

# 5

## Promoting Recreation



### OVERVIEW

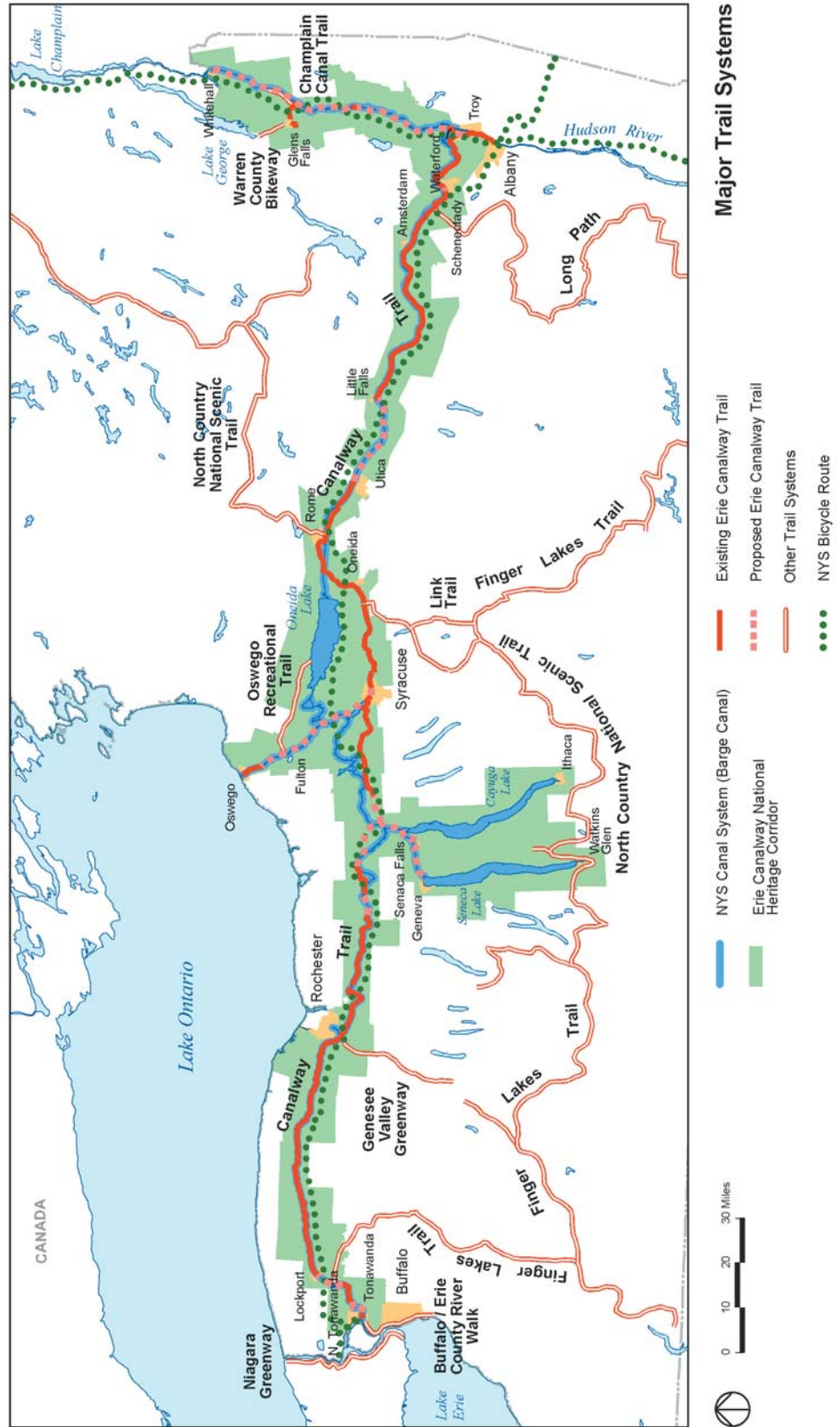
The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor offers abundant recreational activities that range from urban experiences to backwoods settings. In most cases, the quality of the available recreational resources is directly related to the stewardship of natural resources. Fishing, swimming, and boating are all dependent on pristine waters. The integrity of the landscape and continuity of trails establish the basis for attracting bicyclists and hikers into the region. The many historic resources and cultural landscapes featured along these routes provide a deeper understanding of the region and add to its sense of place.

The last decade has seen a marked increase in outdoor recreation and a new focus on the recreational potential on the New York State Canal System. At the same time, heritage tourism has become the recreation of choice for many. The many recreational destinations in the Corridor will attract visitors to the region and improve the quality of life for residents. Organized trips and special events, whether oriented toward bicycling, boating, hiking, fishing, or hunting, offer opportunities to change perceptions and draw new people into the area. The provision of sports equipment, supplies, and rental equipment can enhance the experience of visitors and increase economic activity. The development of strategically located facilities and more consistent and sophisticated information can lead visitors to extend their stay, increasing the economic benefit to the region. The packaging and promotion of the recreational resources in the Corridor will benefit from a coordinated effort that crosses its many jurisdictional boundaries.

Photo:  
Cyclists along the Canalway Trail  
(Photo courtesy of Parks & Trails NY)

Erie Canalway  
National Heritage Corridor  
Preservation and Management Plan

The National Heritage Corridor can advance the ongoing implementation of many of the recommendations of the 1995 New York State Canal Recreation-



way Plan. The Recreationway Plan was developed as a framework to promote the use of the canal system as a recreational resource for boaters, bicyclists, and pedestrians. Many of the planned improvements outlined in the Recreationway Plan have been completed, including seven canal harbors, many of the service port and lock park projects identified in the plan, and 220 miles of the Erie Canalway Trail. The National Heritage Corridor's national status, broader scope, and wider study area provide an opportunity to build on and expand the impact of the Recreationway concept, bringing it into concert with the goals of preservation, conservation, interpretation, and revitalization outlined elsewhere in this Preservation and Management Plan.

In general, this chapter addresses issues related to outdoor recreation. However, it is important to recognize that enjoyment of the Corridor's heritage extends beyond use of the region's waterways, parks, trails, and touring routes. In addition to shopping for souvenirs or antiques, visiting museums and galleries, and attending performances and events – activities that are directly related to the Corridor's unique cultural landscapes – the recreational experience of Corridor residents as well as visitors is often driven by leisure opportunities such as dining, sports events, and local entertainment. Wherever possible, outdoor recreation should be integrated into the bigger picture of heritage tourism and leisure activity – both physically, with well-marked linkages between recreational facilities and downtowns, and conceptually, through cross-promotion and other marketing efforts. These issues are addressed more directly in Chapter 7, *Economic Revitalization*, and Chapter 8, *Tourism Development and Marketing*.

