



THE LAURENTIAN CHAPTER OF THE ADIRONDACK MOUNTAIN CLUB

Memo to: Niagara Mohawk Power Corp., Potsdam Office
St. Lawrence County Forester
New York State DEC, Canton Office
St. Lawrence County Youth Dept.
Supervisor, Town of Colton

CC: The Saratoga Associates

Subject: Proposal for the Cooperative Development of Recreational Trails in the Raquette River Valley between Colton and Brown's Bridge

From: Adirondack Mountain Club, Laurentian Chapter

BACKGROUND STATEMENT

Near the northern boundary of the Adirondack Park between Colton and Brown's Bridge the Raquette River plunges, in its most spectacular descent, over two hundred feet. Of the many falls on the river, none is more picturesque, remarkable, and spectacular, but less known than those at Colton, Stone Valley, Lucy's Hole, and O'Malley Brook. Several named falls and cascades and numerous others make this short stretch unusually valuable as a potential recreational resource for residents of the area and as an attraction to outdoor recreation-oriented visitors.

This section of the river, to which we will refer as Stone Valley, is not readily accessible. This proposal addresses the lack of accessibility by suggesting cooperative action among six parties to create a system of foot trails. The six are three landowners--Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation, St. Lawrence County, and the Town of Colton--, two cooperating agencies--the St. Lawrence County Youth Department and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation--and one group--the Laurentian Chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club. The proposal sets forth a plan and the responsibilities of each party.

LANDS AVAILABLE FOR THE PROJECT

The Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation owns both east and west shorelines of this stretch of the river, as well as significant holdings away from the river in three locations on the east bank, and a large area encompassing the dam, penstock, and power

station on the west bank. St. Lawrence County owns several hundred acres of reforested lands bordering the Lenny Road east of the river. The Town of Colton owns a large parcel that contains the former landfill and the transfer station. These lands are shown on a map accompanying this proposal.

Both the County lands and the larger of the Niagara Mohawk parcels are managed for the production of forest products. However, undeveloped public recreational uses are encouraged by the major landowners. All these lands are contiguous, form a ring-shaped strip, and constitute a significant opportunity for public-private cooperation.

St. Lawrence County's Youth Department and the State of New York Department of Environmental Conservation, together with the County Forester, administer the County's Youth Conservation Corps (YCC). Successful completion of this project depends upon the YCC being made available to extend its trail on the adjacent County lands east of the Lenny Road and perhaps provide some of the manpower required by this proposed trail system.

The Adirondack Mountain Club's Laurentian Chapter, whose main membership is located in St. Lawrence County, is part of the larger Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK). The group has a goal of fostering greater appreciation and awareness of wild areas. The Chapter sees this project as furthering its goals. It asks the cooperation and active support of the Corporation, the County, the Town, and the State in this foot trail project.

THE PROJECT

What is envisioned and offered for your consideration is a short trail initially, but ultimately a complex of trails, with several points of access, that would incorporate lands on both sides of the river, making possible various loops, some as many as seven to eight miles each. The trail(s) would provide for both hiking and cross-country skiing. Only foot traffic would be permitted, with posting against use by wheeled or tracked vehicles. At certain points, the ski trail will have to diverge from the hiking trail because the terrain for which hiking trails is appropriate is in places more steep and tree-studded than is safe for skiing. In such places, the ski trail would take the higher, more level and open ground away from the riverside.

The St. Lawrence County reforestation lands east of the Lenny Road were developed for foot travel by a Youth Conservation Corps project in 1988. Final work on the trail will be finished in 1989. There are numerous logging roads on the County land which could be utilized as part of the trail system with minimal work. The Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation lands also contain logging roads. An informal path now exists along the east bank of the river beside the Stone Valley cascades.

The project is seen by the Chapter as being carried out in four phases. These phases are described in the following sections. Each phase will require the cooperation and resources of the participants. The Power Corporation, the Town and the County would make the lands available and would permit limited brushing, grubbing, removal of small trees, and some bridge work as described in Phase Four. All work on Corporation lands would be under the control of the Corporation's representative. The same would be true for other lands. Actual work could be performed by members of the Laurentian Chapter and by crews of the New York State Youth Conservation Corps, for the most part. The Chapter would prefer that any bridge construction on Corporation property be performed by Corporation employees. All work on County and Town lands could be performed by crews of the Youth Conservation Corps with assistance, if necessary, from the Chapter. The Chapter could also perform periodic cleaning of litter on all trails. Parking is proposed on existing or planned lots developed on County land. Sign details will have to be negotiated during the initial phase. Trails could be trimmed as needed by the Chapter and the YCC. Major blowdown of commercial timber would be removed after consultation among the cooperators.

