

Warren County, NY

Outdoor Recreation Economy Research Report

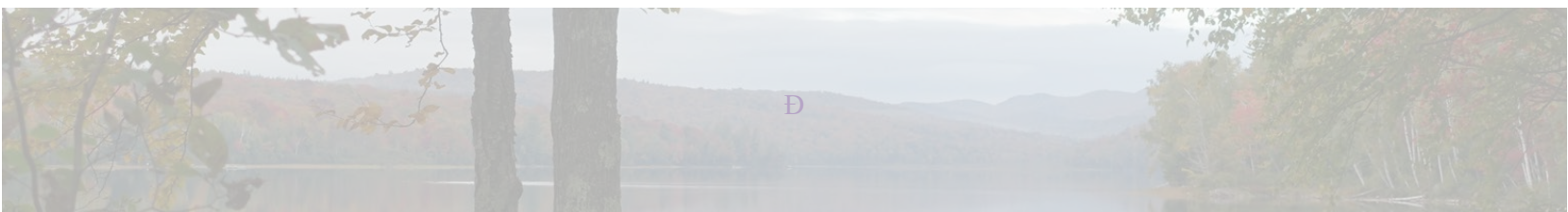
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April 2024



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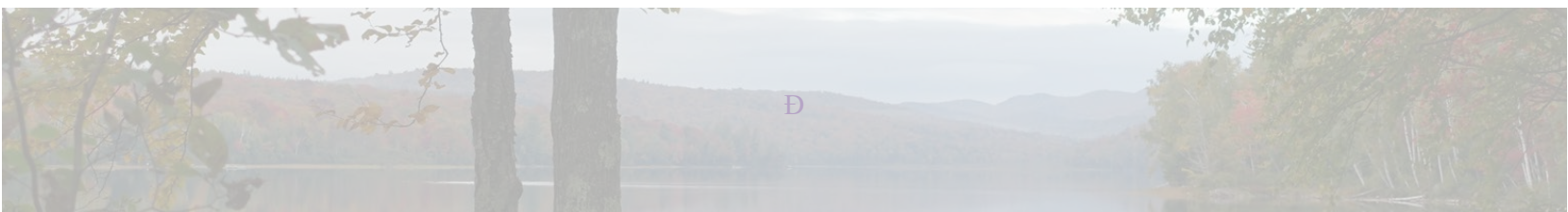
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This report was prepared in April 2024 by SE Group, with support from Common Ground Consulting.



Introduction

In 2023, recognizing the need to better define the role of County government in supporting the outdoor recreation economy, the Warren County, NY Planning Department began the process of preparing an *Outdoor Recreation Economy Strategic Plan*. The *Plan*, scheduled to be completed in 2024, will identify a series of recommendations for enhancing outdoor recreation experiences and amenities and supporting outdoor recreation businesses.

To inform the development of the *Outdoor Recreation Economy Strategic Plan*, Warren County, NY has undertaken a program of research to understand current conditions related to the outdoor recreation economy in the County. This program of research consisted of the following elements:

- An inventory of outdoor recreation assets and businesses in the County.
- A series of roundtable discussions with local and regional stakeholders.
- Solicitation of public input on outdoor recreation needs and experiences through an online survey and an open house event, in combination with the Warren County 2040 Comprehensive Plan process. The complete set of survey results can be accessed using this [interactive dashboard](#).
- A “Grand Tour” of key outdoor recreation destinations, assets, and businesses.

This report documents the key findings from this program of research and will serve as a foundational reference for the planning process.

DEFINING OUTDOOR RECREATION

There is not a standard, universal definition of outdoor recreation. Generally, outdoor recreation refers to recreational activities that are undertaken for pleasure in nature-based settings, often involving some level of physical exertion.

This report and the *Outdoor Recreation Economy Strategic Plan* will primarily focus on recreational activities that are trail-based (e.g., hiking, mountain biking, horseback), water-based (e.g., canoeing, motorized boating, fishing), and/or snow-based (e.g., skiing, snowmobiling), as well as other recreational activities that primarily occur in a nature-based setting (e.g., road biking, hunting). This can also include competitive activities, such as trail running races, but does not include more traditional team sports (e.g., soccer).

DEFINING THE OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY

Broadly, the concept of an “outdoor recreation economy” speaks to the influence that outdoor recreation activity has on economic activity in a given area. More practically, an outdoor recreation economy can be thought of as the linkages between three key pillars: **DESTINATIONS**, **BUSINESSES**, and **COMMUNITIES**.



DESTINATIONS, both public and private, offer various outdoor recreation experiences for residents and visitors (e.g., local trails, rivers, lakes, forests, beaches).



BUSINESSES are where dollars associated with outdoor recreation activity and travel are received.

- “Core” outdoor recreation businesses are directly involved in the sale of outdoor recreation goods, services, and/or experiences (e.g., retail stores, gear manufacturers, guide services, marinas). In some cases, destinations are also businesses (e.g., campgrounds, ski areas). This report includes an inventory and breakdown of “core” outdoor recreation businesses.



- This category also includes other businesses that benefit directly from outdoor recreation activity and travel, such as food and beverage establishments, hotels and motels, and general stores.



COMMUNITIES includes local and regional governments, non-profit organizations, and volunteers, who provide critical infrastructure, services, and support for outdoor recreation experiences and businesses. This also includes residents, employers, and other local institutions that benefit from the quality of life afforded by outdoor recreation amenities.

- Of particular interest in Warren County is the role that outdoor recreation can play in encouraging residents to stay or move to the County, which can impact the ability of businesses to recruit and retain their workforce and encourage young families to stay or locate in the County in response to long-term aging trends. These linkages are not easily quantified using numbers but are important to explore.

The full scope of the outdoor recreation economy is broad and can be difficult to quantify. This report includes an inventory of outdoor recreation assets and businesses, insights from business owners, economic development officials, non-profit organizations, and trail managers, and other supporting data to speak to the strengths, needs, and impact of the outdoor recreation economy in Warren County.

DATA & INFORMATION GAPS

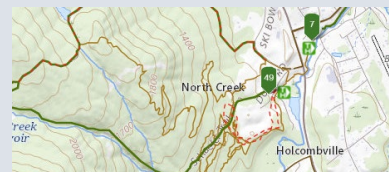
This report draws on a variety of existing data and information sources, including prior plans and studies, geospatial data managed by Warren County and New York State, original business data collection, surveys, and stakeholder interviews. This process yielded a variety of insights into the outdoor economy in Warren County, but also revealed areas where additional data would further our understanding of this economic sector. Key data and information gaps identified include:

- Data on the volume of participants in different outdoor recreation activities in Warren County, such as trail user counts and boater counts. The County-wide survey conducted in 2023 provides some insights into the percentage of residents that participate in different outdoor recreation activities, and registration data can provide some understanding for participation in motorized boating and snowmobiling. There may be opportunities to establish monitoring programs that can record and track participation in different outdoor recreation activities. Monitoring of dispersed activities across the County would be resource-intensive, particularly for activities like hiking, fishing, and paddling that are spread out across a wide range of landscapes.
- Resident and visitor spending associated with outdoor recreation activities. To study the direct economic impact of outdoor recreation activities, it is necessary to understand how much recreational users are spending in association with their travel and activity (e.g., overnight accommodations, food, supplies, entrance fees, etc). Spending can vary significantly from activity to activity, necessitating detailed surveys to gain useful insights. To-date, no such studies or surveys have been conducted in Warren County.

Warren County Recreation Mapper

Warren County maintains an interactive, public-facing web platform that highlights the County's key outdoor recreation assets, such as recreational trails, boat launches, campsites, and public parks. The platform includes an interactive map as well as directions, descriptions of recreational activities, and "must-know" information.

The platform can be accessed at: <https://warrencountyny.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Shortlist/index.html?appid=49e90e574e8240c79bbcea89a75089ea>



Summary of Key Findings

DESTINATIONS

- **Impressive year-round outdoor recreation offerings.** You can just about do it all in Warren County, with multiple downhill and Nordic ski areas, hundreds of miles of hiking and mountain biking trails, dozens of lakes and streams, and hundreds of thousands of acres of conserved land. County residents are active participants in outdoor recreation, with 93% of resident survey respondents indicating that they participate in outdoor recreation.
- **Diversity & accessibility of outdoor recreation activities – with room for improvement.** In Warren County, there are a variety of outdoor recreation activities available to residents and visitors of different interests and ability levels. There is also significant interest and opportunity to expand and enhance recreational offerings, including improved public access to waterbodies, expanded mountain and road biking offerings, improving accessibility for beginner- and limited-mobility recreationalists, and improving the quality and maintenance of trail surfaces and trailheads.

BUSINESSES

- **A strong core of private businesses supports recreation.** There are at least 160 private businesses in Warren County that are directly involved in the sale of outdoor recreation goods, services, and/or experiences. This includes at least 71 businesses involved in the sale of outdoor recreation goods and services (e.g., retail sales, gear repair) and 89 businesses providing outdoor recreation experiences (e.g., guides, campgrounds, boat rentals, ski areas).
- **A robust outdoor recreation tourism economy - with some needs.** In 2022, tourism spending supported 5,866 direct jobs in Warren County, accounting for one in six jobs in the County (16.4%). Recent studies of tourism in Warren County suggest that outdoor recreation plays a major role in attracting tourists and generating visitor spending. Outdoor recreation tourism in Warren County benefits from proximity to large visitor markets and the proximity of hamlet/downtown areas to outdoor recreation amenities but is challenged by a lack of centralized informational resources, limited overnight accommodations in some areas, and trends of shorter trips and last-minute trip planning.

COMMUNITIES

- **Economic connections to outdoor recreation amenities.** Many hamlets in Warren County are nestled in and along the same valleys, mountains, rivers, and lakes that provide outdoor recreation experiences for residents and visitors. This proximity is a key economic asset - one that some communities could take better advantage of. The importance of the outdoor economy to the County's municipalities is codified in a variety of municipal planning documents, which identify a variety of strategies, initiatives, and capital projects for enhancing outdoor recreation to deliver economic and community benefit.
- **A patchwork of organizations provides critical stewardship support for outdoor recreation.** While much outdoor recreation activity in Warren County takes place on vast NYSDEC-managed public lands, municipalities and non-profit organizations play a significant role in the delivery of outdoor recreation, from town-owned parks and water access points to snowmobile and mountain bike clubs that maintain significant networks of recreational trails.
- **Importance of outdoor recreation to resident quality of life and the broader business community.** Residents indicate that outdoor recreation is very important to their quality of life in Warren County. Outdoor recreation is of similar importance to other key quality of life factors, such as cost of living, schools, wages, and housing – a key factor for resident and workforce attraction and retention.



Understanding The County's Outdoor Recreation Economy



DESTINATIONS

+ IMPRESSIVE YEAR-ROUND OUTDOOR RECREATION OFFERINGS.

Warren County boasts an enviable array of outdoor recreation destinations, including major tourism draws and local-serving recreational amenities. Few individual counties in the Northeast can lay claim to a similar list of outdoor recreation assets and supporting landscapes:



Three downhill ski areas and five groomed Nordic ski trail networks.



Over 270 miles of publicly accessible natural surface trail where hiking is permitted.



Seven cross-country mountain bike trail networks and two downhill bike parks.



Over 220 miles of snowmobile trails.



44 campgrounds and camping areas.



Seven mountain summits over 3,000 ft in elevation.



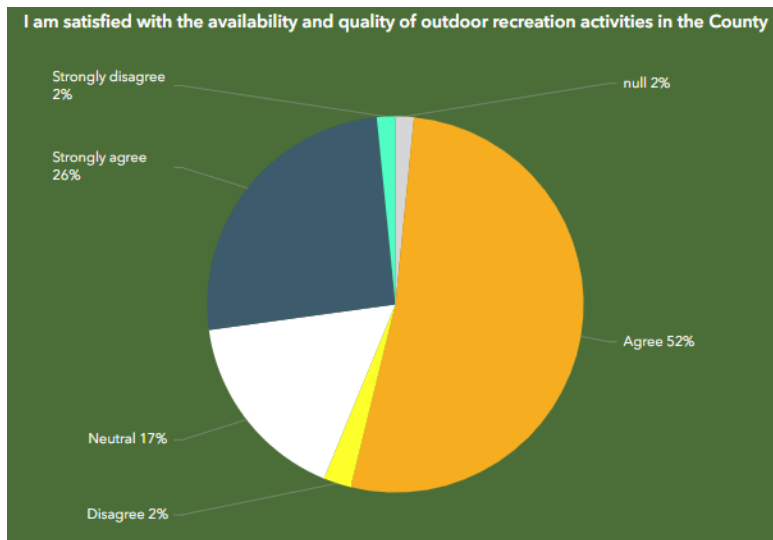
42 lakes and ponds greater than 40 acres in size, including several major lakes over 1,500 acres in size (Lake George, Schroon Lake, and Brant Lake).



Two major navigable rivers (Hudson River and Schroon River) featuring both flatwater and whitewater sections of varying classes.



Over 200,000 acres of state-managed public lands, including two state Wilderness Areas covering nearly 64,000 acres.



County residents participate frequently

in outdoor recreation and are largely

satisfied with the availability and quality

of outdoor recreation activities in the

County, according to responses to a

County-wide survey conducted in fall

2023/winter 2024 (Figure 1). The most

popular activities amongst resident

respondents were hiking (85% participate

at least 1-2x/season), flatwater paddling

(70%), motorized boating (53%),

road/gravel biking (48%), fishing (46%),

and downhill skiing (39%).

Figure 1: resident feedback on quality of outdoor recreation activities in Warren County (n = 758).

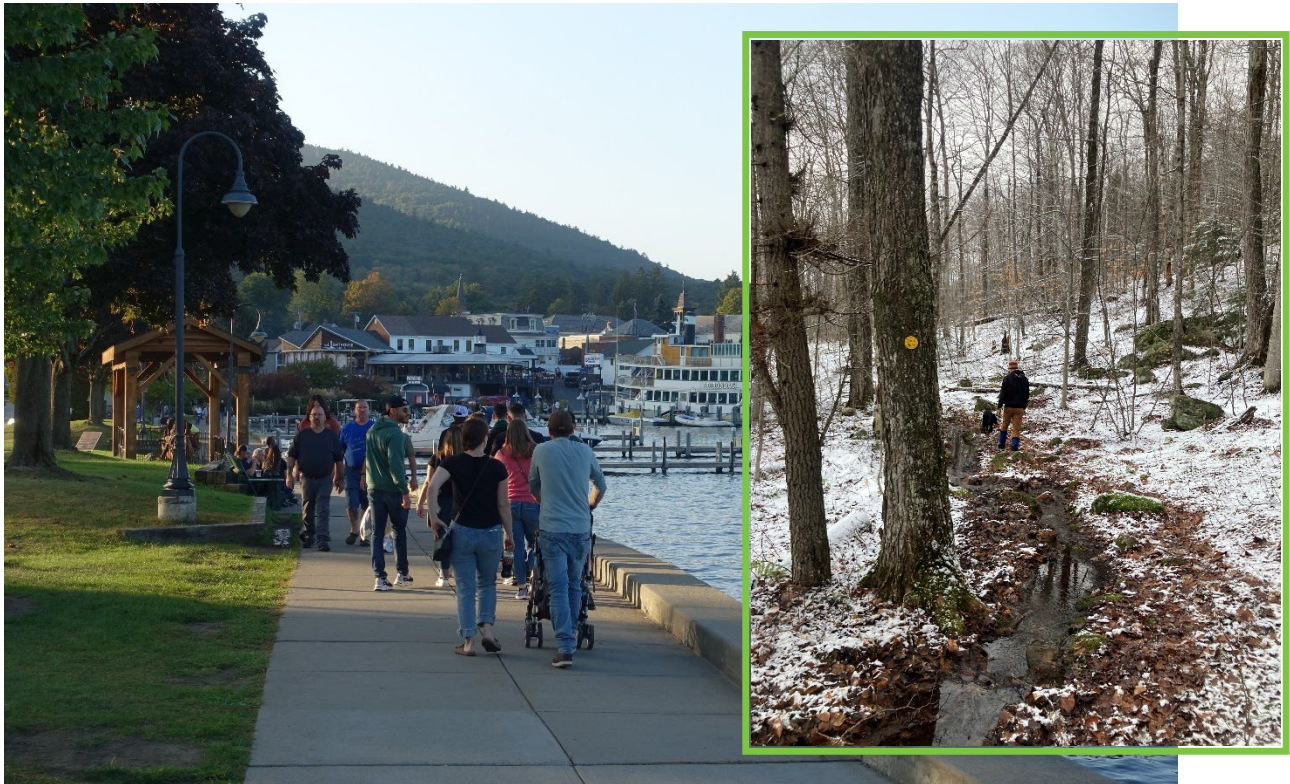


+ DIVERSITY & ACCESSIBILITY OF OUTDOOR RECREATION ACTIVITIES – WITH ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT.

Overall, Warren County generally offers a wide spectrum of outdoor recreation experiences suitable for **different ability levels**. For true beginner recreationalists (or those with mobility limitations), experiencing the Lake George Lakefront Walkway or riding in a rail bike along the Hudson River can offer a memorable and invigorating experience, while more experienced recreationalists can adventure to remote and challenging summits and trails, like Peaked Mountain in North River or the Brant Lake Bike Park.

However, there is **still room for improving the accessibility and comfort** of outdoor recreation amenities to residents and visitors of varying ability levels. Outdoor recreation stakeholders across the county note increasing participation in outdoor recreation by **older residents**, as well as an increase in visitors of **different cultural and ethnic backgrounds**, particularly in the Lake George area, with corresponding needs for improved programs, education, transportation services, and visitor experience training that would complement more accessible recreational trails and facilities.

While Warren County is blessed with water resources, there is **limited public access to certain waterbodies**, with some larger waterbodies having only a single public access point and a handful having no public access or poorly-maintain boat launches. Additionally, some “legacy” recreational trails in the County are challenged by **outdated trail layouts** and **insufficient trailhead facilities**, resulting in challenging gradients and surfaces along certain trails and safety and parking challenges at certain trailheads.



ACCESSIBLE RECREATION (Left): An early fall weekend day along the Lake George Lakefront Walkway.

TRAIL STEWARDSHIP CHALLENGES (Right): The impacts of outdated trail design and poor trail drainage in the Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area.

There is interest, need, and opportunity to improve the diversity and accessibility of bicycling in the County as well. This includes enhancing and expanding opportunities for **low-stress road biking**, particularly where separated bike paths (or wider road shoulders where paths are infeasible) can provide safe and comfortable connections between residential areas or tourist accommodations and recreational destinations, or where quiet byways and gravel roads can offer a pleasant touring experience.

There has also been significant work and advocacy around **expanding mountain biking offerings**, including more beginner-friendly trails as well as more advanced trails that can be a draw for experienced riders. While there are notable mountain bike trail networks in southern Warren County (Gurney Lane, Rush Pond, West Mountain) and in far northern Warren County (North Creek Ski Bowl, Garnet Hill Outdoor Center, Brant Lake Bike Park, Gore Mountain), there are few trails where mountain biking is permitted in central areas of the County.

Warren County Multi-Use Trail Study

In summer 2023, the Warren County Planning Department launched a study for improving pedestrian and bicycle trail connections in southern Warren County, including connections between the Warren County Bikeway, the Feeder Canal Trail, downtown Glen Falls, and nearby recreational destinations.



TRAILHEAD NEEDS: To access the popular Northwest Bay Trail to the Tongue Mountain Range, hikers must walk this high-speed section of Route 9N between the Clay Meadow Trailhead and the start of the trail.

💰 BUSINESSES

+ A STRONG CORE OF PRIVATE BUSINESSES SUPPORTS RECREATION.

As of 2023, there were at least **160 private businesses** in Warren County that were directly involved in the sale of outdoor recreation goods, services, and/or experiences. This includes at least 71 businesses involved in the sale of outdoor recreation goods and services (e.g., retail sales, gear repair) and 89 businesses providing outdoor recreation experiences (e.g., outfitters, campgrounds, marinas, ski areas). The wide array of outdoor recreation activities that these businesses cater to speaks to the diversity of recreational offerings available in Warren County and the surrounding region.