**Outdoor recreation should be integrated into the bigger picture of heritage tourism and leisure activity – both physically and conceptually.**

## GOALS

The recreation goal for the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor is that *the Corridor's recreational opportunities will achieve maximum scope and diversity, in harmony with the protection of heritage resources*. Three objectives have been identified as milestones toward this goal:

### **Increase access to and diversity of recreational opportunities throughout the Corridor**

A broad range of recreational activities benefits residents, appeals to different interests in a family or group planning a trip, and encourages visitors to stay longer. Full implementation of the 1995 Recreationway Plan will maximize the Corridor's unique ability to offer urban and rural experiences in close proximity to each other.

### **Encourage repeat visits and extend the stay of recreational visitors through the quality of the experience**

Visitors to the Corridor should take away such a positive experience that they not only return, but encourage others to visit as well. The quality of the recreational experience is affected by the integrity of the cultural and natural resources; the proximity, accessibility, and development of quality trails, boating, and other



recreational opportunities; and availability of essential hospitality services that meet or exceed expectations.

### **Enhance connectivity between protected areas, trail segments, and recreation destinations**

The best way to enhance the experience of the Corridor's extensive recreational resources is to connect them, either physically, through trails, easements and careful land management, or virtually, through better interpretation consistent standards, and coordinated management, maps, and signage. Heightened connectivity will boost the perception of the Corridor as a cohesive geographic entity with a critical concentration of resources to experience.

## **CONTEXT**

Government agencies, civic groups, and business leaders are developing the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor as an attractive leisure destination for residents, vacationers, and tourists worldwide. More and more communities are seeing waterfront recreation as the way to bring new life and energy to their area, and they are finding that the key to making the most of their waterfront assets includes a clear vision and plan, broad public involvement, and creative partnerships. A number of programs continue to introduce new national and international audiences to the Corridor's remarkable recreational resources and, increasingly, are connecting them to each other and to historic town centers in an effort to improve quality of life for residents as well as visitors.

This chapter outlines the opportunities to build upon the wealth of previous plans and implementation efforts to create a spectacular place for recreation through trail use and management, connectivity and signage, water use and boater needs, seasonal use, facilities, and recreational heritage tourism.

### **NEW YORK STATE CANAL RECREATIONWAY PLAN**

**Many of the planned improvements outlined in the Recreationway Plan have been completed.**

This 1995 plan was developed by the Canal Recreationway Commission as a framework for the adaptive reuse of the canal system as a recreational resource. The plan sought to launch "the next chapter in the canal system's story" – a new vision of the canal system as a gathering place for leisure-time enjoyment, re-energizing adjacent communities and bringing new benefits and prosperity. The plan outlined numerous opportunities for water and landside recreation, including the potential for new charter and tour boats, for winter use of the canal prism and trails, and for the completion of a multi-use trail\* parallel to the entire New York State Canal System – all significantly enhanced by the continuity of public lands managed by the Canal Corporation alongside the waterways.

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\* The *Canalway Trail* was envisioned by the Recreationway Plan as a continuous 520-mile multi-use trail system parallel to the Erie, Champlain, Oswego, and Cayuga-Seneca Canals. The *Erie Canalway Trail*, running 348 miles parallel to the Erie Canal, will be the "spine" of the Canalway Trail system.

The Recreationway Plan envisioned the canal system as the spine for a linear park, with increased landside access along its entire length and recreational facilities located at strategic intervals for boating, hiking, and bicycling. These included seven new canal harbors at major gateways and stopping points and 96 service port and lock projects of varying complexity. Many of these projects were completed by the New York State Canal Corporation under the first \$32.3 million, five-year Canal Revitalization Program begun in 1996, including all seven Canal Harbors, most of the service port and lock projects, large portions of the Erie Canalway Trail, and a system-wide marketing plan. A second \$50 million five-year plan, begun in 2002, is targeting additional improvements to canal frontage at municipalities and access points throughout the system and the completion of the Erie Canalway Trail. When completed, this will be the longest continuous pedestrian and bicycle trail in the country – a significant eco-tourism destination that has already expanded recreational opportunities close to home and inspired additional trail-building efforts, providing quality of life benefits to Corridor residents.

**When completed, the Erie Canalway Trail will be the longest continuous pedestrian and bicycle trail in the country**

#### **NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF PARKS, RECREATION, AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION (OPRHP)**

In addition to developing and managing numerous state parks and historic sites with extensive recreational facilities of all kinds, the OPRHP prepares and implements the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), which sets statewide policy and priorities for recreation and historic preservation. The plan includes an analysis of supply and demand for recreation; a description of major statewide programs and initiatives related to recreation, open space, and cultural resources; and an outline for park planning and capital projects by the OPRHP and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). The plan includes many specific goals and actions within each of these areas, as well as design guidelines for recreational facilities and a generic environmental impact statement for actions related to its implementation.

Under the OPRHP's Parks Program, supported by the Environmental Protection Fund, matching grants are provided for the acquisition and/or development of parks and recreational facilities and for the protection of open space by municipalities and nonprofits. Additional funding programs provide assistance for boating and snowmobiling enforcement and aid to zoos, botanical gardens and aquariums. The OPRHP also sponsors numerous public events and recreational, educational, and outreach programs and administers the Heritage Area System.

#### **NEW YORK STATE HERITAGE AREA SYSTEM**

The Heritage Area System (formerly known as the Urban Cultural Park System) is a state-local partnership established to preserve and develop areas that have special significance to the state. Eight state heritage areas and two state heritage corridors, each guided by its own management plan, lie within or overlap the boundaries of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor. These management plans have identified recreation development as an important goal, and

also address preservation of canal-related resources, conservation, education, and economic revitalization.

Specifically, the management plans for both the Mohawk Valley and the Western Erie Canal (State) Heritage Corridors call for completion of the Erie Canalway Trail, increasing linkages between recreational facilities, and promotion of recreational amenities to regional residents and visitors. The Mohawk Valley (State) Heritage Corridor has also focused on creation of a new Mohawk Tow-path Scenic Byway, a regional partnership of communities that seeks to increase awareness, enjoyment and linkage of the wide variety of scenic, recreational and historic resources along the Mohawk River and Erie Barge Canal corridor from Waterford to Schenectady.

