

# Clarence Fahnestock Memorial and Hudson Highlands State Parks Draft Master Plan / Draft Environmental Impact Statement

## Summary of Public Comments from the Public Information Meeting and Comment Period

*Prepared on November 20, 2009*



David A. Paterson  
Governor

Carol Ash  
Commissioner

Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

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## Introduction

As part of the process of producing a Master Plan for Clarence Fahnestock Memorial and Hudson Highlands State Parks, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) held a public information meeting on September 22, 2009.

During that meeting several OPRHP staff members participated in a presentation that described the master plan process, the current goals and objectives of the agency, and the history of both Clarence Fahnestock Memorial and Hudson Highlands State Parks. An information packet with more detailed information was available and is attached as an addendum to this summary.

Most importantly the meeting provided the opportunity for public input to the master plan. This opportunity was given, at the meeting, by inviting oral comments at the time of the meeting and/or written comments to be received at OPRHP on or before October 23, 2009. Many people spoke at the meeting and their comments were captured by OPRHP staff on flip charts. These

captured comments were then transcribed and categorized by the planning team working on the Clarence Fahnestock Memorial and Hudson Highlands State Parks Master Plan.

During the comment period the agency has received a significant amount of comments by email and postal mail. Those comments have also been categorized.

The following is a summary of the comments received at the Public Information Meeting and the written comments received during the comment period. The comments are not in any order of importance.

# Summary of Public Comments

## ***Planning***

- Develop a better connection between Fahnestock and Hudson Highlands.
- Make recreation a priority.
- Plan, site and design a central visitor center for the park—being so close to NYC really calls for a visitor center to welcome, orient and educate visitors.
- Ensure that all potential activities are considered appropriately in relation to the NYC watershed.
- Design and locate recreational facilities to assure that they do not exceed the parkland's capacity to withstand use.
- Identify areas with environmental sensitivity and direct development away from such areas.

## ***Protection and Preservation***

- Protect the scenic resources of the park from the impacts of cell towers and wind farms.
- Protect the Bird Conservation Areas (BCA) in both parks.
- Prioritize land protection opportunities.
- Provide protective buffers around and within both parks.
- Expand the scenic, ecological and recreational resources of both parks through new land acquisitions.
- Consider whether select locations within the parks should be classified as park preserve areas (or) natural heritage areas.
- Design and locate all activities, structures and infrastructure to minimize visual impacts and to fit in to the park's setting.

## ***Natural Resources***

- Develop early detection and rapid response to invasive species.
- Develop a forest management plan.
- Encourage the growth of native species.
- Ecological communities should be identified and managed for birds.
- Identify the locations of wetlands that may require management, particularly for invasive species control.
- Encourage and support native plant and animal species.
- Provide a detailed description of the extent and types of wetland resources of both parks.
- Ensure that the DEIS demonstrates that any proposed projects have considered alternatives that avoid earthwork on slopes in excess of 20%.
- For any proposed development, ensure the DEIS considers design options that maintain current groundwater recharge capacity.
- Ensure the DEIS addresses the potential for alterations to drainage patterns and assess any impacts to wetlands and streams.
- Protect, manage and maintain areas important as habitat for rare, threatened, endangered or special concern flora and fauna and community types.

- Maintain, restore and/or enhance the natural environment, where appropriate, to improve the quality of natural resources and support biodiversity of flora and fauna.

### ***Cultural Resources***

- Consider the archeology of the area when planning.
- Consider placing historically significant structures on the National and State Historic Register.
- Protect and preserve all of the park's historic resources and archeologically sensitive areas.
- Preserve and interpret cultural resources of the parks.
- Develop programs which educate the public about and interpret the history of the park (and surrounding area).
- Restore, renovate and adaptive reuse of historic structures.

### ***Safety***

- Route 9D between Beacon and Cold Spring is unsafe for hikers and cyclists.
- Put in crosswalks across Route 9D.
- Deer are a significant safety concern along the adjacent roadways.
- Develop an emergency response plan for Hudson Highlands.
- Ensure coordination between emergency response plans with park partners.
- Develop separate pedestrian pathways adjacent to roads to improve safety.

