

**Access and Public Use Plan for  
Tioughnioga Wildlife Management Area  
2021 – 2026**



Division of Fish and Wildlife  
Bureau of Wildlife

1285 Fisher Avenue  
Cortland, NY 13045

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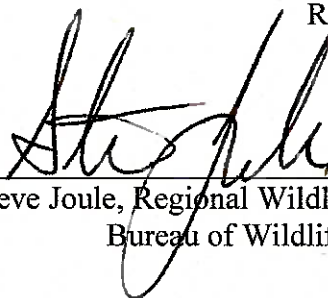
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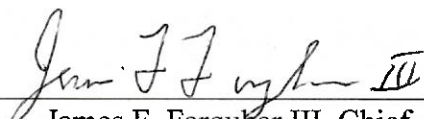
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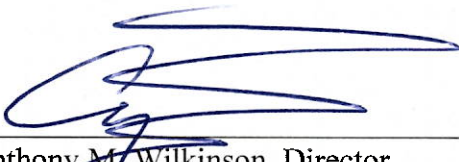
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## ***SUMMARY***

Tioughnioga Wildlife Management Area (WMA) provides public access for a number of important outdoor activities, with the most common uses being both small and big game hunting. Tioughnioga is well known by upland bird hunters for providing the flush of beating wings that they so covet in the autumn woods. At the same time, white-tailed deer hunters enjoy pursuing their quarry in the many mature hardwood stands, creek bottoms, and small woodland clearings that these wary animals call home on the WMA. This property is also very popular with birders seeking to see and/or hear the many species of birds that are present, some of which are becoming increasingly hard to find elsewhere in NY (grasshopper sparrow, Canada warbler, etc.). Some other common recreational activities enjoyed on Tioughnioga WMA are trapping, fishing, and hiking, with the latter taking place on sections of both the North Country Link Trail and the Finger Lakes Trail. Moving forward, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) will continue to promote and improve public access for wildlife-dependent activities on this unique WMA.

Management objectives for public use and access on Tioughnioga WMA include:

- Continue to maintain all existing access infrastructure (parking areas, kiosks, DEC-owned roads, etc.).
- Construct additional infrastructure items as needed to facilitate primary wildlife-dependent recreation (parking areas, pull-offs, kiosks, etc.).
- Specifically concentrate on creating additional early successional and grassland habitat with the intention to improve access for upland bird hunters, big game hunters, trappers, and bird watchers.
- Design and construct an accessible observation tower for bird watching/wildlife viewing, including an accessible parking area and trail to the tower.
- Continue to allow the existence and maintenance of the North Country Link Trail and the Finger Lakes Trail.

## ***I. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION***

### **PURPOSE OF ACCESS AND PUBLIC USE PLANS**

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#### **BACKGROUND**

Providing public access to lands owned by DEC is an integral part of state land management. DEC Division of Fish and Wildlife's (DFW) Bureau of Wildlife (BOW) oversees WMAs, Multiple Use Areas (MUA), Unique Areas, and other properties comprising the WMA system. The Bureau strives to provide safe, convenient, and ecologically-sound public access to these areas.

The priority public use activity on WMAs is wildlife-dependent recreation such as hunting, trapping, fishing, and wildlife observation. Other public use activities may be appropriate if DFW determines they are compatible with both wildlife conservation and the primary public use activities. Guidance on the use and purpose of WMAs and a list of allowable activities is provided in *Public Use of Wildlife Management Areas*.<sup>1</sup>

## **SCOPE AND INTENT**

This Access and Public Use Plan (APUP) complements the Habitat Management Plan (HMP) for Tioughnioga WMA and addresses management objectives for wildlife-dependent recreation, access features, and facility development and maintenance. In conjunction with WMA regulations, APUPs serve as the overarching guidance for providing access to wildlife lands and determining public use activities appropriate for each area. APUPs draw from and build upon other management plans that may exist for the area, including Unit Management Plans (UMP), previous management planning documents, and feedback received during a public comment period.

Primary purposes of this plan:

- To foster compatible wildlife-dependent recreation and wildlife conservation priorities.
- To identify public use activities and access features, highlighting exceptional opportunities specific to the WMA.
- To describe current management challenges and discuss potential solutions.
- To prioritize necessary improvements and proposed new features.
- To establish a maintenance schedule for existing facilities and features.

## **COMPLIANCE WITH STATE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY REVIEW**

Activities described in this plan are included in the 1979 *Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement on Public Use Development Activities of the DEC Division of Fish and Wildlife*,<sup>2</sup> which addressed compliance with the State Environmental Quality Review Act, 6 NYCRR Part 617. All proposed management also requires compliance with the Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act, the State Historic Preservation Act, Executive Order 13175 *Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments*, and CP-42 *Contact, Cooperation, and Consultation with Indian Nations* prior to implementation.

## **WMA REGULATIONS**

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NY Codes, Rules and Regulations, Title 6, Chapter 1, Subchapter G, Part 51: Public Use of State WMAs (“Part 51”) lists regulations for public use of WMAs. Part 51 addresses restricted and prohibited uses of WMAs in order to prevent disturbance to wildlife and interference with wildlife-dependent recreation.<sup>3</sup> Part 51 is currently in the process of being revised to include necessary changes that will keep up with new or evolving public uses, updated laws, and current

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<sup>1</sup> Available online at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7768.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Available online at [https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife\\_pdf/eispublic.pdf](https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/eispublic.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Additional information is available online at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/regulations/regulations.html>.

use concerns on our New York State WMAs. Some uses listed in this document as “prohibited” or “not allowed”, may require these changes to Part 51 to be signed into regulation before being considered illegal on a WMA. Those restrictions of uses requiring revisions to the current Part 51 are still being listed in this document due to the fact that this plan is aimed at describing the current and future conditions of public use on this WMA. It is anticipated with reasonable certainty that the revisions to Part 51 will be signed into regulation sometime during the life of this document.

## ***II. RECREATIONAL RESOURCES***

### **POINTS OF ACCESS**

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Tioughnioga WMA is accessible from a number of different roadways, many of which are open year-round. From the east/west, users can enter the property using Madison County Route 52 (Damon Rd) and Madison County Route 60 (Dugway Rd). Access to the southernmost portions of Tioughnioga is available on Peterson Hollow Rd, via County Route 60 (Dugway Rd).

Accessing the northeastern section of the WMA is possible using Tinsley Hill Rd, via County Route 52 (Damon Rd). Finally, access to the northwestern section of the property is available by taking either Irish Hill Rd or Holmes Rd to this area. For more detailed driving directions and a map of WMA roads, see Figure 1 of the preceding Tioughnioga Habitat Management Plan (page 39), or go to <https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/69633.html>.

### **CONNECTIVITY TO OTHER RECREATION AREAS**

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Tioughnioga WMA borders two other public properties: Tuscarora Nature Park (82 acres) and Dugway County Forest (195 acres). Both parcels allow access for recreational activities similar to those allowed on the WMA. Tuscarora is owned by the Town of Nelson, and Madison County is responsible for managing the Dugway Forest. The nature park is easily accessed along the north side of Tinsley Hill Rd, with the county forest being accessible from the south on Dugway Rd, or the former AT&T right-of-way to the north.