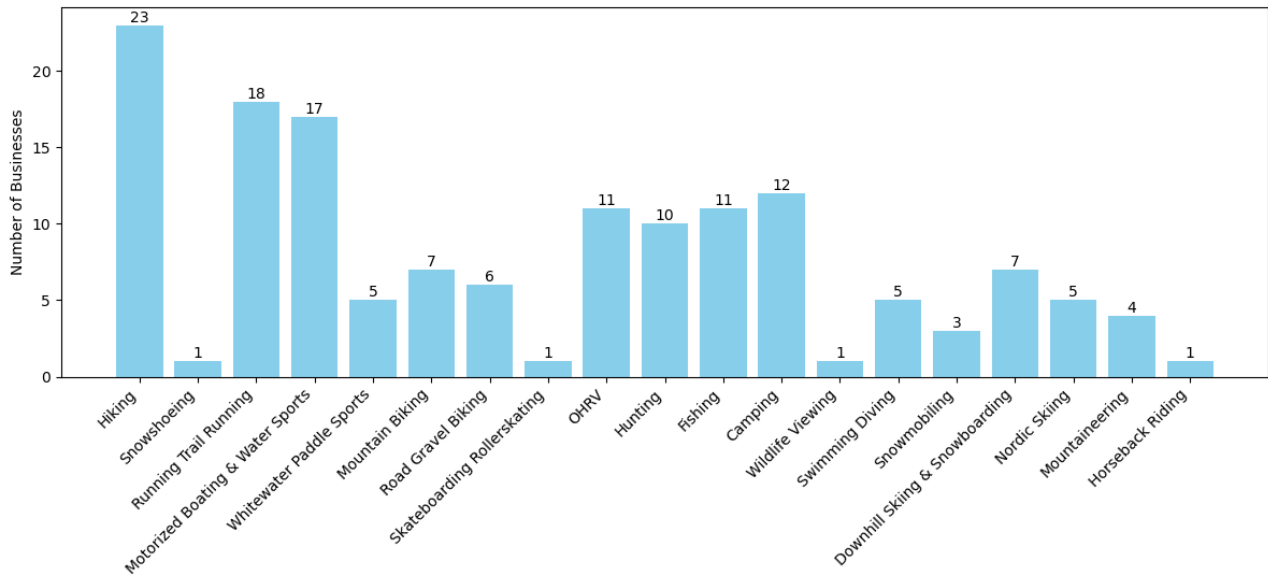







Figure 2: Number of retail sales and service businesses catering to different outdoor recreation activities in Warren County (note: a single business may cater to multiple activities).

OUTDOOR RECREATION PROVIDER BUSINESSES:

-  **33 privately-operated campgrounds and RV parks.**
-  **30 businesses offering motorized boat rentals.**
-  **16 sleepaway summer camps (12 privately-operated, 4 non-profit).**
-  **12 fishing guide/charter services.**
-  **10 whitewater rafting guide companies operating on the Hudson River.**



+ A ROBUST OUTDOOR RECREATION TOURISM ECONOMY - WITH SOME NEEDS.

In 2022, the tourism industry in Warren County generated \$859 million in direct traveler spending – the largest of any Adirondack county. This spending supported **5,866 direct jobs in Warren County**, accounting for one in six jobs in the County (16.4%). Including indirect and induced economic impacts, the tourism industry supported 8,174 jobs in the County (22.4%).

Traveler Spend						2022	% relative
Amounts in \$ millions	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Growth	to 2019
Total	\$1,491	\$1,541	\$1,310	\$1,936	\$2,170	12.1%	140.8%
Clinton	\$142	\$148	\$101	\$151	\$189	25.4%	127.2%
Essex	\$495	\$508	\$509	\$758	\$818	7.9%	161.0%
Franklin	\$98	\$102	\$86	\$121	\$140	16.0%	137.0%
Hamilton	\$83	\$83	\$73	\$98	\$104	6.5%	126.0%
Lewis	\$44	\$46	\$39	\$54	\$60	11.4%	131.1%
Warren	\$629	\$655	\$503	\$755	\$859	13.8%	131.3%

Figure 3: Traveler spending in Adirondack counties, 2018 – 2022. Source: Empire State Development.

	Direct	Total (Direct, Indir., Induced)	Share (Direct)	Share (Total)
Total	13,680	19,063	12.8%	17.8%
Clinton	1,471	2,050	4.6%	6.4%
Essex	3,654	5,092	26.6%	37.1%
Franklin	1,685	2,348	9.9%	13.8%
Hamilton	517	720	30.8%	42.9%
Lewis	487	678	7.3%	10.2%
Warren	5,866	8,174	16.4%	22.8%

Figure 4: Tourism-generated employment in Adirondack counties, 2022. Source: Empire State Development.

Tourism Warren County can include many activities that are not considered outdoor recreation, such as shopping, dining, and amusement parks. However, recent studies of tourism in Warren County suggest that **outdoor recreation plays a major role in attracting tourists and generating visitor spending**. A 2022 Warren County Tourism Study conducted by Hunden Strategic Partners identifies the primary tourism activity nodes in County, most of which involve outdoor recreation. Key outdoor recreation activities and assets identified in this study included:

- Gore Mountain
- West Mountain
- Lake George cruises
- Lake George beaches
- Revolution Rail Company
- Whitewater rafting
- Multiple aerial adventure parks
- Mountain biking
- Snowmobiling

The 2022 study also highlights some of the community tourism hubs in Warren County and notes their connection to outdoor recreation activities:

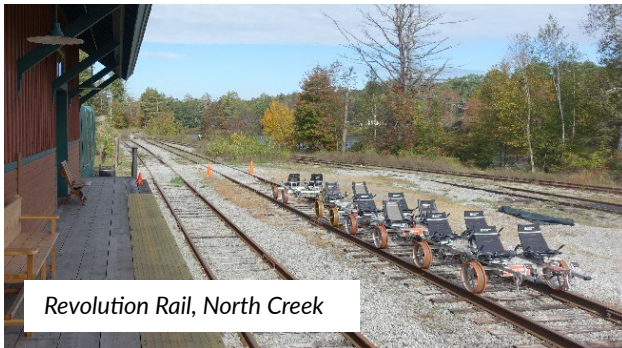
- Lake George Village: waterfront path, beaches, parks, cruises.
- Bolton Landing: beaches, water activity rentals, island camping, fishing, hiking.
- Warrensburg: multitude of outdoor recreation activities including hiking, skiing, fishing, and snowmobiling.



While outdoor recreation tourism is a well-established contributor to Warren County's economy, prior studies and tourism industry stakeholders note some challenges (see Appendix A for a summary of stakeholder input):

OUTDOOR RECREATION TOURISM INDUSTRY ADVANTAGES:

- ❖ **Diversity and quality of outdoor recreation assets.**
- ❖ **Proximity and ease of access from major metro areas (Albany, NYC, New Jersey).**
- ❖ **Seasonal workforce synergies between summer and winter destinations.**
- ❖ **Proximity of hamlet/downtown areas to outdoor recreation amenities.**
- ❖ **Presence of SUNY Adirondack, offering a two-year Outdoor Education associates degree program that prepares students for careers in outdoor recreation, such as guiding.**



OUTDOOR RECREATION TOURISM INDUSTRY CHALLENGES:

- ❖ **Lack of a consolidated and centralized information source on outdoor recreation activities, leading to inconsistent, incomplete, and/or incorrect information being provided to visitors.**
- ❖ **Limited overnight accommodations in certain areas, particularly in northern Warren County.**
- ❖ **Lack of a consistent brand to help promote the full spectrum of outdoor recreation experiences in the County.**
- ❖ **Lack of training and experience for welcoming visitors of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.**
- ❖ **High insurance costs for outdoor recreation providers.**
- ❖ **Poor cell phone coverage discourages visitor exploration.**
- ❖ **Inconsistent weather reporting leading to last-minute visitor cancellations.**
- ❖ **Trend towards shorter visitor stays and last-minute trip planning.**

In addition to the overall County tourism industry, there has been significant study of the hotel and motel sector in Warren County. **Overnight accommodations are of particular importance to the outdoor recreation economy**, as overnight visitation typically results in significantly higher visitor spending. Key trends and insights on the state of hotels and motels in Warren County include:

- While there is a robust stock of hotels and motels overall (140 hotels with 6,843 rooms, as of 2019), most **hotels are clustered in the southern part of the County**, with limited options for overnight accommodations in northern Warren County, particularly around Gore Mountain/North Creek.¹
- There are dramatic swings in hotel and motel occupancy, with over 80% occupancy in August and 30% occupancy in January – a comparable seasonal swing to Cape Cod.¹
- There are many **older motels that are in need of investment** to upgrade facilities and infrastructure. However, motel owners are struggling to access needed capital or solicit buyers.

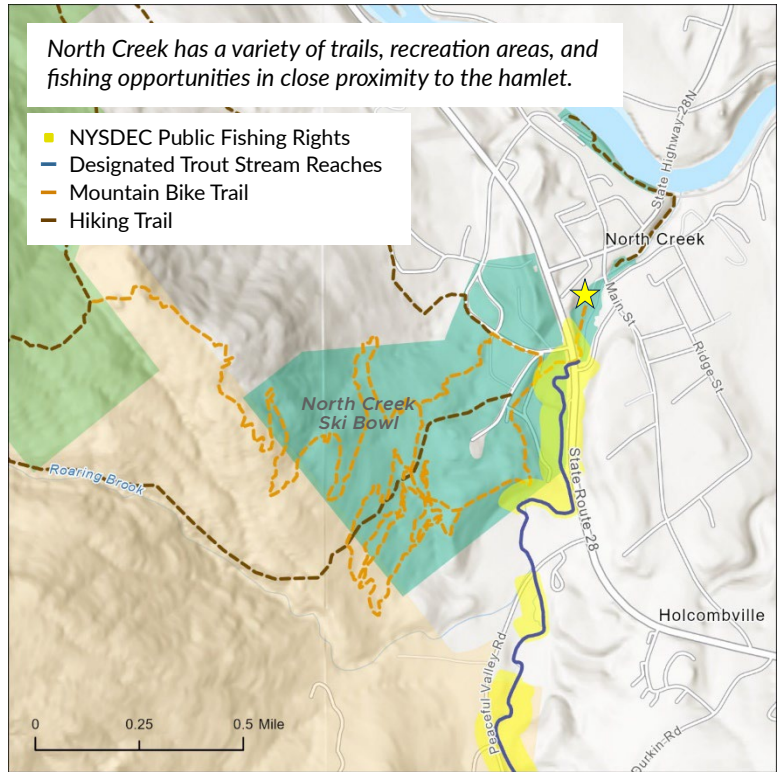
¹ *The State of the Warren County Tourism Industry*. Presentation by STR, Inc., October 2019.

COMMUNITIES

+ ECONOMIC CONNECTIONS TO OUTDOOR RECREATION AMENITIES.

Outdoor recreation opportunities abound in Warren County. Notably, many of the County's premier outdoor recreation assets – lakes, rivers, trails, mountains - are located in **close proximity to local hamlets and downtown areas**, which serve as economic hubs for communities and the County.

In some instances, these assets are well-connected to hamlets and advertised with wayfinding signage, which helps residents and visitors alike find and access recreation opportunities. For example, Shepard Park and the Lake George Waterfront Walkway provide an accessible, well-advertised connection from Lake George Village to the adjacent lakefront. In other cases, **hamlets may be missing out on community and economic benefits when nearby outdoor recreation amenities lack convenient pedestrian access or proper wayfinding signage.**



The Carol Thomas Trail in North Creek provides a useful connection from Main Street to Ski Bowl Park, connecting residents and visitors with outdoor recreation amenities in close proximity to local eateries and retailers. This trail could be better activated for residents and visitors, who must walk down a long driveway and parking area to get to the trail and informational kiosk.



Municipal planning documents codify the importance of outdoor recreation to local economies and resident quality of life as official local policy in Warren County.

Nine of Warren County's eleven municipalities have adopted community plans that emphasize the importance of the local outdoor economy. This includes town-wide comprehensive plans as well as other community planning efforts. These plans identify a variety of strategies, initiatives, and capital projects for enhancing outdoor recreation to deliver economic and community benefit, including new connector trails, improved water access, wayfinding signage for recreational amenities near hamlets, and partnerships and funding for long-term stewardship of recreational assets. For example, the 2015 *Chester Townwide Recreation Plan* describes itself as “an economic development initiative that taps outdoor recreation and heritage tourism strategies” and goes on to identify 35 capital projects to expand, enhance, and connect recreational trails, parks, water access points, and natural areas.

There is significant alignment between the outdoor economy goals and objectives codified in these local plans. **Many communities want, and are striving for, similar outcomes** – improved outdoor recreation offerings for residents and visitors and securing community and economic benefits from those outdoor recreation offerings. There is also strong alignment between these local plans and County-level planning for the outdoor economy, such as the *First Wilderness Corridor*, Warren County's intermunicipal plan for community development in the upper Hudson River Corridor. A key focus of the *First Wilderness Corridor* are trails and trail connections, both within and between communities, park improvements, and wayfinding signage. The 2019 *Final Layout of the First Wilderness Trail* presents a proposed trail alignment following the Hudson River between Corinth and Tahawus, linking hamlets to outdoor recreation offerings along the river corridor. All of this planning work speaks to **a need and opportunity for strategic alignment in Warren County to support and enhance the outdoor economy.**







Veteran's Memorial Park is managed by the Town of Bolton and supports a variety of outdoor recreation activities.

+ A PATCHWORK OF OUTDOOR RECREATION STEWARDS AND SUPPORTIVE ORGANIZATIONS.

A variety of community organizations support the outdoor recreation economy through trail maintenance, organizing events and programs, conservating and stewarding land, and other activities. While the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) maintains significant recreational trails and amenities across over 200,000 acres of state lands, many other organizations provide support to NYSDEC and steward recreation opportunities on other publicly accessible lands.

OUTDOOR RECREATION SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS IN WARREN COUNTY:

-  **2 non-profit land conservancies.**
-  **5 volunteer trail stewardship organizations.**
-  **6 fish and game clubs.**
-  **At least 6 outdoor recreation outing clubs.**

In addition to community organizations, local and regional governments have taken an active role in supporting outdoor recreation. Some examples of recent initiatives include:

- The **Town of Chester** has worked to promote local hiking opportunities in the vicinity of Chestertown through the Chester Challenge, which awards a ceremonial pin to anyone who completes a list of six hikes in a single summer, and is working with the Upper Hudson Trails Alliance to expand mountain biking and Nordic skiing trails at the Dynamite Hill Recreation Area.
- The **Town of Queensbury** has actively supported the development of mountain bike trails at Gurney Lane Recreation Area amongst a variety of other outdoor recreation initiatives.
- The **Town of Johnsbury** has been studying opportunities to enhance Ski Bowl Park and enhance the connectivity of the park to downtown North Creek.

Recreation at Up Yonda Farm

The County-owned Up Yonda Farm provides beginner-friendly recreation opportunities, including an easy guided hike up to an overlook of Lake George.



This patchwork of organizations and governments plays a critical role in supporting outdoor recreation in Warren County but also contributes to an outdoor recreation ecosystem where communities and organizations often operate in silos, may struggle with securing needed resources and organizational capacity, and often need to figure things out for themselves. As noted above, **outdoor recreation assets can feel disconnected from nearby communities** – there may not be awareness of these proximate recreation assets due to lack of signage, poor pedestrian and bicycle access, or lack of community programming and promotion. These challenges speak to an **overall lack of centralized support for the outdoor recreation economy**, whether in the form of financial support for maintaining trails and outdoor recreation infrastructure or capacity-building services that offer guidance and technical assistance.

+ IMPORTANCE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION TO RESIDENT QUALITY OF LIFE AND THE BROADER BUSINESS COMMUNITY.

Responses to a County-wide survey conducted in fall 2023/winter 2024 indicate that outdoor recreation is a significant factor in encouraging residents to reside and remain in Warren County, particularly for younger residents:

- **Participation in outdoor recreation is nearly ubiquitous in Warren County.** Nearly all resident respondents (93%) participate in outdoor recreation activities in the summer, including 96% of residents under the age of 45. Over three-quarters (77%) of resident respondents participate in outdoor recreation activities in the winter, including 88% of residents under the age of 45.
- Residents indicate that **outdoor recreation is very important to their quality of life** in Warren County and that outdoor recreation is of similar importance to other key quality of life factors, such as cost of living, schools, wages, and housing. Over three-quarters of resident respondents (77%) indicated that outdoor recreation is “very important” to their quality of life, including 79% of respondents under the age of 45. This was a similar percentage to cost of living (78%), quality schools (76%), well-paying employment (74%), and quality housing (71%), and not far behind environmental quality (88%) and safety (87%).

Outdoor Activity Summaries



HIKING

Warren County is home to **270 miles of public hiking trails across 65 trail systems**. These trails access a variety of destinations - open mountain summits, swimming holes, trout streams, and backcountry campsites. Key findings regarding hiking trails in Warren County include:

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION:

Hiking trails are well-distributed throughout Warren County. Trails in the southeastern areas of the county tend to be shorter and more beginner-friendly overall, with trails mostly being contained within smaller preserves and NYSDEC tracts. The western and northern areas of the County contain more extensive hiking trail networks on larger NYSDEC Wild Forests (Lake George, Wilcox Lake) and Wilderness Areas (Siamese Ponds, Pharoah Lake).

LAND MANAGEMENT:

NYSDEC is involved with the management of just over half (52%) of the hiking trails and trail systems in Warren County. Municipalities (23% of trails/trail systems) and land trusts (20%) also play a critical role in hiking trail system management.

DIFFICULTY, ACCESSIBILITY, & QUALITY:

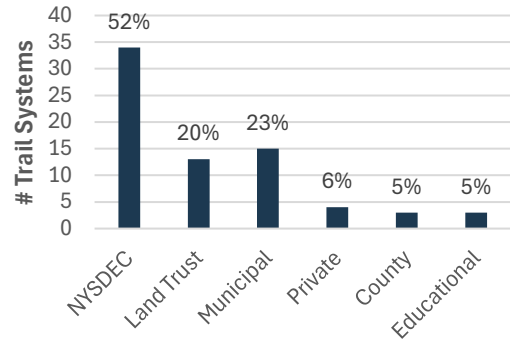
Hiking trails in Warren County range from short, family-friendly walks to rugged ascents of mountain peaks. According to trail ratings prepared by Warren County, over three-quarters (79%) of the hiking trail systems in Warren County contain trails that are rated as beginner-friendly, with some trail systems also featuring moderate and challenging trails. However, there is only one trail network (Dean Farm Heritage Trails in Stony Creek) with hiking trails that are built to accessible standards. Maintenance of **quality trail surfaces** is an ongoing challenge, particularly on NYSDEC trails. Over time, poor trail design and maintenance can increase the difficulty of the trail. **Trailhead quality** is also a challenge for some trails and trail systems in Warren County. Some trailheads are well-designed and contain a variety of amenities (seating, restrooms, trash, kiosks), while others have poor parking layouts, lack informational signage, and are not well-connected to the trail(s) they are provided access to.

HIKING PARTICIPATION

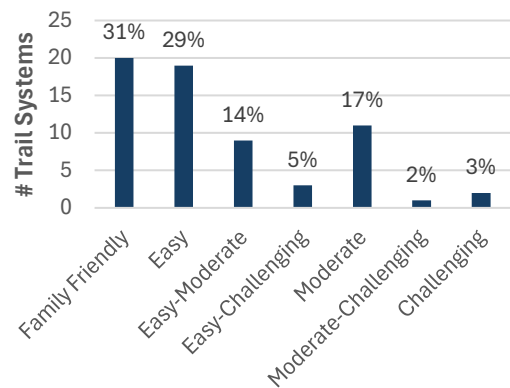
Based on Warren County resident responses to a 2023 county-wide survey:

- 85% of respondents participate in hiking in the summer months. Of these respondents, nearly half (44%) participate in hiking weekly.
- 65% of respondents participate in hiking in the winter months. Of these respondents, 41% participate in hiking weekly.

