

COVER SHEET

Draft-Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS/FSEIS)

Title: Gore Mountain Reclassification Actions and Unit Management Plan Amendment Approval

Name of Co-Lead Agencies: NYS Adirondack Park Agency (APA) and NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)

Location: Town of Johnsburg, Warren County

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Date of Acceptance of DSEIS by the Adirondack Park Agency: June 7, 2018

Date and Location of Public Hearings:

- June 27, 2018; 1:00 pm – NYS DEC Headquarters, 625 Broadway, Albany, NY, Room 129 A
- June 28, 2018; 7:00 pm – Tannery Pond Community Center, 228 Main Street, North Creek, NY

Dates on Which of Public Comments period: Must be Received: Comments will be received from: June 13, 2018 – July 13, 2018.

Preparers: NYS Adirondack Park Agency and NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, in consultation with Olympic Regional Development Authority.

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I. SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED ACTIONS

Three associated actions are the subject of this ~~Draft-Final~~ Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (~~DSEIS/FSEIS~~) developed by the New York State Adirondack Park Agency (APA) and Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). ~~All of the Both~~ actions are proposed pursuant to the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (APSLMP) and Executive Law § 816.

APA, in consultation with the DEC, proposes to approve two reclassification actions involving the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area (Map 1):

- (1) The addition of 38.7 acres of the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area to the Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area (Map 3); and
- (2) The addition of 29.0 acres of the Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest Area to the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area (Map 3).

DEC, subject to a conformance determination by APA, proposes to adopt a Unit Management Plan (UMP) amendment for the reclassified lands to be added to the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area. See, Appendix A. Proposed management activities on these lands include:

- (1) Re-alignment of Lift 12 – The upper terminal of Lift 12 is currently located just inside the northern boundary of the Intensive Use Area, and just to the south of the 29.0-acre area proposed for reclassification. A re-alignment of the chairlift will ~~leave the bottom terminal in place, but involve moving the lower terminal uphill approximately 125 feet on private lands and~~ move the upper terminal to a high point within the lands proposed for reclassification. This relocation will provide access to the new alpine ski trails that are also proposed.
- (2) Construction of New Alpine Ski Trails – Trails 12-L, 12-M, and 12-IA are proposed for construction beginning at the new location of the upper terminal for Lift 12. Construction of these trails will add 0.6 miles of new alpine ski trail to the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area.

The alignment of proposed alpine ski Trail 12-IA has been modified from the conceptual proposal identified by the Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA) in its May 2018 UMP amendment. Specifically, the re-alignment will provide a greater buffer between Trail 12-IA and Rabbit Pond in order to reduce potential noise and visual impacts on the pond from the new lift and trails.

- (3) Reroute the Existing Rabbit Pond Cross Country Ski Trail – In order to accommodate the proposed alpine ski trails, and to maintain a desirable

experience for cross country skiers, a +/- 600 feet portion of the Rabbit Pond Ski Trail will be relocated on Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest Lands to separate it from the new downhill ski trails. This minor relocation will be planned and undertaken by ORDA in coordination with DEC and subject to APA consultation prior to the construction of the new downhill ski trails.

Together, APA's and DEC's proposed actions comprise the Preferred Alternative considered in this ~~DSEIS~~FSEIS.

These actions also require APA approval for the portions of Lift 12 and trails 12M and 12-I-A occurring on adjoining private lands. Pursuant to Executive Law §§ 809 and 814, APA is reviewing an application for an amendment to APA Permit and Order 2017-0228 that would authorize the portions of the proposed actions on private lands. Impacts of the activities on private lands will be mitigated through APA's permit review and the required statutory finding that the proposed project would not have an undue adverse impact on the environment.

II. Purposes

The purposes of these interrelated actions are as follows:

- (1) The 38.7 acres near the summit of Gore Mountain that would be reclassified from Intensive Use and added to the Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area are between 3,100 feet ~~and to~~ 3,550 feet elevation. The forest cover is predominantly mountain spruce-fir forest and is part of the Adirondack Sub Alpine Forest Bird Conservation Area, providing habitat favored by Bicknell's thrush and other neotropical bird species. The proposed reclassification of these lands would help ensure a more restrictive management of these lands to protect this important habitat.
- (2) Reclassification of the 29.0 acres of Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest to Intensive Use represents the minimum acreage necessary to facilitate construction of a new lift and trail connections with the Town of Johnsbury Ski Bowl, ~~and to relocate a portion of an existing cross country ski trail.~~ The proposed addition to the Intensive Use Area would not include Rabbit Pond or its shoreline, continuing the protection of these resources as Wild Forest. The ~~draft~~ UMP amendment would provide for the construction and management of the new lift and trails, and ~~for~~ the relocation of a portion of the Rabbit Pond cross country ski trail. ~~according to APSLMP guidelines for Intensive Use lands.~~

III. Process

Upon acceptance of ~~this the~~ DSEIS by the APA Board, APA and DEC ~~will~~ ~~seeksought~~ public input on the DSEIS and the draft UMP amendment through hearings and a public comment period. The public ~~will have had~~ an opportunity to provide oral comments at the public hearings and to submit written comments during a scheduled timeframe from June 13 – July 13, 2018.

