



Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation

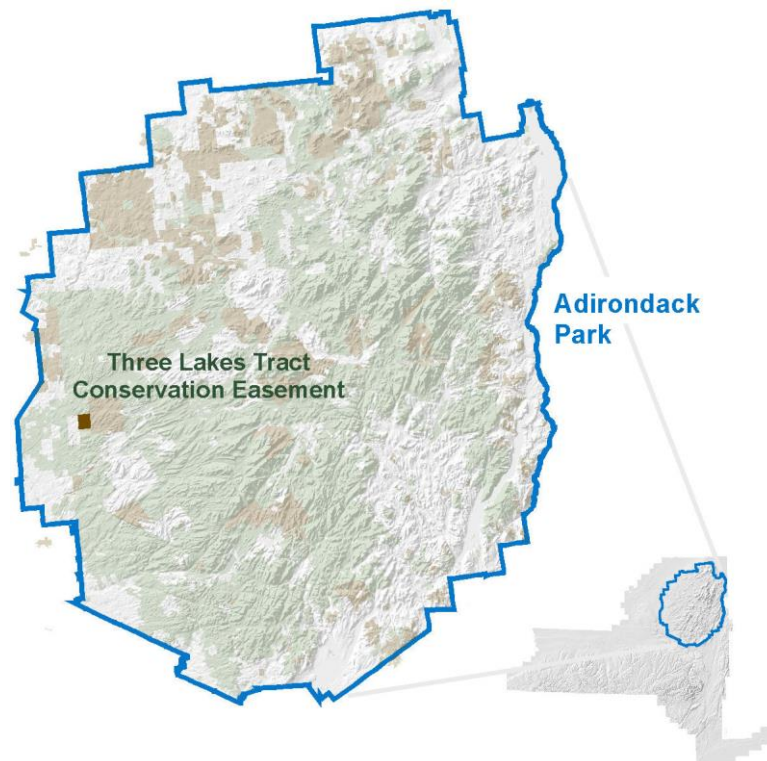
# **Big Moose Tract Conservation Easement**

## **Draft Recreation Management Plan**

January 2023

# Big Moose Tract Location

- The 23,850-acre Big Moose Tract (BMT) Conservation Easement is located in the Town of Webb, Herkimer County.
- The tract abuts the Independence River Wild Forest to the north, Three Lakes Tract Conservation Easement to the west, Ha-De-Ron-Dah Wilderness to the south, and the Pigeon Lake Wilderness and Fulton Chain Wild Forest to the east.



# Big Moose Tract CE

- In 2007, New York State purchased a conservation easement on the BMT.
- The conservation easement grants New York State a legal interest in the property and defines restrictions and rights of both the landowner and New York State.
- The landowner is responsible for managing the property in a manner that complies with conservation easement terms, and NYSDEC is responsible for managing the rights purchased by the People of New York and ensuring landowner management is in compliance with the encumbering conservation easement.
- Public Recreation: The encumbering conservation easement only permits NYSDEC to provide hiking and snowmobile trails on the property – no other public access is permitted.

# Natural Resource Summary

- Most of the property can be described as Laurentian-Acadian Northern Hardwood Forest with interspersed Laurentian-Acadian Swamp Systems, Acadian-Appalachian Montane Spruce-Fir Forest, Laurentian-Acadian Shrub-Herbaceous Wetland Systems, and grassy harvested forest areas in early regeneration.
- Approximately 275.9 acres or 1.2% of the property is covered by waterbodies.
- The Independence River is designated as a Scenic River where it runs through the Big Moose Tract Conservation Easement.
- Approximately 3501.6 acres or 14.8% of the property is covered by wetlands (excluding open water).
- While no surveys have occurred on the BMT, the following species have been identified by the Natural Heritage Program within 5-miles of the BMT:
  - Common loons (*Gavia immer*, NYS Species of Special Concern) have been identified just north of the BMT on Stillwater Reservoir, and south on Independence Lake, as well as on other lakes in this region.
  - Round whitefish (*Prosopium cylindraceum*, NYS Endangered) have been identified immediately west of the Big Moose Tract in Buck Pond, and north of Stillwater Reservoir as well as in several other lakes in the region.
  - Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, NYS Threatened) have been sighted on Stillwater Reservoir.
  - Skillet Clubtail (*Gomphurus ventricosus*, NYS unlisted but critically imperiled) have been found south of the property within the Fulton Chain Wild Forest.
  - Torrey's Bulrush (*Schoenoplectus torreyi*, NYS Endangered), Northern Bog Aster (*Symphotrichum boreale*, NYS Threatened), Cloud Sedge (*Carex haydenii*, NYS Threatened), and Tinged Sedge (*Carex tinctoria*, NYS Endangered) have all also been identified on state land within 5-miles of the BMT.







# Landowner Use and Infrastructure

- **Forest Management**: One purpose of the encumbering conservation easement is to ensure that the forest resource will continue to be available to the current and future landowners for sustainable forest management and the associated long-term production of forest products and the current landowner currently manages the property for forest products.
- **Lease Camps**: Up to 35 camps may be maintained on the property subject to terms of the conservation easement. In addition to forest management, camps and associated hunting leases are an additional source of income for the landowner.
- **Roads**: Approximately 44.8 miles of improved roads and 32.2 miles of unimproved roads are located on the Big Moose Tract.

