



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

BLUE MOUNTAIN WILD FOREST

Draft Amendment

to the

1995 Blue Mountain Wild Forest Unit Management Plan



NYS DEC, REGION 5, DIVISION OF LANDS AND FORESTS

P.O. Box 1316, Northville, NY 12134
r5.ump@dec.ny.gov

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

The Blue Mountain Wild Forest is located in the towns of Indian Lake and Long Lake in Hamilton County and the Town of Minerva in Essex County. The unit is approximately 47,350 acres in size. At 3,759 feet, Blue Mountain dominates the landscape within this unit. The strategic location of the summit of Blue Mountain has made it a critical location for the placement of communication systems, facilities and towers that are used by the State and municipalities to ensure the public's safety and protect the natural resources across the Adirondack region. A Unit Management Plan (UMP) for this area was completed in 1995. The UMP was amended in 2016 to incorporate elements of the Essex Chain Lakes Complex Plan that concern the Blue Mountain Wild Forest.

This UMP Amendment contains four components:

- 1) Development of an accessible tent site on Lake Durant;
- 2) Creation of a spur trail that connects the hamlet of Long Lake to the Northville Placid Trail (NPT);
- 3) Construction of an additional lean-to on a heavily-used section of the Northville Placid Trail; and
- 4) Modifications to the Blue Mountain summit facilities, including:
 - a) rehabilitation of the Blue Mountain access road;
 - b) removal of summit facilities that are no longer in use; and
 - c) installation of improvements that will protect the Department's investment in the facilities on the summit.¹

Many of the management actions proposed in this amendment are important to the safety and general welfare of inhabitants and visitors to the region as well as the employees that perform maintenance on the facilities on the summit of Blue Mountain.

Statement of Need

The NYSDEC, NYS Department of Transportation, the New York State Police, the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office, Hamilton County Emergency Medical Services, North Country Public Radio and New York State Electric and Gas (NYSEG) all rely on the radio communications equipment on the summit of Blue Mountain for basic and emergency radio communications. The routine maintenance and repair of these facilities is essential to serve the needs of the people of the State. It is the responsibility

¹ Refer to Appendix 1 for a list of the facilities that currently exist on the summit of Blue Mountain. Refer to Appendix 3 for mapped locations of these facilities. Refer to Appendix 4 for photos of these facilities.

of the Department to periodically review the condition of these facilities to determine if they are functioning and if they continue to serve a Departmental purpose.

The condition of the access road and the facilities on the summit on Blue Mountain were evaluated by the Department in 2015 following a UTV accident in which two Department employees were seriously injured traveling down the road after completing routine maintenance work on the summit. It was determined that the road improvements and rehabilitation measures outlined in this amendment are required to ensure safe access to the summit for the purpose of maintaining emergency communication facilities by restoring the road to a usable condition. It was also determined that several structures no longer serve a purpose and should be removed, and that additional on-site generated electrical power is needed in the event of a power outage to ensure that the communication and radio systems do not fail.

Management Proposals

1. Accessible Primitive Tent Site

Background:

Old Route 28 is a 0.8-mile long road near the entrance to the Lake Durant public campground. Jurisdiction of the road belongs to the Town of Indian Lake. There are currently two primitive tent sites between the road and the shore of Lake. With some minor improvements, either of these sites has the potential to be made accessible by people with disabilities.

Objective:

- To improve primitive camping opportunities for people with disabilities

Management Action:

Formally designate one of the two primitive tent sites along Old Route 28 on the shore of Lake Durant. The site will be modified as necessary to meet ADA guidelines and will be signed for use by people with disabilities only. Due to the proximity of these sites to Lake Durant, an accessible, pump-out privy will also be installed to minimize impacts to water quality.

2. Long Lake to Northville-Placid Trail, Spur Trail

Background:

The historic Northville-Placid Trail (NPT) courses through 11.6 miles of Blue Mountain Wild Forest. Should hikers want to utilize services available in the hamlet of Long Lake, the current NPT configuration requires a trail user to walk no less than 1.5 miles along public roads in order to get to the hamlet. As outlined in *The Conceptual Plan for a Hut-to-Hut Destination-based Trail System for the Five Towns of Long Lake, Newcomb, Indian Lake, Minerva, and North Hudson*, local tourism could be enhanced by providing trail users with a shorter, more direct, and safer route to the hamlet from the NPT via a Town-owned parcel that is directly connected to the hamlet. (Refer to Appendix 5 – *Proposed Long Lake to NPT Spur-Trail Location*). Approximately 0.75 miles of trail is needed on State land before crossing the boundary onto Town land.

Objective:

- To connect the hamlet of Long Lake to the NPT with a shorter and more direct route than is currently available, and to minimize the amount of trail that is coincident with public roads.

Management Action:

- Construct a spur trail from the Three-Brook Loop Ski Trail (DEC) in the Blue Mountain Wild Forest, to a parcel owned by the Town of Long Lake. This will make a connection between the hamlet of Long Lake and the NPT that will be as short and direct as possible. The route of this spur trail is depicted on the map as a corridor within which the exact trail will be routed based on field reconnaissance and consultation with the Adirondack Park Agency (APA).