Two public hearings were held: June 27, 2018 in Albany and June 28, 2018 in North Creek. Fourteen people attended and three people spoke at the hearings. APA and DEC received four comment letters.

Appendix B provides APA's response to public comment received at the hearings and through the public comment period, which was prepared in consultation with DEC.

APA and DEC staff ~~will~~ ~~considered~~ comments received in the preparation of ~~the~~ ~~this~~ Final Supplemental Impact Environmental Statement (FSEIS) and proposed UMP amendment. The FSEIS ~~will~~ ~~includes~~ a written response to public comments and ~~will~~ ~~presents~~ ~~a the~~ final Preferred Alternative. ~~The FSEIS and draft UMP amendment will be brought to the APA Board after the close of the public comment period.~~

The APA Board will then decide (a) whether to accept the FSEIS, and (b) whether to recommend the APSLMP reclassifications to the Governor. The APA Board will also determine whether the proposed amendment to the Gore Mountain UMP conforms to the APSLMP.

If the APSLMP reclassifications are recommended by the APA Board, a ~~Board~~ ~~r~~Resolution for the package will be forwarded to the Governor for approval. DEC's Commissioner may adopt the amendment to the Gore Mountain UMP after Governor approval of the APSLMP amendments. The Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA), which manages the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area on behalf of DEC, will be responsible for implementation of the adopted UMP amendment.

IV. PROCEDURES UNDER THE STATE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY REVIEW ACT (SEQRA)

This ~~DSEIS-FSEIS~~ is a supplement to the Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement Guidelines for Amending the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (1979) (FPEIS), as well as a supplement to the April 25, 2018 Final Generic Environmental Impact Statement for the 2018 Gore Mountain UMP Amendment.

The FPEIS and APA rules (9 NYCRR §586.5(a)(6)(i)) list the proposed reclassification from a more restrictive to less restrictive category as a Type I SEQRA action. This ~~F~~DSEIS includes a Preferred Alternative to reclassify 29.0

acres of State lands from Wild Forest to Intensive Use, which has the potential to have a significant adverse effect upon the environment. The proposed reclassification of 38.7 acres of lands from Intensive Use to Wilderness is also considered in the ~~F~~DSEIS as part of APA's proposed reclassification action involving the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area.

The alternatives outlined in this document have been developed within the guidelines set forth by the APSLMP Guidelines for Amending the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, the FPEIS, and APSLMP Guidelines for Management and Use of State lands.

V. APSLMP CLASSIFICATION STANDARDS

The APSLMP sets forth the fundamental principles governing the classification considerations and the APA's responsibilities for the long-range planning for the State lands within the Park.

In Part I, INTRODUCTION, the APSLMP states:

If there is a unifying theme to the master plan, it is that the protection and preservation of the natural resources of the state lands within the Park must be paramount. Human use and enjoyment of those lands should be permitted and encouraged, so long as the resources in their physical and biological context as well as their social or psychological aspects are not degraded. (APSLMP, page 1)

The APSLMP was adopted in 1972 following the requirement of the Adirondack Park Agency Act to "classify [state lands] lands according to their characteristics and capacity to withstand use...." (Executive Law § 807).

Part II of the APSLMP entitled "CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM AND GUIDELINES" sets forth three "determinants" and an additional consideration: The first determinant is "the physical characteristics of the land or water which have a direct bearing upon the capacity of the land to accept human use." After listing several characteristics, the discussion of physical characteristics concludes:

[T]hese factors highlight the essential fragility of significant portions of the state lands within the Park. These fragile areas include most lands above 2,500 feet in altitude, particularly the boreal (spruce-fir), sub-alpine and alpine zones, as well as low-lying areas such as swamps, marshes and other wetlands. In addition, rivers, streams, lakes and ponds and their environs often present special physical problems. (APSLMP, pages 14-15)

The second determinant is biological considerations which are related to the physical characteristics, including deer wintering yards and nesting habitat of rare, threatened or endangered species. This determinant also recognizes that,

“Wetland ecosystems frequently are finely balanced and incapable of absorbing material changes resulting from construction or intensive human use.” (APSLMP, page 15)

