

Oral Presentation Problem 2008

Note: This scenario is fictitious and is not based on any existing situation. Any resemblance to a real property is purely coincidental. Additionally, information is presented which you may know is untrue (e.g. regarding the state champion chestnut oak tree). For purposes of this problem, assume the information presented is true. Where information given is incomplete, you may make reasonable assumptions (e.g. you may claim that the American Indian encampment dates from any time period that Indians occupied New York State).

You are a committee of New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Employees. Your committee consists of a forester, a wildlife biologist, an environmental analyst, a mineral resources specialist, and a public relations specialist, one of whom is the chair of the committee.

Your task is to create a draft unit management plan (UMP) for a newly acquired piece of land which will be added to the New York State Forest Lands. When devising your plan, you must consider all stakeholders' wishes, (though you can't honor all those wishes, because some will conflict) while protecting the natural qualities of the property. Priorities of the DEC include combating climate change, providing people with opportunities for outdoor nature activities, fostering green and healthy communities, building a toxic free future and safeguarding New York's unique natural areas.

The 1,413 acre property was part of a 1,554 acre parcel owned by the Ross Family. The Rosses kept 141 acres. The property is located 40 miles from a large metropolitan area, but not in the Catskill or Adirondack State Forest Preserves. The Rosses used the property for minor recreation, including hiking on a narrow trail kept open by wildlife, and occasional deer hunting. Being sensitive to encroaching urban sprawl, the Rosses kept the property fairly wild. There are neither utility rights of way nor mineral leases.

The roughly rectangular property is bordered on the north by a housing development and a shopping mall, on the east by DeCesare Drive, on the south by two housing developments separated by Horton Town Park, and on the west by the Ross's house and parcel. Smith Street runs along the property for a very short distance. Chain link fence (6' high) runs along the north, east and south property lines.

Carey Creek flows through the property. It dries up in the driest summers, but usually is flowing. Carey Creek empties into a large river, 5 miles away. Beavers have created a 30-acre pond in Carey Creek, which does not dry up. Blanding's, painted and spotted turtles are in the pond and four species of salamander breed in the pond, including eastern tiger salamander.

The property is 90 percent forest and portions have been logged, but not in the past 80 years. The remaining 10 percent was agricultural, split about evenly between cultivation and pasture. The agricultural activity ceased 15 years ago and the fields are now slowly reverting by succession to forest. Adjacent to one of the fields is the largest chestnut oak tree in the state.

An abandoned rail line, from which the track has been removed, runs across one corner of the property for a distance of 2,630 feet. There are three foundations left over from buildings along the track route. Archaeological testing revealed an American Indian encampment along Carey Creek. Numerous Indian artifacts were found in the immediate area and arrowheads were routinely found in the fields after cultivation.

Topography is mostly gently sloping, but there are some steeper parts, as well as a rock cliff 50 feet high by 220 feet long of exposed granitic gneiss. Peregrine falcons have nested on the cliff for 4 years, and raised 5 young. Carol's Cave, adjacent to the rock cliff, is a hibernaculum for little brown, big brown, Indiana and hoary bats. The cave entrance is roughly 3 feet wide and 2 feet high. It extends 32 feet deep into Miller Hill. Copperhead snakes have been found near Carol's Cave, but the most recent sighting was 11 years ago.

Many groups and individuals would like access to the property for their use including: an ATV club, hiking club, Audubon society, historical society, horse riding association, pack llama club, mountain bikers, campers, rock climbers, college classes, loggers, hunters, a cable TV company seeking a right of way for a cable line, and a gas company seeking drilling rights. Several organizations have already approached their local town, county, and state representatives to express their desires. **All of the above mentioned groups have provided you with verbal or written comments expressing their desire to use the property.** All represent a potential source of income or at least a boost to the local economy.

Referring to the DEC UMP Web Page (listed in the references) you will see that the UMP process consists of several actions. **You must complete Step 3 in oral format of the UMP process and present your plan to the review panel (the judges).**

Steps of the UMP Process (outside the Adirondack State Forest Preserve):

- 1 - Conduct resource inventory of the unit area.
- 2 - Solicit written and verbal input from the public through press releases and meetings.
- 3 - Development of a draft plan and address State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) issues.**
- 4 - Release draft UMP and conduct public hearings.
- 5 - DEC Commissioner gives final approval and the UMP is adopted.

Your Draft UMP should have, at minimum, the following components:

- 1 – Introduction
- 2 – Property description
- 3 – Stakeholder identification and pros and cons of each stakeholder’s use of the property
- 4 – Your department’s management goals
- 5 – SEQRA considerations: The formal SEQR process is too involved for this application. Be prepared to discuss the SEQR process and the negative environmental impacts of your plan.
- 6 – Maps, graphs, or other visual aids
- 7 – Your plan for public usage including reasons for selecting this plan
- 8 – Conclusion

The Resource Inventory was completed for this property between 2004 and 2007 and is listed below.

Plants

- 73 species of wildflowers, none rare
- 13 species of ferns, one rare, fragrant cliff fern growing on the cliff in a large colony
- 21 species of trees, none rare, but state champ chestnut oak resides here
- 7 species of shrubs, none rare
- 6 species of vines, none rare
- 4 species of clubmoss, none rare
- Various mosses, liverworts, and lichens
- Various fungi (which are not plants)

Animals

- 30 species of mammals, including Indiana bat
- 79 species of breeding birds according to NYS Breeding Bird Atlas 2000-05, including peregrine falcon
- 9 species of reptiles, including Blanding’s turtle (Copperhead has not been found recently)
- 13 species of amphibians, including eastern tiger salamander
- 13 species of freshwater fish, all warm water species, none rare
- Various insects, spiders and other invertebrates

Geologic

Granitic gneiss cliff

Patricia's Pond

Carey Creek

Carol's Cave

Shallow, rocky soils except in the agricultural plots where most rocks have been removed

Abundant glacial erratics of varying sizes

Highest elevation = Miller Hill at 526' is the highest elevation for several miles, hence it has a benchmark;

lowest elevation = 349' at the pond surface

Archaeology

American Indian encampment with pottery shards, broken stone tools, flintknapping stone chips

Stone arrowheads in the field area

Three railroad building foundations

Railroad related artifacts