

Adirondack Cycling Strategy

An Action Plan for The Great South Woods



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Acknowledgements

Presented by:



Prepared by:



Project Team:

New York Bicycling Coalition
Paul Winkeller

Urban Cycling Solutions
Dan Suraci, AICP

TransPro Consulting
Lyndsey Scofield, PMP

Cycle Adirondacks
Matt VanSlyke

Photo Credit:

PureADK



Hamilton County was proud to take the lead in producing an Adirondack Cycling Strategy, as the opportunities around cycling are extraordinary here. You need to only look at the trends around cycling, and the immense outdoor recreational opportunities here in the Adirondacks, to understand why this project is critical. The opportunities for cycling here are second to none, so with a more comprehensive strategy crafted to link assets together and better cater to this growing economic sector, we can become an impressive destination!

-Bill Farber
Hamilton County





Background

Hamilton County received funding to prepare this Adirondack Cycling Strategy under the NYS DEC 2016-17 Adirondack Smart Growth Program. The project goal is to improve opportunities for bicycle tourism in the Adirondack Park and develop the region into a recognized cycling destination. The project is Phase I of a larger effort to create a Park-wide bicycle tourism program including a regional marketing strategy to promote existing assets to travellers. This Project has been funded in part by a grant from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Adirondack Park Community Smart Growth Program through appropriations from the New York State Environmental Protection Fund (EPF).



The purpose of this project is to create a catalytic ‘roadmap’ to transform the untapped potential of the Great South Woods and Adirondack Park into a world-class destination for bicycle tourism.



Project Goals

The recommendations and analysis in this strategy are aimed at three primary goals in the Great South Woods:

INCREASE:

Ridership

Get more people on bikes throughout the Adirondack Park.

FACILITATE:

Tourism

Capitalize on the unique assets that draw visitors to the Adirondacks and identify strategies to engage visitors with diverse interests.

FOSTER:

Economic Development

Work with local businesses and local governments to identify strategies which optimize the revenue potential from bicycle-based tourism.



Project Objectives

1

Assess current state of bicycle tourism and transportation in the Great South Woods.

3

Identify opportunities for enhancing bicycle tourism in the GSW and capitalizing on the benefits of growth in this sector.

2

Engage with broad array of public and private interests in the GSW and throughout the Park to tailor strategies to meet local needs.

