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Finger Lakes Trail Conference and Department of Environmental Protection Announce Opening of New Trail Alongside Cannonsville Reservoir

**New 7-mile Rock Rift Trail was built through partnership
between Finger Lakes Trail Conference and New York City
Department of Environmental Protection**

Trail will open with a celebratory public hike on May 29

The Finger Lakes Trail Conference (FLTC) and New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) today announced the completion of a 7-mile hiking loop that includes the historic Rock Rift Fire Tower near Cannonsville Reservoir. All are invited to celebrate the opening of the Rock Rift Trail with a community hike on Friday, May 29 at 11 a.m. The trail—which was cleared and will be maintained by local FLTC volunteers—follows the route of old telephone lines and logging paths as it ascends Tower Mountain to the historic fire tower. Parking for the event and trail is located on the north end of the Apex Bridge (State Route 268) where it meets State Route 10 in the Delaware County town of Tompkins.

The new trail is one leg of the 570-mile Finger Lakes Trail that stretches from the Catskill Mountains to the Allegany State Park in western New York. Several years ago, this portion of the larger Finger Lakes Trail ran along the shoulders of town, county and state highways for nearly 16 miles. Since 2011, FLTC has collaborated with DEP to relocate these sections of the trail onto city-owned properties, including Tower Mountain. The 342-acre property was acquired by the city in 1957, and the trail marks the first time it is open for public recreation.

“For years, the Finger Lakes Trail skirted Cannonsville Reservoir by utilizing 16 miles of nearby roadways,” said **Rick Roberts, Catskill area coordinator for FLTC**. “Thanks to DEP’s new policy of allowing hiking trails on its property, we’ve been able to relocate this portion of the trail to a safer and more scenic route through the nearby forest. The FLTC greatly appreciates DEP’s efforts to support recreational activities on all its lands, and we look forward to working together again in the future.”

“DEP is proud to support this improvement to one of New York’s longest and most unique hiking trails,” **DEP Commissioner Emily Lloyd** said. “The new Rock Rift Trail will provide safe and scenic hiking for residents and visitors in the western Catskills, along with access to one of the many historic fire towers in the region. Over the past several years, DEP has collaborated with nonprofit groups, including the Finger Lakes Trail Conference, to establish recreation paths and trails throughout the watershed. These trails protect clean water, and support recreation, public health and the tourism economy that is vital to the Catskills.”

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FLTC began working on the Rock Rift Trail in 2013, marking its path along a former telephone line corridor that had provided phone service to the fire tower, and a path that once was used to drag timber from the mountain. The group's Alley Cat Trail Crew—named for the trail path from the Allegany Mountains to the Catskill Mountains—prepared the trail by clearing overgrown brush and removing fallen trees. Seventeen local members of the FLTC will help maintain the trail. DEP provided trail markers that help hikers find and follow the path as it traverses Tower Mountain. The trail runs through a thick-canopy forest, a small section of meadow, and an active bluestone quarry. Some sections of the trail are steep, as it gains more than 1,000 feet of elevation over just a few miles.

The trail leads to the historic Rock Rift Fire Tower, which was constructed in 1934 by the Civilian Conservation Corps. It was used until 1987. The tower, which sits on DEP property but is owned by the state Department of Environmental Conservation, is one of the last unrestored fire towers in the Catskills. While the tower can be viewed from the path, the public is not permitted to climb it. Its lower stairs have been removed as a safety precaution. The state is exploring an option to deed the tower to the Town of Tompkins in hopes that it can be restored in the near future.

The Rock Rift Trail is the ninth recreation trail opened on water supply lands owned by New York City. Those that preceded it included two hiking paths near Pepacton Reservoir in Delaware County, a nature trail alongside a school in Conesville in Schoharie County, and a walking and cross-country skiing trail near Windham in Greene County. All have been built through partnerships with local nonprofit groups that focus on land conservation, hiking and outdoor recreation. These have included the Catskill Mountain Club, New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, Putnam County Land Trust, Teatown Lake Reservation, and the Windham Area Recreation Foundation.

Since 2003, DEP has significantly expanded the amount of city properties within the watershed that are open for recreation. There are now more than 126,000 acres of land and water open for fishing, hiking and other low-impact recreation. Of that, more than 63,000 acres of land are in public access areas that are open to recreation without the need for a DEP access permit. More information about recreation in the watersheds can be found by clicking the "[Watershed Recreation](#)" link on the [DEP homepage](#).

FLTC is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization comprised of dues paying members and governed by a Board of Managers. Founded in 1962, the FLTC strives to build, protect, enhance and promote a continuous footpath across New York State. It works in cooperation with its members and various organizations to develop and maintain a premier hiking trail system in New York. More information about the FLTC can be found at www.fltconference.org.

DEP manages New York City's water supply, providing more than one billion gallons of high quality water each day to more than 9 million New Yorkers. This includes more than 70 upstate communities and institutions in Ulster, Orange, Putnam and Westchester counties who consume an average of 110 million total gallons of drinking water daily from New York City's water supply system. 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 \$70 million payroll and \$157 million in annual taxes paid in upstate counties, DEP has invested more than \$1.7 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, like us on [Facebook](#), or follow us on [Twitter](#).