The third determinant involves “certain intangible considerations that have an inevitable impact on the character of land.” These include “a sense of remoteness and degree of wildness available to users of a particular area, which may result from the size of an area, the type and density of its forest cover, the ruggedness of the terrain or merely the views over other areas of the Park obtainable from some vantage point.” (APSLMP, page 15)

The final consideration is the presence of established facilities and public uses such as highways, ski areas or campgrounds; these uses are generally viewed as inconsistent with a Wilderness or Wild Forest setting. (APSLMP, pages 15-16)

The APSLMP contains nine classification categories. The three classification categories involved with this proposed action are described below:

Wilderness

A wilderness area, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man--where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. A wilderness area is further defined to mean an area of state land or water having a primeval character, without significant improvement or permanent human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve, enhance and restore, where necessary, its natural conditions, and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least ten thousand acres of contiguous land and water or is of sufficient size and character as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historical value. (APSLMP, page 22)

Wild Forest

A wild forest area is an area where the resources permit a somewhat higher degree of human use than in wilderness, primitive or canoe areas, while retaining an essentially wild character. A wild forest area is further defined as an area that frequently lacks the sense of remoteness of wilderness, primitive or canoe areas and that permits a wide variety of outdoor recreation. (APSLMP, page 35)

Intensive Use

An intensive use area is an area where the state provides facilities for intensive forms of outdoor recreation by the public. Two types of intensive use areas are defined by this plan: campground and day use areas. (APSLMP, page 42)

The FPEIS repeats and reaffirms the principles guiding classification of State lands. Like the APSLMP, the FPEIS begins with a foundation of Wilderness classification and recognizes that opportunities for outdoor activities in large, unconfined spaces like the Adirondack Park are rare in New York State. Wild Forest areas are described in the FPEIS as having “[r]esources which allow a somewhat higher level of human use which does not degrade resource quality while retaining a wild character....” An example of such use includes snowmobiling “where such use will not adversely impact the natural resources quality and wild forest character of the area.” (FPEIS, page 19).

The FPEIS generally discourages reclassification from a more protective category to a less protective one. However, the FPEIS provides the following guidelines when such a reclassification to Intensive Use from Wild Forest, as proposed here:

The Master Plan states that additions to the intensive use category should generally come from new acquisitions or from the reclassification of existing Wild Forest areas.... As was noted above, such lands must have a high capability to withstand intensive, concentrated use with little or no degradation in the natural or scenic resource quality or character of the land unit under review or of adjacent or nearby lands. (FPEIS, p. 26)

The APSLMP requires that any request for reclassification of existing lands from another land use category to Intensive Use will be accompanied by a draft unit management plan for the proposed Intensive Use area that demonstrates how the applicable use guidelines will be respected. (APSLMP, page 43) DEC’s proposed Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area UMP amendment, attached as Appendix A, is intended to fulfill that requirement.

VI. APSLMP UMP CONFORMANCE STANDARDS

The APSLMP requires all unit management plans to conform to the guidelines and criteria set forth therein. For Intensive Use areas, the Guidelines for Management and Use (APSLMP, pages 42-43) include the following:

The primary management guideline for intensive use areas will be to provide the public opportunities for family group camping, developed swimming and boating, downhill skiing, cross country skiing under

competitive or developed conditions on improved cross country ski trails, visitor information and similar outdoor recreational pursuits in a setting and on a scale that are in harmony with the relatively wild and undeveloped character of the Adirondack Park. (APSLMP, page 42)

The APSLMP also includes the following special management guideline for ski areas:

Existing downhill ski centers at Gore and Whiteface should be modernized to the extent physical and biological resources allow. Cross country skiing on improved cross country ski trails may be developed at these downhill ski centers. (APSLMP, p. 40)

VII. ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The Adirondack Park was created in 1892 by the State of New York amid concerns for the water and timber resources of the region and the creation of public parks. Today the Park is the largest publicly protected area in the contiguous United States, greater in size than Yellowstone, Everglades, Glacier, and Grand Canyon National Park combined. The boundary of the Park encompasses approximately 6 million acres, nearly half of which belongs to all the people of New York State and is constitutionally protected to remain “forever wild” Forest Preserve. The remaining half of the Park is private land which includes farms, timber lands, businesses, homes, and camps.

The Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area is located approximately two miles south of the Hamlet of North Creek in the Town of Johnsburg, Warren County, New York. The APSLMP identifies the specific boundaries of the ski center. The Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area encompass slopes of two mountains, Gore Mountain and Pete Gay Mountain, with approximately 3,849 acres of land.