There are numerous other areas of public land located in the vicinity of the WMA. These lands include: Nelson Swamp Unique Area (831 acres), Stoney Pond State Forest (1,469 acres), DeRuyter State Forest (972 acres), Morrow Mountain State Forest (1,290 acres), and Three Springs State Forest (797 acres).<sup>4</sup>

Portions of the North Country (Link) Trail<sup>5</sup> and the Finger Lakes Trail<sup>6</sup> run through Tioughnioga WMA. These sections of trail connect to a system that runs all the way from North Dakota to Vermont, and due to this connection these trails have been permitted on this WMA. These trails

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<sup>4</sup> Information available at <https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7792.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Information available at <https://northcountrytrail.org/>.

<sup>6</sup> Information available at <https://fingerlakestrail.org/>.



are marked with paint blazes or small plastic trail markers where they wind their way through the property.

Snowmobile connector trails S57C and C5C also travel through Tioughnioga, facilitating access to main corridor trails located on either side of WMA property. For a more detailed map of the surrounding public lands and connective trails please see Figure 1 towards the end of this document.

## WMA FEATURES

All structures, roads, trails, and other features are documented to track existing conditions and identify future management actions to maintain, repair, or improve public use and access. Table 1 summarizes the existing and proposed features on Tioughnioga WMA. In addition, this property includes a large managed grassland area; which as it is further developed, will have its own unique access considerations.

Table 1. Summary of current and desired public use features on Tioughnioga WMA. Features listed here are those that are available to the public.

Category	Feature	Current Amount (as of 2019)	Proposed Changes
Parking	Vehicle parking lot	9	Increase (as needed)
Roads	WMA road (unpaved)	1.3 miles	Maintain
	Administrative road (controlled access)	5.1 miles	Maintain
	Gates	12	Increase (as needed)
Trails	Hiking trail	6.8 miles	No change
	Snowmobile trail	3.2 miles	No change
Boat launch & fishing access	Launches/platforms/docks	0	No change
Waterbodies	Man-made impoundments	5	No change
	Ponds/open water wetlands	16	No change
	Vernal pools	8	Increase to 10
Observation structures	Wildlife observation tower	0	Increase to 1
Structures and facilities	Building or shed	2	Decrease to 0
	Informational kiosks	4	Increase to 7
Accessible features	Accessible parking area, trail, and observation tower	0	Increase to 1



## MAINTAINING AND IMPROVING WMA FEATURES

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DEC will continue to maintain and improve public use of and access to WMAs in order to provide the following benefits for WMA visitors:

- Provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation that are compatible with wildlife habitat management practices and species management considerations.
- Educate and inform WMA visitors about wildlife and habitat, DEC programs, safety and regulations, recreational activities, and other information pertinent to the WMA.
- Provide and improve inclusivity and usability with accessible facilities. (i.e., accessibility for people of all abilities)
- Maintain clean and safe facilities.

Each year, BOW's Land Management and Habitat Conservation Team develops a work plan specifying maintenance and improvements to WMAs that will enhance access and use of the areas. Implementation of the management recommendations proposed in this plan is dependent upon availability of staff and funding. Locations of features that will be installed, improved, replaced, or removed are shown in Figure 2.

### PARKING AREAS



**Current Conditions:** Currently Tioughnioga has nine gravel parking areas that are in good condition. Most of the WMA roads have various parking areas, pull-offs, and wide shoulder areas, allowing WMA users to park in almost any section. A lot of the parking areas are located to provide access to popular hunting areas, trailheads, or water bodies on the WMA. Parking areas are maintained through mowing around the edges every other year.

**Actions:** The following actions, listed in order of priority, are proposed during the timeframe of this plan:

- Maintain existing parking areas through periodic mowing and adding gravel when needed. Snow plowing of heavily used parking areas will also be considered.
- Add additional parking areas and pull-offs where they are identified as a need for primary wildlife uses.
- Create an accessible parking area for the future observation tower on Tinsley Hill Rd.

### ROADS

**Current Conditions:** As mentioned earlier in this document, Tioughnioga contains 1.3 miles of public roadways and 5.1 miles of DEC administrative roads (controlled access). At this time, all roads owned and managed by DEC on this property are in good condition. Administrative roads are maintained in order to provide DEC with access for timber management activities, as well as providing improved foot access to WMA users to



The former AT&T right-of-way, now a DEC administrative road.

Photo: DEC

various areas on the property. The sides of these roads are mowed every other year to keep vegetation from crowding the sides, and they are graded or re-surfaced periodically as time and workload allows. There are twelve yellow gates located on the property that restrict access to sensitive areas or seasonally close certain roads due to snow or wet conditions. These gates are maintained through painting usually every four to six years. There are numerous small culvert pipes located on DEC roadways, which are being cleaned out or replaced as needed.

**Actions:** The following actions, listed in order of priority, are proposed during the timeframe of this plan:

- Maintain current mileage of DEC-owned roadways through shoulder mowing, ditching, and re-surfacing when necessary.
- Maintain existing gates and culverts through routine maintenance as needed.

## **TRAILS**



**Current Conditions:** The Finger Lakes/North Country Trail and the Link Trail account for all the hiking trails currently present on the WMA, with the different sections totaling 6.8 miles altogether. These trails are currently maintained and marked by volunteers with local trail chapters operating under a yearly Temporary Revocable Permit (TRP; see page 18). The trails are primarily used by hikers and bird watchers, but they are sometimes utilized by hunters to access some areas of the property. There are no plans to further expand the hiking trails present on Tioughnioga. Permanent or temporary re-routes of these trail systems may need to be developed based on ongoing habitat management activities on the WMA.

Snowmobiles are currently allowed on 3.2 miles of trails that pass through the WMA. The Snow Valley Riders Trail Club is responsible for installing signage and grooming of connector trails C5C and S57C. Operation of snowmobiles on the WMA is allowed under a yearly TRP, with the open snowmobiling season being from the day after the Southern Zone muzzle-loading deer season ends to April 15 (as snow conditions permit). DEC maintains the right to close trails due to logging operations or the presence of sensitive wildlife species at any time. There are no planned expansions of snowmobiling trails on Tioughnioga WMA. Figure 1 shows the locations of all snowmobile trails on and surrounding this property.

**Actions:** The following actions, listed in order of priority, are proposed during the timeframe of this plan:

- Create an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA; see page 16) compliant trail on Tinsley Hill Rd connecting the access features (parking area and observation tower).
- Continue to keep an open line of communication with the trail groups should a temporary or permanent re-route or closure of certain sections be necessary.
- Determine an alternate trail route for the Link Trail west of Peterson Hollow Rd, as a planned timber harvest and field expansion changes the route of this trail.

## **BOAT LAUNCHES AND FISHING ACCESS**



**Current Conditions:** There are currently no fishing or boating access features located on Tioughnioga WMA. Due to the limited size of waterbodies located on the WMA and the generally limited fishing opportunities present, there are no plans to create any access features for these activities at this time.

### **OBSERVATION/HUNTING BLINDS, TOWERS, AND PLATFORMS**



**Current Conditions:** Currently there are no blinds, observation towers, or other structures that facilitate wildlife viewing, hunting, or other wildlife-dependent recreation located on this WMA.

