

Rensselaer Plateau Alliance Trails Action Plan

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Prepared By



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Trails Action Plan for the Rensselaer Plateau: Connecting People to the Plateau Communities

Introduction

This Trails Action Plan outlines key steps to expand connections with the Hudson River Valley Greenway Trail system on the Rensselaer Plateau. This includes the Empire State Trail and expanding existing trails to create an internal core trail system that runs north-south along the entire plateau, connecting people and the communities of the Rensselaer Plateau with the area's resources—that is the focus of this project. By connecting people with the natural beauty in their own communities, not only is quality of life enhanced for local residents, but the trail infrastructure, conserved lands, and tourism businesses and attractions that are connected by this trail system become an asset of ever-increasing value for visitors to the region as well.

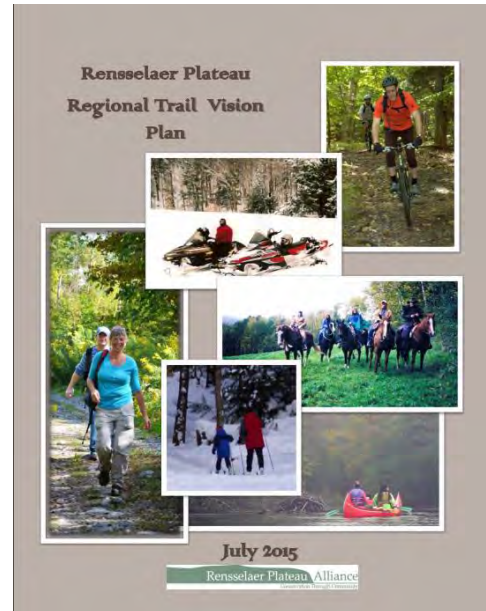
Funding support for this project was provided by the Hudson River Valley Greenway with a grant through the NYS Environmental Protection fund and from contributions by the members and supporters of the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance.

The Rensselaer Plateau Alliance guided the formulation of this plan with assistance from Behan Planning and Design. A series of meetings to outline potential trail routes were organized by the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance and invited participants included representatives from area towns, the county, and nonprofit organizations involved in trail development in the region.

Recognizing the challenges associated with developing a trail system to connect from the valley to the plateau where in many places no trails exist, the plan appropriately focuses on improving existing road corridors to create on-road links to the plateau from the valleys below. There are a few former rail corridors where the creation of off-road shared use paths may be possible and these routes were explored during the planning process. Fortunately, on the plateau itself there are many existing trails and logging/rural roads in the conserved lands that can form the basis of the core trail system.

Plateau Core Path

This trail is envisioned as a rural shared use path and would connect through the center of the Rensselaer Plateau from the towns of Nassau and Stephentown in the south to the towns of Hoosick and Pittstown in the north and would include connecting trails in Stephentown, Sand Lake, Berlin, Poestenkill, Grafton, Petersburg, Pittstown, and Hoosick. This path would link the major conserved lands including:



The Rensselaer Plateau Regional Trail Vision Plan provided a foundation for this next phase of the initiative—an action plan.

See this report at:

<http://www.renssealerplateau.org/trailvision>

- Kinderhook Creek Preserve
- Albert Family Community Forest
- Robert Ingalls Preserve
- Conservation Fund/Cowee Forest Protected Lands
- Chestnut Hill
- Cherry Plain Wildlife Management Area and State Park lands
- Geisler Preserve
- Poestenkill Community Forest
- Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center
- Grafton Lakes State Park
- Grafton Forest (former Gundrum Lands)
- Pittstown State Forest
- Tibbitts State Forest

The design of each section of the core trail will be based upon a management planning process that will reflect the land owner/land management goals for the property where the trail would be located. For example, where space is limited or where a property owner/manager desires only limited trail development, the trail can be in the form of a hiking trail, or only open on a seasonal basis. **Hiking trails** are unpaved paths typically designed for foot traffic and often traverse steep or wet terrain and can be narrow.



Where space permits and there is already an existing or planned forest road or an access drive, the trail could follow a double track laneway. **Laneways** are unpaved, typically located in rural settings, and can be designed to accommodate hikers, hybrid/mountain bicyclists, equestrians, and similar non-motorized users and snowmobiles.



Fortunately, in 2017, the Conservation Fund purchased the Cowee forest lands on the plateau that will provide a major jump start to the realization of the vision of the core plateau path. These lands are adjacent to thousands of acres of protected public land, which enhances access to popular outdoor recreational activities such as hiking, biking, fishing, snowmobiling, and cross-country skiing.

The Cowee Forest lands in New York contain a portion of the Albany Road to Massachusetts, a Colonial highway dating back to 1753 and the first road that crossed the Plateau and Taconic Mountains. It also sits within the viewshed of the Dickinson Hill Fire Tower, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. The property was acquired by the Conservation fund through its Working Forest Fund®. As temporary owner, the fund will manage the property as a sustainable working forest and will partner with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, communities and other local stakeholders to develop a strategy for Cowee Forest's permanent protection.

