

Recreation



Heritage Trail



Stanley Deming Park, Village of Warwick

Open Space resources provide for a variety of recreational opportunities. Federal, State, regional and local parklands; urban spaces; public-access sites; water based recreation and trail systems are examples of these opportunities. The following description identifies the variety of existing facilities from the Federal government down to the community park.

Types and Location

Orange County contains a variety of recreational experiences that are provided at several levels of government management. The **Federal** presence in the County is limited to the Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge Area that is primarily in New Jersey but spills over into a small area of the Towns of Warwick and Minisink, and the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreation River Corridor in the Town of Deerpark along Route 97. In addition, the National Park Service owns several miles of the Appalachian Trail corridor outside of the State Parks. Members of the NY-NJ Trail Conference maintain the trail.

New York State on the other hand owns a significant number of park, historic, water-related public access, trail, and wildlife refuge sites in the County. Some sites have an urban setting, they are for all ages and disabilities, and they serve the diverse ethnic population that is found in the State and the country.

The Palisades Interstate Park Commission (PIPC) is the steward of more than 100,000 acres of parkland in New York and New Jersey. Seven of its parks are located in Orange County. They have come to be included in the Palisades Park System either through direct purchase or as gifts over the last one hundred years. Sterling Forest State Park and Schunnemunk are the State's two most recent additions, accounting for 21,000 acres. In addition to Sterling Forest and Schunnemunk, Bear Mountain State Park and Harriman account for another 20,000 acres. These four parks are located in the southeast end of the county.

Smaller State parks managed by PIPC in Orange County, such as Highland Lakes, Goosepond Mountain and Storm King, total approximately 6500 acres and are identified as "passive parks."

In addition to parkland, PIPC manages four historic sites in Orange County: Knox Headquarters, New Windsor Cantonment, Fort Montgomery Battle Site and Washington's Headquarters.

Annual visitation to the parks and historic sites that are actively managed by PIPC total over three and one-half million people. New York State pays taxes totaling \$5,522,000 for PIPC lands located in the Towns of Cornwall, Highlands, Monroe, Warwick, Tuxedo and Woodbury.

Much of the State-owned parkland in Orange County is important forested segments of "The Highlands" a geophysical region through four states (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut). The U.S. Forest Service has studied the Highlands for over a dozen years. In one of the opening paragraphs of their most recent reports, they state: "The water resources of the Highlands have long been recognized as the region's most valuable resource." And, "Land-use activities are major factors in changing hydrologic and environmental conditions within watersheds. Expected continued growth of population and development in the Highlands balanced with open space protection measures will have a positive effect in protecting stream and ground water quality and aquatic communities."

State parks offer a wide variety of activities to all ages of patrons. Parks like Bear Mountain and Harriman are premier "active recreation" parks. Activities range from hiking and biking to fishing, boating, swimming, horseback riding, snowmobiling, tent and cabin camping. Parks like Sterling Forest, purchased by New York State, New Jersey and the federal government, offer fishing, biking, hunting, hiking, boating, horseback riding. The geographic boundaries of each of these activities is carefully documented and defined in the Master Plan for Sterling Forest, adopted in 2001.

Not all of the State parks lend themselves to all activities. Indeed, some of the smaller parks are specifically designated as "passive parks" because of their size and location. Highland Lakes and Goosepond Mountain State Park are prime examples where the communities that surround them enjoy them for fishing, hiking, horseback riding and even model airplane flying.

Orange County Parks and Historic Sites

Orange County has had the foresight to develop an extensive network of parks that are strategically located in most regions of the County. Presently the Park System consists of 2,918 acres within 10 parks and provides a variety of services and benefits. They include "environmental health and well-being, protection and preservation of open space, public access to parks, trails and open space, preservation of access to historically significant sites, facilities for a full range of recreational and leisure activities, and opportunities for public events and gatherings."

The locations of the parks are such that they are easily accessible to most residents. The Orange County Park Plan recognizes that there are gaps in the location of parks within the County and plans should be made to search for new locations. One of these areas is the Greenville, Mount Hope, and Minisink region.

