

Sterling Forest[®] State Park

Comprehensive Trails Plan and Environmental Assessment 2009



FINAL



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February 3, 2009

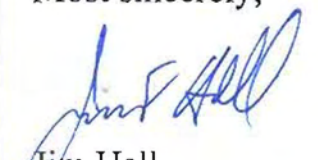
Dear Friends:

It is my pleasure to hereby adopt the Final Comprehensive Trails Plan and Environmental Assessment for Sterling Forest State Park, located in Orange County, New York.

My thanks and appreciation goes to all who assisted in the development of this Plan. There was considerable effort provided by the Trails Plan Study Group which included representatives from a variety of trail groups, environmental organizations, the local community and other trail interests. The study group assisted in outlining information, goal and issue identification and trail assessment. In addition, I want to thank those who provided comments on the Draft Trails Plan. It is with the help of valuable partnerships that I am able to provide you with this plan.

Trails are an important aspect of our State Park system providing people with a variety of recreational opportunities while enjoying our natural surroundings and learning about our past cultures and history. This plan is a culmination of balancing recreational use with the protection of significant natural resources. My hope is for this and future generations to enjoy the trail opportunities afforded at Sterling Forest State Park.

Most sincerely,



Jim Hall
Executive Director

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
II.	VISION AND GOALS.....	3
III.	INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS.....	6
	<i>A. Existing Trail System.....</i>	<i>6</i>
	1. Interim Trails	
	a) Trail	
	b) Length/ Blazing	
	c) Uses	
	d) Map	
	e) Description	
	f) Assessment	
	Allis Trail	
	Bare Rock	
	Clayhole Trail	
	Eagle Lake	
	Eagle Mountain	
	Fire Tower	
	Furnace Loop	
	Hogback Mountain	
	Indian Hill	
	Lake to Lake	
	Lakeville	
	Lakeville Iron Works	
	Long Meadow Extension/ Townsend	
	Long Swamp	
	McKeags Meadow	
	Pine Meadow	
	Red Back	
	Sapphire	
	Sears Hunter	
	South Point	
	Sterling Lake	
	Sterling Mountain	
	Sterling Ridge	
	Sterling Valley	
	Warbler	
	Water Tower	
	West Valley	
	Wildcat Mountain	

B. Proposed Connections.....45

1. New Jersey Trail Connections

Jennings Hollow East Connector

Beech Farm

Boro Boundary

Hope Mountain Connector

State Line Trail

2. In-Park Trail Connections

Lake to Lake/ Red Back Connector

Power Line Connector

C. Post 2006 Acquisition Trails.....52

1. Sterling Forge

Augusta Mine

Caretakers

Caretaker-Pine Meadow Connector

Eagle Mountain Connector

Long Mine

Long Mine-Red Back Connector

Paterson Mine

Red Back North

2. Cintichem

Indian Kill-Hogback Connector

D. Interpretation.....62

E. Support Facilities.....62

F. Special Events.....68

IV. TRAIL SYSTEM ALTERNATIVES.....	69
<i>A. Status Quo - Interim Trails Plan with modifications.....</i>	<i>69</i>
<i>B. Alternative A.....</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>C. Alternative B – The Preferred Alternative.....</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>D. Post 2006 Acquisition Trails.....</i>	<i>79</i>
V. FINAL TRAILS PLAN.....	81
<i>A. Trail System.....</i>	<i>81</i>
1. Trails	
2. Connections	
a) High use areas	
b) External systems	
c) Mass Transportation	
<i>B. Support Facilities.....</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>C. Special Events.....</i>	<i>97</i>
<i>D. Standards.....</i>	<i>97</i>
1. Trailheads, Kiosks, Signage	
2. Design	
3. Maintenance	
4. Accessibility	
<i>E. Enforcement.....</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>F. Permits.....</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>G. Implementation.....</i>	<i>102</i>

1. Interim Trails/ Trail System	
2. New Jersey Trail Connections	
3. In-Park Trail Connections	
4. Post 2006 Acquisition Trails	
<i>H. Coordination</i>	112
<i>I. Interpretation</i>	112
1. Environmental	
2. Cultural	
VI. EVALUATION, ASSESSMENT AND MONITORING	114
<i>A. New Trails and Re-Alignment of existing trails</i>	
<i>B. Monitoring program</i>	
VII. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW	117
VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY	128

List of Tables

Table 1	Parking Inventory.....	64
Table 2	Current Status of Trail System by Use/Mileage.....	81
Table 3	Approved Interim Trails Plan with modifications by Use/Mileage....	81
Table 4	Final Trails Plan additional mileage by use.....	82
Table 5	Final Trails Plan – Total mileage per use.....	82
Table 6	Final Trails Plan - Trails and Uses.....	82
Table 7	Final Trails Plan - Trails and Shared Uses.....	85
Table 8	Parking Facilities.....	89
Table 9	Trail Development Guidelines for Sterling Forest® State Park.....	98

Figures

Figure 1	Procedures for Reroute/ Relocation/ New Trail Project.....	115
Figure 2	Approval for Trail Maintenance.....	116

Appendices

Appendix A	Study Group List.....	129
Appendix B	Memorandum of Agreement.....	130
Appendix C	Comments and Responses.....	132

List of Maps

Map 1	Interim Trails Plan from Master Plan 2001
Map 2	Grid Reference Map
Map 3	Trail Assessment Summary 2004
Map 4	Parking Location Map
Map 5	Interim Trails Plan from Master Plan 2001
Map 6	Interim Trails Plan with Modifications
Map 7	Hiking Trail Alternatives - User Group
Map 8	Bike Trail Alternatives - User Group
Map 9	Equestrian Trail Alternatives - User Group
Map 10	Cross Country Skiing Trail Alternatives - User Group
Map 11	Preferred Alternatives Hiking Trails
Map 12	Preferred Alternatives Biking Trails
Map 13	Preferred Alternatives Equestrian Trails
Map 14	Preferred Alternatives Cross Country Ski Trails
Map 15	Post 2006 Acquisition Proposed Trails
Map 16	Post 2006 Acquisition Preferred Alternative Trails
Map 17a	Final Trails Plan – Trail System
Map 17b	Final Trails Plan – Trail Use System
Map 18	Final Trails Plan - Parking Location Map

I.

INTRODUCTION

Sterling Forest® State Park is a 20,000 acre state park. During the development of the Master Plan, it was determined that trail issues would be best served if addressed within the scope of a comprehensive trails plan rather than within the master planning process. Over the past several years, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) has been working cooperatively with trail user groups to assess and develop a trail system for Sterling Forest® State Park. The results and recommendations of that work are presented in this plan.

Sterling Forest® State Park is located in Orange County, New York. Its borders fall within three towns: Tuxedo, Warwick, and Greenwood Lake. The park was a managed forest prior to its acquisition by the State of New York in 1998. As a result of the forest management that occurred on the property, an intricate network of wood roads was in existence at the time of purchase. This network of wood roads formed the initial backbone of the trail system for the park, along with the long distance Sterling Ridge Trail, a foot path. The Master Plan/Environmental Impact Statement for the Park, which was adopted in 2001, identified an Interim Trail Plan which has formed the basis for this plan.

Following the adoption of the Master Plan, the trail planning process was initiated. A Study Group was formed to provide a coordinated approach to obtaining input into the development of the Comprehensive Trails Plan for Sterling Forest® State Park. The Study Group assisted in outlining information, goal and issue identification, and assessment. The Study Group also assisted the Park Plan Team in the identification of options for trails and staging areas. While the Study Group's recommendations were not binding on OPRHP, its recommendations were taken under advisement during the update of the trails plan.

The Study Group was comprised of representatives that provided a balance among trail groups, environmental organizations, the local community and other trail interests. A list of representatives is provided as Appendix A. It was the responsibility of each representative to keep members of their organization and other organizations with similar interests informed.

The Trails Plan is comprised of seven chapters that provide the structure of the trails system. Each chapter builds on the previous, providing detail on how to develop and implement the trails system in Sterling Forest®. The Trails Plan is organized as follows:

Chapter I, this introduction, describes the background and basis for the Trails Plan.

Chapter II describes the vision and goals for the Trails Plan. The vision provides an overall direction of what the trail system should be and how it serves the public. The goals and objectives provide direction in how the vision state will be achieved. The

vision and goals are designed to be consistent with the recreation goals of the Master Plan.

Chapter III describes the existing trails system through inventory and analysis. The results of the trail inventory are reported in this chapter. The condition of each trail was assessed and the route was described. Currently permitted uses are also noted. Potential connections within the park and into New Jersey are described in addition to potential trails located on properties which were acquired after the Master Plan adoption. Current interpretation activities are described. Existing parking areas are defined and described as well.

Chapter IV describes trail system alternatives. The status quo alternative and user group alternatives are presented in this chapter, along with the preferred alternative.

Chapter V describes the trails plan. This chapter takes the preferred alternative identified in Chapter IV and expands upon it to develop a comprehensive plan for the development of the trails system.

Chapter VI describes the evaluation, assessment and monitoring process. This process will be used when a new trail is proposed and when an existing trail requires modification. Trail modification can range from rehabilitation to relocation, which requires different levels of review. This process is laid out in this chapter. Monitoring of trail conditions is also outlined in this chapter.

Chapter VII is the environmental review. This chapter is the result of the environmental analysis of the alternatives and the preferred alternative. This chapter identifies the potential impacts of each alternative described in Chapter IV. It also reviews the potential impacts of the Trails Plan. The impacts of the Trails Plan are analyzed and described in this chapter as are methods of avoiding impacts and any mitigation measures required during plan implementation.

As part of the process of developing the Trails Plan the Draft Comprehensive Trails Plan and Environmental Assessment was issued for public comment in November 2008. All comments received were reviewed. Appendix C contains a listing of the comments and responses.

II. VISION AND GOALS

VISION:

To develop, maintain and operate a high quality diverse trail system that is compatible with the natural, cultural and recreational resources of the park, linking to regional trail systems and maintained through public/private partnerships.

GOAL: Provide an integrated, year-round trail system for a diversity of trail users.

Objectives:

- Develop a process to evaluate and modify the existing trail system.
- Evaluate multiple uses of trails to avoid conflicts among user groups.
- Establish trail development and maintenance standards.
- Develop guidelines for trail related events.
- Utilize ADA trail accessibility guidelines to guide the development and rehabilitation of trails.

GOAL: Provide linkages with developed recreational use areas and support facilities.

Objectives:

- Utilize multi-use trails where possible, to link recreation use areas to trail systems, where appropriate.
- Provide, where appropriate, parking, comfort facilities and trailheads.
- Establish Visitor Center as focal point for trail connections.

GOAL: Protect the Park's natural and cultural resources by providing trail opportunities and activities that are compatible with the resources of the Park.

Objectives:

- Evaluate sensitive ecological and cultural resource areas for interpretation values while still protecting resources.
- Design and locate trails to assure that they do not impact identified areas with environmental sensitivity, such as wetlands or habitat for rare/endangered species.
- Provide interpretation to increase the trail user's understanding of the natural and cultural resources within the Park.
- Utilize education and other prevention techniques to limit the impacts of invasive species on the biodiversity of plants and animals along trails.

GOAL: Develop a trail information system.

Objectives:

- Develop and implement a uniform signage system for the trails and trailheads.
- Develop trail maps and interpretive brochures.
- Provide trail information and appropriate signage at entrances to the Park, in recreation use areas and at key trailheads.
- Explore the use of the Agency's information system to distribute trail information on the internet.

GOAL: Maintain and encourage partnerships with trail organizations and other groups for the operation and maintenance of the trail system.

Objectives:

- Coordinate the interactions of various trail user groups.
- Develop maintenance guidelines for volunteers and trail organizations.
- Continue partnerships with trail organizations in the development and maintenance of trails.

GOAL: Promote trail-oriented tourism and economic opportunities.

Objectives:

- Coordinate with local and regional tourism bureaus in developing promotional literature.
- Coordinate trail opportunities with other recreational opportunities within and external to the Park to encourage more people to visit the area.
- Encourage Gateway Communities to provide services that would meet the needs of the trail users.
- Explore and evaluate trail linkages with local communities.

GOAL: Continue to develop and maintain linkages to trail systems outside the park.

Objectives:

- Maintain linkages with the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and provide support facilities for its users in accordance with the Master Plan.
- Evaluate and facilitate connections to other regional trail systems in New York and New Jersey.
- Establish and maintain linkages to Harriman State Park.
- Develop trail linkages to access mass transportation and local communities that provide support services.

GOAL: Encourage and enforce a safe environment for trail users.

Objectives:

- Identify methods to educate and inform the public of rules, regulations, and proper trail etiquette.
- Continue to enforce rules and regulations through safety patrols.
- Develop a trail maintenance program.
- Develop a program of safety workshops, clinics and courses regarding trail maintenance.

GOAL: Utilize trails for fire roads where feasible and practical

Objectives:

- Provide fire protection with minimal impact to the natural and cultural resources.
- Maintain the character of the trails that are utilized for fire roads.

III. INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

A. Existing Trail System

The existing Interim Trails Plan (Map 1) is defined in the Sterling Forest® State Park Master Plan. The Interim Trails Plan was based on existing trails and marked and unmarked wood roads. The current trail system consists of approximately 54 miles while the Interim Trails Plan with modifications was approved for over 70 miles of open trails. Not all of the approved actions and modifications of the Interim Trails Plan have been implemented. While the Interim Trails Plan identified trails for a variety of uses including biking, equestrian and cross-country skiing, most of the trails are only open for hiking with some limited opportunities for biking and cross-country skiing. Most need to be improved to meet trail standards.

