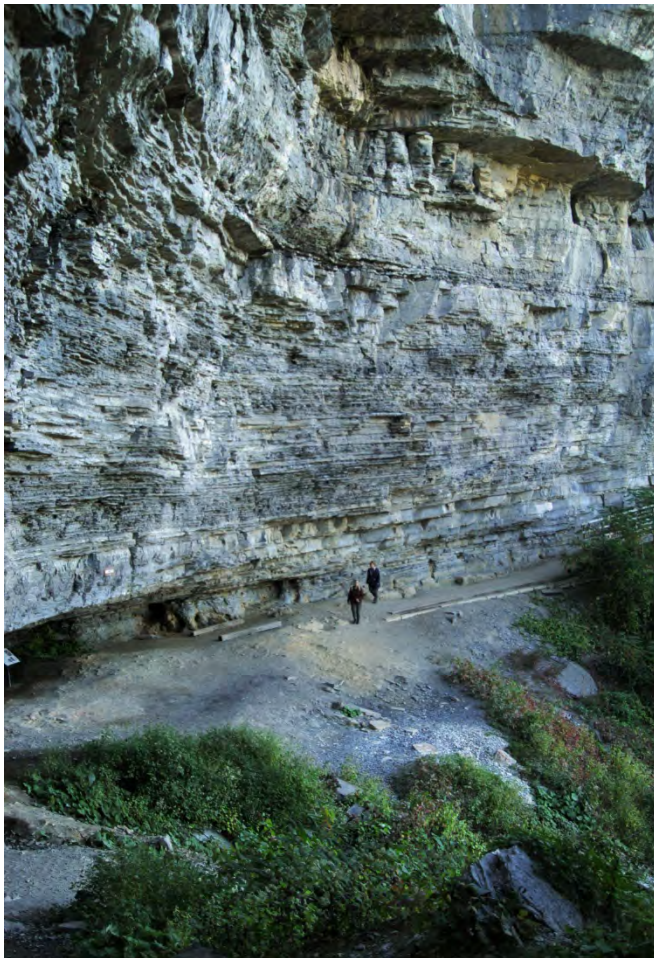


Final Master Plan

For

John Boyd Thatcher State Park

November 13, 2013



Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor

Rose Harvey
Commissioner

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

BCA	Bird Conservation Area
DEC	New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
DEIS	Draft Environmental Impact Statement
DOT	New York State Department of Transportation
EAWPP	Emergency Action Written Preparedness Plan
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EMB	Environmental Management Bureau of OPRHP
FEIS	Final Environmental Impact Statement
IBA	National Audubon designated Important Bird Area
Nature Center	Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center
NCC	Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc.
NHA	Natural Heritage Area
NHP	New York Natural Heritage Program
NWI	National Wetlands Inventory
NYS	New York State
OPRHP	Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
SEQR(A)	State Environmental Quality Review Act
Thacher SP	John Boyd Thacher State Park
Thompson's Lake SP	Thompson's Lake State Park

Conventions Used

Park Names: This master plan proposes merging of John Boyd Thacher and Thompson's Lake State Parks and managing them under one name, John Boyd Thacher State Park. In

this plan, the new name will be used in referring to the entire Park. The campground will be referred to as The Thompson's Lake Campground at John Boyd Thacher State Park.

Introduction

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) administers over 200 state parks and historic sites encompassing more than 330,000 acres of parkland divided into 12 regions. The Saratoga-Capital District park region contains 12 state parks and 8 historic sites. John Boyd Thacher and Thompson's Lake State Parks are administered by the Saratoga-Capital District park region.

These two parks are being treated as one managerial unit in one comprehensive master plan because of their close relationship both geographically and administratively. Even so, there are some specific differences of need between the two which will be pointed out in the plan.

Under Section 3.02 of the Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation Law, OPRHP is directed "...to conserve, protect and enhance the natural, ecological, historic, cultural and recreational resources contained therein and to provide for the public enjoyment of and access to these resources in a manner that will protect them for future generations."

Master planning is an important tool that can be used to help meet the substantial responsibility of providing recreation while at the same time protecting and interpreting resources. The master plan process explores the existing physical, natural, cultural, recreational, and structural resources of the Park. It assesses the condition of these resources to provide recreation and interpretive opportunities within healthy and productive environments. The process calls for the development and consideration of alternatives that improve the recreational opportunities and experiences offered at the Park and enhance the stewardship of natural, cultural, and historic resources. The preferred alternatives best meet OPRHP's mission and vision for the Park and form the final master plan.

OPRHP has determined that the preparation of a master plan for John Boyd Thacher and Thompson's Lake State Parks will further its mission to provide safe and enjoyable recreational and interpretive opportunities for all New York State residents and visitors and to be responsible stewards of our valuable natural and cultural resources.

Establishment of the Parks

In the late 1800s, the Helderbergs became a popular tourist destination. Visitors from New York City and Albany, eager to escape the summer heat, hired buggies to bring them up to the resort hotels near the Helderberg lakes. Park visitors today still find refuge in this beautiful natural setting, just a short distance from Albany.

Both John Boyd Thacher State Park (established in 1914) and Thompson's Lake State Park (established 1961) were made possible by gifts from Emma Treadwell Thacher. Mrs. Thacher initially donated 350 acres for the establishment of a park in memory of her late husband, John Boyd Thacher, a former Mayor of the City of Albany and noted historian.