3. Lean-tos

Background:

Currently, there are two lean-tos within Blue Mountain Wild Forest located adjacent to the NPT in the vicinity of Tirrell Pond. These lean-tos receive heavy seasonal use as a result of float plane use on Tirrell Pond and the foot traffic on the NPT. Construction of an additional lean-to is needed to ensure impacts from camping are concentrated in an appropriate location when the O’Neil Flow lean-to and Tirrell Pond lean-to are at capacity. (*Refer to Appendix 2 – Proposed Lean-To Location on the NPT*).

Objectives:

- To enhance the hiking experience on the NPT and to control camping activity near existing and proposed lean-to’s.
- To address the need for additional shelter options within the unit during peak use times.
- To provide an additional option for emergency shelter during inclement weather.

Management Actions:

- Construct an additional lean-to along the NPT. The location of the lean-to will be West of Salmon Pond along a 0.8-mile section of the NPT on a scenic section of the trail. The lean-to would be located somewhere between 2.0 and 2.8 miles north of the Tirrell Pond lean-to.

4. Tower and Appurtenances (Fire and Radio)

Background:

A Cold War-era radar station was added to the summit of Blue Mountain in 1957 in the name of national defense. It included a building sited immediately southwest of the base of the tower and three emergency generators sited to the northwest. The radar station was obsolete by the time it was completed in 1961 and was subsequently removed.

The current Blue Mountain fire tower was erected in 1917 to replace a wooden tower that was built in 1911. The Blue Mountain Forest Fire Observation Station was used continuously until its closure at the end of 1990. It was one of the last operating fire

towers in New York State. The fire tower was reopened for recreational purposes in 1994 after it was rehabilitated. In 1995, the fire tower became the eighth structure in New York State to be included in the National Historical Lookout Register.

An observer's cabin, built in 1975, still remains near the fire tower. During the summer months, in partnership with the Town of Indian Lake and other organizations, the Department employs a land steward who spends a significant amount of time on the summit of Blue Mountain. This includes occasional overnight use of the observer's cabin. Access to the summit by the steward is limited to non-motorized uses and does not include use of motor vehicles on the access road.

A Hamilton County Sheriff's Communication Building (referred to in this document as the Hamilton County Radio Building) was placed underneath the existing fire tower which was, at one time, necessary for the operation of the County Sheriff's Department mobile radio system. This building is no longer in use. While this building is built within the fire tower base, it is structurally independent of the lower stage of the fire tower. The building contained several items of equipment that were relocated to the Cement Block Radio Building and a list of these items can be found in Appendix 1.

The Blue Mountain access road that leads to the summit was constructed in the 1960's. The original road was paved the entire (or nearly the entire) distance from NYS-28N to the summit. This road was opened to provide access to the radar station and has remained in use since that time to provide administrative motor vehicle access to the communication towers and facilities near and on the summit. The entrance to the access road is located along NYS-28N approximately 1.5 miles north of the Adirondack Museum in the Hamlet of Blue Mountain Lake. The first 2.0 miles of the road are located on private land on which the Department holds a conservation easement (known as the Township 19 Conservation Easement lands). The last 751 feet of the road are located on Blue Mountain Wild Forest. Continued motor vehicle use is required on this road to conduct emergency operations and to accomplish essential maintenance, construction and resource protection activities that cannot be accomplished by other means.

Preliminary improvements to the access road started in the summer of 2016, when the access road was resurfaced with gravel. After a single rain event following the completion of the road work, several sections of the 10-foot wide gravel travel surface were washed away due to the steep slope of the road. At that time a decision was made to provide emergency stabilization, through the application of millings and cross drains, to the most at-risk (steepest) sections of the road, with an understanding that the remaining sections of road on the Forest Preserve will require similar measures in order to remain durable and drivable in the long term.

Figure 1 shows the road immediately after the initial gravel was applied and compacted along the road surface looking uphill from Pole 99. Figure 2 shows the condition of the rehabilitated gravel road after one rain event. A substantial amount of material was washed away and there was extensive damage done to the rehabilitated road. Figure 3 shows the appearance of the road surface after it had been stabilized with millings on a 294' section between Pole 99-Pole 101 on Forest Preserve. The steep character of the road requires a travel surface other than gravel.