**Actions:** The following actions, listed in order of priority, are proposed during the timeframe of this plan:

- Install an accessible wildlife observation tower, complete with the accessible parking area and trail to the tower. This feature will be located on Tinsley Hill Rd in the grassland restoration area, specifically near the existing gate on the south side of the roadway. This feature will provide access for wildlife viewing and bird watching, especially for grassland dependent species. It will be situated in such a way that adjacent private residences will not be able to be easily observed.

### **BUILDINGS AND OTHER PERMANENT STRUCTURES**



**Current Conditions:** Tioughnioga WMA currently contains only two buildings: a barn and a house located on a parcel DEC recently acquired on Tinsley Hill Rd. Due to the overall poor condition of the house and no need for storage space in the barn, DEC will be removing these structures. This will eliminate potential hazards associated with these structures and eliminate costs associated with maintaining both buildings. There are also four informational kiosks found at various locations on the WMA.

**Actions:** The following actions, listed in order of priority, are proposed during the timeframe of this plan:

- Remove the home and barn located on Tinsley Hill Rd. This will include a full hazardous materials assessment (and abatement if necessary) before anything is torn down and removed.
- Install three new informational kiosks.
- Maintain all kiosks with periodic maintenance as needed.



An informational kiosk on Tioughnioga WMA.

Photo: Tom Cunningham, DEC

## MANAGING HABITAT TO PROVIDE RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

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There are several habitat management projects specifically designed to improve public access for wildlife recreation. Please refer to the HMP for a detailed habitat management discussion. Currently the WMA contains a proportionally small amount of early successional habitat, with only around 3% of the acreage in either young forest or shrubland. DEC intends to create over 500 additional acres of this habitat type on the WMA, specifically aimed at providing improved habitat for upland game birds, big game, furbearers, and many species of songbirds. This habitat will be created and maintained using a combination of commercial timber cuts and non-commercial means, the idea being to have a mixture of all different age classes of young forest (0-5 years, 5-10 years, 10+ years). This form of habitat management is directly designed to enhance public access opportunities for hunting, trapping, and bird watching.

A grassland project located on Tinsley Hill Rd is another effort by DEC to improve recreation opportunities on Tioughnioga. Whether for bird watching or pheasant hunting, enhancements to this section of the WMA will provide several user groups with an improved access feature. Currently this area contains 47 acres of contiguous fields, with a mixture of cool-season and warm-season grasses making up the bulk of the existing vegetative cover. Through a 50+ acre clearcut and stump removal project and the recent acquisition of an adjacent parcel of private land, the goal is to end up with a managed grassland of around 125 acres. DEC plans to maintain this habitat through rotational mowing, prescribed fire, and when necessary, by planting grassland vegetation using agricultural equipment.

The following actions, listed in order of priority, are proposed during the timeframe of this plan:

- HMP forest prescriptions such as those described in stands A1, A17, and B22 are the type of actions that will be used to accomplish the increased habitat for primary public uses (see Table 4 starting on page 14 of the HMP for more information on all planned cuts).
- Remove stumps and logging debris from a ~55acre clearcut for bird watching and small game hunting (currently underway).
- Plant ~55 acre cleared area with a native warm-season grass mixture.
- Develop plans and build an accessible observation tower, complete with an accessible parking area and trail to the tower.
- Develop a map and schedule for stocking pheasants on Tioughnioga WMA when habitat conditions become suitable for this species.

## III. PUBLIC USE ACTIVITIES

### RECREATION ON WMAS

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WMAs are unique among other state lands because they are managed for wildlife conservation and wildlife-dependent recreation. DEC adheres to a set of broad goals based on statutory, regulatory, and policy guidance as a basis to determine compatibility of public uses. Briefly, the

primary goals are: (1) providing and enhancing wildlife habitat, and (2) providing and enhancing opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation. Secondary goals include: (3) fostering understanding and appreciation of wildlife and their habitats, and (4) allowing non-wildlife-dependent recreation when it is compatible with the primary goals. DEC carefully considers public use activities and determines whether they are compatible with these goals and the management objectives specific to each WMA. Some activities may be restricted to protect sensitive wildlife or habitats in specific areas or during certain times of year, or to reduce conflicts between user groups. Some activities may be allowed only under certain conditions or by permit. Other activities are not allowed on WMAs because they conflict with the purposes and management of WMAs. Activities that are allowed, prohibited, or may require a permit are discussed in *Public Use of Wildlife Management Areas*.<sup>7</sup>

## RECREATION ON TIOUGHNIOGA WMA

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### PRIMARY ACTIVITIES

Primary activities include wildlife-dependent recreation that is compatible with the primary goals and purposes of WMAs. Hunting, trapping, wildlife watching, wildlife/nature photography, and fishing are the primary uses of Tioughnioga WMA. All statewide hunting, trapping, and fishing regulations apply.<sup>8</sup>



**Hunting:** Located in Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) 7M, Tioughnioga provides excellent hunting for several popular game species, most notably ruffed grouse and American woodcock. Upland bird hunting is one of the more popular types of hunting that takes place on this WMA, mainly due to the abundant suitable habitat for these birds. The property contains many areas of wild apples, hawthorn, aspen, dogwood and viburnum shrubs, and other mast-producing plants. Couple this abundant food with thick understory cover and younger age class timber in spots, and it adds up to a grouse and woodcock hunter's paradise. The HMP calls for enhancing this specific type of hunting, with many forest stand treatments specifically designed for upland game bird species. Patch clearcuts, seed tree cuts, thinning, and apple/aspen releases will all be used to further improve habitat conditions for these birds. The planned management actions will be located near the many roads and parking areas dotted across the WMA, providing additional opportunities for sportsmen and women. Refer to the HMP for more specific information on when and where forest stand treatments are planned to occur.

White-tailed deer hunting is also popular with users of this WMA. The same type of timber management actions that will benefit upland game birds also provide deer with improved habitat conditions. Opening the forest canopy stimulates thick and vigorous plant regeneration, adding browse and cover to a deer's home range. Tioughnioga provides an environment for just about any type of deer hunting. While many productive hunting areas are located within easy walking distance of a road, there are other large sections available to hunters looking for more of a "big woods" type hunt.

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<sup>7</sup> Available online at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7768.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Available online at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/regs/2494.html>.



Other opportunities present on Tioughnioga include: squirrel and rabbit hunting, turkey hunting, predator hunting (coyote, fox, raccoon), and to a lesser degree, waterfowl hunting. Squirrels can be found in the widespread stands of hardwood mast-producing trees found on this property, with oaks and beech being common throughout. Cottontail rabbits are often seen in the many stands of overgrown wild apple trees, thick brushy field edges, and regenerating young forest cuts throughout the property. The wild turkey hunting can be fantastic, as this WMA provides some excellent areas for nesting and brood rearing cover for hens. Hunters may find themselves chasing birds on open hardwood ridges, small forest openings, or some of the bigger fields found on some areas of the property. Most of the timber management described in the HMP will provide improved habitat and cover essential to the life functions of these small game species. Access for these various forms of small game hunting is made very easy by the network of public, administrative, and other roadways located on Tioughnioga WMA. Although present on a limited basis, waterfowl are found each fall on some of the ponds and beaver wetland complexes located on Tioughnioga. Species most commonly seen are wood ducks, hooded mergansers, Canada geese, and mallards. It should also be noted that with the expected continued expansion and increase in black bear numbers in Madison County, opportunities for bear hunting on the WMA will also increase over time. In addition, the planned habitat management actions and access features will also lend themselves to increased black bear habitat on Tioughnioga.

