



Draft Desired Conditions for the Kaaterskill Clove Project Area - Revised

To: McCrea Burnham and Josh Clague, NYSDEC
From: Steve Lawson and Abbie Larkin, DJ&A
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Re: Revised Desired Conditions for the Kaaterskill Clove Project Area
Project No.: 7512

This memorandum presents draft desired conditions statements developed for the Kaaterskill Clove Project Area as part of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Visitor Use Management (NYSDEC VUM) project. Desired conditions are defined as statements of aspiration that describe resource conditions, visitor experiences and opportunities, and facilities and services that an agency strives to achieve and maintain in a particular area. Desired conditions statements differ from current conditions statements in that they describe what conditions, outcomes, and opportunities are to be achieved and maintained in the future, not necessarily what exists today. Desired conditions statements differ from management objectives statements in that they focus on what to achieve, rather than how to achieve it. Desired conditions statements serve as the anchor for long-term monitoring and adaptive visitor use management strategies and actions.

Basis for Desired Conditions Statements

The draft desired conditions presented in this document focus on visitors' experiences¹ and public safety in the Kaaterskill Clove Project Area and were developed using several sources as described in this section. Foundational legislation, agency policies, and management documents that establish the project area's purpose and management direction were used to form the basis for desired conditions. These include the New York State Constitution Article XIV Section 1, the Catskill Park State Land Master Plan, the Kaaterskill Wild Forest Unit Management Plan and Amendments, and the Catskill Advisory Group (CAG) Final Report².

Internal planning workshops were conducted with the Kaaterskill Clove Core Team³ to expand on the desired conditions established in the project area's foundational legislation, agency policies, and management documents. The first Kaaterskill Clove Core Team Workshop was held on February 24, 2023, and used a photo exercise to elicit themes from Core Team members about desired conditions in the project area. During this workshop, Core Team members were asked to submit photos that represented what makes the project area special (i.e., the unique characteristics of the project area) and to describe the photos during the workshop. The second Kaaterskill Clove Core Team Workshop was held on May 30, 2023, and used the following open-ended questions to prompt Core Team members to further articulate desired future conditions for Kaaterskill Clove:

- A) What should visitors experience when they visit the Kaaterskill Clove Project Area?
- B) How should people feel and what should they take away from their experiences in the Kaaterskill Clove Project Area?

¹ Visitors include any person who visits the Kaaterskill Clove Project Area for recreational use, including residents of local communities.

² These documents were summarized in the *Deliverables 1B-1D* document submitted July 5, 2023.

³ The Kaaterskill Clove Core Team includes staff from a range of NYSDEC divisions and programs that have specialized expertise in the project area and/or subject matter relevant to this project.

- C) What types of opportunities should the public have to experience the Kaaterskill Clove Project Area?
- D) What benefits should people and local communities experience from recreation in the Kaaterskill Clove Project Area?

Additional sources to develop the draft desired conditions statements presented in this document targeted the perspectives of stakeholders and the general public. A stakeholder conversation event⁴ was conducted virtually on March 29, 2023, to elicit stakeholder perceptions about concerns, needs, and opportunities for visitor use management in the project area. The perceptions shared during these conversations were incorporated into the development of the draft desired conditions for the project area presented in this document. A public website was launched on May 2, 2023 and an in-person public meeting was held in Hunter, NY on May 10, 2023 to elicit perspectives from the general public. A meeting with a formal Stakeholder Working Group was conducted in-person on October 3, 2023, to further elicit perspectives specific to the group. The public website, public meeting, and Stakeholder Working Group meeting used similar⁵ open-ended questions to those used during the second Kaaterskill Clove Core Team Workshop (listed above) to further describe the desired future conditions for the project area from multiple perspectives.

Information and insights from the sources listed above were used as the basis to develop the draft desired conditions statements included in this document. The draft desired conditions statements included in this document will be refined, finalized, and formalized throughout the NYSDEC-VUM Project.