The Rensselaer Plateau Alliance (RPA) and local landowners spearheaded this and related protection projects in collaboration with the Conservation Fund and other partners in securing grant funding from the U.S Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

Landowner Outreach

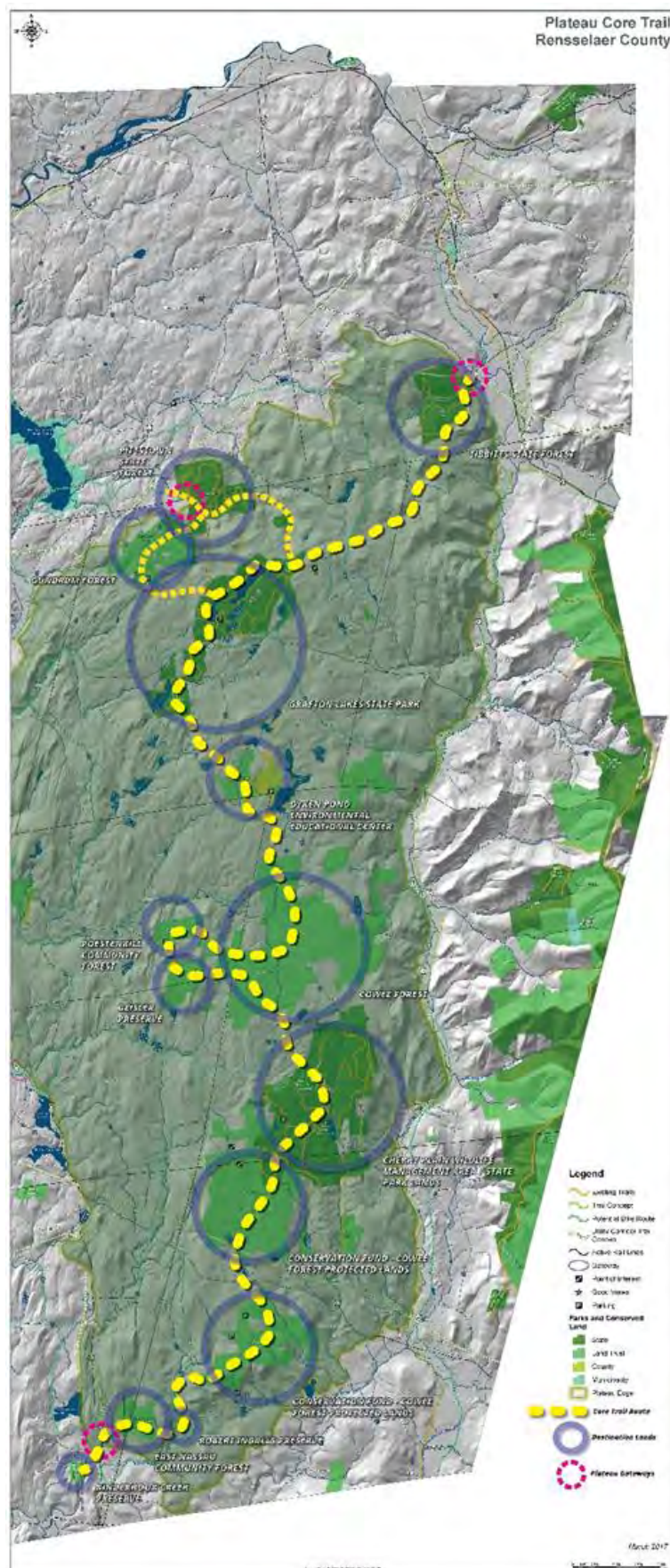
To complete the core plateau path, the RPA has been working with landowners who are potentially interested in finding a way to include a portion of their property as a route on the plateau path system. Many landowners cherish the opportunity to connect from their property onto the larger natural world. That connectivity can provide many benefits including contributing to one's physical and psychological well-being. The type of trail and its maintenance and management are all open items for discussion with individual landowners. Potential trail connections are

custom designed and planned to fit the respective objectives and requirements of each landowner. (Plateau Core Trail map see image on following page. Larger 11x17 format map in appendix.)



In planning for trail connections it is important to accommodate the use of wheelchairs and other power-driven mobility devices (OPDMD) unless that the class of OPDMD cannot be operated following legitimate safety requirements.

Image source: <https://www.gogrit.us/news/2017/9/29/i-went-to-the-woods->



Connecting Communities—River to the Ridge

Starting from the west connecting the Hudson River Valley Greenway Trail at the river's edge and expanding the larger Greenway Trail system up onto the Rensselaer Plateau will link town centers, tourism attractions and major destinations with the extensive trails and natural resources up on the Rensselaer Plateau. Continuing east, the trail will link the plateau to the Hoosic Valley communities and trails up to the Taconic Ridge system onward to Massachusetts and Vermont.

Empire State Trail-Rensselaer Plateau Link

The Empire State Trail will run along the alignment of the Albany-Hudson Electric Trail in the southwest part of the county and cross the Hudson at the Dunn Memorial Bridge where it would tie into the Mohawk-Hudson Bike Path in the Corning Preserve and then link with the Erie Canal trail out to Buffalo and northerly along the Hudson and Champlain Canal trail, the Lake Champlain Valley and ultimately to Plattsburgh and the Canadian border.

