

# New York-New Jersey Trail Conference

## Trails Policy



Approved by

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Board of Directors - March 29, 2011

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### Section 1: Overview

People seek an outdoor experience as a respite from the trappings and tensions of life and should be able to enjoy the natural peace and beauty of the lands through which trails pass.

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference (Trail Conference) is a nonprofit organization established in 1920 for the construction, maintenance, and preservation of hiking trails. The Trail Conference maintains hiking trails in a trail system which extends south into Hunterdon County along the Highlands Trail in New Jersey, north to NY Route 23 in the South Taconics and along the Long Path to the Mohawk River, west to the Delaware River and the blue line in the Catskills, and east to the Massachusetts and Connecticut state lines and all of Long Island.

Trails are the Trail Conference's core program. In addition to building and maintaining trails, the Trail Conference seeks to protect the trail lands from indiscriminate and inappropriate use. The Trail Conference works in close cooperation with various governmental agencies and nonprofits in the region and is the only coordinating organization for hiking trails in its area.

The Trails Council is a committee of peers established in the bylaws of the Trail Conference. Volunteers who are members of the Trail Conference and of its affiliated member organizations carry out the work of Trails Council on and for the trails. Trails Council receives administrative and on-the-ground support from the Trail Conference's staff.

#### 1.1: Definitions

- A **trail** is a defined pathway primarily intended to be used for recreational travel. It may or may not be marked; it generally will not be paved or otherwise improved, except as is consistent with the need for safety, preservation of the resource and its environment, or to be handicapped accessible.
- A **hiking trail** or foot-only trail is intended for foot traffic only, but can include accommodations for handicapped usage. Walking, jogging, backpacking, trail running, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing are considered to be foot traffic. Sometimes when necessary to maintain the continuity of a trail and where no feasible off-road route exists, a hiking trail may be marked along a road that is open to public or private use. In such a case, maintenance is limited to blazing.
- A **single-track trail** is a narrow trail which is not wide enough to allow two users to pass.
- A **single-use trail** is a trail designed for a specific user group.
- **Non-motorized trails** do not allow motorized uses, such as ATVs, four-wheel-drive vehicles, motorcycles, etc. but do allow some combinations of hikers, horses, mountain bikes, bicycles, etc. These trails can also be referred to as **multi-use trails**, called **shared-use trails** in some contexts.
- The **Board** refers to the Trail Conference's Board of Directors

- **Conference trails** are those trails adopted and maintained by the Trail Conference or assigned to its member clubs who report to a Trail Conference volunteer supervisor.
- **Conference organizational members** are member clubs and partners.
- A **Land Manager** is the entity which manages land on which the Trail Conference maintains trails.
- A **Maintaining Club** is a member of the Trail Conference which has been officially assigned to maintain trails on behalf of the Trail Conference.
- **Motorized trails** permit motorized uses, such as ATVs, motorcycles, dirt bikes, or four-wheel drive vehicles.
- **Regional Trail Committees** are responsible for managing and maintaining trails within their region and to interact with the land managers. Appendix A is a list of such committees. This appendix may be changed without Board approval; however, appointment of trails chairs does need Board approval.
- **Snowmobiles** are motorized vehicles which operate only during the winter when snow is on the ground.
- **Trail assessment** is the measurement of the physical properties of a trail (width, grade, surface, side slope, etc), the physical condition of improvements along the trail (waterbars, steps, bridges, and shelters) and a determination as to whether the conditions are acceptable for that particular trail. Thus, a 15% slope may be acceptable on a backcountry trail, but not for an urban trail that is heavily used. A broken bridge, poor blazing, or untrimmed vegetation are never acceptable.
- **Trail design guidelines** specify the acceptable grades, surfaces, widths, etc. and are based on the type of trail (primitive/backcountry, hiking high challenge, hiking moderate challenge, easy hiking, walking, handicapped accessible, etc.), the trail user (hiker, mountain biker, equestrian, etc.), number of users, and the trail's purpose. In addition, these guidelines indicate what is acceptable signage, blazing, etc. and the type of parking that should be available.
- **Universal Design** refers to broad architectural planning ideas that are meant to enhance buildings, products, and environments, such as international icons, signs or symbols that indicate to the user what to expect on a ski or hiking trail, Braille on elevator buttons, and curb cuts in sidewalks. Universal design is not guidelines for establishing handicapped-accessible hiking trails.