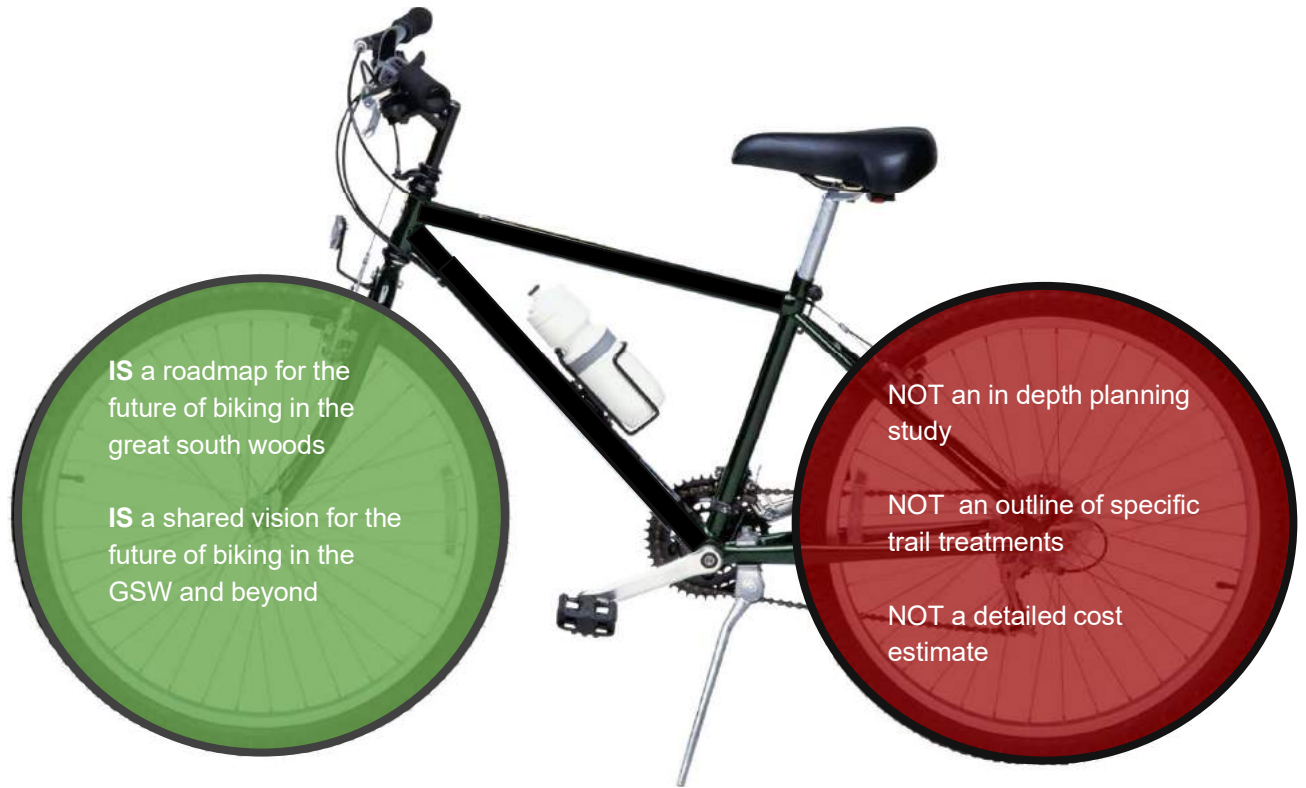
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Develop a suite of recommendations to enhance bicycle tourism that are scalable throughout the Adirondack Park.



Understanding This Cycling Strategy

This cycling strategy was commissioned by Hamilton County for the benefit of all Great South Woods (GSW) communities within the Adirondack Park. The strategies contained in this report are intended to drive GSW forward and enable communities to capitalize on the region's bicycle tourism potential. Further research and planning is required to execute many of the recommended strategies in this action plan.



IS a roadmap for the future of biking in the great south woods

IS a shared vision for the future of biking in the GSW and beyond

NOT an in depth planning study

NOT an outline of specific trail treatments

NOT a detailed cost estimate

Overview



Why Biking; Why Here?

Bicycle Tourism & Growth

Bicycle Tourism is a rapidly growing green industry in the United States. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, "It's estimated that 48 million people bicycle recreationally per year, contributing \$96.7 billion per year to the economy." Beyond economic impacts, bicycling can also reduce automobile congestion and contribute to better social, public health and environmental outcomes.

Economic Impacts of Bicycle Tourism

In 2017, the Outdoor Industry Association produced a study estimating that bicycle tourism is attributed to \$83 billion in 'trip-related' sales and generates an estimated \$97 billion in retail spending.

The same study also estimated that spending associated with bicycle recreation (change from tourism) contributes to the creation of 848,000 jobs. In New York State, a 2012 economic impact study of the 277-mile Erie Canalway Trail found that visitors generate \$253 million annually in sales, and contributed to the creation of 3,440 jobs. Spending for overnight visitors is estimated at \$531.47 per visit. These numbers are more than six years old and NYBC, who is the lead in this report, is currently developing plans for a statewide study to document the impact of bike based tourism throughout New York.



Photo: PureID1

Existing Conditions

A scenic view of a paved road winding through a mountainous landscape. Two cyclists are riding on the road. The background shows rolling hills and mountains under a clear sky. The road has a white shoulder line and a double yellow center line. Large grey rocks are in the foreground on the left.