Figure 1



Figure 2

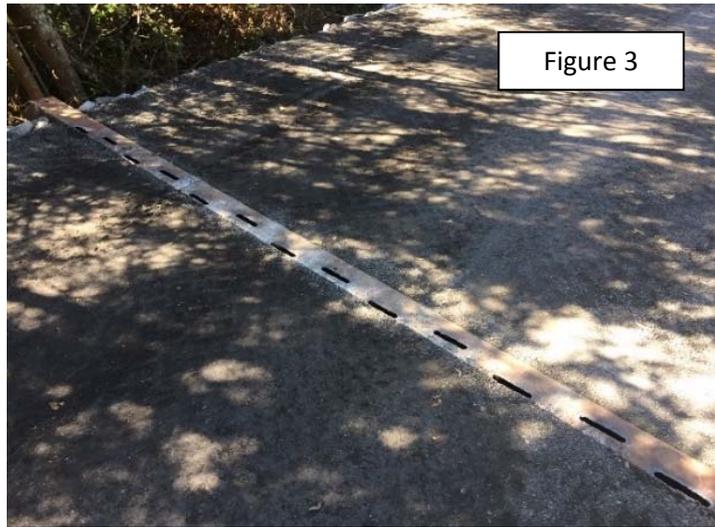


Figure 3

Objectives:

- Protect the unit's natural resources while accommodating the Department's administrative needs.
- Provide safe administrative access to the Blue Mountain summit facilities and emergency communications equipment.
- Restore the Blue Mountain fire tower to a condition approximate to its historic appearance, and in keeping with National Historic Lookout Register Guidelines.
- Provide emergency, on-site, back-up power generation to ensure radio communications coverage is reliably available.
- Address the appearance of and vandalism to the 12'x18' Cement Block Radio Building.

Management Actions:

- Rehabilitate, improve and maintain the travel surface of the Blue Mountain access road. Stabilize the driving surface and install drainage improvements. The road rehabilitation will provide the necessary access to maintain the mountain top communication facilities that are utilized by the Department and other entities to protect the Forest Preserve and to ensure the public's safety. Rehabilitation and maintenance of the road will not extend uphill beyond the point where improvements were made during the summer of 2016.
- Restore the fire tower to as close to its original condition as practicable by removing the 10'x12' Hamilton County Radio Building at the base of the fire tower and the antennas on the sides of the fire tower that are no longer in use.
- Install an 8'x8' prefabricated building that will be located next to the existing Cement Block Radio Building that will house an emergency generator to provide a back-up power source.
- In consultation with the APA, improve the appearance and protection of the Cement Block Radio Building.
 - Remove the existing 5' fence surrounding the Cement Block Radio Building. Install an 8' fence to encompass the radio building, the radio tower and the 8'x8' prefabricated emergency generator building. Perimeter of enclosed area will be 25'x35' and will protect the radio facility from vandalism and maintain a safety buffer to protect the public from radio frequency exposure.
 - Install a wood façade to the exterior of the cement block structure to give it rustic character, in keeping with the Wild Forest setting.

Potential Impacts

Bicknell's Thrush

All of the management action alternatives proposed on the summit of Blue Mountain would take place above 2,800 foot elevation in an area identified as an Adirondack Sub-Alpine Forest Bird Conservation Area (BCA) for the Bicknell's Thrush. Trail and road construction and maintenance activities do have the potential to disturb the activities of these high altitude birds. Therefore, specific management considerations and mitigation measures will be applied in a manner consistent with the conservation of the nesting habitat for this unique bird species. This includes avoiding tree cutting operations above 2,800 feet during Bicknell's Thrush nesting period between May 15 and August 1. Other construction activities proposed above 2,800 feet in terrain identified as suitable Bicknell's thrush habitat shall be reviewed for potential impact during this time period and activities that may cause negative impact to Bicknell's Thrush will be scheduled for other times.

This page intentionally left blank

Proposed Road Rehabilitation Alternatives

A. Alternative 1- Preferred Alternative

(The only physical difference between alternative 1 and alternative 2 is the scope of work involved in the access road rehabilitation.)

Rehabilitate and maintain the Blue Mountain access road on Wild Forest lands

Complete the travel-surface stabilization and rehabilitation of the existing access road. A linear distance of 457' of gravel-surfaced road would be resurfaced with millings. The existing road corridor, including the travel surface and adjacent cleared area, would be maintained to its existing width, and the travel surface would remain limited to 10 feet. Cross drains would be installed where appropriate to decrease the velocity of water that would travel down the steep road surface during precipitation events. The Best Management Practices for water quality would be applied.

(www.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands_forests_pdf/dlfbmpguide.pdf) Where cross drains are located, outflow structures would be placed on top of light stone fill and extended beyond of the toe of the road to an area that would disperse the water that is collected in the box beams away from the road surface and the base of the road. The sections of road surrounded by ledge rock would require daylighting these drainage structures into the woods approximately 20' away from the existing footprint of the road to divert water away from road bed and road surface

These measures are necessary to protect the natural resources of the Forest Preserve land by controlling erosion and runoff. These rehabilitation actions are the minimum required actions necessary to restore the road to usable condition, enhance safety of maintenance personal and minimize impacts to the Forest Preserve resulting from gravel washouts along the steep sections of the existing road. The visual appearance of the road will be consistent with the character of a Wild Forest road.

Conclusion: This alternative is preferred because it provides suitable solutions to the stated objectives with the least impact to the Forest Preserve.

