

## Memorandum

To: Chapter Members/Volunteers/Concerned Parties  
From: Central NY Chapter—NCTA Newsletter Editor, Al Larman  
Subject: New York Parks — Unilaterally Imposed Actions

**Background:** Two non-contiguous sections of a former Lehigh Valley RR (LVRR) branch line were acquired by NY Parks after the company declared bankruptcy in 1970—train operations had ceased at year end 1967. One section extends from the Bingley Road area near Chittenango Falls State Park to a point just south of Freber Road, formerly named Hodge Road. The other section extends from a point north of Perryville to a point south of Canastota. The Cazenovia Preservation Foundation purchased sections that extend south and north from Cazenovia. The latter extends to the Bingley Road area. The former LVRR section from approximately Freber Road to the north of Perryville was purchased by an area resident for agricultural purposes.

After many interactions and the noted accomplishments of the Chapter's volunteers on other sections of the trail, Parks issued a revocable five year permit to us in 2001 to develop/maintain a hiking trail from Bingley Road to Carey Hill Road and from Nelson Road eastward toward Canastota. During this time span, excellent progress was made via a "good partnership of effort" with Parks, the Madison County Planning Department and other agencies. A successful application for a TEA-21 grant was filed and an application for guardHELP submitted. The latter program combines necessary training and skills retention for NY State Army National Guard personnel. By happenstance, an Engineering Battalion (Heavy) scheduled to go to Europe could not secure military transport—their services were offered to us unexpectedly for a 12 day span in August 2003 if we could accept the offer "on the spot". We did! The focus was on drainage restoration, culvert installations and grading. Parks issued a second permit to us in August 2006 for another five years. It permitted us to develop the remaining Parks lands. We achieved major trail improvements; the impassable washout north of Carey Hill Road was bypassed and the remaining trail cleared to the west side of Nelson Road. All of the trail sections were certified to National Park Standards.

**Developments:** In 2008, Parks imposed a pilot program for horse use on the trail section east of Nelson Road despite our concerns as to probable damage and safety considerations—large groups of equestrians and hikers—some with family members and dogs—do not co-exist well on a single track trail. We termed the one year evaluation to be non-representative since the equestrian group submitted a document stating that their trail use had been self limited due to weather conditions. For the winter seasons of 2009-10 and 2010-2011, Parks again unilaterally imposed snowmobile use on the trail section east of Nelson Road. The evaluation term was applied after the fact. Violations of posted rules issued by Parks were frequent and documented. The Madison County Planning Department was the major architect of the planned uses in both the equestrian and snowmobile cases.

**Current Situation:** In July 2011, the Chapter requested a hiking trail permit renewal essentially the same as the prior two we had received. In October, we received a renewal application with the term "multiple use" replacing the term "hiking trail". Other changes were noted, notably a permit length of two years rather than five years. We replied that a full review would be required by us since this a drastic change—one that impacted trail certification and more. On November 25, the day following the Thanksgiving Holiday, our trail steward found that a tracked excavator, a big bulldozer, and a large BobCat mounted brush-hog, plus a crew of chain-saw operators, were clear-cutting the trail from Nelson Road westward from Nelson Road. A call to the Parks Police resulted in their confirming that the Tri-Valley Snowmobile Club had a Parks permit to "improve the trail" from that point to Quarry Road. The operation continued through that weekend and part of the next weekend. The "trail improvement" stripped all of the trees, vegetation, and more from the former rail-bed. The North Country National Scenic Trail/Link Trail segment was totally obliterated. The net result is a road like dirt surface that is essentially a straight line from Nelson Road to the crossing at Cottons Road near Bruce Road. From there it extends westward to the Smithland Farms area for now.

The Central NY Chapter-NCTA, The ADK-Onondaga Chapter, the National Park Service and a number of individuals have expressed dismay with the results of this Parks issued permit, as well as the manner in which the foot-travel community interests were mistreated. NY Parks HQ, Albany, has established a multi-interest committee to seek ways to address these issues. The chairman intends to pursue fact-finding in depth prior to scheduling a meeting with all concerned—most likely late in March or in April. We will participate actively.

**Watch for an update on this matter and more in a full newsletter— March issuance planned.**

(View representative photographs on the following pages)



Representative example— foot trail west of Nelson Road. Trees and brush provided soil stabilization—buffered noise and winds—a four season trail segment.



Chain saw crew cut trees ahead of excavator & brush-hog- Note logs, brush, and soil being dumped into adjacent drainage ditches .



Left Photo)View west from Nelson Road toward Harp Road—note tree and brush cuttings, plus base material from old rail-bed, dumped into adjacent drainage ditch.

(Right Photo)—view is westward from Harp Road. The cut width ranges from 15-25+ feet, far more than the space needed for modest speed snowmobile use.



The trail is now devoid of attractions, protection from winds, and has drainage ditches littered with brush and cut trees. Truck traffic reportedly attributable to Tri Valley “maintenance personnel” is apparent. An apt term for the result is “road”.



( above) Area just west of Harp Road—large pile of cut trees and brush—note large tree uprooted during clearing operations.



(Above) one of several gates torn down —thrown in the drainage at Harp Road—other debris in ditch nearby. (Gate since salvaged by CNY-NCTA)



Example—bulldozed rail-bed material positioned at edge of bank of Canastota Creek—unstable situation.



Another example of potential runoff from the disturbed soil into Canastota Creek on the section from Nelson Road westward for hundreds of feet. Canastota Creek on the north and a tributary stream on the south have strong flows at times. With tree, vines, and brush roots removed or disturbed, erosion issues are likely occurrences.

All photographs were taken between November 25 and December 5, 2011.