Adjoining lands are a mix of State lands and private lands, with a portion of the Vanderhacker Mountain Wild Forest Area to the north and the Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area to the west. Adjoining private lands lie to the north, south, east and west. According to the Adirondack Park Land Use and Development Plan Map, lands to the north and west are classified as "Resource Management" and "Industrial Use," to the east as "Low Intensity Use," "Hamlet," and "Moderate Intensity Use," and to the south as "Moderate Intensity Use" and "Rural Use."

Gore Mountain targets winter sports enthusiasts for downhill and cross-country skiing. It includes 27.4 miles of constructed alpine ski trails, 14.6 miles of Nordic ski trails, 11 ski lifts, a ski school program, a ski racing program, bike trails, and multiple accessory structures. The summer and fall season program centers around hiking, mountain biking (including mountain bike racing), educational interpretive opportunities and nature-oriented activities.

A number of new, proposed management actions for the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area were described in the April 2018 Unit Management Plan Amendment & Final Generic Environmental Impact developed by ORDA. ORDA issued a SEQRA findings statement on May 7, 2018. On May 10, 2018, the APA Board determined that the proposed new management actions would conform to the Management and Use Guidelines for Intensive Use Areas provided by the APSLMP. The April 2018 Unit Management Plan ~~will be finally~~ was approved upon issuance of a SEQRA findings statement and adoption of the amendment by DEC's Commissioner in July of 2018.

Physical and Biological Characteristics of the Lands Considered for Reclassification

A detailed description of the physical and biological resources of the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area can be found in Section II of the Gore Mountain 2018 Amendment to the ~~2012-2002~~ Unit Management Plan and Final Generic Impact Statement.

Lands Proposed to be Reclassified from Intensive Use to Wilderness:

Adirondack Mountain summits above 2,800 feet in Clinton Essex, Franklin, Hamilton and Warren counties comprise the Adirondack Sub-alpine Forest Bird Conservation Area (BCA). ~~21~~ More specifically, those summits above 2,800 feet with dense subalpine coniferous forests favored by Bicknell's thrush and other neotropical bird species. Portions of the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area at elevations above 2,800 feet are potential Bicknell's thrush habitat. Field studies were undertaken by the Wildlife Conservation Society (Saranac Lake) in 2004 and 2005 to determine if ski trail construction on the Bear Mountain portion of the larger Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area could potentially impact Bicknell's thrush. "Surveys involving playbacks conducted in 2004 and 2005 did not detect presence of Bicknell's thrush on Gore Mountain." An inquiry to NY Natural Heritage Program resulted in a response that identified only Bicknell's thrush as being present at Gore Mountain IUA. In the summer of 2005 Bicknell's thrush was identified in an area of spruce-fir forest located 0.25 miles northeast of the State fire tower.

The sensitive physical and biological characteristics of the 38.7 acres of land proposed to be added to Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area from the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area make a Wilderness classification appropriate. The 38.7 acres are undeveloped and generally steep-sloped. They are located at the mountain's highest elevations, running from about 3,100 feet to approximately 3,550 feet. Characteristically for such a high-elevation site in the Adirondacks, the natural community is described as primarily Mountain Spruce-Fir Forest with less Spruce-Northern Hardwood Forest. This 38.7 acres is part of the Adirondack Subalpine Forest Bird Conservation Area.

Lands proposed to be Reclassified from Wild Forest to Intensive Use:

In the UMP amendment approved by APA on May 10, 2018, ORDA had conceptually identified a 159-acre portion of the Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest Area for reclassification to Intensive Use. Reclassification of this larger parcel would have “squared-off” the northern corner of the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area along a revised Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest Area boundary and an existing Low Intensity Use boundary. Primarily because of physical and biological limitations associated with portions of the 159-acre area (redefined now as 160.9 acres), a much smaller area of 29.0 acres is proposed for reclassification as the Preferred Alternative discussed below.

The 160.9-acre area includes sensitive resources, namely Rabbit Pond and – reaching downslope to Rabbit Pond along most of its shoreline – a mature forest predominated by sugar maple situated within the Beech-Maple Mesic Forest generally characteristic of the mountain’s lower elevations. Sugar maple and beech are typically predominant in this community, although variable quantities of paper birch, red maple, yellow birch, and red oak can also be found.

The 29.0 acre area included in the Preferred Alternative has been carefully delineated to exclude Rabbit Pond and to include the minimum acreage needed for the proposed management actions (Map 4). Overall, the physical and biological characteristics of the 29.0 acres proposed for reclassification to Intensive Use indicate that the lands are able to support the proposed management actions.

