

North Creek Recreational Trail Plan

Prepared for the Town of Johnsburg

August 2019

Cover Photo Courtesy of Visit North Creek



[PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The North Creek Recreation Trail Plan Advisory Committee would like to thank the many citizens of Town of Johnsburg for contributing their ideas toward the creation of this plan and for their commitment to improving their community.

Project Partners

Town of Johnsburg
Warren County Planning Department

Project Advisory Committee

Andrea Hogan, Town Supervisor
Steve Tomb
Pete Gilbertsen
Kelly Nestle
Rick Morse
Dick Carlson
Ed Orr
Dave Putnam

Plan Prepared By

The Chazen Companies
Wilderness Property Management



This document was prepared for by the New York State Department of State with the funds provided under Title 11 of the Environmental Protection Fund.



[PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Background	4
Existing Plans	5
Case Study: Kingdom Trails, VT	6
Planning Process	7
Existing Conditions	8
Master Trail Plan	9
Trail Development	11
Plan Alternatives	17
Wayfinding	18
Implementation Considerations	20
Preliminary Cost Estimates & Funding Considerations	24

Appendices

Appendix A – Inventory & Analysis

Appendix B – Cost Estimates

Appendix C – Meeting Notes

Appendix D – Public Workshop Presentation

Appendix D – Sample Recreation Agreement

INTRODUCTION

The Town of Johnsbury Recreational Trail Plan is an initiative to expand and improve the Town’s recreational trail network and associated amenities, with a particular focus on such active recreation trail uses as mountain biking, hiking, and backcountry skiing near the Hamlet of North Creek and Gore Mountain (see the location map at the end of this section). Trails are more than just paths blazed through the woods. They enhance the local economy, celebrate the natural environment, bring community members together, and promote a healthy and active lifestyle. This plan builds off local and regional efforts to incorporate outdoor recreation into the core of the community. The following themes were central to the creation of this plan.

Community Development

Developing and enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities is, at its core, a community development initiative. Outdoor recreation is often leveraged for its ability to draw outside spending into the community. However, trails and recreational facilities also benefit existing residents by providing opportunities for



Backcountry skiers use various types of equipment to explore the landscape

socialization, the maintenance of physical and mental health, and alternative transportation.

Environmental Stewardship

The Town of Johnsbury has long recognized that its environmental setting and resources are key community assets. This plan approaches recreational development from an environmental sustainability perspective. Trail routing, design, and use have been carefully planned to avoid damaging important resources, while at the same time fostering an appreciation of and providing access to the environment.

Grassroots Approach

Most recreational planning in the Adirondack Park is initiated at the state and regional level. A top-down approach is often crucial to developing plans that encompass multiple municipal jurisdictions, various state land management units, and sensitive environmental habitats. The downside of the top-down approach is that the needs of individual communities are considered after the ‘big picture’ ideas. This plan started with the question “what type of recreational development is desired by and is best for the community?” It then considers how to fit this vision into existing regional trail plans.

Professionally Designed Trails

There are many examples of community-initiated trail planning efforts that result in a series of lines drawn over a map without regard for actual user experience or site conditions. In the same way that designing a road network requires the technical expertise of an engineer, trail networks also need guidance from professional experts. This plan was guided by professional trail builders and dedicated user groups and the resulting recommendations are

INTRODUCTION

grounded by deep technical knowledge and passion.

Purpose Built Trails



A rider descends "Snakes Tongue"

Adirondack trails are becoming victims of their own success as increasing numbers of visitors are using old or improperly designed trails. Purpose built trails are intended to withstand

user pressure and provide an excellent user experience. No one trail is ideal for biking, skiing, and hiking - each activity has its own design considerations.

Connectivity

New York State and the wider region is in the midst of a trail building boom. As the network of long-distance trails continues to strengthen, there will be more opportunities for local municipalities to 'get a lot for a little' by investing in local connections to these growing trail networks. Strategic local improvements will leverage these state investments in regional trails.

Implementable Actions

This plan prioritizes trail improvements and provides design guidance and cost estimates, as well as a roadmap through the complex sequence of administrative approvals required to develop trails on public land

LOCATION MAP

The Hamlet of North Creek and Gore Mountain are located in the Town of Johnsburg, in New York's Adirondack Park. Just over 20 miles from the Adirondack Northway (I-87), the area is accessible to the greater New York, New England, and Canadian population centers.