B. Alternative 2

Recommend reclassification of 1.32 acres of Wild Forest Land to State Administrative

Blue Mountain Access Road: Alternative 2 would require the reclassification of 1.32 acres of Wild Forest to State Administrative land, which must be recommended by the Adirondack Park Agency and approved by the Governor. The access road corridor as well as the facilities on the summit would be subject to the proposed reclassification. The travel surface of the existing access road will be widened to 12' and would be resurfaced with millings. Millings, box beams and slot drains would be installed where appropriate. Under this alternative, the road rehabilitation would include but would not be limited to the following activities: constructing new ditches or drainage structures; widening existing ditches; cutting trees other than dead or hazardous trees pursuant to Lands and Forests Policy Lands and Forests Policy 91-2, Cutting and Removal of Trees in the Forest Preserve as well as blasting to remove ledge rock that surrounds the existing road. Alternative 2 would facilitate easier access to summit facilities, enhance the safety of personnel by increasing visibility around turns and would improve the clearance between tree line and personnel that use the road to access the summit. Modifications to the access road would be consistent with the characteristics of a road found in a State Administrative Area.

Conclusion: While the structures and uses identified in this UMP amendment conform to the guidelines for management and use for Wild Forest areas as listed in the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (APSLMP), they are of a scale and purpose that approaches the definition of a State Administrative Area. This alternative was not selected as the preferred alternative, however, because the objectives identified for each management action can be met under the existing Wild Forest classification.

C. Alternative 3

'No Action' Alternative

The 'No Action' alternative would prevent necessary improvements to the existing Blue Mountain summit facilities where a need is clearly demonstrated and administrative use is mandatory. No action would be taken to preserve the Department's investment in the infrastructure on the summit of Blue Mountain.

Potential impacts of not undertaking the proposed improvements:

- The access road would not be rehabilitated and maintenance personnel would not have safe and reasonable access to the summit.
- The Hamilton County Radio Building at the base of the fire tower would not be removed and the fire tower will not be restored to its historic condition.
- The 'No Action' Alternative would result in antiquated public safety radio communication system that would be inefficient in light of current technology available for basic and emergency public safety radio communications.

Conclusion: Because of the continued need to provide maintenance and/or improvements to the existing facilities near the summit of Blue Mountain, the No-Action alternative is not acceptable.

This page intentionally left blank

Appendix 1: Blue Mountain Summit Facilities

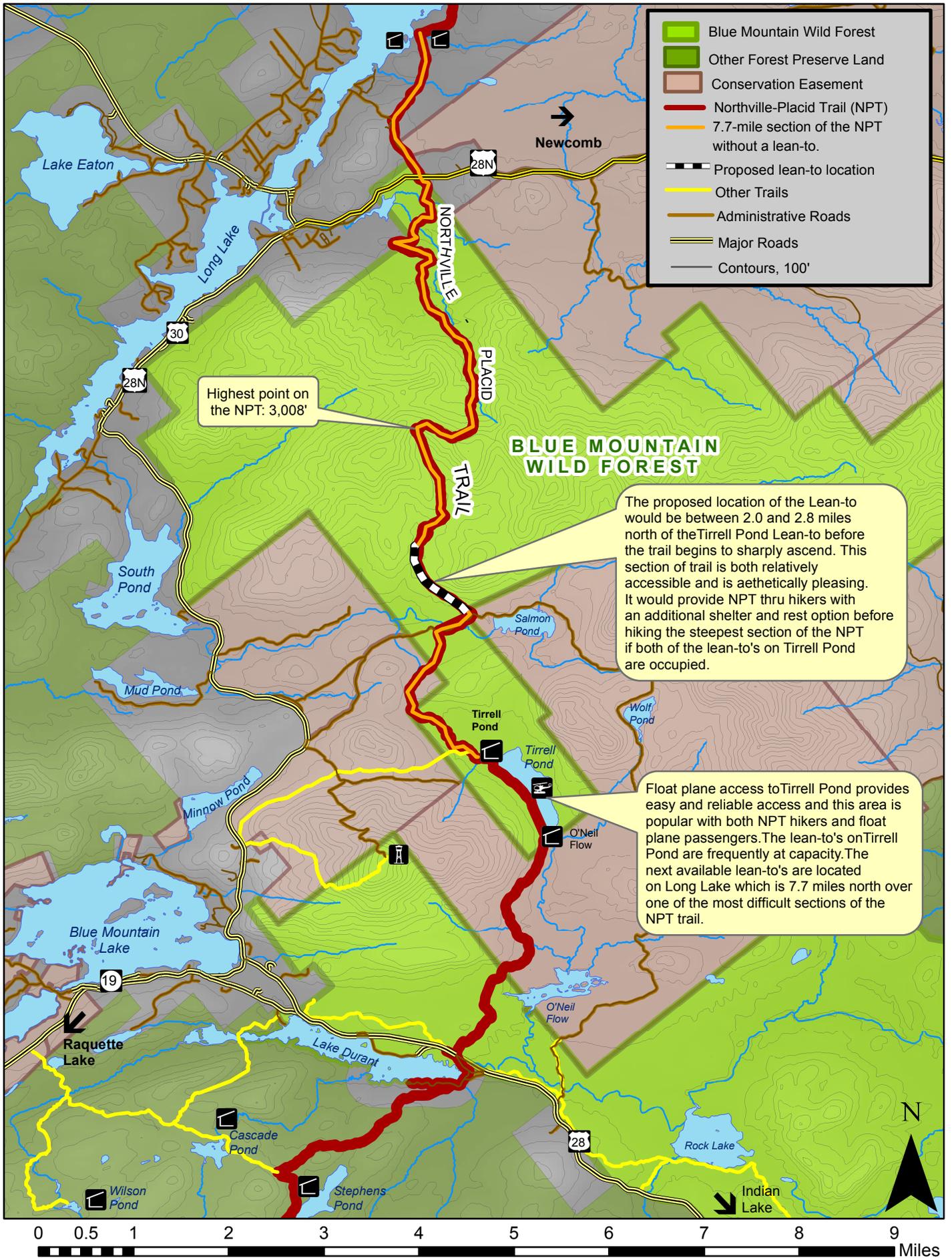
The management actions proposed by this amendment do not impact all of the facilities on this list. #1-# 6 are the facilities that will be modified by the management actions that are included in this amendment.