Rabbit Pond is 2.15 acres in size. Small, higher-elevation water bodies are uncommon in the Adirondacks. It is presumed to be a draw for a wide variety of wildlife species and has provided a special recreational opportunity for cross country skiers and hikers who travel along the trail that passes by its shoreline. Additionally, the shoreline and tributary of Rabbit Pond contain wetlands.

The Soil Survey of Warren County identifies three soil map units in this area, HeC (Hermon very bouldery fine sandy loam, sloping), HmE (Hermon-Lyman-Rock outcrop complex, steep) and BdE (Bice very bouldery fine sandy loam, steep). HeC is moderately sloped (8-15 percent slopes) and consists predominantly of Hermon soils (70 percent of the unit), which are deep, somewhat excessively drained loamy till. HmE is steep (25-35 percent slopes) and consists predominantly of Hermon soils (40 percent of the unit); Lyman soils (20 percent of the unit) which are shallow, somewhat excessively drained loamy till; and rock outcrop (20 percent of the unit). BdE is steep (23-35 percent slopes) and consists predominantly of Bice soils (75 percent of the unit), which are deep, well drained loamy till. All of the soils have low or low-moderate erosion potential.

The 29.0 acre area adjoins the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area to the south, Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest to the north and west, and the Town of Johnsborg Ski Bowl to the east. Existing and approved ski trails and lifts on the surrounding Intensive Use and Low Intensity Use lands limit the degree of remoteness of the 29.0 acres included in the Preferred Alternative, making it more suitable for the proposed management actions.

A portion of the Rabbit Pond cross country ski trail is the only existing facility on the 29.0 acres of land included in the Preferred Alternative. The draft UMP amendment proposes relocation of a portion of that trail in order to separate it from the proposed, new alpine ski trails. The exact length and location of this minor relocation is not known at this time, but it will be planned and undertaken by ORDA in coordination with DEC and subject to APA consultation prior to the construction of the new downhill ski trails.

VIII. UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT PROPOSAL

As required by the APSLMP (APSLMP, page 43), the proposed reclassification of 29.0 acres of the Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest Area for inclusion in the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area is accompanied by a draft UMP amendment (Appendix A) demonstrating how the proposed management actions will conform to the Guidelines for Management and Use of Intensive Use Areas provided by the APSLMP.

Proposed Management Actions

The following management actions are being proposed in this UMP amendment for action. They are intended to benefit patrons of the Gore Mountain Ski Center and other users of the Forest Preserve by creating a variety of opportunities in collaboration with adjoining landowners.

1. **Re-alignment of Lift 12** – The upper terminal of Lift 12 is currently located just inside the northern boundary of the Intensive Use Area, and just to the south of the 29.0 acre area proposed for reclassification. A re-alignment of the chairlift ~~will involve moving~~~~will leave~~ the bottom terminal ~~in~~~~uphill approximately 125 feet on private land~~~~place, but and~~ moving the upper terminal to a high point within the lands proposed for reclassification. This relocation was chosen because it will allow the alpine ski trails that are also proposed for this location to be constructed at a suitable grade and orientation relative to other approved trails in this vicinity.

Other alternatives considered:

- Leaving the current Lift 12 in place, or the “no action” alternative, was rejected because it does not provide access to the land where the new alpine ski trails are proposed.
- Building the upper ski terminal further east into lands now classified as Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest was also rejected because the topography would not allow for a connection to the other approved trails in the Town of Johnsbury lands.

2. Construction of New Alpine Ski Trails – Trails 12-L, 12-M, 12J-A, and 12-IA are proposed for construction beginning at the new location of the upper terminal for Lift 12. The location of these trails was selected because the topography within the 29.0 acre parcel lends itself well to the relocation of Lift 12 and the proposed connections to the previously approved trails on Town of Johnsbury lands.

The alignment of proposed alpine ski Trail 12-IA has been modified from the conceptual proposal identified by ORDA in its April 2018 UMP amendment. Specifically, the re-alignment will provide a greater buffer between Trail 12-IA and Rabbit Pond in order to reduce potential noise and visual impacts on the pond from the new lift and trails.

Other alternatives considered:

- The “no action” alternative was rejected because it would not enable the Gore Mountain Ski Center to strengthen its connection to other adjacent recreation lands.
- As mentioned previously, the alignment of Trail 12-IA was originally proposed to be closer to Rabbit Pond. This alignment was ultimately rejected because of the potential visual and noise impacts to other recreational users near Rabbit Pond due to the steep terrain between the pond and the proposed site for the upper lift terminal. The preferred alignment for the trail will reduce the amount of tree cutting directly visible from Rabbit Pond. When leaves are on the trees, the greater amount of vegetation between the pond and Trail 12-IA should also block more sound.

