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FALL 2019

Celebrating History

Building A New Future



Sullivan O&W Rail Trail Feasibility Study

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This report was made possible by the use of funding through the Environmental Protection Fund from the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.



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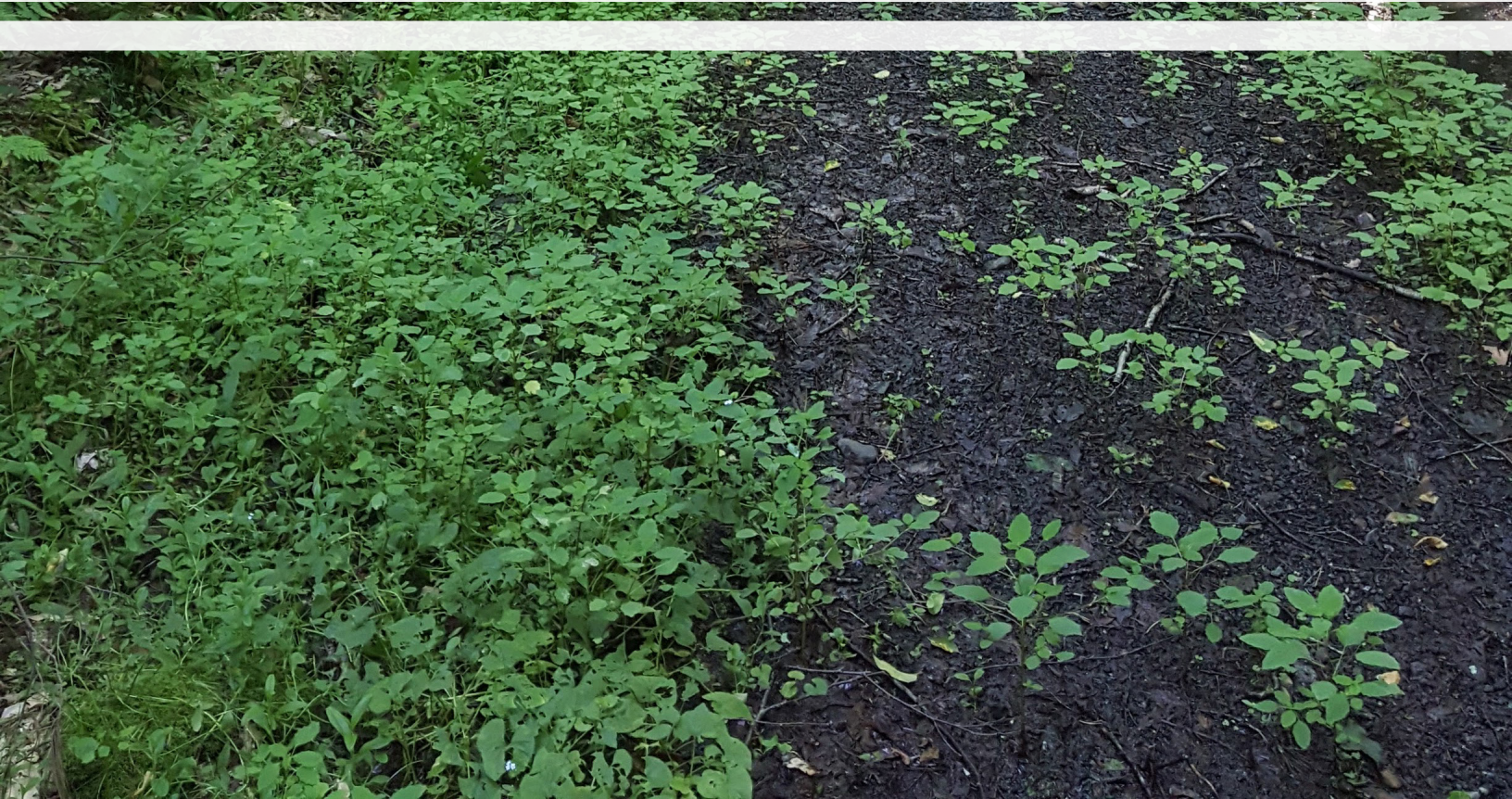
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Introduction



PROJECT OVERVIEW

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The historic corridor of the O&W railroad presents an exceptional opportunity for over 50 miles of contiguous multi-use rail trail through the verdant valleys and scenic overlooks for which Sullivan County, New York is famous. The proposed trail improvements will offer economic improvements through tourism as well as a safe alternative transportation route for residents. This proposed expansion will create a continuous recreational trail from Summitville, a hamlet of the Town of Mamakating northwest to the hamlet of Livingston Manor. An additional continuous trail route can be provided on the Monticello Spur of the O&W from the Orange County/Sullivan County line north to the Village of Monticello. The routes will benefit the local and regional community by attracting visitors, activating local businesses, and linking hamlets and villages that intersect the trail corridor. Presently there are 25 miles of trail developed, but these segments are disconnected and in varying condition. This plan provides not only a design concept for the trail but also a consistent brand and marketing strategy, a road map for upgrades, phased build out, and operations maintenance.