There are multiple opportunities to link to this trail down from the plateau. A relatively direct connection to the Albany Hudson Electric Trail section of the Empire State Trail is possible beginning south of Nassau Lake where Rensselaer County Highway Route 15 (Lake Avenue) intersects with



Much of the Empire State Trail will be built as shared-use path. (Image here is Railroad Run, a popular shared-use path in Saratoga Springs.)

county route 7 (Elm Street). As County Route 15 heads north it is called Nassau-Averill Park Road and provides a good connection to the Burden Lake area and its attractions. The average annual daily traffic (AADT) on this stretch of road is relatively low at 918 vehicles per day (NYSDOT <https://gis3.dot.ny.gov/html5viewer/?viewer=tdv>). As a path for traveling by bicycle, this road should be improved where possible with a widened shoulder and ideally with a side path separated from the vehicle lane if sufficient right-of-way exists/can be obtained (see images on following page).



The route would continue to Millers Corners and up into Averill Park where it would head east a for about three-quarter's of a mile along NYS Route 43 (traffic is heavier here at average annual daily traffic at 4,532 vehicles per day) and linking to Taborton Road (Rensselaer County Route 42). Taborton Road travels through a fair amount of topography along the valley formed by Horse Heaven Brook. It is recommended that Taborton Road be evaluated for potential improvements to better accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians as this is an important link up to (and down from) the plateau connecting Sand Lake and other parts of Rensselaer County to Cherry Plain Wildlife Management Area and Cherry Plain State Park and the Conservation Fund's newly acquired Cowee Forest lands.

The trail route would continue heading north-eastward and link with Dutch Church Road (County Route 41) where the Cowee Forest lands are extensive along both sides of the county highway. The trail route would connect to Plank Road (County Route 40) and thence head east to Berlin, NY and the Little Hoosic River Valley. From that corridor, NYS Route 22 has wide shoulders for north-south destinations and points east.

River to Ridge Link. From Troy, this trail would connect the riverfront with a trailhead/destination at Prospect Park where the community is working on an in-city trail system. The Narrows is an extensive 5 mile hiking trail proposal that winds through the waterfalls, outcrops, and historic landscapes of Troy's Wynantskill and Poestenkill



The paved shoulder width available for bicycles (and pedestrians) varies along this route, here on NYS Route 2 (Brunswick Road) looking east heading out of Cropseyville the shoulders provide some space for bicycles (and pedestrians). This entire corridor should be evaluated for improved accommodations where necessary.

Image source: <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Rulson+Rd+Cronseville+NY+12180/@42.7480518,->

valleys: a wilderness hike...in the City. When complete, the wilderness trail will wind to downtown Troy from the Hudson Mohawk Bike-Hike Trail over the river on the 378 Bridge.

(See:<https://narrowstroy.org/trails/map-overview/>)

From Prospect Park, the River to Ridge Link would follow Pinewoods Avenue (County Route 140). In the western section of Pinewoods Avenue, vehicle traffic at 2,712 AADT is relatively small compared with other routes out of the city (e.g., NYS Route 2 at 5,459 AADT). The bike route would head east along Pinewoods to Eagles Mills. Ideally, this entire corridor should be evaluated for necessary improvements to accommodate bicycles and pedestrians as it is an important travel corridor for Troy, Brunswick and other Rensselaer County residents. From Eagles Mills the route would connect easterly on NYS Route 2, taking advantage of the existing shoulders available along long stretches of the state highway in this area. In Grafton, the proposed trail route veers north off State Route 2 for a bit and runs along Old Road (County Route 84). This route as planned would continue easterly to connect with Grafton Lakes State Park and continue on along NYS Route 2, crossing to the Little Hoosic River Valley in Petersburg and following Main Street and Dayfoot Road then head back on up Route 2 (the Taconic Trail). Thence, the route would connect to the Taconic Crest and provide access to the Taconic Ridge State Forest. From there the trail would extend into the Commonwealth of Massachusetts including the Taconic Trail State Park and down into Williamstown.

Uncle Sam Bike Path-Mohican Trail Link

As currently developed the Uncle Sam Bikeway is a three-mile paved path with wildflowers, waterfalls and shale cliffs offering scenery alongside the route. The bikeway provides excellent walking for handicapped persons and for pushing wheelchairs and strollers. The path is built on an old railroad roadbed and is entirely level with gentle curves as it follows the contours of the adjacent hill. The roadbed was constructed in 1850-52 by the Troy and Boston Railroad, which was leased to the Fitchburg Railroad in 1887, and then to the Boston and Maine Railroad in 1900. The tracks were dismantled in 1972-73 and the bikeway was opened in 1981.