Current habitat on the WMA is not suitable for pheasants. In the future, DEC will evaluate the possibility of releasing ring-necked pheasants on the grasslands of the WMA located along Tinsley Hill Rd. With the planned expansion and enhancement of grassland habitat in the fields present there already, it may eventually provide suitable habitat for pheasants. If this indeed turns out to be the case, this will be an excellent opportunity to provide public access to pheasant hunters.



**Trapping:** Many species of furbearers can be found on this WMA including: beaver, muskrat, mink, fisher, weasel, red and grey fox, coyote, raccoon, opossum, and striped skunk. In addition, sightings of bobcat and river otter continue to increase in the Tioughnioga area, but currently this WMU is not open to harvest of either species. Future changes to season structure for these species may provide trapping opportunities on this WMA. Several of the drainages meandering through the property have multiple beaver-pond complexes, making them excellent spots for water trapping. There are also many small streams and culverts that make for prime mink trapping locations. Much of the upland portion of Tioughnioga provides habitat and various locations to set traps for whichever species a land trapper may be targeting. Being located in WMU 7M, Tioughnioga is located in an area that is very well suited to fisher trapping. Following the opening of a three-year experimental fisher trapping season in 2016, WMU 7M has consistently been among the top producing units in the state since. Many of the forest management practices prescribed in the HMP will enhance food and cover for furbearer prey species (small rodents, rabbits, etc.), thus improving the WMA for furbearer species as well.



**Wildlife observation/bird watching:** Tioughnioga WMA provides many different habitat types that are conducive to wildlife watching, specifically bird watching. The area provides ample opportunities to see or hear many

different species of birds, including species normally associated with more northern boreal habitat like pine siskins, red crossbills, and pine grosbeaks. Grassland bird species also call some of the larger fields home, with savannah sparrows, grasshopper sparrows, eastern meadowlarks, and bobolinks all being observed on the property within the last several years. The wide variety of habitat types present at Tioughnioga present birders with a wide variety of places to locate a very diverse array of bird species, with the extensive road and trail systems providing access to almost any area they wish. With future management actions aimed at further enhancing both early successional and grassland habitat, the area will no doubt continue to attract an increasingly wide range of bird species.

This property also provides access for viewing and/or photographing other types of wildlife besides birds. Mammal species such as deer, mink, beaver, and fisher can often be seen in the many forest openings and watercourses throughout Tioughnioga. Visitors wishing to see common amphibians and reptiles can easily find green frogs, spotted salamanders, American toads, garter snakes, and painted turtles.



**Fishing:** Tioughnioga is not generally known as a primary fishing destination among local anglers, but there are some opportunities on the WMA to enjoy this type of recreation. Some of the ponds contain warm-water species such as bluegill, largemouth bass, and bullhead. Most of these bodies of water can be reached with a short hike off one of the many roads. There are also some limited angling options for brook trout in some of the streams that traverse the WMA. Since fishing is not generally viewed as one of the more common uses on this property, there are no management actions planned in the next ten years to specifically enhance or further facilitate this activity on Tioughnioga WMA. At this time, there are also no plans to stock any of the water bodies on this property. With that being said, best management practices will be used on all habitat management projects to ensure that there are no negative impacts on any of the fish communities present on the WMA.

## **SECONDARY ACTIVITIES**

Secondary activities are not necessarily wildlife-dependent, but they are generally compatible with the goals and purposes of WMAs. Secondary activities including hiking, bicycling on WMA roads, cross country (Nordic) skiing, and snowshoeing are normally compatible with the goals of Tioughnioga WMA. These activities are also permitted when used in conjunction with a primary activity (e.g., snowshoeing to go hunting or trapping).



**Hiking:** Hiking is one of the most common secondary uses permitted at Tioughnioga WMA. Sections of the Finger Lakes and North Country Link Trails travel through the property, connecting to the larger trail system that runs all the way from North Dakota to Vermont. The trails on the WMA are the responsibility of each trail organization and are maintained through local chapter volunteers. Maintenance is allowed through a yearly TRP. Maintenance activities are generally restricted to the use of hand tools (chainsaws, brush cutters, etc.), as the overall impact on area wildlife is usually low with this type of trail maintenance. In keeping with the low-impact nature of these trails, DEC limits the installation of any new permanent structures (i.e., bridges, large walkways, etc.) from being built along trail sections. The locations of all trails on the WMA are taken into consideration when timber is being cut, and



DEC will communicate with the trail groups should a temporary/permanent re-route or closure of certain sections be needed.



**Bicycling:** Bicycling is allowed on both the town/county and DEC owned roadways running through the WMA. The amount of bicycle use is currently believed to be very minimal on Tioughnioga, so it is not expected to create a large amount of wildlife disturbance at this time.



**Cross country (Nordic) skiing and snowshoeing:** Cross country skiing and snowshoeing are allowed on administrative roads and the sanctioned trail segments located on the property. It is currently not known how popular these two types of recreation are on this WMA, but the disturbance to wildlife is believed to be minimal.

### **RESTRICTED ACTIVITIES**

Restricted activities are typically not wildlife-dependent and have the potential to adversely affect wildlife or wildlife-dependent recreation.

The following restricted activities may be allowed on Tioughnioga WMA on a limited basis, with conditions and/or a permit:

**Horseback riding:** Horseback riding is only allowed on roadways that allow motor vehicle traffic (town, county, un-gated DEC access roads). Riding on foot trails, logging access roads, fields, or any other off-road portion of the WMA is prohibited.

**Snowmobiling:** Snowmobiles are only allowed on connector trail segments C5C and S57C (portions of Holmes Rd, Corkinsville Rd, and the old AT&T right-of-way). They are prohibited from using any other sections of administrative roadways or trails on the property, as these machines have the potential to cause unnecessary stress to wintering wildlife, hunters/trappers, and other wildlife-dependent users. The trail segments allowed on Tioughnioga are posted and maintained by the local snowmobile club, with yearly permission for these trails granted through a TRP issued out of the Cortland DEC office.

**Operating motorized vehicles, including ATVs:** Other than designated routes for Motorized Access Permits for People with Disabilities (MAPPWD), the only motorized vehicle trails that may be permitted on WMAs (at the discretion of the regional wildlife manager) are connector trails (no loops, spurs, or dead ends) that allow snowmobiles to cross the WMA solely for the purpose of connecting one designated and maintained snowmobile trail to another. If no connection is possible via the shoulder of public roads, WMA connector trails should be over administrative roads and follow the most direct and least intrusive path to connect trail networks. Additionally, WMA lands must not be snowmobile destination sites or permit off-trail riding, and use of snowmobile trails must not disturb wildlife or wildlife habitats, or in any way interfere with wildlife-dependent recreation or normal administration of the area by DEC.