#### **ERIE CANAL GREENWAY**

A state agency task force is developing the concept for a legislatively designated state greenway along the Erie Canal, proposed by the Governor in 2005. The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor Commission was invited to participate as a member of the New York State Canal Corporation Interagency Task Force. The Commission will cooperate with the Canal Corporation and any entity created to help achieve compatible and complementary goals.

#### **NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (DOT)**

The Department, in conjunction with the New York State Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Council, developed the New York State Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan in 1997 as a strategic document to improve bicycle and pedestrian access, mobility, and safety statewide. The plan calls for the development, implementation, and maintenance of a complete network of on- and off-road non-motorized transportation facilities to safely provide linkages between worksites, residences, schools, shopping areas, downtowns, and recreation sites (see *Trail Activities*, page 5.11). The Department has worked to integrate the Canalway Trail into the state's transportation network through its Environmental Initiative, Context Sensitive Solutions program, and Bicycle and Pedestrian Program.

#### **NEW YORK STATE SCENIC BYWAYS**

The Department of Transportation administers the New York State Scenic Byways program, created in 1992 to coordinate recreation and tourism development with resource preservation along road corridors of outstanding regional scenic, natural, cultural or historic significance. Scenic Byways are sponsored by local or regional organizations, which develop and implement corridor management plans guided by a Scenic Byways Advisory Board that includes a number of state agencies as well as members of the motoring public, tourism associations, and organizations interested in preserving scenic quality. Several New York State Scenic Byways cross the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, each offering an alternative travel route to the region's major highways while telling a story about New York State heritage. Three of these – Lakes to

Lakes Passage, an All-American Road, and the Seaway Trail and the Mohawk Towpath Scenic Byway, both National Scenic Byways – have also been designated as “America’s Byways” by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

#### **LAKES TO LOCKS PASSAGE**

Designated an All-American Road – among the best of the nation’s scenic byways – Lakes to Locks Passage was created by merging the Champlain Canal Byway and the Champlain Trail (along Lake Champlain) for community revitalization and tourism development. The Byway’s Corridor Management Plan, developed through a partnership of the public and private stewards of the historic, natural, cultural, recreational and working landscape resources along the Champlain Canal, Upper Hudson River, Lake George and Lake Champlain regions, provides a structure to unify the communities along the interconnected waterway. Lakes to Locks Passage has developed a series of multi-modal and theme-based interpretive trails for bicycling, boating and walking the Byway, complete with guidebooks and maps. Work is currently underway to expand the Lake Champlain Birding Trail through the Upper Hudson, Lake George and Champlain Canal regions.

#### **NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION (DEC)**

The Department is responsible for the conservation and protection of the state’s environment and natural resources. DEC plans for the future use of state lands and protection of the state’s open space; advises on watershed planning efforts; administers management of water quality, air quality, environmental remediation, and solid waste; develops Watershed Restoration and Protection Action Strategies (WRAPS); manages the state’s fish, wildlife, and marine resources; and oversees local administration of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), a significant tool for influencing all development actions that require government permits. In addition to its water quality initiatives, the DEC works to enhance fishing opportunities by managing several hatcheries and stocking fishing areas.

#### **NEW YORK STATE OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION PLAN**

Jointly administered by the OPRHP and DEC, this plan sets forth the state’s policy priorities and recommendations for open space conservation and preservation. Its goals include the protection of water quality to sustain aquatic ecosystems and water-based recreation; the provision of high quality outdoor recreation, on both land and water, accessible to New Yorkers regardless of where they live, how much money they have, or their physical abilities; the protection and enhancement of scenic, historical, and cultural resources; the protection of the habitat to sustain the traditional pastimes of hunting, fishing, trapping, and viewing fish and wildlife; and the maintenance of critical natural resource-based industries, including tourism.

**Visitors would be more likely to extend their stay and develop a richer appreciation of the area if a coordinated approach were established to link destinations, provide coordinated maps and informational materials, and convey the importance of local sites to the regional and national stories.**

## RESOURCE ANALYSIS

This section analyzes the Corridor's major recreational resources and describes their associated activities. The quality of the resource, a critical mass of opportunities, continuity, and consistency will in many cases determine how useful the resource is to visitors and to local residents. Similarly, quality services and clear orientation and information will enhance the visitor experience. The major recreational resources in the Corridor can be categorized as:

- Heritage tourism activities, including experiencing cultural landscapes, historic sites, natural resources, and cultural institutions
- Water-related activities, including boating, water skiing, swimming, fishing
- Trail activities, including bicycling, walking, in-line skating, horseback riding, and picnicking
- Off-trail activities, including hiking, camping, bird watching, hunting, and trapping
- Winter activities, including cross country skiing, snowshoeing, ice skating, ice fishing, and snowmobiling

These resources, which have the potential to attract recreation-oriented visitors from beyond the Corridor boundary, are supplemented and, often, connected by a wealth of local recreational facilities and opportunities used primarily by residents.

## HERITAGE TOURISM AND SIGHTSEEING

Designated heritage areas, scenic routes and byways play particularly important roles in orienting travelers and connecting destinations both physically and thematically. A broader discussion of heritage development issues is provided in Chapter 7, *Economic Revitalization*. Key heritage tourism resources and opportunities in the Corridor are presented in the Appendix and summarized below:

**Canals and canal features** – A rich array of resources exists, remarkably intact along the 20<sup>th</sup> century Barge Canal and more fragmented along the towpath-era canal segments (see Chapter 3, *Protecting Our Heritage*). Numerous museums, visitor centers, and historic sites provide interpretation although the level of information and the message varies considerably (see Chapter 6, *Interpretation and Orientation*).

**Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area** – This national heritage area overlaps with the eastern portion of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor and seeks to recognize, preserve, protect, and interpret the nationally significant cultural and natural resources of the Hudson River Valley. The Hudson River Valley Greenway is responsible for the management of the national heritage area.

**National Park System units** – In addition to its oversight of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, the National Park Service administers four Park units within the Corridor: the Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural National Historic Site in Buffalo, the Women's Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls,



Fort Stanwix National Monument in Rome, and Saratoga National Historical Park in Stillwater. The Kate Mullany National Historic Site, an affiliated area of the National Park System in Troy is managed by the American Labor Studies Center.