# Draft Recreation Management Plan Development

- The purpose of an Recreation Management Plan (RMP) is to establish a planned, written management strategy to implement the State's rights and protect property rights of the landowner. RMPs condense applicable laws and regulations, DEC policies, easement-specific conditions, and property-specific information into a single management document. RMPs may be periodically updated or amended, following a similar public planning process as occurs during drafting of the initial RMP.
- Before preparing the draft RMP, the DEC consulted with the landowner, and solicited input from DEC management team members, including Lands and Forests staff, Division of Fish and Wildlife biologists, Division of Operations maintenance staff, and Division of Forest Protection Forest Rangers. The public and stakeholders also had the opportunity to provide input between January 28, 2022 and February 28, 2022.
- Public comments will be accepted through February 2, 2024. Upon completion of the public comment period, all comments will be reviewed and the RMP may be revised accordingly before a final draft is released.

# Summary of Draft RMP Public Recreation Proposals

- The Stillwater Mountain Fire Tower and access trail will remain open to the public except for the period from the second Tuesday in October through December 20<sup>th</sup> each year. Seasonal closure of this trail is a term of the conservation easement.
- Selective clearing of trees around the Stillwater Fire Tower will occur to enhance scenic views.
- A visitor survey will be conducted at Stillwater Mountain to inform NYSDEC about visitor experience on the trail and summit.
- All snowmobile trails currently located on the property will be maintained (Three Lakes Trail and North Fork of Three Lakes Trail; 8.6 miles). It is noted that the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor also passes through the property and is open to snowmobiles (3.8 miles).
- 8.2 miles of alternative snowmobile trails are proposed to be designated, to be used when trail closures occur due to winter timber harvesting. Alternative trails mostly follow existing roads and trails, except 0.7 miles of new trail which will need to be constructed (Stillwater Spur Trail).
- In addition to the interpretive panel located at the summit of Stillwater Mountain, another panel will be designed focused on forestry on the BMT.



# Implementation of Proposed Public Recreation

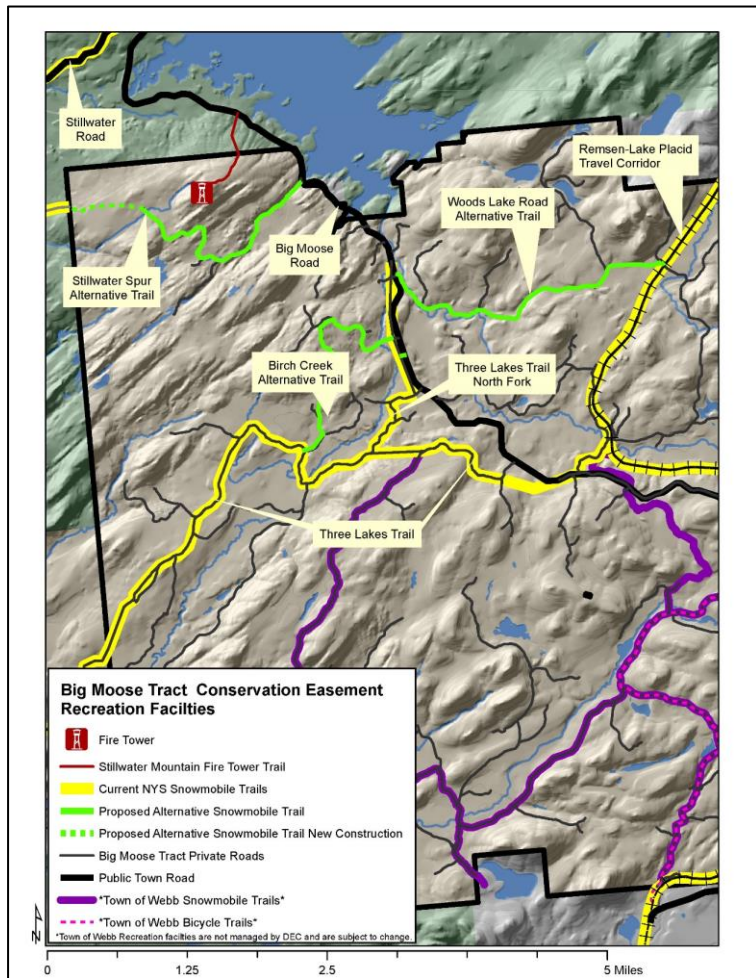
## Phase 1

- 1) Develop an interpretive panel focused on forestry in consultation with the landowner and NYSDEC Office of Communication Services.
- 2) Conduct visitor survey at Stillwater Mountain Fire Tower.

## Phase 2

- 1) Clear views from the Stillwater Mountain Fire Tower by coordinating with a landowner harvest or cutting individual trees with landowner permission.
- 2) Construct Stillwater Spur Trail extension over BMT.

# Map of Proposed Recreation and Facilities



# To Provide Comments on the Draft RMP

## Send by Mail:

NYSDEC

Attn: Matthew Nowak

7327 State Route 812

Lowville, NY 13367

Email: [r6.ump@dec.ny.gov](mailto:r6.ump@dec.ny.gov)

Comments must be received by February 2, 2024.