PHASE I: EAST LOOP

The first phase would involve building a trail of two to three miles in length beginning on the Lenny Road near the Colton Town Transfer Station, descending to the river bank, paralleling the river northward, and striking east to the Lenny Road over Niagara Mohawk lands where recent logging operations have left much slash. Work on this section would begin as soon as all parties have agreed, with some work anticipated during the winter months of 1989. This work would only involve route-finding, flagging, and limited removal of brush. The goal for the winter months and early spring is to have a trail that can be followed safely to observe the spectacular spring runoff.

Work done in the initial phase would be located on Niagara Mohawk and Town of Colton lands.

Phase I work would probably continue into the summer of 1989. This phase could also include a major cleanup of trash, especially at O'Malley Brook, where a truck will be needed to remove a quantity of trash. The Corporation would be asked to provide the truck and crew, and the Town would be asked to discard the trash.

PHASE II: EXTENSION OF THE EAST SIDE TRAIL

In the second phase the trail would be extended along the river to O'Malley Brook. After leaving the brook area, the trail would enter the County land and make use of woods roads until reaching the Lenny Road, where a parking area has recently been developed by the County on the east side of Lenny Road.

Phase II work would take place on Niagara Mohawk and County lands.

PHASE III: COMPLETION OF THE EAST SIDE TRAILS

A third phase would be to extend the trail at both ends of the section constructed in Phases I and II. At the O'Malley Brook end, this would consist of constructing a trail along the river through the Niagara Mohawk "corridor" northward to the contact with the Lenny Road. At the southern end a new extension would be constructed from the riverside trail of Phase I near the landfill to the Colton Fire Station. At the completion of this phase the system would be complete east of the river. Trail construction for Phase III would take place only on Niagara Mohawk lands.

PHASE IV: WEST SIDE TRAILS

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Phase IV would involve a similar combination of hiking and skiing trails on the west side of the river, utilizing again a single trail when feasible and a separate ski branch where safety considerations require. This trail would start on the Power Plant (service) Road near Colton and end at Brown's Bridge. The trail would follow the river bank with the addition of a cut-off trail that would eliminate the big bend in the river opposite O'Malley Brook for those wishing to take a shorter and more direct route. The West Side Trail would require construction of a walkway over the penstock at the Colton end. Together with trails constructed in the first two phases, the West Side Trail would make possible combinations of trails forming a loop of 8-10 miles in length.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Appreciation of Nature

The Chapter sees this remarkably beautiful and spectacular stretch of the River as a place where people would recreate themselves in the truest sense of the word at all seasons of the year, enjoying the river in spring and fall when it runs full; in summer when it is relatively dry and the riverbed presents a very different face to the visitor; and in the fall and winter when autumn foliage and winter snow and ice formations provide additional aspects of the area's beauty.

Educational Benefits

As well as the unusual loveliness of the area, there are many educational possibilities. For those interested in natural history, the wildlife, wildflowers, and geology are well worth observing. An appendix to this proposal describes the area as seen by local experts in these fields. History and archeology hobbists will find much of interest in the ruins at the dam in Colton. These sites could be developed by historical societies for educational purposes.

The County's and Corporation's active logging operations are seen potentially as an educational asset. The trail system purposefully could be routed through logged areas to acquaint foot travellers with a major segment of the North Country economy which is rarely seen at the worksite.

These educational uses of the area could involve a self-guided tour with numbered stations explained by pamphlets located at the entrance of trails or an alternative such as moisture proof descriptions of unusual features posted at appropriate locations on the trail. *Conf?*

Signs and Routes

Trail markers and signs would be kept to as modest a scale as possible and still be effective. As many paths and woods roads already exist, much use would be made of them. Paths would be kept as narrow as possible, consistent with safety. Various means would be used to avoid erosion, including locating the treadway away from steep slopes where possible and constructing water diversion bars as needed. The Adirondack Mountain Club High Peaks Trail Coordinator will advise the cooperators on trail construction, on-scene, if desired.

Expenses

Expenses would be modest compared to the public pleasure and knowledge to be gained. The Chapter proposes that costs be shared as follows:

- + The landowners would assume the cost of building materials used for bridge, stairway, or other construction where the use of on-site materials is impracticable.
- + The County would assume the cost of parking facilities on the Lenny Road and County Route 40 (Colton-Parishville Road).
- + Chapter members will provide their own hand tools when performing trail work.

SPECIFIC REQUESTS

The Laurentian Chapter wishes to enter into discussions with the other parties and is willing to meet with them for this purpose. When each party finds the project acceptable from its perspective, the Chapter requests a letter of agreement to participate, and this letter should spell out any conditions, limitations, or other relevant considerations. For the landowners, this letter or other form of response should also give permission to commence work on the trail system.

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