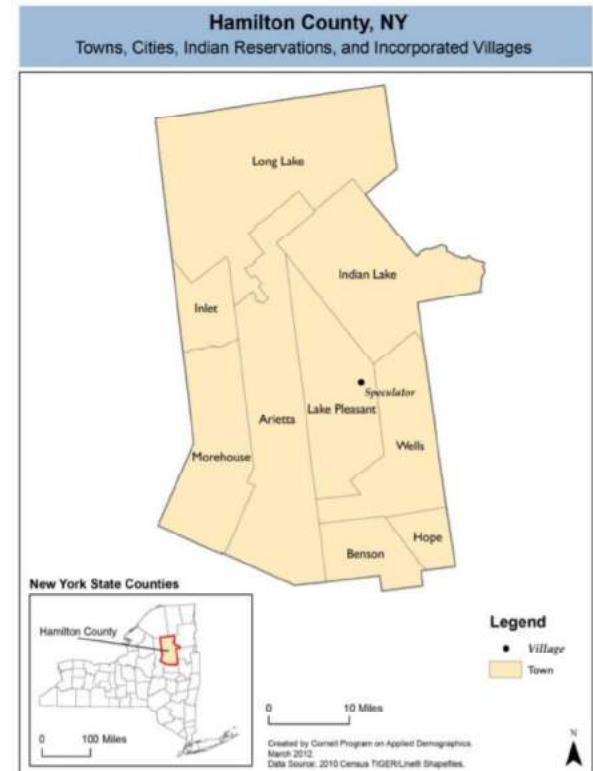


Hamilton County & The Great South Woods

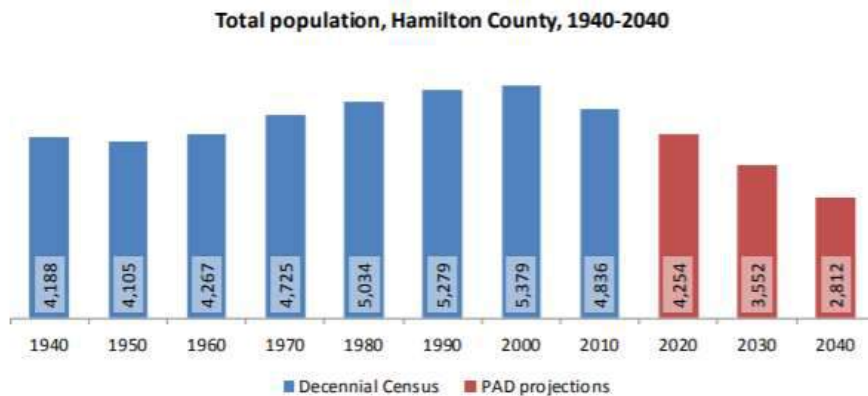
Located entirely within the Adirondack Park in north-central New York, Hamilton County is the state's third largest county in area but remains its least populous, with fewer than 5,000 residents. In fact, it is among the least populated counties in the eastern portion of the United States. There are nine towns and one incorporated village. Hamilton County lies within the two-million acre Great South Woods (GSW) planning area of the Adirondack Park. The GSW is also home to the highest percentage of state land in the Park, the most towns and hamlets, and nearly 900 miles of existing trails.

Demographic Snapshot

- Hamilton county is the least populous County in New York and expected to continue to lose population
- Only one of two counties located entirely within the Adirondack Park
- Population is aging, with approximately 28% of residents over age 65 as of 2015, and over 50% expected to be over age 65 by 2040
- A quarter of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher
- The unemployment rate is higher than New York State overall, and has been increasing since 2015



According to the 2017 Hamilton County Profile developed by the Cornell Program on Applied Demographics, the population of Hamilton County as of the 2010 Decennial Census was 4,836 and projected to decline over the next few decades.