Existing facilities located on or near the summit of Blue Mountain include the following:

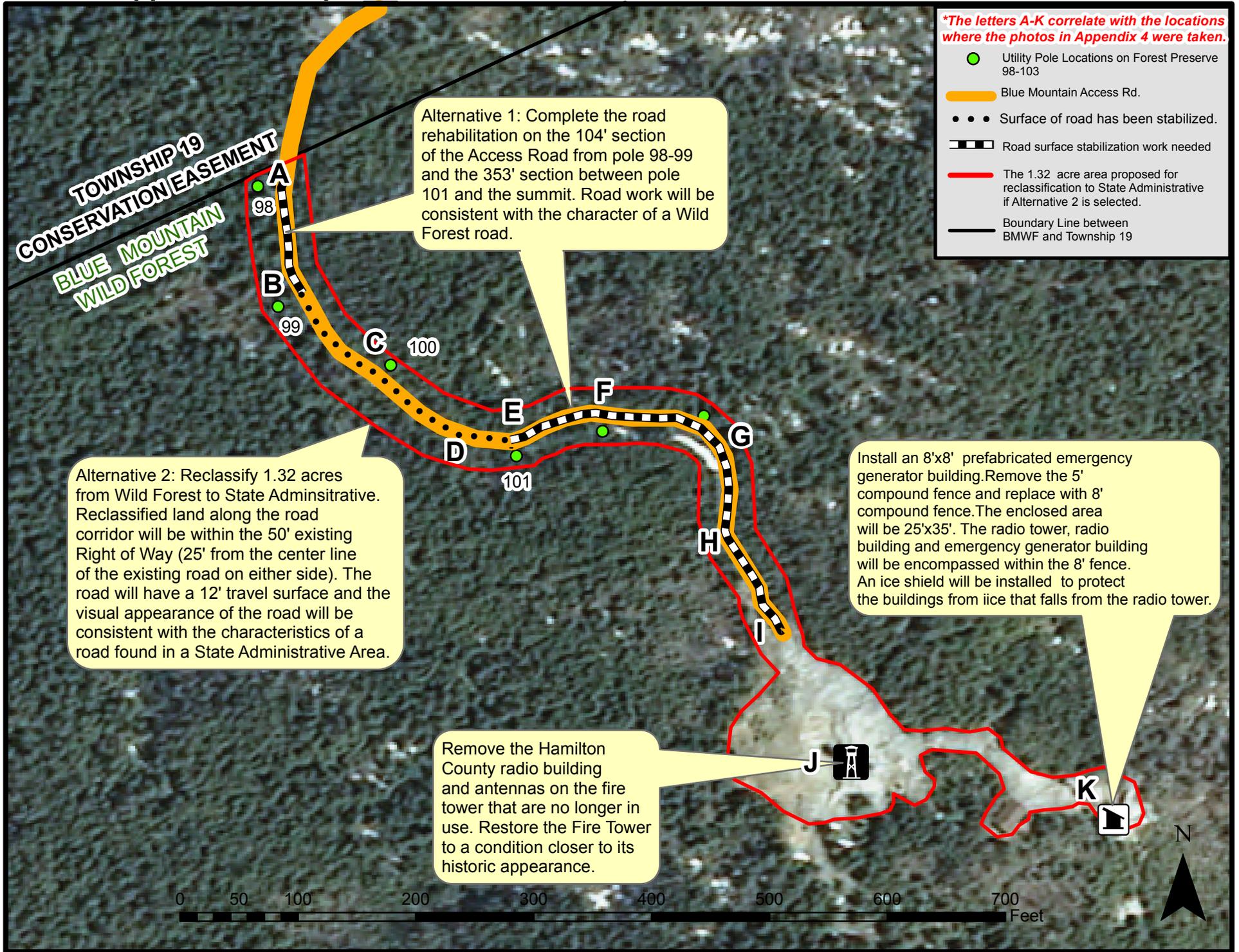
1. A 719' access road extends from the border of the Township 19 Conservation Easement/Forest Preserve property line to the summit;
2. A 35' foot tall steel frame Aeromotor fire tower (erected in 1917);
3. The Hamilton County Radio Building that was necessary for the operation of the County Sheriff's Department mobile radio system is located underneath existing fire tower and no longer in use. While this building is built within tower base, it is independent of the lower stage of the fire tower;
4. A 12'x18' Cement Block Radio Building is located next to a radio tower. This building houses the radio equipment (microwave system) and several other items that were relocated from the former Hamilton County Radio Building. Items that have been moved include: a Sheriff's repeater with one antenna, the Local Government (fire dispatch & Department of Public Works) base with one antenna, an uplink/downlink base station for the control of the Local Government base with two antennas, an Emergency Management RACES Amateur Radio VHF voice repeater with one antenna, an Emergency Management RACES Amateur UHF voice repeater with one antenna and an Emergency Management/ Wilderness Search & Rescue GPS data store-and-forward relay with one antenna;
5. There is a DEC Administrative repeater as well as DEC Dispatch and TAC repeaters present on the summit.
6. A 5'ft high compound fence encompasses the Cement Block Radio Building;
7. Six (6) NYSDEC utility poles (numbered from 98-103) and associated medium 4,800 voltage power lines that are owned by NYSDEC. The fiber optic line is owned by the Development Authority of the North Country;
8. 120/240 volt step-down transformer owned by the State Police;
9. A fire observers cabin (built in 1975):
10. Situated on grade near the base of the fire tower are five concrete foundation slabs. The largest L-shaped slab was the foundation of a radar station built in the 1960's. An isolated rectangular slab marks the site of the 1949 observer's cabin which is no longer there;
11. Blue Mountain Radio Tower – 125' guyed radio tower is located in the vicinity of the summit next to the cement block radio building. The tower was erected in