Construction of these trails will add 0.6 miles of new alpine ski trail to the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area. A table summarizing the status of constructed and proposed trails at the Ski Center is below.

	Forest Preserve Lands	Town (Ski Bowl) Lands
Existing trails	27.43	2.48
Approved trails, not yet constructed*	6.22*	2.8

Proposed trails in this UMP amendment	0.6	0.0
Total	34.25	6.11

* Includes 0.7 miles of trail proposed in April 2018 UMP Amendment

3. **Reroute the Existing Rabbit Pond Cross Country Ski Trail** – In order to accommodate the proposed alpine ski trails, and to maintain a desirable experience for cross country skiers, a portion of the Rabbit Pond Ski Trail will be relocated on Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest Lands to separate it from the new downhill ski trails. The exact length and location of this minor relocation is not known at this time, but it will be planned and undertaken by ORDA in coordination with DEC and subject to APA consultation prior to the construction of the new downhill ski trails.

Other alternative considered:

- The alternative of not re-locating the Rabbit Pond Trail was rejected because of the potential for conflicts between cross-country skiers and downhill skiers. The narrower character and general experience of the existing Rabbit Pond Trail will be maintained by relocating the trail.

Impact Analysis and Proposed Mitigation Measures

The draft UMP provides the following Impact Analysis and Proposed Mitigation Measures relevant to this **FDSEIS**:

A. Geology

It is unlikely that blasting will be necessary as part of the trail creation actions. Should it be necessary, ORDA will employ the services of a professional, licensed and insured blasting company to perform any needed blasting. Blasters in New York State are required to possess a valid NY State Department of Labor issued Explosive License and Blaster Certificate of Competence. The Explosives License permits the licensee to purchase, own, possess or transport explosives. The Blaster Certificate of Competence permits the use of explosives. If it is determined that blasting will be required, a written blasting plan will be developed and approved prior to the commencement of blasting. In general, the blast plan will contain information about the blasting methods to be employed, measures to be taken to protect the safety of the public, and how the applicable rules and regulations will be complied with. If during the evolution of the project, there are significant changes in the blast design a new blast plan will be required. A test shot will be required for the first shot after the approval of each blast plan.

B. Soils

Disturbance of areas of steep slopes during construction can lead to an increased vulnerability of the soils to erosion. Suitable measures must be implemented to first prevent soil erosion and then second to make sure that any soils that are eroded are contained and prevented for causing sedimentation in receiving waters. ORDA will implement proper erosion and sediment control practices when undertaking construction practices. These proper practices are set forth in the New York State Standards and Specifications for Erosion and Sediment Control (last updated November 2016). These standards and specifications will be used to develop Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans (SWPPPs) for construction activities in accordance with NYSDEC's SPDES General Permit for Stormwater Discharge from Construction Activity, GP-0-15-002. SWPPPs will detail those measures that will be implemented during construction to mitigate potential soil erosion and surface water sedimentation. SWPPP content will include such things as construction sequencing and phasing, temporary and permanent stabilization, structural erosion control practices and vegetative control practices. SWPPPs will include provisions for monitoring, inspections, data collection, and compliance documentation. [ORDA has proposed identical practices in its application to amend APA Permit and Order 2017-0228.](#)

C. Topography and Slope

Very limited grading is required for the new ski trail and lift, or for relocation of the existing cross country ski trail. Trails are laid out to follow natural fall lines. Impacts associated with grading involve erosion and sediment control (see the previous section) and protection of water resources (see the following section).

D. Water Resources

Identified impacts to surface water are (1) sedimentation of eroded soils and (2) increased stormwater runoff with accompanying loadings (nutrients, dissolved solids, etc.). Measures that will be implemented to prevent erosion and subsequent sedimentation were described previously in the Soils section. No impacts to [wetlands or](#) the surface waters of Rabbit Pond will occur.

E. Vegetation

Tree clearing associated with the new management actions includes 8.7 acres for the new downhill ski trails and limited additional clearing for the relocation of the cross-country ski trail. There is no tree cutting proposed above 2,800 feet in elevation. All tree cutting will be done in compliance with the DEC tree cutting policy LF-91-2. Only areas absolutely necessary for construction of ski trails, ski lifts, and other proposed improvements will be cleared of vegetation. All other areas will be maintained in a natural state. Erosion control measures will be used on cleared areas with disturbed soils to avoid affecting adjacent vegetation by

erosion or siltation. Erosion-control devices to be used will include filter fabric fences and staked straw bale filters. Upon the completion of clearing of new ski trails and ski lift corridors, they will be seeded with grass mixtures of native spp. to promote rapid revegetation. Areas disturbed for any other improvements will also be landscaped and revegetated with native spp. as soon as practicable.