Six years later, in 1920, Mrs. Thacher donated an additional 50 acres on the western shore of Thompson's Lake. Ten of the 50 acres was to be set aside as a summer camp for the Albany Boy's Club—Camp Thacher. By 1972 an additional 997 acres of land had been added to Thacher State Park bringing the total acreage up to 1,347. Today the Park has grown to 2,157 acres in size through acquisitions and donations. An additional 257 acres has also been added to Thompson's Lake State Park bringing the total number of acres to 308.

Planning that has been done in the past

Development plans for Thacher Park were completed in the 1930's and 1940's. Individual projects (the Thacher pool in the 1950s, for example) were undertaken, but no formal, public planning process occurred.

In 1969 the firm of Vollmer Associates completed a plan titled *Outdoor Recreation for the Capital District New York* (Vollmer, 1969). This regional plan studied the parks and historic sites in what is now the Saratoga-Capital District State Park District. The plan made several recommendations concerning both Thacher and Thompson's Lake State Parks. Some of those recommendations have been implemented.

Planning and Environmental Review

The environmental review of proposed master plans for state park facilities is conducted in accordance with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). OPRHP fully integrates the planning and environmental review processes. This document is accompanied by a Final Environmental Impact Statement which provides that review and compliance with SEQRA.

Park Description

The Region

John Boyd Thacher and Thompson's Lake State Parks are in the Saratoga-Capital District Park Region. This region covers all of Albany, Rensselaer, Montgomery, Schenectady, and Schoharie counties as well as parts of Fulton, Saratoga, Washington, Greene, and Warren Counties.

Location and Access

John Boyd Thacher State Park (Thacher SP) is located on the Helderberg escarpment on NY 157 approximately 4 miles west of the intersection with NY 85 (New Scotland Road). Portions of the Park lie in the towns of Berne, Guilderland, New Scotland and Knox.

Thompson's Lake State Park (Thompson's Lake SP) is located on NY 157 in the town of Knox. It is approximately 3.5 miles west of Thacher SP. A second entrance, serving the Emma Treadwell Nature Center is on Nature Center Way (formerly Stan Levine Drive) off of Ketcham Road.

Both parks are accessible by motor vehicle from NY 157. There are no bus routes that access the Park. Pedestrians and bicyclists also enter the Park from the main state roads. Access on foot is also available from the Long Path, a hiking trail that extends 375 miles from Fort Lee Historic Park in New Jersey to NYS Route 146 just outside of Thacher SP.

Existing Conditions

This description of the existing conditions at the Park is meant to be a summary highlighting the most important elements which lead to the formation of the master plan. More detailed descriptions and maps of the existing resources are included in Chapter 1 and Appendices of the accompanying EIS.

Physical Resources

Geology. Geology was perhaps the most significant natural factor in the initial development of John Boyd Thacher State Park. Geologists-Paleontologists and the public were attracted to the prominent cliff of the “Helderberg Escarpment”, that runs through the Park and to the south, for a century before Emma Treadwell Thacher gifted lands to the State of New York, a legacy of her husband’s effort to preserve the cliffs from development. (Ver Straeten, 2012)

John Boyd Thacher and Thompson’s Lake State Parks are perched atop the Helderberg Escarpment, one of the richer fossil bearing formations in the eastern United States. The Helderberg Escarpment is the most northeastern extent of the Helderberg Plateau at its juncture with the Mohawk and Hudson Valleys. This juncture is, in part, responsible for the dramatic cliffs which rise over 700 feet from the valley floor. The Helderberg Plateau consists predominantly of layers of shale, sandstone, and limestone.

The cliffs of the Helderberg Escarpment stand out in large part due to the more resistant nature of the limestones of the Manlius and Coeymans Formations that form the bulk of the cliff. Softer, more easily eroded rocks below these limestones (Schenectady, Indian Ladder, Brayman and Rondout Formations) form the slopes below the cliff.

Water flowing through the layers of limestone on the plateau has dissolved and eroded the limestone, forming crevices, caves, disappearing streams and uncertain footing. This geological landscape, which is known as karst terrain,

along with the shallow depth to bedrock, limits development in the area of the Park adjacent to the escarpment. This is especially true at Thacher SP.

Soils. The soils at both Parks are mainly derived from the parent glacial till. They present some restrictions to development. (Appendix C of the accompanying FEIS)



Figure 1 Cliffs of the Helderberg Escarpment

Topography. The most significant topographic feature of the Park is the Helderberg Escarpment. Otherwise the Park has a moderate topography of rolling hills typical of the Appalachian Plateau.

Water Resources. The significant water resource of the Park is Thompson's Lake. The lake is classified by DEC as suitable for drinking water. It may support a trout population. There is no surface outflow from the lake. The lake is oligomesotrophic (low



Figure 2 State Park Beach at Thompson's Lake

to moderately productive) and has excellent water quality for swimming (Snow and Terbush 2012).

The outflow is underground, which is typical of a karst terrain. Another small un-named pond is located in the northern section of Thacher Park; fishing may be an activity in this pond. (Cebada Mora, Snow and Smith, 2012)

Streams and creeks cross both parks. The streams in Thacher Park run mostly west

to east, some disappear underground and several form waterfalls when they reach the escarpment cliff.

Due to the nature of the Karst terrain underlying the Park, surface water (runoff and streams) can penetrate deeply into the bedrock and reach the groundwater.

