

## **Beekman Conservation Advisory Council**

Date: 2026-03-02 19:53:57

Location: Beekman Town Hall

### **Participants:**

Beekman CAC -- Suzette Lopane (chair), Obed Varughese, Karen Anewalt, Claude Rancourt, Bill Crain, Ken Follett (notes)

Guests: Matt Paul (NYSDEC), Cliff Schwark, Robert Bergdall, Rick Wilson, Joe Willie, Marty Mygar

### **Meeting Notes**

Discussion with Matt Paul from the NYSDEC re: Grape Hollow

Discussion covered laws and procedures guiding transfer from a land trust to DEC. A DEC forester/land manager (Matt Paul), noted early-stage field work followed by higher-level administrative and legal steps handled above their level; the process occurred during COVID. The property (including the Pescatori parcel) sits within Grape Hollow Associates and was well known to DEC.

Conclusion: Transfer followed standard DEC acquisition processes with legal/administrative details managed above field staff.

Topic: Forest Tax Law (480-a) Program and Property History

The Pescatori property has been enrolled since 1978 (about 47–48 years), originally under one certificate, later split into two. The 480-a program functions like an agricultural exemption for forest products, aiming to maintain timber production. DEC oversees best management practices; landowners typically hire consulting foresters. Requirements include at least 50 contiguous forested acres and adequate stocking; landowners receive an 80% reduced assessment on committed acreage. Foresters submit management plans with inventories, stocking, and schedules of actions. Enrollment does not guarantee harvest; actions may span 10–30 years to grow timber to crop status.

Topic: Local Zoning Context in Beekman

In the Town of Beekman, especially the Highlands portion, land is designated land conservation by zoning code (about 10% of town). The property's prior forest-use status aligns with this zoning.

Topic: Background on Property Sale and Prior Involvement

Matt Paul conducted numerous inspections prior to the state purchase and frequently interacted with Mr. Pescatori, discussing eventual sale and hopes to connect to Depot Hill Multiple Use Area.

Conclusion: Property is now public; integration into broader management planning is a goal.

Topic: Interaction of Local Forestry Law and State Programs

Questions addressed whether Beekman's forestry law or state programs take precedence. Private landowners in 480-a remain subject to local ordinances and reviews; local review may be more relaxed when DEC oversight and management plans exist, but town enforcement remains important.

Conclusion: Local ordinances apply alongside state programs; coordination is expected.

Topic: Town Concerns About Unauthorized Cutting and Site Controls

Issues noted with improper tree cutting and lack of erosion/sediment controls and proper staging as occurred at other locations within the town. Building inspector's role is key since DEC is not onsite daily. DEC acknowledged complaints but reaffirmed adherence to town rules and clarified 480-a benefits relate to tax savings and sustainable harvest, not guaranteed timber profits.

Topic: Unit Management Plan (UMP) Alignment and Dam/Spillway Issue

The property will be incorporated into the East of Hudson UMP draft (in development since 2022), which is not yet adopted. Large, multi-property plans can be delayed by single issues. Adoption is preferred with concrete direction rather than conditional notes; drafts must pass multiple review levels and timelines can be lengthy. Target adoption within approximately two years, circumstances permitting.

Conclusion: Plan is to amend this property into East of Hudson UMP; progress depends on dam remediation and review processes.

Topic: Managing Public Use, Waterfowl Hunting, and Neighbor Impacts

Neighbors reported early-morning waterfowl hunting noise and high use since public access began. DEC intends to start access management, identify formal access points, and amend the UMP to include this property. Proposed approach includes small parking areas (3-5 spaces), potential restrictions on road parking during hunting season, and enforcement of local parking rules. Suggested to explore multiple access locations across ~500 acres to reduce roadside issues and discourage roadside shooting.

Conclusion: Prioritize designated access and seasonal parking restrictions to manage peak hunting-season use.

Topic: Environmental Resource Inventory and Facility Siting

Significant environmental features highlighted: 72-acre wetland, riparian areas, steep slopes, vernal pools, and water quality concerns. Comprehensive inventories and analyses are requested before decisions. DEC confirmed resource inventories (via NY Natural Heritage biologists) are standard; timelines may not perfectly align with drafting, but facility siting (parking, trails) can be adjusted to avoid sensitive resources without redoing the entire UMP.

Conclusion: Environmental surveys will inform siting; plans allow flexibility to avoid sensitive areas.

Topic: Culvert Issue Near Proposed Parking and Town Coordination

A problematic town culvert hydrologically connects wetlands; high water levels and limited capacity noted. DEC questioned town expectations regarding replacement; beaver activity downstream exists, but the culvert is town-owned. The culvert invert may be set too low; remediation timeline is uncertain. DEC will cooperate and coordinate permits as needed; parking lot siting should account for the culvert to avoid compounding problems.