**New York State Heritage Area System** – The Mohawk Valley and Western Erie Canal (State) Heritage Corridors are regional resources with many interpretive materials and sites. In addition, eight Heritage Areas, formerly known as Urban Cultural Parks, interpret areas of more localized significance within the Corridor. The Albany, Buffalo Theatre District, Hudson-Mohawk (RiverSpark), Rochester High Falls, Schenectady, Seneca Falls, Syracuse, and Whitehall Heritage Areas all incorporate state-funded, locally operated visitor centers.

**New York State Historic Sites** – Schoharie Crossing State Historic Site and Old Erie Canal State Park are thematically tied to the National Heritage Corridor. A number of other state historic sites in the Corridor predate the canals, including several colonial and Revolutionary War sites concentrated along the Mohawk and Hudson River Valleys. Others, such as the Darwin Martin House in Buffalo, a notable Frank Lloyd Wright house, post-date New York's canal era.

**New York Scenic Byways** – Four byways provide touring routes connecting heritage sites within the Corridor: Lakes to Locks Passage, connecting Waterford to Rouses Point at the northern end of Lake Champlain; the Mohawk Towpath, connecting Waterford to Schenectady; Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway, encircling Cayuga Lake; and the Revolutionary Trail, connecting Albany to Rome. Lakes to Locks Passage, an All-American Road, and the Mohawk Towpath Scenic Byway, a National Scenic Byway, have also been designated as "America's Byways" by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Other byways provide connections between the Corridor and other significant tourism regions, including the Adirondack Trail, Southern Adirondack Byway, Central Adirondack Trail, Black River Trail, and Scenic Route 90. The Seaway Trail, a 454-mile National and New York State Scenic Byway along the Lake Erie, Niagara River, Lake Ontario, and St. Lawrence River waterfronts, parallels much of the Corridor.

Marketing information for these resources is developed on a county or regional basis, often overlooking connections from one region to another. In many cases, visitors would be more likely to extend their stay and develop a richer appreciation of the area if a coordinated approach were established to link destinations, provide coordinated maps and informational materials, and convey the importance of local sites to the regional and national stories (see Chapter 6 and Chapter 8, *Tourism Development and Marketing*).

## WATER-RELATED ACTIVITIES

The Corridor offers a wide variety of settings for water-related activities, including boating of all types, swimming, and fishing. While the features and the quality of the resources influence the pattern of activities, in all cases the quality and quantity of the water is essential for people enjoying water activities. The water features within the Corridor are detailed in the Appendix:

- New York State Canal System – 524 miles of connected waterways, including land cut canals and canalized rivers, used primarily for boating and also for fishing. The canal system is officially open to navigation from May 1 to November 15, and closed to through-boaters the rest of the year; weather-related closings and other interruptions in navigation are posted on the Canal Corporation website.
- Rivers and streams – In addition to the canalized rivers, a number of smaller rivers and streams drain the area and provide opportunities for fishing and small boat use.
- Towpath-era canals – Surviving watered towpath-era canal sections are ideally suited to small boat use and casual fishing.
- Lakes – The Corridor touches on two Great Lakes and Lake Champlain, and encompasses a number of lakes in the central part of the state, including two Finger Lakes, all of which host boating of all kinds, fishing, and swimming.

The recreational boating industry in America is generally considered to have peaked in the 1980s, and recreational traffic on the New York State Canal System remains below 1989 levels. While private boat ownership and use on the canals are difficult to foster, many canal segments remain underserved by excursion, tour, and charter boat services, as well as the provisioning services needed to sustain longer trips. Unlike their European counterparts, many American vacationers have yet to embrace the pleasures of extended canal boating. In 2004, there were 17 registered tour boats and 24 registered charter boats on the canal system, including hire boats and passenger vessels. From 2003-04, the number of tour boat lockings on the canals increased 3.3 percent, from 8,239 to 8,514, and the number of hire boat lockings increased 8.5 percent, from 6,791 to 7,369 (a locking is recorded each time a vessel passes through a lock or beneath a lift bridge). The persistent recreational underutilization of the canal system represents both a cultural challenge and an opportunity for economic growth.

**Many canal segments remain underserved by excursion, tour, and charter boat services, as well as the provisioning services needed to sustain longer trips.**

Boating activities range from waterskiing and the use of large and small powerboats, houseboats, and personal watercraft to the use of non-motorized craft such as kayaks, canoes, rowboats, rowing shells, sailboards, and sailboats. The large scale of Oneida, Cayuga, and Seneca Lakes makes them well suited for water-skiing and sailing; after temporarily removing their masts and rigging, some sailboats also use the canal system and the Hudson River to travel between the Great Lakes and the Atlantic coast. In some cases, shared use of the waterways, especially the narrower canal segments, creates conflicts. Organized competitive rowing has become more popular and makes use of certain canal segments for practice and races. Competitive meets can only be held, however, if motorized traffic is stopped for a limited time period. Excessive speed of motorized boats can hamper small boating in canoes, sculls, and kayaks, whose users may prefer the quieter waters of the historic canals and the smaller rivers, streams, and lakes in the region.

While the canal harbors, service ports, and lock parks constructed since the 1995 Recreationway Plan have greatly enhanced public access to the canal system, many places still lack supportive or related services. Support services are critical for boating, especially public boat launches and marinas where docking, fuel, information, and other services are available. Visitors and many residents

depend on boat rentals for access to the water, whether for a weeklong houseboat excursion or an afternoon of canoeing or fishing from a rowboat. Camping facilities and motels convenient to the canal harbors, service areas, and marinas are important features needed by long distance boaters.

Action should be taken to encourage the participation of private enterprise in improving, creating and maintaining boater facilities in the Corridor. The Recreationway Plan's description of a typical service port included both private elements, such as a marina, retail shops or restaurants, and rental facilities, and public components such as a Canalway Trail linkage and a waterfront park. Recommendations for expanding private enterprise in the Corridor are provided in Chapter 7, *Economic Revitalization*. Some steps specific to recreation development are already being taken. For example, in response to the concerns of private marina operators, the Canal Corporation is reviewing its rules and regulations on fees for the overnight use of public canal system bulkheads and docks.

