



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

OVERLOOK MOUNTAIN WILD FOREST

Draft Amendment

to the

1999 Overlook Mountain Wild Forest Unit Management Plan

NYS DEC, REGION 3, DIVISION OF LANDS AND FORESTS

21 South Putt Corners Road, New Paltz, NY 12561
(845) 256-3076 | r3.ump@dec.ny.gov

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Overview

This is an amendment to the Overlook Mountain Wild Forest Unit Management Plan (UMP) which was adopted in May 1999. The UMP provides the area description and history, information on the inventory, use and capacity to withstand use, management and policy, proposed use and management, and a schedule for implementation and budget.

The Overlook Mountain Wild Forest is a management unit in the southeastern portion of the Catskill Park made up of Forest Preserve lands in the Town of Woodstock in Ulster County. The unit consists of approximately 590 acres of land bordered to the north and east by the Indian Head Wilderness Area.

This amendment proposes 4 projects to be implemented within the Overlook Mountain Wild Forest which address several areas of concern including: classification of recently acquired lands, visitor parking, public access and public sanitation (see Map 1).

Project 1 – Classification of Recently Acquired Lands

Five parcels of land have been acquired that are adjacent to this unit since the adoption of the UMP. Four parcels were acquired from the Open Space Institute (OSI) consisting of Magic Meadow (198.24 acres), former Illges lot (27.82 acres), former Berg lot (84 acres) and the former KTD lot (74.851 acres). The fifth parcel was acquired from the Town of Woodstock and is located off of California Quarry Road and is referred to as the California Quarry Road parcel (191.205 acres).

Catskill Forest Preserve lands can be classified through a revision to the Catskill Park State Land Master Plan or through an amendment to a Unit Management Plan. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (Department) proposes to classify the five parcels described above through this UMP amendment as Wild Forest to be added to the Overlook Mountain Wild Forest Unit Management Plan.

With the addition of the five parcels described above, this unit has grown from 590 acres to approximately 1,166 acres of Forest Preserve land.

Project 2 – Improve Visitor Parking

Overlook Mountain Trailhead Parking

Trailhead registers are used by the Department to estimate the amount of public use occurring on State lands and are used as a guide to assist with management decisions regarding the use of our public lands. Although trail registers do not capture complete visitor usage, due in part to registration being voluntary and rates of registration varying significantly from trailhead to trailhead, they do provide information regarding trends in visitor usage. The total amount of registered users may vary significantly from year to

year at a particular trailhead but the rate of registration, that is the percent of the actual users signing in, likely varies much less. This reasonably stable rate of registration allows for year to year comparisons regarding trends in overall usage at each trailhead.

The Overlook Mountain Trailhead, located on Meads Mountain Road, is the most visited trailhead in the southern Catskills according to visitor use tallies derived from trailhead registers maintained by the Department in Sullivan and Ulster Counties. Additionally, visitor use of the area appears to be increasing significantly on an annual basis (see Table 1).

Overlook Mountain Trail Register Sign In Totals	
2012	7,491
2013	9,246
2014	10,860
2015	12,610

Table 1

The Overlook Mountain trailhead register is estimated to have one of the lower sign-in rates (+/- 20%) when compared to other trailheads in the region. This may be due to the straightforward manner of the trail and it being located on the fire tower access road. Based on the estimated rate of registration of approximately 20%, the number of visitors utilizing the Overlook Mountain Trailhead parking area could be as much as five times the numbers shown in Table 1. This use is apparent on most weekends and many weekdays as visitor parking spills out of the current parking area onto both sides of Meads Mountain Road south towards the Village of Woodstock as well as to the north of the parking area on both sides of Macdaniel Road. This large overflow of parking has caused significant problems for the safe passage of the roads by the residents and visitors of the area as well as to the adjacent private lands owned by the Karma Triyana Dharmachakra (KTD) Monastery. This has prompted the Town of Woodstock to post “No Parking” signs along both roads to discourage parking in an attempt to allow for the safe passage of vehicles.

Due to the continual overflow of the Overlook Mountain trailhead parking area, the Department has determined that additional parking facilities are necessary to alleviate the problems caused by visitors parking on town roads and the overcrowding of current parking facilities.