### ***Traffic and Parking***

- Improve parking situation along Route 9D; as it is now parking is limited and dangerous.
- Reduce speed limit on roadways adjacent to the parks.
- Improve parking areas for horse trailers.
- Reduce the speed limit on 9D, especially near Little Stony Point.
- Explore the feasibility of installing a traffic light on 9D near points of interest.
- Develop a parking area at the end of the Notch Trail.

### ***Park Facilities***

- Provide more electric campsites in the campground.
- Improve the cabins at TOEC.
- Improve lighting at changing and bathrooms at Winter Park / Canopus Beach.
- Pave the parking lot near the Winter Park / Canopus Beach.
- Improve grading and drainage near the Winter Park lodge.
- Put in blinds for photographers and bird watchers.
- Continue to maintain Hubbard Lodge.
- Explore additional uses for Hubbard Lodge
- Add more picnic tables at Canopus Lake Beach / Winter Park lodge.
- Design recreational facilities to be compatible with the character of the parks and their resources.

- Address each of the facilities much needed repairs and rehabilitation projects (including buildings, dams, bridges, septic, petroleum bulk storage...)

### ***Park Operations***

- Minimize conflicts with other users on trails, specifically illegal ATV / ORV use with other allowed uses.
- Keep emergency access to trails.
- Expand the hours of operation during the summer months.
- Develop a shuttle between the Metro North station in Cold Spring and Fahnestock for year-round use.
- Add signage at Duck Pond explaining the rules and regulations for fisherman.
- Improve garbage collection at campsites. Install additional receptacles.
- Ensure proper maintenance of the butterfly garden at Hubbard Lodge.
- Prioritize major infrastructure upgrades (Canopus Beach facility should be at the top of the list).
- Increase the staffing level to a level that better matches the facilities size and diversity of recreational opportunities

### ***Education and Interpretation / TOEC***

- Upgrade environmental stewardship programs.
- Improve programming and expand to more groups / park patrons.
- Improve environmental educational/interpretive opportunities at the waterfront at Duck Pond.
- Develop additional classrooms for Environmental Education and Interpretation (EE&I).
- Consider labelling trees and plants along a few trails.
- Develop a summer event with boats or canoes.
- Develop additional programming for the local community and the general park patron.
- Continue and expand programs that are compatible with, and encourage the public's understanding of the protection and stewardship of park resources.

### ***Partnerships / Volunteerism***

- Continue to work with the Appalachian Trail Conference.
- Continue to work with the NY / NJ Trail Conference to maintain trails in both parks.
- Increase partnerships to increase the number of volunteers to maintain trails and buildings, etc.
- Develop partnerships with the local mountain biking clubs to help build and maintain trails.
- Increase partnerships with adjacent landowners regarding endangered species protection.
- Continue to cultivate the user group organizations and land preservations groups within the area and encourage interactions among them.
- Promote and support the Friends of Fahnestock and Hudson Highlands State Parks in their efforts to raise funds and recruit volunteers to undertake projects that advance the parks vision and goals.

- Coordinate with local and state agencies and not-for profit organizations in the management of the natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources of the parks, buffer property and linkages between OPRHP property and other public lands.

### ***Wildlife Management***

- Develop uniform procedures for wildlife management.
- Continue to manage the BCAs in both parks pursuant to the BCA guidelines developed.

### ***Swimming***

- Improve Canopus Beach.
- Improve the bath and changing rooms at the beach.
- Improve the main building with the concession area.

### ***Camping***

- Improve campground facilities but maintain the tent oriented camping experience.
- Expand the campground facilities.
- Upgrade the restrooms and showers at the campgrounds.
- Create a “quiet section” of the campground to separate noisy campers from those who want a serene camping experience.
- Extend the camping season.