Presently the County has parks in the following areas. The Delaware and Hudson Canal Park is located in the Town of Deerpark on Route 209. Nearby the County obtained the Swarthout property and has leased some of the land to the Town for field recreation facilities. Further east, between the Towns of Crawford and Montgomery is the Winding Hills Park. It is located on the Route 17K. Just south on Route 416 in the Town of Hamptonburg, is the Thomas Bull Memorial Park, the most central and widely used facility. East of the Winding Hills Park on Route 17K and in the Town of Montgomery is the Brick House Museum and Farm Museum. In the Town of Newburgh between Route 52 and Route 32 is Cronomer Hills/ Algonquin Park. The Warwick County Park serves the southern section of the County. It is located in the Town of Warwick on Route 17A. Along the Hudson River is a DEC-owned piece of land known as Plum Point and renamed Kowawasee Unique Area. DEC and the County signed an agreement giving the County Parks Department the management authority for the facility. Finally, an abandoned railroad ROW known as the ERIE Mainline was developed as a non-motorized multi-use trail, excluding horses, from Goshen to Harriman.

The County has also undertaken efforts to add lands to existing parks. A recent acquisition effort includes land adjacent to the Thomas Bull Memorial Park.

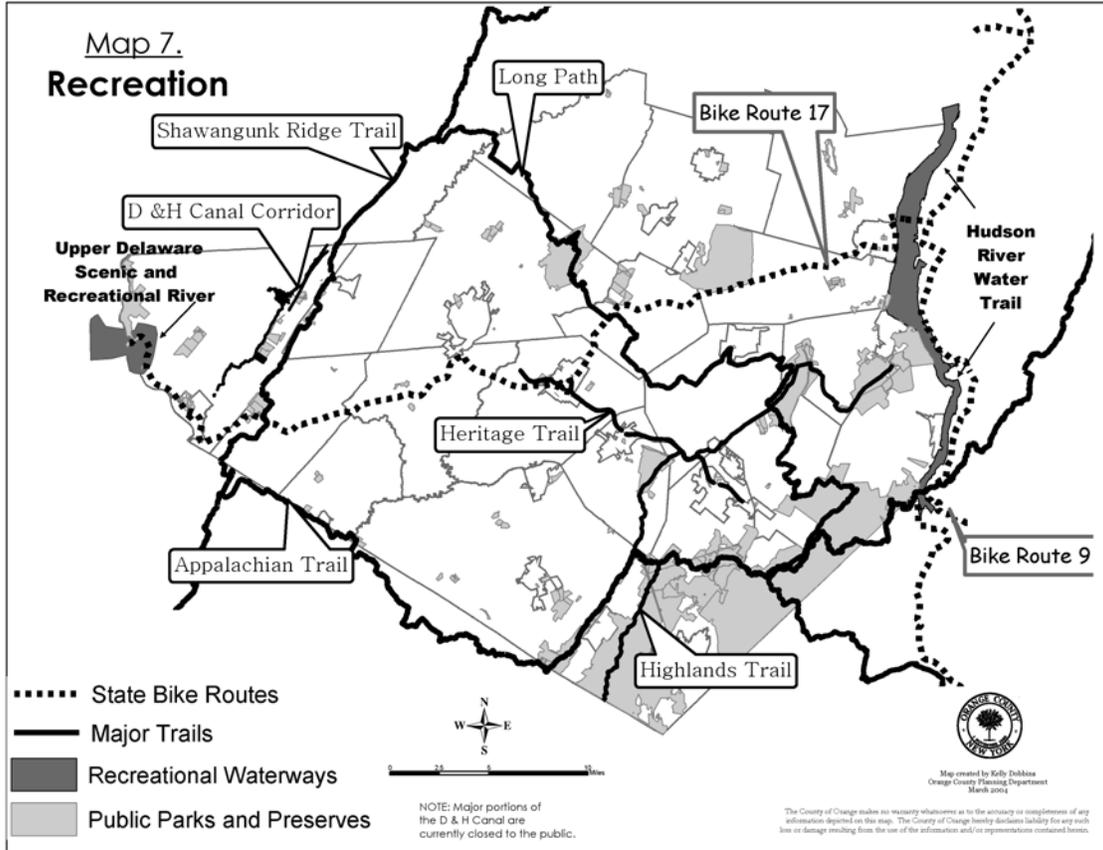
For the location of the County Parks see Map 7.