BACKGROUND

This project is the convergence of the efforts of local recreational enthusiasts who have been quietly toiling in the forests and hills to maintain and develop a world class trail network. The Town of Johnsburg recognizes that these recreational trails are an important community asset deserving of municipal support. This is following the trend of rural communities across the nation that are awakening to the fact that outdoor recreation development is intrinsically tied to economic and community development.

Outdoor recreation is considered by many to be a pursuit, a hobby, or a pastime, but a new effort by the federal government to quantify the economic impacts of outdoor recreation is changing policy-makers minds. According to the Federal Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), the outdoor recreation industry accounted for two percent of the entire 2016 US Gross Domestic Product. According to a recent study, consumer spending on outdoor recreation is approximately \$887 billion, and generates 7.6 million jobs, which exceeds employment in computer technology and construction. In New York State, the outdoor recreation industry generates \$41.8 billion in consumer spending, generating 313,000 jobs and \$3.6 Billions in state and local tax revenue.

These staggering numbers, combined with the growing knowledge that the economic struggles facing Adirondack communities are not a direct result of land use policies that promote environmental protection but simply the trend in



rural communities across the country, is lending support to the idea of municipally supported outdoor recreation.

This plan aims to leverage renewed interest in active, modern recreation, as well as increased state investment in the Gore Mountain Ski Center, focusing particularly on the increase in recreational offerings beyond lift service alpine skiing (e.g., Nordic ski trails, backcountry skiing, mountain biking, snowshoeing, and hiking). For years the Hamlet of North Creek has worked to capitalize on visitation to Gore Mountain. The Town, working with the local business community, has established programs like the ski shuttle and events like the RideOn Mountain Bike Festival. This plan complements these existing efforts and supports the Town's efforts to integrate outdoor recreation into the core of the community.

EXISTING PLANS

Outdoor recreation and trail planning have played a central role in various local and regional planning initiatives over the years. This plan builds off and supports the following plans.

The Hamlets to Huts Initiatives “Adirondack Community-based Trails and Lodging System” report (2017): This report provides a conceptual and practical foundation for developing a recreation-based tourism network of interconnected trails and lodging facilities, much like existing European models. Portions of this ‘Hamlets to Huts’ system are already operational, including the North Creek to Indian Lake route.

First Wilderness Corridor (2000 and Present): In 1995, Warren County purchased a 40-mile right-of-way of the former Adirondack Branch of the Delaware and Hudson Railroad line between the Town of Corinth in Saratoga County and the Hamlet of North Creek. Since purchasing, Warren County has been developing the corridor as a focal point for outdoor recreation, heritage tourism, and local community development. In 2019, the First Wilderness Trail Plan was unveiled, which outlines town to town trail connections throughout the corridor.

Ski Bowl Park Enhancement Plan (2001): This master plan for Ski Bowl Park outlines various concepts for improving and expanding amenities in Ski Bowl Park. Significant portions of this plan are still relevant today and are reflected in the basecamp concepts included in this plan.

Town of Johnsbury Comprehensive Plan (2005) and subsequent updates: The vision statement of the Town’s 2005 Comprehensive Plan is directly reflected in the efforts of this plan: *“The*

Town of Johnsbury should remain as a scenic, rural, residential community for both year-round and seasonal residents with services provided primarily in the hamlet areas. North Creek hamlet should be revitalized as a tourist destination and service center with closer linkage to the Gore Mountain Ski Center. The local economy should be supported by enhanced tourism/recreation trade as well as by business and industry compatible with the town’s rural and scenic character.”

Gore Mountain Unit Management Plan (2002), Vanderwhacker Wild Forest UMP, Siamese Ponds UMP, and subsequent amendments: This policy document for the management and development of recreation facilities at Gore Mountain has been updated to support the expansion of more ski trails and associated facility improvements.

Adirondack Park Trail Plan for the North Country National Scenic Trail (2015): The North Country National Scenic Trail will be 4,600 miles when complete, connecting North Dakota to New York. It is intended to connect through the Town of Johnsbury from east to west. The North Country Trail Association offers guidance on how to become a “Trail Town” and capitalize on the benefits that the Trail can bring to the area.

North Creek and Ski Bowl Circulation/Capacity Analysis: The Adirondack/Glens Falls Transportation Council (A/GFTC) is evaluating existing and proposed connections between the hamlet of North Creek and Ski Bowl Park. This study will evaluate existing intersections and propose enhanced pedestrian connectivity and intersection realignments.