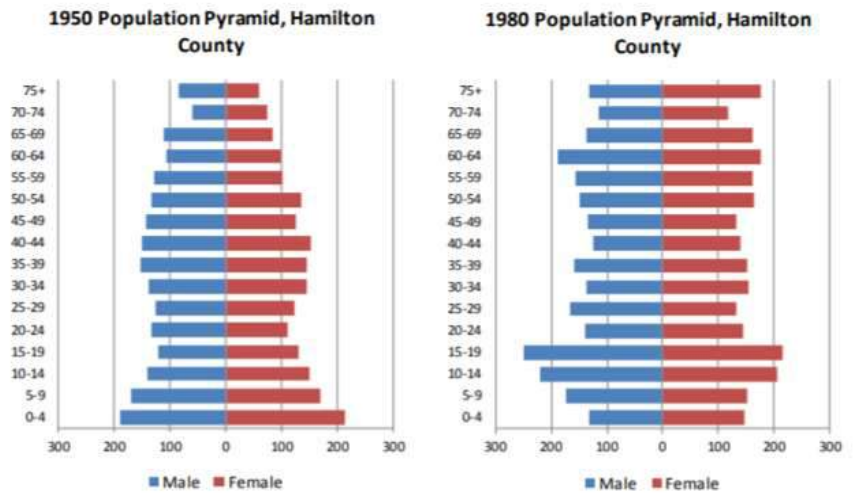
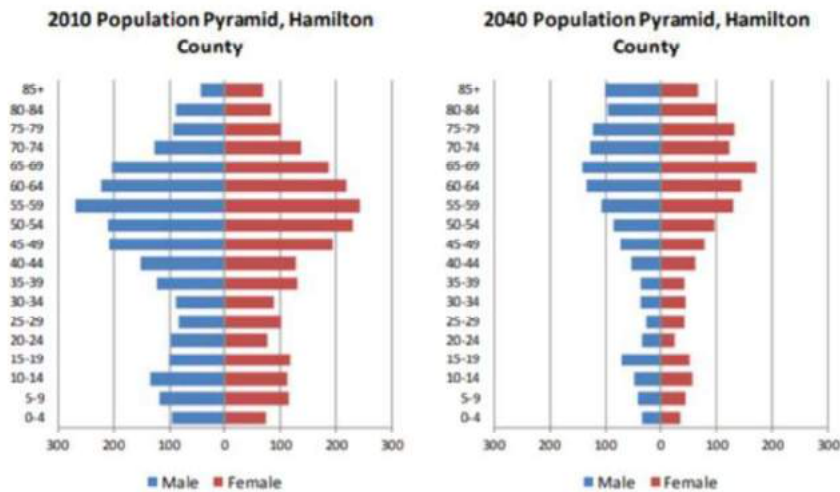
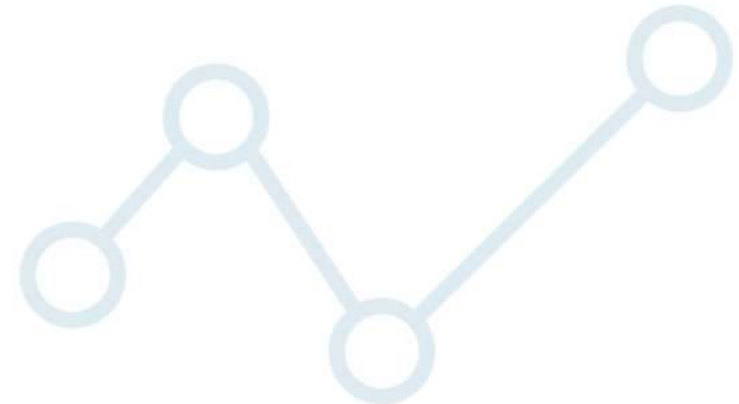
Source: 1940-2010 Decennial Census and projections by Cornell Program on Applied Demographics

Among the towns of Hamilton County, all but two lost population between 2000-2010 (Arietta and Hope had modest population gains). Indian Lake is home to more than a quarter of total County residents with a population of 1,352.