Natural Resources

Ecological Communities. The high elevation and karst landscape features contribute significantly to the biodiversity of the Park. The Natural Heritage Program (NHP) documented 21 distinct ecological community types in Thacher SP (Evans and Weldy, 2000). Several of these community types are listed as state significant.

Rare and Endangered Species. Thacher SP has documented rare plant species, and is home to rare and endangered species of bats, birds, and a salamander species that is of special concern.

Invasive Flora and Fauna. The most widespread invasive flora species are common buckthorn and bush honeysuckle. Garlic mustard, spotted knapweed, common reed, and purple loosestrife are also found in the Park.

Zebra mussel, an invasive bivalve, and Eurasian water milfoil, an invasive aquatic plant, are found in Thompson's Lake.



Figure 3 Jefferson Salamander *Ambystoma jeffersonianum*

Cultural Resources

Archaeological. The archeology and history of Thompson's Lake is of special interest because of its isolated location above the Helderberg escarpment. It was a place where prehistoric people as early as perhaps 6000 B.C. camped, fished, and repaired tools for brief periods during hunting trips.

Prehistoric. Long before Europeans arrived on the continent, Native Americans were traveling from the western hills of the Schoharie Valley to the Hudson River Valley by way of footpaths. The logs they cut to ascend and descend the escarpment were called "Indian Ladders" by the early settlers, giving rise to the name of the region and the Indian Ladder trail.

Historic. Old farm maps as well as various publications describe the existence of several houses and structures that once stood within the current property boundary lines of Thacher SP. There appears to be evidence of structures and houses that were part of the farms atop the escarpment in the Glen Doone and Greenhouse areas as well as structures adjacent to Beaver Dam Road on the south side of the Park.

A one room schoolhouse in Thompson's Lake SP was last used as a schoolhouse in the 1930's. It has been restored by the Helderberg Kiwanis Club and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Scenic Resources

The main scenic resource of the Park is the vista from the top of the Helderberg Escarpment (Figure 4). This magnificent panorama has no parallel in the capital district. The view takes in the Hudson and Mohawk Valleys and the Adirondack and Green Mountains.



Figure 4 View from The Overlook atop the Helderberg escarpment in John Boyd Thacher State Park

Recreational Resources/Activities

Thompson's Lake State Park provides 140 tent/trailer sites on two loops and a small but popular sandy beach, public swimming area and hand carried boat launch. There are rowboat and paddle boat rentals available seasonally. Thompson's Lake State Park has other recreational opportunities including a volleyball court, horseshoe pits, a playing field, playground, fishing and ice fishing.

The Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center (Nature Center) is part of Thompson's Lake SP. It is an environmental education center located on the northwest shore of Thompson's Lake.

John Boyd Thacher State Park has picnic tables, grills, nine pavilions and two tent pavilions located throughout the southern portion of the Park. Some are located in secluded, wooded areas while others are located near the escarpment and offer spectacular views. Thacher Park also has volleyball courts, ball fields and three playgrounds.

Trails. Thompson's Lake and Thacher Park north and south combined include 28 miles of designated trails. Eighteen miles are multi-use, open to hiking, bicycling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and/or snowmobiling. Bicycles and snowmobiles are not allowed on the trails in Thompson's Lake State Park.

A trail on the lands of the Patroon Land Foundation connects Thacher Park's trail system to the Thompson's Lake State Park trails. Recently permission was granted to OPRHP to develop a bike path along the existing trail to better connect the two parks.



Figure 5 Interpretive Signage at the Overlook

Environmental Education and Interpretation at Thacher and Thompson's Lake State Parks is presented through programming, Nature Center exhibits, outdoor interpretive signage (Figure 5), and publications. A diverse array of environmental education and interpretive programs are offered at Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center (Nature Center) and Thacher Park throughout the year.

Outdoor interpretive programs explore the diverse environments of Thacher and Thompson's Lake Parks.

Programs are also offered interpreting the rich cultural history of the Park and region. In addition to programs and Nature Center exhibits, interpretive information panels are posted in several areas of Thacher Park.

Agency Mission

The mission of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation is to provide safe and enjoyable recreational and interpretive opportunities for all New York State residents and visitors and to be responsible stewards of our valuable natural, historic and cultural resources.

Vision Statement

John Boyd Thacher and Thompson's Lake State Parks will merge into one cohesive park, providing a wide range of complimentary recreational amenities including hiking, swimming, climbing, camping, picnicking and educational programming. The Park will

also grow as a well-known and appealing destination for exploration, protection, interpretation and education of the public about the geologic, natural, scenic and historic resources of the Helderberg Escarpment.

In support of this vision the Park will:

- Streamline operations and infrastructure to improve efficiency, reduce the barriers to access and enjoyment, and help ensure long term sustainability of the Park.
- Improve the trail system by providing more trail destinations, strategically clearing views, and adding way-finding and interpretive signage.
- Consolidate park operations and visitor accommodations and orientation into one new welcome center.
- Seek private investment to build and operate an adventure course.
- Improve existing picnic facilities and enhance associated recreational amenities.
- Protect rare and endangered plants and animals in the Park

Action Steps

This section provides a narrative description of the master plan, outlining what will be done in the Park for natural and cultural resource protection, recreation resource development, management and operations. Most of the action steps described here are based on the analysis in the accompanying EIS and the preferred alternatives (Chapter 2). Some of the action steps are administrative or managerial in nature (such as the decision to merge the two parks) and are only presented here.