1980 and sized high enough for radio signals to be able to reach the Department's Regional Headquarters in Ray Brook. Mounted on the radio tower are various antennas.

Appendix 2: Proposed Lean-To Location on NPT



Appendix 3: Proposed Modifications to Blue Mountain Summit Facilities



Appendix 4-Blue Mountain Summit Facility Photos

(Letters correlate with the Blue Mountain Summit Facilities Map found in Appendix 3)





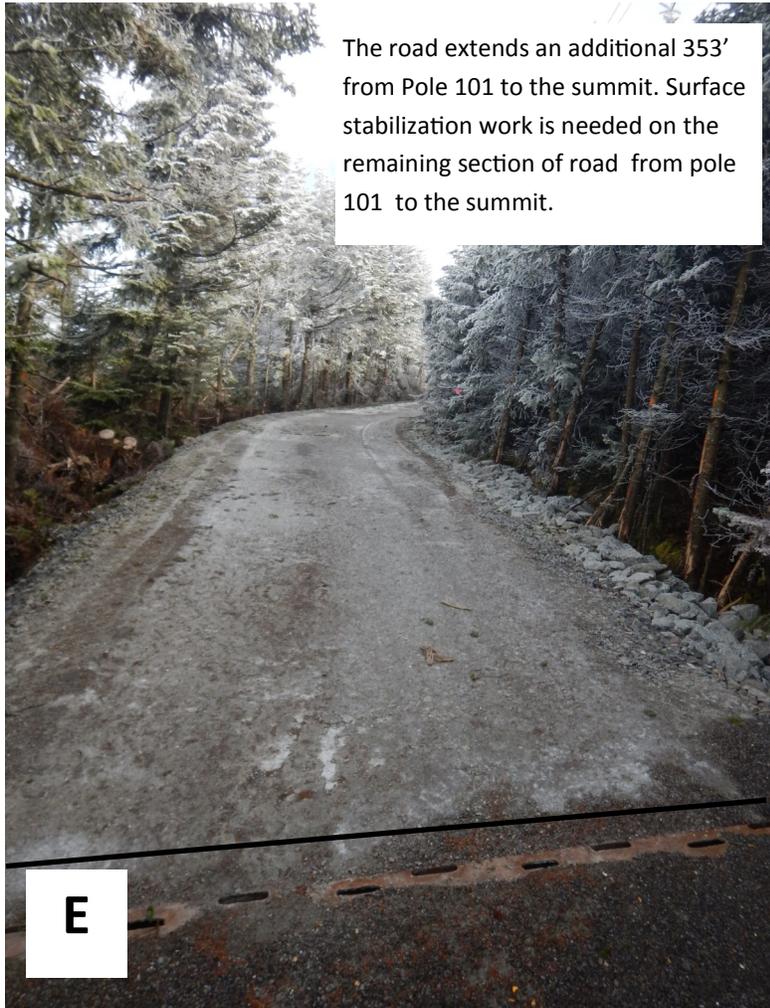
Current condition of the road looking up hill from Pole 100. The road surface along this section of road has been stabilized. The box beam with slot drains was installed to control water and prevent erosion

C



Location of the end of the road surface stabilization work from Pole 99- Pole 101.