Even though the County has added Hickory Hill Golf Course, Kowawasee Unique Area, the Brick House Museum, and the Heritage Trail to its system within the last ten (10) years, there is still a need to pursue additional parkland to accommodate the growing population, needs and changes in recreation pleasure. A comparison of similar Counties in the U.S. for the County Park Plan indicate that Orange County has 9 acres of parkland for 1000 people as opposed to a standard of 10 acres per 1000 people and a peer average of 17.35 acres per 1000 people. Although further study is warranted to determine more precisely the needs and locations of future parkland, the numbers indicate that the County should pursue additional land to meet its growing population.

Municipal Parks

Municipalities in Orange County have successfully created active parks that provide active recreation, including ball fields, tot lots, soccer fields and to a limited extent swimming facilities, hiking trails, bicycle trails, tennis courts and similar types of active recreation. Even though these are important needs at the local level, this plan will emphasize the importance of setting aside open space areas that may be used for future active recreation, but not be the primary purpose.

The Plan will recognize the need to set aside land for trails and connective corridors for larger open space areas and existing park systems. Appropriate farmland and watershed areas could also play a part in developing trail networks within and beyond municipal boundaries. For locations of municipal parks see Map 7.



Trail Systems and Networks

Trails and interconnecting trail networks or corridors are primarily for linear recreation as cross-country skiing, nature study, hiking, jogging, bicycling, horseback riding, roller blading, etc. Existing linear systems in the County such as the D&H Canal Towpath, Railroad rights-of-way and streambeds can provide immediate solutions to trail needs. Long term needs can be planned and acquired through conservation easements on lands that are planned for future development. Future trail systems may take advantage of existing trails and other public places to provide linkages between communities. They also stimulate economic growth in communities that have retail establishments through patronage of these services by users of the trails.

The Orange County Comprehensive Plan, the County Parks Plan, the New York State Recreation Plan and the New York Greenway recognize the importance of trails as a growing recreation resource for the growing population in the County. Trail corridors

and linkages need to be a part of the future plans being considered by planning officials at all levels of government.

The County, presently, supports a variety of trails that range from multi-state trails to municipal trails. Each trail has a basic purpose and serves a select group of users. Map 7 shows a few of the trails, but, for lack of space, does not encompass the entire number of trails that are found in the parks and the municipalities.

Below are a few examples of the major trails that are enjoyed by County and out of County users:

Multi-Use Trails

1. **Orange Heritage Trail:** This trail is located on the former Erie Mainline that ran from Middletown to Harriman. Presently the trail is owned by the Orange County Parks Department and maintained by Orange Pathways. Uses on the trail include walking, bicycling, and rollerblading. Additional areas on the original railroad ROW are available to expand the trail from the Walkkill River to Middletown and beyond.
2. **The Hudson River Valley Greenway Trail System:** The New York State Greenway Community Council and Conservancy are actively seeking community trails that can fit into a Greenway trail along a corridor of the Hudson River. Several trails in Orange County are designated and more are sought. Examples of these trails are the Trail of Two Cities (Newburgh to Beacon), Stillman and Howell Trail in Cornwall, Highland Falls Trail and the West Point Trail. The Stillman and Howell Trail is the only walking trail of that list.
3. **Single-Use Only Hiking Trails**
 - a. **The Delaware River Heritage Trail:** This trail is located primarily in the City of Port Jervis and follows a course along the river and through the streets of the city. The river and various historic sites are the themes for this trail.
 - b. **The Appalachian Trail:** The trail is a regional trail that begins in Georgia and ends in Maine. The trail is owned by the National Park Service and maintained by the NY-NJ Trail Conference. The Trail is over 2000 miles long and is a popular destination for many County and State residents.
 - c. **The Long Path:** The trail is a regional trail that begins near Fort Lee, New Jersey and ends in the Adirondack Mountains of New York. It diagonally traverses the County connecting public parklands and following roads in between. The NY-NJ Trail Conference continues to pursue ways to relocate the entire trail on public and private lands through cooperative agreements.
 - d. **Shawangunk Ridge Trail:** The Shawangunk Mountains in Orange County are part of a mountain ridge that runs from New Jersey north to the Kingston area of New York. The Shawangunk Ridge Trail originates in the High Point State Park of New Jersey and intersects with the Appalachian Trail. It runs northeast along the ridge of the mountain. Much of the trail in Orange County uses private property and roads for the trail. The NY-NJ Trail Conference is actively pursuing avenues to purchase land that would secure the trail on public land.
 - e. **The Highlands Trail:** This is a new trail that follows the Highlands, a mountain area that originates in Pennsylvania and ends in Connecticut. The trail is located on roads and public land and follows a path that begins in Warwick and passes through Chester,

Monroe, Woodbury and Cornwall. Once again, the NY-NJ Trail Conference is pursuing methods to secure a permanent trail.