Fishing occurs throughout the region, with some water bodies in the Corridor offering opportunities that are among the best in New York and the United States. This activity is popular with many residents, but salmon runs, fishing tournaments, and seasonal fishing opportunities also have the ability to attract anglers from outside the region and state; the opportunities for carp fishing along the canal have begun to attract international interest. In the Corridor, interest in ice fishing, particularly on Oneida Lake, and winter steelhead fishing, at the mouth of the Oswego Canal, has been increasing in recent years. Throughout the canal system and connecting lakes, anglers can catch a large variety of fish, including bullhead, bass (rock, small mouth, and large mouth), northern pike, catfish, sheepshead, yellow perch, carp, bluegill/pumpkinseed, walleye, steelhead, and salmon. High water quality, the control of invasive fauna and flora, increased public boat launches and other access sites, the acquisition and management of public fishing rights, and improved tourism information and marketing are key for expanding this activity.

Swimming is an activity that primarily serves local populations at informal locations throughout the Corridor. Water quality issues limit swimming opportunities in many canal segments due to historic industrial discharges, combined sewer outfalls, and urban and agricultural runoff. As these water pollution issues continue to be addressed state-wide, opportunities for swimming may increase within the Corridor.

## TRAIL ACTIVITIES

Trail systems in and around the Corridor provide a significant recreational resource in the region. In particular, the Erie Canalway Trail and other statewide and national trails can become major visitor destinations. Many people may also discover the many regional and local trails that link to the Erie Canalway Trail, each distinguished by unique features and destinations along the way. Although the Corridor as a whole is served by a variety of long-distance trails, there are many opportunities to improve links between trails, or between trails and other recreational facilities or downtown areas. Leading trail organizations

such as Parks & Trails NY have set as a goal the establishment of a continuous trail network, with a maximum of trail use opportunities, connected to the system-wide Canalway Trail. Regional and metro area bicycle/pedestrian plans undertaken with the support of the New York State Department of Transportation are another key element of the Corridor's trail network.

Most trails in the region are multi-use and allow walking, bicycling, and cross country skiing. Special uses such as horseback riding, in-line skating, mountain biking, and snowmobiling are designated on a trail-by-trail basis, with considerable variation from one location to another. The North Country National Scenic Trail and the Finger Lakes Trail are designated for foot traffic only. By maintaining the presence of horses in the region, multi-use and designated horseback riding trails provide a reminder of the primary source of power for canal boats in the towpath-era canals. The characteristics of individual trails are summarized in the table below.

**There are many opportunities to improve links between trails, and between trails and downtown areas or recreational facilities.**

	Miles	Horseback Riding	In-line Skating	Snowmobiling
<b>Canalway Trail Segments (1)</b>				
Erie Canalway Trail				
Erie Canal Heritage Trail (2)	100	○	●	○
Camillus Canal Park Trail	8	●		●
Old Erie Canal State Park Trail	36	●		●
Rome-Utica	14		●	
Little Falls-Fort Plain	15			●
Canajoharie-Fort Hunter	17		●	●
Mohawk-Hudson Bikeway	60		●	
Champlain Canal Trail				
Feeder Canal Park	7			
<b>National/Statewide Laterals</b>				
North Country Trail	4,600			
Finger Lake Trail	560			
<b>Regional Laterals</b>				
Long Path Trail	326			
Genesee Valley Greenway	52	●	●	●
Oswego Recreational Trail	26	●		●
Link Trail	30	●		
Niagara Greenway	33		●	
Buffalo/Erie County Riverwalk	12		●	
Warren County Bikeway	17		●	

(1)Analysis does not include urban segments between 1 and 3 miles long

(2)Equestrian use and snowmobile use allowed in some sections (○)

For the national and statewide trails where recreation is restricted to non-motorized uses, multiple trail alignments may be necessary to accommodate other uses, especially along the canal towpaths. This could be accomplished in some areas by creating snowmobile trails on the opposite bank or by using the bed of the frozen canal, where the surface and the width are better suited for snowmobiles.

For bicyclists, the completed segments of the Erie Canalway Trail offer long stretches of off-road routes, with connections to small roads through the countryside. Once completed, the continuous 348-mile off-road trail along the route of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century canals will provide a unique touring experience. Bicyclists might also be interested in pursuing the many other trails in the region, such as the Genesee Valley Greenway, Niagara Greenway, Finger Lakes National Forest Loop, Warren County Bikeway, and Buffalo and Erie County Riverwalk.

Experienced bicyclists looking to explore the Corridor may also choose to follow New York's State Bicycle Route 5, a 365-mile on-road signed bicycle route that parallels the Erie Canalway Trail between Niagara Falls and Albany and provides a direct link to State Bicycle Routes 9, 11, 14, 19 and 20. Together, these total over 1,700 miles of signed on-road bicycle routes across upstate New York, with links to other bicycle routes in Pennsylvania, Vermont, Massachusetts, and the Province of Quebec.

As a high priority project for the Canal Corporation, the implementation of the Erie Canalway Trail is steadily making progress, with funding and a phasing plan in place for remaining sections. Currently, about 220 miles of the trail are complete. In some locations, particularly along the lateral trails, key gaps remain. For example, a gap of 11 miles separates Fort Ann from Whitehall; since both towns are tourist destinations, this segment would be valuable for day trips as well as long-range cyclists traveling to or from the Lake Champlain bikeways. Upon completion, the Erie Canalway Trail will be the nation's longest continuous, dedicated hiking and bicycling trail. The value of the trail would be enhanced considerably by connections to regional trail systems throughout the Corridor.

As most recreational bicyclists and trail users arrive by personal automobile, there is a need for additional trailhead sites with parking facilities in villages and at key access points, where space is available. For the Erie Canalway Trail to truly become a national and international destination for bicyclists, more bicycle-related infrastructure, such as bicycle racks, needs to be installed, and better links from the area airports and train stations need to be established. For the annual Cycling the Erie Canal tour on the Erie Canalway Trail, riders are directed to take taxis from the airports and train stations to access the trail. At the same time, better links between trails and downtown areas could encourage commuting by bicycle or walking. Whether the improved links take the form of a physical trail connection or better signage within transportation hubs, easier connections will increase the number of riders on the trail.

Hikers and walkers are welcome on the trails mentioned above, but many may be attracted to some of the more remote or rugged trails in the region such as the North Country National Scenic Trail, the Finger Lakes Trail, the Long Path Trail, and the Link Trail. These off-road trails generally do not allow wheeled or motorized use. Four locations in the Corridor and vicinity currently offer approximately 100 miles of trails for horseback riders: Old Erie Canal State Park, Camillus Erie Canal Park, the Link Trail in Madison County, and the Oswego Recreational Trail.