### ***Trails***

- Improve trail signage at both parks with mile posts, blazes and directional signage.
- Name all of the trails.
- Develop new trails east of the Taconic State Parkway, getting people off roadways to reach trail heads.
- Sustain existing bridle trails.
- Continue to work with trails groups to help maintain the trails in the parks.
- Develop additional shared-use trails.
- Enforce rules and illegal activities occurring on trails.
- Review and renew the MOU with the Appalachian Trail Conference.
- Do not expand trails into BCA managed areas.
- Carefully consider the development of new trails as they have the potential to fragment habitats.
- Add kiosks to trailheads.
- Develop the Hudson Trail to help connect both parks.
- Develop and maintain a sustainable trail system that is compatible with the park’s natural, cultural and physical resources, provides recreational and educational opportunities for a diversity of users (including but not limited to hikers, equestrians, and birders) and links to regional trail systems.

### ***Cycling***

- Provide high quality, narrow, curvy, forested, sustainable of single track trails for mountain biking.

- Create and enhance mountain biking trails and opportunities.
- Keep mountain biking trails open in Hudson Highlands/Mt. Beacon.
- Make mountain bikers a legitimate user of the trails on Mt. Beacon in hopes that more legitimate users will decrease the illegal ATV / ORV use.
- Expand mountain biking trails.

## ***Winter Park***

Winter recreational comments primarily requested expanding the cross-country skiing trails, upgrading the facilities and maintaining the Winter Park as is. The following comments were also received:

- Develop a snow-making system.
- Expand the trail system—groom additional trails.
- Develop night skiing opportunities—add lights to the trails.
- Improve signage where the cross-country skiing trails cross the road (Rt. 301).
- Install a small cabin along one of the trails that would have a bonfire and hot cocoa.
- Improve drainage at the Winter Park lodge.
- Develop a warming hut near the ice skating area.
- Continue to operate the Winter Park.
- Enlarge and upgrade the Winter Park lodge and changing areas—add lockers.
- Patrol the trails to ensure everyone has the appropriate badges and has paid.
- Upgrade rental equipment.
- Upgrade grooming equipment.
- Upgrade the warming hut.
- Make Winter Park more sustainable (financially and environmentally).
- Upgrade the vendor area (Acorn Café) within the lodge—more seats (indoor and outdoor), more options and additional areas to purchase hot beverages.
- Add more food options to the Acorn Café—perhaps make it a restaurant that would bring in non-skiers (and revenue).
- Develop a wax room.
- Build a new cross-country skiing trail around Stillwater Lake.
- Offer a season pass for entry into the Winter Park.
- Offer lessons.
- Host a cross-country skiing competition.
- Expand the cross-country skiing trails and offer night skiing.

## ***Hunting***

- Expand hunting area.
- Extend hunting season.
- Expand bow hunting opportunities.
- Access for hunters should increase with an increase in the license fee.



## ***Motorized Vehicle Access***

The motorized vehicle access comments focused either on providing snowmobile access to the park and not allowing motorized vehicle access.

- ATV use has ruined the single track trails.
- Continue to enforce illegal ATV / ORV use on trails.
- Stricter enforcement of illegal ATV / ORV use.
- Increase patrols of the Mount Beacon area by Park Police and improve coordination with the local police and other agencies to enforce the rules.

## ***Other comments***

Comments that did not fit easily into a specific category were included below:

- Continue to allow geo-caching.
  - Keep recreational money use for snowmobiling campground at Sunken Mine Road / Hole Mountain
  - Develop and disseminate printed literature for the parks to promote tourism.
  - Do not overly restrict the size of groups coming to the parks.
  - Continue to allow orienteering in the parks as a low impact activity.
  - Facilitate scientific research to enhance the long term viability of the parks natural and cultural resources.
  - Provide a coordinated approach to inventory, monitoring and research that facilitates data exchange.
  - Develop and implement a monitoring program that measures changes within the park.
  - Assure that all monitoring and research programs are compatible with the protection of the park's resources.
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CLARENCE FAHNESTOCK MEMORIAL and  
HUDSON HIGHLANDS STATE PARKS  
DRAFT MASTER PLAN and DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL  
IMPACT STATEMENT  
**PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING**



