



New York State
Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

CAROL ASH
Commissioner

DAVID A. PATERSON
Governor

**AGENCY DECISION
AND
STATEMENT OF FINDINGS**

**Adoption of a Master Plan for Saratoga Spa State Park
Designation of a Park Preservation Area
Designation of a Bird Conservation Area
Designation of a Natural Heritage Area**

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has prepared a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Final Master Plan, dated December 16, 2009 for Saratoga Spa State Park located in the City of Saratoga Springs and Town of Malta in Saratoga County.

By the authority vested in me in State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation Law, I do hereby adopt the Final Master Plan for Saratoga Spa State Park. I also designate portions of the park, as detailed in the Master Plan, Park Preservation, Bird Conservation and Natural Heritage Areas.

This decision represents certification of the attached Findings Statement prepared in accordance with the requirements of 6 NYCRR Part 617.11, the regulations implementing Article 8 of Environmental Conservation Law - the State Environmental Quality Review Act. This decision is based on the Findings Statement and the content of the Master Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Carol Ash
Commissioner
NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Date

SEQR FINDINGS STATEMENT

Saratoga Spa State Park Master Plan

January 27, 2010

Pursuant to Article 8 (State Environmental Quality Review Act – SEQRA) of the Environmental Conservation Law and 6 NYCRR Part 617, the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), as lead agency, makes the following findings.

Title of the Action:

Adoption and Implementation of a Master Plan for Saratoga Spa State Park

Location:

Saratoga Spa State Park is located in the City of Saratoga Springs and Town of Malta in Saratoga County.

Description of the Action:

The master plan for Saratoga Spa State Park provides long term guidance for the development and management of the park and protection of its resources as summarized below.

Date of Completion of the Final EIS: December 16, 2009

Findings:

1. These findings consider the relevant environmental impacts, facts and conclusions disclosed in the final EIS; weigh and balance relevant environmental impacts with social, economic and other considerations; provide a rationale for the agency's decision; certify that the requirements of 6 NYCRR Part 617 have been met; and certify that consistent with social, economic and other essential considerations from among the reasonable alternatives available, the action is the one which avoids or minimizes adverse environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable, and that adverse environmental impacts will be avoided or minimized to the maximum extent practicable by incorporating as conditions those mitigative measures that were identified as practicable.

2. The Final Plan was subject to a complete Environmental Impact Statement process including a public information meeting and a public hearing.
3. The Final Environmental Impact Statement contains a chapter on responses to comments on the Draft EIS. This chapter contains clarification of issues raised during the review of the Draft EIS. It also provides information that has been used in the preparation of the Final Plan.
4. The park is located in the City of Saratoga Springs and the Town of Malta within the Saratoga-Capital District State Park Region. The park contains approximately 2500 acres of which 60 are developed and 390 are actively managed, with the balance being natural area.
5. The general topography of the park is flat to gently sloping with some rolling hills and an area of steep slopes into a creek gully. The park shows typical characteristics of both the southern foothills of the Adirondack Mountains and northern extent of the Glacial Lake Albany sand plain. The ecological communities occurring in the park vary greatly from open and forested wetlands to mature upland forest. The Park contains habitat for the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly and the state listed threatened frosted elfin butterfly.
6. The Kayaderosseras Creek and its tributary, Geyser Brook, are the two main water bodies within the park boundaries. Kayaderosseras Creek empties into Saratoga Lake which eventually drains to the Hudson River.
7. The Park was initially established when the state began acquiring lands in Saratoga to protect and preserve the unique and famous mineral springs, which were being overexploited by commercial gas companies.
8. The northern end of the park is a designated a National Historic Landmark and the Park is recognized for its classical architecture and its historic structures and landscape.
9. Recreational resources in the park include two pools, two golf courses, eight tennis courts, eight picnic shelters and miles of trails. The park is open year round and offers many winter activities including snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and ice skating. The park is also home to several major facilities – the Saratoga Performing Arts Center (SPAC), the Gideon Putnam Hotel, the National Museum of Dance, the Saratoga Auto Museum and the Spa Little Theatre
10. The plan identifies a vision statement and goals for the Park. The vision statement is: Saratoga Spa State Park will be a place for the public to visit, enjoy and appreciate the

natural, cultural and physical resources and the recreational opportunities that the park offers. Balance will be achieved between recreational use, and protection of the biological, physical and cultural resources of the park.