F. Wildlife

The actions proposed in this UMP are expected to have minimal impacts on wildlife. New management actions are proposed at low elevations on the mountain.

G. Unique Areas

No unique biological areas have been identified.

H. Critical Habitat

No new management actions are proposed to occur above 2,800 feet in elevation. There will no impact to the Adirondack Sub Alpine Forest Bird Conservation Area, except for the positive impacts associated with the reclassification of the 38.7 acres near the summit of Gore Mountain from Intensive Use to Wilderness.

I. Visual Resources

The actions proposed in the ~~is~~ UMP amendment are expected to have minimal visual impacts. Overall, the relocation of Lift # 12, with its terminus on Forest Preserve lands, will have some visual impacts due primarily to vegetative clearing associated with the new lift location on private lands. Mitigation of potential visual impacts on private lands will be achieved through AP Agency review of ORDA's proposed amendment to APA Permit and Order 2017-0228. Development of those portions of the relocated lift on Forest Preserve lands will be done in a manner that minimizes vegetative clearing to that which is absolutely necessary, further reducing visual impacts.

MJ. Cumulative Impacts

Consistent with prior SEQRA review of actions involving the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area and the Town of Johnsbury Ski Bowl, no significant cumulative impacts have been identified for the actions proposed on private and Forest Preserve lands. Direct impacts to water resources will be avoided, and planned mitigation measures will be employed to manage stormwater and limit erosion. Vegetative clearing on Forest Preserve lands will be limited to the minimum absolutely necessary. Vegetative clearing on the private lands must be

preceded by an APA finding of no undue adverse impacts, including impacts to visual resources, through approval of an amendment to APA Permit and Order 2017-0228.

IX. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

This section discusses potential impacts associated with the three reclassification alternatives considered. A discussion of the potential impacts associated with the proposed management actions, and of how they are proposed to be mitigated, is provided in DEC's draft amendment to the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area UMP.

- 1. SEQRA regulations require an assessment of the “no action” alternative. In this case, the no action alternative would be defined as the Agency taking no immediate procedural steps to reclassify lands involving the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area or the Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest Area. Absent reclassification, the “no action” alternative would also foreclose the possibility of a UMP amendment authorizing the management actions proposed by DEC (Map 1). Alternative 1 is not the Preferred Alternative.**

The “no action” alternative is not the Preferred Alternative because it would preclude ORDA from achieving the goal of facilitating new lift and trail connections with the Town of Johnsbury Ski Bowl as described in the draft UMP amendment. This would be inconsistent with the APSLMP guideline encouraging the modernization of ski centers in the Adirondack Park to the extent “physical and biological resources allow.” (APSLMP, p. 40) This alternative is also undesirable because it would eliminate the proposed reclassification of potential Bicknell Thrush habitat (Map 5) from Intensive Use to Wilderness.

- 2. Reclassify 38.7 acres of the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area to Wilderness and 160.9 acres of the Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest to Intensive Use, and adopt the proposed management actions described in DEC's draft amendment to the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area UMP (Map 2). Alternative 2 is not the Preferred Alternative.**

Alternative 2 would provide the potential for more recreational opportunities beyond those proposed in the draft UMP amendment, including the possibility of additional trail connections to the Town of Johnsbury Ski Bowl on the Low Intensity Use lands. By including the proposed reclassification of potential Bicknell Thrush habitat from Intensive Use to Wilderness, Alternative 2 would also provide important protection for that habitat compared to Alternative 1.

Of the three alternatives considered, Alternative 2 is not identified as the Preferred Alternative because it would include lands with environmentally sensitive resources. Based on physical and biological considerations, classifying the entire 160.9-acre parcel as Intensive Use could potentially lead to significant adverse environmental impacts to those resources. Compared to the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 3), the lands around and including Rabbit Pond could potentially be adversely impacted by activities normally associated with ski centers, including water withdrawal for snowmaking and potential impacts to adjoining wetlands.

3. Preferred Alternative - Reclassify 38.7 acres of the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area to Wilderness and 29.0 acres of the Vanderhacker Mountain Wild Forest to Intensive Use, and adopt the proposed management actions described in DEC's draft amendment to the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area UMP (Map 3). Alternative 3 is the Preferred Alternative.

The Preferred Alternative reflects the minimum reclassification of acreage from Wild Forest to Intensive Use needed to reasonably accommodate the proposed uses described in the draft UMP amendment. Like Alternative 2, the Preferred Alternative allows for achievement of recreational connections to the Ski Bowl, but it avoids the potential for significant adverse impacts to Rabbit Pond raised by Alternative 2. Like Alternative 2, the Preferred Alternative also includes the proposed reclassification of potential Bicknell Thrush habitat from Intensive Use to Wilderness, providing important protection for that habitat.