Map 2 is a grid reference map to help the user to determine trail locations. Grid coordinates are provided next to each trail name.

As part of the planning process, a detailed assessment of the trails was conducted with the assistance of members of the Study Group. The following provides a description and condition assessment of each trail that is keyed to Map 3. Proposed New Jersey connection trails and trails located on new acquisition properties were not included on this map. They were assessed as a separate process at a later date.

A seven-mile long segment of the Appalachian Trail transects the northern portion of the park. This Mid-Atlantic Region segment is part of the 2,155-mile long hiking trail that extends from Springer Mountain, Georgia to Baxter State Park, Maine. The trail was designated the first National Scenic Trail in 1968 and is part of the National Parks System. The Appalachian Trail is cooperatively managed by the Appalachian Trail Conference and the NY-NJ Trail Conference and partnered with NYSOPRHP and PIPC.

The following inventory list provides a description and analysis of each of the existing trails as presented in the Interim Trails Plan as well as approved modifications to the Plan. Also included are the proposed Lakeville Ironworks (Interpretive) Trail as well as proposed connecting trails to New Jersey and proposed trails on newly acquired lands. The Uses noted are approved by the Interim Trails Plan but the trails are not necessarily currently open to all approved uses. The distinction is made in the description of the trail.

Interim Trails

Designated Hiking Trails – all are currently marked and open. These are trails that existed prior to the acquisition of the park or have been designated following a planning/environmental review process.

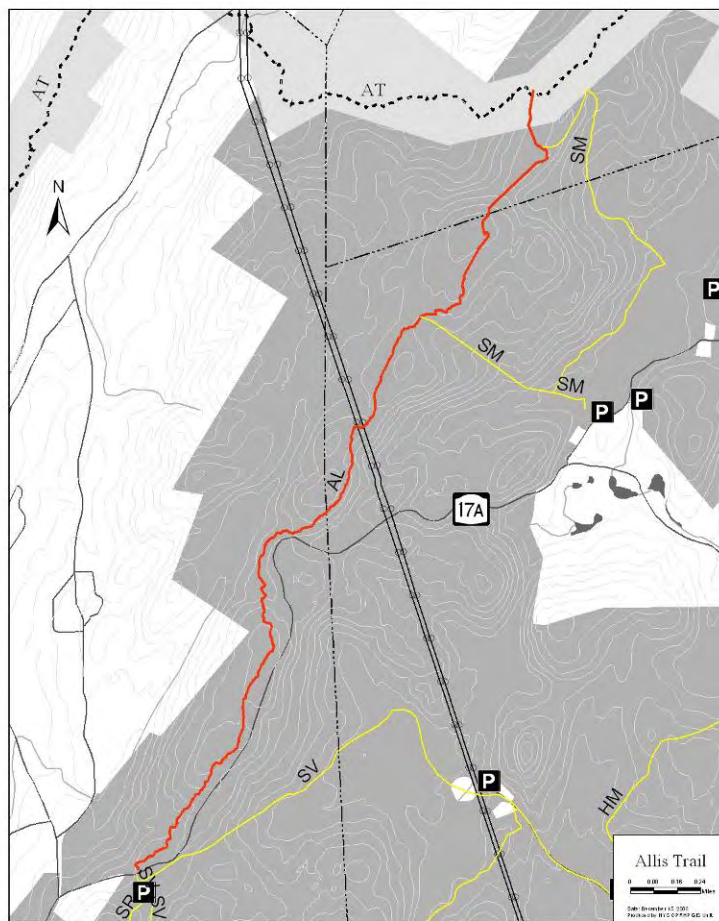
Woods Roads - most are currently marked and open. These are trails that utilize the former woods roads that existed when the forest was managed by the previous

owner. These trails generally are on 5 – 10 foot wide roads that were used by skidders or logging trucks. Various unmarked wood roads were considered in the Master Planning process as potential routes for trails within the park and provided the basis for the interim trail system. Some realignment may be necessary due to deterioration of the wood roads over time, environmental considerations, the need to meet trail design and maintenance standards or other factors. Trails that will not be used by the Park for maintenance or fire suppression activities will be maintained as a trail corridor and area beyond the trail standards will be allowed to re-vegetate.

AL - Allis Trail (Grid C4, C5, D3, E2)

Length: 3.7 miles – Marked with blue blazes

Uses: Hiking



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking only. The Allis Trail is a single track hiking trail and co-aligned with the long distance, regional Highlands Trail. The southern trailhead of the Allis Trail is located on the north side of NY 17A, across the road from the parking area for the Sterling Ridge and Sterling Valley Loop Trails. A section of trail parallels NY 17A for 1.6 miles as it begins to make its way through the Doris Duke Wildlife

Assessment:

BR - Bare Rock Trail (B5, C5)

Uses: Hiking



8

unmarked portion was reassessed, realigned, marked and has undergone a separate review process.

Marked Portion - The eastern trailhead is located on the Sterling Lake Trail, just off of West Sterling Lake Road. The trail travels generally east-west, crossing the Sterling Ridge Trail. The marked portion of the trail terminates at the intersection with the West Valley Trail. There are some areas of seasonal wetness along the trail. There is a section of trail at 15% grade with obvious signs of unauthorized motorized vehicle activity and wetness. Routine trail maintenance should be sufficient in these sections. There are several stream crossings, one of which has a 24' x 3' bridge in good condition.

Unmarked Portion - The unmarked portion of the trail travels generally north-south, once west of the West Valley Trail. The original proposal for the trail was to utilize several old wood roads, cross the Fire Tower Trail and terminate at the Lake to Lake Trail. There is a view of Greenwood Lake at the "Bare Rock" location. Along the trail, there are some challenging terrain, seasonal wet spots, a vernal pond, and an area with steep slopes. Some of the slopes have severe erosion that should be addressed.

The NY-NJ Trail Conference proposed an alternative route for a portion of this trail that travels more along the ridge top and off of the old wood roads. This trail offers no more significant views, beyond the "Bare Rock" viewpoint of Greenwood Lake than the original proposed route but does relocate the trail off of the old wood roads. The proposal was assessed and reviewed by Planning and the EMB then cleared by the RMG (Albany-based Resources Management Group) to proceed with construction. This construction has not yet taken place. The map above shows the approved route.

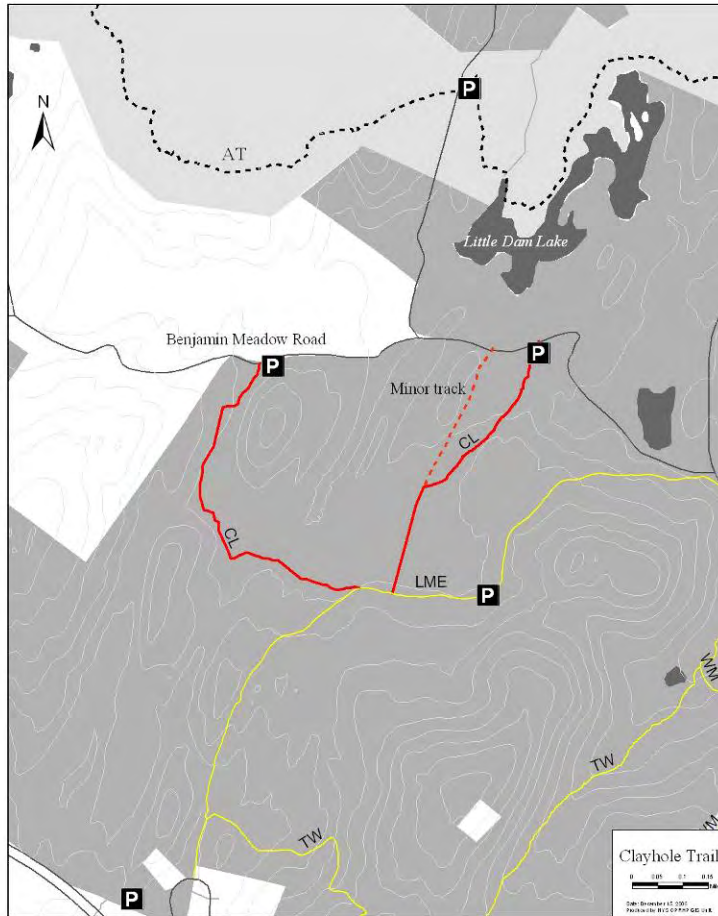
Assessment:

Between Sterling Lake and West Valley trails (marked portion), there is a section of trail with a 15% grade and seasonal wetness. Routine trail maintenance should address these areas. The section west of the West Valley trail (unmarked portion) will be constructed to hiking trail standards.

CL - Clayhole Trail (F3, G3)

Length: 1.9 miles - Unmarked

Uses: Hiking



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies the western section of this trail for hiking only. The trail runs from Benjamin Meadow Road to the Long Meadow Extension Trail. The trail is very attractive with many ferns, healthy hemlock trees, and interesting rock formations.

Assessment:

The trail is in exceptional condition. There are indications of possible ATV or other illegal uses on the trail. A short section of this loop follows the Long Meadow Extension Trail. It is difficult to find the trail from the Long Meadow Extension Trail. When the trail is marked and cleared for use, care should be taken to make the entrance of these trail sections obvious.

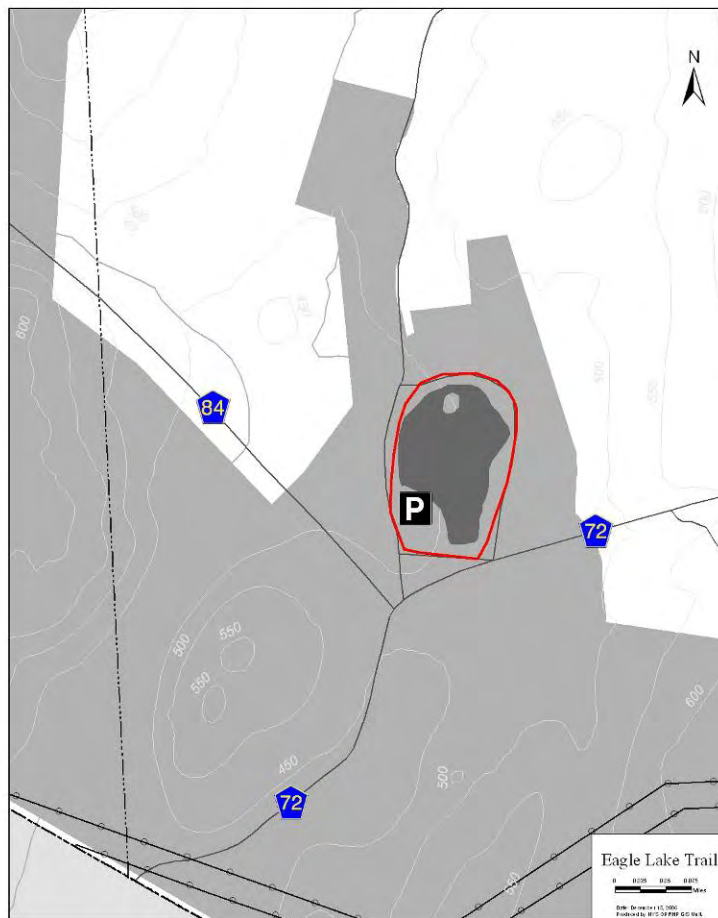
There are two sections of the trail approaching the Long Meadow Extension Trail that have been taken over by a stream. The first section should be corrected with minor rock rearrangement along the left edge (going uphill). The second section can be moved 10-20 ft to the right through open woodland.

There are two tracks that can be considered on the eastern section of the Clayhole Loop (shown on map above). These two tracks are fairly close together. Both tracks were explored and it was determined that there are no special features on either. The eastern one is an obvious main track and should be selected as the trail corridor. Due to water issues, it is recommended that the minor track be abandoned.

EL - Eagle Lake Trail (E8)

Length: 0.4 miles – Marked with yellow blazes

Uses: Hiking



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking only. The trailhead and parking area are located near the intersection of CO 72 and Sterling Mine Road (CO 84). This trail is a short, easy, flat loop around Eagle Lake. Portions of the trail are paved. There appears to be a relatively firm surface for the length of the trail. This trail does not connect with any other trails.

Assessment:

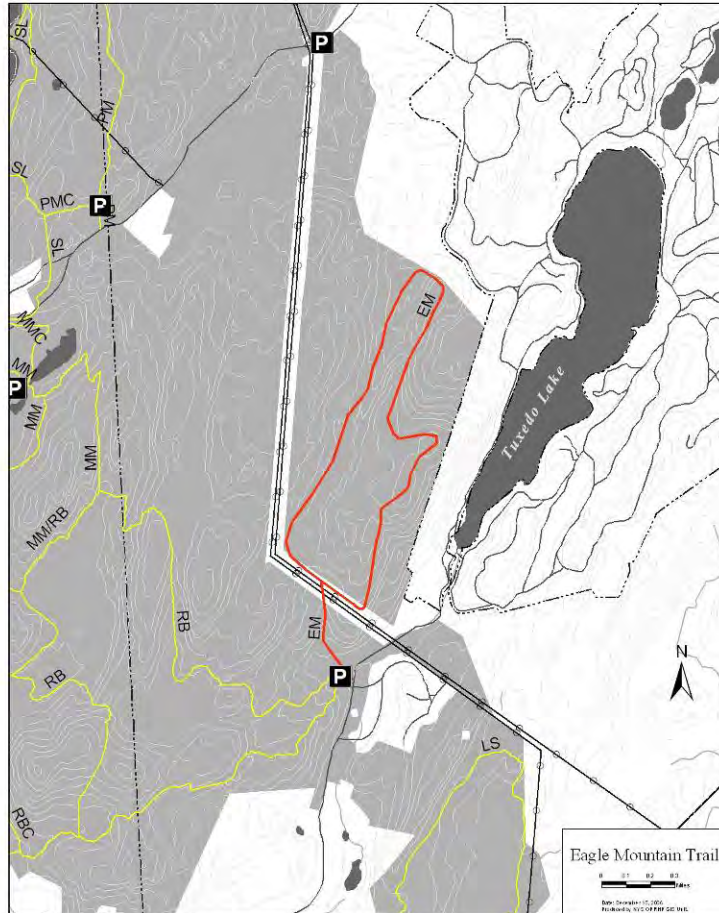
Trail is in good condition. This trail could be made accessible for persons with disabilities. The surface would need to be examined further to determine if any alterations need to be made in order to provide access for persons with

disabilities. There is one area where the trail blazes need to be redone, along the northeastern section of the trail. The trail splits and it appears as if the markings have been removed.