Conclusion: Town leads culvert remediation; DEC to coordinate and consider constraints when locating parking.

Topic: Concerns About Mountain Biking Impacts on Forest Lands

Rising intensity of mountain biking and impacts on forest trails were discussed; unmanaged "maintenance" has sometimes coincided with unauthorized trail proliferation. Compatibility of current mountain biking uses with desired area uses was questioned.

Conclusion: Shared concern about unmanaged trail expansion; stricter management needed.

Topic: Historical Context and Management Response to Trail Expansion

Mountain biking has grown rapidly over the last 10–15 years. Early management underestimated aggressiveness among some users; unauthorized expansion occurred. Management shifted to assertive engagement: mapping all trails, formal agreements, and enforcement for violations.

Topic: Engagement Strategy and Conditional Access Agreements

Strategy involves direct engagement with mountain bike groups, clear expectations, mapping existing trails, and formal agreements. Violations lead to revoked agreements; unsanctioned work prohibited; individuals seen with tools may be ticketed or arrested. Unauthorized trails are expected to naturally revegetate over time.

Topic: Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms

Oversight responsibility lies with DEC staff, supported by rangers and agreements. Processes from prior experience guide monitoring.

Topic: Taconic Multi-Use Area — Self-Policing Outcome

A disorganized trail network led to renewed agreements with strict conditions. After an unauthorized trail appeared, a mountain biker reported it under pressure from club leadership; fear of losing access fostered self-policing. Concerns remain that damage occurs once a trail is built.

Topic: Trail Remediation and Compaction Concerns

A remediated trail was noted. Questions raised whether soil compaction impacts can truly be reversed, citing ecological damage from unmanaged mountain biking at Graham Hills Park. Long professional experience emphasized invasive species risks and ecosystem health challenges.

Conclusion: Unmanaged trail use causes serious ecological issues; remediation is possible but challenging.

Topic: Strategic Approach to Mountain Bike Management

Preference is to partner with user groups over prohibition for monitoring and accountability. A meeting with the mountain bike community is scheduled; a trails proposal has been submitted with some acceptable elements and others not. A collaborative process will refine routes for a draft amendment with public review.

Conclusion: Proceed with a collaborative, transparent planning process involving the mountain bike community and public review.

Topic: Need for Natural Resource Inventory Before Trail Planning

Calls for conducting and reviewing habitat and resource inventories before design, including species, compaction sensitivity, and ecological constraints. Volunteers may lack needed expertise. DEC agreed that no work proceeds without inventory; trails should be planned for multi-use.

Conclusion: Natural resource inventory is a prerequisite; trails will be designed for multi-use.

Topic: Case Study — California Hill State Forest Enforcement and Collaboration

DEC shut down 12–15 miles of illegal trails after detecting them via Strava/Trailforks. Closure prompted engagement and remediation (including Boy Scouts) under an agreement with NY-NJ Trail Conference and local leads. A new multi-use trail system was planned after public feedback, with adjustments for hunting areas.

Conclusion: Enforcement plus collaboration can convert illegal use into a managed, multi-use system responsive to stakeholders.

Topic: Stewardship and Partner Organizations

NY-NJ Trail Conference suggested as potential stewards. DEC noted the Conference holds the California Hill agreement, with a mountain biker leading on-the-ground work under a multi-use design. Principle is balanced outcomes with shared compromises.

Conclusion: Consider NY-NJ Trail Conference or similar as stewardship partners with a multi-use mandate.

Topic: Local Demand and Placement of Mountain Biking

Divergent views on need for new trails given existing options (e.g., road/dirt-road riding, Depot Hill lacks singletrack). Some perceive outside groups seeking access; local advocates questioned. DEC noted mountain bikers are currently the most active regional trail user group.

Conclusion: No consensus on necessity; recognition of an active MTB user base versus alternatives.

Topic: Safety and User Conflict Mitigation

Incidents on mixed-use trails, including e-bike concerns, were raised. Conflict mitigation strategies include design solutions (avoiding steep fall lines), controlling features (jumps/cliffs), and ongoing communication with partners to address unsafe elements.

Conclusion: Safety addressed through careful layout, standards, and active oversight.

Topic: Logging, Forest Management, and Conservation Values

Advocacy for keeping forests uncut to store carbon was balanced against DEC's working forest model. UMP analyses identify stands for potential harvest but may exclude them due to wetlands or special management zones. Distinction made between

deforestation and working forests; the Young Forest Initiative supports early successional habitat. Deer pressure may inhibit regeneration; hunting is used for management.