The Department proposes to construct a 25-30 car parking area along the north side of Macdaniel Road, southwest of the Magic Meadow area (see Map 2). The proposed parking area will be located about ½ mile northwest of the current Overlook Mountain trailhead on Meads Mountain Road and if built, will nearly double the available parking. The parking area will include spaces designed, constructed and marked for

accessibility. In addition, an accessible information kiosk will be constructed to provide visitor information regarding recreational opportunities available in the area.

Although the addition of this proposed parking area is expected to alleviate some of the parking issues associated with the use of this area, it is unlikely that it will resolve all of the issues. The Department will continue to seek viable options for further improving access to the Overlook Mountain trailhead.

California Quarry Parking and Access

The Department recently acquired the 191 acre California Quarry parcel located off of California Quarry Road from the Town of Woodstock to conserve the southeastern slopes of Overlook Mountain as well as to improve access to the Overlook Mountain Wild Forest and the surrounding Indian Head Wilderness Area.

To improve public access, the Department proposes to remove the existing gate currently inhibiting vehicular access to the California Quarry parcel and constructing a 10 car parking area in the old quarry located just beyond the existing gate. The gate would then be relocated to the east, adjacent to the fence surrounding the communication tower, to prohibit unauthorized vehicular access beyond the proposed parking area (see Map 4). The parking area will include spaces designed, constructed and marked for accessibility. In addition, an accessible information kiosk will be constructed to provide visitor information regarding recreational opportunities available in the area.

To provide the public with clear access to State lands, a short foot trail (< 0.5 mile) will be delineated and marked within the existing 50 foot wide public easement leading from the proposed parking area to State lands(see Map 4).

Forest Preserve access and parking signs will be installed at the junction of the access road and California Quarry Road to provide clear direction for public access of State lands.

Project 3 – Improve Public Access

Connector Trail

Due to the distance of the proposed Macdaniel Road parking area from the Overlook Mountain trailhead , the Department proposes to build a short foot trail connecting the proposed parking area with the red marked Overlook Mountain Spur Trail just beyond the gate and prior to the existing information kiosk and trail register (see Map 2). This will eliminate the need for the public to walk along the shoulder of Macdaniel road for nearly ½ mile to get to the Overlook trailhead. This new trail will be built in a sustainable manner using best management practices and best available techniques, and will take advantage of the user-created and unofficial network of trails that currently exist between Magic Meadow and the Overlook Mountain Spur Trail.

Loop Trails

In addition to the connector trail proposed above, the Department proposes to construct two short foot trail loops to provide additional opportunities for visitors seeking shorter hiking options. The proposed loop trails will utilize existing user created trails in the area where appropriate. Each trail will consist of approximately 1/3 mile in length and will connect to the proposed Macdaniel Road parking area via the proposed connector trail (see Map 3).

Opportunities to provide access for visitors of all abilities will be sought during the trail layout and design phase of all proposed trails listed above.

Overlook Mountain Fire Tower-Overlook Mountain Spur Trail

Currently, public access to the Overlook Mountain fire tower is attained via hiking approximately 2.4 miles along the Overlook Mountain Spur Trail beginning from the Overlook Mountain parking area located on Meads Mountain Road. This trail utilizes the existing gravel road which was constructed for access to the Overlook Mountain House and later, to access the fire tower. The Department is subject to two private leases utilized for operation and maintenance of several communication towers. The agreements also permit the lessees to access the towers via motor vehicular and to perform maintenance on the access road (AKA Overlook Mountain Spur Trail) from Meads Mountain Road up to the communication towers, located adjacent to the Overlook Mountain House ruins.

To improve access to the fire tower for visitors of all abilities, the Department proposes to designate the Overlook Mountain Spur Trail from Meads Mountain Road to the fire tower as a CP-3 *"Motor Vehicle Access to State Lands Under Jurisdiction of the Department of Environmental Conservation for People with Disabilities"* road. If approved, the designation of the road would allow visitors with disabilities the ability to drive a motor vehicle to the fire tower via a permit. This would allow visitors of all abilities to visit one of the five remaining Catskill fire towers and attain a panoramic view of the surrounding area from the base of the tower. In addition, the Department proposes to construct an information kiosk or wayside exhibit near the tower to provide visitors information on such things as notable visible features such as mountain peaks, the Hudson River, New York City Reservoirs and other similar objects of interest.