The potential route for the Uncle Sam Bike Path-Mohican Trail Link would extend the bike bath along the route of the former railroad connecting the communities of Valley Falls, Johnsonville, and Eagle Bridge with a spur to Bennington and a spur to Hoosic Falls and points east. (A connection of the Mohican Trail would run along the south side of the Hoosic River from the proposed rail trail down toward the Hudson and Champlain Canal Lock 4 Park).

Since so many years have passed since the abandonment of rail operations, the ownership and uses of the corridor have become fragmented, making the development of this trail link a highly challenging endeavor; nonetheless, given the potential for tremendous benefits to both nearby landowners, the communities and quality of life for residents, this concept is surely worth pursuing in earnest.



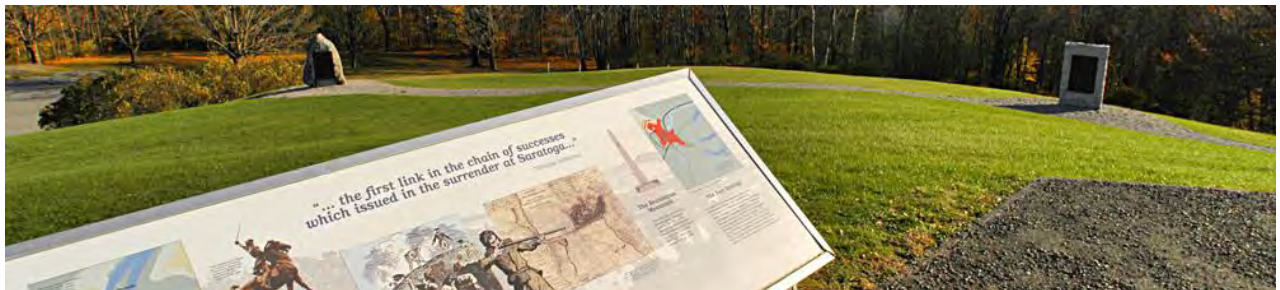
Ribbon cutting for first phase of Uncle Sam Trail Extension Project. Image source: <http://www.troytny.gov/mayor-madden-first-phase-of-uncle-sam-trail-extension-project-complete/>

Connection to the Champlain Canal Trail and the Saratoga Battlefield

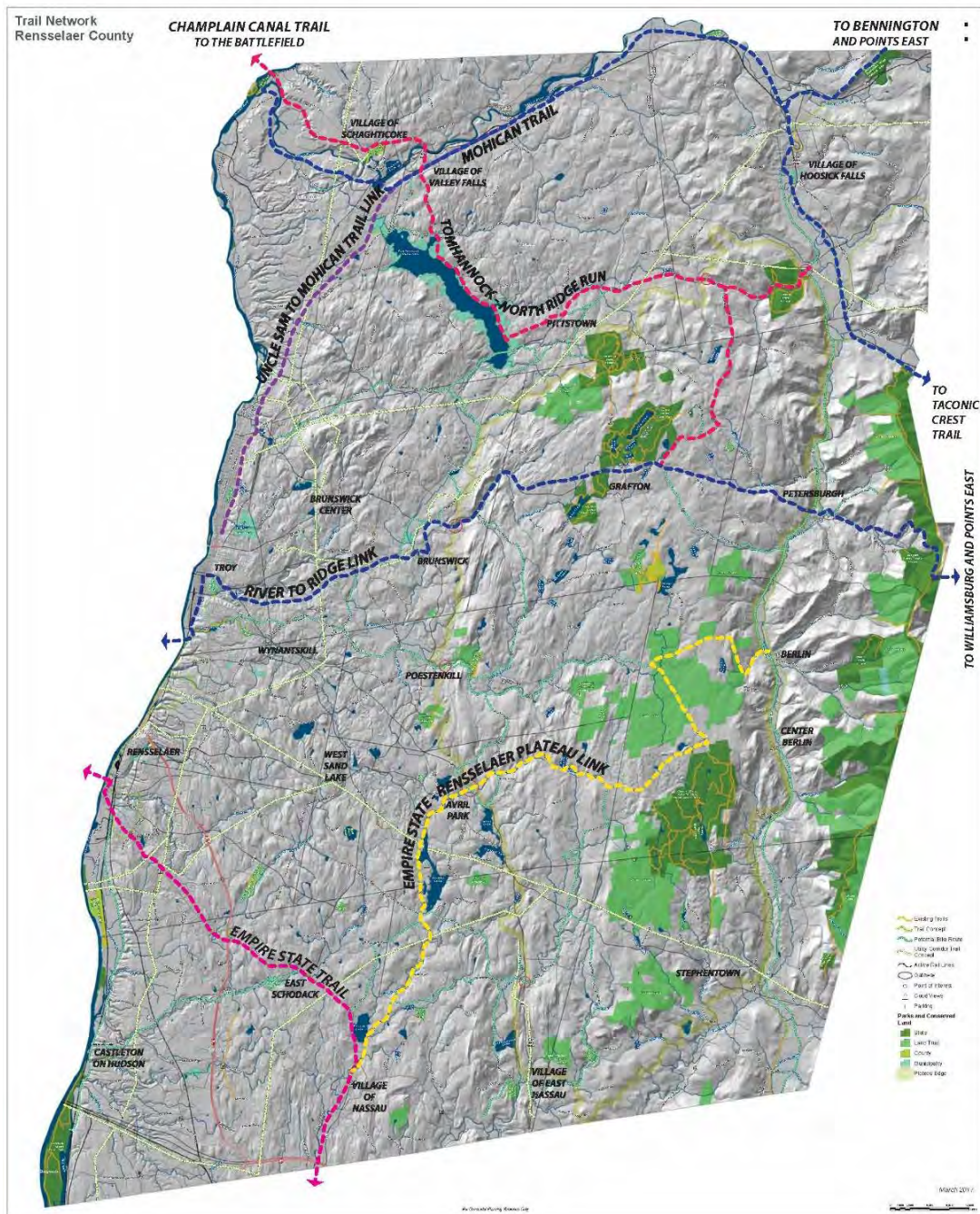
This vision for an interconnected Revolutionary War heritage trail system draws from an historic granite milepost marker that announces “To the Battlefield” located off of NYS Route 9P on Saratoga Lake several miles from the Saratoga Battlefield National Park. The idea of connecting that resource up through and across the Rensselaer Plateau to the Bennington Battlefield is embraced by this plan. The following provides a brief overview of some of a potential primary trail routes. If this concept is attractive to local, county and state highway officials, it is recommended that the roadways be evaluated for phasing in of improvements to better accommodate trail users.