## 1.2: Acronyms

- **AANR** - Adopt a Natural Resource
- **ADA** - Americans with Disabilities Act
- **AT** - Appalachian Trail
- **ATC** - Appalachian Trail Conservancy
- **DEC** - NY Department of Environmental Conservation
- **DEP** - NJ Department of Environmental Protection
- **DEP-NYC** - New York City Department of Environmental Protection
- **LP** - Long Path
- **MOU** - Memorandum of Understanding
- **NPS** - National Park Service
- **OPRHP** - Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NY)
- **OSHA** - Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Federal)
- **PIPC** - Palisades Interstate Park Commission
- **USFS** - US Forest Service

## Section 2: Trails

### 2.1 Trail Use

The Trail Conference focuses its efforts on the creation, stewardship, and protection of sustainable, high quality foot-only trails. However, the Trail Conference supports the concept that trails should afford an appropriate and satisfying outdoor experience to the widest possible segment of the population. Thus, the Trail Conference believes that, where appropriate, there should also be trails on public land available to all responsible non-motorized users, provided:

- An appropriate network of hiking-only trails is also available in each trail system;
- The total number and types of trails in a trail system do not overwhelm the resource;
- Each trail is designed to safely accommodate all its designated users and should be managed for the primary purposes for which it was designed.

The Trail Conference may build and maintain multi-use trails and is prepared to cooperate with other trail groups in the maintenance of such trails. Communication and cooperation among the user groups, landowners, and land managers enhances the outdoor recreation opportunities for all groups.

Snowmobiles (although motorized vehicles) are usable only when trails are covered with snow. Since they can be used only during a limited season, their use on hiking trails is not necessarily inconsistent with the status of these trails as foot trails; snowmobiles may be allowed on some hiking trails on a case-by-case basis.

The Trail Conference will not maintain trails in areas that charge an entrance fee or restrict hiking to members only, except upon the recommendation of the Trails Council and approval of the Board. A parking fee is not considered an entrance fee, because there is no charge if a hiker enters the park on foot or by public transportation.

The Trail Conference opposes the use of mountain bikes or horses in areas designated or being considered by the state as wilderness or natural areas or on dedicated hiking trails. This opposition also extends to landowners including who designate open space as a preserve. The Trail Conference supports the current NPS policy for mountain bike route designation [36 CFR 4.30] requiring a written determination and/or special regulation stating that mountain bike use is consistent with the protection of a park area's natural, scenic, and aesthetic values, safety considerations, and management objectives and will not disturb wildlife or park resources.

The Trail Conference will not sign trail use agreements indemnifying other organizations or public entities except with Board approval. The Trail Conference will provide a certificate of insurance to any landowner who requests it as a condition of the routing of a trail across his property, but the Trail Conference will not agree to indemnify such a landowner without Board approval.

The Trail Conference supports off-trail use for orienteering, geocaching, and hunting with the landowner's permission and following the landowner's guidelines.

Also see the Mountain Bike Policy currently in effect.

## 2.2 Trail Management Principles

Fair and reasonable access to trails on public land should be based on the following principles:

**Management:** While the establishment and continuity of trails is ultimately the responsibility of the land managers or owners, volunteer user organizations should actively assist land managers in planning trails and trail systems. User groups should be responsible for building, monitoring, and maintaining the trails they use to appropriate standards to protect the resource from likely damage by their users as well as nature. For multi-use trails, user groups should cooperate to determine which group manages each trail and by what standards. Long-term commitment to public trail management is necessary to sustain such trails as a recreational opportunity.

**Resource Protection:** Trail use should entail minimal damage to the treadway and minimal disruption of plant and animal life. When planning new trails, the purpose of the trail, the terrain through which it travels and the trail use density should be considered. Alterations to the terrain should only be made to prevent resource damage or alleviate dangerous conditions. When trails deteriorate, they should be assessed as to whether moving is a better alternative than repairing. If moved, the old trail must be rehabilitated.

**Safety:** Steep and/or narrow trails should be single-use and have appropriate notice so the user can accept the risk. Multi-use trails must be appropriately wide enough to allow safe passing and two-way use, with sufficient sight lines to avoid collisions, or should be signed as one-way. Even though collisions are rare, it is important to impart an awareness of danger and need for alertness. Safety information and educational material, including signs indicating permitted uses, help to ensure the safety of all trail users.