Action steps are presented which have been guided by the vision for John Boyd Thacher and Thompson's Lake State Parks. Each element of the park vision has one or more action steps that will be part of its realization. Taken together with the vision, these action steps describe the master plan. The master plan is also presented graphically in the large format Master Plan Map and Trails Plan Map that accompanies, and is part of, this document.

Natural Resource Protection Strategies

Action Step 1. Create a Natural Heritage Area (NHA)

Several criteria for recognition of Natural Heritage elements are met in the Park. Most prominent is the statewide significant status of the Calcareous Cliff Community along the cliff of the escarpment. Because of this and other factors an NHA will be created which includes that significant community, the cliff face and all areas at the bottom of the cliff that are inside the Park boundary. (Figure 10 in the accompanying FEIS.)

Action Step 2. Expand the existing Bird Conservation Area (BCA)

Currently parts of the Park are included in a BCA. The existing BCA cuts out parts of the Park that are developed. The new BCA will include all of the Park, including developed parts. This strategy more closely illustrates the importance of the Park for bird habitat.

Action Step 3. Develop a comprehensive invasive species management plan and follow recommendations of OPRHP staff and biologists

Under this alternative the current management protocol will be continued and expanded with new techniques and strategies that will detect and respond to invasive species in a timely manner.

Recreation Development

Action Step 1. Re-design the main area – “The Meadow” for recreation

The central area of the Park, which once accommodated a public swimming pool and bathhouse, has been underutilized since the closure of the deteriorated swimming facility

in 2007 and its subsequent removal in 2010. . Being centrally located and easily accessible, the area can serve a variety of recreation functions which will improve user experience at the Park.

- Install a new “challenge course” type recreation area at the former pool site. This will include publicly accessible challenge elements such as ropes, low cables, and obstacles strung between or on poles. Equipment examples may include: swinging balance beam, triangle traverse, rope bridges and tire swings. This course is meant to test physical strength, stamina, agility, balance, and flexibility. The course also invites participants to confront their fears in a controlled situation. The course will be managed and operated by Park personnel who will receive training from professional challenge course instructors.
- Develop a grassy open space for passive recreation, strolling, events and relaxing. This space would have visual connection to the challenge course and walkways, would connect to the Escarpment Trail, picnic areas, a new bicycle path and the new visitor center.
- A new basketball court will be built on the site of the current makeshift court in the Pear Orchard parking area.



Figure 6 Conceptual Layout of New Facilities at "The Meadow"

Action Step 2. **Implement a rock climbing program**

Rock climbing will be opened at the Park in selected areas. The activity will be by permit and will be managed by the Park in cooperation with a locally managed not-for-profit rock climbing group. Details of this activity, including specific areas open to climbing,

will be developed in a Climbing Management plan. Areas to be considered for climbing will be assessed for three major factors:

- Endangered Species
- Accessibility
- Rock face stability

Ice climbing is currently not a permitted activity at any NYS Park. The possibility of ice climbing at John Boyd Thacher State Park will be included in the decisions generated during the development of the Climbing Management plan.

Action Step 3. Solicit proposals from concessionaires to develop a high ropes adventure course in the Park

Areas being proposed for this facility will include the Yellow Rocks, Greenhouse, and Hop Field picnic areas. OPRHP would consider alternate locations based on the opinions of concessionaires, however, other locations would need further OPRHP review to determine feasibility with regards to environmental protection and Park operational functionality.

- High ropes course with multi-level challenges and obstacles
- Designed, Operated and Maintained by concessionaire

Action Step 4. Re-design Glenn Doone picnic area

Glenn Doone is the most popular picnic area in the Park. It enjoys spectacular views and room for many picnickers. Comments from park patrons have inspired a re-design which will improve the experience. (Figure 7)

- Open the view from the existing picnic pavilion over the escarpment
- Rehabilitate the existing comfort station and build a new comfort station near the upper parking area closer to where most patrons recreate
- Rehabilitate the concession stand for use by patrons and caterers
- Rehabilitate the patio area and build a roof over the lower patio level
- Leave the lawn area for placement of rental tents
- Improve the view from the lawn area by selective vegetation removal
- Remove the lower parking area and the road to it when it becomes deteriorated and restore the area to natural habitat
- Build a new playground near the upper parking area

