



# New York Mountain Bicycling Coalition

## *NewsLetter*

2003 Edition

### **Catskill Park Draft Master Plan Revision Released Cyclist Response Needed!**

DEC released a draft master plan for all activities in the Catskill Park on August 25, 2003. The press release is at [www.dec.state.ny.us/website/press/pressrel/2003/200399.html](http://www.dec.state.ny.us/website/press/pressrel/2003/200399.html) while the entire plan is available at [www.dec.state.ny.us/website/df/publands/cats/cpslmp.pdf](http://www.dec.state.ny.us/website/df/publands/cats/cpslmp.pdf) All New York Cyclists *must respond* to this plan!! It imposes two significant restrictions on bicycle use in the park:

1. In "wild forest" portions of the park (essentially all non-wilderness areas), *bicycles will be banned* from all trails unless specifically designated as being signed open.

2. All wilderness sections *will be closed to bicycles* (and the area designated as "wilderness" is increased to about half the total park area)

These actions will significantly reduce the great cycling opportunities available in this park and may set a precedence for elsewhere in the state. Don't think this plan is a "done deal" and your comments don't matter. Cyclists provided a huge response to the planned significant reductions to bicycle access to state forest land in central NY in 2002. This huge response put these terrible restrictions on hold. Just as large a response is needed this time around.

**To voice your comments on this plan:**

**1. Attend one of the public hearings!**  
There are only four and they are coming up fast:

- Monday, September 8, 2003, 7 p.m.  
at Guilderland town Hall
- Tuesday, September 9, 2003, 7 p.m.  
Windam Town Hall, Hensonville
- Thursday, September 18, 2003 7 p.m.  
Neversink Town Hall, Gramsville
- Saturday, September 20, 2003, 10 a.m.  
Belleayre Ski Center Lodge

**2. Submit your comments in writing!**  
Hard copy comments (better than e-mail) should be sent to:

Peter J. Frank  
Bureau Chief Forest Preserve Management  
NYSDEC  
625 Broadway  
Albany N.Y. 12233-4254

E-mail comments (which are better than no comments) should be sent to:  
[pjfrank@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:pjfrank@gw.dec.state.ny.us)

Well written comment letters may be copied to the following officials as well:

Robert Davies Director,  
Division of Lands and Forests

Peter Duncan  
Executive Deputy Commissioner

these officials are at:  
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation  
625 Broadway  
Albany, NY 12233

also consider:

Marc Moran  
Director, Region 3  
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation  
21 South Putt Corners Road  
New Paltz, NY 12561-1696

and

William Rudge  
Natural Resources Supervisor  
Region 3 New York State Department of Environmental Conservation  
21 South Putt Corners Road  
New Paltz, NY 12561-1696

**Why this Plan is important**

The Catskill Park State Land Master Plan is THE document that provides the policy, classifications, guidelines and regulations by which DEC will administer the nearly 300,000 acres of PUBLIC LAND it manages inside the blue line known as the Catskill Park Boundary. The Master Plan establishes four classifications of State land: wilderness, wild forest, intensive use and administrative areas each having a different level of protection and public use. The original plan was developed in 1985 and was supposed to have been reviewed every five years. The Plan also designates management units and directs the DEC to de-

velop individual unit management plans that guide management activities and public use for each of those individual units. The draft revision of the master plan sets forth an updated vision for the management of public land within the Catskill Park. In *addition to* the bicycle issues outlined above, major changes in the draft include:1) creation of the Windham Blackhead Range Wilderness2) creation of the Hunter West Kill Wilderness3) elimination of current provision that requires wilderness designation to all lands above 2700 feet in elevation (this is good)4) prohibiting the development of snowmobile trails above 3,100 feet elevationthese are just some of the proposed changes.In addition, the draft revised Catskill Park Master Plan will result in the following land classification and management unit changes from the original 1985 Plan:

Size(Acres)		
	1985 Plan	2003 Revision
Wilderness	92,300	143,000
Wild Forest	155,000	130,000
Intensive Use	4,250	5,265
Administrative	802	816

**How should you respond to this plan?**

How you respond is up to you. The draft plan is huge and takes a while to read. You can search for "bikes", "bicycles", and "biking" in the PDF version to find specific areas to respond to. It is important to respond to what the plan actually says, not to what one may "think it says". In preparing a response, It is important to provide convincing, persuasive arguments as to why their conclusions are in some cases wrong. Letters that simply say "I don't want restrictions" aren't going to get anywhere. The DEC has indicated that they "didn't expect mountain bikers to like the recommendations", so just telling them you don't like it won't be bringing anything new to the table.