CASE STUDY: KINGDOM TRAILS, VT

The Kingdom Trails network in Vermont is an example of a successful, community driven trail network that has grown from a modest trail system into a national destination. Started in 1994 by residents and business owners in the area surrounding Burke, Vermont, the trail network has grown to include over 100 miles of purpose-built trails. In 2018, the trails were used by over 140,000 mountain bikers, cross-country skiers, and hikers. Today, Kingdom Trails is consistently rated as of the “Best Mountain Bike Trails in North America” and hosts massive outdoor industry events.

The trail system depends on the cooperation of over 60 private land owners. Users pay modest annual or daily membership fees that help maintain and develop trails. These fees support paid welcome center staff and a trail crew. The Kingdom Trails network has developed an excellent web presence to market the area and inform visitors of trail conditions and events. Their web presence supports sponsorships and cross marketing with local businesses.

Kingdom Trails are noted for their easy access to a charming village and the accommodation of a diverse range of riding abilities. The marketing department also works to accommodate the Quebecois market and offers signage and advertisements in French.

The surrounding area has seen an uptick in economic activity. Rental shops have been established, and accommodations market their proximity to Kingdom Trails. Rabbit Hill Inn markets a mountain biking, dining, and accommodation package.

Kingdom Trails benefit from a partnership with the Burke Mountain ski resort that has extended its season because of the new opportunities.



NEMBAfest attracts thousands of visitors to Vermont, supporting local businesses



Trails are designed for a wide range of users and attract entire families



Special care is taken to ensure ongoing support from willing landowners

PLANNING PROCESS

To develop this plan, professional trail evaluation assistance was complimented by extensive public and stakeholder engagement. The Town of Johnsburg benefits from an enthusiastic group of community minded outdoor recreationists who are generous with their ideas.

The Advisory Committee comprised Town of Johnsburg residents, including elected officials, recreational enthusiasts, business owners, members of trail groups, and others who have been deeply involved with local community development initiatives. The Advisory Committee helped to inventory existing conditions, identify connections between assets, and set project priorities. The Advisory Committee met throughout the planning process, and members had multiple opportunities to participate in field site visits (hiking, skiing, biking) with a professional outdoor recreation developer.

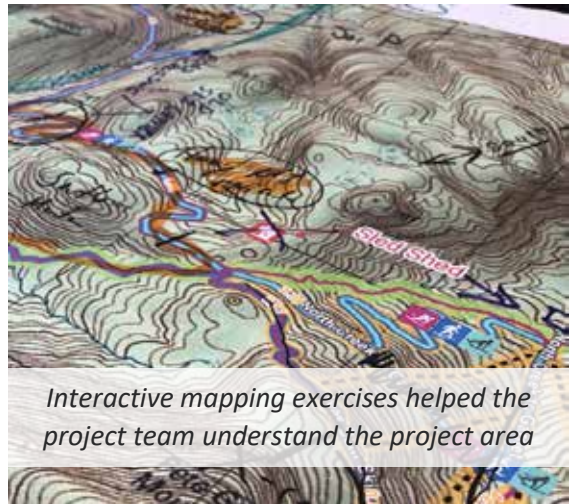
In addition to multiple Advisory Committee meetings, a public workshop was held at the Tannery Community Center in North Creek (see Appendix D). The Public Workshop was an opportunity for members of the community to learn about the project and to provide input during an interactive mapping exercise. At this event, community members pointed out possible trail connections, existing informal trails, and high priority connections.

Stakeholder meetings - both formal and informal - were held to solicit input and advice from the community.

The project team conducted extensive site visits to evaluate the condition of existing trails, inform the type and location of improvements, and determine the most appropriate routing of new trail connections.



Community members gather at the Tannery Community Center to discuss the project



Interactive mapping exercises helped the project team understand the project area



Community members reviewed draft maps and provided direct feedback on issues and opportunities

EXISTING CONDITIONS

There are currently 47 miles of trails in the trail network study area. Ninety-three percent (approximately 44 miles) of trails are on publicly-owned land. The majority (over 37 miles) traverse land owned by the state, with the remainder traversing land owned by the Town of Johnsburg. Just over three miles of trails traverse privately-owned land (see Appendix A).

In total, the 47-mile trail network consists of 20 trails. As shown in following adjoining table and the “Winter Use Trail Network (Existing & Proposed)” figure, current winter trail uses include backcountry skiing (on all or portions of 13 of the trails, totaling over 38 miles), snowshoeing (on all or portions of 12 of the trails, totaling over 24 miles), and cross-country skiing (on all or portions of four of the trails, totaling over six miles). Current summer trail uses include hiking (on all or portions of 14 trails, totaling over 41 miles) and biking (on all or portions of 12 trails, totaling over 13 miles). The adjoining table provides an overview of existing trail statistics and the map “Existing and Proposed Trail Network” identifies their locations.