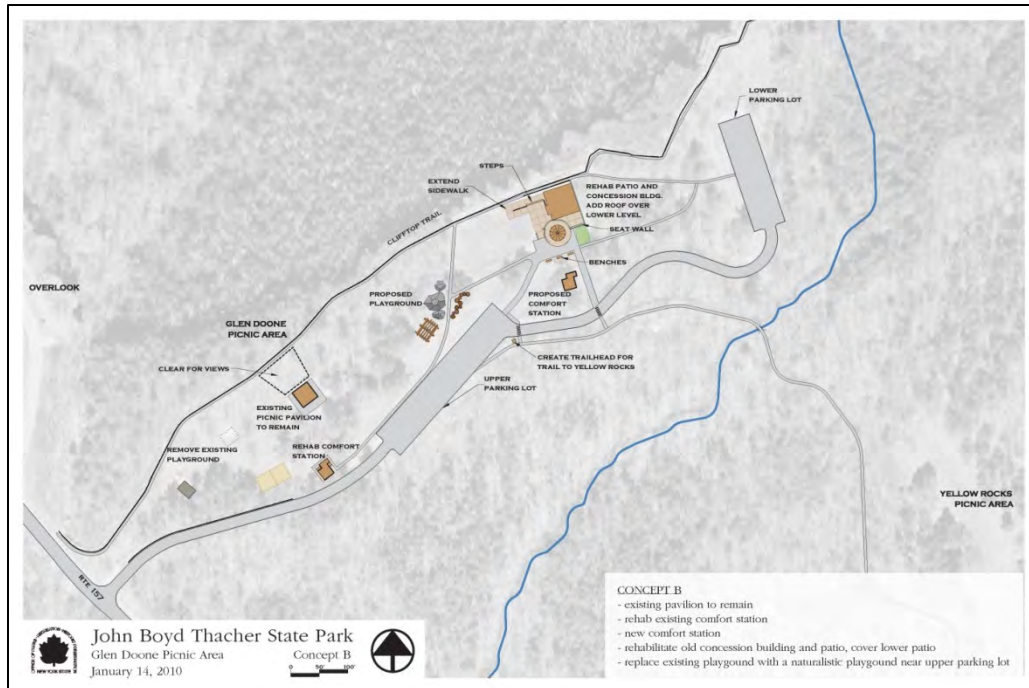


Figure 7 Conceptual Plan for Glen Doone Re-Design

Action Step 5. Improve trails

The trail system is one of the Park's most popular recreational resources. A consolidation of some trails and addition of others will make the system more responsive to user needs, protect sensitive environmental factors, and improve the connection between the main park and the Thompson's Lake area. The trail system will be modified and improved in a variety of ways. Below is a brief overview of the proposed changes. For a complete description of the trail changes planned see Appendix A and the large format trails plan.

- Realign/Reblaze several trails
- Reroute or upgrade trails or sections of trails that are often wet, muddy or highly eroded; some sections built on old roadbeds will be replaced with sustainably built singletrack trails
- Designate specific uses for each trail
- Close and restore various connector and remnant trails
- Develop the Tory Cave Trail extending north from the Indian Ladder Trail to connect to the Horseshoe I picnic area.
- Develop the Hailes Cave Trail providing visual access of the cave opening
- Extend the Escarpment Trail southeast along the top of the escarpment to Greenhouse picnic area
- Develop a 4.6 mile bike path (accessible to the extent feasible) connecting Thacher and Thompson's Lake SPs along mostly existing trails including the Salisbury Trail
- Enhance access to park resources along trails such as scenic vistas, the escarpment and its geologic formations, wetlands, and other water resources

- Improve accessibility of the trail system including paving a portion of the Escarpment Trail and developing accessible routes to destination locations including multiple waterfalls
- Enhance trailhead and intersection signage along trails and directional signage along roadways indicating access points to the trail system
- Enhance interpretation throughout the trail system to highlight natural, cultural and historic resources
- Explore external trail connections with adjoining landowners
- Expand partnerships with local organizations and user groups for development, maintenance, and monitoring of the trail system

Other Trail Uses

The master plan does not recommend significant changes to the following trail uses and therefore these uses do not include analysis and alternatives in the FEIS but are included here as part of the Master Plan.

- **Hiking**

The Park currently allows hiking on all designated trails. Hiking will continue to be allowed on all designated trails of the trail system as modified above. The quantity of trails open to hiking is considered suitable for this activity.

Trails at Thompson's Lake will remain hiking only trails with the exception of the new bike path connecting Thompson's Lake Campground with the main part of Thacher State Park.

The Indian Ladder Trail, and the new Tory Cave Trail and Hailes Cave Trail will be closed to hiking during the winter months. Unsupervised access to these trails at the base of the escarpment has been deemed too risky during the winter months. The Park will offer a limited number of winter guided hikes on these trails as conditions and Park resources permit.

- **Mountain Biking**

Mountain biking is currently allowed on most trails in Thacher SP. All trails in northern Thacher will be designated for mountain bike use including the new mountain biking skills park and looped trail system (see below). All trails in southern Thacher, with the exception of the Indian Ladder Trail, new Tory Cave Trail, new Hailes Cave Trail, and the Escarpment Trail, will be designated for mountain bike use. With the exception of the new bike path, biking will continue to not be allowed in Thompson's Lake SP. The quantity of trails open to mountain biking is considered suitable for this activity.

- **Cross-country Skiing**

The Park currently allows cross-country skiing on most trails. Some trails are groomed for winter use when Park resources allow. Cross-country skiing will be a designated winter use on all trails with the exception of the Indian Ladder Trail, new Tory Cave Trail, new Hailes Cave Trail, and the Escarpment Trail. Trails in the Park vary from wider gentle-sloped doubletrack trails to undulating narrow singletrack trails. This allows for a variety of trail experiences for different skill

levels (ie. beginner, intermediate, and advanced). The quantity of trails that allow cross-country skiing is considered suitable for this activity.

- **Snowshoeing**

The Park currently allows snowshoeing on all designated trails with the exception of the Indian Ladder Trail which is closed during the winter. Snowshoeing will continue to be allowed on all designated trails of the trail system as modified above with the exception of the Indian Ladder Trail and the new Tory Cave Trail, and new Hailes Cave Trail. The quantity of trails open to snowshoeing is considered suitable for this activity.