Visitors to Saratoga Battlefield and its related destinations (top) would also enjoy a trip up to the Rensselaer Plateau to see its historic and natural landscape and head on down to the Bennington Battlefield (bottom).



From the Village of Stillwater, the proposed trail would follow Stillwater Bridge Road (County Route 125) into the Village of Schaghticoke to the Valley Falls and then (crossing the potential rail trail) onto a ride along the north shore of the Tomhannock Reservoir on the proposed **"Tomhannock-North Ridge Run"**. This route will connect up to the plateau by way of Reservoir Lake Road (County Route 115) to Phillips Road into and through Pittstown center linking up with NYS Route 7. Heading east along 7 to access Tibbitt's State Forest or to access Grafton Lakes State Park bear south along Babcock Lake Road (County Route 87). (Larger map in appendix along with more detailed maps of additional potential trail routes.)



Rensselaer Plateau Trails and Community/Tourism Connections: Conceptual Website Plan

In order to help achieve broader public awareness of the area trail system and increase usability, a website should be developed which provides useful information about all of the local trails, features and amenities along with other information that would be helpful to support the local tourism-based economy. A description of how this website could function is provided below.

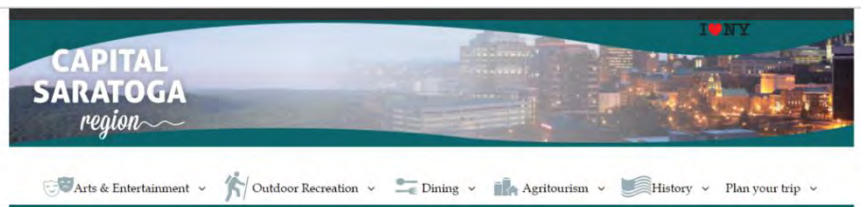
Regional Context

- 1. Promote the Rensselaer Plateau as a Destination in the Capital-Saratoga Tourism Region.** New York State is a leader in tourism promotion and development and the New York State Division of Tourism and the Capital Saratoga Region and Rensselaer County Tourism are each important partners in coordinating website content and search engine optimization.
- 2. Expanded Collaboration with County Organizations.** The RPA should continue to collaborate in promoting the plateau's attractions with expanded web links and project-specific partnerships with Rensselaer County Tourism, Rensselaer County Regional Chamber of Commerce and other like-minded organizations.

Home Page

- 1. Primary Feature: Trails Map.** An interactive Trails Map should feature prominently on the main page which allows users to pan and zoom in and around the Rensselaer Plateau Region. This map could be a specialized Google Map which is embedded in the page. *(See "Interactive Map Design Options" below for more information on how a specialized Google Map could work.)*

The map should include icons or graphics which can be clicked by visitors to open a small pop-up "Quick Glance" window which would provide a short description of the trail route, distance and difficulty level or similar information. From this Quick Glance pop-up, a "More Info" option can be provided to open a separate browser window which would provide a full description of the location, trail features and all amenities if necessary.



Where the mighty Hudson and the Mohawk meet.



From the bright city lights to the quiet countryside

The Capital-Saratoga Region has everything you're looking for in your next getaway. Explore the Capital of New York State's Albany Heritage Area Visitor's Center, and make your way to nearby local breweries, museums and parks. Immerse yourself in New York State's first historic district, The Stockade, and end your night with a touring Broadway performance at Proctors theatre. Enjoy thundering thoroughbred horses at Saratoga Race Course and top ballet and orchestra performances at Saratoga Performing Arts Center. Marvel at the beautiful architecture and industrial history of Troy during a farmer's market along the river.