EM - Eagle Mountain Trail (E5, E6)

Length: 4.6 miles - Unmarked

Uses: Hiking



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking only. The Plan included a proposal for a new section of trail, which would make this trail a looped system. The trail will be located on existing trail as well as new single track trail. Access to the trail is from the parking area on South Gate Road. From here it is a short on-road walk north to access the trail which is on the opposite side of a stream that feeds Summit Brook. Heading in a northerly direction, a steep incline with rock outcroppings has to be negotiated in order to reach a wooded plateau beyond which is a power line corridor at 0.5 miles. Crossing the power line and entering an open, wooded area, the trail leads in a northeasterly direction paralleling the ridge overlooking Tuxedo Lake. Views of the lake may be possible during late fall, winter and early spring. Continuing northeast, the trail passes several erratics to a point where the land

falls away steeply. Turning west, the trail then heads northeast again, on a gentle downward slope, through open hardwood forest for about 0.8 of a mile at which point the land again falls away steeply. At this point, looking in a northeasterly direction, the northern end of Tuxedo Lake can be seen. At this viewpoint, four u-shaped iron pieces are anchored into the ground. Traveling northwest for a short distance, the trail turns where the land begins to fall off then heads southwest on a ridge that overlooks wetlands below. The trail continues down the mountain along the power line.

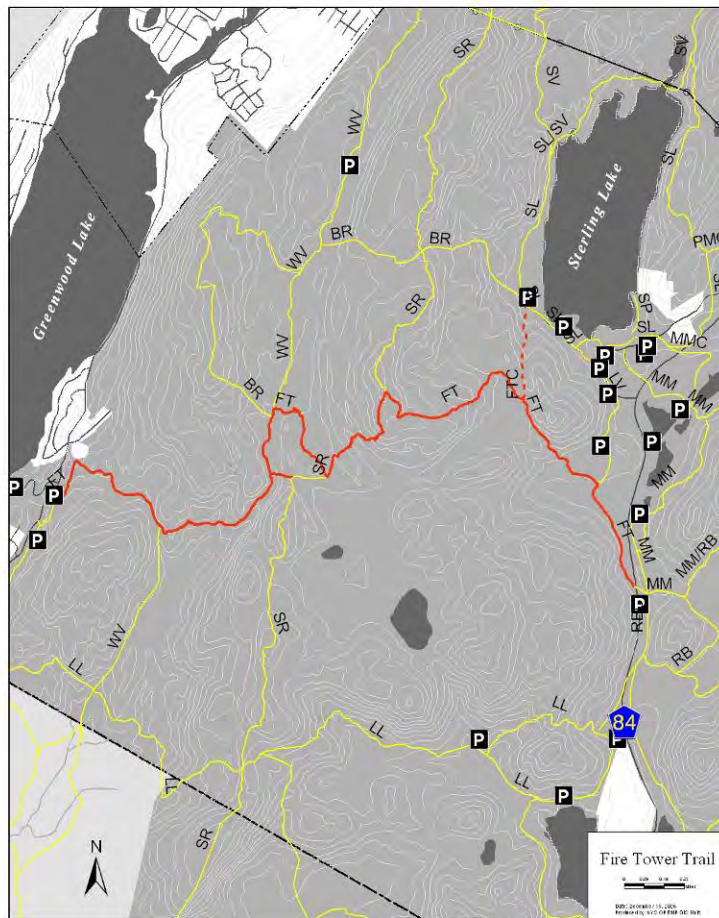
Assessment:

Trail route is not complete although was approved in the Interim Trails Plan. The proposed trail would follow old woods roads for a portion of the route. The woods roads portion of the trail is in acceptable condition. In the north, about 1/4 to 1/3 of the trail is undeveloped.

FT - Fire Tower Trail (A6, B6, C6, D6)

Length: 4.6 miles – Marked with red blazes

Uses: Hiking (Cross-country skiing, biking on portions)



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking with the section west of West Valley trail also designated for cross country skiing and the section east

of the Lakeville trail also designated for biking. From the seasonal hunting parking lot located off of County Route 84, the trail travels northwest and ascends to the fire tower. This portion of the trail supports vehicle traffic and was used by the fire tower ranger. There are several steep grades between approximately 18 – 22%. A section of the trail is severely eroded. From the fire tower, there is a portion of the Fire Tower trail that is co-aligned with the Sterling Ridge Trail. From this point, the trail descends down a primitive trail, which is a mostly rock hardened surface. There are several sharp descents (45 – 65%) along with viewpoints of the Greenwood Lake area. West of the intersection with the West Valley Trail, there are only minor slope changes which make the trail useable for cross-country skiing. The Fire Tower Connector Trail is also identified in the Interim Trails Plan and is an old wood road that connects the Fire Tower Trail to the Sterling Lake Trail.

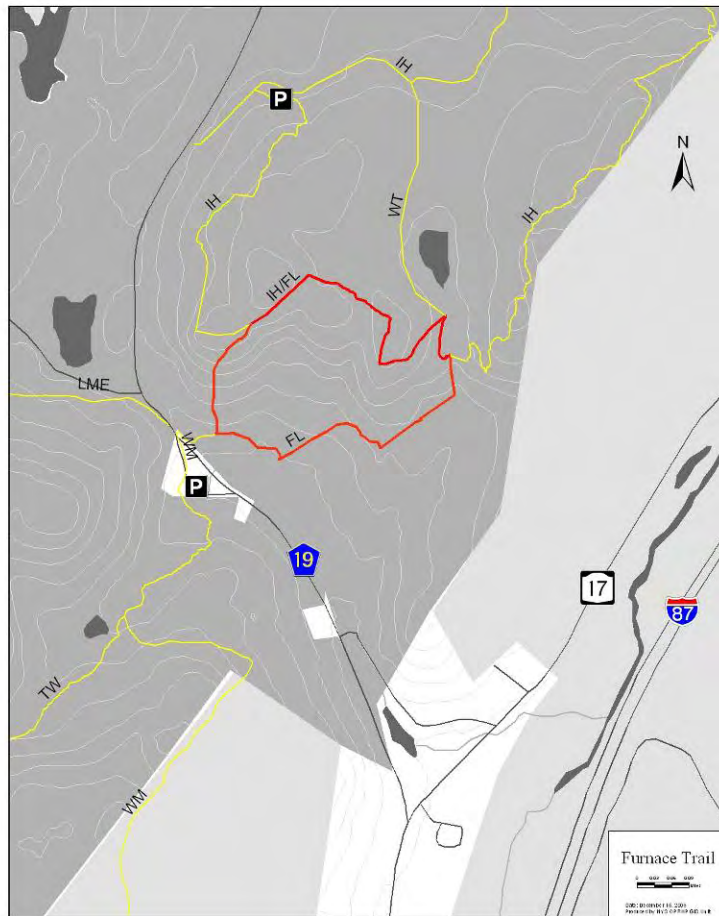
Assessment:

Along the co-aligned portion of the Sterling Ridge Trail and Fire Tower Trail, there is a wet area with frequent, large standing pools of water. Initial review has determined that there are some areas of limiting slopes with eroded surfaces and sections of standing water along the trail. These areas should be investigated further to see if they merit reroute or if water diversion will improve the trail conditions. There is beaver activity and flooding where the Fire Tower Trail meets the West Valley Trail. Towards the end of the trail (on the Greenwood Lake side), there is an area with evidence of illegal ATV use. A reroute of the trail between the Sterling Ridge Trail and the West Valley Trail has been proposed. This short reroute is not recommended for multi-use; however, it is scenic in nature. Between the Lake to Lake Trail and the West Valley Trail, there is a stream crossing that is difficult to traverse. The Fire Tower Connector Trail is in acceptable condition.

FL - Furnace Loop Trail (G3)

Length: 1.4 miles – Marked with red blazes

Uses: Hiking



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking only. The trailhead for the Furnace Loop is off Bramertown Road opposite the Wildcat Mountain Trail. It enters the woods over a constructed bridge. The trail meets the Indian Hill Trail and is co-aligned along the northern portion of the loop. It then continues south back to the trailhead. The trail goes by the Southfields Iron Furnace, constructed in 1804 – 1806.

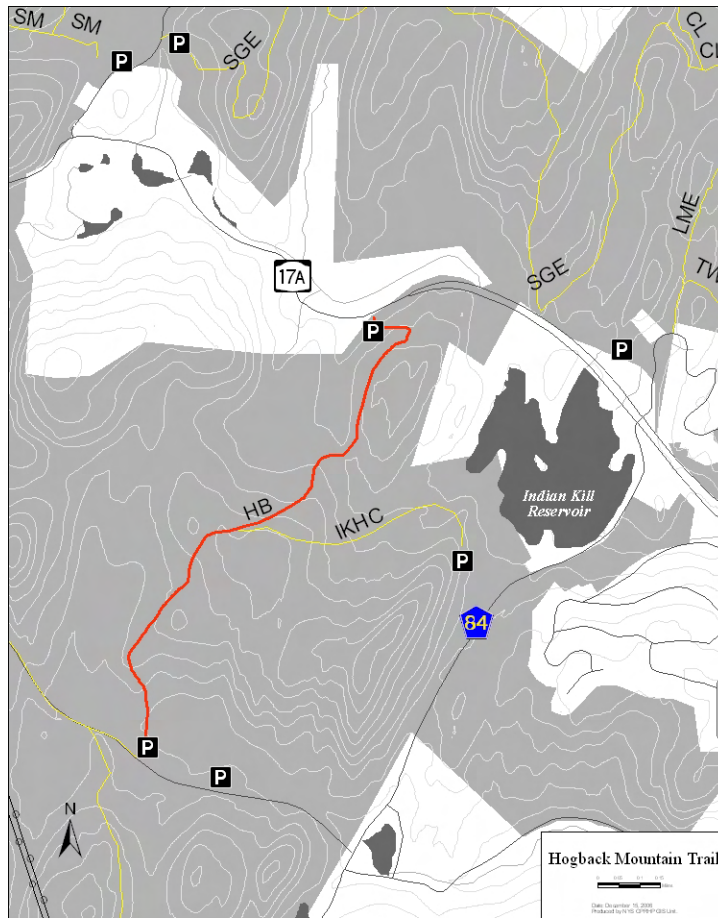
Assessment:

This trail was assessed with no areas of concern noted. Trail alignment should continue as is.

HB - Hogback Mountain Trail (E3, E4)

Length: 1.5 miles - Unmarked

Uses: Hiking, Biking



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking and biking. The trail is currently not open for use because the bridge at the southern end of the trail has collapsed and needs to be repaired or replaced. The southern trailhead is located near the NYU apartments on Ironwood Drive. The trail travels generally north-south over Hogback Mountain. The northern trailhead is located on Route 17A near the Sterling Forest® Ski Area. Generally, this trail is a pleasant trail with no significant views.

Assessment:

There are several sections of seasonal wetness on the trail that can be repaired with trail maintenance. Some of the sloped portions of the trail follow the fall line with slopes of approximately 10 – 15 %. These sections may need water diversion techniques to prevent erosion.

At the southern trailhead, there is a deteriorated bridge that crosses a stream. The bridge needs to be replaced or removed and the trail rerouted. If the trail is to remain open to vehicle traffic (for the purposes of fire prevention), the

bridge should be repaired. If vehicle traffic is not necessary, an alternative stream crossing should be made that would accommodate all types of uses for this trail. Proposed uses of this trail include biking/mountain biking and hiking.