Hiking Trail System Land Management

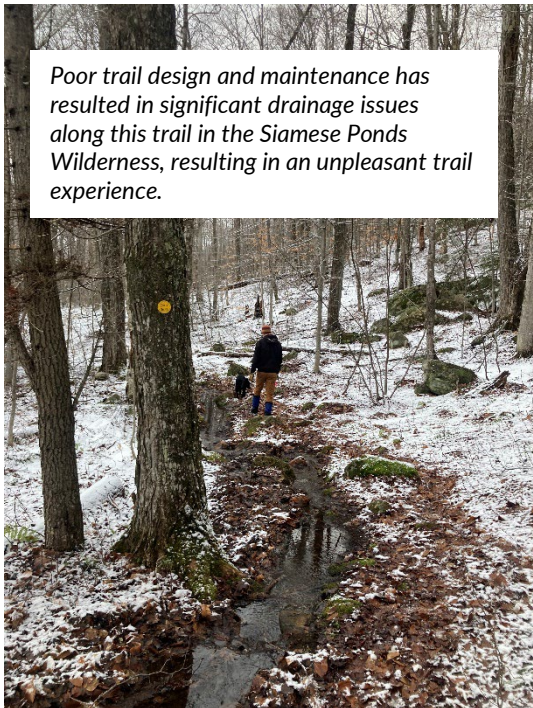


Difficulty Rating: Hiking Trail Systems





The flat, crushed stone provides a beginner-friendly hiking experience along the Hudson River in North Creek.



Poor trail design and maintenance has resulted in significant drainage issues along this trail in the Siamese Ponds Wilderness, resulting in an unpleasant trail experience.



This NYSDEC trailhead gate, while intended to block vehicles from entering the trail, may cause confusion for visiting hikers.



The trailhead for the Prospect Mountain Trail in Lake George lacks signage that hikers rely on for information about the length and difficulty of the trail.



Hikes to open mountain summits, such as Peaked Mountain, provide sweeping vistas of the County's mountainous topography and waterbodies. Photo courtesy of Protect the Adirondacks.



MOUNTAIN BIKING

Warren County is home to **seven purpose-built cross country mountain bike trail networks and two downhill mountain bike parks**, providing an array of bicycling experiences. Key findings regarding mountain biking in Warren County include:

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION:

Purpose-built mountain biking trail networks are primarily found in northern and southern reaches of Warren County, with minimal opportunities in the central portion of the county. Queensbury is the hub for all southern trail networks, with trails being relatively easy to access from residential areas.

LAND MANAGEMENT:

Most purpose-built mountain bike trail networks in Warren County are managed by local entities – towns, land trusts, and private landowners. Local support organizations assist with the maintenance of some trail networks as well. Mountain biking is also permitted on certain NYSDEC trails in Wilcox Lake Wild Forest and the Lake George Wild Forest; however, these trails were not built for mountain biking and see minimal bicycle traffic.

DIFFICULTY & ACCESSIBILITY:

Most of the purpose-built mountain bike trail networks in Warren County contain a variety of trail types suitable for riders of different ability levels, ranging from mellow, smooth flow trails to steep and technical features. To-date, there are no purpose-built accessible mountain bike trails in Warren County that are suitable for adaptive bicycles (typically requiring a wide treadway, wide turn radii, and gentler grades).

MOUNTAIN BIKING PARTICIPATION

Based on Warren County resident responses to a 2023 county-wide survey, 24% of respondents participate in mountain biking in the summer months. Of these respondents, one-third (32%) participate in mountain biking weekly.

According to trail counts conducted by the Town of Queensbury, there were 74,443 visits to the Gurney Lane and Rush Pond mountain bike trail networks in 2023 – a 150% increase since 2019.

Trail Network	Location	Mileage	Owner	Support Orgs.	Trail Notes
Gurney Lane	Queensbury	12 mi	Town of Queensbury	Gurney Lane MTB Riders	Primarily beginner and intermediate trails with a few advanced trails.
Rush Pond	Queensbury	9 mi	Town of Queensbury	Gurney Lane MTB Riders	Primarily beginner and intermediate trails.
Van Dusen Preserve	Queensbury	2 mi	Queensbury Land Cons.		Intermediate loop.
West Mountain	Queensbury	17 mi	West Mountain		A mix of cross country and downhill trails with option for lift-served or self-powered access.
Garnet Hill Lodge	North River	5 mi	Garnet Hill Lodge		Beginner and intermediate trails. No charge to use trails.
North Creek Ski Bowl	North Creek	12 mi	Town of Johnsburg	North Hudson Trails Alliance; ORDA	Primarily beginner and intermediate trails with a few advanced trails.
Gore Mountain	North Creek	10 mi	ORDA		Intermediate and advanced trails with one beginner loop.
Brant Lake Bike Park	Brant Lake	5 mi	Mill Park ADK	North Hudson Trails Alliance	Intermediate and advanced trails.
Dynamite Hill Rec. Area	Chester	3 mi	Town of Chester	North Hudson Trails Alliance	Primarily beginner trails with plans for additional trails.





ROAD & GRAVEL BIKING -----

Warren County has a variety of scenic and quiet roads that are desirable road biking destinations. Key findings regarding road and gravel biking in Warren County include:

INFRASTRUCTURE:

Most road bicycling opportunities in Warren County are on paved roads. There are periodic stretches of gravel roads in the County, which are becoming increasingly desired by bicyclists seeking scenic, lower-traffic routes. Adirondack Cycling Advocates (ACA), which promotes safe and quality bicycling in Warren County, maintains a web map of recommended road bicycling routes, some of which are mixed-surface routes containing gravel and paved roads. Gravel roads are far more prevalent in nearby Washington County and Vermont, with these areas capturing more gravel biking events and associated visitation.

The Warren County Bikeway is the only separated, paved bicycle path in the County. The 9.4-mile route connects downtown Glens Falls to Lake George Battlefield State Park using a handful of on-road connections. The nine-mile Feeder Canal Park Heritage Trail in Glens Falls provides a separate bicycle path with a smooth, crushed stone surface, with long-term plans to build a connecting path to the Rush Pond Trail in Queensbury.

Warren County is defined by steep and rugged topography. This can appeal to experienced bicyclists that seek out the thrill and challenge presented by long road climbs and descents but is often a barrier to less experienced bicyclists. The increased availability and adoption of e-bikes may change this equation in the future. ACA includes some more mellow recommended routes following major river corridors. Even on less hilly terrain, most adult bicyclists are hesitant to venture on to roads with higher traffic volumes and speeds. These bicyclists will typically seek out quieter roads and/or separated paths for their riding experience. This highlights the importance of providing comfortable, convenient, and interconnected bicycle routes.

PLANNING INITIATIVES:

Warren County is currently undertaking the *Modernization and Connectivity Plan for Multi-Use Trails*, which will examine enhancements and connections to the Warren County Bikeway and Feeder Canal Trails.

In recent years, there have also been discussions amongst County leadership and bicycling advocates over the recreational use of the approximately 40 miles of County-owned railroad corridor running along the Hudson River, which could provide a scenic and comfortable bicycling route through a rails-to-trails project. This concept was explored at a high level in the *Warren County Rail Line in the First Wilderness Corridor: Study of Options*, prepared by the Warren County Safe & Quality Bicycling Association in 2019. The active rail line in this corridor supports tourist train and rail biking operations, for which the County receives revenues to help offset the costs of maintaining rail infrastructure. A long-term vision for this rail corridor could be useful in examining the benefits and costs of different recreational access scenarios.

EVENTS & ITINERARIES:

Warren County hosts a variety of on-road bicycling events annually, such as the Prospect Mountain Hill Climb. The Warren County Cycling Challenge is a well-promoted self-guided event that tasks participants with completing eight bicycling routes established by ACA, with finishers receiving a certificate and window decal.

ROAD & GRAVEL BIKING PARTICIPATION

Based on Warren County resident responses to a 2023 county-wide survey, nearly half (48%) of respondents participate in road or gravel biking in the summer months. Of these respondents, 41% participate in road or gravel biking weekly.



▲ CAMPING

Warren County hosts an impressive array of camping opportunities ranging from family-friendly campgrounds and RV parks to backcountry campsites that can only be accessed by foot or boat. Key findings regarding camping in Warren County include:

CAMPGROUNDS & RV PARKS:

There are 33 car-accessible campgrounds in Warren County, 32 of which are privately operated. There are 23 campgrounds that accommodate tent camping and RVs, six campgrounds that are RV-only, and four campgrounds that are tent camping-only. Over half of these campgrounds are located in Lake George (9) and Warrensburg (8), with other campgrounds scattered throughout the County.

BACKCOUNTRY & ISLAND CAMPING:

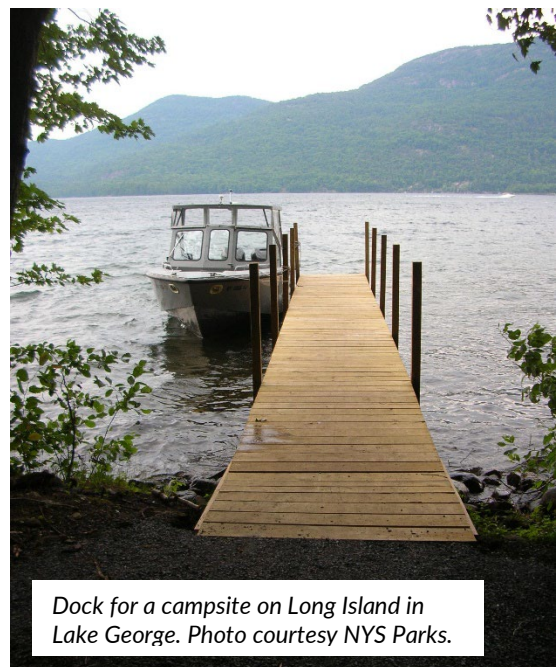
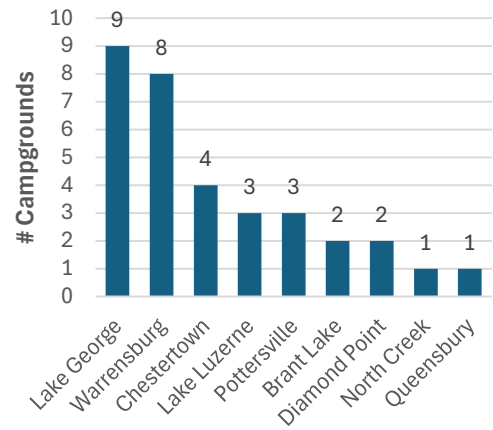
NYSDEC manages 523 backcountry camp and tent sites and 9 lean-tos in Warren County, including 387 sites across 44 state-owned islands on Lake George that can only be accessed via boat. These sites require advanced reservations and a fee. Most other backcountry sites are first-come, first-served sites that can only be accessed via foot, except for a small number of sites on Thirteenth Lake in the Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area that are paddle-accessed. Backcountry sites offer a remote and wild camping experience without electricity and most other amenities and support overnight backpacking, skiing, and paddling outings.

NYSDEC Area	# Sites	Access	Notes
Lake George Islands	387 sites	Boat	25 sites can be accessed by foot; 2 accessible campsites
Wilcox Lake Wild Forest	63 sites 4 lean-tos	Foot	Dispersed camping permitted
Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area	19 sites 3 lean-tos	Foot; Boat	3 campsites on 13 th Lake are accessible only by boat
Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest	2 sites	Foot	Additional campsites located to the north in Essex County
Lake George Wild Forest	48 sites 2 lean-tos	Foot	
Pharoah Mountain Wilderness Area	4 sites	Foot	Additional campsites located to the north in Essex County

CAMPING: ACCESSIBLE RECREATION

Campgrounds play a key role in Warren County's outdoor economy by providing lower-cost overnight stays as well in addition to being recreational destinations themselves. For many visitors and families, camping is an affordable, accessible, and intergenerational activity.

Car Campgrounds in Warren County



Dock for a campsite on Long Island in Lake George. Photo courtesy NYS Parks.



SKIING & SNOWBOARDING

Warren County is home to **four lift-served skiing and riding areas** as well as **four groomed Nordic skiing areas**. There are a variety of options for backcountry skiing and riding as well. Key findings regarding skiing and snowboarding in Warren County include:

DIVERSE ALPINE SKIING AND RIDING EXPERIENCES:

Warren County's ski areas span the full range of alpine skiing and riding experiences. Gore Mountain is New York's largest ski area by skiable acreage (448 acres), offering multiple terrain parks and significant expert level terrain. West Mountain provides a classic small mountain feel and supports a robust ski racing program. Hickory Ski Area is a true community-supported ski operation, with its steep slopes reliant on natural snow. Dynamite Hill provides a small open bowl and rope tow for beginner-level skiers.

BACKCOUNTRY SKIING AND RIDING:

When natural snow conditions permit, Warren County is host to some notable backcountry skiing and riding destinations as well. Alpine skiing and riding opportunities include alpine glades off Bald Mountain and Prospect Mountain. The Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area includes approximately 25 miles of trail that are suitable for backcountry Nordic skiing.

SKIING & SNOWBOARDING PARTICIPATION

Based on Warren County resident responses to a 2023 county-wide survey:

- 38% of respondents participate in alpine skiing or snowboarding at ski areas. Of these respondents, over half (52%) participate weekly.
- 34% of respondents participate in Nordic skiing on groomed trails. Of these respondents, 31% participate weekly.

Ski area visitation data for Gore Mountain indicates steady participation in alpine skiing, with 216,672 visits during the 2021-2022 season, up slightly from 212,703 visits during the 2004-2005 season.

Ski Area	Type	Owner	Trail Stats	Notes
Gore Mountain / North Creek Ski Bowl	Alpine skiing & riding; Nordic skiing	ORDA	108 alpine ski trails; 14 lifts; 4 km of groomed Nordic ski trails	n/a
West Mountain Ski Area	Alpine skiing & riding	West Mountain	35 alpine ski trails; 5 lifts; night skiing	Also has tubing park
Hickory Ski Center	Alpine skiing & riding	Ski Hickory Hill Inc.	17 alpine ski trails; 4 lifts	Supported by Hickory Legacy Foundation
Dynamite Hill Recreation Area	Alpine skiing & riding; Nordic skiing	Town of Chester	1 alpine ski trail; 1 lift; 5 km of ungroomed Nordic ski trails	
Garnet Hill	Nordic skiing	Garnet Hill Lodge	55 km of groomed Nordic ski trails	
Cole's Woods	Nordic skiing	City of Glens Falls	10 km of groomed Nordic ski trails; night skiing	Trails managed by Friends of Coles Woods
Warren County Nordic Ski Trails	Nordic skiing	Warren County	16 km of groomed Nordic ski trails	
Roger's Rock Ski Trails	Nordic skiing	Warren County	4.5 km of groomed Nordic ski trails	



PADDLE SPORTS

Warren County hosts **42 lakes and ponds greater than 40 acres in size**, including several major lakes over 1,500 acres in size (Lake George, Schroon Lake, and Brant Lake), as well as **two major navigable rivers** (Hudson River and Schroon River) featuring both flatwater and whitewater sections of varying classes. These waterbodies support a variety of canoeing, kayaking, rafting, and tubing activities. Key findings regarding paddle sports in Warren County include:

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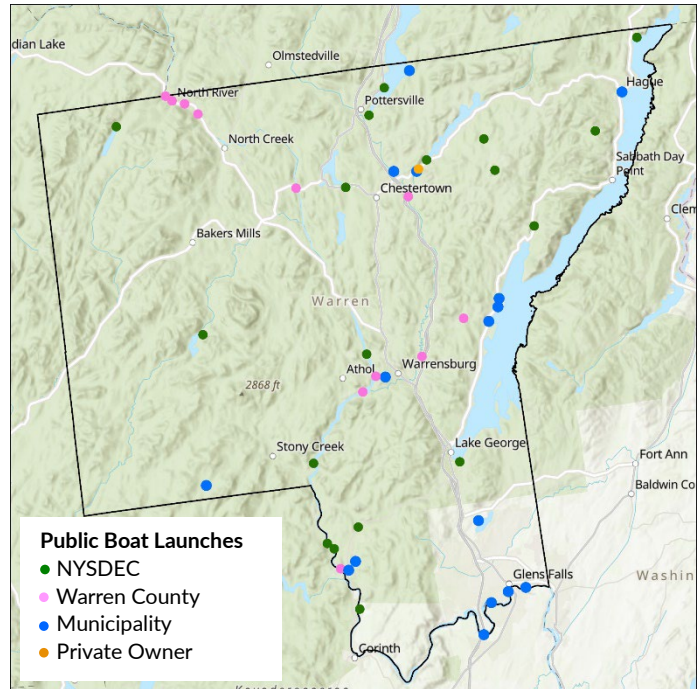
Opportunities for flatwater paddling are found in all areas of Warren County. On larger lakes, such as Schroon Lake and Lake George, paddlers share waters with motorized boats. Some smaller lakes and ponds, such as Thirteenth Lake and Jabe Pond, restrict access for motorized boats, providing sought-after quiet paddling experiences.

The Hudson River Gorge is a popular whitewater rafting destination, as evidenced by the ten whitewater rafting guide businesses based in Warren County, primarily in North Creek. The Hudson River Gorge is located to the north of Warren County; however, the most popular takeout locations for the end of river trips are located along Route 28N in North River and North Creek. Tubing outfitters typically use more mellow stretches of river located within Warren County.

BOAT LAUNCHES:

Safe and well-designed boat launches are critical infrastructure for paddle sports. There are 52 public boat launches in Warren County – mostly managed by NYSDEC (18) or Warren County (16). Municipalities manage an additional 18 launches. There are 16 public boat launches along the Hudson River and three along the Schroon River. Warren County is primarily responsible for Hudson River launches in the northern part of the County, while NYSDEC and municipalities manage launches in the southern reaches. There are seven total public boat launches for Lake George in Warren County; however, there are long stretches of shoreline without public launches. Lake George, Schroon Lake, and Brant Lake each feature one fully accessible boat launch. Some smaller lakes and ponds, such as Friends Lake and Sherman Lake, lack any formal public access.

While some public boat launches Warren County are well-designed and maintained, others are in poor condition or were constructed without proper design. Poor quality boat launches can create accessibility challenges for paddlers as they transport heavy boats by hand towards the water and can result in erosion of shoreland areas.



PADDLE SPORTS PARTICIPATION

Based on Warren County resident responses to a 2023 county-wide survey:

- 70% of respondents participate in flatwater paddling. Of these respondents, one-third (32%) participate weekly.
- 26% of respondents participate in whitewater paddle sports. Of these respondents, 14% participate weekly.

This takeout location along the Hudson River is eroding and a challenge to navigate.



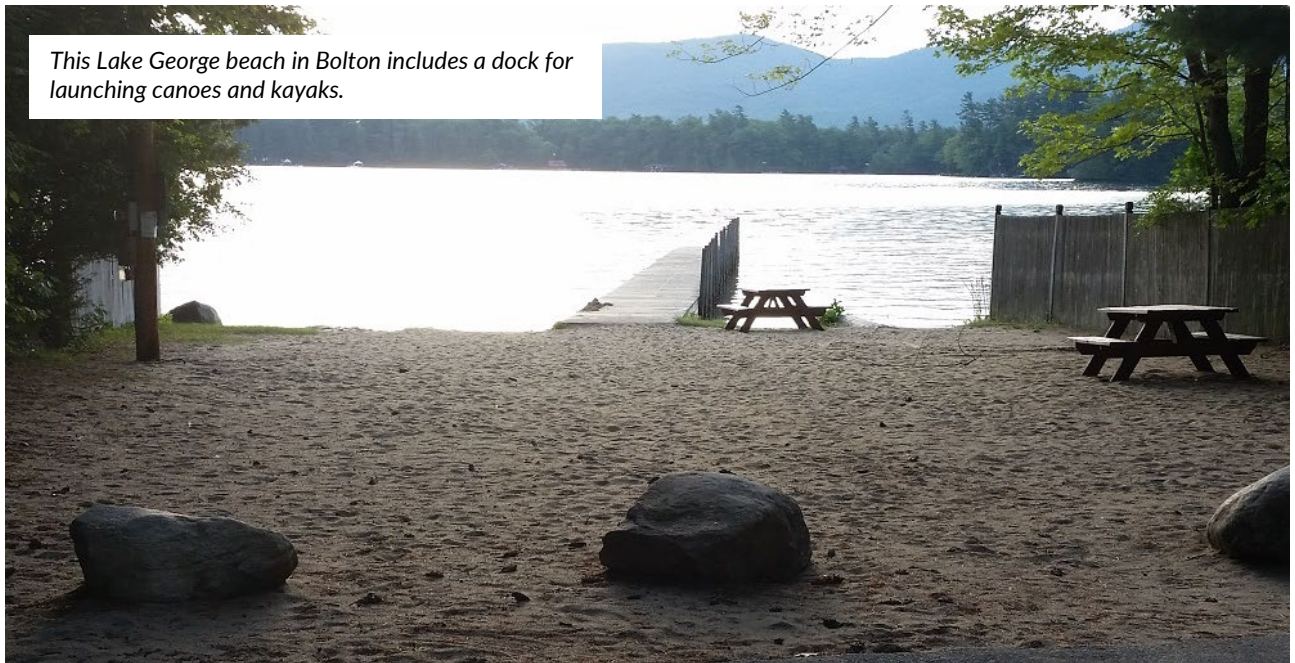
This hand launch along the Schroon River has a nicely designed cribbed staircase and kayak slide, but could use some routine maintenance.