Through the proposed connections to the Town of Johnsbury Ski Bowl, the Preferred Alternative advances the APSLMP management guideline of modernizing the Gore Mountain ski center "to the extent physical and biological resources allow." The proposed reclassification of 29.0 acres from Wild Forest to Intensive Use, accompanied by the draft UMP amendment describing how the proposed lift and trails would be constructed and managed in conformance with APSLMP Intensive Use guidelines, complies with APSLMP classification and management guidelines for protecting resources.

By limiting the lands proposed for reclassification from Wild Forest to Intensive Use to those needed for the proposed lift and trails described in the draft UMP amendment, the Preferred Alternative minimizes the potential for adverse environmental impacts to sensitive resources. As discussed in the Environmental Setting section of the FDSEIS and in the draft UMP amendment, the lands on which the proposed uses would occur are able to withstand the potential resource impacts. Any impacts that do occur will be further mitigated by the construction and management measures described in the draft UMP amendment.

X. CONCLUSION

In making their respective SEQRA findings and decisions, APA and DEC must consider all of the relevant environmental impacts, facts and conclusions disclosed in this FSEIS and the attached, draft UMP amendment. The agencies must weigh and balance the relevant environmental impacts of the Preferred Alternative with the social and economic benefits to be gained from providing the opportunity for new recreational connections from the Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area to the Town of Johnsbury Ski Bowl.

For its reclassification decision, the APSLMP requires APA to classify the land according to its characteristics and capacity to withstand use. With respect to the draft UMP amendment, APA must consider whether the proposed management actions will conform to Guidelines for Management and Use provided by the APSLMP for Intensive Use areas.

From among the reasonable alternatives available, Alternative 3 is the Preferred Alternative and would avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable. Alternative 3 would avoid potential impacts to Rabbit Pond, as compared to Alternative 2, and would provide additional resource protection for potential Bicknell Thrush habitat on the top of Gore Mountain. Management of the 29.0 acres reclassified to Intensive Use pursuant to the draft UMP amendment would further mitigate potential environmental impacts.

The reclassification actions included in the Preferred Alternative would classify the lands according to APSLMP guidelines. The reclassification of the higher elevation Intensive Use lands to Wilderness will provide added resource protection to those lands. The 29.0 acres proposed for reclassification from Wild Forest to Intensive Use have the capacity to support the uses described in the draft UMP amendment, and the draft UMP amendment demonstrates how the Intensive Use guidelines will be respected.

Management of the construction and maintenance of the proposed lift and trails in accordance with the draft UMP amendment would limit environmental impacts and conform to the Guidelines for Management and Use of Intensive Use areas provided by the APSLMP. Furthermore, the addition of the proposed lift and trails, providing connections with the Town of Johnsbury Ski Bowl, will support the APSLMP guideline for ski centers of encouraging modernization to the extent “physical and biological resources allow.” (APSLMP, p. 40)

The Preferred Alternative combines the important attributes of resource protection and recreational opportunities within the Gore Mountain Intensive Use

Area. It provides the balance intended by SEQRA and ensures the resource protection and reasonable use inherent in the standards provided by the APSLMP.

XI. MAPS

1. Alternative 1
2. Alternative 2
3. Alternative 3: Preferred Alternative
4. Preferred Alternative showing Existing & Proposed Recreational Development
5. Preferred Alternative showing High Elevation Spruce-Fir Forest

XII. APPENDIX ~~ACES~~

[Appendix A: Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area UMP Amendment \(June-August 2018\)](#)

[Appendix B: Response to Public Comment on the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement \(DSEIS\) for the Gore Mountain Reclassification Actions and Unit Management Plan \(UMP\) Amendment Approval](#)

**Gore Mountain Reclassification Action and Unit
Management Plan Amendment Approval**

Maps

**FinalDraft Supplemental Environmental Impact
Statement (~~F~~DSEIS)**

**Gore Mountain Reclassification Action and Unit
Management Plan Amendment Approval**

Appendix A

**Gore Mountain Intensive Use Area UMP
Amendment (~~June~~ August 2018)**

**Final Supplemental Environmental Impact
Statement (FSEIS)**

**Gore Mountain Reclassification Action and Unit
Management Plan Amendment Approval**

Appendix B

**Response to Public Comment on the Draft
Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement
(DSEIS) for the Gore Mountain Reclassification Action
and Unit Management Plan (UMP) Amendment
Approval**