



VIA EMAIL

August 5, 2008

Mark Hohengasser
Planning Bureau
Agency Building One
Empire State Plaza
Albany, New York 12238

**RE: ACCESS FUND SCOPING COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT MASTER PLAN FOR
MINNEWASKA STATE PARK PRESERVE**

Dear Mr. Hohengasser,

The Access Fund welcomes the opportunity to provide scoping comments on the Draft Master Plan for Minnewaska State Park Preserve. Please consider these comments when planning for climbing access at the park and contact us anytime for assistance with information on established best climbing management polices used by state governments from around the country.

The Access Fund

The Access Fund is the only national advocacy organization whose mission keeps climbing areas open and conserves the climbing environment. A 501(c)3 non-profit supporting and representing over 1.6 million climbers nationwide in all forms of climbing—rock climbing, ice climbing, mountaineering, and bouldering—the Access Fund is the largest US climbing organization with over 15,000 members and affiliates. The Access Fund assists land agencies around the country with climbing management issues. In fact, the Access Fund has signed memoranda of understanding (MOU) with both the BLM¹ and USFS² relating to any climbing initiatives within their areas of management. Many of our members climb and live in New York and the Tri-State area and have a direct interest in recreational access at Minnewaska.

The Access Fund promotes the responsible use and sound management of climbing resources by working in cooperation with climbers, other recreational users, public land managers and private land owners. We encourage an ethic of personal responsibility, self-regulation, strong conservation values and minimum impact practices among climbers. Working towards a future in which climbing and access to climbing resources are viewed as legitimate, valued, and positive uses of the land, the Access Fund advocates to federal, state and local legislators

¹ <http://accessfund.org/pdf/AF-BLM-MOUfinal.pdf>

² <http://accessfund.org/pdf/AF-03-MOU-USFS.pdf>



concerning public lands legislation; works closely with federal and state land managers and other interest groups in planning and implementing public lands management and policy; provides funding for conservation and resource management projects; develops, produces and distributes climber education materials and programs; and assists in the acquisition and management of climbing resources. For more information about the Access Fund, visit www.accessfund.org.

A significant number of the Access Fund's members climb at the Peterskill area in Minnewaska State Park Preserve and at the adjacent Mohonk Preserve. The Access Fund's affiliated local climbing organization—the Gunks Climbers Coalition (GCC)—has a proud record of conservation activism at both of these areas. In fall 2007, the GCC organized two Adopt-a-Crag stewardship events in the area—one at the Peterskill area and one at the Skytop area of the Mohonk Preserve—where volunteers removed micro-trash and helped with trail maintenance. Additionally, in 1996 the Access Fund participated in the public process for Minnewaska State Park Preserve's original Master Plan, and later the associated Climbing Management Plan for the Peterskill area.

Scoping Comments

The climbing opportunities in Minnewaska State Park Preserve are of exceptional quality. By all accounts the pilot project established for climbing access at the Peterskill area has been successful and we feel that this success should be expanded to the other areas in the park as contemplated by the initial Master Plan as well as additional areas that were later acquired and incorporated into the park. These as-yet unopened climbing areas within Minnewaska State Park Preserve represent one the largest climbing closures of public land in the country. The Access Fund urges the Park to recognize climbing a legitimate and valued low-impact recreational use at Minnewaska.

Throughout our National Park System, climbing is considered a “welcomed and historical use.” In national parks like Yosemite, Joshua Tree, and Rocky Mountain climbing has been a popular pursuit for more than half a century. Climbing is also a welcomed and historical use on other agency lands including hundreds of sites managed by the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and Army Corp of Engineers.

At the state and regional level, climbing is equally popular and reasonably managed. State parks in New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Colorado, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and California, to name but a few, offer a variety of rock climbing opportunities.³

³ For a few examples of the many successful state park climbing management plans (and a few county/local plans too), see the following: Eldorado State Park, CO



Additionally, many parks and preserves whose primary mission is conservation and preservation allow climbing. A shining example of this multiple-mandate balance includes Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. See <http://www.wichitamountains.org/refuge.html>.