This hand launch on the Schroon River is very sandy and badly eroding.



This Lake George beach in Bolton includes a dock for launching canoes and kayaks.



MOTORIZED BOATING

Lake George, Brant Lake, and Schroon Lake are large lakes that are **well-established motorized boating destinations** in Warren County. Motorized boating also takes place on smaller lakes such Friends Lake and Loon Lake, as well impounded sections of the Hudson River. Key findings regarding motorized boating in Warren County include:

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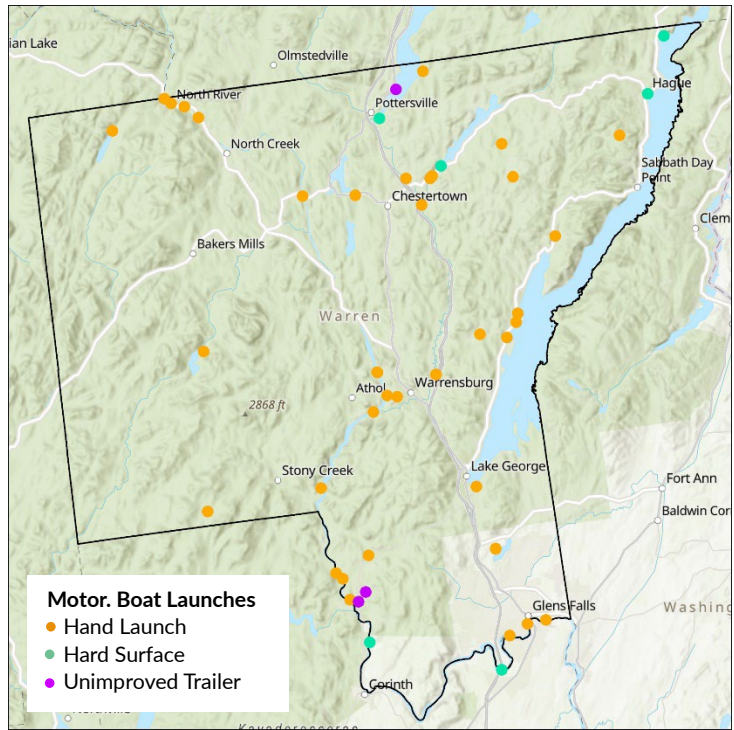
Motorized boating access to waterbodies is dependent on public hard surface or unimproved trailer boat launch sites as well as private marinas. Most public boat launch sites in Warren County are hand launches which are typically not suitable for launching motorized boats. Public motorized boating access is provided to the following waterbodies: Lake George, Brant Lake, Schroon Lake, Lake Luzerne, Trout Lake and Hudson River impoundments.

MOTORIZED BOAT LAUNCHES:

Of the nine public hard surface and unimproved trailer launches in Warren County, five are managed by NYSDEC and four are managed by municipalities. There are also seven privately-operated marinas located on Lake George where boat owners can store and launch motorized boats.

MOTORIZED BOAT RENTALS AND TOURS:

There are 21 motorized boat rental and tour operators on Lake George. This includes daily boat rentals as well as tour boat operators such as the Lake George Steamboat Company, which operates the iconic Minne Ha Ha, MV Mohican II, and Lac du Saint Sacrement cruise boats. These tours provide an accessible outdoor recreation experience on Lake George. Some motorized boat rental companies offer multi-day rentals, enabling visitors to camp overnight in Lake George islands campsites.



MOTORIZED BOATING PARTICIPATION

Based on Warren County resident responses to a 2023 county-wide survey, 53% of respondents participate in motorized boating. Of these respondents, 38% participate in motorized boating weekly.

According to state records, in 2024 there were 6,456 motorized boats registered to owners in Warren County.



FISHING

Warren County has **plentiful fishing opportunities**, thanks to a plethora of lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams, as well as robust fish stocking programs. Key findings regarding fishing in Warren County include:

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION:

Quality fishing opportunities are found all over Warren County. Lake George is a major fishing destination, with species ranging from Largemouth bass to Northern pike to stocked Landlocked salmon. Mountain ponds and streams support trout fishing opportunities, primarily in the central and northern areas of the County. Ice fishing is permitted by NYSDEC at 42 lakes and ponds across the County.

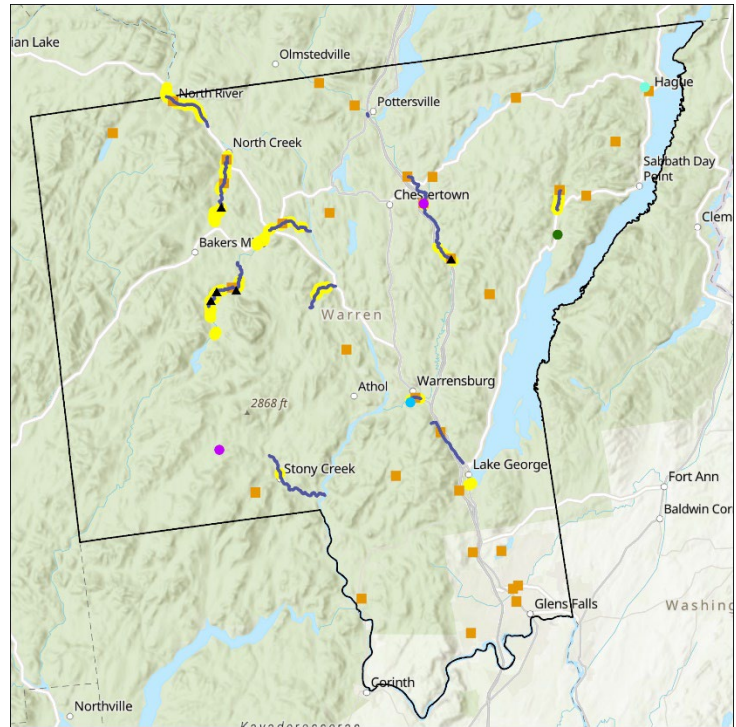
FISHING ACCESS:

There are a variety of managed public fishing access locations scattered throughout the County. This includes five designated fishing access points with short paths to river and stream banks, including a fishing pier in Warrensburg. These access points vary in their condition and accessibility.

There are also public access areas where NYSDEC has secured public fishing rights along sections of stream corridors. There are some designated parking areas along these stream corridors; however, access to these streams is often primitive without formal trails.

FISH STOCKING:

Warren County operates a county fish hatchery in Warrensburg and conducts an annual stocking program, with over 25,000 rainbow and brook trout stocked at 32 stocking sites throughout the County in 2023. NYSDEC stocked over 115,000 fish in Warren County in 2022, including four species of trout as well as Landlocked salmon in Lake George.



- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Fishing Access Points | Additional Fishing Access & Fisheries |
| ● NYSDEC | ■ NYSDEC Public Fishing Rights |
| ● Warren County | ▲ Parking Areas for Public Fishing Rights |
| ● NYSDOT | — Designated Trout Stream Reaches |
| ● Municipality | ■ Warren County Trout Stocking Sites |

FISHING PARTICIPATION

Based on Warren County resident responses to a 2023 county-wide survey:

- 46% of respondents participate in fishing in the summer months. Of these respondents, 23% participate weekly.
- 22% of respondents participate in fishing in the winter months. Of these respondents, 32% participate weekly.





SNOWMOBILING

Warren County has **223 miles of public snowmobile trail** traversing a patchwork of public and private lands. Key findings regarding snowmobiling in Warren County include:

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION:

Warren County hosts an interconnected network of snowmobile trails, with higher densities of trails in the southern and northeast areas of the County. The C8D corridor trail parallels the I-90 in central Warren County and provides the singular connecting trail between trails in the northern and southern areas of the County. Motorized vehicles, including snowmobiles, are not permitted in the Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area in the northwest corner of the County, which limits possibilities for snowmobile trails in the North Creek area.

SNOWMOBILE TRAIL CLASSIFICATION & MAINTENANCE:

There are three classes of snowmobile trail established by NYSDEC:

- **Corridor trails** provide important regional linkages and typically see higher volumes of trail use. These trails are eligible for state grant-in-aid funding for maintenance. There are 78 miles of corridor trail in Warren County.
- **Secondary trails** primarily exist to provide connections to corridor trails and may see lower volumes of trail use than corridor trails. These trails are eligible for state grant-in-aid funding for maintenance. There are 113 miles of secondary trails in Warren County.
- **Local trails** provide local connections and loops. These trails are not eligible for state grant-in-aid funding for maintenance. Local clubs perform fundraising to support maintenance of these trails. There are 33 miles of local trails in Warren County.

Four local non-profit snowmobile clubs are responsible for all maintenance of snowmobile trail infrastructure in Warren County, including trail surfaces, culverts and bridges, trailheads, and signage. Clubs also perform trail grooming, sponsor snowmobile safety courses, and host fundraising events.

Snowmobile Club	Corridor Trail Mileage	Secondary Trail Mileage	Local Trail Mileage	Total Trail Mileage
South Warren Snowmobile Club	32.6	44.6	7.5	84.7
Hague Sno-Goers	0.0	11.5	1.0	12.5
Thurman Connection Snowmobile Club	22.6	17.8	4.0	44.4
Northern Warren Trailblazers	22.6	39.3	20.1	82.0
Total	77.8	113.2	32.5	223.5

INTERACTIVE MAP & APP

Warren County has produced a smartphone application titled "Snowmobiling in Warren County, NY" which can be used to navigate snowmobile trail networks in the County, even in areas without cellphone coverage. The County also maintains an interactive web map of all snowmobile trails at <https://warren-county-gis-warrencountyny.hub.arcgis.com/apps/665a021701e24c318fcc8bde03fd5b9a/explore>.

SNOWMOBILING PARTICIPATION

Based on Warren County resident responses to a 2023 county-wide survey, 20% of respondents participate in snowmobiling. Of these respondents, one-third (32%) participate weekly.

According to state records, in 2024 there were 1,373 snowmobiles registered to owners in Warren County.



ADDITIONAL OUTDOOR RECREATION ACTIVITIES -----

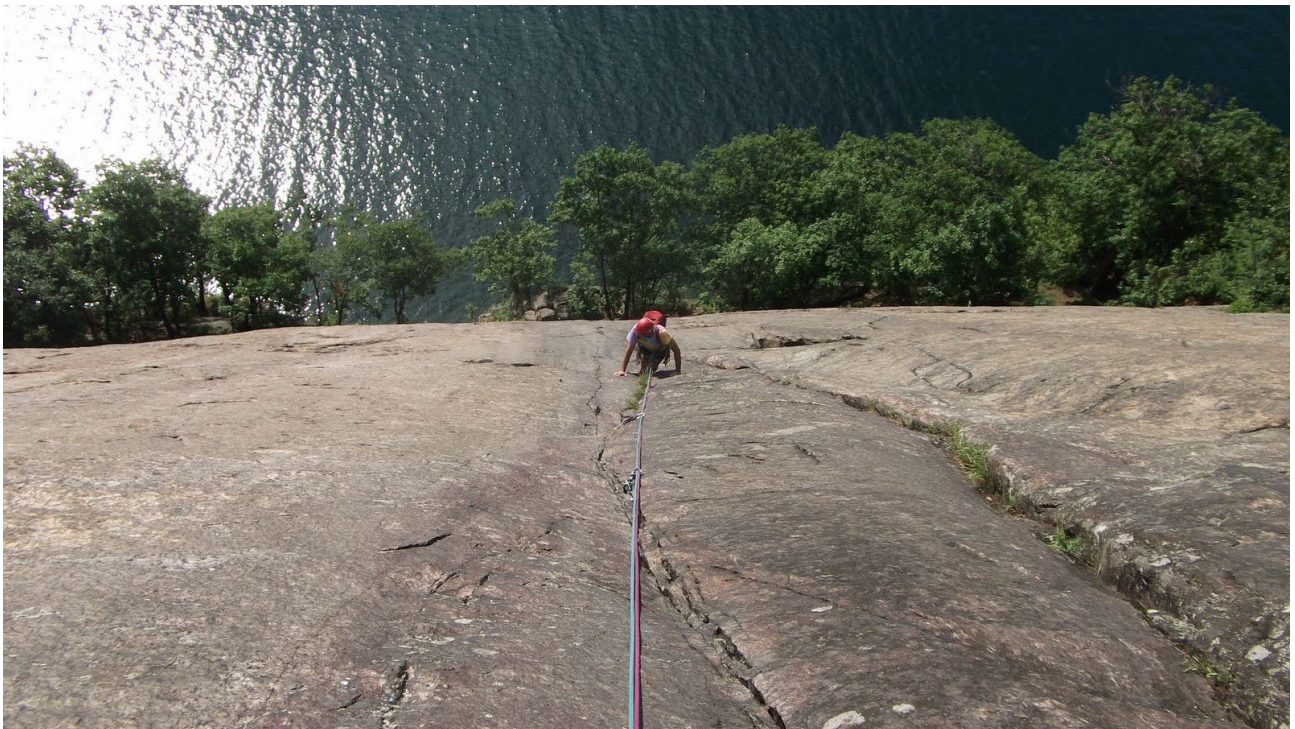
HUNTING: Hunting is permitted on nearly 199,000 acres of State-managed lands in Warren County, with hunting restricted only in Intensive Use Areas (e.g., campgrounds, boat launches, ski areas). NYSDEC estimates that 90% of hunting activity in New York State occurs on private lands, although this may be lower in Warren County due to the plethora of public lands. There are several private fish and game clubs that offer membership-based access to hunting lands. According to results of a 2023 county-wide survey, 18% of resident respondents indicate that they participate in hunting.

ATV RIDING: As of 2024, there are no public trails in Warren County where ATV or dirt bike use is permitted. According to results of a 2023 county-wide survey, 20% of resident respondents indicate that they participate in ATV and/or dirt bike riding, indicating that residents are riding ATVs and dirt bikes on private trails in Warren County and/or seeking out public trails outside of the County.

HORSEBACK RIDING: Horseback riding is permitted on 27 miles of NYSDEC-managed trail in Warren County, including trails in the Lake George Wild Forest, Wilcox Lake Wild Forest, and the Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area. There are five privately-operated stables that offer guided horseback riding on private trail networks in Warren County as well.

ROCK CLIMBING: Warren County is home to a variety of well-known rock climbing destinations, with a number of popular and well-rated climbing routes. Notable climbing areas include Roger's Slide, a multi-pitch climb of a 700' rock slab rising directly out of Lake George, as well as Crane Mountain and Potash Cliff (Lake Luzerne).

SWIMMING: There is a plethora of swimming opportunities in Warren County's plentiful lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams. 15 municipally-managed public beaches support opportunities for casual swimming.



Climber on Roger's Slide above Lake George (photo courtesy MountainProject).



Community Outdoor Economy Profiles

INTRODUCTION:

This section presents one-page profiles for each of Warren County's eleven municipalities. These profiles are intended to showcase the relationship that each community has to the local and regional outdoor economy. Each profile contains three sections:

TOWN CENTER OUTDOOR RECREATION CONNECTIONS: Hamlets are the economic hubs for Warren County communities. A critical economic asset for these communities is the proximity of outdoor recreation amenities to their hamlets. For each municipality, a map and summary of key outdoor recreation amenities located near their primary hamlet is provided.

LOCAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY: This section provides a summary of the local impact and presence of the outdoor economy in each community, including a summary of local businesses that are directly involved in outdoor recreation, as well as data on local employment in tourism-oriented economic sectors.

OUTDOOR ECONOMY AS LOCAL POLICY: This section provides information on local policy documents, such as comprehensive plans, that speak to the community's relationship to the outdoor economy, as well as identified needs and priorities for enhancing the outdoor economy and improving outdoor recreation offerings for residents and visitors.



BOLTON

TOWN CENTER OUTDOOR RECREATION CONNECTIONS:

Outdoor recreation opportunities within close proximity to the Bolton Landing hamlet include:

- Two waterfront parks on Lake George (Rogers Park and Veterans Memorial Park) with beach and boat launch facilities.
- Fishing opportunities at Trout Lake and Edgecomb Pond.
- Hiking trails to the Pinnacle and Cat Mountain summits with panoramic views.

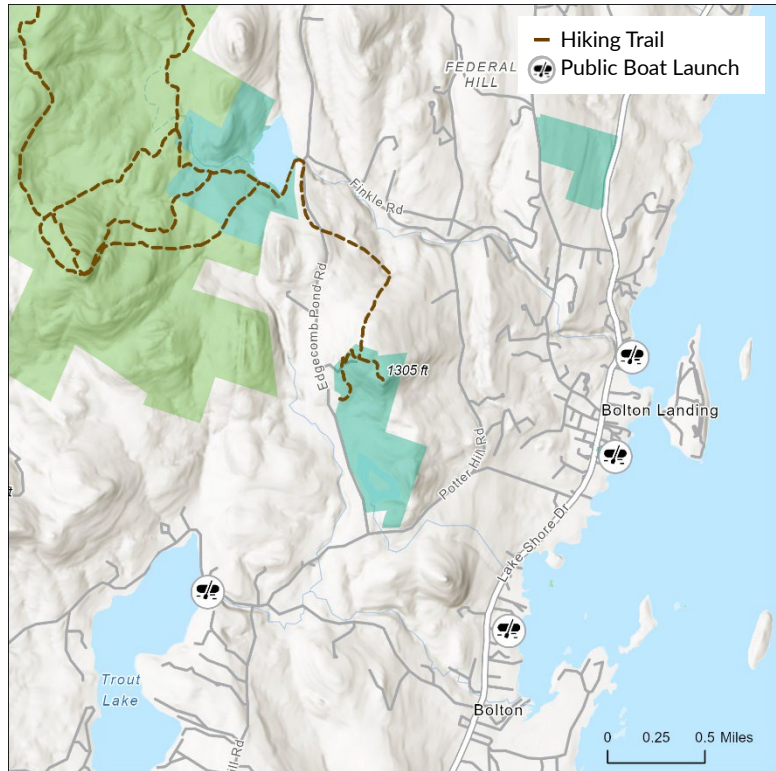
LOCAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY:

There are 14 private businesses in the Town of Bolton that cater directly to outdoor recreation, primarily marinas and boat rental services. The Town is a hub for recreation- and tourism-oriented businesses with nearly three-quarters of local jobs (74%) falling in the Accommodation/Food Service and Arts/Entertainment/Recreation economic sectors – a significantly higher percentage than Warren County overall.

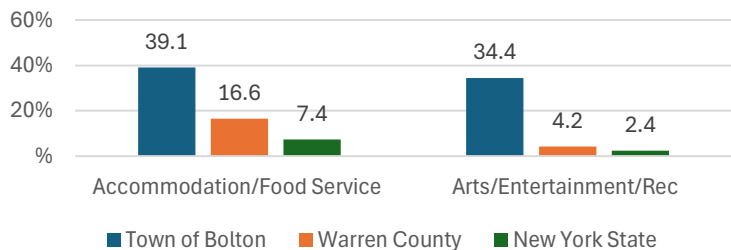
OUTDOOR ECONOMY AS LOCAL POLICY:

The 2019 *Bolton Recreation Hub Strategy*, prepared jointly by the Town of Bolton and the Lake George Land Conservancy, focuses on the connections between outdoor recreation, quality of life, and the local economy, noting that “this is the first plan on behalf of the LGLC and the Town of Bolton that explicitly outlines a coordinated approach to enhancing recreational resources in a manner that furthers conservation efforts and promotes the idea of a recreation hub as an economic development strategy.”