**Dog training:** Training dogs on wild game during the training season (August 16 to April 15) does not require a permit. All other dog training, all dog trials, and any training outside these dates requires a permit from the regional DEC office. For the purposes of this plan, “dog training” will be defined as a single dog owner(s) and his or her dog(s) under the direct control and supervision of the owner(s) while engaged in activities aimed at teaching the dog(s) how to pursue and retrieve wild game. During the time period mentioned above, August 16 to April 15, any dog training activities that involve a gathering or group of dogs and owners (more than one group of owners and their dogs together) will be considered a “dog trial” and will require a permit from the regional DEC office to use WMA property.

**Collecting edible plants, fruit, or fungi** other than for immediate personal consumption is not allowed.

The following restricted activities on Tioughnioga WMA are authorized only under permits issued through the Regional DEC office:

- Dog trials and group training events
- Organized competitive races or group events
- Geocaching
- Drone flying is not allowed unless it is a permitted wildlife, research, or habitat management flight\*
- Camping is restricted to two designated parking areas on Tioughnioga WMA, requires a permit, and is allowed from September 15<sup>th</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup> only. Camping permits are available on a first come, first serve basis from the Cortland Wildlife office. Applications must be submitted no less than 30 days prior to the desired dates. These restrictions limit disturbance to wildlife and any damage to WMA infrastructure that may be caused by those camping (garbage, sewage, fires, etc.).

The following activities are not allowed on Tioughnioga WMA:

- Mechanized boating
- Overnight mooring or boat storage
- Swimming
- Fires, except for cooking or warmth with a camping permit
- Picnicking
- Target shooting\*

\* Proposed amendments to Part 51

## **ACCESSIBLE RECREATION**



**Providing Accessible Recreation through the WMA System:** Wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities are available on many state lands for people of all ages and abilities.<sup>9,10</sup> The WMA system includes accessible trails, hunting blinds, observation

<sup>9</sup> Information about accessible recreation on state lands is available at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/34035.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Information about public use of State Forests is available in the *Strategic Plan for State Forest Management* at [http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands\\_forests\\_pdf/spsfmfinal.pdf](http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands_forests_pdf/spsfmfinal.pdf).

platforms, canoe launches, and other opportunities for visitors to hunt, fish, observe, and enjoy wildlife. Throughout the WMA system:

- Service animals (dogs, miniature horses) are welcome at all DEC facilities.
- Hunters with disabilities can apply for various special permits and reduced fee licenses through DEC's Special Licenses Unit.<sup>11</sup>
- Through the Motorized Access Program for People with Disabilities (MAPPWD), DEC has established vehicular routes on certain WMAs to facilitate access for wildlife-dependent activities. These mapped routes are accessible by permit only, available through DEC's regional offices.<sup>12</sup>
- WMA visitors may apply for accommodation permits to request use of power-driven mobility devices on state lands beyond MAPPWD routes.<sup>13</sup> Applications for special accommodation are available through DEC's regional offices.
- To maintain and improve access for persons with disabilities, DEC employs a network of accessibility coordinators throughout the regions and in Central Office (Albany).
- Accessible destinations are shown on DEC's Accessible Recreation Destinations webpage. All WMA maps and webpages show available accessible features and how to get to them.

While not all existing facilities on WMAs are accessible, new features or existing features requiring repair will be evaluated and designed to be inclusive and accessible to the greatest extent possible while retaining the ecological integrity and wildlife value of the site.

Management proposed in this plan is in accord with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (ABA), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title V, Section 504, the Application of the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG), and Principles of Universal Design. For more information on how DEC follows ADA guidelines on WMAs please see Appendix B at the end of this document.

**Accessible Recreation on Tioughnioga WMA:** During the development of this plan, an accessibility assessment was completed at Tioughnioga WMA to determine the current accessible features, assess their condition, and identify appropriate actions such as updating existing facilities or installing new ones. Currently there are no accessible recreational opportunities available on Tioughnioga WMA. To improve usability and inclusivity of wildlife-dependent recreation, this plan calls for the construction of an accessible parking area, trail, and observation tower, which will be discussed in greater detail in the *Management Strategies* section below.

## MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

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Providing safe, accessible, and ecologically responsible public access on WMAs requires balancing recreation with wildlife and habitat conservation. Challenges may arise when these two priorities conflict, such as balancing protection of and providing access to or through

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<sup>11</sup> Information about special permits is available at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/permits/30419.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Information about MAPPWD is available at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/2574.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Information about accommodation permits is available at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/73029.html>.

inherently fragile habitats (e.g., wetlands, dunes). Responsible management of public access requires maintaining miles of property boundaries, working with user groups to minimize impacts of certain activities, and enforcing violations. This requires regulatory support as well as constant mindfulness of the unique purpose of WMAs.

On Tioughnioga WMA, there are several challenges to maintaining and managing the property. One of the main difficulties is the WMA's location at a relatively high elevation that is prone to heavy snowfall. Winter conditions not only make habitat management challenging, but also complicate improving access to certain features. Adding parking areas, removing trees for new access features, and maintaining roads and boundary lines are all made more burdensome by this weather. As a solution, when possible, BOW works with the Division of Operations and/or private contractors to try and complete necessary work when snow isn't an issue.

DEC is committed to avoiding impacts to protected bats, whose populations have declined dramatically due to White-nose Syndrome. DEC staff perform acoustic surveys to determine if bats are using a site. If protected bats are detected, staff avoid working in such an area during the species' active season.

Other challenges to providing public access for wildlife dependent recreation on this property involve the illegal use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and horseback riding. In recent years, ATV activity has increased in some of the more remote areas of Tioughnioga WMA. These vehicles not only provide a source of unnecessary disturbance to wildlife, but they also damage vegetation and create erosion issues. Horseback riding has also been observed in some areas not open to such activity, creating some of the same disturbances to wildlife and hunters that ATVs do. BOW has identified some of the more common areas where these two types of activity are taking place and has alerted the Forest Rangers. Unfortunately, these activities have also forced DEC to install additional gates and/or barriers to further protect the resources being damaged or accessed illegally. DEC plans to continue to address these issues in the future with added enforcement and additional barriers where needed.

## **PERMITS AND USER AGREEMENTS**

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### **TEMPORARY REVOCABLE PERMITS**

Temporary Revocable Permits (TRPs) are short-term permits for certain individual or group activities or events on DEC-managed public lands.<sup>14</sup> A TRP may be required for some activities on WMAs. TRPs are issued by DEC regional offices and can be revoked at any time due to violations of TRP conditions.

At Tioughnioga, yearly TRPs are currently issued to both the North Country Link and Finger Lakes Trails, and the snowmobile trails on the WMA. In addition to these groups, anyone wishing to conduct research activities on the property is also required to apply for a TRP (colleges, high schools, graduate students, etc.). There may be other activities that require a special TRP that will be evaluated on a case by case basis.

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<sup>14</sup> Information about TRPs is available at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/regulations/397.html>.

## **VOLUNTEER STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENTS**

Volunteer Stewardship Agreements (VSAs) are issued when an individual or organization engages in activities to provide positive benefits to state lands.<sup>15</sup> For example, a VSA may be established for a local trail group to maintain a hiking trail on a WMA. VSAs are issued by DEC regional offices. There are currently no active VSAs on Tioughnioga WMA.

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<sup>15</sup> Information about VSAs is available at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/regulations/90822.html>.