	Total Population		Difference	
	2000	2010	Count	%
New York State	18,976,821 *	19,378,102	401,281	2.1%
Hamilton County	5,379	4,836	-543	-10.1%
Towns				
Arietta	293	304	11	3.8%
Benson	201	192	-9	-4.5%
Hope	392	403	11	2.8%
Indian Lake	1,471	1,352	-119	-8.1%
Inlet	406	333	-73	-18.0%
Lake Pleasant	876	781	-95	-10.8%
Long Lake	852	711	-141	-16.5%
Morehouse	151	86	-65	-43.0%
Wells	737	674	-63	-8.5%

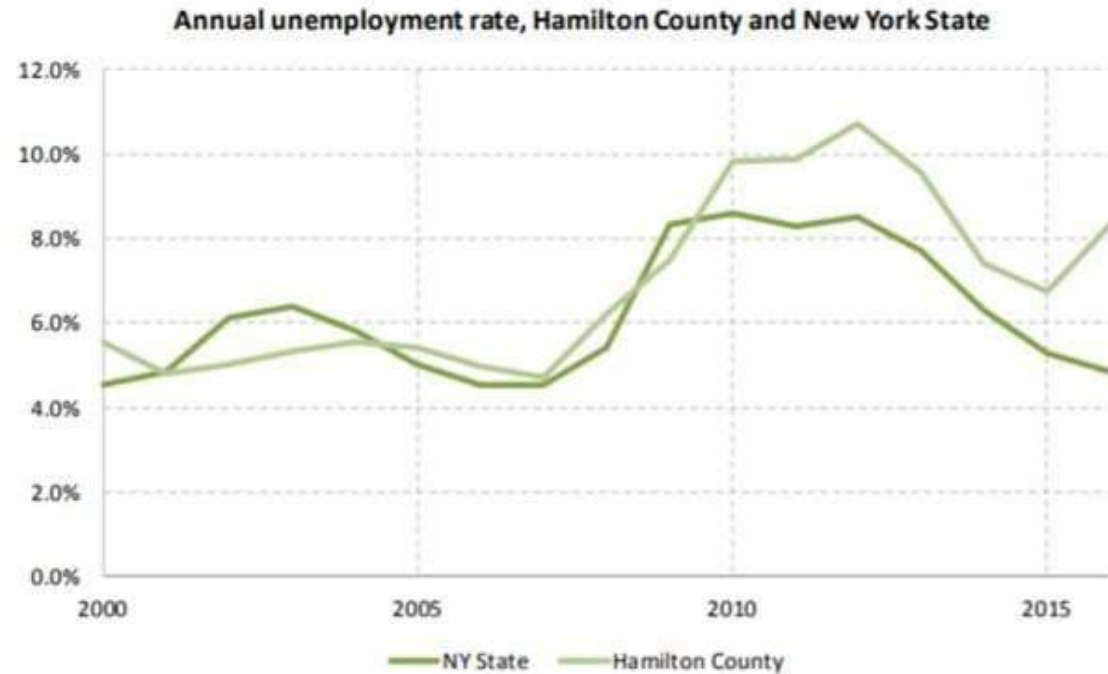
* Original counts revised through Count Question Resolution Program (CQR)
Source: U.S. Census Bureau intercensal population estimates 2000-2010

According to historical trends and projections, Hamilton County is comprised of an aging population. While the age distribution in 1980 was roughly evenly spread, the largest age cohort in 2010 was 55-59 and is projected to be 65-69 in 2040. By 2040, over half of Hamilton County residents are projected to be over 65 years of age.



Source: 1950, 1980, 2010 Decennial Census and projections by Cornell Program on Applied Demographics

The unemployment rate in Hamilton County has historically followed a similar pattern as New York State overall, but beginning in 2010 has an unemployment rate that exceeds that of the state and continues to trend upward while the state as a whole trends downwards.



Source: Bureau Labor Statistics (BLS)

Tourism, government and education are the three largest employers of those working in Hamilton County. As reported in the Adirondack Trail Towns (ATT) Strategic Plan, the economic opportunity to capitalize on the region's assets is promising. Located within a day's travel time to over 120 million people, the report highlights that visitation, especially among geotourists and Canadians, is increasing and the Park is reaching new markets.