The plan identifies enhancements to trails, parks, and marketing/branding as catalysts for delivering high-quality recreation experiences for residents and visitors. Specific capital projects include new trail connections, trailhead amenity enhancements, and wayfinding signage, with a total of \$1.2 million in capital investment needs identified.



Percentage of Total Jobs in Key Tourism-Oriented Sectors



Source: ESRI Business Analyst

CHESTER

TOWN CENTER OUTDOOR RECREATION CONNECTIONS:

Outdoor recreation opportunities within close proximity to the Chestertown hamlet include:

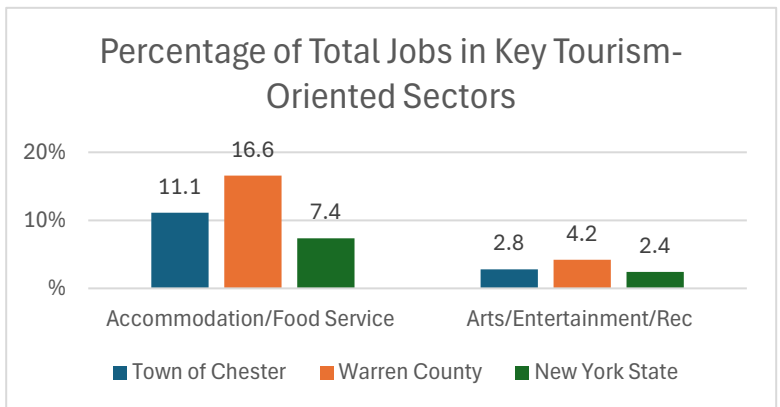
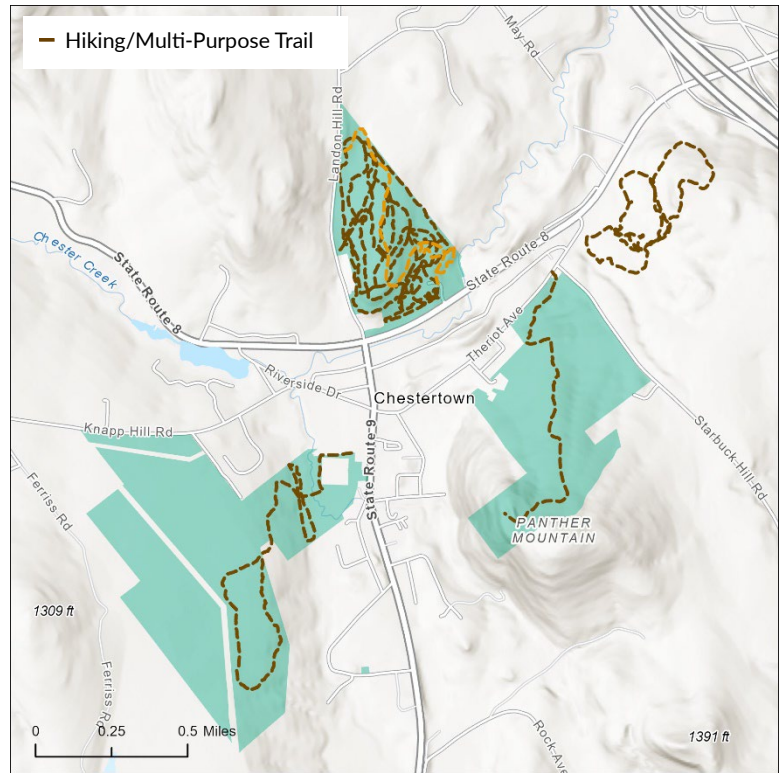
- Dynamite Hill Recreation Area, featuring a rope tow and trails for Nordic skiing, hiking, and mountain biking.
- A variety of hiking trails, including Panther Mountain, Cunningham Community Forest, and the Cougar Nature Trails.

LOCAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY:

There are 14 private businesses in the Town of Chester that cater directly to outdoor recreation, including campgrounds, a sporting goods store, a snowmobile tour operator, and a bait shop. The Town has a lower percentage of recreation- and tourism-oriented employment than Warren County overall, suggesting that some of these businesses may be more resident-oriented.

OUTDOOR ECONOMY AS LOCAL POLICY:

The 2021 *Cunningham Community Forest Master Plan*, prepared by the Town of Chester, envisions a series of multi-purpose trails in the Cunningham Community Forest that are directly connected to and integrated with the Chestertown hamlet.



Source: ESRI Business Analyst

In addition to proposed layouts for new connecting trails, the plan also provides strategies for trailhead improvements and informational and wayfinding signage to help activate the trail network for residents and visitors to the hamlet. The plan lays out three phases of capital investment for improving recreational trails and access in and to the forest, totaling \$774,815 of identified capital projects.

The 2015 *Chester Townwide Recreation Plan* is “an economic development initiative that taps outdoor recreation and heritage tourism strategies.” The plan identifies 35 capital projects to expand, enhance, and connect recreational trails, parks, water access points, and natural areas.



GLENS FALLS

CITY CENTER OUTDOOR RECREATION CONNECTIONS:

Outdoor recreation opportunities within close proximity to downtown Glens Falls include:

- The Feeder Canal Trail and Warren County Bikeway, both providing a separated walking and bicycling path.
- Multiple boat launches on the Hudson River.
- Trails for Nordic skiing, walking, and mountain biking in Cole's Woods.
- Haviland Cove Park and Beach.

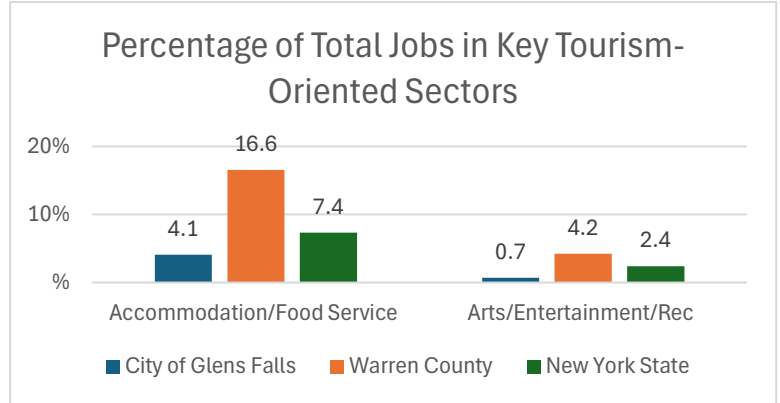
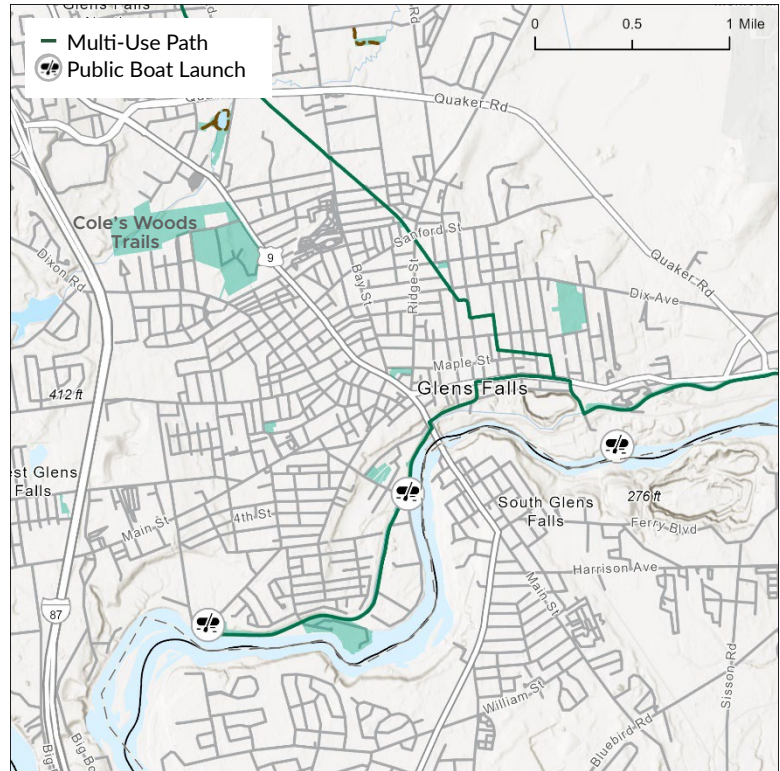
LOCAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY:

There are seven retail and service businesses in Glens Falls that cater directly to outdoor recreation, including campgrounds, including a bike shop, gear store, ski shop, and a dive shop. The City has a much lower percentage of recreation- and tourism-oriented employment than Warren County overall, indicative of its role as a more diversified employment hub for the region.

OUTDOOR ECONOMY AS LOCAL POLICY:

The 2017 *Downtown Revitalization Initiative Strategic Investment Plan*, prepared by the City of Glens Falls, lays out a community vision for a vibrant downtown area. Recreation opportunities feature heavily in the plan, which includes “conserve open space and promote access to the region’s natural resources and recreation amenities” as a key strategy.

The plan identifies a variety of capital projects to support downtown revitalization, including a project create a new downtown park, a wayfinding signage program that will highlight existing outdoor recreation amenities, and improving physical pedestrian and bicycle connections between key downtown amenities.



Source: ESRI Business Analyst



HAGUE

TOWN CENTER OUTDOOR RECREATION CONNECTIONS:

Outdoor recreation opportunities within close proximity to the Hague hamlet include:

- Hague Town Beach Park, offering picnic areas, a beach, and a boat launch for access to Lake George.
- Peggy's Point, offering fishing access to Lake George and lakefront walking trails.

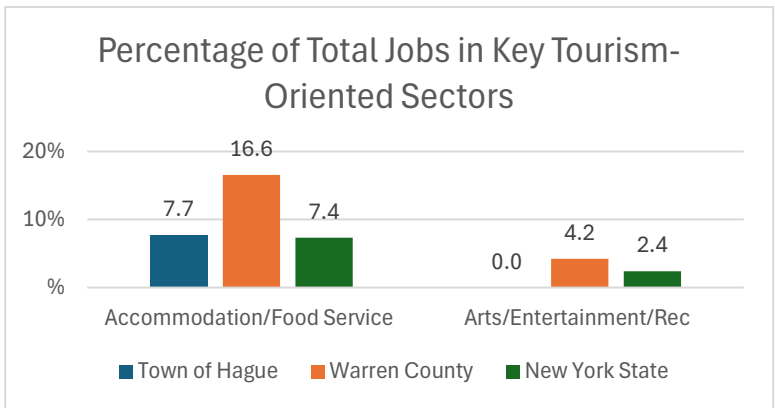
LOCAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY:

There are seven private businesses in the Town of Hague that cater directly to outdoor recreation, including boat dealers, marinas, and fishing guides. Overall, there is less tourism-oriented employment in Hague than in other Warren County towns.

OUTDOOR ECONOMY AS LOCAL POLICY:

The 2017 *Town of Hague Comprehensive Plan*, states that “the Town of Hague’s overall economic condition is dependent on stabilizing the year-round population and a growing a year-round visitor base” and includes “continuing to develop recreational resources that appeal to residents and visitors” as a key economic development strategy. The plan identifies the following priority actions and capital projects related to enhancing outdoor recreation for economic development:

- Develop and promote a system of easy to intermediate hiking areas and pedestrian pathways that are inter-linked and connected to the regional hiking, biking and snowmobile trail network.
- Create a comprehensive online and paper resource of trails and recreation areas.
- Implement the DOS grant award to expand public docking at the Town Park and/or at the Town Pier.
- Review the Adirondack Trail Towns concept and adopt the guidelines to become a certified “Adirondack Trail Town.”
- Develop a report on the feasibility of developing a Regional Visitor Center in Hague that would potentially focus on boating, industry, tourism, nature, photography, islands, science and the future of the lake.



Source: ESRI Business Analyst



HORICON

TOWN CENTER OUTDOOR RECREATION CONNECTIONS:

Outdoor recreation opportunities within close proximity to the Brant Lake hamlet in the Town of Horicon include:

- The Brant Lake Bike Park, offering several miles of mountain bike trails and a hiking trail to a scenic overlook.
- The Fox Hill Trail, a 2-mile hike to a scenic overlook.
- The Brant Lake Public Beach, as well as multiple boat launches for Brant Lake.

LOCAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY:

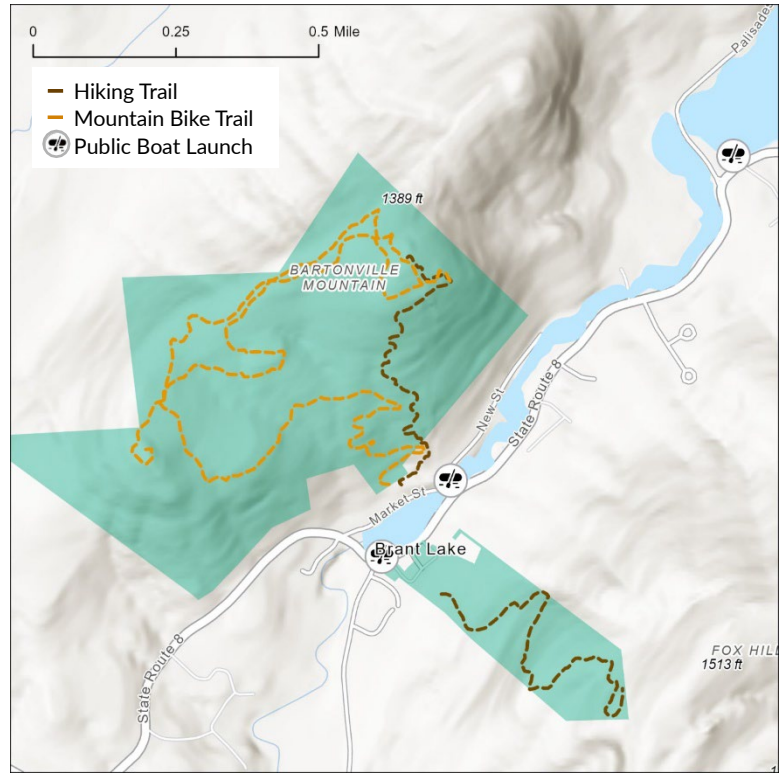
There are eleven private businesses in the Town of Horicon that cater directly to outdoor recreation, including two marinas, a bike shop, sleepaway camps, and campgrounds. Nearly three-quarters (72.1%) of jobs in Horicon are in tourism-oriented economic sectors, with half of jobs (50.1%) being in the Accommodation/Food Service sector.

OUTDOOR ECONOMY AS LOCAL POLICY:

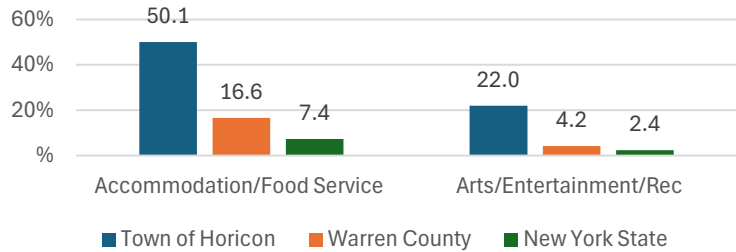
The 2010 *Town of Horicon Comprehensive Plan* emphasizes the relationship between outdoor recreation, tourism, and the local economy, noting that “more should be done to promote tourism and to capture tourism generated dollars locally.

Tourists use the lakes, trails, recreation areas and open space resources of the town, but spend little money in Horicon due to lack of local business establishments.” The plan notes improving resident access to Brant Lake access and creating recreational trails as key areas of need for the local outdoor economy.

Since the adoption of the *Comprehensive Plan*, the Town has had success in addressing these needs, with improved access to the southern end of Brant Lake, the establishment of The Hub café and bike shop, and the opening of the Brant Lake Bike Park.



Percentage of Total Jobs in Key Tourism-Oriented Sectors



Source: ESRI Business Analyst



JOHNSBURG

TOWN CENTER OUTDOOR RECREATION CONNECTIONS:

Outdoor recreation opportunities within close proximity to the North Creek hamlet in the Town of Johnsburg include:

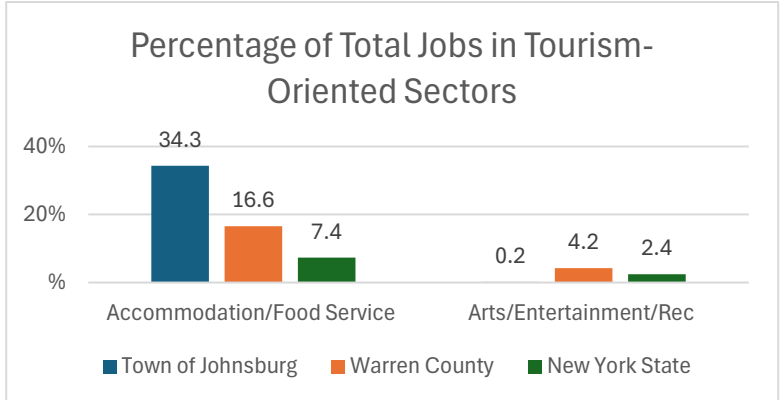
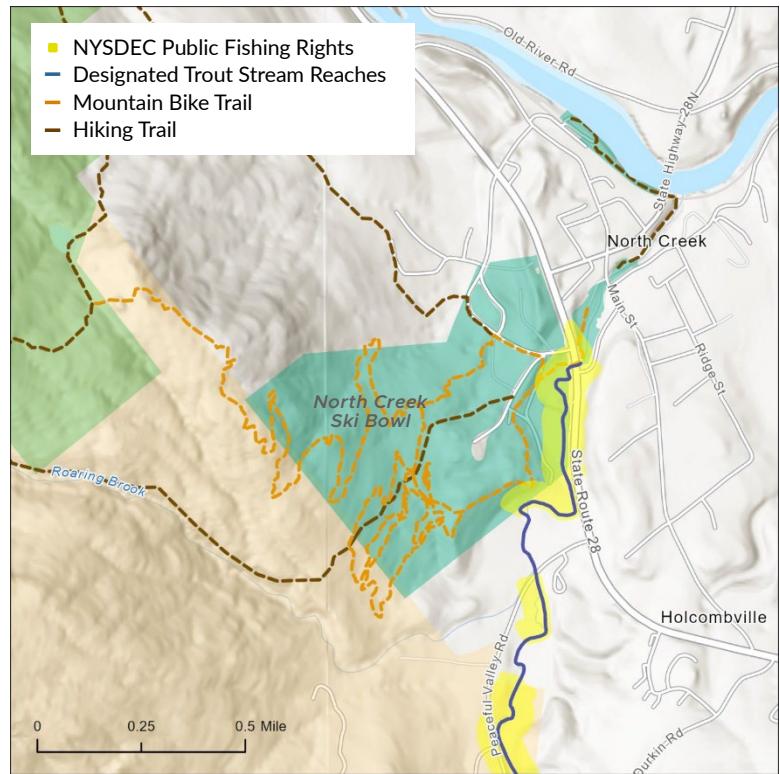
- Ski Bowl Park, offering mountain biking, hiking and Nordic skiing trails, lift-served alpine skiing operated by Gore Mountain, and a town beach.
- The start of the Schaefer Trail, a hiking trail ascending to the top of Gore Mountain.
- The Carol Thomas Trail, starting in downtown North Creek and wandering along the Hudson River.
- Public fishing access to North Creek.

LOCAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY:

There are 12 private businesses in the Town of Johnsburg that cater directly to outdoor recreation, including eight whitewater rafting guiding companies, two sporting goods stores, and a rail biking operator. Gore Mountain, operated by the Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA), is a major recreational destination and employer as well. Over one-third of jobs (34.5%) are in tourism-oriented economic sectors. North Creek also has a large percentage of jobs in the public administration sector (16.1%, versus 7.3% for Warren County overall), which includes ORDA employees.

OUTDOOR ECONOMY AS LOCAL POLICY:

The Vision Statement of the 2005 *Town of Johnsburg Comprehensive Plan* speaks heavily to the relationship between outdoor recreation and local economy, noting that “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.” The 2019 *North Creek Recreational Trail Plan* notes that, in Johnsburg, “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.” The Plan recommends 23 miles of new trails and associated trail and trailhead amenities, a total capital investment of \$1.7 million.