## IV. MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

In summary, Table 2 lists facility maintenance and public access actions planned for Tioughnioga WMA for the duration of this plan. Location of management actions are shown in Figure 2. Completion of actions are dependent on staff and funding availability.

Table 2. Summary of management actions recommended for Tioughnioga WMA, 2019-2026.

Description of Action	Priority	Estimated cost <sup>a</sup>
Create 569 acres of young forest (clear cuts, aspen/apple releases, and shrubland maintenance) to facilitate improved access for hunting, trapping, and bird watching. <i>[also identified as habitat improvement in Chapter 1]</i>	High	Variable depending on treatment type
Enhance and expand large existing grassland blocks on the WMA to 341 acres to provide more opportunities for birders, trappers, and upland bird hunters. Includes stump removal and seeding for expanded areas. <i>[also identified as habitat improvement in Chapter 1]</i>	High	\$450,000
Install 1 accessible bird observation tower, including parking area and trail to tower	High	\$16,000
Maintain 6.4 miles of DEC-owned roads with shoulder mowing, ditching, and re-surfacing when necessary	High	\$1,000/ yr.
Remove 2 buildings on recent acquisition	High	\$90,000 (\$10,000 haz.mat. survey; \$80,000 demo and removal)
Maintain 4 existing informational kiosks, install 3 new kiosks	Medium	\$500/ new kiosk
Maintain all existing parking areas/pull offs add new parking areas/pull-offs as needed	Medium	\$500/ new parking area
Maintain all existing gates add new gates if needed	Low	\$1,000/new gate cost \$200/installation

<sup>a</sup> Cost estimate provided for planning purposes only and is subject to change.



## V. FIGURES

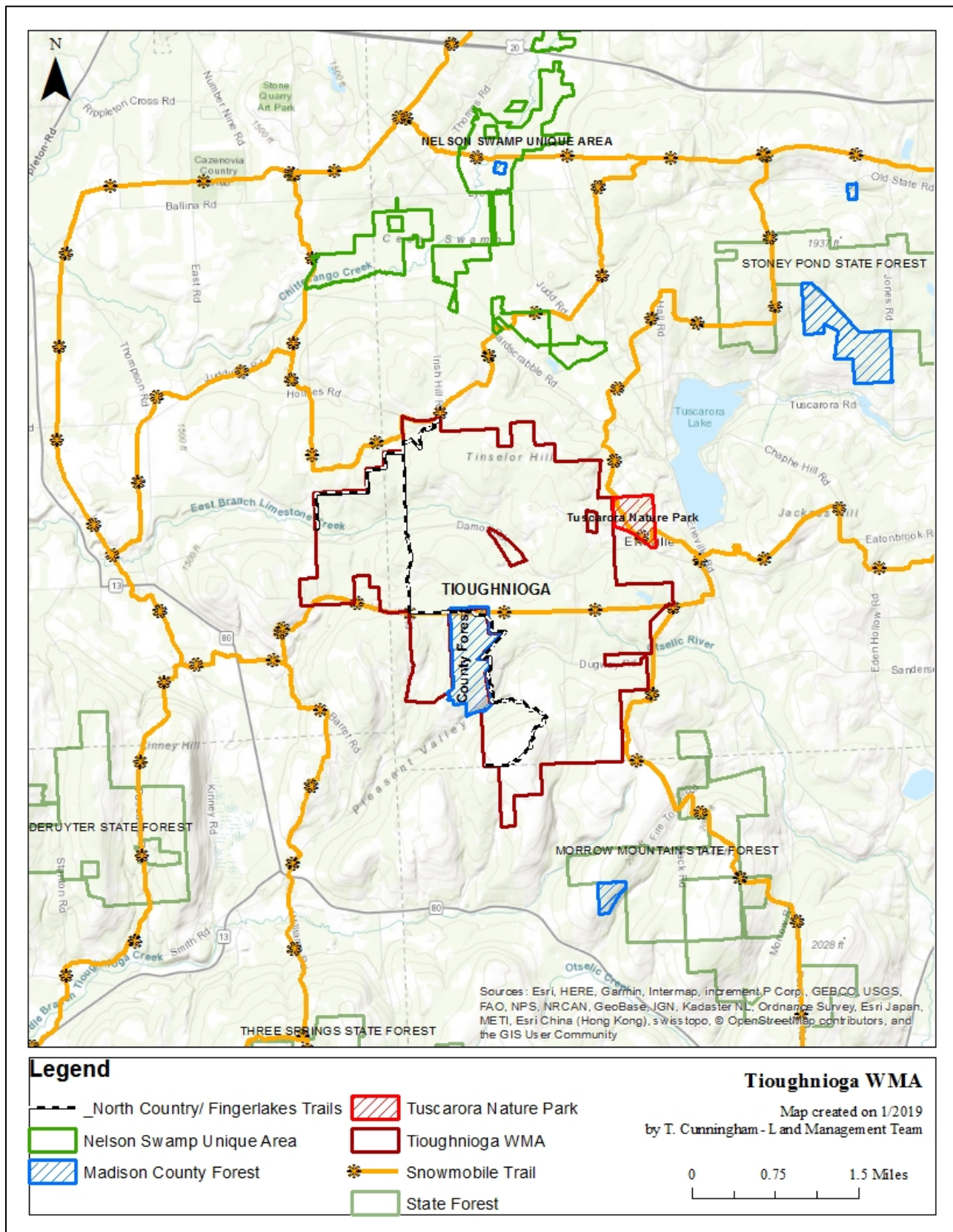


FIGURE 1. Connectivity to other public lands and recreation areas.