Trends in Recreation

The **New York Statewide Comprehensive Recreation Plan for 2003** outlines the existing programs and facilities, looks at needs and trends and recommends solutions for future needs and concerns. In the area of trends the Plan relied upon a survey of recreation users in the State to give them information for developing a strategy for the future.

The State, 1998 has conducted a General Public Recreation Survey, a Park Professional Survey and a Park Visitor Survey. Among the top priority of needs within those surveys is the need for more protected open space, hiking trails, biking trails, and active outdoor recreational opportunities.

The State, as part of its goals for the future of its park development, is to preserve and protect natural and cultural resources. Within that goal they intend to ensure that recreation development recognizes environmental limitations, ensure acquisition of open space in rural and urban communities, and protect parks that are threatened by encroachment. Other major goals include improving water-oriented recreation and developing comprehensive recreation ways, greenways and heritage trail systems. To support their goals and the goals of Orange County, the Parks Plan contains a matrix of indicators that identify recreational needs by county and type of recreation facility. Orange County five recreational uses having needs are swimming, biking, hunting, hiking and boating. All of these recreational needs require water access and large, undeveloped tracts of land.

If Orange County wants to meet these needs for its residents, protective actions are an immediate concern for all levels of government. The Plan recognizes these urgent needs and calls for an active program to locate and protect open space land for present and future residents.

In 2002, the Orange County Legislature accepted the Orange County Parks Plan as a tool to build upon the existing park system and plan for the future park needs of County residents. The Plan outlined goals and strategies to undertake an important task. The Plan surveyed the residents of the County to find out what they viewed as needs and trends for future recreation facilities.

Two important elements discussed in the plan are: 1. Trends in the technological segment of the community and the social makeup of the community, and 2. The services that residents identify as important for future park development.

Park and recreation developments in the past were influenced by dramatic changes in our society that led to the need for active recreational facilities in neighborhoods and communities. Trends in technology, the economy, population diversity, social changes,

consumer needs and political impacts are still influencing future needs and locations for park development.

Although the rise in usable income for leisure activities has allowed families to travel longer distances to recreate, there is still an important need for recreational facilities within local communities to satisfy the need for daily activities. Communities are facing a bulging need for organized recreational programs for adults and children alike. Hiking and biking have grown as a result of the demand for exercising and relieving the stress of every-day life.

A section of the Orange County Park Plan elaborates on the importance of these trends and the ultimate impact that they will have on the way people will recreate and the way park planners will plan.

The second area presented in the Park Plan identifies the needs that residents envision for their future. A series of public meetings were held and surveys were available for interested groups and individuals. The residents identified a large list of needs.

Mayors, supervisors and other elected officials participated as well and provided their input in a similar process. The outcome of the process identified several items at the top of the list that coordinate nicely with the direction that the Open Space Plan is taking. The first ten items on the list in the Park Plan are as follows:

- Preserve open space, unique natural lands and related activities
- Improve recreational opportunities by increasing facilities and services
- Improve the availability of linked, interconnecting trails for local use and for long distance access to cultural and natural resources
- Increase public programming for natural and cultural history programs and services
- Develop countywide facilities for cultural, economic and educational purposes
- Protect and preserve historic properties
- Provide more parks in the cities
- Preserve farmlands and operations
- Use owned but currently unavailable county and state lands for recreational, open space purposes
- Provide public equestrian facilities

It is clear from the responses that outdoor activities are foremost in the minds of Orange County residents and trends toward more free time, local sports activities and the importance of outdoor exercising will encourage park planners and public officials to provide the necessary facilities in response to the needs.

**Orange County Park Master Plan
Natural Resources and Open Space
Recommendations**

- 1. Connect Hiking and Biking Trails**
- 2. Develop Canoe/Water Trails**
- 3. Negotiate Recreational Use Rights**
- 4. Partner with Equestrian Community**
- 5. Balance Park Distribution Across County**