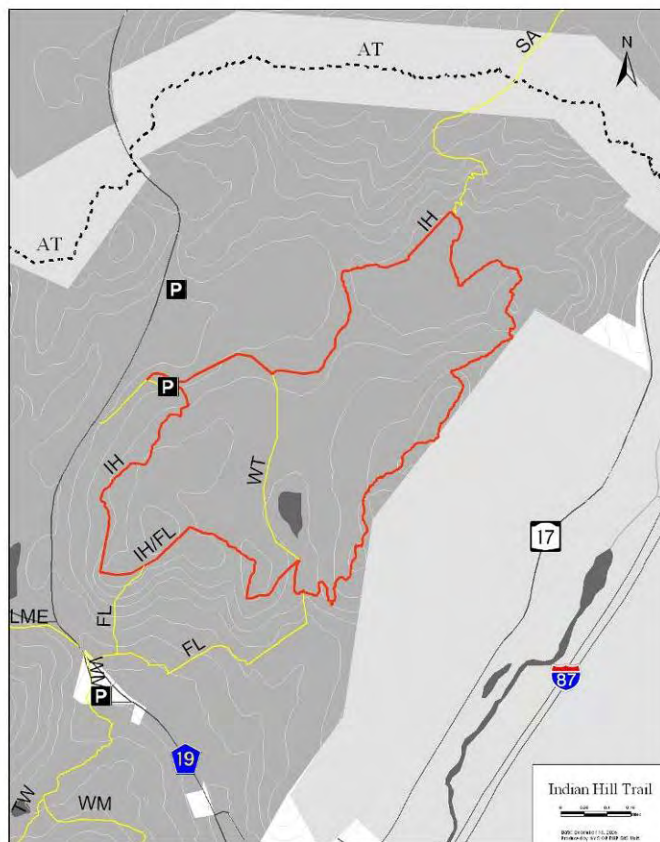
Bridge options:

1. Repair bridge to allow vehicle traffic.
2. Remove bridge and provide an alternative stream crossing.
An alternative stream crossing could be located further up the trail (closer to the NYU apartment area) at a place that is easier to cross and would require less bridge construction. A relocation of the trail off of the road can be explored to make the connection between the Sterling Valley Trail and Hogback Trail.

IH - Indian Hill Trail (G2, G3, H2)

Length: 3.1 miles – Marked with yellow blazes

Uses: Hiking



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking only. The Indian Hill Trail is a single track hiking trail. The trailhead is located off of Orange Turnpike. The parking area has a portable toilet facility. There are several

seasonal viewpoints along the trail. The trail parallels and cuts through an extensive system of rock walls, both natural and man-made. This area offers opportunities for historic interpretation due to these features and the remains of buildings in the center of the trail loop. From this trail, connection can be made to both the Appalachian Trail to the north and the Furnace Loop trail to the south.

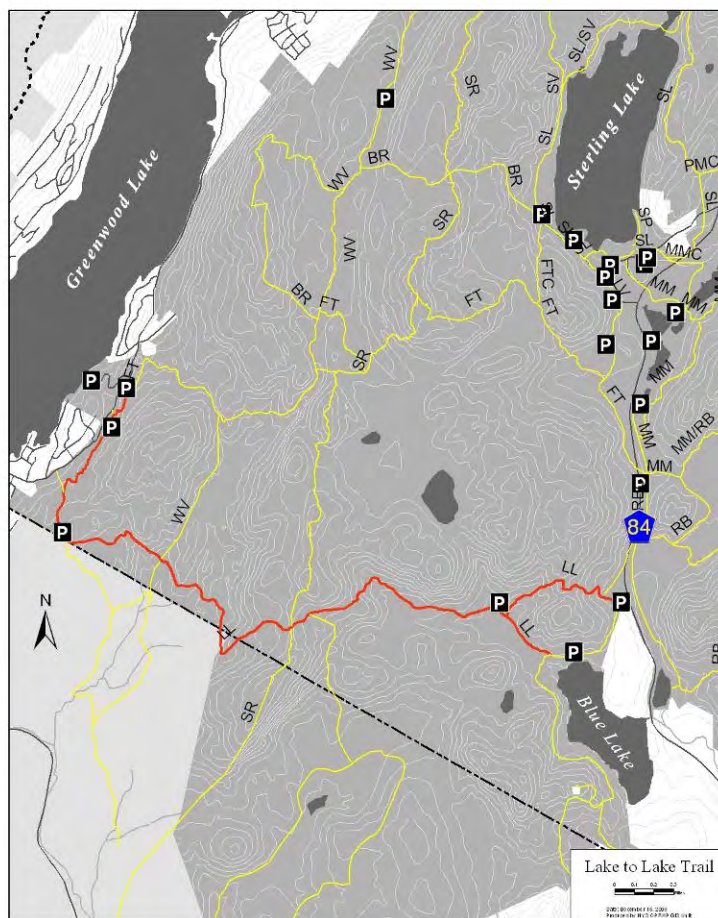
Assessment:

Most of the trail is single track on very thin, heavily organic soils which will not wear well with heavy foot or horse traffic. There are numerous very steep stretches on rocks or rock steps which make it unsuitable for either bikes or horses. There are some sections of seasonal wetness that currently do not cause any problems. Trail maintenance is performed by volunteers from the NY-NJ Trail Conference.

LL - Lake to Lake Trail (A6, B7, C7)

Length: 4.0 miles – Marked with white blazes

Uses: Hiking (Cross-country skiing on portion)



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail as primarily for hiking with the section west of the West Valley Trail also designated for cross country skiing.

The Lake to Lake Trail traverses the southern portion of the park. Traveling from west to east, the trail begins near the Village of Greenwood Lake, where the parking area is located along East Shore Drive. The trail generally parallels the New Jersey border with a portion of the trail dipping into New Jersey briefly. The trail crosses the future intersection with the West Valley Trail and then crosses the Sterling Ridge Trail. It terminates at Blue Lake, where there is a parking area and portable toilet facility. There is also a trailer boat launch site located here.

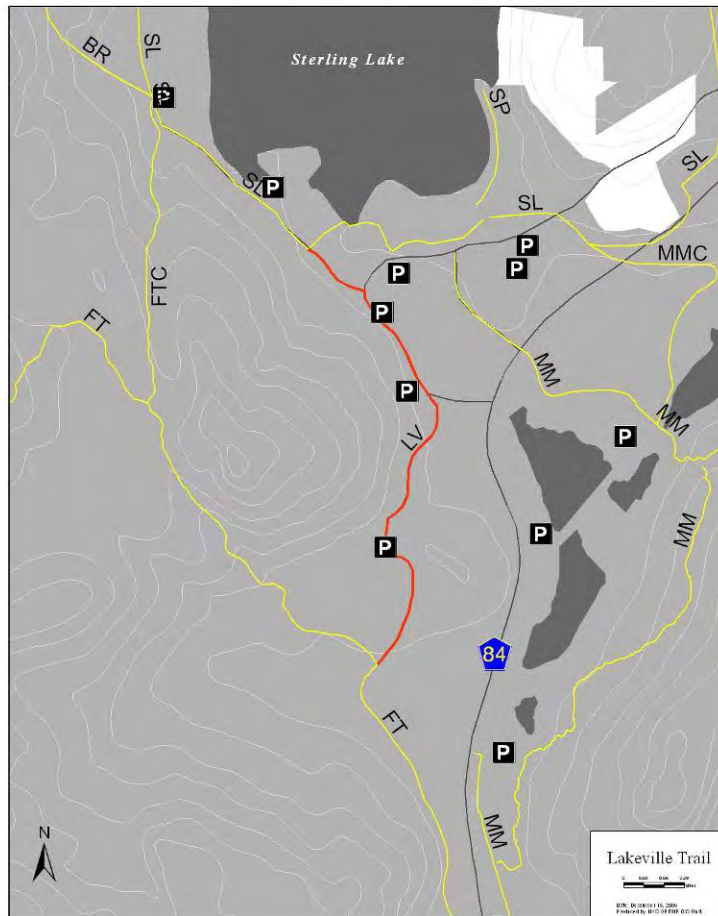
Assessment:

Along the trail, there are some areas of seasonal wetness that may require some drainage work. Many of the water issues on the trail can be resolved with appropriate water abatement methods. There are some areas where a reroute may be necessary. However, other environmental resources, such as endangered species, will have to be considered. The width of the trail reflects the previous logging practices that occurred. There are some sections along the trail, particularly in the areas of steep incline where the treadway is not in good condition and others where the surface material has eroded to the point that large rocks have been exposed. When wet, these rocks become very slippery. Due to these conditions, the treadway is being expanded in order to skirt the area. With some water abatement and trail maintenance, the treadway of this trail could improve greatly. There is a major stream crossing at Jennings Creek. A pedestrian foot bridge was constructed at this location.

LV - Lakeville Trail (C5, C6)

Length: 0.75 miles – Marked with white blazes

Uses: Hiking, Biking



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking and biking. The Lakeville Trail follows an abandoned paved roadway formerly known as the Sterling Lake Road. This trail is currently gated on its north intersection with Old Forge Road to prevent public vehicular access. This trail serves as a multiple use connection between the Visitor Center and the McKeags Meadow Trail.

It passes through the historic village of Lakeville where now only foundations of the former iron mining village remain. Trail users are reminded of the history here and the past lives that struggled to get by. Many foundations are less than 40 feet away from each other. Locals refer to the area as Ghost Town.

Assessment:

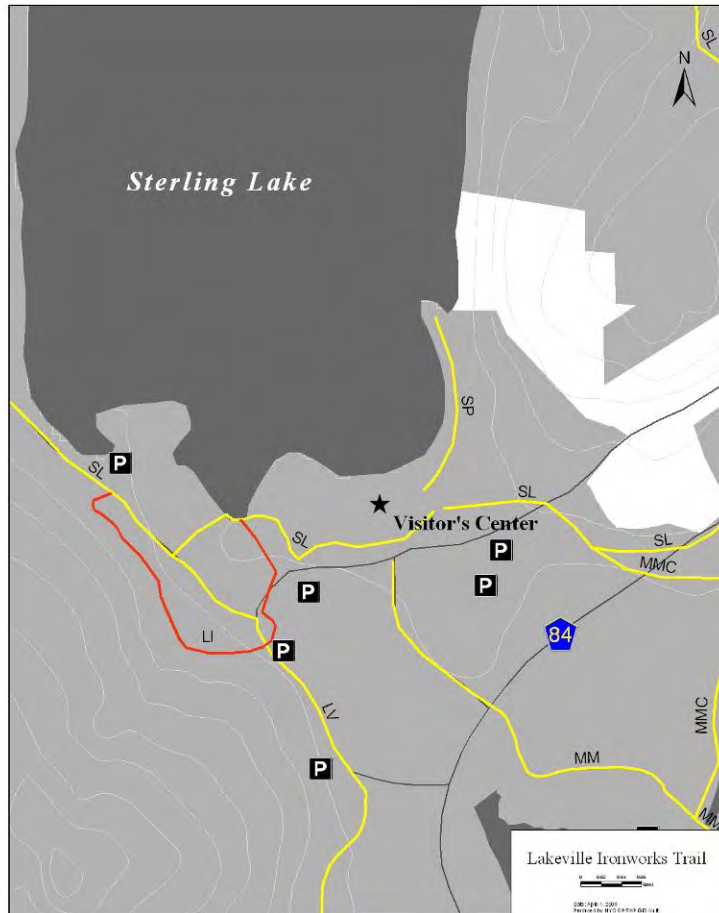
A 14-20 foot wide paved roadway of gentle to moderate grades, it is suitable for walking, hiking, biking or cross country skiing. It connects Old Forge Road with the Fire Tower Trail. Width of the roadway diminishes annually as vegetation encroaches on the sides. Some of the roadway is cracked and

grasses and woody plants begin to emerge. Width may be maintained with annual mowing and trimming of encroaching invasive plant species composed primarily of euonymus [fire bush] and barberry.

LI – Lakeville Ironworks Trail (C5)

Length: 0.5 miles – Recently marked with yellow blazes

Uses: Hiking



Description:

This trail is not in the Interim Trails Plan. For interpretive purposes hikers will be encouraged to walk the trail counterclockwise. From the Visitor Center, patrons will walk south on the Sterling Lake Trail to the section that is on West Sterling Lake Road, where they will turn left onto the Lakeville Ironworks Trail. The trail goes up a small hill past the Lake Mine then takes a sharp left turn past the remains of the early 20th century iron ore processing structures – a cable house, crusher, dryer, ore separator, and storage bin. It then follows the pathway worn by the miners themselves past the older Sterling Mine and crosses Old Forge Road. Once across Old Forge Road, the trail crosses Sterling Creek on a yet to be completed foot bridge and passes the last remaining miner's home in Lakeville. The trail then takes a sharp left turn, crosses back over Old Forge Rd. and passes the Sterling Furnace before

meeting back up with the Sterling Lake Trail. The trail surface is primarily a mix of soil darkened in places by the use of charcoal in the mining process, and discarded stone “tailings” from the mines. The undulating trail rises no more than 80 feet in elevation and is generally easy to walk.

Assessment:

Installation of a hand railing near the Lake Mine entrance and the Sterling Mine, as well as, removal of columns surrounding the Sterling Furnace needs to be completed. Requires some culvert installation for surface erosion control.

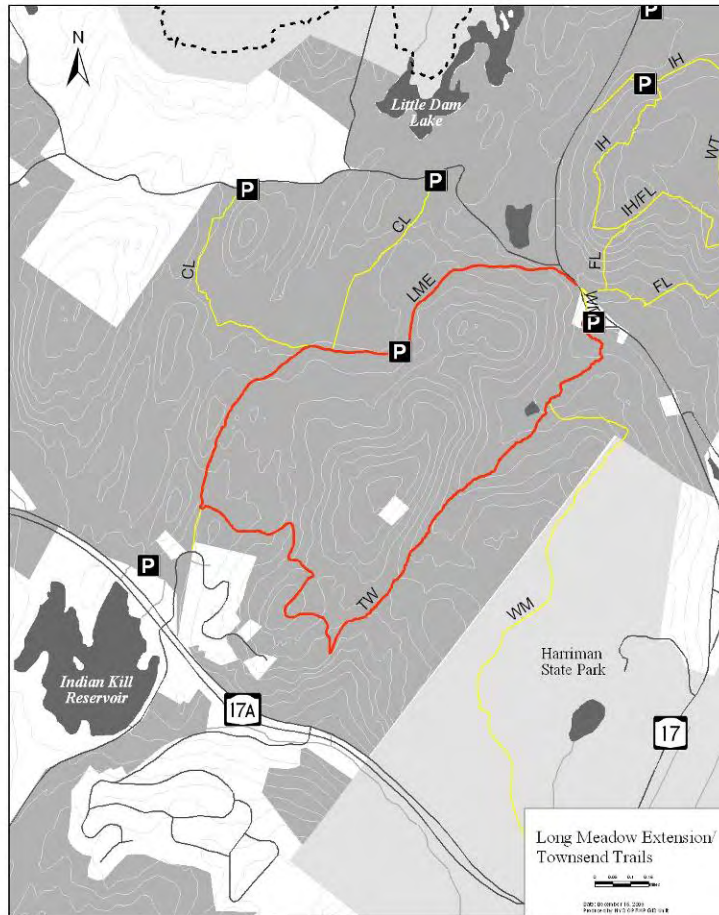
Note: this trail was progressed by a joint effort of the Highlands Environmental Research Institute (HENRI), the Palisades Interstate Park Commission (PIPC) and the NYS OPRHP. A mine opening was recently secured with a metal gate and the construction of the footbridge across Sterling Creek was completed.