The ATT Strategic Plan also discusses findings of the NYS Empire State Development "Economic Impact of Tourism in New York for the Calendar Year 2014" report, which found that Adirondack tourism generated 19% of total employment and was a \$1.3 billion industry, supporting nearly 21,000 jobs in 2014. The tourism industry generated almost \$350 million in direct labor income, almost \$600 million in combined direct, indirect and induced impact, and almost \$160 million in state and local taxes. According to the annual visitation study completed for ROOST, the average stay reported in 2012 increased substantially to more than five nights. The average age of respondents was 53 years old and a majority live within a day's drive or less, with half living in New York State. These tourism trends are promising and offer an opportunity for Hamilton County to leverage new strategies to increase their contribution to Adirondack tourism and reduce unemployment.

Adirondack Tourism Facts:

 **19%** of employment is tourism-related.

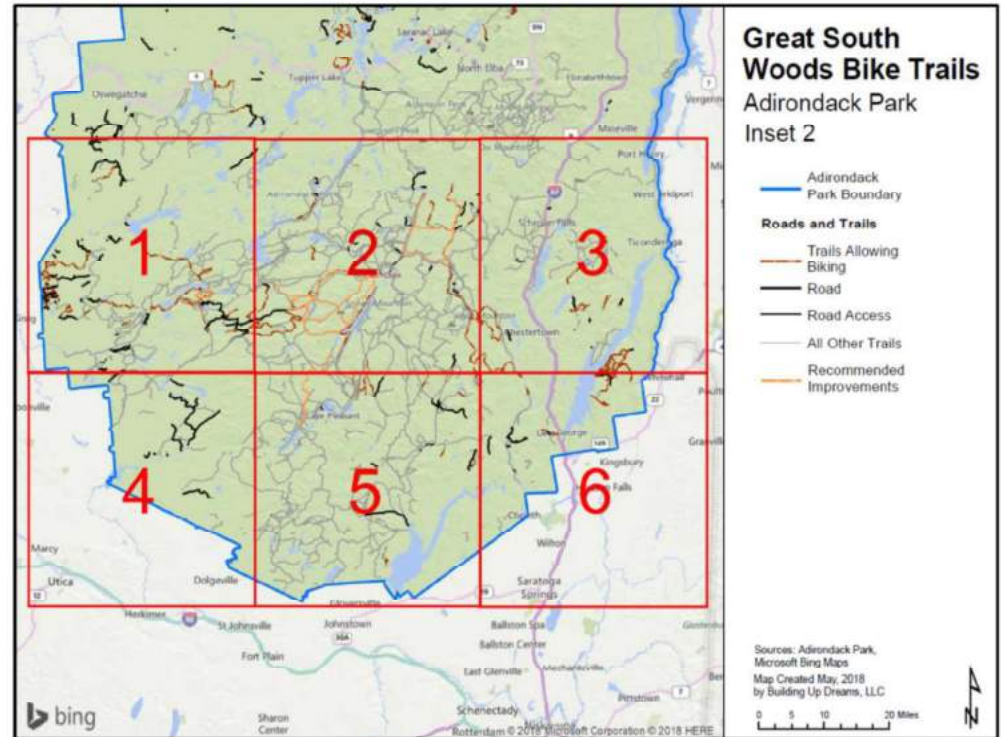
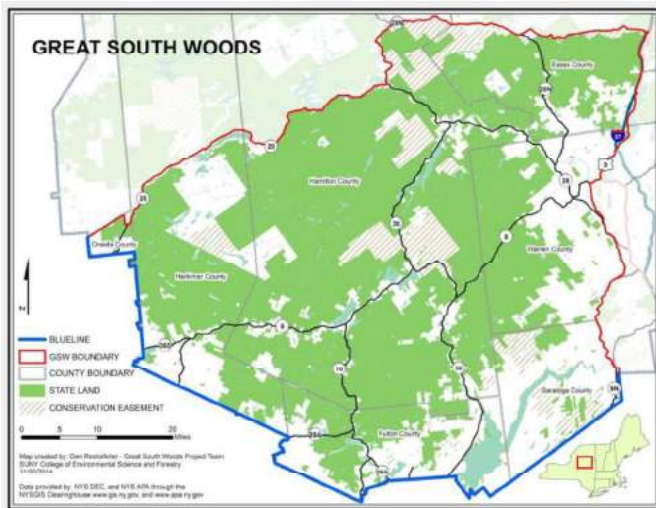
 **1.3B** Adirondack tourism industry.