Action Step 6. Install new mountain biking skills park and trails

Mountain biking is becoming a more popular activity in the area. Several clubs and mountain biking associations exist statewide and locally to promote these activities. This action will support this activity in the Park by creating an area specifically designed to attract cyclists who wish to enhance their mountain biking skills and others who wish to gain biking skills. The concept would be to design and install a skills park that will provide technical facilities that pose challenges in a graduated level of difficulty and a series of looped trails where riders can practice their skills. Mountain biking groups would be encouraged to cooperate in the design and maintenance of this area. The proposed area for the skills park is in the northern part of the park, near the Carrick Road trailhead. (See the large format Trails Plan Map) The development of looped trails with features will utilize sections of existing trails in this vicinity.

Action Step 7. Equestrian trails

Because of potential damage to existing trails and resources, funds needed to upgrade trail surfacing and lack of local demand, there will be no designated equestrian trails in the Park.

Action Step 8. Cave management

The Park will allow authorized representatives of the Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. (NCC) to locate and map the caves in the Park. Once caves are mapped, a management plan will be written to formalize strategies for permitting guided cave exploration. There will be no general opening of the caves to the public for caving.

The cave management plan will include seasonal restrictions for the protection of bat hibernacula, places where bats congregate to shelter for the winter. Hailes Cave, in particular, will be off limits during the time of the year when bats are present in their hibernaculum. The cave will be permanently gated with an approved bat gate which will allow bats to fly in and out of the cave but will prevent human intervention in the cave. No caving will be allowed at Hailes Cave except in an OPRHP sanctioned and permitted guided tour.

Action Step 9. Snowmobiling

Snowmobiling will continue to be allowed along the main north-south corridor from Paint Mine to the trail south of Beaver Dam Road and north from Paint Mine to connect to northern Thacher. Snowmobile trailer parking will remain available as is.

Although the snowmobile trails at Thacher are not currently connected with the statewide snowmobile system, park management will continue to work with local snowmobile clubs and adjacent landowners for external trail connections as appropriate.

Action Step 10. Expand the Thompson's Lake camping area

In order to satisfy the increasing demand for campsites in the Park and in the region in general a new camping loop will be constructed north of the existing camp loops at Thompson's Lake campground. The camp sites will be smaller than standard campsites and designed primarily for tent camping.

Selected sites in the existing camping loop "A" will be re-habilitated to provide electric hookups.

Action Step 11. Expand the Thompson's Lake beach

The sandy beach area at Thompson's Lake will be expanded to the north to approximately the drainage ditch or the property line. This will add about 1350 square feet of beach area to reduce crowding at peak use times.

Action Step 12. Basketball court

A new, full basketball court will be installed at the site of the existing makeshift court in the Pear Orchard parking area.

Action Step 13. Park as museum concept

The general concept of this action is to make several elements in the Park serve collectively to educate the public about the geology and natural history of the Helderberg Escarpment, the driving force behind the original formation of the Park. (Friends of Thacher Park and Thompson's Lake State Park 2013)

Several elements in the master plan support this concept. Each element serves a specific function to educate and interpret the geology in its own way. Some elements perform this function at the site where they exist. Others perform the function in a more traditional museum setting, in exhibits at the new visitor center:

- The exhibit space in the new visitor center will illustrate the geologic history of the Park. The exhibits will also include other topics which relate the natural history to the geology. These may include the flora and fauna of the Park, the history of the area and the various peoples that have inhabited it.
- Interpretive signage will be placed on trails and other public gathering areas (such as picnic areas and lawn areas) where geologic and natural history features are visible. The features that can be interpreted will include, but not be limited to:
 - the escarpment
 - karst geology

- caves
 - bedrock at the surface
 - influence on flora and fauna
 - sediment layers
 - sink holes (Thompson's Lake)
- The interpretive signs will have a consistent design that fits in with the character of the Park, the rest of the Park signage and existing interpretive signage and kiosks.

Facilities and Operations

Action Step 1. Merge John Boyd Thacher and Thompson's Lake State Parks

The current status will change to reflect the reality of the combined management and operation of the two parks. The Park will be called John Boyd Thacher State Park and the current camping area at Thompson's Lake will be designated as the Thompson's Lake Campground at John Boyd Thacher State Park.

Action Step 2. Build a new visitor center/park office/park museum



Figure 8 The existing Park Office is outdated and does not meet current public and park operations needs.

The existing park office has outlived its usefulness as a point of contact with the public. A new visitor center will be constructed in the Park at the Indian Ladder picnic area. This new facility and its landscape will become the grand focal point of activity in the Park. The center will include many functions that will improve the visitor's experience. The design will enhance the beauty of the landscape and allow visitor enjoyment of

the scenic view.

The new facility will be open year-round and will include:

- a welcome/information center,
- a multi-function meeting room,
- outdoor classroom,
- geological, historic, and other exhibits,
- a simple gift shop,
- connections to the Park's trail system,
- fireplace for warming in the winter,
- four season enclosed rental space with basic kitchen facilities,
- restrooms (also accessible from the outside),
- and park office.