## Section 3: Trails Council

### 3.1 Responsibilities

As stated in Article 6.1 of the Trail Conference bylaws:

"The Trails Council is a committee of peers consisting of the Chair of the Trails Council, the chairs of each of the regional trail committees, and others as specified in the Trails Policy. Each regional chair is recommended by the Board Chair and approved by the Board. The regional committees follow the Trails Policy developed by the Council."

Within the jurisdiction of the Trail Conference, the Trails Council is responsible for:

- Protecting, maintaining, and constructing trails and shelters according to trail design guidelines and maintenance standards as detailed in the *Trail Management Guide*
- Writing and reviewing the Trails Policy
- Approving trails to be maintained and managed by the Trail Conference
- Managing, distributing, and updating the *Trail Management Guide*
- Monitoring any land owned by or easements held by the Trail Conference
- Approving major trail relocations
- Giving preliminary approval of trail systems with new partners, co-alignment of trails, and AT management plans
- Providing training for trail volunteers
- Providing guidance to the Board and staff relative to trail issues
- Submitting a consolidated budget on time
- Complying with restrictions placed by land managers such as NY State DEC
- Maintaining records of meetings, trail approvals, and other documentation
- Coordinating with other committees as appropriate
- Seeing that MOUs are developed where required or appropriate

- Forming regional trail committees
- Other duties as assigned by the Board

Issues requiring Board approval are:

- Changes to the Trails Policy, except for material in Appendix A
- Issues related to legal matters
- Issues requiring significant expenditures other than those provided for in the budget
- Adoption of any new trail or trail system with a new partner in a region where the Trail Conference does not already maintain trails. For example, trails in a new county park in a county where the Trail Conference already maintains trails in other county-owned parks do not need Board approval
- Adoption of a trail system that could have a significant impact on Trail Conference resources
- Requests to maintain trails in areas that charge an entrance fee, are restricted to members only, or require a permit
- Requests for co-alignment of another organization's trails on trails the Trail Conference maintains pending approval of the landowner or land manager
- Signing trail use agreements indemnifying other individuals, organizations, or entities
- Approving MOUs with public entities for signature by the Board Chair or Executive Director
- Local management plans for the AT (which are in turn submitted to ATC for its approval)
- Issues that the Trails Council refers to it for decision

### **3.2 Membership**

Members of Trails Council must be members of the Trail Conference. Voting members include:

- Chair of Trails Council, appointed by the Board Chair, subject to the approval of the Board
- The chairs of the regional trail committees, supervisors, corridor managers, AT overseers, and trail crew chiefs
- Staff members whose primary responsibility are trails or volunteers
- Other volunteers and staff working on trail issues as determined by the Trails Council chair

The Trails Council chair may appoint any other officers who are necessary, such as secretary or vice chair. At least one member of Trails Council, known as the Board Liaison for Trails, must be a Board member. The chair and the board liaison may be the same person.

### **3.3 Meetings**

The meetings of the Trails Council shall be open to all interested parties. Voting members are encouraged to attend. Trails chairs of maintaining clubs, maintainers, monitors, and trail crew members are particularly welcome. Meetings will ordinarily be held bi-monthly.

### **3.4 Voting**

A quorum of 16 voting members is required to transact official business. Decisions are usually reached by a voice vote of those present. Any voting member present may call for a formal vote of Trails Council members. An issue is referred to the Board for resolution when more than 20% of eligible voting members dissent (fractions are rounded up). Both majority and minority opinions must be submitted.

### 3.5 Operational Responsibilities

Members of a regional trail committee (also known as a trails committee) include the regional trails chair, supervisors, overseers, corridor managers, trail crew chiefs, and any other supervisory volunteers such as assistant chair, assistant supervisors or outreach coordinator. The Executive Director may assign a staff member to assist the regional trail committee.

It is highly recommended that a regional trail committee meet at least once a year to plan, submit a budget, and discuss trail management problems. This meeting may or may not include partners and is in addition to one-on-one meetings with park managers.