September 22, 2009

6:30 PM

Taconic Outdoor Education Center



David A. Paterson  
Governor

Carol Ash  
Commissioner

Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

## **Agenda for Public Information Meeting**

1. Introductions and Welcoming Remarks
2. Overview and Timeline of the Planning Process
3. Overview of the Parks
4. Public Input
5. Next Steps

## **Overview**

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) has developed new Priority Themes and Initiatives that will help guide the agency's activities. These new priorities are: Revitalizing Parks and Historic Sites, Natural Resource Stewardship and Interpretation, Creating Connections, and Sustainability. The master plan for Clarence Fahnestock Memorial and Hudson Highlands State Parks is part of an accelerated planning initiative that will advance these themes, and determine the best course of action to preserve and utilize park resources for this and future generations.

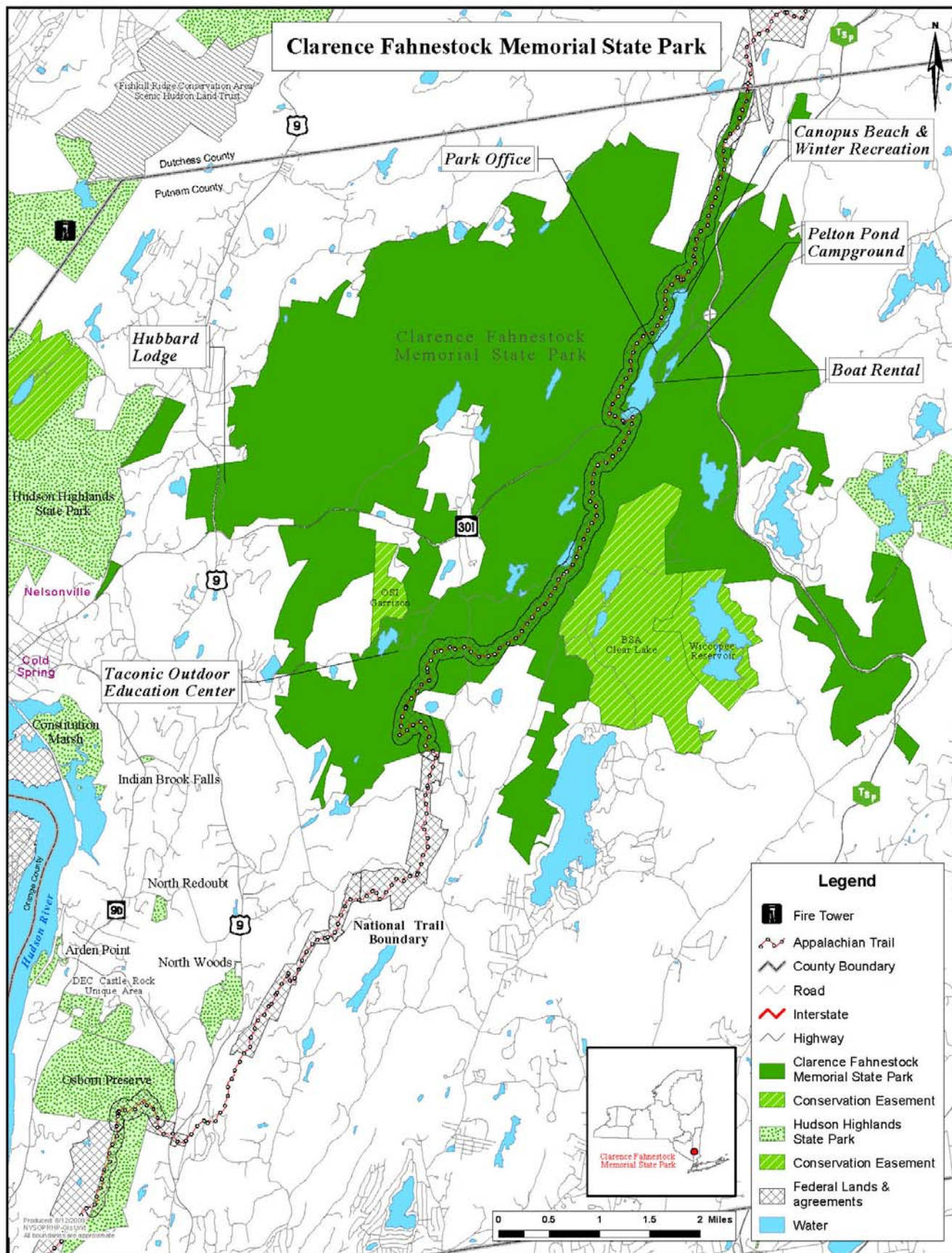
The purpose of this public information meeting is to actively invite public participation in the planning process. Public participation will help OPRHP in identifying issues, concerns and alternatives as well as determining the depth to which each of the topics is explored within the Draft Master Plan / Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). It is important to provide public input opportunities now and throughout the planning process to encourage identification of the compelling issues to be addressed within this planning effort.

