scenic locations along the trail.
- Creating a 15-foot safety setback and installing split-rail fencing along designated portions of the trail; and
- Installing a culvert to cross an existing stream and improve site drainage.

Phase II project work will include:

- Reconstructing the Valentine Flats Trail to improve emergency access from the parking area to the creek and enable access for emergency vehicles;
- Installing bench seating in designated areas on the new Memorial Trail;
- Improving the parking area to create accessible parking; and
- Installing a new informational kiosk and gate.



## Project Timeline

- Tree removal work required to support efforts in advance of the Memorial Trail's development was completed in spring 2023.
- Phase I Trail construction activities will begin in November of 2023 and are anticipated to be completed by the summer of 2024.
- Phase II improvement work will begin following completion of Phase I activities.
- **All work is anticipated to be complete and ready to re-open to visitors in 2025.**

## Parking and Access During Construction

- **The Valentine Flats parking area and trail will be closed during construction.**
- Other access points, including Forty Road in the town of Persia and the Holcomb and Ross Pond areas will remain open to visitors throughout construction.
- Updated information about trail and parking closures will be posted on DEC's website at <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/36931.html>.

## Project Overview, Goals, and History

Development of the new and accessible Memorial Trail is part of DEC's ongoing efforts to enhance public safety and the enjoyment of Zoar Valley for all visitors. Trail development and improvements were identified during a public scoping process for the Niagara Frontier Unit Management Plan (UMP), which includes Zoar Valley. The Niagara Frontier UMP underwent a public review and comment process and is available for review on DEC's website at [www.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands\\_forests\\_pdf/niagarafrontierdraftump.pdf](http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands_forests_pdf/niagarafrontierdraftump.pdf).

These, and other efforts, bolster DEC's work over the last several years to make Zoar Valley safer and more enjoyable for all visitors.

## Public Safety as a Top Priority

DEC continues to invest significant resources and staff expertise to enhance public safety. Over the last several years, DEC has advanced a suite of safety enhancements at Zoar Valley, including:

- Hiring additional Forest Rangers to promote public safety and responsible recreation, as well as Assistant Forest Rangers, stewards, and interns assigned to the site;
- Installing hundreds of new and enhanced safety signs at access points, along trails, and at the gorge rim, to advise of potential dangers and encourage visitors to stay on approved trails;
- Brushing in hazardous and unofficial trails;
- Erecting new informational kiosks with maps and safety information;
- Working with external entities to ensure accurate maps are posted online; and
- Enacting emergency regulations restricting access to hazardous locations upstream from the Forty Road Parking area, including a 15-foot setback from cliff edges and prohibiting climbing cliff walls.

### PROJECT UPDATES

- Visit DEC's website at <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/36931.html> for project updates and visitor information.
- Questions? Contact DEC at [region9@dec.ny.gov](mailto:region9@dec.ny.gov) or 716-851-7000.
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