Source: ESRI Business Analyst



LAKE GEORGE

TOWN CENTER OUTDOOR RECREATION CONNECTIONS:

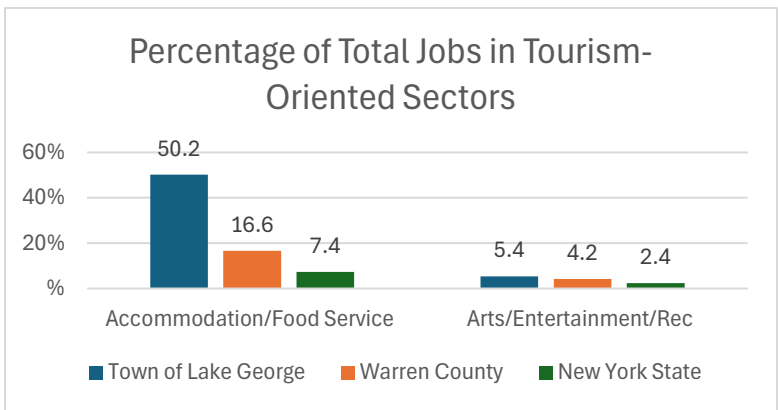
Outdoor recreation opportunities within close proximity to Lake George Village include:

- A hiking trail to the summit of Prospect Mountain.
- The Lake George Waterfront Walkway, connecting Shepard Park Beach and Million Dollar Beach.
- The northern terminus of the Warren County Bikeway.
- Lake George Battlefield State Park.
- A variety of Lake George water access points – a public boat launch, multiple marinas, and docks for the Lake George Steamboat Company.



LOCAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY:

There are 46 private businesses in the Town of Lake George that cater directly to outdoor recreation, including nine campgrounds and RV parks, 13 companies offering boat tours and rentals, and 22 retail stores selling outdoor recreation gear and apparel. Tourism-oriented employment is strong in Lake George, with half of jobs in the Accommodation/Food Service sector.



Source: ESRI Business Analyst

OUTDOOR ECONOMY AS LOCAL POLICY:

The 2016 *Town of Lake George Comprehensive Plan* focuses heavily on the Town's relationship to the outdoor economy – both as a driver of the current tourism-based economy as well as a tool for economic diversification. The plan's Vision Statement identifies in-town and nearby outdoor recreation opportunities as key amenities for attracting year-round residents, retirees, and businesses.

The plan identifies the environmental quality of Lake George as a high-priority and immediate-term need for the Town's health and recreation economy and emphasizes the importance of providing a range of recreational amenities that are accessible to a variety of ages and ability levels.



LAKE LUZERNE

TOWN CENTER OUTDOOR RECREATION CONNECTIONS:

Outdoor recreation opportunities within close proximity to the Lake Luzerne hamlet include:

- The Riverside Trail along the Hudson River.
- Wayside Beach and Pavilion Park on Lake Luzerne.
- Multiple boat launches for Lake Luzerne, and a boat launch for the Hudson River.

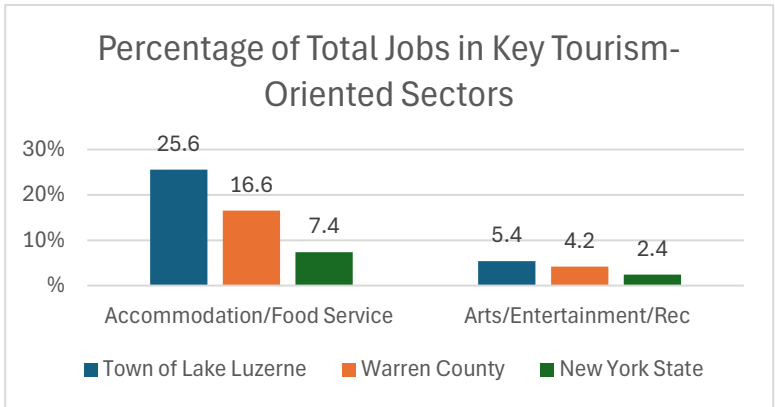
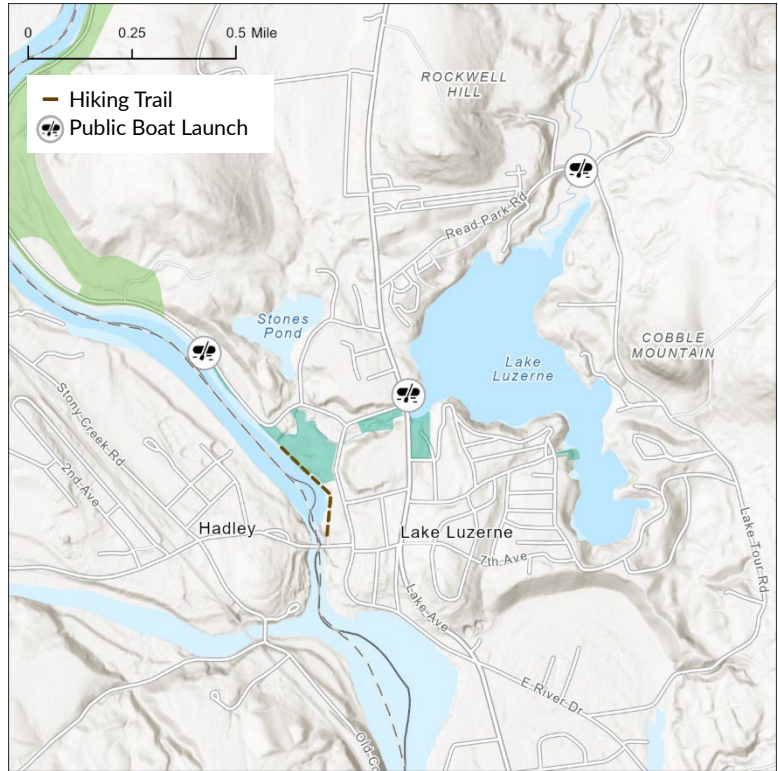
LOCAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY:

There are 11 private businesses in the Town of Lake Luzerne that cater directly to outdoor recreation, including four campgrounds and RV parks, river tubing outfitters, sleepaway camps, and two firearm retailers. Lake Luzerne is also home to Double H Ranch, a large non-profit camp for children with serious illnesses. Nearly one-third of jobs (31%) in Lake Luzerne are in tourism-oriented economic sectors.

OUTDOOR ECONOMY AS LOCAL POLICY:

The 2023 *Town of Lake Luzerne Comprehensive Plan* reflects on the connection between outdoor recreation and the local economy. The plan notes that “the waters of Lake Luzerne are critical to the identity of the community and provide a vast array of scenic views and recreational opportunities. The health of the Town’s tourism economy hinges on the quality and accessibility of these various waterways” and describes how water-based recreation is instrumental for resident quality of life and attracting visitors.

Projects and initiatives identified in the plan include a branding and marketing plan for the Town’s outdoor recreation and cultural resources, exploring the feasibility of extending the Riverside Trail and building a Rockwell Falls viewing deck, supporting the development of the regional First Wilderness Trail along the Hudson River, developing a wayfinding signage plan, developing a trails master plan, creating a bike trail connection to Lake George, and exploring possibilities for new kayak takeouts and pocket parks along the Hudson River.



Source: ESRI Business Analyst

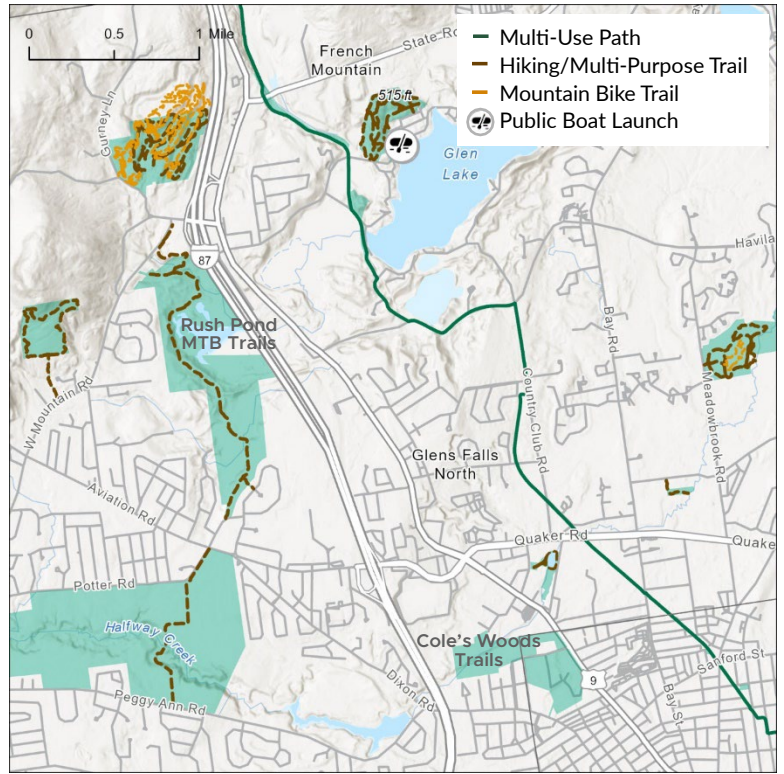


QUEENSBURY

TOWN CENTER OUTDOOR RECREATION CONNECTIONS:

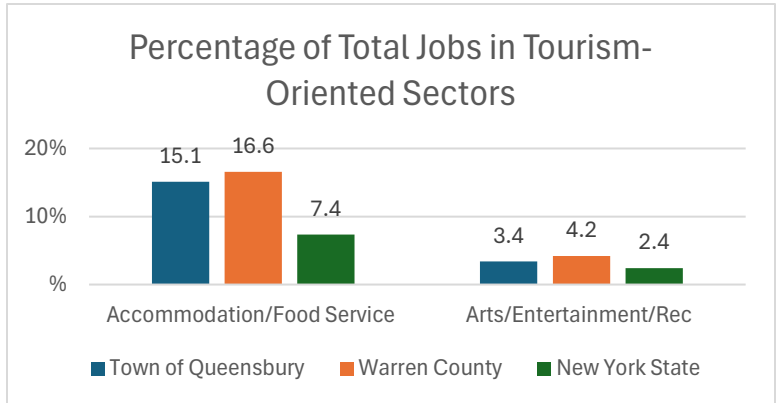
Outdoor recreation opportunities within close proximity to the Glens Falls North census-designated place in the Town of Queensbury include:

- Two large mountain biking and walking trail networks – Gurney Lake and Rush Pond.
- The Halfway Brook Trail.
- Van Dusen Preserve, featuring a mountain biking and hiking trail.
- Meadowbrook Preserve, featuring trails for walking, hiking, mountain biking, and Nordic skiing.
- Sullivan Preserve, featuring trails for hiking and Nordic skiing.
- The Warren County Bikeway.
- Cole’s Woods, featuring groomed Nordic ski trails that are used for walking and biking in the summer.
- A boat launch on Glen Lake.



LOCAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY:

There are 17 private businesses in the Town of Queensbury that cater directly to outdoor recreation, including six sporting goods stores, bike, boat, ski and ATV dealers, West Mountain ski area, two boat tour operators, and a campground. Tourism-oriented employment makes up a comparable percentage of jobs in Queensbury as in Warren County overall but is still a higher percentage than New York State overall.



Source: ESRI Business Analyst

OUTDOOR ECONOMY AS LOCAL POLICY:

The Town of Queensbury is in the process of updating its comprehensive plan. The draft plan emphasizes the local linkage between outdoor recreation and the local economy. The draft plan presents a vision for economic development in Queensbury where “the Town positions itself as a prime location for both traditional and remote work, leveraging its proximity to natural resources of the Adirondacks along with their significant tourism economies,” as well as an objective to “capitalize on the economic benefits of a thriving tourism ecosystem by strategically positioning Queensbury as a premier destination for recreation enthusiasts, fostering community vibrancy, services and economic prosperity.” The draft plan also lays out objectives to increase access and connectivity to outdoor recreation areas from residential areas and support recreational amenities for all ages and ability levels.



WARRENSBURG

TOWN CENTER OUTDOOR RECREATION CONNECTIONS:

Outdoor recreation opportunities within close proximity to downtown Warrensburg include:

- A network of hiking trails on Hackensack Mountain leading to a scenic overlook.
- A fishing pier on the Schroon River.
- Boat launches on Echo Lake and the Hudson River.
- Lift-served Alpine skiing at Hickory Ski Center, as well as hiking trails.
- The Hudson River Recreation Area, featuring walking and Nordic ski trails, as well as Hudson River access.

LOCAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY:

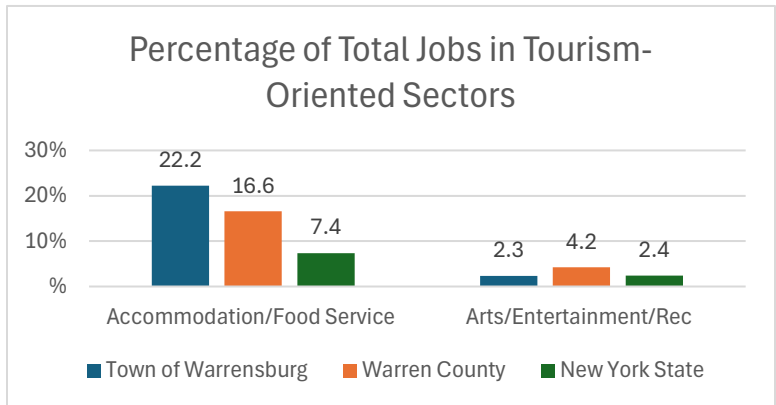
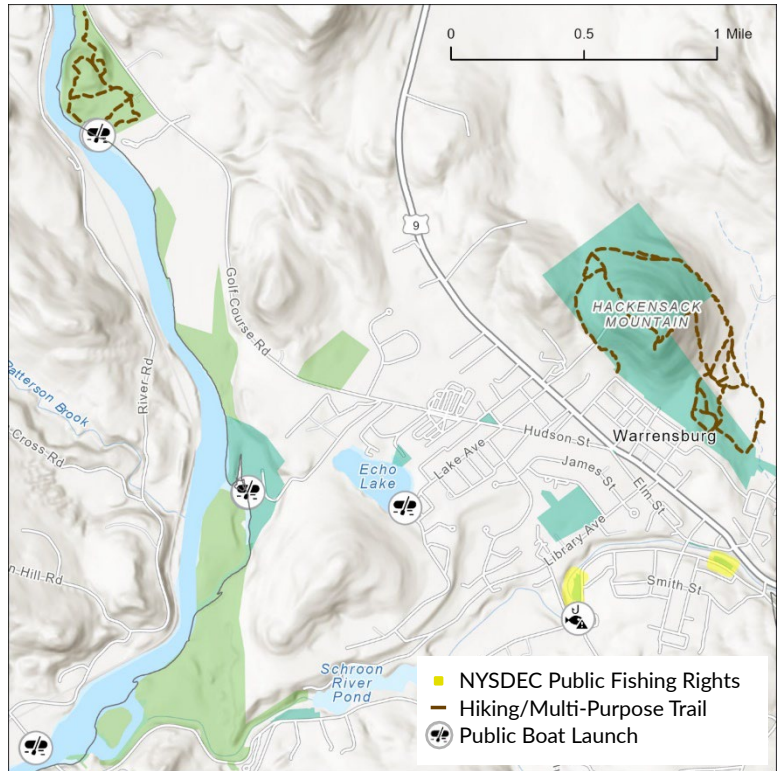
There are 13 private businesses in the Town of Warrensburg that cater directly to outdoor recreation, including seven campgrounds, two sleepaway camps, a whitewater rafting outfitter, and fishing, equestrian, and motorsports dealers. Tourism-oriented jobs accounted for one-quarter (24.5%) of all jobs in Warrensburg, a slightly higher rate than Warren County overall.

OUTDOOR ECONOMY AS LOCAL POLICY:

The 2023 *Town of Warrensburg*

Comprehensive Plan identifies five overarching goals for the Town, including “improve & diversify recreational offerings,” noting that “residents and visitors alike are drawn to Warrensburg’s vast menu of recreational offerings, from skiing and forested walks to water-based activities and local parks” and that there are opportunities to leverage recreational resources for greater community and economic benefit.

The plan identifies a variety of strategies and projects for improving outdoor recreation offerings, including trailhead improvements for Hackensack Mountain trails, exploring the feasibility of trail connections to regional snowmobile trails, the Warren County Bikeway, and the proposed First Wilderness Trail, providing improved recreational amenities at the Warren County Fish Hatchery, and supporting the development of year-round recreation offerings at Hickory Ski Center.



Source: ESRI Business Analyst



STONY CREEK & THURMAN

OUTDOOR RECREATION CONNECTIONS:

Stony Creek (population 758) and Thurman (population 1,095) are the two smallest municipalities in the County by population. Key outdoor recreation opportunities within Stony Creek and Thurman include:

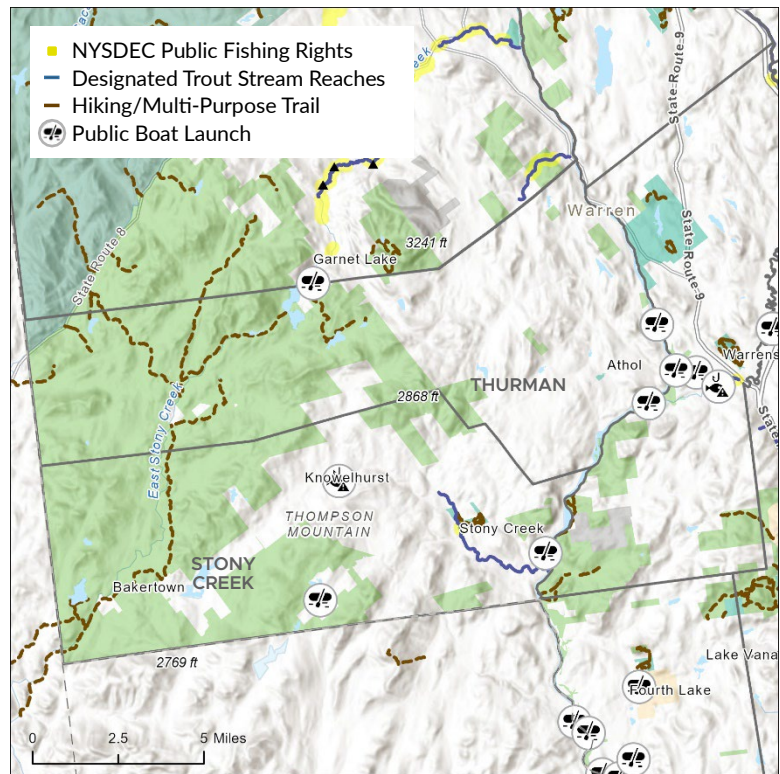
- Crane Mountain, a popular peak known for its rugged hiking trail and summit fire tower.
- The lakes, streams, and trails of the Wilcox Lake Wild Forest.
- The Dean Farm Trails in Stony Creek.

LOCAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY:

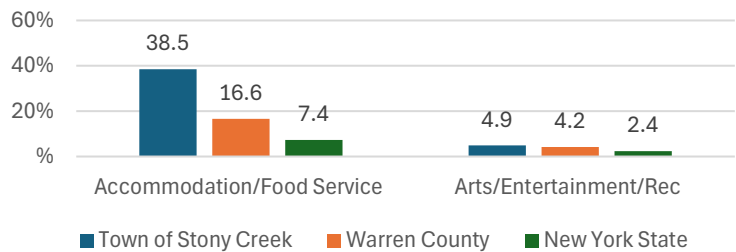
There are six privately-operated lodges and campgrounds spread across Thurman and Stony Creek. Tourism-oriented jobs accounted for over half (52.7%) of jobs in Thurman and nearly half of jobs (43.4%) in Stony Creek.

OUTDOOR ECONOMY AS LOCAL POLICY:

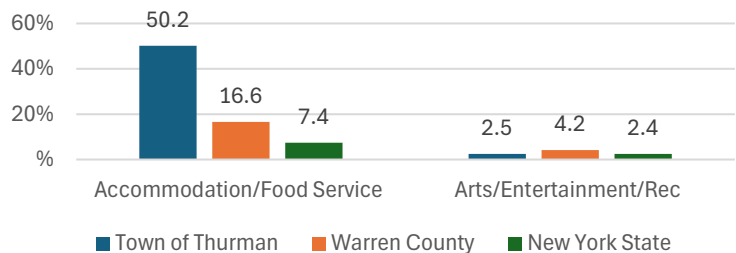
Neither town maintains a comprehensive plan. The NYSDEC-managed Wilcox Lake Wild Forest comprises a significant percentage of the areas of both towns; accordingly, state policy and funding is the primary driver of outdoor recreation offerings and management. The Stony Creek Chamber of Commerce heavily promotes outdoor recreation opportunities and associated accommodations in the area.