LME - Long Meadow Extension Trail (F3, G3)

TW - Townsend Trail (F3, G3)

Length: Long Meadow Extension Trail– 1.9 miles – Marked with green blazes;
Townsend Trail – 1.6 miles – Marked with orange blazes

Uses: Hiking - both, Long Meadow Extension Trail – Biking



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies the Long Meadow Extension Trail for hiking and biking, and the Townsend Trail for hiking only. Currently both trails are open for these uses, as well as, the LME is open to cross-country skiing. When these trails were assessed, there was no distinction made between the two different trails. The trails have access points on Bramertown Road to the north and through Clinton Woods off of Route 17A to the south. The route of these trails creates a loop and generally follows a utility road and a gas line road. The route is wide with a flat surface that might be well-suited for use as a casual, “family” type hike.

The Long Meadow Extension Trail also connects to the Clayhole Trail. The Townsend Trail is co-aligned with the Wildcat Mountain Trail for a short distance.

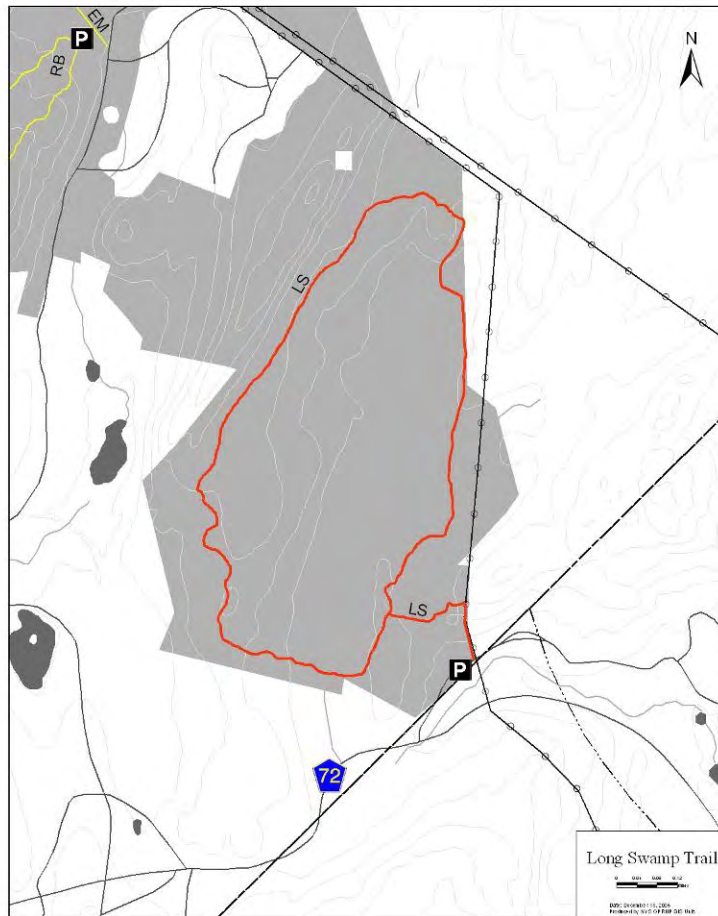
Assessment:

There is a section of the Townsend Trail that has a stream running along the trail bed. Water management measures should be sufficient to improve this section of trail.

LS - Long Swamp Trail (E7, F7)

Length: 3.0 miles – Marked with orange blazes

Uses: Hiking, Cross-country skiing



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies the Long Swamp Trail for hiking and cross country skiing. The trail is currently open to both uses. The trailhead and parking area for the Long Swamp Trail are located off of Eagle Valley Road. The loop is accessed by a short trail that follows along the shoulder of the road then travels up a power line right-of-way. The segment along the shoulder of the road is very narrow and a suitable reroute off of the road, onto park land should be investigated. In general, the trail has a gentle to moderate grade with the major uphill portion along the power line access right-of-way. Once the loop portion of the trail is reached, the trail widens and becomes a more moderate grade.

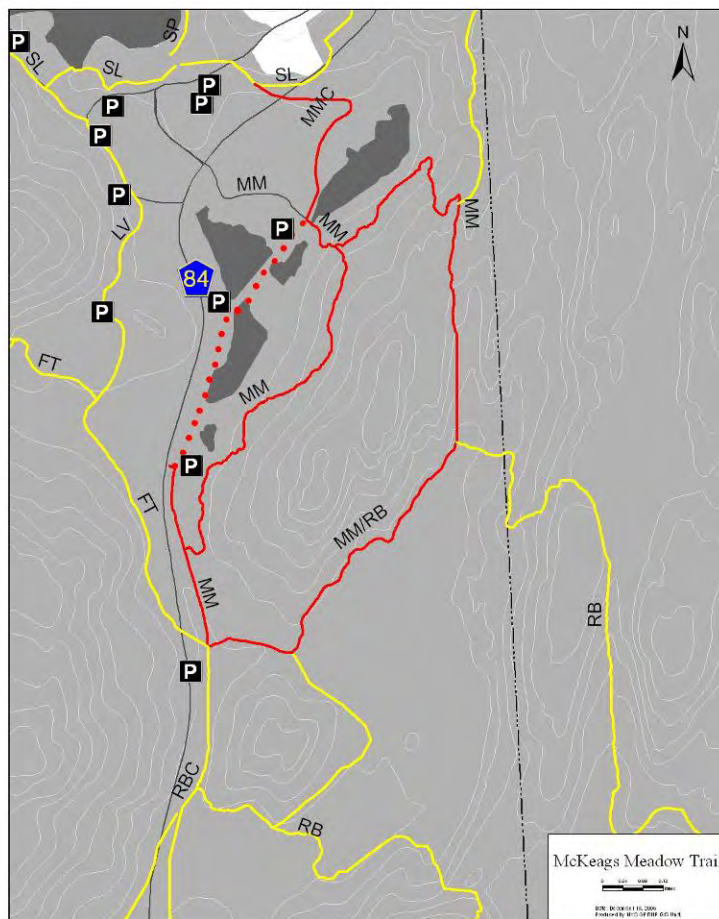
Assessment:

There is a major wet area of standing water at the southern portion of the trail, with no obvious, easy way around it. Currently, the only way to cross this water is through a crude system of planks and a ladder. The trail should be rerouted in this area. There are several old mines on this portion of the park, some which can be seen from the trail. These mines should be secured as the area receives more use. There is also a potential for interpretation. Portions of this trail loop come very close to private property. There is evidence of illegal ATV use on the trail.

MM - McKeags Meadow Trail (D6)

Length: 3.1 miles – Marked with yellow blazes

Uses: Hiking, Cross-country skiing (Equestrian on portion)



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies the McKeags Meadow Trail for hiking and cross country skiing and equestrian use on a portion of the trail. Currently the trail is only used for hiking and cross country skiing. The entrance is off of Long Meadow Road (Rt. 84) where there is a parking area with a portable toilet facility. The trail climbs gradually over wet and eroded spots. Traveling clockwise, at 0.6 miles, the trail surface levels off and passes by

McKeags Meadow before descending past the intersection with the Red Back Trail. Along the trail, several fallen trees need to be removed. No viewpoints were identified. At the bottom of the descent and to the north, a sand pit / abandoned firing range was noted. The trail then heads south and approaches an area flooded by beaver, which impacts the trail. The trail can only be negotiated with some difficulty. The trail continues to a 'T' juncture with an unmarked trail paralleling Long Meadow Road, which runs north - south. The marked trail turns north and crosses two wooden bridges. There is no tree canopy along this entire stretch. Approaching Laurel Meadow Ponds, the trail becomes a narrow, overgrown path that requires much maneuvering to pass wet areas created by pond overflow near fishing spots at the south end of the pond. Erosion of the trail in this location would continue if not addressed. This segment of trail was difficult to traverse.

The McKeags Meadow Connector trail connects the Visitor Center to the McKeags Meadow Trail. The trail begins as part of the old switchback for the railroad and then continues on an old woods road. This is for hiking only.

Assessment:

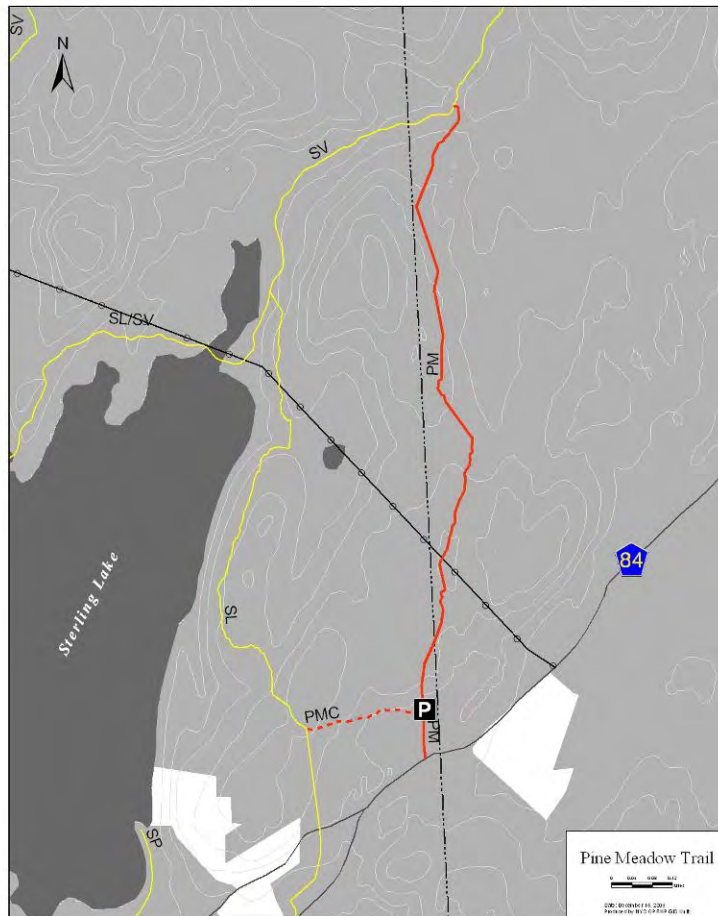
The section of trail impacted by water due to the pond overflow is shown in dots on the trail map above. The trail was re-routed in this section as an approved modification to the Interim Trails Plan. A reroute of the southern portion of the trail that is flooded by beaver is necessary. The two wooden bridges need improvement. The transition between the trail and the bridge is uneven. The bridge surfaces consist of hard, smooth decks, which may be incompatible with some uses.

The McKeags Meadow Connector Trail is in acceptable condition.

PM - Pine Meadow Trail (D4, D5)

Length: 1.4 miles – Marked with orange blazes

Uses: Hiking, Cross-Country Skiing



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking and cross country skiing and the trail is currently open to both uses. The trailhead is located along Old Forge Road (County Route 84), just east of the Sterling Forest® State Park Visitor Center. There is a small year round parking area available at this trailhead. Generally the trail is in hemlock stands which are in good condition. Two mine pits were found near the trail; one had strong water flow into a 2 foot opening. The trail terminates at the Sterling Valley Trail, just north of Sterling Lake. The Pine Meadow Connector Trail connects the Pine Meadow Trail to the Sterling Lake Trail.

Assessment:

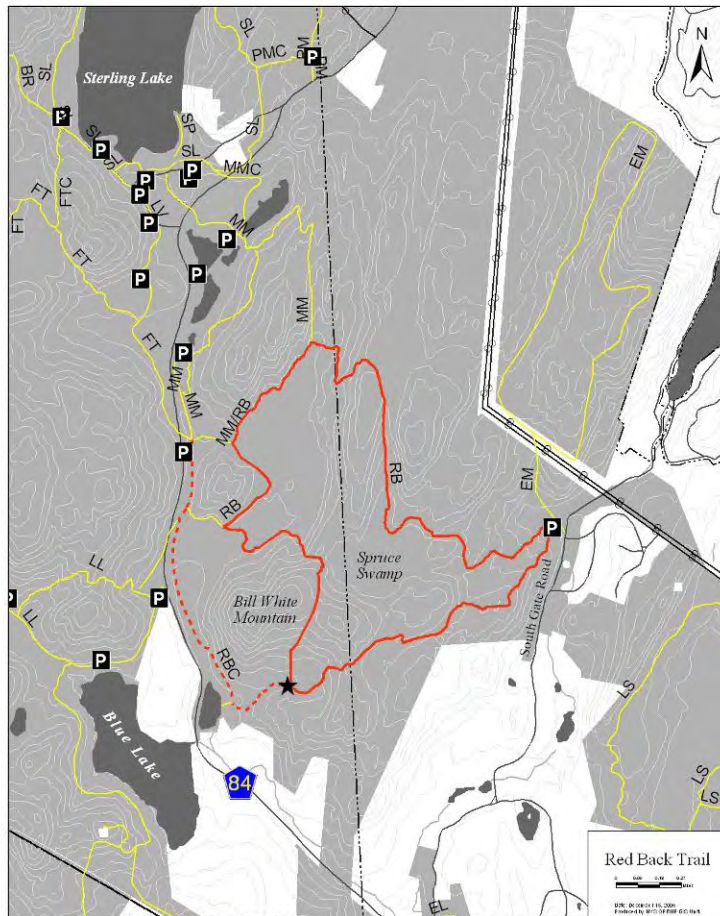
Blazing needs to be reviewed to determine if the trail has sufficient markings throughout its length. Pine Meadow Connector Trail was mistaken for a spur trail due to incomplete blazing. There are some sections of the trail which have water problems that can be improved by using water diversion methods. The mine pits within the vicinity of the trail need to be addressed.