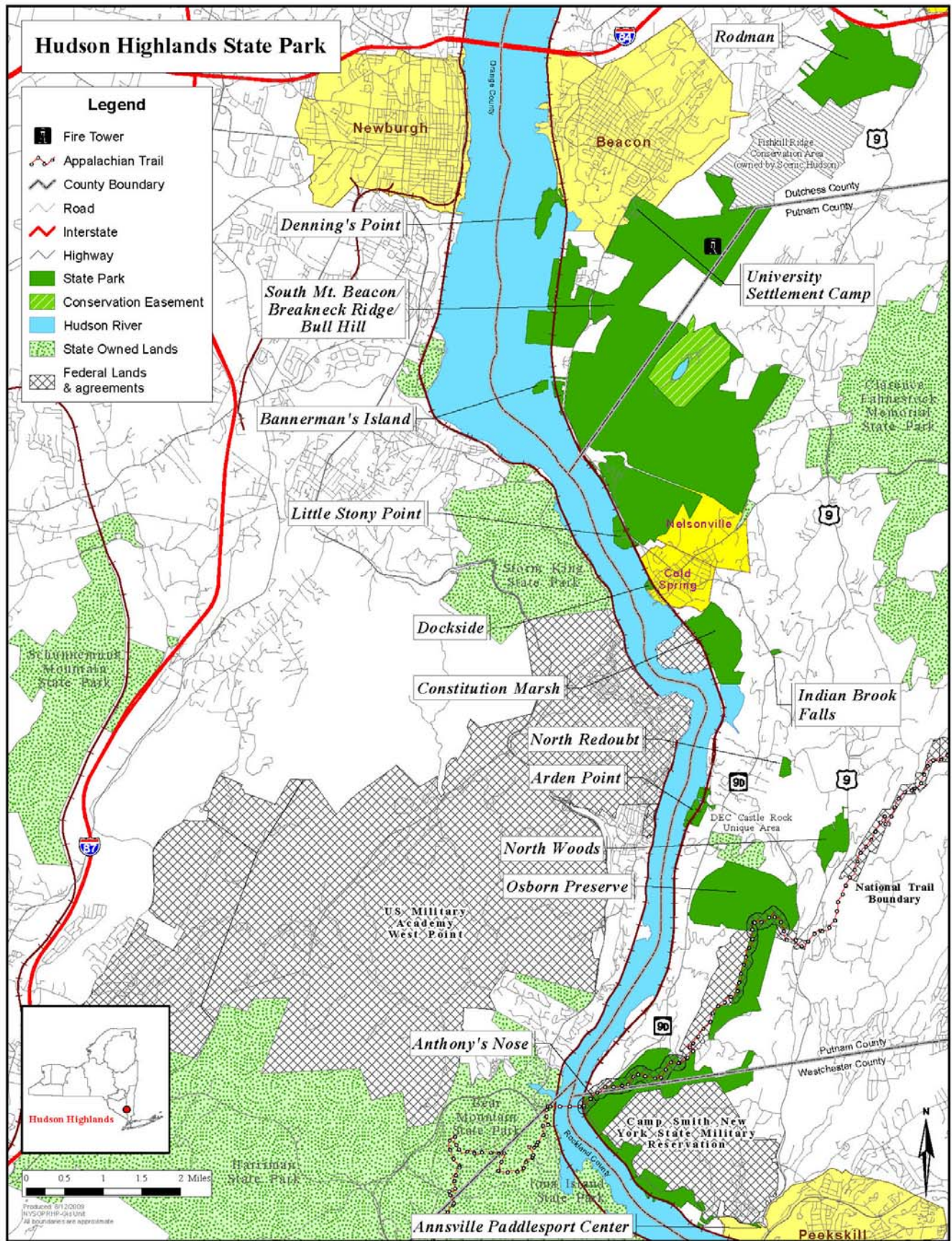
This information packet and the public information meeting are intended to provide the public with a concise overview of both parks, the setting, the natural, cultural, scenic, and historic resources and the issues identified to this point. Additionally the meeting is designed to provide an opportunity for public input at an early stage in the master planning process.