SULLIVAN COUNTY

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY AREA

Sullivan County is located in southeastern New York, approximately 60 miles northwest of New York City. The area is home to approximately 75,500 residents but is also a summer getaway for NY Metro Area dwellers. Because of this, Sullivan County presents a unique opportunity to provide a multi-use trail that accommodates a wide range of needs and users. Within the southern portion of the Catskills, Sullivan County offers mountains, woodlands, lakes, and rivers for residents and visitors to traverse and explore. The communities along the trail provide amenities for residents and visitors to enjoy the outdoors such as ski resorts, boating, overnight stay accommodations, parks, museums, shopping and outdoor recreation businesses. The connected trail will provide a link to these amenities as well as an access to the natural areas Sullivan County cherishes.

HISTORY OF SULLIVAN COUNTY

Before Europeans settled in the southeastern part of New York, the woodlands, streams and lakes were home to the Native Americans who came to the area over 10,000 years ago, when the area was recovering from the last ice age. Since then, Native American tribes developed and flourished until Dutch settlers arrived to the area in the mid-17th century. Sullivan County was established in the early 19th century after separating from Ulster County, which had been established in 1683. During the Industrial Revolution the area experienced a dramatic increase in population and economic wealth when factories driven by water were built along streams and rivers. Hamlets eventually grew larger and transformed into towns. Eventually, canals and railroads were built, serving industry and offering greater opportunity for population growth.

The area is considered a part of the “Borscht Belt,” a colloquial term for the summer resorts in the Catskill Mountains. The word “Borscht” is actually the name of the soup typically associated with immigrants from eastern Europe but was also a way of saying “Jewish”. From the 1920s until about the 1970s the area was a very popular summer destination for Jewish people residing in New York City. The Catskills offered a cool retreat from the pre-air-conditioned era of New York City. By the 1960s, air conditioning became common place in New York City and during the 1980s air travel made the trip to the Catskills become less appealing than other vacation options, and more people vacationed elsewhere. Many of the resorts were stages for traveling Jewish comedians or musicians. These performers on occasion would gain fame from performing on the Borscht Belt and move on to more popular venues in New York City. The area is also known for the 1969 Woodstock Festival held in Bethel, New York. The 3-day event attracted some 400,000 people and the festival site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.





Photo description:
Round Top Trail: a sidepath hike offers majestic views of the town of Livingston Manor



Photo description:
Few remnants at this historic O&W infrastructure remain in the woodlands along the trail corridor.

O&W RAIL TRAIL HISTORY

The majority of the proposed trail alignment will exist on the old O&W Rail Bed left over from the mid-20th century. The former O&W Railroad or the “New York, Ontario and Western Railway” stretched from Weehawken, New Jersey to Oswego New York.

Through its service life, the O&W had branch lines to:

- Scranton, Pennsylvania
- Kingston, New York
- Port Jervis, New York
- Monticello, New York
- Delhi, New York
- Utica, New York
- Rome, New York.

From its start in the late 19th century until its bankruptcy in the 1950s, the route was used for transporting people, coal, and dairy to and from rural communities across New York and the New York City metropolitan area. Since it primarily relied on the coal industry for its profits, the rail line experienced financial strains during the 1920s and then steadily declined through the early to mid-20th century. As petroleum fuels, natural gas, and electricity offered more competition for the coal markets, the railroad became financially unsustainable. United States manufacturing also moved towards the south, west and southwest during the mid-20th century. Populations started to move out of rural communities and into metropolitan areas leaving a smaller consumer market. In a last-ditch effort, the railroad stopped passenger service and tried to acquire new freight customers through the late '40s and early '50s. The railroad finally went bankrupt and liquidated its assets in 1957. The O&W railroad was the first Class I railroad in the United States to be fully abandoned. The old railroad bed is still evident in some areas along with old stations, and equipment.



Picture of a New York O&W Railroad locomotive from the O&W Railroad Historical Society



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