The trail is well-suited to cross-country skiing as it has no severe grades. Caution signs should be appropriately placed for novices. The surface of the trail is unusually smooth so that 6 inches of snow may be sufficient cover for light use. The trail should be assessed further to determine if it can be recommended for use by persons with disabilities.

RB - Red Back Trail (D6, D7, E6, E7)

Length: 6.7 miles (includes 0.5 miles of the McKeags Meadow Trail) – Marked with rose blazes

Uses: Hiking, (Equestrian and Cross-country skiing on portions)



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking, portions for equestrian and cross country skiing. Currently the trail is not open due to the need for two bridges and reroutes necessary around beaver inundated areas. There is a parking area on South Gate Road. The trail assessment began at this point and was conducted in a clockwise direction. The trail ascends a series of low hills in a southwesterly direction until gently descending the south side of Bill White Mountain. At this point (starred on the map), two options exist:

First option is to turn north and go over Bill White Mountain and down its north face which has a somewhat rocky path. Upon reaching the bottom of the hill, the trail goes westerly along a section where the trail alignment goes through a beaver inundated area. At this point, the trail is under water. A reroute needs to be explored and developed for this area. The trail then undulates before crossing a stream (approximately 40 feet wide) below the beaver dam.

The **second option** (shown as the dotted Red Back Connector Trail) travels around Bill White Mountain. The trail would continue on the same roadway southwesterly until it joins the former Sterling Iron Mountain Rail bed at 1.7 miles. The trail follows the rail bed in a northerly direction. There are two former stream crossings which are no longer passable and must be re-built. The first crossing is at the 2 mile point, immediately above Little Sterling Lake and the second crossing is at the 2.6 mile point. From this crossing, the trail continues another 0.6 miles until it leaves the rail bed immediately before the next stream crossing and follows a path east of the beaver ponds. The trail intersects the McKeags Meadow Trail that enters from the left and then proceeds over a hill. Passing through the valley on the back side of the hill at the 4.7 mile point, the trail turns abruptly east, ascending to 1040' and intersects the first option of the Redback Trail at 5.1 miles.

From here, the loop trail turns south passing the Red Back Mine at mile point 5.7. Erosion was noted along this section. Immediately before the swamp, the trail turns east at mile point 5.8 and then passes Spruce Swamp and ascends an old mining access road until it reaches a utility maintenance road. Continuing easterly, the trail passes Moorhead Mine at mile point 6.4 and returns to the parking area for a total distance of 6.7 miles.

Assessment:

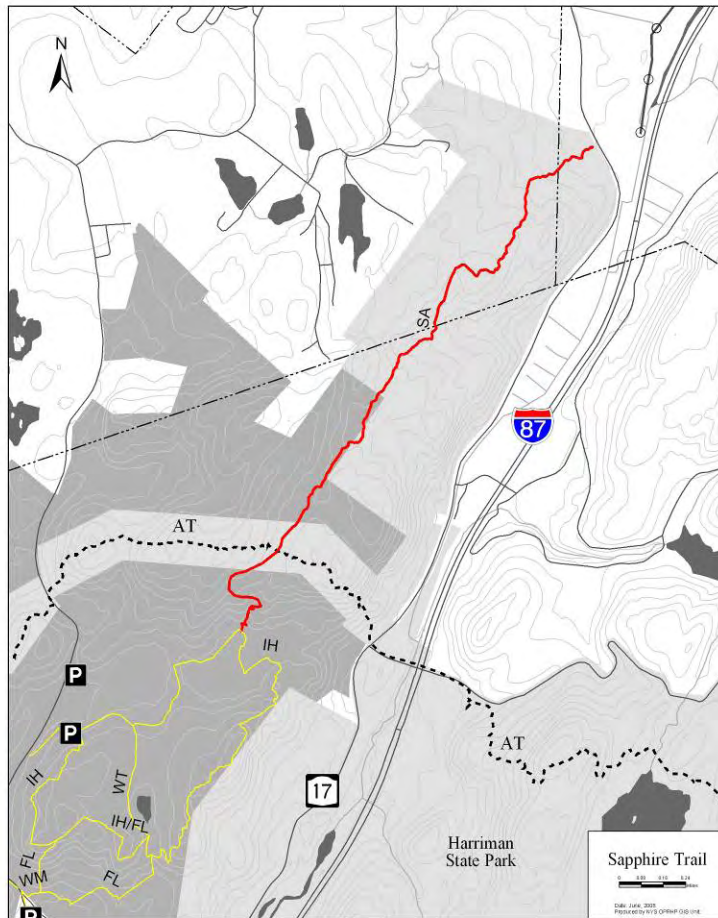
First Option: The section of trail over Bill White Mountain to the McKeags Meadow Trail is steep and rocky, with areas that are difficult for horses to traverse. The stream crossing requires rock rearrangement to meet equestrian trail standards. The lower section of the north face of Bill White Mountain is adjacent to a swamp which beaver have now dammed resulting in water backing up over the route. Paralleling the original trail in this section may be difficult. Beaver control measures should be considered. A reroute of this section of trail will be explored.

Second Option: This option is predicated upon two bridges being re-built across Sterling Stream. The abutments are in place but both require some engineering. The first crossing has original railroad abutments, low over the water; the second railroad crossing is 10-12 feet higher than the water with offset parallelogram hand cut stone abutments.

SA – Sapphire Trail (H1, H2)

Length: 2.75 miles – Marked with blue blazes

Uses: Hiking



Description:

This trail was not identified in the Interim Trails Plan but was an approved modification to the Plan. The Sapphire Trail was proposed and constructed by the NY-NJ Trail Conference and is a single track hiking trail. This trail provides a connection between Route 17/Harriman Trail Station and the Appalachian/Indian Hill trails. Beginning at Rt. 17 opposite the train station, the trail is in Harriman State Park and passes into Sterling Forest® State Park at 1.8 miles. The trail leaves Rt. 17, passes a park access gate and continues across a roadway (the former highway) and enters a mixed pine/hardwood forest. The trail in this area is a footpath that meanders through former farm fields as it ascends the ridge. At 1.0 miles the trail turns left onto a woods road and descends to a stream crossing where it bears to the right onto another wood road. The trail passes a former house site and begins to ascend. Here the trail leaves the woods road several times to avoid washed out areas. The trail enters Sterling Forest® and shortly after crosses 2 streams before continuing on to meet the Appalachian Trail at 2.6 miles. This trail leaves the

AT and continues in a southerly direction to meet with the Indian Hill Loop Trail.

Leaving the AT, the trail is in good condition and is easily followed. As the trail descends the ridge, there are several areas where the trail goes through areas of large stones. In these areas the trail is hard to follow and potentially dangerous when wet or leaf covered. Once beyond these rocks, there has been considerable trail work done to delineate the trail as it descends a slope towards a seasonal brook (This work should continue, as there are several areas where the trail is hard to find and footing is slippery; additional marking in this area would help). Once over the brook, the trail climbs a small knoll and then descends back to the brook. It crosses the brook again and then shortly after meets with the Indian Hill Loop Trail.

It is recommended that the trail alignments for the section that provides the connection to the train station be improved. Overall, this trail is in very good condition, with minor issues to be corrected.

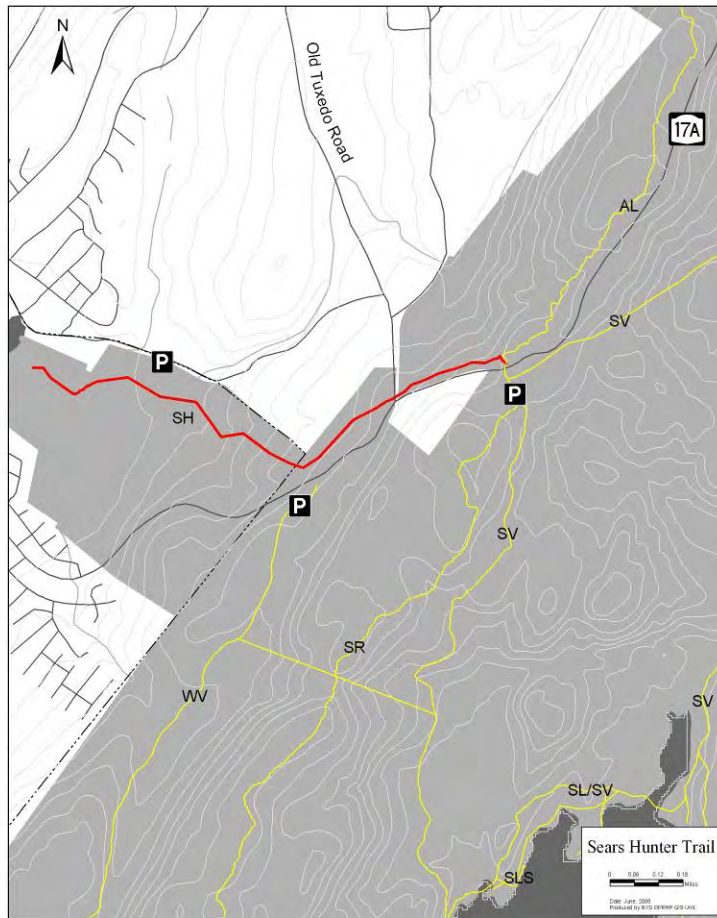
Assessment:

Trail maintenance is performed by volunteers from the NY-NJ Trail Conference. Minor maintenance issues that need to be addressed include: additional stepping stones at wet areas/stream crossings, additional marking and improvement of tread way where trail has been moved to avoid eroded spots (to delineate trail).

Sears Hunter Trail (B4, C4)

Length: 1.4 miles - Unmarked

Uses: Hiking



Description:

The western section of this trail was part of the Interim Trails Plan as a hiking trail. Starting at the Sears Hunter parking area, this trail would follow existing wood roads and continue through wooded areas in overgrown farm fields.

The Interim Trails Plan showed this trail then heading south to connect with the West Valley Trail. This section of the trail was closed as an approved modification to the Interim Trails Plan and is not shown on this map.

The eastern section of this trail creates a connection to other trails in the network. After leaving the wood roads, the trail would begin uphill to make a crossing of Old Tuxedo Road near its intersection with Route 17A. Once across Old Tuxedo Road, the trail would parallel Route 17A on a hillside west of the highway. There are two stream crossings on this section before the trail makes a connection to the Allis Trail just west of the Allis/Route 17A crossing. This map shows the final suggested trail route.

Assessment:

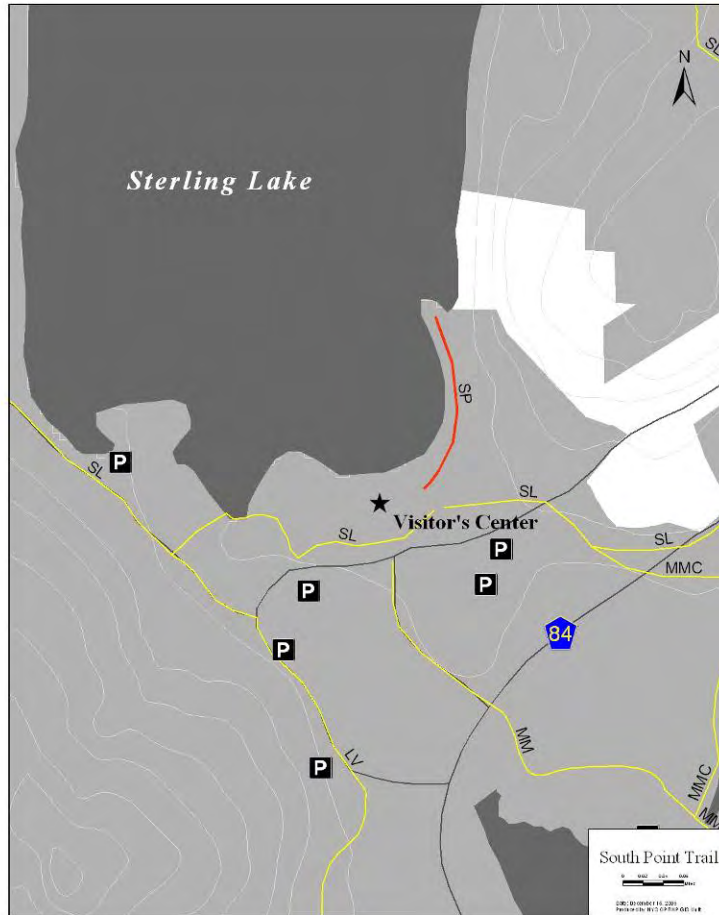
The portion of trail between Old Tuxedo Road and Route 17A will require considerable trail work to be done in order for this to be a multiple use trail.