The building will be designed following these guidelines:

- Take advantage of the view from the escarpment while minimizing visual impacts to the view of the escarpment from the surrounding area
- Exterior materials will be natural (e.g. stone and wood) to the greatest extent possible
- Building will accommodate the natural grade, and its appearance will generally resemble the rustic style of Adirondack or Catskill lodges
- Outdoor lighting will utilize dark sky techniques
- Indoor lighting will use natural lighting wherever possible and energy efficient lighting equipment where needed

Action Step 3. Improve parking areas

Remove Unused Parking Lots

Several parking areas in the Park that are currently not in use or that duplicate other areas will be removed and allowed to revert to natural habitat and/or planted with native species to advance the restoration process.

Removing the following areas will reduce the amount of maintenance as well as improve stormwater recharge to the ground.

- Upper Paint Mine (and connector road)
- Minelot
- Parking area at south entrance to the Park. (Stone Lot)



Figure 9 Unused Parking Area at South Entrance

Reconfigure Existing Parking Areas

Haile's Cave parking area will be removed and a new one constructed closer to the pavilion.

Rehabilitate Meadow Parking Lot

The Meadow Parking Lot is in need of rehabilitation due to natural site conditions and/or wear and tear from normal use. This parking area will be re-paved and re-designed to include green stormwater methods wherever site conditions allow.

Action Step 4. Construct pavilion at the nature center

A new pavilion will be installed next to the existing nature center. This will add flexibility and more outdoor education space for the nature center's programs.

Action Step 5. Construct new pole barn at Thompson's Lake maintenance area

This will add much needed service space for vehicles and other equipment.

Action Step 6. Comfort station replacement and improvements

The comfort stations at the Park will be replaced with newly designed comfort stations. The existing comfort stations are at the end of their design lives, and are difficult to maintain. The new comfort stations will be ADA-accessible and built with durable materials. They will be easier to maintain and more energy efficient. (Figure 12)

The Park will also transition from the existing central waste water treatment plant to individual septic systems at the comfort station locations.

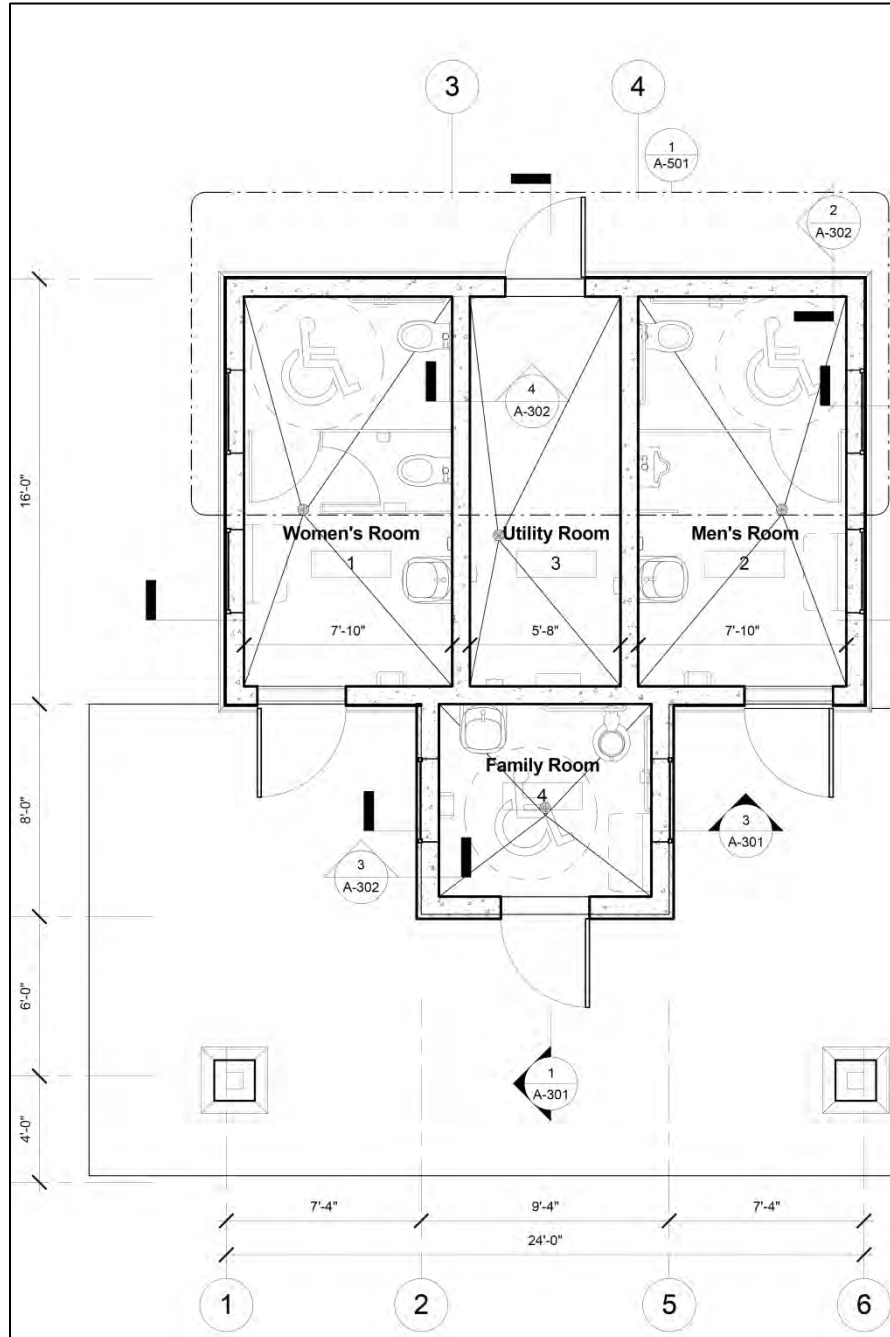


Figure 10 Microstation Conceptual Floor Plan

Other improvements to the comfort stations will be done according to Table 2.