Additional information can be obtained from OPRHP at:

Jayne McLaughlin, Regional Director  
Taconic Region  
PO Box 308  
75 Mills Mansion Drive  
Staatsburgh, NY 12580  
(845) 889-4100

Elisabeth Pezzolla, Park Planner  
Planning Bureau  
Agency Building 1  
Empire State Plaza  
Albany, NY 12238  
(518) 486-2909





## **Introduction**

Clarence Fahnestock Memorial State Park and Hudson Highlands State Park offer a variety of recreational opportunities in an exceptionally scenic and historic setting in the Hudson River Valley. These parks have expanded significantly over the last fifteen years which has prompted the development of this master plan. They also serve as major open space and scenic resources, and as important protected natural areas in the Hudson Highlands of New York State. The parks extend from the Hudson River shoreline to the heights of the New York Highlands and encompass some 23,000 acres in Dutchess, Putnam and Westchester counties. Combined, Fahnestock and Hudson Highlands State Parks attract approximately 363,000 visitors annually. The parks are located within 55 miles of New York City and Hudson Highlands is accessible by the Metro-North Railroad.

## **Location**

The parks are located in the Taconic State Park Region in Putnam, Dutchess and Westchester counties and cross multiple municipal boundaries. Fahnestock is bisected by Route 301 and has the Taconic State Parkway near the eastern border and Route 9 is the closest road near the western border of the park. Hudson Highlands is more segmented, but the major western boundary is the Hudson River and Route 9D. Route 9 represents the approximate eastern boundary of the park.

## **Timeline for Development of the Parks**

### *Clarence Fahnestock Memorial State Park*

- 1930—Clarence Fahnestock Memorial State Park was established when approximately 2,400 acres were donated by Dr. Ernest Fahnestock in memory of his brother, Clarence, for the development of the parkway and a state park. The original core of land around and including Canopus Lake was developed through the use of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps which were established in the park and began development of the picnic area and campground, comfort stations, bridle paths, shelters, roads, and dams at Pelton Pond, Canopus and Stillwater lakes.
- 1935—The Parkway was opened to Route 301 which provided access to the park.
- 1960s—Approximately 2,700 acres were added to the park.
- 1978—Young Adult Conservation Corps facility opened at Duck Pond and later became the site of Taconic Outdoor Education Center in 1984.
- 1981—The Canopus Beach complex opened.
- 1990s—Approximately 3,800 acres were added to the park.
- 2003—Hubbard Lodge area renovated and trails opened; Ann Odell Memorial Butterfly Garden established.
- 2004—to present—Through additional land acquisition the park reached its current size of 14,200 acres.