Draft Desired Conditions

Desired conditions may vary across the landscape depending on resource types, recreation opportunities, and desired experiences for visitors. The Kaaterskill Clove Project Area is part of the Forest Preserve (i.e., state-administered lands) of the Catskill Park and is located in the Kaaterskill Wild Forest Management Unit (Figure 1). As such, the draft desired conditions reflect the Forest Preserve status and Wild Forest classification of the project area. In order to further reflect the spectrum of resource, visitor use, and management conditions that exist in the project area, this document presents preliminary draft subregions for the Kaaterskill Clove Project Area and includes draft desired conditions for the full project area as well as each of the preliminary draft subregions (Figure 1). The concept of these subregions emerged during Core Team Workshop discussions based on the resource types, recreation opportunities, and desired experiences for visitors that are unique to each subregion. In addition, the desired conditions reflect the fact that robust partnerships with adjacent communities and partner organizations, as well as ongoing coordination of management between the Kaaterskill Wild Forest and the adjacent North-South Lake Campground, are critical to achieving desired conditions for the Kaaterskill Clove Project Area.

⁴ The stakeholder conversation event was summarized in a separate synthesis document delivered to NYSDEC and shared publicly on the project website.

⁵ Question A was modified for the public website to read: *What would you like to experience when you visit this area?*