This would include stone work, cutting out the uphill embankment to improve trail width, slope stabilization and at lease two stream crossings.

SP - South Point Trail (D5, D6)

Length: 0.4 miles – Marked with orange blazes

Uses: Hiking



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking only. The trail begins at the Sterling Forest® State Park Visitor Center. The trail is wide at the beginning and then narrows. The trail ends at a large rock with a magnificent view of Sterling Lake and the surrounding mountains.

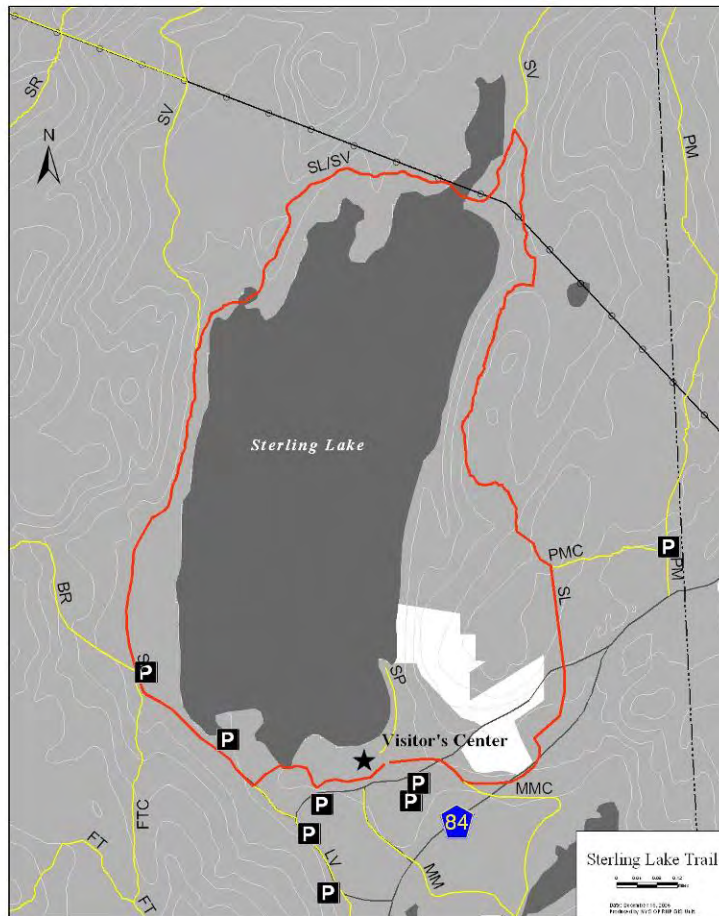
Assessment:

Trail is in acceptable condition.

SL - Sterling Lake Trail (C5, D5)

Length: 4.0 miles – Marked with blue blazes

Uses: Hiking (Biking and Cross-country skiing on portions)



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this entire trail for hiking, along with the western section for biking and the northern section for biking and cross country skiing. The trail is currently open for these uses. The trail begins at the Visitor Center. The trail proceeds west and then north along the western side of the lake to the point where the Sterling Valley Trail diverges from the Sterling Lake Trail. The trail is relatively wide, with gently rolling terrain (except for two relatively short climbs).

The Sterling Lake and Sterling Valley trails are co-aligned along the northern part of Sterling Lake. The trail passes over a causeway.

The trail along the eastern side of the lake is generally more rugged, with steeper and more numerous grades, as well as rockier terrain. Near the southern end of Sterling Lake, the trail crosses Old Forge Road and then returns to the point of beginning at the Visitor Center.

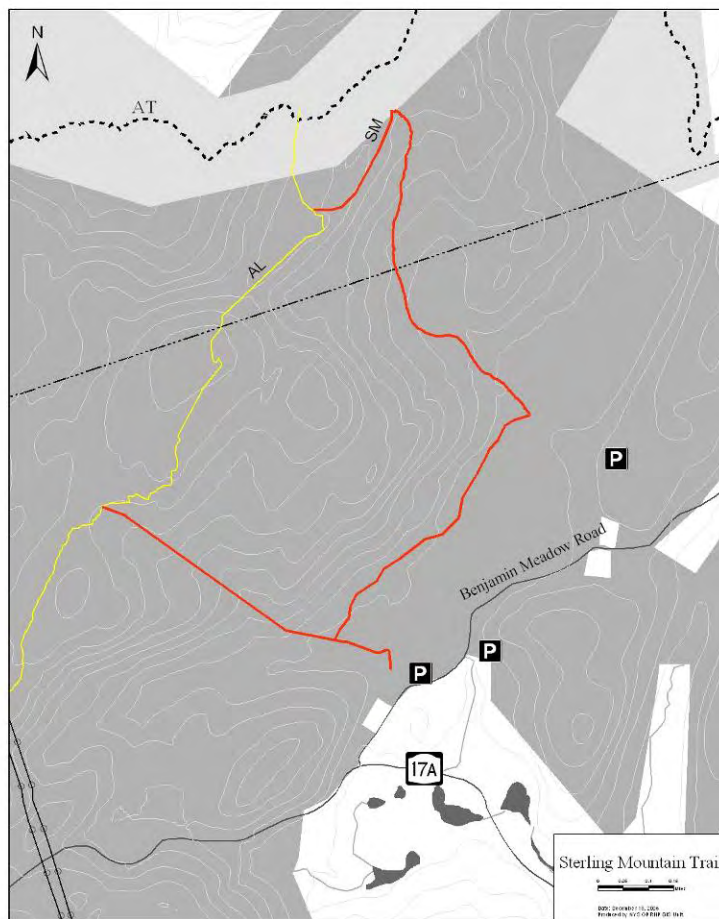
Assessment:

No obvious signs of serious trail erosion were observed, and the trail appears to be in generally good condition. One concern is the number of unsigned side trails, which would be tempting to explore by any curious user. The current trail route on the eastern side of the lake that circles east away from the lake was chosen due to a possible fire hazard risk of the dead hemlock trees in the area near homes and the steep slopes near the lake. The re-routing of this section will be reconsidered in the future if these concerns can be addressed.

SM - Sterling Mountain Trail (D3, E2, E3)

Length: 3.3 miles - Unmarked

Uses: Hiking



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking but it is not currently open. The trail begins at the parking area of the old Sterling Gardens on Benjamin Meadow Road. The trail proceeds north through waist-high brush. There was garden debris along the route. Crossing a brook at 0.2 mi., the trail turns right and parallels a marsh area. There are fallen trees along this section. At 0.3 mi., the trail passed a huge glacial erratic. Continuing to the end of the

marsh area, passing an old road to the north, the trail reaches another wood road at 0.7 miles. The trail travels to the north until reaching the boundary markers of the Appalachian Trail Corridor at 1.2 miles. Entering the corridor, the trail turns northwest and begins climbing a steep slope, negotiating blueberries, rock outcroppings and fallen trees, eventually reaching the Allis Trail, as it descends the northeast side of Sterling Mountain. The user then follows the Allis Trail southwest for 0.9 miles and then the trail splits and travels southeast back to the Sterling Gardens area. This half mile section of the trail is highly eroded and difficult to walk.

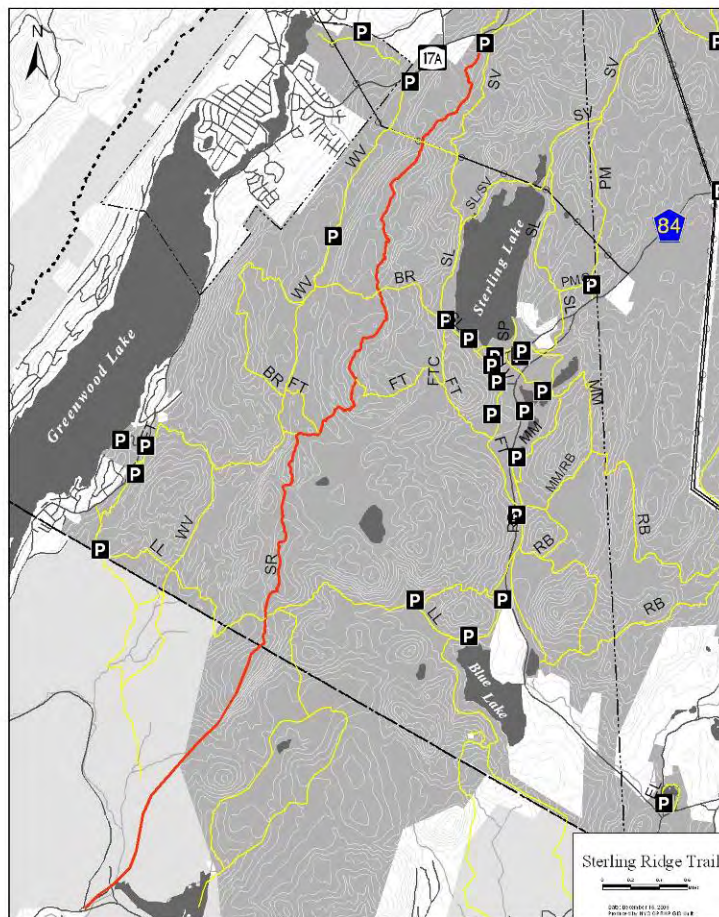
Assessment:

This trail is very steep and rocky. Portions are highly eroded.

SR - Sterling Ridge Trail (Highlands Trail) (A7, A8, B6, B7, C4, C5)

Length: 5.75 miles – Marked with blue blazes

Uses: Hiking



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking only. The Sterling Ridge Trail is a single track hiking trail and is co-aligned with the long distance, regional Highlands Trail. The trail provides access into New Jersey and Passaic County parkland that is managed by the PIPC. The southern trailhead

is located in New Jersey at the junction of Greenwood Lake Turnpike and East Shore Road. The trail enters Sterling Forest® at the New York – New Jersey border, from the Passaic County parkland, Tranquility Ridge. Once the trail enters New York, it crosses several trails, including the white blazed Lake-to-Lake Trail. Heading north, the trail makes several ascents and descents, crossing several seasonal wet areas west of the Cedar Pond area. There are several viewpoints along the trail on the way to the Fire Tower. At 1.8 miles, the Fire Tower Trail joins the Sterling Ridge Trail from the west. After a series of four rather steep ascents, the Sterling Ridge Trail reaches the Sterling Forest® Fire Tower (2.4 miles), with 360° views. Here, the Fire Tower Trail leaves to the east, while the Sterling Ridge Trail continues north over undulating terrain. The orange blazed Bare Rock Trail crosses at 3.4 miles. The trail continues north providing three good views of Sterling Lake from rock outcrops along the way. The trail crosses a power line at 4.9 miles then the yellow blazed Sterling Valley Trail comes in from the right on a wood road at 5.9 miles. The Sterling Ridge Trail continues through a parking area and ends at Route 17A, directly across from the Allis Trail trailhead. The Highlands Trail continues north along the Allis Trail.

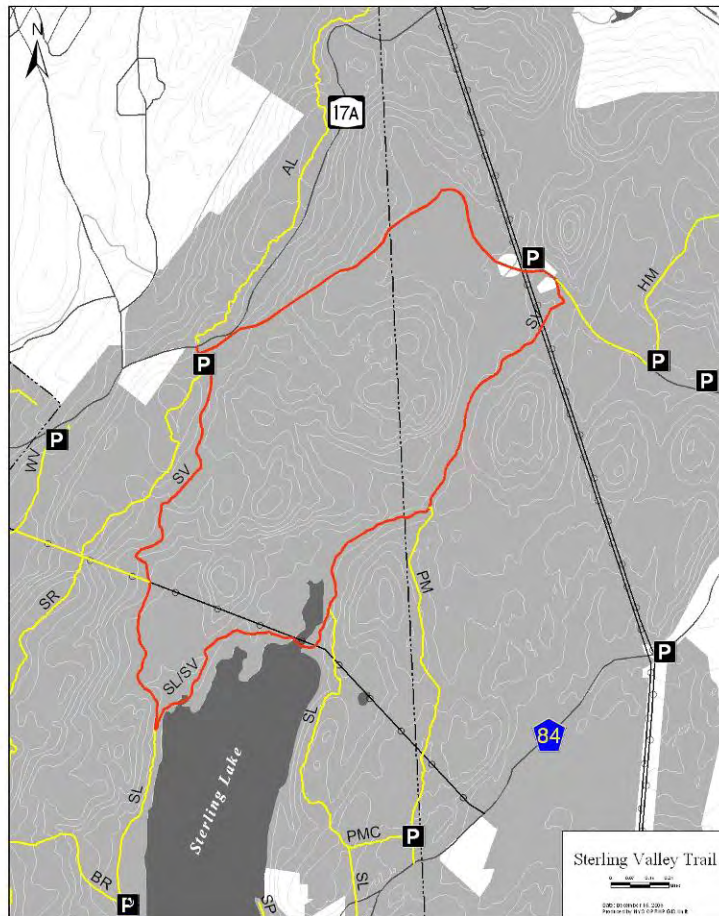
Assessment:

Seasonal wet areas. Trail maintenance is performed by volunteers from the NY-NJ Trail Conference.