D

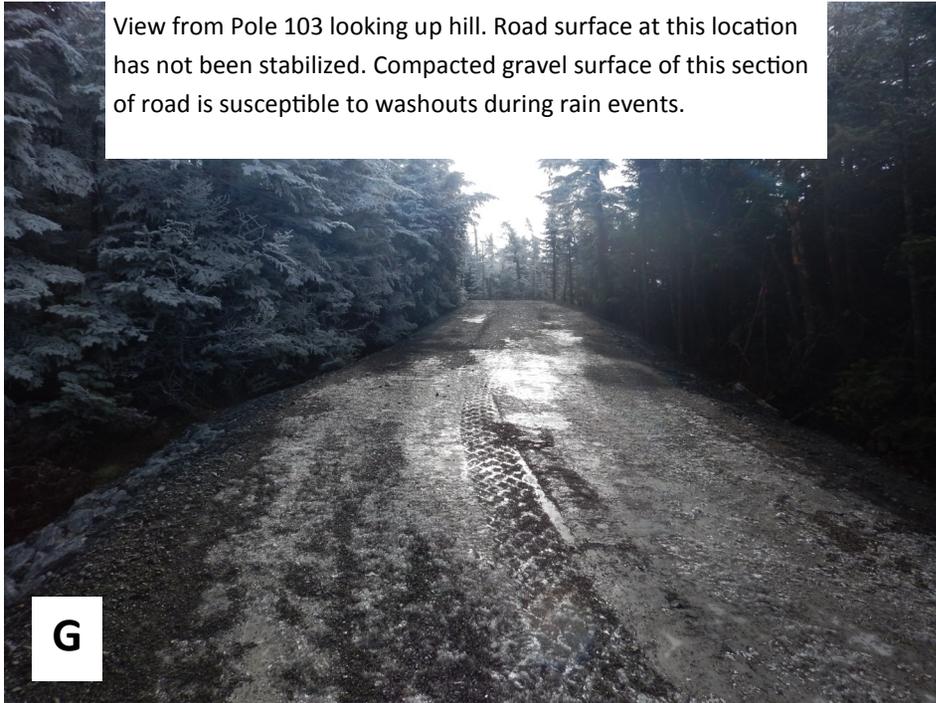


The road extends an additional 353' from Pole 101 to the summit. Surface stabilization work is needed on the remaining section of road from pole 101 to the summit.



Current road condition seen from Pole 102 looking towards Pole 103. Gravel surface is subject to erosion and needs to be stabilized to prevent impacts to the adjacent Forest Preserve.

View of road from Pole 102.



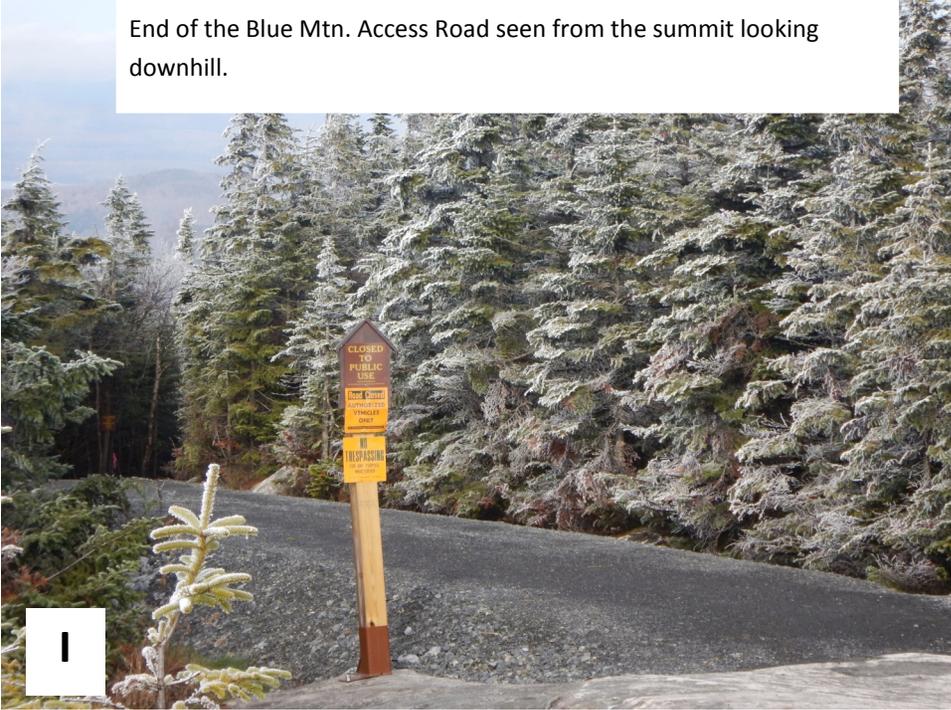
View from Pole 103 looking up hill. Road surface at this location has not been stabilized. Compacted gravel surface of this section of road is susceptible to washouts during rain events.