**For the Canalway Trail to truly become a national and international destination for bicyclists, better links from the area airports and train stations need to be established.**



**Services for trail users such as private campsites and accommodations, outfitting and bicycle shops, and equipment rental facilities represent key opportunities for small business development along the Corridor's major trails and downtown or waterfront trail linkages .**

Many successful partnerships have been formed between organizations to facilitate trail completion and maintenance, but trail management can be a challenge. Some trails use public lands; others access private holdings through cooperative agreements and easements. Routes are periodically updated and improved as new alignments become available. Maps are available for some trails, but not others. Allowable uses and surface materials vary from segment to segment. The region's trails are managed by a wide variety of entities, including non-profit and volunteer organizations; town, city and county governments; the National Park Service, which administers the North Country Scenic Trail in cooperation with numerous public and private partners; and statewide agencies including the New York State Canal Corporation, Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), and Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP).

Campsites supported by the Canal Corporation have been opened along the Canalway Trail and are tailored to the needs of bicyclists, hikers, and boaters. The sites include enough area for at least four tents, potable water, picnic tables, grills, and toilets. New facilities are planned at canal locks and other publicly owned locations. The long-term goal is to establish a network of campsites along the Erie Canalway Trail approximately 35 miles apart. Additional services for trail users such as private campsites and accommodations, outfitting and bicycle shops, and equipment rental facilities represent key opportunities for small business development along the Corridor's major trails and downtown or waterfront trail linkages (see Chapter 7, *Economic Revitalization*).

#### **OFF-TRAIL ACTIVITIES**

The Corridor offers tremendous opportunity for off-trail activities based on the extensive lands in local, state, and national ownership. While not all of this land is contiguous, it is concentrated in certain portions of the Corridor, providing regional focus for people who enjoy the back-country experience. Permitted activities vary within these areas, but generally include hunting and trapping during designated seasons, cross country skiing and snowshoeing in winter, and hiking, bird watching, and horseback riding year-round.

The central area of the Corridor provides significant attractions for outdoors enthusiasts, anchored by the excellent fishing in the Oswego River, Oneida Lake, Lake Ontario, and other waterways. Glacial action in this region gave rise to swampy, low-lying areas that have resisted development and provide excellent habitat for waterfowl and woodland animals, particularly in the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, a popular site for bird watching. Because these marshlands are so extensive, they form an important part of the flyway for migrating birds. A band of marshlands also extends along the southern edge of the Corridor between Lockport and Rochester, providing a significant destination for off-trail activities in the western Erie Canal region. In these remote areas, including the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge, hunters will find waterfowl, rabbit, fox, raccoon, and squirrel. These areas also serve as part of the flyway for migration of ducks and Canadian geese.

The Finger Lakes are another significant destination for outdoor activities. While the lakes themselves offer rich fishing and boating opportunities, the mix of hardwood forest uplands, open pastures, and dramatic waterfalls will also draw people. Numerous wineries overlook the lakeshores and offer another destination for visitors in the region. Significant natural areas have been preserved under state and federal management. The eastern Erie Canal region and the Champlain Valley have older settlement patterns and do not have major back-country areas under public ownership within the boundaries of the Corridor. Most of the off-trail activities that occur in this region are focused on the tremendous resources of Adirondack Park to the north and the Catskills to the south. Moreau Lake State Park in Glens Falls and Delta Lake State Park north of Rome are primarily water-related resources, but they do offer hiking, camping, cross country skiing, and snowmobiling.

#### **WINTER ACTIVITIES**

Resources for winter recreation in the Corridor are diffuse and relatively small in scale, making them more likely to appeal to the local community than to destination visitors. Ice fishing occurs on the lakes and river segments. Cross country skiing is allowed on most trails, although the level terrain may be better suited to short workouts rather than long distance touring. The region offers some significant opportunities for snowshoeing, especially in the more remote areas. Because snowmobiles are allowed only on limited towpath segments and along the 26-mile Oswego Recreational Trail, this use is more likely to occur in nearby uplands, the Tug Hill Plateau, and the Adirondack and Catskill Mountains. Long distance ice skating along the land-cut canals would be quite unique, but the necessity of drawing down the water in most segments for winter lock maintenance precludes this activity. Still, a shallow ice sheet, cleared of snow and stopping short of the lock mechanisms, would in fact be preferable for safety.

The ability to share the trail is a key question, especially with motorized snowmobiles that can travel at high speeds. The possibility of allowing snowmobile use on a shallow frozen canal bed has been raised; this would have to be balanced with ice skating. Similarly, snowmobile use on the trail segments may conflict with cross-country skiing. In all cases, the enforcement of speed limits would be essential for safety.

Winter trail use decisions should be made on a collective regional scale rather than at an individual community level, to help maximize continuity in long-distance opportunities and ensure that the needs of all user groups are met. Snowmobile riders may require distances that span community boundaries to provide a worthwhile and pleasurable adventure. As such, partnerships with snowmobiling clubs should be sought to better understand their needs, balance trail uses appropriately, and encourage enforcement of trail use regulations.

In order to promote winter activities, whether for residents or visitors, small parking lots and trailheads are necessary at regular intervals and will require maintenance and snow clearing during the winter. Special consideration should be given to locations near population centers.

## GUIDELINES FOR HERITAGE DEVELOPMENT

The diversity of recreation options within the Corridor provides residents and visitors with opportunities to improve their physical health through exercise, to experience and appreciate natural and scenic resources, and to educate themselves about and be inspired by the history of the region. The sheer size of the Corridor makes prioritizing the scope of recreational improvements daunting. The criteria described below provide a framework for evaluating projects and identifying those that will best serve the overall recreational success of the Corridor, while still providing needed local improvements.

The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor supports full implementation of the 1995 Recreationway Plan, the regional plans on which it was based, and the local, regional, and statewide efforts it set in motion. In particular, the Corridor's outreach and education efforts, technical assistance, and targeted investments seek to advance the Recreationway Plan's recommendations for expanding recreation and tour boating opportunities, developing side trails off the system-wide Canalway Trail, encouraging open space conservation, and creating a continuous greenway alongside the canal system (see Chapter 4, *Conserving Natural Resources*).