SV - Sterling Valley Trail (C4, C5, D4, D5)

Length: 5.8 miles – Marked with yellow blazes

Uses: Hiking, Biking and Cross-country skiing



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking, biking and cross country skiing. Currently, the trail is open for hiking; only the eastern and southern sections are open to biking and cross country skiing at this time. This loop trail begins along Route 17A at the trailhead/parking area which is also shared by the Sterling Ridge and Allis Trails. There is also a small trailhead located off Ironwood Drive, by the NYU apartments. At the northern end of Sterling Lake, the Sterling Valley Trail is co-aligned with the Sterling Lake Trail. The Pine Meadow Trail terminates at the Sterling Valley Trail along the eastern side of the trail.

Assessment:

From the Route 17A trailhead, the blazed trail proceeds north and east from the trailhead to an excessive slope, with a rocky and watered surface. The trail traverses muddy or intermittently wet areas in several places. At approximately 100 feet north and east of the trailhead, there is an impassable wet area. The topography offers an inviting alternative up a gentle slope to a promontory where there is a partial but very pleasant vista of

Sterling Valley. The possible alternative would be to re-connect with the existing trail not far beyond the wet area.

At approximately another 150 feet, at the site of a dog-leg curve in the trail, the trail grade was measured at 15% sustained for a distance of about 250 feet. During periods of heavy rain, this section of trail functions as a running stream bed.

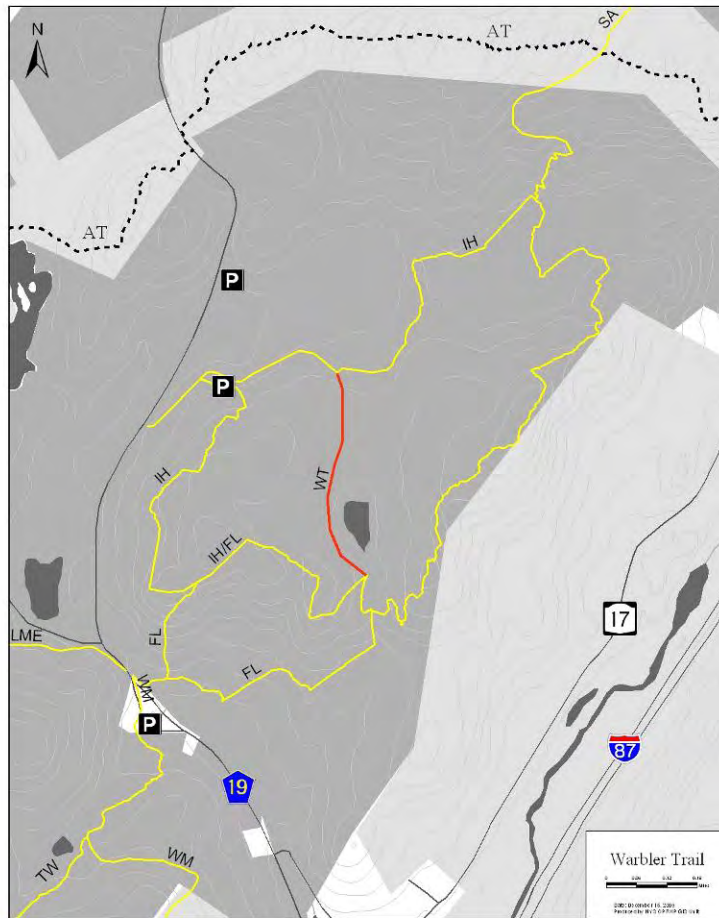
A series of interconnected road traces were discovered to the south and east of the trail. These seemed to climb the slope at a gentler grade. It would be possible to utilize the system of road traces to skirt the steepest section of the existing trail. Areas to the southwest of the parking area which were noted as problematic require further investigation.

There is the potential to reroute the trail from Sterling Ridge/Sterling Valley parking lot going out in both directions from the trailhead. Slope, erosion and other factors need to be investigated more thoroughly to determine the extent of trail rehabilitation or relocation if necessary.

WT - Warbler Trail (H2, H3)

Length: .5 miles - Unmarked

Uses: Hiking



Description:

This trail is not in the Interim Trails Plan but was approved for construction as a modification to the Plan. It is not currently open. The Warbler Trail is native bank run sand & gravel soil and approximately 10-14' in width. It runs approximately ½ mile in a north-south direction past the former mountain top farm, then narrows to single track foot path which connects to Indian Hill Loop as it passes a 2 ¾ acre farm pond. The pond is visited by fishermen, wildlife enthusiasts and birders.

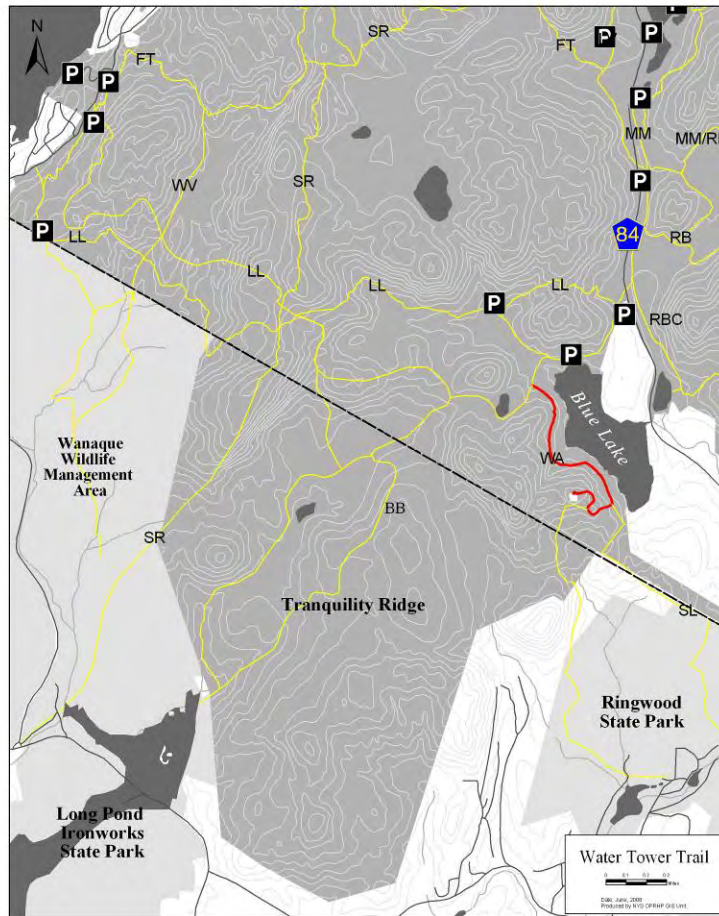
Assessment:

Trail corridor is in excellent condition with the exception of the last 500 feet which reverts to a single track alongside the farm pond. This section requires some clearing, drainage, and trail surface improvements.

WA - Water Tower Trail (C7)

Length: 1 mile - Unmarked

Uses: Hiking



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking only. This is a gravel road on the southwest side of Blue Lake, which is wide enough for two lanes of traffic at some points. Where it leaves the side of the Lake and climbs the hillside it narrows to a single vehicle width and reverts to rock / gravel with 7-10% slopes. The trail terminates at a water tower, which is privately held. There are two further opportunities off of this trail, which would link into New Jersey trails.

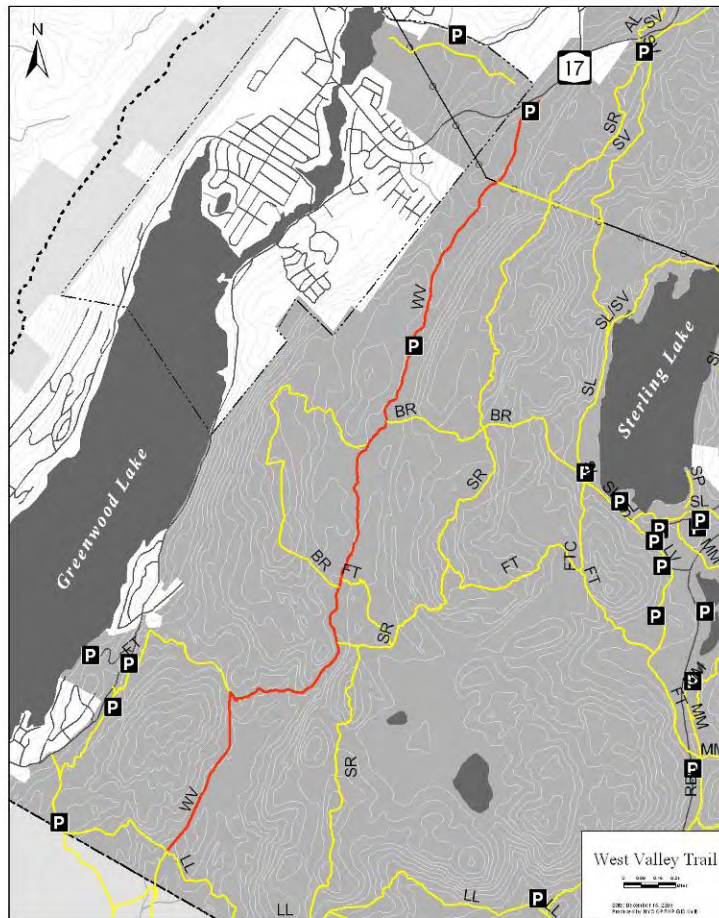
Assessment:

Trail is in acceptable condition. It is maintained by United Water Co.

WV - West Valley Trail (A5, B5, B6, C4)

Length: 4.5 miles – Marked with green blazes

Uses: Hiking (Cross-country skiing on portion)



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking and the southern section between the Fire Tower Trail and the Lake to Lake Trail for cross-country skiing. Currently, the northern sections of the trail are open. The section south of the Fire Tower Trail is not currently marked or open. The West Valley trailhead is located along route 17A, 1 mile northeast of Greenwood Lake. The parking area is situated on a fairly steep incline and is difficult to negotiate. The lot allows for parking for approximately 5 vehicles. During hunting season with a special permit, park patrons are allowed to drive past this trailhead parking lot and down the trail for approximately 1.2 miles to a large open area. Located here is a gate which prevents hunters from driving any further. After this gate, the trail then becomes more of a footpath but is still fairly wide. The trail travels another 1.3 miles to the intersection with the Fire Tower Trail. The trail is then co-aligned with the Fire Tower Trail for approximately 1 mile. The last portion of the trail is approximately 1 mile long and terminates at the Lake to Lake Trail.

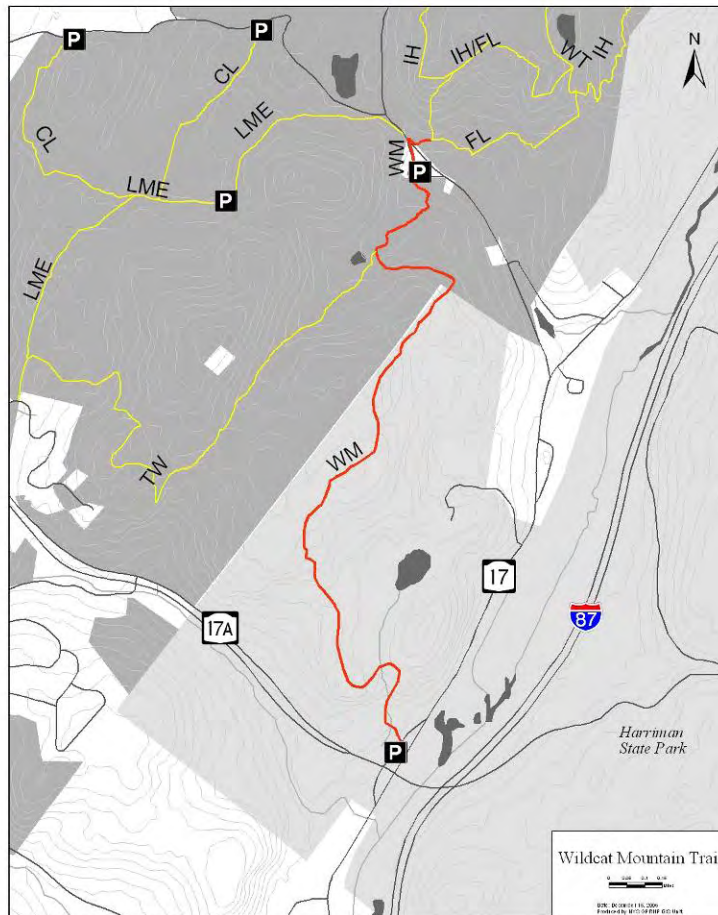
Assessment:

The drivable section of West Valley Trail has severe erosion issues due to running water flowing down the trail. The second half of the trail has severe erosion occurring along with deep standing water directly on the trail, forcing the user to walk off the trail and through the woods in order to continue. This is partially due to illegal ATV usage on the trail from individuals entering from the nearby power lines.

WM - Wildcat Mountain Trail (G3, G4)

Length: 2.3 miles – Marked with white blazes

Uses: Hiking



Description:

The Interim Trails Plan identifies this trail for hiking only. The Wildcat Mountain Trail is a single track hiking trail and partially in Sterling Forest® State Park and mostly in Harriman State Park. The southern trailhead is at the Route 17A Park and Ride on Harriman property. The trail is a single track foot path that climbs Wildcat Mountain and passes by Spruce Pond. After the trail passes Spruce Pond, it enters Sterling Forest® property. A portion of the trail in Sterling Forest® is co-aligned with the Townsend Trail. The trail terminates at Bramertown Road across the road from the trailhead to the

Furnace Loop. There is limited parking at the northern trailhead. This trail was recently designed and developed with the assistance of the NY-NJ Trail Conference and has been through the environmental review process.

Assessment:

Trail is in excellent condition. Trail maintenance is performed by volunteers from the NY-NJ Trail Conference.