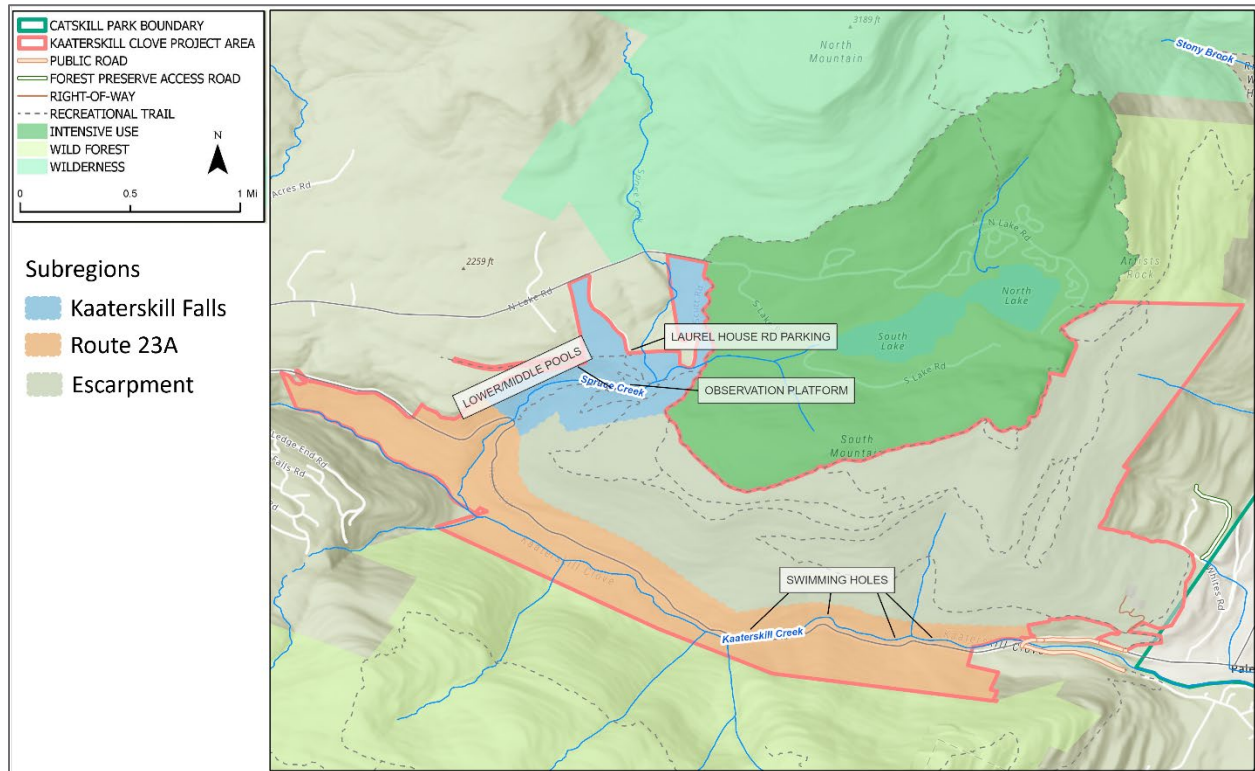


Figure 1. Kaaterskill Clove Project Area and preliminary draft subregions.

Kaaterskill Clove Project Area

The project area provides positive and high-quality visitor experiences to safely access outstanding scenic views and feel connected to nature with relative ease. Visitors have opportunities to realize physical and mental health benefits from spending time in nature. They are able to recharge and refresh through sensory, emotional, and spiritual connections to the plants, animals, and water. The sights and sounds of nature dominate and allow visitors to immerse themselves in a Wild Forest setting. The wild character and natural resources in Kaaterskill Clove are protected and maintained for current and future generations. Previously impacted areas in Kaaterskill Clove are restored. Visitor activities, facilities, and services are in harmony with the natural surroundings and with the enjoyment and safety of the visiting public. The opportunities the area offers for public use promote representation, inclusion, and access for all. All people feel welcome, which fosters in them a sense of place for the project area, an appreciation for the unique qualities and wild setting of the Forest Preserve, and a desire to return with their family and friends to share special experiences.

Visitors can participate in a spectrum of dispersed and responsible public uses and low impact activities. Frequent encounters with other visitors are expected in parking areas, on popular trails, and at primary destinations, but visitors can move freely along the trail network and among scenic destinations. When encounters with other visitors occur, these interactions are positive and create a sense of shared appreciation for the project area. Visitors also have opportunities to hike on less-traveled trails and to enjoy a sense of calm and tranquility in the natural surroundings.

The clove's natural scenic beauty predominates visitors' experiences, whether they are driving through the clove or spending time along the creek. Travel on the roadway is uncongested and drivers do not experience traffic safety risks from pedestrians or parked vehicles in or along the shoulder of the highway. Visitors experience a sense of arrival when they enter the Clove. Visitors

can find safe and convenient places to park their vehicles with modes of access from where they park to safely reach their destinations in the project area. They can access the area without impacting the flow of traffic on local roads, causing congestion that restricts local residents' ability to go about their daily routines, or creating potential traffic safety hazards for themselves or others.

Information and services are available and promoted to help visitors feel prepared for their visit and to make informed decisions about how to safely access and enjoy the area at their own pace and skill level. Education and information about points of access, recreation opportunities, the popularity of the area, the area's history and significance, responsible use of public lands, and the importance of planning ahead are provided by NYSDEC and partners. This information is made available for advanced trip planning and onsite. All information is designed to communicate clearly and effectively with the diverse public that visits this area.

Facilities, trails, signage, and wayfinding are provided to encourage safe and sustainable visitor use, and to minimize impacts to natural resources and the quality of visitors' experiences. They are strategically located to provide optimal utility within the smallest footprint necessary. They are designed to be unobtrusive and to integrate with the rustic, natural, wild, and scenic character of the area, and to be welcoming for all visitors.

Visitors are connected and engaged with local communities and businesses that work collaboratively with NYSDEC, NYS Department of Transportation, and other partner organizations and agencies. Strong and enduring partnerships are essential to support safe, memorable, and high-quality visitor experiences.