G



View of the access road as it approaches the summit. Gravel surface requires stabilization.

H



End of the Blue Mtn. Access Road seen from the summit looking downhill.

I

J



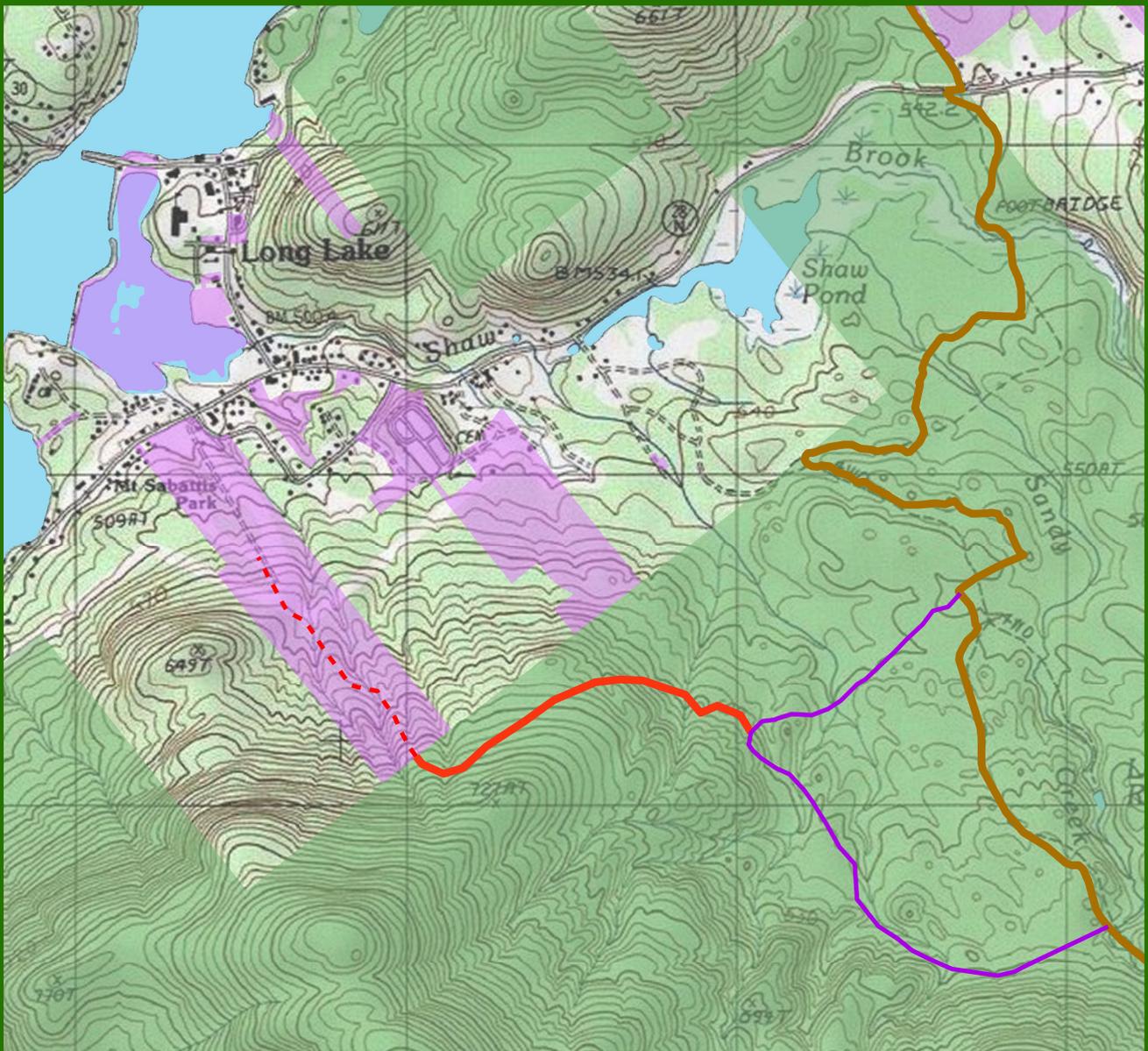
← This Amendment proposes removal of the Hamilton County Radio Building and the antennae's on the side of the Blue Mountain Fire Tower that are no longer in use. These actions would restore the Fire Tower to its historic condition.

K

Cement block radio building



Appendix 5 - NPT Spur Trail Map



Legend

NPT

-  NORTHVILLE-PLACID TRAIL
-  THREE-BROOK LOOP-SKI TRAIL
-  Blue Mountain Wild Forest
-  Town of Long Lake Parcels

Approximate Locations:

-  Proposed NPT Spur Trail
-  Town of Long Lake Conceptual Trail Connector

Copyright © 2013 National Geographic Society. Further