For readability, the base map imagery used for the interactive map should be on a color relief map showing terrain, roads, town/village/city locations and green shaded areas for parks. Ideally, this map should also include a select number of local area attractions and businesses, such as eating/drinking establishments, shopping and other attractions in the vicinity, identified by simple icons which represent the type of establishment. If maintaining the map information for these local attractions is too difficult, an alternative option would be to provide a listing of them as described below in “Local Attractions.”

- 2. Sidebar Search Function.** A sidebar alongside the interactive map should be provided which provides checkboxes for visitors to filter search results on the map depending on what type of trail experience they are looking for based on “Activity”, “Difficulty” and/or selected keywords. Some examples of how this might work are provided below.

Filter Trails by Activity (check all that apply):

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walking Trail | <input type="checkbox"/> Hiking Trail | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> On-Road Biking Route | <input type="checkbox"/> Bike Path | <input type="checkbox"/> Mountain Biking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cross-Country Skiing | <input type="checkbox"/> Horseback Riding | |

Find Trails by Difficulty (Check all that apply)

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Easy | <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficult |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|

Filter Trail by Keywords (Check all that apply)

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wheelchair Accessible | <input type="checkbox"/> Kid Friendly | <input type="checkbox"/> Nature / Interpretive Trail |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scenic / Great Views | <input type="checkbox"/> Summit Hikes | <input type="checkbox"/> Picnic / Park Facilities |

Based on which filters are selected, the interactive map would refresh to display the geographic location of each trail using highlighted routes and icons on the map which matched the filter criteria – links to the “Quick Glance” popups. In addition, a listing of all the trails which matched the filter criteria would also be provided below the map in Quick Glance format for easy reference. This would provide visitors with the flexibility of searching by geographic proximity (on the map) or browsing a comparison of trails (in the list).

This type of filtering functionality is recommended for the online trail map as it would create a user-friendly interface that would help people find the types of activities and experience they are looking for with minimal effort. If local business and attractions are also included on the map as recommended above, a filter option should also be provided to allow visitors to turn the display of these specific features on or off.

Local Attractions /Resources

If local area attractions are not included directly on the map itself, a second subpage of the website is recommended for listing area attractions such as eating/drinking, shopping and other activities in and around the immediate plateau area, particularly along trail or bike routes. This list should be grouped by category, with a link to the attraction website. Outreach to these businesses should be conducted to let them know the website will be helping to attract visitors to their establishment, with the hope that they could in turn provide a reciprocal link to the trails map for cross-marketing.

This page would alternately be used to provide links and information to outside resources and partner organizations, such as Empire State Trail, local town and village websites, Rensselaer County, local trail advocacy groups, or the Capital District Transportation Committee. Likewise, reciprocal links to their sites should be provided as well to help generate cross-traffic wherever possible.

About Us/Info

An additional subpage of the website, also accessed by a menu link, would provide a page dedicated to describing the Rensselaer Plateau, the Alliance, the website and how it is managed and operated. It could also provide information on how people can donate funds, time, land easements or notify RPA of incorrect map data or problems/issues on the existing trails. Lastly, it can provide "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ) or information on the funding/credits/acknowledgments for the website effort.

Optional Website Ideas

- 1. User Account Login.** Visitors to the website should have the option of creating a free registered account with the website. All of the functional website features and information would be available to visitors regardless of whether they have created this account, however having an account would provide some bonus features and interoperability. Some examples of how this could be used are provided below.
 - **Ability to track progress.** Visitors could keep track of which trails they have completed, similar to the "46ers" in the Adirondack High Peaks. As they complete more trails, they can earn achievements, "badges" or go up in "ranking".
 - **Scavenger Hunt!** Hidden information, similar to geocaching, could be located at selected points along trails. Visitors would have the option of taking on different challenges to locate hidden information or a specific location on a trail, and then reporting back to the website with the correct answer. Advanced features of this could include a series of "waypoints & clues", where trail visitors would be challenged to find a specific location, and once they have succeeded, the website would provide them with the next clue until they have solved the



Continue to Expand Branding and Promoting the Rensselaer Plateau as a Distinct Place.

exploration puzzle. Something akin to this could be a great family/kids activity with broad educational opportunities.

- **Mile Tracker.** The visitor account could keep track of miles of trails they have completed.
- **Email Contacts.** Visitors would provide their email address when creating their (optional) account. The email addresses collected could be used to send out quarterly newsletters, notices, announcements and similar marketing or fundraising material.