## Section 4: Trail Management Guide

The *Trail Management Guide* spells out guidelines and procedures for management of trails the Trail Conference manages and maintains, including but not limited to:

- Trail assessment
- Trail design guidelines
- Reporting requirements
- Appointments, resignations, and removal of trail volunteers
- Training
- Requests for relocations, temporary closings, abandonments and reopening of trails
- Notification of changes
- Emergency preparedness procedures
- Conference-affiliated trails
- Forms for any of the above
- Trails Policy
- Volunteer Handbook
- Youth Policy
- Grants the Trail Conference offers
- Other appropriate materials

### 4.1 Training

The Trails Council is responsible for offering training workshops for trail maintainers, AT monitors, assessors, supervisors/overseers, and chain sawyers. It is also responsible for ensuring that appropriate one-on-one training be provided to new maintainers, monitors, and assessors. In addition, the Trails Council holds roundtables for supervisors, trail crew chiefs, and regional trails chairs.

Anyone using a chainsaw is required to be certified through an OSHA or USFS approved course.

### 4.2 Assessment and Standards

**Trail Design Guidelines** - The trail's purpose and classification is determined by the landowner with the input of the user groups. The Trail Conference will build/reconstruct trails to either the landowner's standard or to the appropriate guidelines specified in the *Trail Management Guide*.

Where possible, trails will be built or upgraded using universal design principles and signed appropriately. Guidelines are based on recognized standards from USFS, New York, New Jersey, and the ADA standards, as modified in the *Trail Management Guide*.

**Trail Assessment** - The Trail Conference will assess trails periodically, so that all trails are assessed at least once every five years to determine that they meet the guidelines of their classification. A less formal assessment is a continuous process based on the input from

maintainer reports and public trail problem reports. There will always be some non-compliance due to natural events that destroy parts of trails.

**Maintenance Standards** - The standard for trail maintenance by the Trail Conference is the Trail Conference's *Trail Maintenance Manual* except as superseded for particular areas or particular trails by the landowner or land manager (e.g., the AT and the Catskill Forest Preserve). See Section 4.8 for more detail on the AT and Section 4.9 for the Catskill Forest Preserve. Trail standards are defined in AANR with the DEC as further described in Section 4.9. The AANR is to be provided to each new Catskill maintainer.

Trail Crews build/reconstruct to the trail guidelines specified for the type of trail they are constructing; their work is not considered to be trail maintenance. Trail maintainers are not responsible for bringing a trail up to guidelines, but are responsible for adhering to the maintenance standards.

### 4.3 Reports

Maintenance, monitoring, trail crew and sawyer reports are submitted semi-annually on the current forms electronically or on paper.

Assessment reports are submitted on the current forms electronically or on paper.

### 4.4 Co-aligned Trails

When two or more trails follow the same treadway, they are co-aligned trails and may have more than one maintainer. All the maintainers are responsible for the co-aligned sections unless supervisors have made other arrangements (which can be renegotiated when maintainers change).

Special cases:

- When the Highlands Trail is co-aligned, the maintenance responsibilities vary and are determined by an agreement among the chairs and supervisors
- In the Catskills, co-aligned trails have only one maintainer
- The Long Path in the Catskills is identified with distinctive Long Path markings only at trailheads and trail junctions

Another organization may request that their long distance trail be overlaid or co-aligned on a Trail Conference trail. The form for requesting an overlay is in the Trail Management Guide. Such requests are presented for approval first to the Trails Council and then to the Board.

### 4.5 Trail Relocations

There are three types of relocations - major, minor, and minimal.

**Major** - A major relocation is one which would be visible on Trail Conference maps (e.g. more than 100 yards) or which moves the trail onto property owned by a different landowner. Major relocations require approval of the landowner, the regional trails chair and the Trails Council. Major relocations in the Catskill Forest Preserve require DEC approval through the AANR planning process as described further in Section 4.9. Major relocations on the AT require following NPS/ATC procedures.

**Minor** - A minor relocation is not visible on a map, but is likely to be noticed by someone familiar with the trail. It requires approval from the regional trails chair, who is responsible for consulting the landowner if further approvals are needed. An example of a minor relocation is the relocation of a trail 10 to 20 feet from the existing route over a distance of 100 yards to avoid swampy conditions or erosion problems. In the Catskills, minor relocations are made only after consultation with the responsible DEC forest ranger.