11. The plan presents a series of “preferred alternatives” for future development and operation of Saratoga Spa State Park. Cumulatively, the actions described in the plan present OPRHP’s long-term vision for the rehabilitation and enhancement of public use facilities at the park.
12. Two primary alternatives were identified in the Plan: (1) the Preferred Alternative, and (2) the Status Quo Alternative. The Status Quo Alternative consists of the current facilities, programs and practices. The Preferred Alternative combines the preferred options for recreation development and resource protection into one that best meets the goals for the park. This alternative represents the Final Master Plan.
13. The Master Plan considers the historic, cultural, natural and recreational resources of the park and responds to the needs and safety of park patrons, protection of natural resources and principles of sustainability. It details the proposed park classification, designations, recreation and stewardship elements. The Plan also recognizes that the initiation of each specific action will be determined by the level of funding available to OPRHP in future years.
 - The park will continue to be classified as a Recreation Park within OPRHP’s Parkland Classification System. A Recreation Park is located in suburban or rural areas and has a mix of natural and developed areas, significant natural areas are not essential. The types and mix of current and future uses in the Park lead to the recommendation to maintain the classification as a Recreation Park.
 - A portion of the park will be designated a Park Preservation Area (PPA). Article 20 of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law states that portions of a park may be designated as Park Preservation Areas. The purpose of such a designation is to conserve and protect park lands containing wildlife, flora, scenic, historic and archeological sites that are unique and rare in New York State. The PPA area will include all those lands south of the East West Road including the Driscoll Road Property. It will also include all the lands in the park to the east of Route 9 including the Hemlock Trail and butterfly management areas. The new off-leash area and all parking lots will be excluded as well as the former landfill and other park operations areas. Park Preservation Area designation recognizes the areas within the park with significant natural resources. It is consistent with the type and extent of use proposed in these areas in the Plan and will encourage the study and interpretation of environmental resources in the area.

- OPRHP will not convey easements or fee title to land within portions of Saratoga Spa State Park that are designated Park Preservation Areas under this master plan. Similarly, the agency will not enter into leases with public or private entities for lands within these Park Preservation Areas except for concession leases to provide food and beverage services or other customary amenities.
- The NYS Bird Conservation Area (BCA) Program was created by state law in 1997. It calls for the dedication of state-owned lands as BCA's. These lands must meet certain criteria identified within the BCA law. Saratoga Spa State Park was evaluated and determined to meet several of these criteria. As a result the Plan proposes that a BCA be designated within the Park. The BCA will have the same boundaries as the PPA.
- Article 5 - Title 11 - Section 0539 of the NYS Environmental Conservation Law calls for the dedication of state-owned lands with rare species and/or significant natural communities as Natural Heritage Areas. These lands must meet certain criteria identified within the law. The Park was evaluated and the lands to the east of Route 9 within the Karner blue butterfly management area were determined to meet the criteria. These areas of the park support populations of the state and federally endangered Karner blue butterfly and the state threatened frosted elfin butterfly.
- The plan provides protection of natural resources through several means including: erosion management measures for the Kayaderosseras Creek and the Geyser Brook, management and restoration practices for the Karner blue butterfly habitat area, control strategies for invasive species management, and management measures for successional old fields in the southern part of the park.
- OPRHP will continue to consider protection of open space and acquisition of land from willing sellers that will protect and buffer the resources at Saratoga Spa State Park. This would include watershed and wetland protection and water access.
- The plan provides for the protection and interpretation of the important cultural resources including creation of a new mineral waters museum and visitor center in the Lincoln Bath House; continuation of interpretation and education programs about the waters, buildings and landscapes; rehabilitation of the Roosevelt II Bath House for park services; and maintenance of the many structures listed on the National Historic Register.
- Recreation areas will be improved and new activities added including: improvements and additions to the Park's playgrounds, picnic areas, the Peerless Pool complex and the Victoria Pool; rehabilitation of asphalt tennis courts and landscaping

improvements, and the addition of a new nine hole disc golf course.

- The trail system will be improved through implementation of the Trails Plan which designates seven loop trails and their uses, extends some existing trails and creates a new off road trail along the East West Road.
- A fenced off leash area will be provided for dogs in the eastern portion of the park.
- Park operations, maintenance and infrastructure will be improved actions taken will increase the efficiency with which park staff serve the patrons and care for the park. Among these are: moving the park offices to more appropriate accommodations in the Roosevelt II Bath House, renovating the Dormitory building for maintenance space; improving storm water management to reduce impacts to Geyser Brook, rehabilitating and relocating spring houses as necessary; continuing and expanding the reduced lawn mowing protocol as appropriate, repairing the maintenance building and warehouse, developing a new signage plan throughout the park for wayfinding, interpretation and trails, and repairing aging utility infrastructure such as the 1960's era gas mains and the 1930's era cast iron water mains.
- In addition, the Plan recognizes that significant capital investments will be required to maintain the park's basic infrastructure including buildings, utility systems, park roads and parking areas and other infrastructure such as the Geyser Brook Dam.

