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## DEP and Ulster County Announce Conceptual Agreement on Rail Trail Alongside Ashokan Reservoir

**DEP commits \$2.5 million toward proposed trail and constructing trailheads**

**City will support Ulster County in efforts to secure other local, state and federal funds**

New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Carter Strickland joined Ulster County Executive Mike Hein on Thursday to announce the City's support for the proposed Ulster County rail trail project. Under terms of a conceptual agreement with Ulster County, the City has committed to provide \$2.5 million for developing the 11.5-mile stretch of proposed trail that runs through water supply lands alongside Ashokan Reservoir. The funds provided by DEP are designated for projects that provide watershed protection, and can only be used for building the trail, which will meet or exceed watershed protection standards and address localized erosion issues. In addition to the funding, the City will also construct and maintain access points along the trail, including parking areas, and support Ulster County as it seeks other local, state and federal funds for the project.

The City also announced plans to connect the proposed trail with other popular recreation facilities at Ashokan Reservoir. This will include establishing a dedicated lane for recreational use across the dividing weir bridge when it is reconstructed—a project that is tentatively scheduled for the year 2019. A lane along the dividing weir would allow walkers, joggers and cyclists to safely access the proposed Ulster County rail trail, the popular “frying pan” trail along Ashokan's east basin and the promenade off Route 28A. A recent DEP survey

More Information

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found that roughly 25,000 visitors already use the frying pan and promenade trails every year, making them among the most popular recreational paths in the region.

“DEP is committed to working with Ulster County to develop a world-class recreation trail alongside Ashokan Reservoir, while also making sure the project is held to the highest standards of water quality protection,” Strickland said. “DEP has already collaborated with local governments and nonprofits to open several other trails across the watershed. These trails have supported the tourism economy of the Catskills, public health, a better understanding of the New York City water supply system, and an appreciation for the scenic beauty of the entire region. DEP is confident that the proposed trail in Ulster County will go a long way toward achieving those positive outcomes and many more.”

The conceptual agreement underscores DEP’s commitment to support the outdoor recreation and tourism economies of the Catskills. Since 2003, DEP has more than doubled the amount of water supply lands that are open for recreation. That total now stands at 118,600 acres, including roughly 85,000 acres of land and 33,000 acres of water. Access to those properties has been enhanced through partnerships with watershed counties and the Catskill Watershed Corporation. The City has also collaborated with nonprofit groups such as the Catskill Mountain Club and New York-New Jersey Trail Conference to open four trails on water supply lands in towns that include Andes, Conesville, Tompkins and Walton. Ashokan Reservoir is currently open for fishing from approved boats and the shore during fishing season, and 3,453 acres around the reservoir are open to hunters with the required permits and licenses.

By working closely with Ulster County, DEP will also ensure the proposed trail is developed according to highest water quality protection standards. DEP has committed to guiding the county through the process, including securing all necessary approvals under the watershed regulations. This will include steps such as creating a stormwater protection plan for the trail, repairing existing washouts along the corridor, and pinpointing culverts that need to be cleared or fixed to control erosion.

The conceptual agreement will permit trail use only through the Ashokan Reservoir lands, and it recognizes that a rail-with-trail scenario is not feasible along that section of the corridor. DEP has long noted that a trail alongside the existing railroad could not be safely constructed through the Ashokan lands because the corridor is too narrow and it is surrounded by steep slopes on both sides. In fact, the existing rail bed lies within feet of the reservoir along portions of the west basin where a causeway was built in the early 1900s to accommodate the railroad. In written comments dating back as far as 2005, DEP noted that conditions such as these would preclude development of a trail alongside an operating railroad.

DEP’s conceptual agreement with Ulster County also includes the following principles:

- The proposed trail will be used for low-impact recreation such as walking, running, cycling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and walking dogs on a leash. Horses will not be permitted. Motorized vehicle also will not be permitted, except for maintenance, regular patrols and emergency response by authorized parties.
- Ulster County will operate and maintain the proposed trail. The County will also be responsible for guiding the project through all the required environmental reviews.
- DEP will build and operate several public-access points along the trail, including parking and sanitary facilities at sites that will be determined in the design phase of the project.
- DEP and Ulster County will agree upon a surface for the trail that maximizes its accessibility and is consistent with protection of water quality.

- DEP will support the County in its efforts to secure other local, state and federal funds to construct the trail.
- Ulster County and DEP will agree upon signs along the trail corridor that underscore the historic importance of both the railroad corridor and the New York City water supply.
- Ulster County and DEP will coordinate a marketing effort to draw visitors from the Catskills, Hudson Valley, New York City and elsewhere.

The original Ulster & Delaware Railroad was built in the Esopus Creek valley starting in 1868, and carried freight, farm goods and tourists between New York City and the Catskills. The rail was relocated in the early 1900s to accommodate the construction of Ashokan Reservoir. This relocation to the reservoir’s north shore resulted in the City granting a permanent easement to the Ulster & Delaware Railroad—the same easement that Ulster County acquired from Conrail in 1979.

The proposed trail includes beautiful views of Ashokan Reservoir and Esopus Creek as it flows into the reservoir. Ashokan Reservoir, placed into service in 1915, is the oldest of New York City’s reservoirs in the Catskills. It holds 128 billion gallons of water that flow into the reservoir from a 255-square-mile drainage basin. It has the largest surface area of any reservoir in the Catskills, totaling roughly 8,300 acres. Ashokan Reservoir provides about 40 percent of the 1.1 billion gallons of drinking water used by New York City and upstate communities every day, including the hamlet of High Falls and the town and village of New Paltz in Ulster County.

DEP manages New York City’s water supply, providing more than one billion gallons of water each day to more than 9 million residents, including 8.4 million in New York City, and residents of Ulster, Orange, Putnam, and Westchester counties. This water comes from the Catskill, Delaware, and Croton watersheds that extend more than 125 miles from the City, and the system comprises 19 reservoirs, three controlled lakes, and numerous tunnels and aqueducts. DEP has nearly 6,000 employees, including almost 1,000 scientists, engineers, surveyors, watershed maintainers and others professionals in the upstate watershed. In addition to its \$68 million payroll and \$157 million in annual taxes paid in upstate counties, DEP has invested more than \$1.5 billion in watershed protection programs—including partnership organizations such as the Catskill Watershed Corporation and the Watershed Agricultural Council—that support sustainable farming practices, environmentally sensitive economic development, and local economic opportunity. In addition, DEP has a robust capital program with over \$14 billion in investments planned over the next 10 years that will create up to 3,000 construction-related jobs per year. For more information, visit [nyc.gov/dep](http://nyc.gov/dep), like us on Facebook at [facebook.com/nycwater](https://facebook.com/nycwater), or follow us on Twitter at [twitter.com/nycwater](https://twitter.com/nycwater).

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