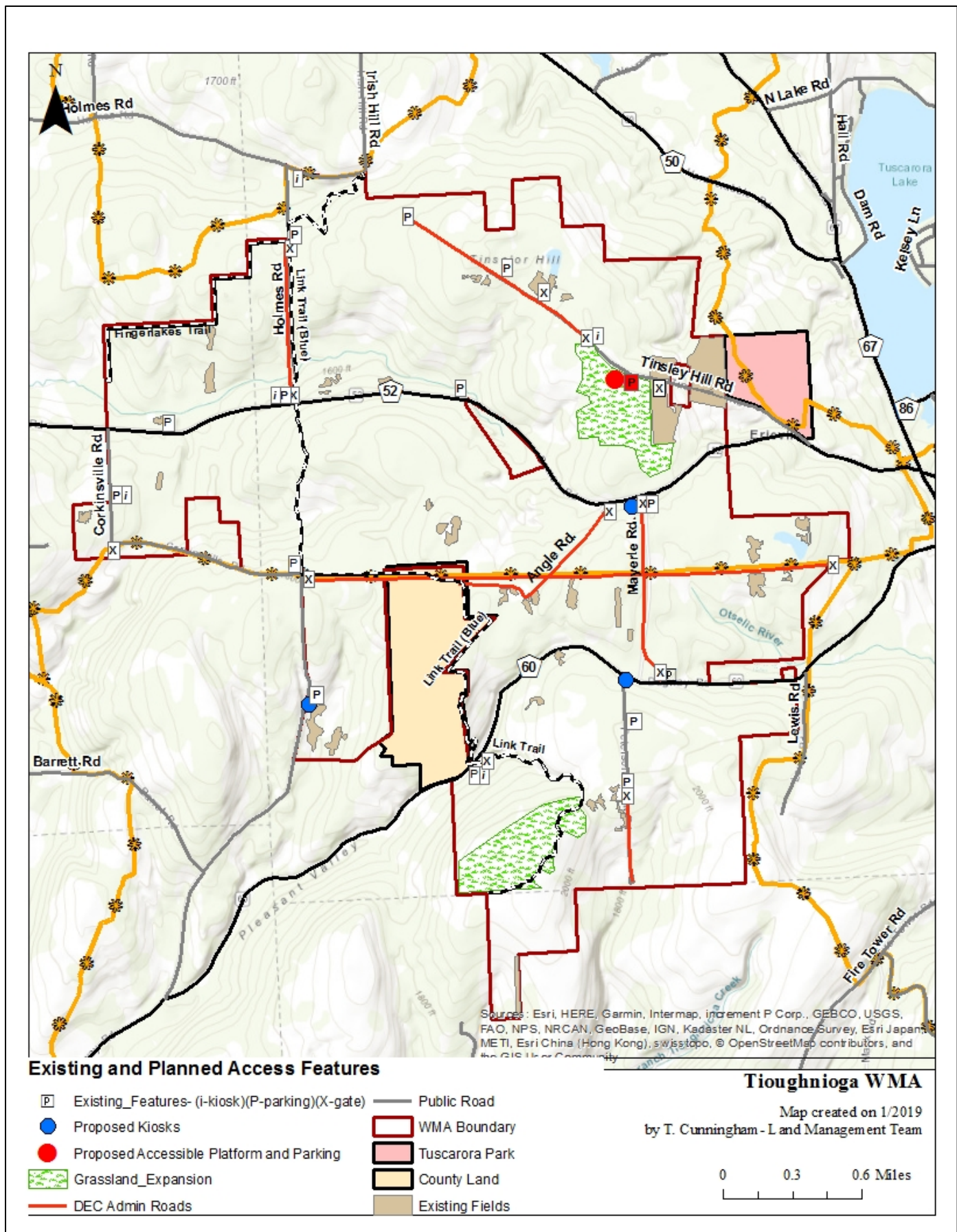


FIGURE 2. Location of existing and proposed access features at Tioughnioga WMA.

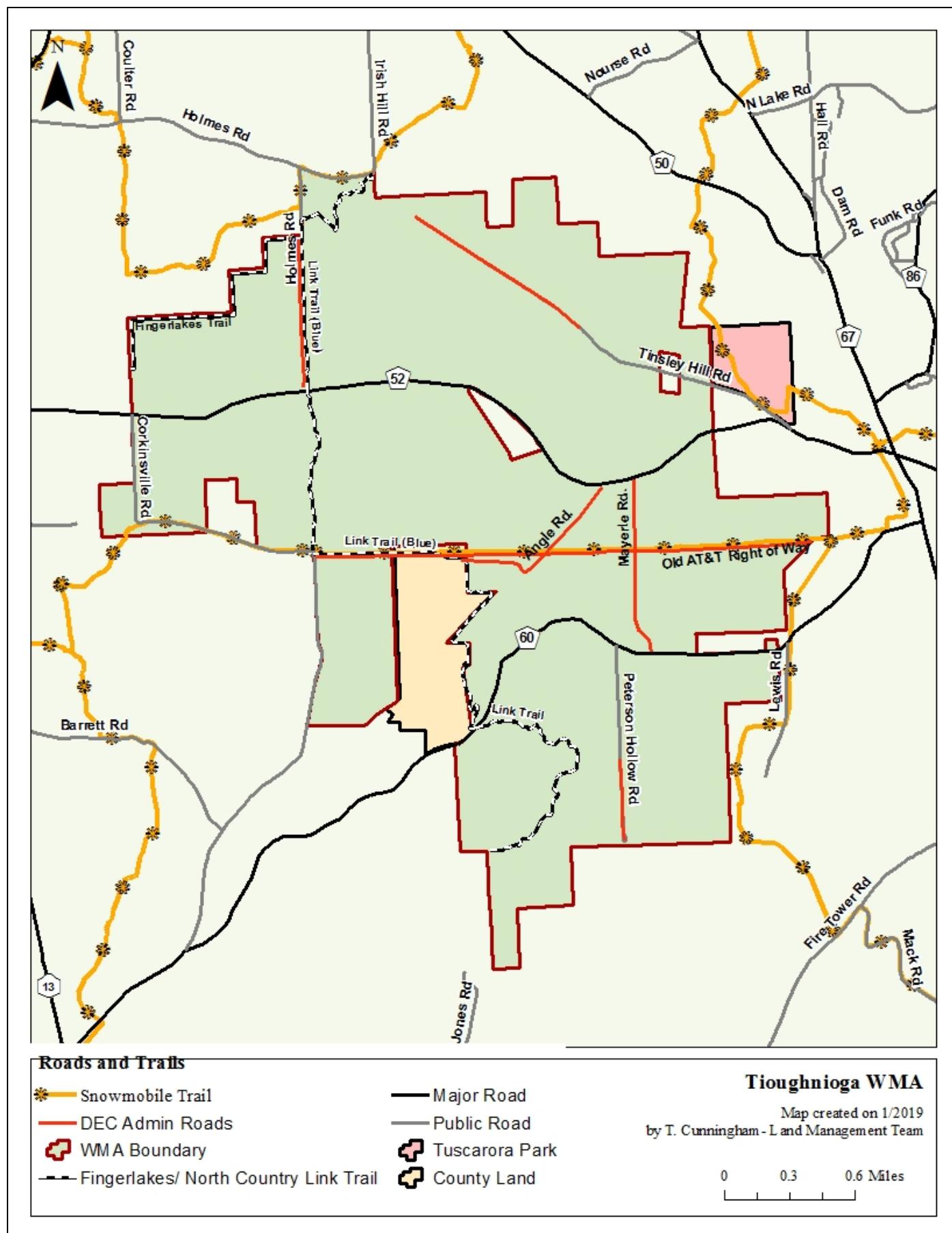


FIGURE 3. Roads and trails on Tioughnioga WMA.

## VI. APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS AND RESPONSES

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The following is a summary of the comments that were received during the public comment period of August 11 to September 15 for the Tioughnioga WMA Access and Public Use Plan (APUP), and any changes made to the plan as a result of comments. Comments are in **bold** text, with DEC responses in *italics*.

#### COMMENTS RECEIVED

**Comment: Several groups/individuals voiced support for the development of the APUP for Tioughnioga WMA. The support centered around DEC development and enhancement of habitat directly aimed at providing increased opportunities for hunters, trappers, and wildlife viewers on the property. Support was also voiced for taking steps to limit non-wildlife dependent recreation on the WMA when necessary to prevent conflicts with primary wildlife dependent user groups.**

*Response: DEC appreciates the support received in reference to the APUP. DEC will continue to rely on the input and support of primary stakeholder groups moving forward with the public access and management of Tioughnioga WMA. Access related to non-wildlife dependent uses will continue to be considered on a case by case basis, and will only be allowed if it is deemed to have little to no impact on wildlife use, survival, and wildlife-dependent recreation. Decisions on user group requests will continue to follow the guidelines provided in the “Public Use of Wildlife Management Areas” guidance document, which can be found at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7768.html>.*

**Comment: Two comments centered around concern that the revisions to 6 NYCRR Part 51, which regulates public use of WMAs, have not yet been adopted by the DEC. The comments urged DEC to make these changes soon so that the APUP will be able to be implemented and non-permitted uses will not be allowed to become commonplace on the WMA.**

*Response: Changes to Part 51 are currently undergoing internal review by DEC. Upon completion of this process, the changes will be posted for public comment, following which the amended Part 51 regulations will be formally adopted and become in effect. Until revised Part 51 regulations are in effect, the DEC will continue to follow the guidance of the “Public Uses of Wildlife Management Areas” document and the current Part 51 regulations to regulate public use on WMAs.*

**Comment: One comment voiced support for the wildlife observation tower planned for the grassland area located on Tinsley Hill Road, however; the individual asked that the tower**

be situated in such a way that adjacent private residences were not readily viewable from the tower.