Given the appropriate acceptance of climbing as a permitted use on state and federal public lands elsewhere, we encourage Minnewaska State Park Preserve to allow recreational climbing in the park except at locations where there is a specific resource-based reason to restrict climbing (such as the presence of special status species). Many New York residents would like to see climbing as an opportunity on their state public lands, and accordingly the park should recognize climbing as a legitimate, valued and positive use of Minnewaska State Park Preserve.

The Access Fund recognizes that recreational access at the Park must be balanced with proper management (which may include restrictions) to protect the integrity of the natural resources. Any impacts associated with climbing can be addressed and evaluated in a climbing management plan. The climbing management plan for the Peterskill area has successfully balanced resource protection and recreational use. The Access Fund believes that a similar plan for the entire Park would be equally or more successful.

Conclusion

We encourage Minnewaska State Park Preserve to recognize climbing as a legitimate and low-impact recreational use in the Park that is greatly valued by New York residents. It is the Access Fund's experience that virtually all potential threats or actual impacts to natural and cultural resources associated with climbing and user-group conflict can be eliminated or reduced to acceptable levels through a combination of education, cooperation with the climbing community, and site-specific prescriptions, including rerouting of trails or partial crag closures. The Access Fund's grant program regularly provides funding for management initiatives that raise awareness about climber responsibilities and promote climber understanding of natural and cultural resource sensitivities.

(<http://parks.state.co.us/Parks/EldoradoCanyon/ParkActivities/RockClimbing>; <http://www.aceeldo.org/brochure>); Castle Rocks State Park, ID (<http://www.accessfund.org/pdf/CastleRocksCMP.pdf>); Adirondack Park State Land, NY (http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands_forests_pdf/giant1.pdf); City of Rocks State Park, NM (http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/PRD/documents/CRSPMPlanDraft102606_000.pdf); Crowder's Mountain State Park, NY (http://www.crowdersmountain.com/v1/climbing_rules.asp); Foster Falls State Park, TN (<http://www.seclimbers.org/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=31>; http://www.trails-edge.com/climb/foster/foster_rules.htm); Willoughby State Forest, VT (<http://www.vtfrp.org/lands/willoughby/wilplan.pdf>); Cooper's Rock State Park, WV (<http://www.coopersrockclimbers.org>; <http://www.wvforestry.com/coopersrockstateforest.cfm>); and Beacon Rock State Park, WA (<http://www.mrpiton.com>). For additional information on state-level climbing management policies, contact the Access Fund.



Examples of grants awarded include:

- Boise Climbers Alliance, Black Cliffs, ID—Cliff nesting raptor signage & brochure.
- Colorado Division of Wildlife, Boulder Canyon, CO—Cliff nesting raptor signage.
- Joshua Tree National Park, CA—vegetation surveys, and GPS location of climbing areas in relation to Threatened & Endangered species sites.
- North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, NC—Peregrine falcon monitoring and outreach.

The Access Fund and the American climbing community have an exemplary record of supporting natural resource protection. In general, climbers are strong supporters of open space and conservation, have a vested interest in environment, and understand the balance between conservation and access.

We look forward to working with you on the Draft Master Plan for Minnewaska State Park Preserve. Please contact me if you have any questions or need any assistance from the Access Fund.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diana Vernazza".

Diana Vernazza
Access Director
The Access Fund

cc: Brady Robinson, Access Fund Executive Director
Jason Keith, Access Fund Policy Director
Chris Moratz, Gunk Climbers Coalition Chairman
Hank Alicandry, Mohonk Preserve
Russ Clune, Mohonk Preserve
Senator John Bonacic, New York State Senate
Assemblyman Kevin A. Cahill, New York State Assembly