All the existing trails in the network are located within Adirondack Park and subject to Adirondack Park Agency (APA) regulations, which vary by APA land classification (refer to the “Existing & Proposed Trail Network” figure). These APA land classifications include NYS Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area, NYS Vanderwhacker Wild Forest, and NYS Gore Mountain Intensive Use (GMIU). In addition, lands owned by the Town of Johnsburg are designated for low-intensity and hamlet development, and privately-owned land is designated for resource management, low-intensity, and industrial use development.

Existing Trail Network*		
Trail Name (Primary)	Miles	Jurisdiction
11 Mountain to Old Farm	12.43	NYS
Alternative	0.86	Town of Johnsburg
Balm of Gilead Mountain	0.49	NYS
Botheration Loop	3.20	NYS
Carol Thomas Trail	0.25	Town of Johnsburg
Halfway Brook	3.69	NYS
Heart Brake	0.91	Town of Johnsburg
Hoot	0.34	Town of Johnsburg
Ives Dam Ski	0.60	NYS
Long Trail	2.56	Town of Johnsburg
North Creek to Garnet	1.54	Private lands
On the Rocks	0.20	Town of Johnsburg
Puffer Pond	4.19	NYS
Rabbit Pond Ski	1.47	NYS & private lands
Raymond Brook Ski	3.94	NYS
Roaring Brook Ski	1.22	NYS
Schaefer	3.51	NYS & Town of Johnsburg
Second Pond	2.68	NYS
Ski Bowl Connector	1.56	Private lands
Ski Bowl Loop Trail	1.32	Town of Johnsburg

**Note: Many of the distances listed for existing bike trails are 10% to 15% longer than the distances listed here that were derived from GPS data. Wheel measuring a trail is a more accurate way to determine actual distance. This discrepancy was accounted for in the cost estimates (Appendix C).*

MASTER TRAIL PLAN

Throughout the planning process, site visits, the public workshop, Advisory Committee meetings, and review of existing regional trail initiatives (both planned and under construction) were used to create a master list of trail expansions and improvements.

The trail locations on the map represent a narrow corridor that is appropriate for a recreationally sound and environmentally sustainable trail. The trail locations were site verified to conform to the recreational expectations of the Advisory Committee and user groups.

Extensive public and stakeholder input allowed the project partners to finetune trail routes, evaluate the need to connect to different destinations, and understand how the proposed trail plan would bolster other community initiatives.

All the proposed new trails were professionally site assessed for practicality, recreational soundness, environmental sustainability, and administrative feasibility. Existing trails and proposed trails were skied, hiked, or biked where possible.

The following Winter and Non-Winter Use Trail Network Maps (next page) are the result of these extensive efforts. The maps show existing trails that are officially recognized by the NYSDEC and local government, proposed trails, and unofficial trails that already exist but are not recognized as part of an area's Unit Management Plan or formalized by easement or land ownership.

The trails are symbolized by their primary use and secondary uses. The goal is to design new trails and improve existing trails based on the desired primary use. However, secondary uses will need to be taken into consideration as well.

The major proposed and existing uses are symbolized as follow:



Mountain Biking: Mountain biking trails are designed differently from hiking trails. Bike trails have a flow line, climbing turns, banked turns, rollers, rock ride overs, and rolling contour and grade reversal design. Simply allowing a bicycle on a hiking trail and calling it a bike route is not desirable or sustainable. The International Mountain Bicycling Association's (IMBA) Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack and NYSDEC's relevant Management Guidance provide a good basis of design.



Hiking: Existing and proposed hiking trail should be designed to provide a wide range of user experiences, ranging from short beginner hikes to more expert multi-day hikes through the Forest Preserve Wilderness Areas.



Cross-country: This style of skiing is not as technical as backcountry skiing and the trails include fewer extreme ascents and descents. These trails may or may not be machine groomed in accordance with NYSDEC regulations.



Backcountry Skiing: Specialized skiing equipment that allows skiers to ascend and descend more technical terrain. Trails for this use are designed in accordance with NYSDEC guidelines and are suitable for intermediate to advanced skiers. The Draft Forest Preserve Ski Touring Trail Development Guidelines provide a good basis of design.



Snowshoeing: Snowshoeing trails are designed like regular hiking trails and do not have any special design criteria.