 **160M** tax revenue.

 **21,000** jobs.

The Great Southwoods Trail Landscape

The Great South Woods represents the southern third of the Adirondack Park encompassing more than two million acres across seven counties including: Hamilton; Essex; Saratoga; Herkimer; Oneida; Fulton; Warren. Leveraging data from the 2016 Great South Woods study, this map provides detailed information on trails in the GSW including those allowing bicycle access. Appendix A provides detailed maps of each numbered map segment in this GSW map.



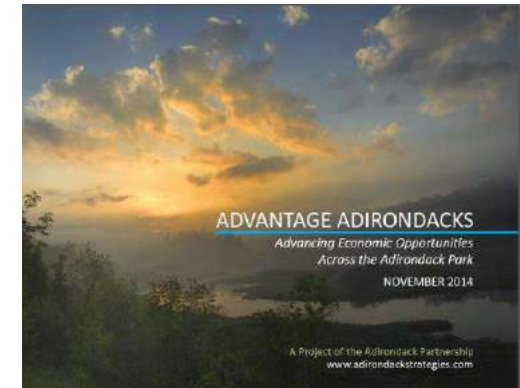
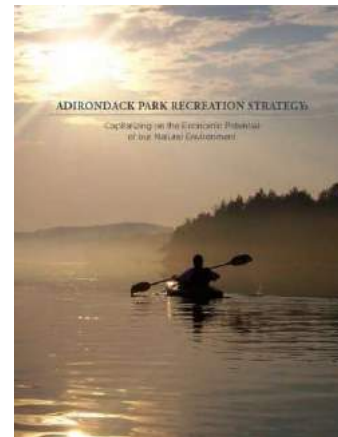
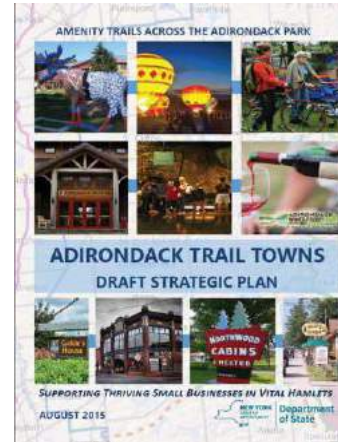
Literature Review

A scenic view of a paved road winding through a mountainous landscape. Two cyclists are riding on the road. The background features rolling hills and mountains under a clear sky.



Overview

While numerous studies and planning efforts have been undertaken for Hamilton County, the Great South Woods, and broader Adirondack Park region to address recreational and economic development opportunities that both directly and indirectly involve bicycling, a few of the particularly relevant studies are described in this section. This serves to provide a foundation and leverages ideas from prior planning efforts that can inform recommendations in the Adirondack Cycling Strategy.





Great South Woods Complex Planning: Strategies and Recommendation


This study was undertaken by the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry with input and guidance provided by NYS DEC Lands & Forests, Adirondack Park Agency and Hamilton County Board of Supervisors. By linking together communities and adjacent points of interest along the road system (e.g., lodging, restaurants, recreation outfitters) with recreation destinations of natural and cultural interest in the Forest Preserve (e.g., summits, scenic vistas, waterfalls, fishing and hunting areas), the GSW Strategy seeks to build a functional network for moving recreation users around the region.


This network would allow visitors and local residents to access trailheads and other entry points directly from locations within the communities. As envisioned, such a network would provide a number of other advantages, including: increased visitation of local communities and patronage of tourism-related businesses, reduced demand for roadside parking and camping adjacent to trailheads, and closer community engagement in project design and implementation.

Building on recent successes with public-private cooperation to maintain recreation access, such as in the Moose River Plains Wild Forest with the Towns of Inlet and Indian Lake, the GSW process also emphasizes that partnerships among communities, private sector and agency officials will be fundamental to design and implementation of the GSW Recommendations.