Table 1 Changes to Comfort Stations

Location	Action
Glen Doone II	New comfort station installed with the re-design
Hop Field	Replace existing with composting toilet and warming hut
Knowles Flat	Replace existing comfort station
Indian Ladder	Replace the existing comfort station with restrooms at the new Visitor Center
Pear Orchard	Add new comfort station
Horseshoe II	Replace existing comfort station
Yellow Rocks	Retain existing comfort station, pending Ropes Course RFP. Long-term fallback plan will be to remove the Yellow Rocks picnic area.
Greenhouse	Retain existing comfort station, pending Ropes Course RFP. Long-term fallback plan will be to replace existing comfort station.
Paint Mine	Replace existing comfort station with new comfort station across the road closer to the pavilion
Hailes Cave	
Overlook	Needs facilities – new composting toilet or full station
Thompson's Lake Campground	Eventually needs to be on its own septic. Currently pumping sewage to treatment plant.

Action Step 7. Continue installing uniform signage

Uniform signage in a state park helps to give a sense of place. The presence of signs, especially way finding and location identification signs, keep the park visitor from feeling lost and points them in the right direction for getting to their destination. The Park will improve signage so that uniform, clear and visually pleasing signage is used throughout.



Figure 11 Hop Field Trail Information Sign

Interpretive signs should be designed to give a distinctive and consistent look throughout the Park. A graphic grid system such as that used by the National Park Service aids this consistency. Some guidelines for design of signs in the Park are:

- Use colors that are easily readable and which complement the natural surroundings
- Use few different (preferably only two) fonts and use them consistently on all signs throughout the Park
- Place wayfinding signs at each intersection (roads, walkways and trails) showing directional arrows and approximate distances
- Place identification signs at the entrances to all locations
- Interpretive signs should be placed so that the feature being interpreted is prominently visible when a patron stands in front of the sign
- Trail signage should follow the Trail Signage Guidelines for the NY State Park System

Action Step 8. Reduce pedestrian/bicycle/vehicular conflicts

The Park, region and OPRHP will collaborate with NYS DOT to install traffic calming devices on the road through the Park, especially at pedestrian crossing points. Some of these devices may be combined with wildlife tunnels for small animals such as amphibians.

Action Step 9. Remove unused structures

The following unused structures will be removed:

- The old manager's house and garage
- The small building outside the former pool area
- The barn and horse shed across the street from the rental house
- The upper Paint Mine comfort station

Implementation

Timeline

The master plan sets forth OPRHP's vision for capital improvements and operational enhancements to the Park for the next ten to fifteen years. OPRHP has not developed detailed cost estimates for the proposed components. Cumulatively they will cost tens of millions of dollars to implement. The pace and sequencing of recommended actions will be determined by the availability of funding, which is a function of the size of OPRHP's annual capital budgets and the need to balance investments throughout the park system. The master plan will be reviewed annually to select projects that will be added to the Park's budget for implementation and to assess the progress of plan implementation.

The implementation of the master plan for the Park is divided into priority phases. These elements are subject to reorganization based on available funding for specific components in the Master Plan.

Table 2 Priority Phases

Implementation Priorities	Description/Development Component
Immediate:	Implement changes to Bird Conservation Area
	Create Natural Heritage Area
Capital Infrastructure Priorities	
Priority 1:	Visitor Center
	Demolish and repurpose material from the barn on Ketcham Road
	Comfort stations – Phase 1 (Horseshoe 2, Pear Orchard, Knowles Flat and Glen Doone)
	Design and install Tory Cave Trail – Phase 1 – From Indian Ladder Trail Head to Tory Cave
	Viewshed Restoration – Phase 1 – (Hailes Cave, Horseshoe and Indian Ladder
	Bat gate installation at Hailes Cave
	Trail Improvements (Appendix A) and Mountain Biking skills course
Priority 2:	Redesign former pool area
	Redesign wastewater treatment systems
	Helmes Crevice and Hailes Cave access
	Thompson's Lake beach expansion (sandy area)
	New pavilions at the nature center and beach
	Redesign Glen Doone picnic area
Priority 3:	Construct team building high ropes course in the meadow

Implementation Priorities	Description/Development Component
Priority 3 continued:	Thompson's Lake campground expansion
	Bike path from escarpment to the campground
	Warming hut and composting toilet at Hop Field
	Comfort Stations – Phase 2
	Tory Cave Trail – Phase 2 – Escarpment ascent
	Demolish old manager's house and garage
	Demolish Upper Paint Mine comfort station
Ongoing	Remove unused parking areas
Operations Priorities	
Priority 1:	Open all Park gates during daylight to welcome visitors to all areas of the Park
	Plan and implement rock climbing proposals
	Issue RFP for commercial Adventure Course
	Upgrade lighting and mechanical systems to improve efficiency
Priority 2:	Open Helmes Crevice to public access
	Establish more formal trail heads in remote areas of the Park

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