**Minimal** - A minimal relocation is one which affects less than 20 feet of trail and does not involve major construction, such as a bridge. Examples include moving the trail closer to a tree suitable for a blaze or to an adjacent less-eroded location. Even people familiar with the trail would not be likely to notice the change. Maintainers may handle minimal relocations without prior consultation with their supervisor or chair, but those changes should be reported to the supervisor.

#### **4.6 New trails**

All proposed new trails must be approved by the landowner or land manager prior to requesting Trails Council approval. In special cases, Trails Council approval may be sought first, contingent on subsequent approval by the landowner. The requirements for presenting a new trail for approval are in the Trail Management Guide.

Land managers have the final say on trail names and blaze details. The Trail Conference does not name trails after living people.

#### **4.7 Reporting Trail Changes**

All new trails, abandoned trails, reinstated or reopened trails and relocations are to be reported on the Trail Update form in the Trail Management Guide. This form specifies the details and mechanisms for such reporting and who gets notified. These reports are necessary to keep all of our publications up-to-date.

#### **4.8 The Appalachian Trail**

NPS has delegated management responsibility for the AT to the ATC. In turn, ATC has delegated management responsibility for the AT in New York and New Jersey to the Trail Conference. Thus, the management of the AT is a joint responsibility of the AT local management committees, the Trail Conference, ATC, NPS and state agencies. The details of these responsibilities are spelled out in ATC and NPS documents as well as the local management plans of the AT management committees.

Local management plans must be reviewed and approved by the Trails Council and the Board before submission to ATC. In other respects, the management of the AT should follow the Trails Policy.

By federal law, the AT is restricted to foot traffic only, except where grandfather clauses and special-use permits allow equestrian use (and bike use outside our area).

#### **4.9 Catskill Forest Preserve**

Trails in the Catskill Forest Preserve are on New York State constitutionally protected "forever wild" lands. The DEC has primary management responsibility for the trails and lean-tos within the Catskill Forest Preserve. By agreement between the Trail Conference and the DEC, many of these trails and lean-tos have been adopted by the Trail Conference. An AANR agreement between the Trail Conference and the DEC details maintenance standards and procedures to be followed within the Catskill Forest Preserve.

In the Catskills, maintainers are required to communicate with the forest ranger responsible for their trail. More restrictive standards apply to Trail Conference operations within designated Wilderness Areas than in Wild Forest Areas of the Forest Preserve. All new trail construction in the Catskills must be approved by the DEC and must conform to the controlling DEC Unit Management Plan (UMP).

#### **4.10 Trail Conference Affiliated Trails**

For trails to be considered Conference affiliated, (e.g. the Long Island Greenbelt Trail) the organizational member maintaining the trail must apply to the Trails Council for this status. The form for requesting such status is in the Trail Management Guide. The maintainers report directly to the landowner or governmental body. A maintenance report is also filed with the Trails Council chair at least once a year. By adopting the affiliated trail, the Trail Conference commits to assist in the protection of that trail.

### **Section 5: Cooperative Management Agreements and Easements**

Whenever the Trail Conference maintains a trail on public land or on lands owned by a non-profit conservation organization, a cooperative management agreement should be entered into between the Trail Conference and the public landowner.

Whenever the Trail Conference maintains a trail on private land, permission must be requested and obtained from the landowner. Ideally, the Trail Conference should obtain a permanent easement to maintain the trail across the private land. If a permanent easement cannot be obtained, a written revocable agreement (which may be in the form of a letter) should be obtained.

If the landowner will give only verbal permission, a memorandum stating the circumstances under which verbal permission was obtained must be filed in the Trail Conference office.

Forms required by a partner are to be filled out and handled according to the requesting partner. A copy can be obtained in the Trail Management Guide. For example, OPRHP requires all volunteers who give service in the state parks to file a Volunteer Service Agreement.

### **Section 6: Communications**

#### **6.1 Government partners**

Communication and cooperation among user groups, landowners and land managers lead to an enhanced opportunity to provide the best possible hiking experience. In addition, open communication with government partners and land managers helps establish the Trail Conference's credibility.