The opportunity exists to make the Corridor a national and international destination for travelers in pursuit of unique outdoor recreation experiences (see Chapter 8, *Tourism Development and Marketing*). A signature sporting event focusing on human athleticism, such as a long-distance relay event with running, bicycling, and paddling segments along the length of the canals, could help raise the Corridor's profile, bringing both spectators and top-level athletes to the canals. The Commission will support the development of this and other athletic events that will increase utilization of and support for the Corridor's recreational facilities by both residents and visitors.

**The Corridor seeks to advance the Recreationway Plan's recommendations for expanding recreation and tour boating opportunities, developing side trails off the system-wide Canalway Trail, and encouraging open space conservation and the creation of a continuous greenway alongside the canal system.**

### GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. **Diversity of Use** – Proposed projects that offer a range of uses within their scope increase the overall opportunities in the Corridor and appeal to more than one type of user. For example, boating facilities located near a trailhead can provide facilities for hikers as well as boaters. Trails that connect both cultural and natural resources appeal to those seeking outdoor experiences and those eager to embrace the history of the region.

2. **Location and Access** – Proposed projects close to existing recreational resources, are accessible through public lands, and are along or connect to the Canalway Trail, the Barge Canal, or the towpath-era canals should be given priority. These projects will demand fewer resource inputs, will serve a known existing recreational audience, and will continue to focus attention on the main attraction of the Corridor – the historic canal system. In addition, projects that complete links (close gaps) between existing recreational destinations should be prioritized. These links will help create the identity of the larger connected Corridor, provide alternative lengths of experiences, and provide options for different user groups.

3. Accessibility – Many recreational facilities in the Corridor, including pedestrian trails, boat launches, and fishing access points, are inaccessible to people with disabilities. Recipients of Corridor support for recreational development must demonstrate that appropriate measures have been taken consistent with federal requirements to allow access by visitors with disabilities.

4. Visual Quality/Scenic Value – Proposed projects that provide access to or through areas of high scenic value should be given a high priority. Promontories, natural features that display the region's geology and hydrology (e.g., waterfalls, cliffs), and historic structures should be considered of high scenic value. Projects should focus on showcasing the most scenic and visually appealing landscapes within the Corridor; increased opportunities to view the canal system from roadside pulloffs should also be pursued. Cultural landscape surveys and scenic quality assessments can identify priority locations and guide efforts to protect and enhance scenic value (see Chapter 3, *Protecting Our Heritage*).

5. Ecological Health - All decisions made to increase the recreation potential of the Corridor should consider the ecology of the natural resources in which new facilities are constructed. Ecological health can be measured by the presence of endangered, threatened or rare communities; high species diversity and habitat quality; and high ecological function (nutrient cycling, role in hydrological cycle). When recreational facilities are located in areas of high ecological health, construction must be environmentally sensitive and limit loss of habitat. Maintenance of recreational resources, such as the clearing of vegetation from trails and the control of pests and invasive species, should use environmentally sensitive methods.

6. Cultural Significance – All decisions made to increase the recreation potential of the Corridor should consider the cultural significance of the historic resources in which new facilities are constructed. Projects proposed within cultural landscapes should not jeopardize the overall historic integrity and character-defining features of that landscape (see Chapter 3, *Protecting Our Heritage*). Best practices for the private development of recreational facilities, including waterfront access for residential and commercial properties, should be identified and publicized.

7. Visitor Use Management – Expanded recreational facilities require adequate support infrastructure and services such as bathrooms, straightforward circulation plans, and safety and orientation devices such as signage, fencing, lighting, and boundary markers to prevent damage to sensitive areas and private property. In particular, much more signage providing directions, mileage, and trail use regulations is needed for the region's pedestrian, bicycle, and multi-use trails, and enhanced visitor guides are needed for many segments of the canal system. Recipients of Corridor support for recreational development should be required to address the concerns of private property owners and other parties affected by their work, and make use of the guidelines regarding signage, orientation, and visitor services provided in Chapter 6, *Interpretation and Orientation*.

Below is a summary of activity-specific guidelines to assist in establishing priorities for recreation-focused improvements within the Corridor. The guidelines vary in specificity from convening working groups to determining trail surfaces. Roundtables, bringing together recreational facility managers from across the Corridor, may be a particularly effective means of expanding awareness and generating consensus on multiple use guidelines, design standards, and strategies for enhancing seasonal use.

**Heritage Tourism** – includes experiencing cultural landscapes, historic sites, natural resources, and cultural institutions. For guidelines, see Chapter 3, *Protecting Our Heritage*; Chapter 6, *Interpretation and Orientation*; and Chapter 7, *Economic Revitalization*.

**Water-related Activities** – include boating, fishing, and swimming

1. New boating opportunities for a wide variety of recreational users should be strongly encouraged. Excursion or day-trip boats, tour boats, charter or hire boats, and nonmotorized rental boats require distinct dockages and supportive services. Ready access to these activities should be a primary consideration in the location of new recreational facilities, waterfront improvements, and interpretive and visitor services (see Chapter 6, *Interpretation and Orientation*); they should be prominently featured in orientation and tourism promotion materials. Use of nonmotorized boats such as canoes and kayaks, a growing activity, can be encouraged by construction of launches for car-top boats and enforcement of speed limits to limit powerboat wakes.

2. New boating facilities and support services should continue to be installed at locations consistent with the system of boating services outlined in the Recreationway Plan. This system was based on length of average travel days, proximity to population centers, and potential to maximize opportunities for a variety of boating and other recreational activities. Facilities should accommodate non-motorized as well as motorized transportation and include boat rental facilities and removable boarding docks where the market demands them. The maintenance and upgrade of existing boat launches should be a high priority. To meet regional demand, any new boat launches should be sited in more developed recreation areas where roadway access is available, demand is high, and potential impacts to sensitive environmental resources is low. Consideration should also be given to winter-time access to allow for ice fishing.

3. Opportunities to promote the recreational use of the canal system by club and student athletes should be encouraged. Efforts to develop or expand rowing facilities, designate no-wake zones, and coordinate temporary stoppages of motorized boat traffic in limited canal segments should be undertaken in partnership with the organizers of regattas, community rowing programs, and educational boat building programs.

4. Fishing activities can be encouraged through improved boating facilities (see above) and dock facilities on shore. Fishing platforms and docks should be encouraged in appropriate town center settings or in proximity to other devel-

**Ready access to boating opportunities should be a primary consideration in the location of new recreational facilities, waterfront improvements, and interpretive and visitor services**



oped recreational facilities. Bird viewing platforms, set carefully into the landscape and along trails, can double as fishing platforms in some cases.