*Response:* The tower will eventually provide an accessible location for wildlife viewing that might otherwise be difficult from ground level (i.e. viewing grassland songbirds, raptors, etc.). DEC will make every effort to situate the tower in a location that maximizes wildlife viewing potential, while at the same time limits or prevents the viewing of surrounding private residences.

**Comment:** A comment was received in reference to allowing loggers to access private land timber sales by way of the WMA, and that this policy/procedure may start an undesirable future precedent on the property. This was in direct reference to a timber sale completed in 2018-2019 on the property.

*Response:* While not a common or standard practice on WMA property, this type of scenario does occasionally play out during timber management projects. In this case, the logger conducting the harvest on the WMA was also contracted by an adjacent private landowner in the immediate vicinity of the existing WMA harvest. The existing skid trails and landings were utilized by the logger, no additional trails or access features had to be constructed on WMA property to facilitate the timber harvest. The harvest on private land was also done at roughly the same time as the logging on the WMA, thus not causing any disturbance to areas that may have been otherwise regenerating trees should the habitat work on the WMA have been done several years earlier. The logger applied for and was granted a TRP (temporary revocable permit) allowing the use of the existing trails/landing for the private land harvest, also being required to carry full insurance coverage and provide DEC with a security bond for the job. Upon completion of the sale the logger was also required to complete cleanup and any restoration to the satisfaction of DEC before the security bond was released. This type of agreement will be considered on a case by case basis in response to future specific requests for such access on WMA lands.

DEC also recognizes the benefits of timber management on both public and private lands as a way to create wildlife habitat. Publicly owned land is only a small portion of the landscape in New York State, so most timber management that takes place on private property (especially when immediately adjacent to a WMA), is generally mutually beneficial for the wildlife on both types of property. DEC fully encourages the responsible and best management practice driven timber management of private lands in New York, as many species of both common and rare wildlife and plant species depend on the habitat created.

**Comment:** The North Country Trail Association (NCTA) commented on some changes to the trail system they maintain and or use on the WMA, which include the Finger Lakes Trail and the Link Trail. Some of these changes are being caused by Young Forest Initiative activities, which the club fully supports, yet will require some significant trail re-routes. The NCTA asked that DEC be open to allowing a new trail connection across a short portion of the WMA to eliminate a long section of paved roadway trail along Dugway Rd/Route 80.



*Response: DEC recognizes the value the trail system has to local residents and trail users for various forms of outdoor recreation. However, DEC will need to review any re-routes or additions proposed for trails prior to the implementation of any changes. Hiking alone is considered a non-wildlife dependent, or secondary, form of recreation on a WMA. Hiking trail use at low levels is generally not considered a major disturbance to area wildlife, which is why DEC has generally allowed this use on Tioughnioga WMA at its current levels for some time now. DEC also understands that birders, hunters, and trappers do use these trails, so the opportunity for mutually beneficial trails does exist if designed and built correctly. The DEC will continue to work with the NCTA, consider any proposed changes, and maintain an open line of communication.*

**Comment: One user asked that DEC consider plowing snow from some of the parking areas located along Damon and Dugway Roads during the winter months to better facilitate access for fall and winter recreation.**

*Response: DEC will consider this request. However, there are some challenges due to fiscal constraints related to Covid-19, which will make this difficult to accomplish during the winter of 2020-21. Plowing parking areas for intended WMA users sometimes results in use by non-primary user groups including snowmobilers and non-wildlife dependent recreation groups. This can lead to the development and use of unsanctioned trails on the WMA, trash deposits, and unnecessary disturbance to wintering wildlife. , DEC will look into providing plowing in some parking areas starting in the winter of 2021-22 with the understanding that if it leads to problems or increased costs it will need to be discontinued.*

**Comment: A comment was received disagreeing with the management of Tioughnioga WMA as a location to provide public access for wildlife-dependent recreation. This comment centered around disliking hunting and trapping or the ethical use of wildlife in any way as a form of recreation.**

*Response: DEC appreciates this comment and respects that everyone is entitled to their own opinion. However, this comment is completely out of the scope of the APUP and will not be addressed at this time.*

#### **SUMMARY OF CHANGES MADE TO THE PLAN**

Page 8: Additional language was added to include the possibility for future snow plowing of some parking areas for winter access.

Page 10: Language was inserted to address concerns with the location of the planned wildlife observation tower.

## **APPENDIX B. APPLICATION OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT**

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The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), along with the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (ABA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Title V, Section 504, have had a profound effect on the manner by which people with disabilities are afforded equality in their recreational pursuits. The ADA is a comprehensive law prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities in employment practices, use of public transportation, use of telecommunication facilities and use of public accommodations.

Consistent with ADA requirements, the Department incorporates accessibility for people with disabilities into the siting, planning, construction and alteration of recreational facilities and assets supporting them.

In addition, Title II of the ADA requires in part, that services, programs and activities of the Department, when viewed in their entirety, are readily accessible to and usable by people with disabilities. The Department is not required to take any action which would result in a fundamental alteration to the nature of the service, program or activity or would present an undue financial or administrative burden. When accommodating access to a program, the Department is not necessarily required to make each existing facility and asset accessible, as long as the program is accessible by other means or at a different facility.

This plan incorporates an inventory of all the recreational facilities and assets on the unit or area, and an assessment of the programs, services and facilities provided to determine the level of accessibility. In conducting this assessment, DEC employs guidelines which ensure that programs are accessible, including buildings, facilities, and vehicles, in terms of architecture and design, transportation and communication to individuals with disabilities.

For outdoor recreation facilities not covered under the current ADA standards, the Department will use standards provided under the Architectural Barriers Act, to lend credibility to the assessment result and to offer protection to the natural resource.

All new facilities, and parts of facilities that are constructed for public use, are to be accessible to people with disabilities. Full compliance is not required where DEC can demonstrate that it is structurally impracticable to meet the requirements. Compliance is considered structurally impracticable only in those rare circumstances where the unique characteristics of terrain prevent the incorporation of accessibility features. Compliance is still required for parts of the facility that can be made accessible to the extent that it is not structurally impracticable, and for people with various types of disabilities.

A record of accessibility determination is kept with the work planning record. Any new facilities, assets and accessibility improvements to existing facilities or assets proposed in this plan are identified in the section containing proposed management actions.

For further information contact the ADA Coordinator at [accessibility@dec.ny.gov](mailto:accessibility@dec.ny.gov).