Motor vehicles will be limited to passenger vehicles equipped with four wheel drive and only allowed during the time period of April 1 through December 15 unless snow or ice covered. Due to the steepness of terrain, public motor vehicle use under a CP-3 permit will be prohibited during times of ice or snow cover.

The gate located at the entrance to the Overlook Mountain Spur Trail adjacent to the Overlook Mountain Parking Area on Meads Mountain Road will remain closed to prevent unauthorized motor vehicle access. Recipients of a CP-3 permit wishing to

utilize the road will be allowed access through the gate via a key or combination to the lock.

Project 4 – Improve Public Sanitation

Visitor usage at the Overlook Mountain trailhead has been increasing significantly on an annual basis as indicated by the amount of visitors signing in at the trailhead register. This increase in usage has prompted many visitors to seek formal sanitation facilities such as those found at the KTD Monastery located across from the trailhead parking area, causing an undue burden on the Monastery.

In an effort to protect the natural resources and to alleviate public pressure on neighboring landowners for sanitation facilities, the Department proposes to install two port-a-john style sanitation units at the Overlook Mountain trailhead. Sanitation facilities will be placed near the gate at the beginning of the Overlook Trail and will include at least one unit which meets current accessibility standards.

The Department will continue to monitor public use of the Overlook Mountain trailhead and Macdaniel Road parking area (if approved), to ensure that the sanitation facilities provided are adequate for the amount of use the area receives.