14. Impacts associated with the implementation of the plan and mitigation measures identified are as follows:

- The plan will result in substantial beneficial recreation and open space improvements including a variety of new and improved recreation facilities and visitor amenities including picnic areas, disc golf, playgrounds, and improvements at the Peerless Pool and the Victoria Pool. A fenced, off leash dog area will provide a safe recreation area for dogs and their owners. The improved trail network will provide a better visitor experience by creating an organized trail system with designated trail uses and improved signage. A new visitor center, park office and nature/interpretive center will provide improved visitor services, while also incorporating sustainable design.
- Open space protection and land acquisition from willing sellers provide benefits from additional open space for the park, improved trail locations and linkages to other regional trail systems along with the benefits of open space and resource protection.

- The Master Plan will not significantly change the traffic patterns or access to the Park. Traffic circulation and access will remain the same. There is adequate parking to accommodate new recreational uses such as expanded picnicking facilities and the improved trail system. Implementation of the Trails Plan will result in an organized trails system which will accommodate a variety of uses including walking/hiking, biking, equestrian, and cross-country skiing.
- There will be some physical change to the land, particularly where new recreation facilities and trails will be constructed or segments of trails relocated. Most new recreation facilities will be sited in lawn areas and require little ground disturbance. New trail sections may require some vegetation removal and leveling. Disturbance will be limited primarily to the required width of the trail corridor.
- Plan implementation will result in construction activities that could temporarily result in movement of soils and sediment, especially following storms. Soil erosion and stormwater runoff will be limited by several measures including the construction of vegetated swales, restoration of natural vegetation and new plantings, preparation of erosion control plans, use of Best Management Practices, and adherence to the conditions of the SPDES General Permit. Construction of proposed new docks could increase turbidity in the lake during the installation and removal process. These impacts will be mitigated through the use of installation techniques designed to minimize the suspension of sediment.
- Water bodies and watercourses within the park will be improved by addressing bank erosion and the expansion of invasive species along both the Kayaderosseras Creek and Geyser Brook. The plan proposes to use native vegetation, bioengineering, stormwater and erosion controls, and invasive species removals to stabilize stream banks, provide shade to cool the waters and improve water quality. The park's famous and historic mineral water springs will be restored to assure continued public access and safety. The park contains several important wetland complexes; improvements in stormwater management and stream water quality will have beneficial impacts on these wetlands.
- Overall, the Plan will have a positive impact on the natural resources within the park. Direct impacts associated with proposed improvements, such as the new picnic pavilions, playgrounds and disc golf course have been sited in areas with previous development and limited environmental sensitivity. The importance of the natural resources within the park is recognized with the proposed designation of portions of the park as Park Preservation Area, Bird Conservation Area (BCA) and as a Natural Heritage Area (NHA). Native plants in the park will benefit from the

plan to manage invasive plant species. Historic landscapes in the park, including the Avenue of the Pines, will be managed under a framework that recognizes their significance as a historical/cultural resource. The plan provides for the protection of Karner blue butterfly (state and federally endangered) and the frosted elfin butterfly (state threatened) through the restoration of their habitat. The fenced off leash dog area will provide a safer location for activities, while restricting dogs from the butterfly management area will eliminate the impacts from dogs walking into and trampling the butterflies' habitat.

- The park contains a large number of major historic structures both large and small. OPRHP will continue its work repairing and restoring these structures. The LaTour House will be secured and mothballed until an appropriate use can be found. Existing and historic mineral springs will be restored and improved with new signage and interpretation. Improved signage and interpretive materials throughout the park will highlight the history and the importance of the mineral waters and the Spa complex.
- Scenic resources, both the formal landscapes and the natural settings, will be protected and maintained through the actions recommended in the plan.

15. The Plan describes the process for supplemental environmental review. The Plan also provides for guidance as to when additional environmental review may be required and identifies the types of actions that are likely to require additional review. These include new actions not addressed with the Master Plan that are not Type II actions within Part 617, any change from the preferred alternative for recreational and facility elements of the plan that would result in significant adverse environmental impacts and any leases, easements or other agreements between OPRHP and other entities that would affect resources in a manner that is not adequately addressed in the Master Plan.