### *Hudson Highlands State Park*

- 1938—Two parcels totaling 177 acres on the face of Breakneck Ridge were donated to the State by the Whitney and Nelson families through the efforts of the Hudson River Conservation Society and following several years of growing concern about quarrying in this part of the Highlands.
- 1967—NYS Legislation appropriated \$750,000 for land acquisition in the Highlands and Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc, agreed to match State purchases; Little Stony Point and Bannerman’s Island were acquired in 1967.
- 1960s—Approximately 2,500 acres were acquired by NYS with the assistance of the Rockefeller family’s Jackson Hole Preserve.
- 1970—Under the direction of the Taconic State Park Region, Charles T. Main, Inc. developed a master plan for the development of Hudson Highlands State Park; Constitution Marsh acquired as a wildlife sanctuary to be managed by the Audubon Society.
- 1970-1979—Approximately 1,100 acres were added to the park, including the Osborn Preserve, Constitution Marsh and Indian Brook Falls.
- 1980 –1989—North face of Anthony’s Nose and Denning’s Point were acquired adding approximately 300 acres to the park.
- 1990s—Arden Point, the top of Anthony’s Nose and the Harriman Toll House were added to the park.
- 2000 – to present—Annsville Creek facility transferred from NYS Department of Transportation to OPRHP for redevelopment as Annsville Creek Paddlesport Center. The Beacon Institute for Rivers and Estuaries established at Denning’s Point. About 2,600 acres acquired including Revolutionary War sites at the North Redoubt and Connecticut Camps, north end of the Highlands at Route 9 / I-84, part of Surprise Lake Camp, Dockside, University Settlement Camp and the City of Beacon watershed property at South Mount Beacon, bringing the park to its current size of 6,832 acres.

### **Environmental Setting**

#### *Flora and Fauna*

Both Fahnestock and Hudson Highlands State Parks contain a wealth of natural resources and are well-known for their biodiversity. The natural communities of both parks are similar in composition. Appalachian oak-hickory forests dominate both parks and can be found on the mid to upper elevations, integrating with chestnut oak forests at higher elevations and oak-tulip tree forests at lower elevations.

Fahnestock has five natural communities that are considered significant from a statewide perspective. The approximately 6,700-acre chestnut oak forest within the park is one of the largest documented occurrences of this forest type in NY State. Additionally, Fahnestock supports at least three rare animal species and other species of conservation

concern, as well as one rare plant population. Nearly 70% of Fahnestock is designated as a Bird Conservation Area.

Hudson Highlands contains twelve significant natural communities including high quality pitch pine-oak heath and red cedar rocky summit communities. It also harbors four NY State Threatened plants, four NY State Threatened animal species and several species of conservation concern.

Hudson Highlands State Park also includes Constitution Marsh, a 270-acre brackish tidal marsh along the Hudson River. The marsh is managed by the National Audubon Society and operates as an Audubon Nature Center and Sanctuary. It is one of only five large tidal marshes remaining on the Hudson River. The marsh contains several rare species of breeding birds, rare plants and rare insect populations.

The importance of both parks to the biodiversity of this portion of the Hudson Highlands cannot be overstated. Both parks are considered as Significant Biodiversity Areas within the Hudson Valley. This is based on the fact that these parks support diverse populations of both resident and migratory birds and important habitats for regionally rare plant and animal species. The parks are also recognized as part of an important landscape corridor linking New Jersey and Pennsylvania to New England. Along with other state and federal partners, OPRHP has a major role in large scale conservation efforts in the Hudson Highlands.

#### *Water*

Fahnestock State Park has several lakes including Canopus Lake, used for swimming, boating and fishing, as well as Pelton Pond and Stillwater Lake which are primarily used for fishing. Fahnestock also contains a variety of wetland habitats ranging from highbush blueberry bog thickets to shallow emergent wetlands and vernal pools that are dominated by invasive species such as common reed and purple loosestrife. Numerous streams that provide fish and wildlife habitat are also present within the park.

The water resources of Hudson Highlands State Park include tidal marshes such as Constitution Marsh, as well as other Hudson River shoreline areas with important tidal mudflats, sandy shoreline and deepwater habitats. This park has a number of small ponds, a reservoir, upland swamps, marshes, vernal pools, and small streams that support a variety of aquatic and terrestrial life.

#### *Topography and Geology*

Both parks have fairly rugged terrain and are rich in iron ore typical of the Highlands region. Bedrock outcroppings on steep slopes and summits, vertical ledges and associated talus slopes are present in both parks. While Fahnestock is characterized by steep ravines with small wetlands situated between ridges, Hudson Highlands has a more varied topography with steep ridges rising sharply from the river shoreline up to a maximum of 1500 feet above sea level.