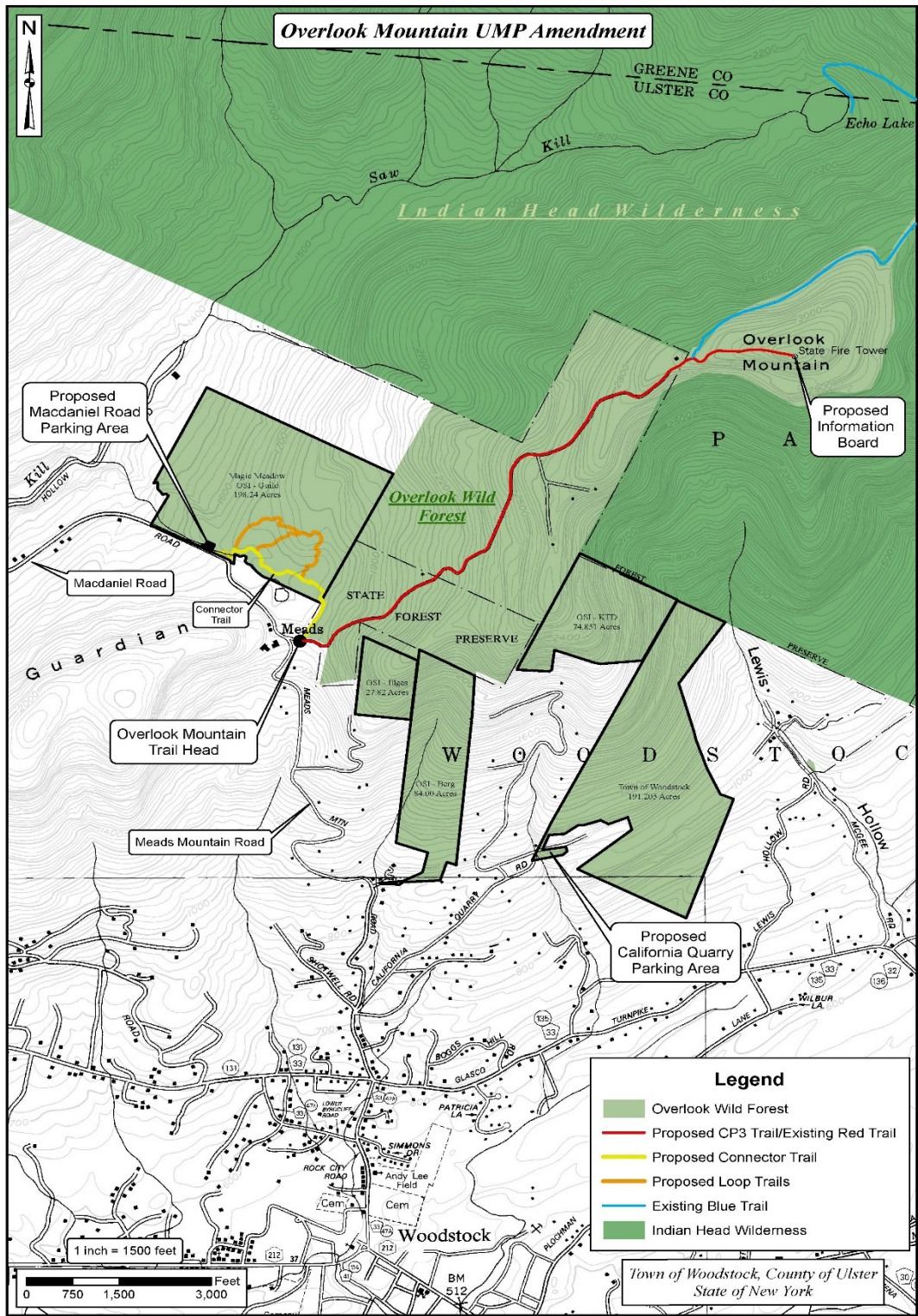
State Environmental Quality Review

An Environmental Assessment Form (EAF) has been completed for this amendment resulting in a determination that there are no moderate to large impacts expected as a result of the implementation of any projects listed in the Overlook Mountain Wild Forest unit management plan amendment.