5. The maintenance and upgrade of existing swimming facilities should be a priority. Where sufficient demand exists, new swimming facilities should be sited carefully to meet criteria of acceptable water quality, adequate roadway access, suitable topography to minimize shoreline erosion, protection of sensitive wetland or bank vegetation, separation from boat launch facilities, little or no current, and other safety considerations.

6. The spread of invasive species such as water chestnuts and zebra mussels threatens to alter or curtail recreational activities such as boating, fishing, and swimming in some parts of the canal system. Corridor support for new water-related recreational facilities will seek to improve education about ways to reduce invasive species, such as routine boat maintenance and rinsing to reduce transfer.

**Trail Activities** – include bicycling, walking, in-line skating, horseback riding

1. Trail projects that connect to the Canalway Trail should be given priority over other trail construction. The canal system is the hallmark of the Corridor and every effort to link with it should be encouraged. Links to other key statewide, regional, and local trails, as well as downtown areas, waterfronts, and intermodal hubs such as train and bus stations, should also be encouraged.

2. Trailheads should be constructed at regular intervals on major pedestrian and bicycle trails as a means to increase public access and promote use. Interpretive kiosks with maps, trail information, and historic references should be installed at each trailhead location. Trailhead parking facilities should be located near canal locks, scenic locations, restaurants, or town centers, where they can serve as rest areas or support additional trailside amenities. Trail marking should be used to indicate permitted uses, and include directional signage and mile markers for bicyclists. Markings should also be placed in advance of intersections with other on- or off-road trails, especially the Canalway Trail. Other amenities that should be considered include emergency call boxes and weather shelters, potable water supply, picnic tables, and restrooms.

3. Each historic, natural, and cultural site gains significance and popularity when it is linked with another resource. Priority should be given to trails that access canal-related sites and allow travel through or views of Corridor cultural landscapes (see Chapter 3, *Protecting Our Heritage*), but should not be exclusive of other historic sites in the region (e.g., Revolutionary War sites, Native American sites). Car trips to and from these sites may also be reduced if alternative modes of transportation are available and intermodal connections are provided and well-marked.

4. In general, trails should be designed as multi-use trails except in cases of documented historic conflict. Multiple use trails meet the needs of most users, and limit the environmental impact and financial burden of dual trail construc-

**Trail projects that connect to the Canalway Trail should be given priority.**

tion; fewer signs clutter the landscape, and trail monitoring and surveillance are simplified. Trail use conflicts typically occur between pedestrians, bicyclists, and in-line skaters, and between snowmobilers and cross-country skiers in the winter. Trails that adequately address trail user speeds, sight distances, and trail widths can reduce the potential for conflict. In situations where use conflicts are not easily resolved and limited resources preclude the construction of additional trails, the concept of alternate-day zoning could be explored to handle heavy trail use. Under this system, the trails continue to be open to all uses, but are designated for a specific use on a given day.

5. The surface material of a trail often influences its use. Some trails follow old rail beds and have a cinder base; others follow the old towpaths and are surfaced in stone dust or asphalt. Stone dust and dirt paths are more suitable for horses, while road bicycles and in-line skates perform best on asphalt. The trail associations in the state have found that stone dust is the easiest surface to maintain. The Corridor will seek to support trails that are tailored to the desired user group and have the organizational capacity for both trail construction and long-term maintenance. Typically, trails in urban areas should be paved to promote a greater diversity of activities and populations. Trails in rural (exurban) areas should be stone dust for multi-purpose use (bicycle, horse, foot), ease of maintenance, and initial cost reduction. Lighting should be considered for safety and to appeal to evening uses, and designed to minimize light pollution of the night sky.

6. Individual regional and community trail planning and management efforts should seek to cooperate on use regulations and enforcement, publishing and distribution of maps, and installation of consistent signage throughout the Corridor's trail networks.

**Off-Trail Activities** – include hiking, camping, bird watching, hunting, and trapping

1. With the goal of creating a network of camping facilities in the Corridor, campsite construction should be prioritized where gaps exist along the Canalway Trail and other known multi-day outing routes. Campsites should be designed to accommodate multiple types of recreational activities. Modeled after the Canal Corporation's campsites along the Canalway Trail, campsites should include areas for tents, potable water, picnic tables, grills, and toilets (back-country camp sites not included), as well as put-ins for non-motorized boats.

2. Construction of additional hiking trails should be focused on linking existing trails to one another within the Corridor and to recreational facilities and established trail networks outside the Corridor. Extensive trail networks appeal to the multi-day visitor as well as residents seeking a variety of hiking options.

3. Facilities to enhance bird watching should be designed to minimize interference with the quality of the wildlife habitat. Where recreational trails, drives, and other facilities already exist, careful landscape design can serve to attract more birds by providing a diversity of habitat including fields, dense shrub-

**Trail use decisions should be made on a collective regional scale rather than at an individual community level**

bery, and wetland plantings. In more sensitive environments, boardwalks, trails, viewing platforms, and parking, if carefully sited, can provide limited access that enhances the experience. Special consideration should be given to prime sites on the north-south flyway, such as the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, both to protect the natural habitat and to allow for limited access and birdwatching. Interpretive signage and active programming can provide information about the variety of species, the importance of habitat, and threats to the ecosystem, including the activities of humans, dogs, and horses, and the various unintended consequences.

4. Hunting activities can be promoted through the preservation of large tracts of inter-connected wildlife habitat, especially undeveloped back woods and marsh areas where there is limited human activity. Hunting proximate to the canal system, an area of active public use, should be discouraged. Cooperative agreements with private landowners allow public access for hunting and other recreational purposes.

**Winter Activities** – include cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, ice skating, ice fishing, and snowmobiling

1. Regional working groups should be convened to address the dual use of trails by snowmobiles and cross-country skiers. In order to attract snowmobilers, adequate trail mileage must be available. As such, neighboring towns need to work together in the trail use decision-making process to address the snowmobiling issue. Involvement in trail use decisions by those affected is the best course of action for achieving a positive outcome.

2. Ice skating may be possible on portions of the canal if cooperative agreements can be arranged between the Canal Corporation and local municipalities and interest groups. The Canal Corporation's concerns related to winter-time maintenance must be addressed, and may require creating a shallow ice sheet in the prism and installing barriers to prevent the ice from reaching lock structures. Access into the canal prism must also be addressed.