The iron ore and vast forests of both parks led to the establishment of an iron manufacturing industry in this region from the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century through the end of the



19<sup>th</sup> century. The iron, and sometimes other minerals such as sulfur, was mined while the forests were harvested to provide the charcoal fuel for the smelting furnaces. As a result, there are many abandoned mines, exploratory pits and rail beds within the parks that are remnants of this once-active industry.

### **Recreational Resources**

At Fahnestock, activities such as swimming, picnicking, camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, boating, equestrian, and biking are available. In the winter Fahnestock offers snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, ice fishing, and sledding. Fahnestock is also home to the Taconic Outdoor Education Center, a year-round environmental education facility serving day-use and overnight groups.

Hudson Highlands offers hiking, picnicking, fishing, hunting, boating, and equestrian. It provides multiple points of access to the Hudson River including Denning's Point in Beacon and Annsville Creek near Peekskill. Hudson Highlands also hosts The Beacon Institute for Rivers and Estuaries at Denning's Point, the Audubon Society at Constitution Marsh, and municipal parks on Route 9D at Dutchess Junction and the former University Settlement Camp in Beacon. Both parks contain a rich variety of historic and cultural resources, and are traversed by the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

### **Scenic Resources**

There are numerous points in both parks that offer scenic views of the Hudson River Valley. Bannerman's Island, located within Hudson Highlands, is home to Bannerman's Castle and Arsenal and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Hudson Highlands is located within a Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS), designated by the New York State Department of State, and the Taconic State Parkway was designated as a State Scenic Byway in 1992. In addition, Pelton Pond and Canopus Lake offer scenic views for visitors at Fahnestock Memorial State Park.

### **Infrastructure**

*Electric Service* - Electric service is provided by NYS Electric & Gas and by Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corporation via overhead and underground lines.

*Water Supply* – The water supply is from wells within the parks and the City of Beacon.

*Waste water / Sewerage* – The parks uses on-site septic systems for residences and sewage treatment facilities for the camping, day use and group camp areas.

*Buildings*—66 structures are located within Fahnestock and 48 are in Hudson Highlands.

*Roads*—State, local and park roads traverse both parks.

*Bridges*—There are three bridges over the Metro-North railroad within Hudson Highlands and smaller bridges are located throughout both parks.

*Dams*—There are eleven dams at Fahnestock and five dams at Hudson Highlands.

## **List of Potential Topics for Master Plan to Consider**

- Water - Access, Quality and Watershed Protection
- Invasive Species – Threats and Management
- Campground Improvements
- Trail system Improvements
- Education and Interpretation Opportunities
- Connectivity to Other Public Lands
- Scenic Vistas
- Security
- Public Health and Safety
- Research Opportunities
- Habitat Restoration and Management
- Rehabilitation of Existing Structures
- Canopus Beach Facility Improvements
- Historic and Cultural Resources

## **Proposed Master Plan Timeline**

Public Information Meeting – *September 22, 2009 – Taconic Outdoor Education Center*

Comments Due – *October 23, 2009*

Draft Plan/DEIS – *September 2010*

Hearing – *October 2010*

Final Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) – *December 2010*

Findings and Adoption – *February 2011*

## **Next Steps**

The issues, concerns and alternatives identified at the public information meeting and through written comments will be summarized and made available. The Draft Master Plan/DEIS will address these issues. Further opportunities for public input may take place during the preparation of the Draft Master Plan/DEIS. Public review of this document will include a public hearing and public comment / review period. Comments made during this time will be considered in the preparation of the Final Master Plan/FEIS. After the issuance of the final plan and a public consideration period, a findings statement will be issued along with the Commissioner's decision regarding adoption of the plan.

## **Comments are due by October 23, 2009**

Written comments may be sent to:

Elisabeth Pezzolla

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Planning Bureau

Agency Building One

Empire State Plaza

Albany, NY 12238

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