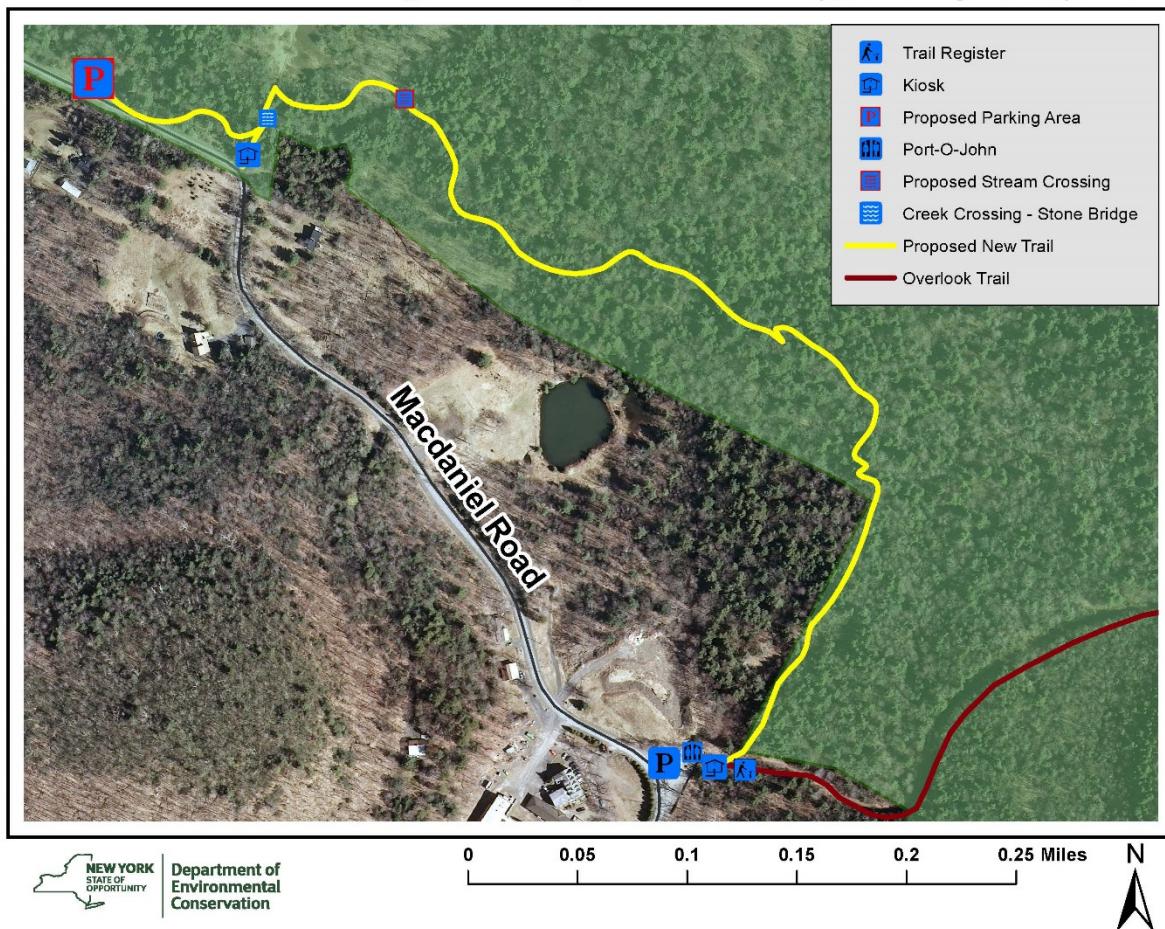
Schedule of Implementation and Budget

Year: 2017-2018

Proposed Project	Cost
Construct new parking lot along Macdaniel Road with Information Kiosk, trail register	\$60,000
Build new spur trail from parking area / Magic Meadow to Overlook Trail	\$2,000
Provide sanitation facilities at Overlook Mt. Trailhead	\$3,000/year
Construct parking area and information Kiosk at California Quarry	\$5,000
Relocate gate at California Quarry	\$1,000
Construct/mark foot trail from California Quarry parking area over existing 50' easement to State lands	\$500
Mark the Overlook Mountain Spur Trail as a CP-3 Access Route and construct information kiosk/wayside exhibit	\$2,000