The DEC has spent many years preparing this document. The authors of the plan, who will also be those revising the plan, will take any comments you make personally because of the time and effort they have invested in this work. If you want to influence their revision of the document, you must provide constructive comments backed up with sound reason. Angry or insulting comments will work against us. While how you respond is up to you, NYMBC provides the following observations:

1. The number one goal of the commenting effort should be removal from the plan of the "closed unless open" policy for all Wild Forest units. The plan provides no justification for limiting human-powered trail use to hiking only. NYMBC has convincingly assembled the facts that show that bicycling has no greater impact on trails, especially properly designed trails, than hiking (see NYMBC's comments developed for the Region 7 master draft master plan). Without justification, this change in management approach should not be made. Currently all trails are open to bicycles in Wild Forests. NYMBC would accept the closure of certain trails on a case-by-case basis if they are shown to be unsustainable. NYMBC urges that the plan provide a default condition of Wild Forest trails open to bicycles, with selected closures if and when appropriate. This approach would be protective of the Forest Preserve resource, without providing significant reductions in bicycling opportunities.

2. It may be extremely difficult to reverse the approach of banning bicycles from state-designated wilderness. NYMBC does not support blanket closures of state wilderness areas to bicycles. This blanket closure goes so far as removing bicycles from existing dirt roads. Many trails in state wilderness areas are entirely suitable for bicycles without providing impacts on the resource any greater than pedestrian use. That said, NYMBC may accept, as a *very significant compromise*, the wilderness ban. However,

in exchange for accepting this compromise, the closed-unless-open designation for Wild Forest units must be reversed to "open-unless-closed".

3. NYMBC supports the DEC position to remove the automatic designation of any land above 2,700 feet elevation as state wilderness. As pointed out above, we do not support the banning of bicycles from state wilderness and thus do not wish to see these areas arbitrarily defined by elevation.

It has been reported that a contributing factor for reaching the unfortunate recommendation of "closed-unless-open" for bicycles in Wild Forests was that this was a "compromise" position in response to removing the 2,700-foot restrictions (for which some environmental groups campaigned). If this is the case, NYMBC urges that the "closed-unless-open" policy (if it must be applied) be applied to only those areas above 2,700 feet in elevation.

4. The final master plan should remove the recommendation in Section VIII of the draft plan "ACTIONS NECESSARY TO IMPLEMENT THE CPSLMP" to promulgate regulations restricting the use of bicycles to trails designated and marked for their use. Not only does this follow from our point #1 above, but more importantly this could have disastrous effects throughout the rest of the state. Depending on how the regulation were to be worded, it could extend the closed-unless-open policy to areas outside of the Catskills as well, contrary to DEC management policy in non-forest-preserve forests.

5. NYMBC urges DEC to abandon the concept of "bicycle trails". The specifications for a trail suitable for bicycling are exactly the same as for a trail suitable for hiking.

Use of the terms "bicycle trail" or "foot trail" suggests that these are different types of trails or that use is incompatible. These trails should be designated as "non motorized trails", and where appropriate, limited to hiking use via signs at the trailheads.

For more information on NYMBC:

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East Aurora, NY 14052  
Tel: 716-655-5130

e-mail: [info@nymbc.com](mailto:info@nymbc.com)  
web: [www.nymbc.com](http://www.nymbc.com)

For info on how to help keep trails in your area open, contact your local MTB advocacy organization.

Founding Organizations:

Western NY Mountain Bicycling Association  
Rochester Bicycle Club (RBC)  
Central NY-DIRT (Dedicated Individuals for Responsible Trail-use)  
Mohawk-Hudson Cycling Club (MHCC)  
Westchester Mountain Biking Association  
'Gunks Mountain Biking Association  
Fats in the Cats  
Concerned Long Island Mountain Bicyclists

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NYMBC  
c/o Jon Sundquist  
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