2. Touring Route Attractions. The trails map could be augmented with points of interest along the way which identify places to eat, shop or explore. These identifiers could be displayed on the map by default, or could be filtered on/off. Consider developing theme-based tourism routes. Some initial concepts to explore include those based upon the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area Management Plan including heritage-based themes and potential subthemes:

- Freedom and Dignity
 - Revolutionary War Heritage (Saratoga Battlefield to Bennington Battlefield).
 - Underground Railroad and the connection from Troy (a major Underground Railroad “station”) to the Tibbitts Estate adjacent to the Tibbitts State Forest. (The Mansion at the estate has a tunnel leading beneath the campus down to the Hoosic River. It was sealed at both ends in 1952. The tunnel is rumored to have been used as an escape route when the Tibbitts estate was a stop on the Underground Railroad.)
 - The Manor of Rensselaerswijck, Fort Crailo, and the Anti-Rent Wars.
- Nature and Culture
 - Watersheds and Water supply—the Hoosic River watershed including the Tomhannock Reservoir and its subwatershed, the Wynantskill and Poestenkill watersheds, the Hudson River Estuary.
 - The Rensselaer Plateau ecology and unique habitats.
 - History and culture of Native Americans that called the plateau home.
 - Artists and authors of the Rensselaer Plateau and Rensselaer County
- Corridors of Commerce
 - The Burden Iron Works and the extensive system of mill ponds and feeder reservoirs.
 - Logging and Forestry Industries—from saw timber to charcoal kilns.
 - Roads of antiquity—historic road traces across the Rensselaer Plateau.

Web Hosting and Design

1. Hosting. Hosting for this website could be done one of two ways. It could be designed as a “stand-alone” website with its own unique web address and identity. Alternately, it could be included as a “subpage” of an already established partner website. The second option could help to reduce hosting and maintenance costs, and may also have the benefit of helping to capture more internet visitors. It is recommended that sharing a site with an established partner website be pursued at least in the short term.

2. **Metadata SEO.** The website should be designed with appropriate Metadata and Search Engine Optimization (S.E.O.) that will capture internet search queries and direct appropriate people to the site.
3. **Mapping Updates.** As the local trail systems grow and evolve, the interactive map will need to be updated periodically. This should be accounted for in the design and budgeting of the website; either through included training of a local GIS/Admin to process the updates, or through a subscription/maintenance agreement with a subconsultant.
4. **Interactive Map Design Options.** There are a number of options for creating an interactive trail map. The most robust systems can utilize a custom Content Management System (CMS) which is maintained and updated using GIS. This information is then ported through Google Maps API into a graphically rich display with custom maps, rich text format, photos and search tags. Some examples of these custom pages, created by Community-GIS.org, are provided below. Costs for developing these robust custom systems can typically range from \$20,000 - \$30,000, with annual hosting and domain fees around \$800 - \$1000.
 - [Paddle SC](#) (Waterways Map for Kayaking and Canoeing in South Carolina)
 - [Maine Trail Finder](#) (Hiking Trails Map in Maine)
 - [QC Trails](#) (Multi-Use Trails Map in Iowa, Illinois)
 - [Carolina Thread Trail](#) (Trails Maps in North / South Carolina)

Less advanced “intermediate” trail mappers, which provide less filter/search functionality, can be developed with smaller budgets of around \$3,000 - \$10,000. Some examples of these are provided below.

- [Moosehead Lake](#) (Outdoor Recreation finder map in Maine)
- [Catamount Trail](#) (Ski map from Massachusetts to Canada)

Other, less expensive options for creating basic trail maps include utilizing [ArcGIS Online](#) and [WordPress Google Maps](#). These two platforms cost around \$42 per month or \$100 respectively, not including time and labor to set up the data, and could potentially be developed within the range of about \$1,000 - \$2,000.

Overall, the ability to provide a map of the local trail systems and area attractions in a readily-accessible online format would greatly increase the visibility and use of the Rensselaer Plateau.

Overall Branding Strategy

Broadly speaking, the overall branding objective is to reinforce the concept and public perception of the plateau as a significant region in the northeast which is on-par with the ‘Catskills’ and ‘Adirondacks’ in terms of identity destinations. More specifically, the goal is to help leverage this identity as a marketing tool for the overall trail systems and the recreational opportunities it provides. In order to meet this objective, a consistent advertising and marketing strategy should be used across a variety of platforms.

The draft Rensselaer Plateau “logo” graphic branding which is currently being developed should be deployed consistently and frequently across platforms including the website, social media, print media

and trailhead / gateway locations. Repeated use of this logo branding will help to establish the plateau identity.

Trailhead / Gateway Prototype Design

A prototype trailhead should be designed and constructed at an existing roadside location which is highly visible. This location should feature a prototype sign with the final Rensselaer Plateau logo. [Do we want to discuss having trailhead signs be “sponsored” by local business, for funding purposes?] Likewise, there are numerous gateways into the plateau which should be highlighted with welcome signage – such as “Welcome the Rensselaer Plateau”. This signage would greatly help to advance the identity of the plateau. Ideally, this signage should be privately built along the roadways for maximum visibility, but outside the road right-of-way on donated or otherwise approved land. An attractive design theme should be used for this signage, such as the use of wood, stone or other natural materials which could evoke the look and feel of national or state park signs. If privately built custom signs are not feasible, DOT-approved roadway signs could be utilized as a secondary alternative.