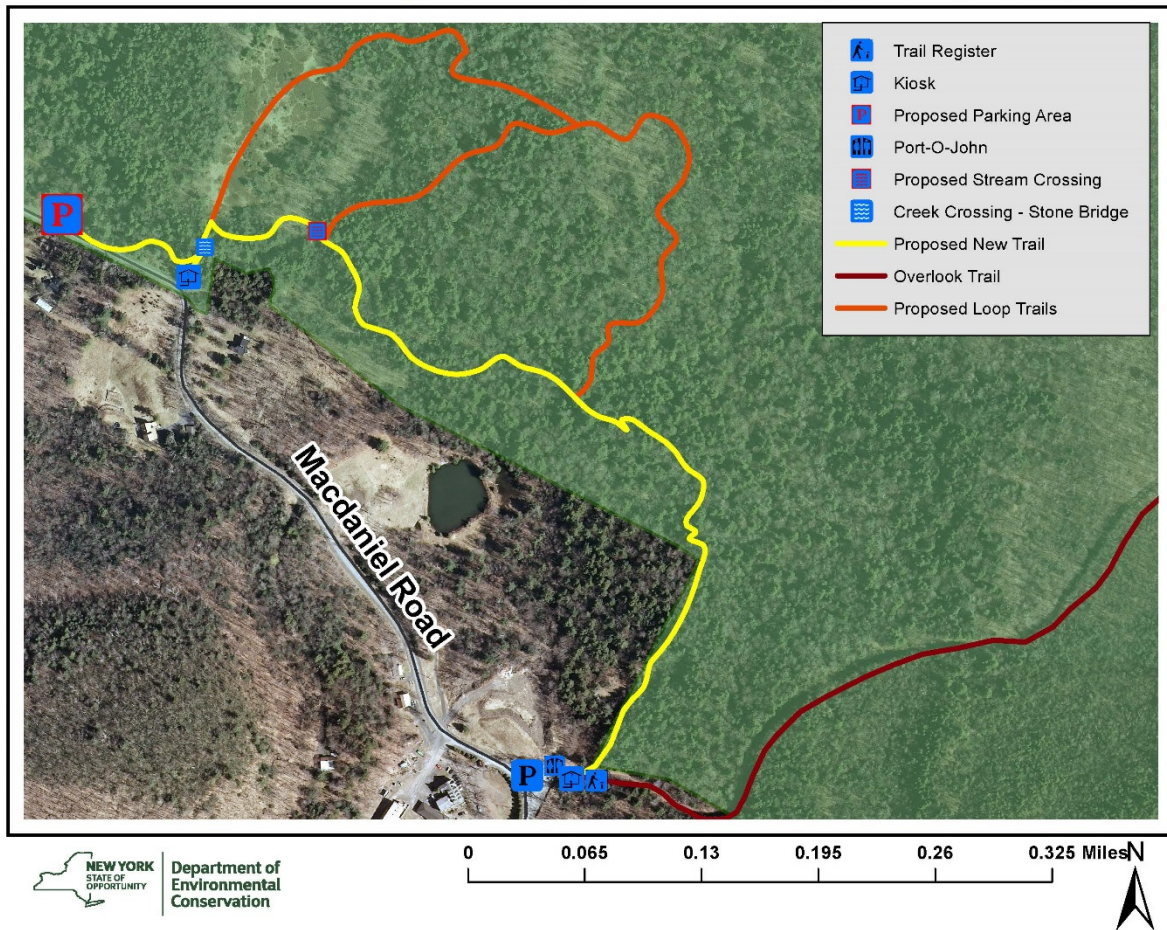


Map 1: Overlook Mountain Wild Forest Proposed Projects



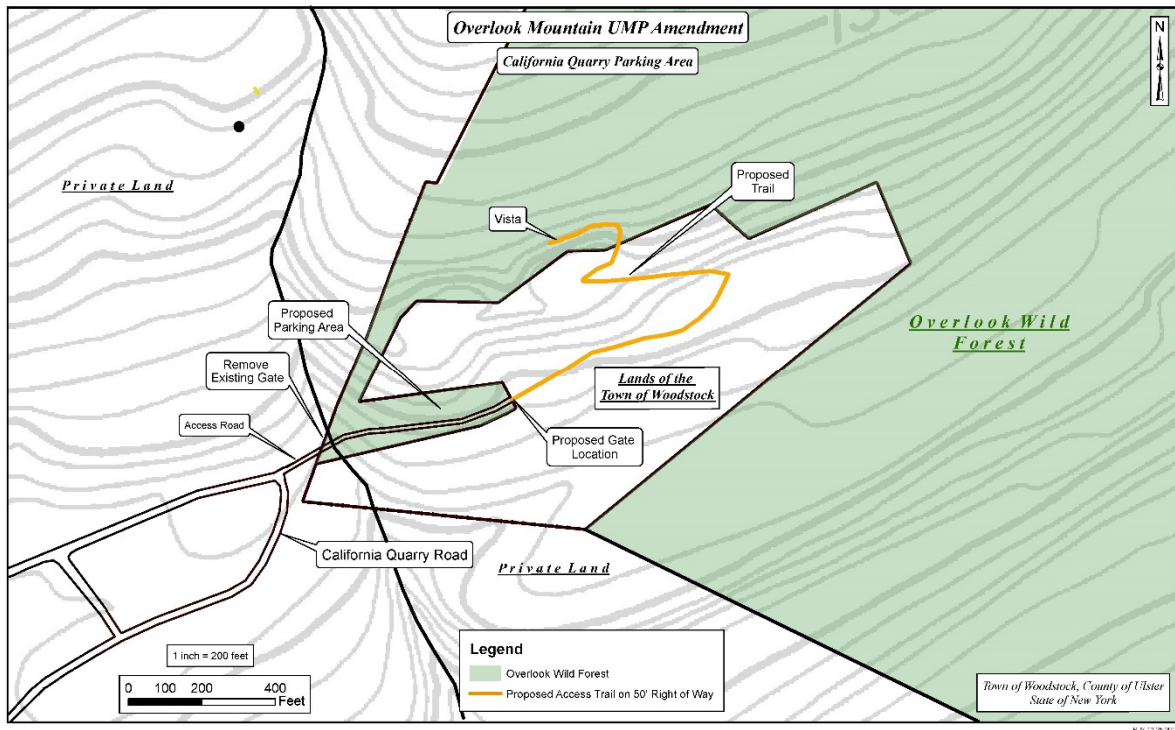
Map 2: Connector trail from new parking area to Overlook Spur Trail.

Projects outlined are conceptual in nature.



Map 3: Connector trail with short loops.

Projects outlined are conceptual in nature.



Map 4: California Quarry Proposed Projects.

Projects outlined are conceptual in nature.