Regional trails chairs (or supervisors, by prior arrangement) should communicate regularly with park managers by phone and e-mail, and they should meet with them in person at least once a year. Regional chairs may arrange for maintainers to report minor issues (such as litter bags left for pick-up) directly to maintenance staff and to report directly to park rangers or police trail misuse that requires immediate action. However, discussions with park officials of matters on policy, MOUs, etc. should take place only by or with the approval of the regional trails chair. Regional trails chairs should submit a list of their supervisors to their park managers and introduce them to the manager of the park they supervise.

#### **6.2 Public meetings**

When speaking or testifying before public bodies such as the DEC, PIPC, zoning boards, greenway hearings, etc., one should be careful to distinguish between personal opinions and Trail Conference opinions. Even if one does not identify oneself as a Trail Conference official, governmental partners who recognize the speaker as a Trail Conference official and may assume that all remarks made by the speaker reflect Trail Conference policy, unless the speaker clearly points that his remarks reflect only his or her own opinions.

### **6.3 Press contacts**

The Board adopted a press policy on November 22, 1988, which states:

“Press Announcements by Trail Conference officials: Any Trail Conference official who submits any article or letter to the editor of an outside publication using their Trail Conference title should submit the article to the Trail Conference office for review beforehand. This policy does not apply to letters addressed to government officials unless such letters make policy for the Trail Conference.”

When speaking to the press, clear remarks with the Trail Conference office if at all possible.

### **Section 7: Emergency Preparedness**

The Trail Conference office must be notified of any emergency conditions as soon as possible. The existing reporting structure should be used to notify the affected regional trails chair, supervisors and maintainers as necessary, so that the problem may be dealt with as soon as possible.

The Trails Council shall develop and maintain action plans that detail how to deal with various emergencies, such as injury, fire danger, storm damage, lost hikers, and trail closures. These plans are part of the *Trail Management Guide* and *Volunteer Handbook*.

## Appendix A- Regional Trail Committees

This appendix is not part of the formal part of this document and may be changed without explicit approval to reflect the current existence of trail committees. Any realignment of committees requires agreement among the committees involved and Board approval of the trails chairs.

- **Catskill Region 3** - all Trail Conference trails in the Catskills within DEC Region 3, including the Long Path
- **Catskill Region 4** - all Trail Conference trails in the Catskills within DEC Region 4, including the Long Path
- **Central North Jersey** - Rockaway River Wildlife Management Area, Pequannock Watershed, Pyramid Mountain, Fanny Highlands, Southern Wyanokies, Mountainside Park, Garret Mountain/High Mountain and Morristown National Historical Park
- **Dutchess-Putnam Appalachian Trail Management** - the AT in Dutchess, Putnam and Westchester counties, including blue-blazed side trails and corridor management
- **East Hudson**- all Trail Conference trails in Fahnestock, Hudson Highlands, Taconic and Wonder Lake state parks and the Wappinger Greenway
- **Highlands Trail - East** - The Highlands Trail from the Hudson River to Connecticut, with co-aligned section maintainers reporting to the local committee
- **Highlands Trail - West** - the Highlands Trail from the Delaware River to Hudson River, with co-aligned section maintainers reporting to the local committee
- **Lenape Trail** - A linear trail connecting parks in Essex County
- **Long Path North** - the Long Path north of the Catskills
- **Long Path South** - the Long Path south of the Catskills and associated local trail systems
- **Metro** - all trails in the five boroughs of New York City
- **New Jersey Appalachian Trail Management** - the AT in New Jersey, including blue-blazed side trails and corridor management
- **North Jersey** - Ramapo Mountain State Forest, Ramapo Valley County Reservation, Campgaw Mountain County Reservation, New Jersey Palisades, Northern Wyanokies, Ringwood State Park, and Stonetown/Monksville
- **Orange-Rockland Appalachian Trail Management** - the AT in Orange and Rockland Counties, including blue-blazed side trails and corridor management
- **West Hudson - South** - Harriman-Bear Mountain and Sterling Forest trails, excluding the Appalachian Trail and Long Path
- **West Hudson - North** - New York trails west of the Hudson River, north of Harriman-Bear Mountain and south of the Catskills, excluding the Long Path
- **West Jersey** - Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, High Point State Park, Jenny Jump State Forest, Pequest Wildlife Management Area, Stephens/Allamuchy State Parks, Stokes State Park, Swartswood State Park, Wawayanda State Park, and Worthington State Forest