Social Media

The Rensselaer Plateau already utilizes a very active Twitter account (@RenssPlateau) and Facebook Page (Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, Inc.) in addition to a robust website (rensseleerplateau.org). Currently social media searches on this topic only appear to include the basic “Rensselaer Plateau” identification. It may be beneficial to develop a nickname or hashtag specific to the trails system which can be used on all three platforms to help tie them together and increase visibility. A catchy hashtag would be more likely to be used by visitors, and is easier to remember. (Many people, especially visitors to this area, have difficulty remembering how to properly spell ‘Rensselaer’, and sometimes, ‘plateau’.) This would further allow users to help spread information to other platforms, such as Instagram, which would provide a venue for stunning photos of the plateau. A potential concept for a #hashtag for the trails system would be: #RPAtrails

Brochures / Print Media

The Rensselaer Plateau already publishes a free e-newsletter which is published bi-annually.

Regional Planning:

In 2012 RPA developed the Rensselaer Plateau Regional Conservation Plan. This trails action plan advances the Conservation Plan’s goals which are:

- Conserve the Plateau's important ecological resources and biodiversity.
- Support expansion of local economic development that is compatible with the environmental health of the plateau.
- Raise public awareness about the Rensselaer Plateau.

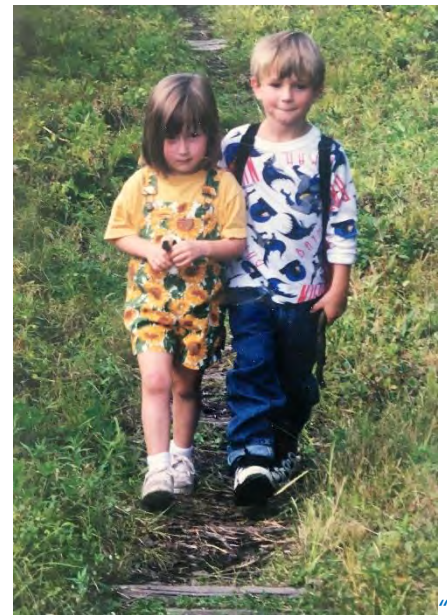
As well, it helps advance trail development concepts for key partners including the local communities on the plateau, Rensselaer County and the Rensselaer County Land Trust, and the Hudson River Valley Greenway among others.

Implementation Program: This trail action plan recommends the following next steps:

Core Trail

Implement a training program for board member/volunteers to expand the outreach program to landowners along the potential trail routes. Develop public education and related supporting material to address common concerns from a landowner perspective including:

- Trail planning, design and management—how a trail can fit into the landscape and become an important amenity to a property. Discuss permitted and prohibited uses of the trail. Address design, trail surface types, signage, fencing and other management tools.
- Trail maintenance and liability concerns—establish options and commitments for trail maintenance and address potential concerns and clarify liability issues including insurance.
- Trail usage—options for trail use including license agreements, easements and fee purchase.
- Landowner benefits—outline and documentation of the benefits of trails including scientific studies on property values, recreation and health benefits.
- Secure voluntary permissions/easements where possible and secure grant funding as necessary. Funding sources include New York State (NYSDEC and NYSOPRHP <https://parks.ny.gov/grants/recreational-trails/default.aspx>) and supportive nonprofits such as the American Hiking Society <https://americanhiking.org/national-trails-fund/>
- Recognize and celebrate landowners' contributions to the quality of life engendered by the trail for current and future generations.



A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

(Originating from famous Chinese proverb attributed to Laozi.)

On-the-road/Roadside Trails and Shared-Use Paths

Review trail action plan with local, county and state government officials including highway officials and:

- Secure concurrence of the importance of improving these selected corridors. (Modify plan as/if necessary to address any concerns of note.)
- Secure funding to undertake preliminary inventory and design development for improvements to each of the trail routes—consider partnering with other organizations to help/lead this effort (e.g., town/county government, other nonprofit). (Funding sources include Capital District Transportation Committee and New York State Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) process.)
- Develop and implement a robust public involvement program as it will be of utmost importance that adjacent landowners and neighborhood members understand the public safety benefits of the bicycle and pedestrian improvements.
- Foster formation of a core group of supporters to organize and continue to promote, support and refine the trail plan, recognizing the time and expense (and dedication) that will be required to actually see physical improvements on the ground.

Website Development

Collaborate with Rensselaer County Tourism/Rensselaer County Regional Chamber of Commerce and town/village government officials to secure matching funding and support for the website development program outlined in the plan. Secure additional grant funding through Empire State Development and other agencies/foundations as appropriate.

Conclusion

Creating better trail systems creates better communities by improving transportation options, recreation and tourism activities, natural resource preservation, and overall quality of life. This plan outlines specific trail options to connect the areas within the Rensselaer Plateau. Just as important as the trail infrastructure, is the trail branding and marketing to make sure residents and tourists know the variety of options available to them. Creating a cohesive trail implementation plan and online marketing message that reflects the input from public outreach activities will deliver the best trail connection system to the Rensselaer Plateau.

[Appendices](#)

Plateau Core Trail Map

Primary Trail Route Map

Detailed Potential Trail Routes Map (Separate Document, Previously Submitted)

Core Trail GIS and Excel Database (Separate Document, Previously Submitted)