Conclusion: Forest management will balance habitat objectives, climate concerns, and public input; potential harvests will be site-specific and may be excluded based on ecological constraints.

Topic: Process and Public Input

Process includes releasing a draft plan, stakeholder comments (e.g., hunters), field flagging, and iterative adjustments with community participation to reach a balanced trail system.

Topic: Trail Use at Grape Hollow/Depot Hill/West Mountain

Debate on allowing mountain biking and trail development at Grape Hollow, with comparisons to Depot Hill and West Mountain. Proposal to treat Grape Hollow like Depot Hill (no MTB trails by default). Depot Hill has no formal trails except the AT; West Mountain generally allows bikes on some trails, but conditions and access are limiting. Concern that MTB demand will creep in without formal planning.

Conclusion: No formal decision recorded; differing views on MTB access and alignment with Depot Hill precedent.

Topic: Access, Safety, and Parking Constraints

Roads near Grape Hollow/Depot Hill (e.g., Route 292) are poor and steep, raising safety concerns for cyclists and trailers. Parking capacity may dictate site carrying capacity; small lots could limit use year-round. Residents and existing road users could be impacted; a maple operation and culvert issues were noted.

Conclusion: Parking likely a limiting factor; no final decision on lot size or location.

Topic: Environmental Concerns (Steep Slopes, Erosion, Headwaters)

Highlands-area properties include steep slopes; erosion risk flagged for multi-use trails. Area contributes to Whaley Lake headwaters; trails could have downstream impacts on nearby homes.

Conclusion: Significant environmental constraints acknowledged; no finalized mitigation plan.

Topic: Appalachian Trail Connectivity and User Experience

Vision for Grape Hollow includes a single-track hiking loop with potential backcountry linkage via the AT corridor and possible access to services. Similar access exists from Depot Hill.

Conclusion: Concept described; no commitment to specific alignments or construction.

Topic: Trail Definitions and Permitted Uses

Not all multiple-use trails suit all uses; suitability depends on grade and conditions. Proposed trails characterized as single-track hiking with potential bike suitability; not for snowmobiles; equestrian use may vary per trail. DEC mapping tools list permissible uses by segment to prevent misuse.

Conclusion: Agreement on specifying allowed uses per trail; no finalized designations for this site.

Topic: Culvert and Permitting

The problematic culvert in a wetland area will limit access if unaddressed. DEC offered help with permits required for replacement. Frustration exists with permitting timelines for other infrastructure (e.g., dam), but a permit will likely be needed.

Conclusion: Need for culvert action and permitting recognized; no action assigned.

Topic: Pawling Lake Estates Dam (Related Regional Issue)

A 22-foot-high dam at Pawling Lake Estates is non-compliant (spillway capacity inadequate; no drop inlet). Options include removal (over \$1 million) or other fixes; public access limitations complicate investment decisions. Community opposes removal; coordination with Riverkeeper and DEC staff continues; weekly siphon checks have occurred since before COVID.

Conclusion: No resolution; negotiations ongoing; tangential to Grape Hollow trails but relevant to regional water management.

Topic: Stakeholder Engagement and Contacts

Meeting closed after about an hour; attendees thanked each other. Contact provided for follow-up: [matthew.paul@dec.ny.gov](mailto:matthew.paul@dec.ny.gov).

## **Next Arrangements**

Identify and propose formal access points and small parking areas (3–5 spaces) for the property; assess impacts on nearby roads and residents.

Coordinate with the Town of Beekman on seasonal road parking restrictions during hunting season; consider year-round capacity limits if needed.

Initiate or continue environmental resource inventories (wetlands, riparian buffers, steep slopes, vernal pools, rare/threatened species) and use findings to inform siting of parking and trails.

Amend the East of Hudson UMP draft to include this property, proposed access management, and trail policies; outline timeline and milestones toward adoption.

Town to assess and plan remediation for the problematic culvert; coordinate permits and notifications with DEC; incorporate culvert constraints into access design.

Develop a draft multi-use trails plan for public review and comment; specify permitted uses per trail segment and align with AT restrictions.

Hold the scheduled meeting with the mountain bike community to review and refine the proposal; evaluate stewardship agreements (e.g., NY-NJ Trail Conference) and partner roles.

Map all existing trails; formalize agreements with mountain bike groups; establish enforcement protocols for unauthorized work and tool possession; define reporting channels and periodic monitoring.

Assess deer management implications for forest regeneration; map and avoid conflicts with popular hunting areas in trail routing.

Engage local stakeholders (including mountain bikers and residents) for input on access, parking, trail use, and safety; communicate planned access controls and hunting-season management.

Suggestion made that a local group could be formed that would act as stewards to this property.