Percentage of Total Jobs in Tourism-Oriented Sectors: Stony Creek



Percentage of Total Jobs in Tourism-Oriented Sectors: Thurman



Source: ESRI Business Analyst



Stakeholder and Industry Engagement Summary

Compiled by Larissa Read, Common Ground Consulting

OVERVIEW

Those with industry and community knowledge provide critical perspectives and information during community-focused strategic planning. Stakeholder input in the Warren County Outdoor Recreation Economy Strategic Plan included roundtables focused on eight different outdoor recreation economy sectors. Thirty-four experts participated in the stakeholder and industry roundtables, providing almost 700 comments over ten hours of interviews. The challenges and opportunities shared by the stakeholder and industry experts support and provide detail to the themes included in this Outdoor Recreation Economy Report.

This summary is supported by a full stakeholder report found in Appendix A.

AT THE TABLE

We spoke with industry and community leaders in the following sectors:

- Local governments: municipal and county staff and town managers
- Non-profit environmental organizations: conservation, watershed, and land trusts
- Recreation-oriented businesses: retail shops, outfitters, and guides
- Chambers of commerce, visitor bureaus, and economic development agencies (EDAs)
- Trail user groups: snowmobile clubs, cycling, hiking, and media/events promoters
- Private and developed recreation: recreational vehicle (RV parks, campgrounds, marinas, stables, and YMCA camps
- Lodging partners
- Ski areas and developed snow/four-season resorts

WHAT WE HEARD

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

- Lack of consolidated information source for outdoor recreation
- Lack of housing for employees
- Poor cell coverage
- Lack of public transit for visitors and employees
- High cost of visiting Lake George
- Limited lodging across Warren County for guests
- Limited water access at many lakes including Lake George
- High cost of insurance for outdoor recreation businesses

TRENDS

- Increase in visitor diversity and more family groups
- Increase in active older adult resident and visitor population
- More opportunities to provide environmental and cultural information



- Increase in number and type of cyclists using trails, gravel roads, and paved paths
- Reduction in publicly accessible boat launches and other types of public lake access
- Desire for more beginner and learning opportunities, for mountain biking in particular
- Visitors want more videos and visual information about their choices
- Reliance on over-simplified weather apps deter visitors away from outdoor activities

STRATEGIC NEEDS & PRIORITIES

- Create a consolidated and updated information source
- Develop consistent brand and marketing approach
- Consider use of occupancy tax to support outdoor recreation
- Clarify short-term rental policies across the county
- Plan for and welcome more diverse visitors
- Be ready for shorter, less planned stays
- Prepare for more year-round resident and visitor recreation
- Develop more beginner-friendly and accessible recreation options
- Better public transit
- More off-road trails
- More lake access
- More beginner opportunities
- More parking at busy trailheads
- More weekend-long events
- More benches and bathrooms
- More education about the environment
- Broader regional marketing

OUTDOOR RECREATION AMENITIES: HIGHLIGHTS FROM STAKEHOLDER SUGGESTIONS

- Develop low-barrier, easy walking trails near Lake George and elsewhere
- Invest in more safe shoulders on roads for both residents and visitors to use for commuting and recreation
- Build more disc golf and pickleball courts to serve active older adults and family groups
- Develop location and support to learn mountain biking
- Work with Saratoga County to improve safety and access across Cooper's Cave Bridge
- Develop electric vehicle charging stations
- Support more public transit (bus routes) around the county
- Promote Warren County's water access sites for small craft and fishing
- Provide local cell coverage at trailheads for safety and connectivity
- Provide more basic recreation trail infrastructure, like signage, benches, and public restrooms

WHAT SHOULD THE ROLE OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT BE?

Stakeholders were specifically asked how Warren County could help them deliver high-quality outdoor recreation. Participants across all industries shared the following suggestions for Warren County's role in the outdoor recreation economy.

- Convene regular opportunities for those in the outdoor recreation economy to meet and develop partnerships, coordinate projects, and solicit funding across nonprofits, businesses, municipal and county program staff, and others
- Serve as a liaison between businesses, nonprofits, and hamlets with the State of New York, in particular Department of Environmental Conservation, the Canal Corporation, and the Adirondack



Park Agency, to streamline permitting, provide better public access to lands and waters, and expedite decision-making

- Develop a consolidated website and hard-copy information about outdoor recreation across the county, and allow it to be easily accessible and updated regularly
- Develop educational materials and opportunities for residents, municipal officials, staff, and business owners, and employees to learn about the economic impacts of the outdoor recreation economy
- Develop a brand, identity, and marketing strategy to support all areas of the county, especially those in the northern areas with limited Chamber of Commerce support
- Ensure that County departments are communicating with each other and supporting the outdoor recreation economy (e.g., replacing highway signs for businesses or attractions)
- Develop or support a physical location where basic outdoor recreation equipment can be share or rented, to support users with a range of abilities and financial resources
- Promote more weekend or week-long events, learning from regional successes
- Continue to tackle the issue of affordable housing and transit for employees



Appendix A: Warren County Outdoor Recreation Economy Strategic Plan Industry Roundtable Stakeholder Report

Compiled by Common Ground Consulting, February 2024

INTRODUCTION

Those with industry and community knowledge provide critical perspectives and information during community-focused strategic planning. To this end, experts in eight different outdoor recreation economy sectors were invited to share their perspectives as part of the broader community engagement for the *Warren County Outdoor Recreation Economy Strategic Plan*.

More than 50 stakeholders were invited to one of eight topical meetings, and 34 attended. The meetings were 60 to 90 minutes in length, and were held via Zoom in November 2023, December 2023, and January 2024. The stakeholder meetings were facilitated by Larissa Read of Common Ground Consulting with guidance and support from Warren County planning staff Ethan Gaddy and Sarah Brugger and Alex Belenzs of SE Group.

The attendees have multiple roles in the community beyond their listed role (e.g., a business owner who also serves on a nonprofit board), and thus represent a wide variety of Warren County perspectives. The information documented in this report represents more than 10 hours of interviews and almost 700 comments. In addition to summary findings and highlights, this report also contains specific ideas and phrases used by participants.

WHO WE INVITED: INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

1. local governments: municipal and county staff and town managers
2. nonprofit environmental organizations: conservation, watershed, and land trusts
3. recreation-oriented businesses: retail shops, outfitters, and guides
4. chambers of commerce, visitor bureaus, and economic development agencies (EDAs)
5. trail user groups: snowmobile clubs, cycling, hiking, and media/events promoters
6. private and developed recreation: recreational vehicle (RV parks, campgrounds, marinas, stables, and YMCA camps
7. lodging partners
8. ski areas and developed snow/four-season resorts

WHAT WE ASKED: THEIR VIEWS ON OUR OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY

- Are you satisfied with the availability and quality of outdoor recreation activities in Warren County? Is it easy to find information? Should we focus on attracting more visitors to grow our local economy?
- What are the major obstacles to success for your industry/group in Warren County?



- What trends in outdoor recreation are you seeing? What opportunities do these trends present?
- How can Warren County support you in delivering high-quality outdoor recreation?
- What are your top recommendations for the *Warren County Outdoor Recreation Economy Strategic Plan*?

WHAT WE HEARD: CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

- No updated and consolidated information source about outdoor recreation
- Lack of housing for employees
- Concerns about the "bed tax" usage
- Poor cell coverage/broadband coverage
- Gloomy weather reports affecting visitor decisions
- High cost of insurance for rental equipment, ski resorts, and events
- Lack of public transit for visitors and employees
- Lack of accurate resource and visitor data
- Challenge of marketing to different sectors
- High cost of visiting Lake George region
- Lack of lodging across Warren County for guests
- Lack of water access at many lakes including Lake George
- Unaware of current resources such as the Warren County recreation mapper

WHAT WE HEARD: TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- need for consolidated and updated information source about outdoor recreation
- need for both print and online marketing and information
- need for a "unified brand" across Warren County outdoor recreation economy
- desire for Warren County government to support collaboration and communication
- need for more beginner/entry/accessible options
- desire for more weekend-long events
- desire for clear short-term rental policies
- desire for revisiting of "bed tax"
- plan for and welcome more diverse visitors
- be ready for shorter, less planned stays
- and many suggestions for specific amenities and opportunities (see end of report)

Stakeholders provided numerous suggestions about the Warren County outdoor recreation economy and their ability to provide high-quality recreation experiences. Major themes included amenity development, marketing/identity/promotion ideas, and priority business and employee development ideas, and ways that Warren County government could serve as a leader in the outdoor recreation economy.

The results of these stakeholder interviews will inform the broader *Warren County Outdoor Recreation Economy Strategic Plan*. They will also guide the Warren County Planning Department on key initiatives in the future. The remainder of this report is comprised of two sections: (1) summary reports from each of the eight stakeholder meetings, and (2) specific suggestions categorized to reflect the key themes above.



TOPIC: LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Industry / Stakeholder Roundtable Report #1

Monday, November 20, 2023, 9:00-10:30am

Attendees:

- 1) Dan Barusch, Town of Lake George (Planning & Zoning)
- 2) Don Lehman, Warren County (Public Affairs)
- 3) Dane Morton, Lake Luzerne (Planning Board)
- 4) Joshua Westfall, Town of Bolton (Planning & Zoning)
- 5) Kristin Wilde, Warren County (Up Yonda Farm)

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON THE AVAILABILITY, QUALITY, AND INFORMATION ABOUT OUTDOOR RECREATION IN WARREN COUNTY?

- There is a wide variety of opportunities at different ability levels
- Warren County provides strong support to towns with mapping, marketing, and general engagement
- The Warren County tourism department is improving and helpful
- Tri-state area guests are ready for adventure and are ready to try new things
- There is no central location to find information about outdoor recreation

WHAT ARE YOUR MAJOR OBSTACLES TO SUCCESS?

- Towns and elected officials do not understand the magnitude of the impact that the outdoor recreation economy has on the community and our economy
- Funding for outdoor recreation is often lower priority than other local government needs
- Historically, there is an over-reliance on New York State to provide and fund outdoor recreation opportunities
- There is no central location to find all the information about outdoor recreation; there are so many different, confusing websites
- There is a lack of a strong identity for Warren County as an outdoor recreation area
- We know that Warren County competes with Lake Placid and the High Peaks for visitors and events
- The lack of cell coverage/broadband is not likely to be solved soon, so other ways of communication must be enhanced
- There is a disconnect between Warren County government departments that leads to inefficiencies

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The diversity of visitors is increasing, especially on holiday weekends and Saratoga track season.
 - *We must grow and sustain this trend, and help diverse visitors flourish here.*
- As government entities, we are getting more requests for ways to improve the short-term rental situation to address accommodation needs, esp. in winter when hotels/motels close.
 - *We would benefit from clarifying and enhancing short-term rental opportunities.*
- Our population is aging.
 - *We must pay attention to and prepare for active older adults.*
- Fishing license receipts are falling, but it's hard to know if there are fewer anglers or more people fishing without licenses.
 - *We need more information about what water-based recreation trends are truly occurring.*



HOW CAN WARREN COUNTY SUPPORT YOU IN DELIVERING HIGH-QUALITY OUTDOOR RECREATION?

- Convene regular opportunities for those in outdoor recreation to meet and develop partnerships within Warren County
- Help us promote other parts of Warren County beyond the Lake George region
- Help towns and county departments connect to funding opportunities

LOCAL GOVERNMENT: TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PLAN

- Develop a website to serve as a central location for all Warren County outdoor recreation information, and provide hard-copy information
- Share outdoor recreation information with towns and recreation providers, lodging partners, employers, and chambers of commerce
- Develop consistent identity and branding across the county, including towns
- Clarify and provide ways to convey the importance and impact of outdoor recreation on the economy to local government decision-makers
- Convene opportunities for local government to have regular outdoor recreation discussions and strengthen our relationships



TOPIC: NON-PROFIT ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Industry / Stakeholder Roundtable Report #2

Date & Time: Monday, November 20, 2023, 1:00-2:30pm

Attendees:

- 1) Jackie Bowen, Adirondack Council
- 2) Jamie Brown, Land Trust Alliance & Queensbury Land Trust
- 3) Kim Brown, Adirondack Mountain Club, Glens Falls/Saratoga
- 4) Julia Goren, Adirondack Mountain Club
- 5) Megan Stevenson, Adirondack Land Trust
- 6) Jim Schneider, Adirondack Mountain Club, Glens Falls/Saratoga

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON THE AVAILABILITY, QUALITY, AND INFORMATION ABOUT OUTDOOR RECREATION IN WARREN COUNTY?

- There is no central hub for information about outdoor recreation
- Visitors and residents find out about opportunities in a variety of ways
- There is an opportunity to expand interpretation and education about natural resources
- There are few locations for beginners to learn new activities such as mountain biking
- If you meet the needs of people that live here, they will be more welcoming of visitors

WHAT ARE YOUR MAJOR OBSTACLES TO SUCCESS?

- Many visitors bypass the NYS Adirondacks Welcome Center at Exit 17 and instead go directly to boat washing stations, thus missing an opportunity for orientation to the region
- Environmental nonprofits are concerned about “getting ahead of ourselves” by promoting visitation and outdoor recreation without clear knowledge of current conditions, projected visitor patterns, and expected impacts
- Nonprofits do not know enough about what local government agencies are doing in outdoor recreation, and what their needs or opportunities might be for partnerships
- Providing housing for our regional workforce is especially challenging in Warren County and the Adirondacks because of the highly seasonal visitor patterns (i.e., busy summer and quiet winter)

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- NY State and other partners are not investing in trail maintenance.
 - *There is an opportunity to promote community engagement and resource protection alongside trail maintenance projects.*
- The region is seeing an increase in visitor diversity.
 - *Warren County could support regional initiatives to provide welcoming, safe spaces for diverse visitors.*
- Decisions about outdoor recreation are being made without adequate information.
 - *Warren County could lead visitor use management studies and implementation.*
- As terrestrial and aquatic invasive species expand, there are growing concerns about impacts on regional natural resources.
 - *This is an opportunity to educate and engage residents and visitors about invasive species management and how it relates to outdoor recreation.*
- There is an increasing demand for a variety of activities, especially water-based activities.
 - *Similarly, this trend is an opportunity to provide interpretation and education about natural resources and the environment that are core elements of Warren County outdoor recreation.*



HOW CAN WARREN COUNTY SUPPORT YOU IN DELIVERING HIGH-QUALITY OUTDOOR RECREATION?

- Convene regular opportunities for environmental nonprofit staff and volunteers to meet with Warren County and partners to coordinate projects and identify funding
- Help us connect with and impress upon NYS the need for accurate mapping, data collection, and visitor use management planning
- Help us identify where in Warren County are potential locations or opportunities for new or expanded preservation or outdoor recreation

NONPROFIT ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS: TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PLAN

- Improve the quality, quantity, and availability of natural resource, cultural resource, and visitor data collection, mapping, and asset identification
- Promote and develop sound visitor use management as an aspect of future decision-making
- Provide more opportunities for beginners and diverse visitors
- Enhance and support opportunities for natural and cultural interpretation and education
- Revisit how occupancy taxes are used, and encourage their expenditure on trail maintenance, invasive species management, and visitor impact mitigation



TOPIC: RECREATION-ORIENTED BUSINESSES

Industry / Stakeholder Roundtable Report #3

Monday, November 27, 2023, 9:00-10:30am

Attendees:

- 1) Jackson Donnelly, Hike With Jackson
- 2) Niles Gagnon, Grey Ghost Bicycles
- 3) Jeff Goldberg, Fish307

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON THE AVAILABILITY, QUALITY, AND INFORMATION ABOUT OUTDOOR RECREATION IN WARREN COUNTY?

- There is a wide range of quality outdoor recreation opportunities in Warren County
- Opportunities are well-known to local and residents, but harder for visitors to find
- The Warren County Bikeway is successful and popular due to its route and easy terrain
- Visitors have limited time and want to carefully chose how they spend that time
- Warren County has a smooth process for a small business owner to set up their business

WHAT ARE YOUR MAJOR OBSTACLES TO SUCCESS?

- Visitors feel overwhelmed with unconsolidated and mixed types of information on which to make their outdoor recreation decisions
- While some websites/apps have downsides, one strong point about third-party apps is that trail users can report and assess real-time conditions
- We need both hardcopy and online information to combat lack of internet/broadband coverage
- Local lodging and restaurant staff are often asked by visitors where to hike, bike, or boat, but they do not have adequate information about opportunities and difficulty levels
- Road safety is declining and/or perceived to be declining across the region, both of which are problematic in the outdoor recreation community
- Visitors want to assess the “wow” factor when making decisions about how to spend their limited time and resources
- There is shortage of public transportation options and limited parking at popular locations, restricting potential visitor access and use
- There are few public launch sites on major lakes, which restricts public access to our most popular water bodies

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Experienced road cyclists do not want to ride on our roads anymore due to safety concerns and seek quieter gravel roads or paved trails. More cyclists are coming through the area with Empire Trail promotion and development.
 - *Regional cycling and trail networks are attracting an increasing number of locals and visitors, generating support and need for new trails, trail connections and itineraries, and related amenities.*
- Lake George continues to become more expensive as a destination, and public access is decreasing. Anglers are choosing not to fish on Lake George and are traveling to lakes such as Champlain and Ontario because of limited access and high cost.
 - *We have an opportunity to reestablish Lake George as a premier location for fishing and watersports, but we will need strong public-private partnerships to change the status quo about access.*
- Cycling and hiking remain popular activities, and more families are trying mountain biking.
 - *There is a continued opportunity to develop and promote safe and varied hiking and cycling opportunities in the region for users of all ability levels.*



HOW CAN WARREN COUNTY SUPPORT YOU IN DELIVERING HIGH-QUALITY OUTDOOR RECREATION?

- Convene regular gatherings of businesses who work in the outdoor recreation industry and local chambers of commerce to share ideas and promote unified marketing
- Support regulations to restrict private use of bubblers and ice heaters on Lake George and other water bodies, which result in safety concerns and restrict public access
- Work with Saratoga County to improve safety and multi-modal use across Cooper's Cave Bridge (the bridge connecting Glens Falls and South Glens Falls)

RECREATION-ORIENTED BUSINESSES: TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PLAN

- Develop a website to serve as a central location for all outdoor recreation information, and include real-time trail conditions if possible
- Create itineraries with detailed information so users can evaluate different outdoor recreation opportunities and make informed decisions about how to use their time in Warren County
- Support policies and amenities to improve public access to lakes, rivers, and public beaches and launch sites
- Open the public lands and watershed protection areas north and west of West Mountain to public access and use



TOPIC: CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES (EDAS)

Industry / Stakeholder Roundtable Report #4
Monday, November 27, 2023, 11:00am -12:30pm

Attendees:

- 1) Steve Magee, Lake George Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau
- 2) Jim Siplon, Warren County Economic Development Council
- 3) Suzanne Tyler, Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce
- 4) John Wheatley, Warren County Economic Development Council

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON THE AVAILABILITY, QUALITY, AND INFORMATION ABOUT OUTDOOR RECREATION IN WARREN COUNTY?

- Opportunities for many different types of activities are a major draw to Warren County
- Locals know about outdoor recreation opportunities, but visitors cannot find consolidated information
- Business owners are doing a lot of the promotion of outdoor recreation but do not have accurate information
- A lack of continuity of messaging and promotion makes it seem like businesses and communities are in competition with each other, though we may not be

WHAT ARE YOUR MAJOR OBSTACLES TO SUCCESS?