Kaaterskill Falls Subregion

Opportunities for visitors in this area are diverse. They include short visits to scenic vistas, hikes along the official trail network that follows Spruce Creek, and enjoyment of the pools that form at the base of the falls along the creek. Visitors to this area can expect other people to be present along trails, at vistas, and in and around the pools at the base of the falls. Yet, iconic views of Kaaterskill Falls and the surrounding landscape predominate visitors' experiences and visitors do not feel crowded. Infrastructure and facilities in this area support accessibility for all people. They are designed to help direct visitor use, provide safe and enjoyable visitor experiences, minimize impacts to natural resources, and promote the restoration of previously impacted areas. Visitor information is readily accessible to all visitors for wayfinding, interpretation, and education about low-impact practices. Administrative personnel are present during busy periods to support safe and sustainable visitor use in this area. The levels of infrastructure, facilities, and staffing are more prominent here compared to the other subregions in the Kaaterskill Clove Project Area.

Route 23A Subregion

The clove's natural scenic beauty predominates visitors' experiences, whether they are driving through the clove on the scenic byway or spending time along the creek. Travel on the roadway is uncongested, travel speeds are safe, and drivers do not experience traffic safety risks from pedestrians or parked vehicles in or along the shoulder of the highway. Visitors can safely access the creek, without having to walk in or along the roadway. Visitors spending time along the creek can appreciate the rush of the cool creek waters that cut the scenic landscape of the narrow clove and the self-guided experience afforded by the lack of trails. Visitors to this area can expect other people to be present at the pools formed by the creek and along the creek bed, but visitors do not experience crowding. Visitors' activities are in harmony with the natural surroundings and with the enjoyment and safety of the visiting public. Recreational facilities are kept to a minimum to balance with the Wild Forest character of the area. Strategically placed signage reminds visitors of the area's

unique natural features and encourages visitors to recreate safely and sustainably. Administrative personnel are periodically present to support safe and sustainable visitor use in this area and reachable in an emergency.

Escarpment Subregion

Visitors to this area can experience the surrounding forested landscape along an expansive, less-traveled trail network with dramatic scenic vistas that stretch across and down into the clove. Visitors engage with the landscape through a broad range of public uses that include hiking, camping, skiing, hunting, ice climbing, and more. Those that hike can enjoy a range of experiences from family-friendly short hikes to long-distance traverses that include historic monuments and outstanding scenic overlooks along the way. Those that prefer unconfined and self-sufficient activities such as hunting and ice climbing can also appreciate this area and can expect high-quality experiences. Visitors have opportunities to feel close connections to nature and to experience tranquility. Signs are kept to a minimum in this area to harmonize with the Wild Forest setting and to help visitors navigate the trail network, while allowing for a sense of adventure in the forest. There is little or no presence of administrative personnel here, allowing visitors to practice self-reliance as they experience the area.

Activities and Facilities

Table 1 lists activities and facilities that are appropriate in each subregion.

Table 1. Appropriate activities and facilities, by subregion.

Subregion	Activities	Facilities
Kaaterskill Falls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-country skiing • Day hiking • Horseback riding in select areas • Ice climbing • Nature study • Picnicking • Sightseeing along the creek • Waterfall viewing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible primitive campsites • Garbage facilities • Horse mounting platform • Informational and directional signage • Kiosks with trail registers and signage • Observation platform • Parking areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Laurel House Road Parking Lot ○ Scutt Road Parking Lot • Pedestrian bridge • Toilet facilities • Trail network (including hardened stairways and accessible trails)
Route 23A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fishing • Ice climbing • Nature study • Sightseeing along the creek • Waterfall viewing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informational signage • Parking areas (Route 23A roadside⁶)
Escarpment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backpacking • Camping in designated campsites • Cross-country skiing • Day hiking • Dispersed camping • Fishing • Horseback riding • Hunting • Ice climbing • Mountain biking • Nature study • Picnicking • Snowmobiling on designated trails • Trapping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informational and directional signage • Kiosks with trail registers and signage • Parking areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Harding Road Parking ○ Whites Road Parking Lot • Primitive campsites • Trail network

⁶ Parking in roadside lots/roadside along Route 23A was temporarily restricted during the 2023 summer season. This action may be permanently implemented in the future, which would effectively restrict parking in the Route 23A subregion.