- There is a lack of a range of lodging and accommodations for visitors
- There is a lack of housing for seasonal workforce
- The lack of cell coverage/broadband is both a real issue and a perception problem
- Many of our outdoor activities are, or are perceived to be, weather-dependent
- Smaller towns like Stony Creek and Lake Luzerne have less presence in Warren County
- Visitors do not understand the geography of our county, and that is normal to travel between locales

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- More visitors are asking about mountain biking opportunities than in the past.
 - *We are starting to see how impactful mountain biking is on our outdoor recreation economy and what draws visitors to our region.*
- More visitors want multi-day frisbee golf opportunities, and some towns are seeing a major growth in pickleball.
 - *Both residents and visitors are engaging in emerging outdoor recreation activities, and our communities should respond proactively.*
- Many visitors do not know or care what town or county they are in when visiting the region.
 - *We have an opportunity to promote Warren County as a cohesive region.*
- Visitors are becoming more diverse, but some residents are not ready for conversations about diversity, equity, and belonging.
 - *We have an opportunity to create a stronger, more impactful dialog and outcomes around inclusivity and diversity for visitors and residents alike.*

HOW CAN WARREN COUNTY SUPPORT YOU IN DELIVERING HIGH-QUALITY OUTDOOR RECREATION?

- Develop a website / central location for all information, and provide hard-copy information
- Develop education materials and opportunities for municipal officials, staffs, and business owners to learn about the economic impacts of the outdoor recreation economy



- Support local residents' understanding of the impacts of outdoor recreation on our local economy with clear and regular information (e.g., "tourism pays for part of your taxes")
- Host regular conversations with those who are part of the outdoor recreation economy

CHAMBERS AND EDAS: TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PLAN

- Promote a clear messaging campaign to local residents about the positive impacts of outdoor recreation on our community, including financial benefits and amenities
- Quantify financial and other impacts for elected officials, and provide regular updates and education as staff and elected officials change frequently
- Advocate for our natural resources: elected officials and other decision-makers should understand that there is considerable growth potential in outdoor recreation in Warren County that does not depend on traditional development; our natural resources are a major draw in themselves, and warrant support



TOPIC: TRAIL USER GROUPS

Industry / Stakeholder Roundtable Report #5

Monday, November 27, 2023, 1:30-3:00pm

Attendees:

- 1) Darryl Caron, Adirondack Sports publisher and Adirondack Sports Expos events
- 2) Doug Haney, Bike Adirondacks and Great Range communications
- 3) Barbara Joudry, Adirondack Cycling Advocates
- 4) Patrick McGowan, Northwest Trailblazer Club and cottages owner
- 5) Pattie Simone, Feeder Canal Alliance
- 6) Mike Zilm, South Warren Snowmobile Club

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON THE AVAILABILITY, QUALITY, AND INFORMATION ABOUT OUTDOOR RECREATION IN WARREN COUNTY?

- There is general satisfaction with the availability and opportunities and quality overall, though there are some aspects that could be improved
- Locals and visitors can enjoy a variety of trails, land-based and water-based activities
- It seems that towns and the county support our local businesses and have good relationships
- It is difficult to find information about amenities, activities, locations, and events

WHAT ARE YOUR MAJOR OBSTACLES TO SUCCESS?

- Local residents do not appreciate that visitors are good for our economy
- There is no organized, central information hub to share with our trail users
- We do not have enough weekend or weeklong regional trail events
- Our trail systems are not well-signed, and lack bathrooms and other basic amenities like trash/recycling and benches
- Mountain bike trails seem to be little islands unto themselves, not well connected across the county
- There are few places to rent equipment, such as snowshoes, bikes, or snowmobiles, because insurance costs are extremely prohibitive and only a few businesses have taken this on

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- We are seeing more visitors who are beginners and request learning opportunities.
We should share the message that it is safe to try new outdoor activities in Warren County, and we are prepared to encourage beginners, families, and visitors of different abilities.
- Snowmobile rentals and use are strong; local clubs have robust memberships of local and through-riders.
We can increase support to the snowmobile community with continued support for snowmobile trails, related planning efforts (e.g., easements), and amenities.
- There is good availability of trails for different user ability levels.
We have an opportunity to promote the current variety of flat, gravel, and paved trails in Warren County.
- The cycling community is changing, including local cyclists, commuters, and visitors.
We should prepare for a continued increase in e-bikes and support, amenities, and infrastructure such as e-bike rental stations. There is also an opportunity to provide off-road or gravel road options.
- Increasing pressure for mountain biking trails has led to the misunderstanding that snowmobile trails must also be good mountain biking trails.
As a group, we believe this expectation is false, for safety, environmental, and property rights' reasons, and we should educate the public about this.



HOW CAN WARREN COUNTY SUPPORT YOU IN DELIVERING HIGH-QUALITY OUTDOOR RECREATION?

- Promote the clean environment and high-quality natural resources in Warren County
- Support our relationships with New York State and the Canal Corporation to coordinate and expedite decisions that overlap with state-owned or state-managed lands and waters
- Develop or support a physical location where basic outdoor recreation equipment could be share or rented, to support users with a range of abilities and financial resources
- Develop and promote more weekend or week-long events, learning from regional successes
- Provide more investment to develop safe shoulders on regional and county roads, not just for tourists but for residents who are commuting by cycling or walking

TRAIL USER GROUPS: TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PLAN

- Promote a culture shift towards the quality and fun for recreation enthusiasts of all ability levels
- Provide more basic infrastructure such as off-road trails, consistent signage, open bathrooms, and benches
- Promote more weekend events that are focused on learning and celebrating one type of activity



TOPIC: PRIVATE AND DEVELOPED RECREATION

Industry / Stakeholder Roundtable Report #6

Tuesday, November 28, 2023, 9:00-10:30am

Attendees:

- 1) Jiné Andreozzi, YMCA Camp Chingachgook
- 2) Jaime DeLong, Tubby Tubes
- 3) Natalie Droddy, 1000 Acres Ranch
- 4) David King, Lake George RV Park
- 5) Kellye Shaw, Adirondack Extreme and Tubby Tubes
- 6) Gary Thornquist, Lake George RV Park and Lake George Chamber of Commerce

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON THE AVAILABILITY, QUALITY, AND INFORMATION ABOUT OUTDOOR RECREATION IN WARREN COUNTY?

- Visitors want visual information to make decisions about their activities
- We are seeing a strong growth in interest and requests for a variety of outdoor recreation activities
- We are experiencing a clear recovery from the pandemic, including but not limited to more kids, more families, and more diverse visitors

WHAT ARE YOUR MAJOR OBSTACLES TO SUCCESS?

- A lack of cell coverage is especially problematic for visitors and seasonal staff
- There is no consolidated source for outdoor recreation information, and our current tourism guides and maps focus on attractions and restaurants, but not information about trails, natural resources, or sights
- It is tough to compete with LakeGeorge.com, which has very strong search engine optimization; this makes it difficult for us to promote our websites and opportunities
- Because year-round staffing is extremely limited, the services and recreation opportunities we can offer are similarly constrained to the summer season
- Elected officials and local governing boards change often; we are “constantly having to re-educate them about tourism and the bed tax”
- Overnight and day use patterns have changed, leading to more last-minute reservations, and shorter visits overall
- Visitors’ dependence on summarized weather information is hindering decision-making; an over-simplified weather app icon for clouds or rain quickly deters visitors (which often doesn’t materialize)

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- We are seeing more local and regional students, as school districts stay closer to home.
This is an opportunity to promote our business and community, and possibly grow our regional and local clientele and program attendees.
- Same-day bookings due to weather information are a major challenge for staffing and program delivery, and our visitors are frank about it.
We have an opportunity to educate visitors and regional media that our weather is variable, safe, and enjoyable.
- Compared to the past, guests now stay for shorter durations and undertake more activities in one shorter trip.
Better decision-making tools and information, including videos, will allow visitors to make better choices. More early-week specials could also tap into those with flexible schedules.
- Our current marketing approach seems to combine all visitors together. But in reality, there are two groups: day trips by regional visitors and overnight trips by visitors coming from farther away.



We would benefit from recognizing these two different market sectors: day visitors and overnight visitors.

- Parents seem more eager than in the past to learn new activities, and more families are signing up for programs.

This shift in user ability and skill level warrants increasing opportunities for beginner and entry-level activities for all abilities.

HOW CAN WARREN COUNTY SUPPORT YOU IN DELIVERING HIGH-QUALITY OUTDOOR RECREATION?

- Support policies for larger and more business signage on roadways
- Redesign TV8 to include more businesses and support updating videos easily
- Work with towns on providing better on-street parking (e.g., Glen Lake Road)
- Remember that we small businesses rely on Warren County to advertise leisure travel, while group travel and conventions are promoted through visitor bureaus

PRIVATE AND DEVELOPED RECREATION: TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PLAN

- Project the visitors we want to see here in our marketing, especially diverse visitors
- Develop a consolidated website and hard-copy materials that can compete with other media and websites
- Always keep in mind that Lake George's attractions make us feel invincible, but we should not become complacent about our status and that of other compelling locations



TOPIC: LODGING AND ACCOMMODATIONS

Industry / Stakeholder Roundtable Report #7

Tuesday, November 28, 2023, 11:00am-12:30pm

Attendees:

- 1) Tyler Herrick, The Queensbury Hotel
- 2) Sam Luciano, Fort William Henry Hotel

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON THE AVAILABILITY, QUALITY, AND INFORMATION ABOUT OUTDOOR RECREATION IN WARREN COUNTY?

- Visitation and lodging are strong in the summertime, but we need to improve visitor and workforce amenities for year-round residents and visitors
- Warren County is unique in the northeast in that has an abundance of outdoor recreation, lakes and mountains while also having indoor recreation activities like bowling and video arcades
- Visitor return rates are indicative of what we can offer: they are coming back in high numbers since the pandemic, and we are seeing both higher visitor numbers, and higher percentages of returning visitors

WHAT ARE YOUR MAJOR OBSTACLES TO SUCCESS?

- Housing and transit for our workforce are the biggest obstacles to our success in lodging
- J-1 students tell their home programs about sub-par living and work situations; we cannot afford that bad reputation overseas, since we are so seasonally dependent on those workers
- There is no consolidated website to which we can send visitors for recreation information and lodging reservations
- It is hard for mom-and-pop lodging to compete with chains and larger venues, now that stays are much shorter (mom-and-pop accommodations were historically for week-long rentals)
- Working with New York State agencies such as Department of Environmental Conservation and the Adirondack Park Agency is extremely slow; the slow pace of decision-making impacts our ability to move forward on planning and projects
- The lack of interconnected trail system is an issue for lodging partners, as there few connected trails to suggest to visitors (even if we have bikes for guests on site)

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Shorter trip durations and last-minute bookings change how lodging partners operate and plan for staffing, including housekeeping.
We must rethink our advertising to attract a variety of guests to accommodate these changing booking patterns.
- There are more diverse visitors coming to the area, based on shifts in the global economy.
We should plan ahead: more diverse visitors often travel in larger groups and prefer multi-room / multi-bed units, request different foods, and are aided by information in other languages.
- There are fewer learn-to-ski programs than in the past, and ski resorts offer more limited packages.
There is an opportunity to reinstate learn-to-ski programs partnered with accommodations to provide real value and convenience to guests.
- More people of all ages and backgrounds are using technology to explore and make decisions about their vacations. They are especially interested in video content.
Redesigning TV8 and making it easier for mom-and-pop lodging could level the playing field and provide more information and options for overnight guests.
- Younger guests want experiences related to their accommodations, not just a place to stay.



Simple adjustments like adding a fire pit and providing s'mores drive new guests to our accommodations and improve the likelihood of their returning.

HOW CAN WARREN COUNTY SUPPORT YOU IN DELIVERING HIGH-QUALITY OUTDOOR RECREATION?

- Develop unified branding that includes Warren County and towns
- Develop a clearinghouse for information that can be accessed easily by lodging partners (e.g., with a “go-board” in the lobby) as well as hard-copy information
- Redesign and promote TV8 so that content can easily be updated by businesses and groups

LODGING AND ACCOMMODATIONS: TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PLAN

- Proactively anticipate and plan for major shifts in visitation overall, especially diversity
- Continue the efforts around workforce housing and transit, which are major drivers of what the lodging industry in Warren County can provide
- Proactively anticipate and plan for more residents moving to the area, especially with teleworking and the local technology industry increasing
- Impress upon decision-makers to heed tourism industry evidence that investment in three major areas pays off in the long-run: marketing, arenas and venues for events, and beautification



TOPIC: SKI AND DEVELOPED SNOW RESORTS

Industry / Stakeholder Roundtable Report #8

Tuesday, January 23, 2024, 1:00-2:00pm

Attendees:

- 1) Sue Catana, Hickory Ski Center
- 2) Julia Johnson, Gore Mountain and North Creek Ski Bowl

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON THE AVAILABILITY, QUALITY, AND INFORMATION ABOUT OUTDOOR RECREATION IN WARREN COUNTY?

- There is a satisfactory diversity of ski opportunities and ability levels in Warren County
- Ski resort visitation has rebounded since the pandemic, and the three Warren County ski resorts are seeing high visitation numbers
- Skiers and snowboarders are interested in and are purchasing a variety of ticket options, such as season passes, multi-day packs, day-of tickets, discount passes, and reciprocal passes
- Visitors show a strong interest in access to a wide range of terrain, from beginner to expert, groomed and ungroomed, etc.
- Managers and visitors both desire more support of the ski areas that are not NY State-owned ski areas (Gore, Belleayre, or Whiteface)

WHAT ARE YOUR MAJOR OBSTACLES TO SUCCESS?

- Finding staff to work at the ski resorts is one of the biggest challenges, and it is tied to workforce housing availability
- For non-NY State owned ski resorts, insurance rates are extremely high and present a major financial challenge
- It is difficult to access capital for improvement, and staff have little time to write grant applications
- Visitors like “vintage” equipment, but it is extremely expensive to fabricate, permit, and maintain
- Signage on local highways and I-87 has been removed, reducing our visibility to visitors
- The permitting process with the Adirondack Park Agency is cumbersome and slow (e.g., for ski area planning, detention ponds, and near wetlands)

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Our primary visitor base continues to draw from the tri-state area, Boston, and the Capital District.
We have a continued opportunity to market Warren County as a destination for those within a four-hour driving distance.
- It is noteworthy that despite the conglomerate ski passes now available (e.g., Epic and Ikon passes), visitors are willing to bypass ski areas in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont to come ski at smaller resorts in New York.
We have a broad opportunity to market and capitalize on the unique variety and differences between the three ski areas within Warren County to compete with larger ski corporations.
- Climate change, staffing, and finances all pose challenges that require all ski and winter resorts in NY State to consider four-season amenities and activities for visitors.
We have begun to understand the importance of four-season recreational opportunities such as mountain biking, golf, and local accommodations. We must continue to plan for this changing environment, as they require substantial financial investments.
- Visitors request assistance in deciding how to spend their time in the region. They are looking for streamlined information sources and opportunities.
We are beginning to offer multi-opportunity packages with other businesses in the region, and we are finding success with this model. Continued partnerships across the outdoor recreation economy will be essential to meet visitor expectations.



HOW CAN WARREN COUNTY SUPPORT YOU IN DELIVERING HIGH-QUALITY OUTDOOR RECREATION?

- Support an expansion of the lower Warren County chambers of commerce to include more robust participation in North Creek and other more northerly locations in the county
- Develop a mechanism to provide insurance at reasonable costs to smaller ski resorts and businesses who provide outdoor recreation equipment rentals, because insurance costs are currently prohibitive
- Cross-market all three Warren County ski resorts together, emphasizing their unique differences and offerings as part of a complete range of winter and four-season opportunities
- Collaborate between Warren County transportation and other highway districts to ensure ski resort signage is up-to-date and intact on regional roadways

SKI AND DEVELOPED SNOW RESORTS: TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PLAN

- Recognize and support the differences between the three Warren County ski resorts, including acknowledgement of their different funding and financial models and impacts on the county economy
- Provide opportunities for cross-marketing of the ski and four-season resorts in Warren County
- Streamline mechanisms for private businesses to access infrastructure monies and employee pools



IMPROVING THE OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY IN WARREN COUNTY - SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders shared specific ideas about amenities, capital improvements, programs, policies, and regional efforts they would like to see in the future. These suggestions are captured below.

AMENITIES AND CAPITAL PROJECTS

- develop low-barrier walking trails (where it is "okay to be in flip-flops")
- develop a beginner hiking trail near Lake George
- provide more environmental and cultural education and interpretation
- be ready for more diverse residents and visitors (e.g. picnic facilities for larger groups)
- build more disc golf - it is a multipurpose space, and people visit multiple courses
- develop more pickleball courts - active older adult population is clamoring for courts
- develop rail line along Hudson - opportunity for businesses and parallel walking path
- support more watersports (which supports wide range of ability levels)
- develop location and support to learn mountain biking
- support more bike rentals and e-bike/CDTA bikes
- develop electric vehicle charging stations
- provide more green buses - more routes around the county
- remove telecommunications equipment from Gore Mountain to attract more visitors
- improve signage and access at Exit 18 launch at Hudson River Park and keep the gate open year-round
- promote Warren County's water access sites for small craft and fishing along trails
- provide cell coverage at trailheads for safety and connectivity
- provide more basic recreation trail infrastructure, like signage and benches
- ensure that public bathrooms are clean, accessible, and open

BUSINESS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- standardize short-term rental policies
- revisit occupancy tax collection and distribution / use (using Queensbury as a model)
- provide better access to NYS employee pool, including parolees, students, and retirees
- host difficult community conversations about affordable housing (EDAs offered to host)
- provide materials about outdoor recreation that can be used to train J-1 and SUNY ADK students, for their own use and to share with visitors
- continue working with CDTA on bus routes year-round for staffing

MARKETING, PROMOTION, AND IDENTITY

- be very clear with locals/residents about the financial impact of the outdoor recreation economy - what is the impact of having visitors here, what it "pays" in terms of your taxes
- support our niche market for entry-level outdoor experiences
- market our beginner experiences like "walking to a bog, not a peak"
- develop more weekend events like fishing derbies and bikeathons
- develop and promote a variety of visitor itineraries
- provide more information about winter activities in particular
- promote 4-season fun opportunities like "poker runs"
- increase the fun factor
- support a culture shift towards experiences, not elite athletes



- provide universal, consistent signage for attractions and wayfinding
- allow more business signage across the county, including road signs
- advertise that weather apps do not tell the whole story – rain is normal and nice in the Adirondacks, and often much less prevalent than what is shown on app
- remind visitors that 30' drive is normal in Warren County
- focus more on visitors within a 4-hour drive – NYC, Boston, Montreal – for event planning
- use letterboxing as example of what works: the materials themselves did the “heavy lifting” for people to explore the area
- work with influencers from NYC and NJ for regional advertising
- promote more to youth/scouts/sports teams, etc. – they bring their families back the next year
- develop consistent marketing across Warren County, towns, and local chambers
- make hotels aware of all the recreation opportunities and other local businesses
- encourage hotels to buy “go boards” that are interactive; Warren County can provide the content, but the hotel purchases the board
- station a steward at the Exit 17 welcome center
- join Leave No Trace for promotion and financial support
- tell the Warren County story as part of the Adirondacks as a whole
- support cross-marketing of all three Warren County ski resorts
- increase promotion of why boat washing stations are important
- teach visitors about invasive aquatics (and stop blaming only the anglers)
- when developing websites, reduce confusion with Lakegeorge.com

WARREN COUNTY LEADERSHIP (E.G., "WARREN COUNTY COULD...")

- convene local governments to discuss and align priorities
- clarify and promote the impact of outdoor recreation on our local economy with real data that can be shared with locals/residents
- bolster the assets we already have (e.g., disc golf at hatchery, our boat launches, our own hiking trails)
- develop a county-wide vision for connected trails
- help us with State relationships, such as getting decisions made in timely manner at NYS Department of Environmental Conservation work with towns on more on-street parking near popular trailheads and destinations
- improve and lead data collection about visitor use management, desired conditions, and monitoring
- talk to other counties about their outdoor recreation
- send a strong message to NY State to provide more public access on Lake George and other popular lakes
- explore whether the county could provide insurance for ski resorts and rental equipment
- provide consistent information to chambers, so they can train businesses
- support consistency in shoulder/roadway rebuilds; work across town/political lines
- support public transit expansion, and solicit the public's feedback on the timing and types of services needed
- support bubbler policy consistency and enforcement
- streamline permitting (e.g., for YMCA camps); duplicate permits for Warren County and the Adirondack Park is inefficient
- revisit and reconsider how the bed tax is used

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