While the strategy is not focused on bicycling, the trail recommendations do include trails or trail segments that are currently or potentially suitable for bicycling. For example, the Potter Bike Trail is highlighted as an example where only 1.78 miles of newly constructed trail would be required to complete it, and its location in proximity to Inlet offers an opportunity to support local business.

Map 3 ▶ Fulton Chain Potter Bike Trail





Access: New trail segments close circuit and provide access to scenic view on hilltop, via spur trail up to 4th Lake Lookout.

Connectivity: Uses part of South Shore Rd, snowmobile trails (also Hamilton County Trail), and the start of the Black Fly Challenge trail out of Inlet. Junction with Limekiln Loop Trail (proposed).

Stewardship: Field-validate suitability of snowmobile trails for biking, assess potential impacts on wetland areas. Bike tracks may need to be established to connect main loop with portion of Hamilton Co Trail (proposed) that runs south to Limekiln Lake Campground. Install bike-washing stations for invasives and junction signage at trail crossings. Foot traffic on shared portions of route may require alternative tracks for hikers.

Destination: Bike from camp on Limekiln Lake along wooded trails to Fulton Chain scenic views and good eats in Inlet, then follow the circuit back to camp. Suitable for beginner/intermediate bikers (and families). Needs to be designed to ensure high-quality mountain biking experience.

Partnerships: Just over a mile of construction to close the circuit, some of which is located on private land, requiring negotiation with landowners; potential to organize mountain bike trail stewardship organization, and coordinate with bike rental businesses in Inlet (likely already using this area) and Old Forge. Design specialized trails for advanced bikers.

The **Potter Bike Trail** is a 7.73 mile mountain bike loop that originates in the hamlet of Inlet and encircles Fern Park, a popular community recreation area. The Trail takes advantage of existing roads and trails, only requiring 1.78 miles of newly constructed trail. Spur trail affords a view at 4th Lake Overlook. Potter Bike Trail links to the TOBIE, which is also bike-able around the Fulton Chain of Lakes. Bikes can be rented from the local outfitter in Inlet.



Adirondack Trail Towns Strategic Plan: Supporting Thriving Small Businesses in Vital Hamlets

Prepared in 2015 for Hamilton County and the Adirondack Partnership, this plan evaluated the “feasibility and desirability of developing a community-oriented Adirondack Trail Towns (ATT) program.... to encourage Main Street revitalization, hamlet revitalization and support small businesses. It links a wide range of arts, heritage, cultural, etc. amenities with sport ‘recreation’ destinations Park-wide.” As pictured on the right, it included a wide range of case studies from which it identified a number of key principles that could be instructive to Hamilton County. Overall, the plan mentions that four types of experiences have been identified as necessary to address contemporary trends, all of which can be leveraged to inform Hamilton County’s Cycling Strategy:

- Educational experiences expose visitors to new information, increasingly in a hands-on way.
- Aesthetics experiences enable visitors to enjoy and directly interact with both the natural and built environments.
- Entertainment experiences help visitors to access a range of venues, events and activities which are fun social gatherings.
- Escape experiences help tourists to appreciate the uniqueness of the Adirondacks as different from home and perhaps different from other places people have visited and offer opportunities for adventure.

The plan also cited the “Upper Hudson Recreation Hub,” consisting of Newcomb, Minerva, North Hudson, Long Lake and Indian Lake, as a promising emerging example of cooperation. With Long Lake and Indian Lake being located in Hamilton County, there may be an opportunity to integrate this hub into Hamilton County’s Cycling Strategy.

Other efforts mentioned in the study, like the Champlain Area Trails in Essex County, that are consciously planning starting and ending points for guided trails in hamlets, partnering with local businesses to offer discounts and free services to trail users, could also provide instructive models for similar efforts to be undertaken in Hamilton County. Another example is the North Country REDC, which has focused on communities that support river corridors and scenic highways through projects like “Bike the Byways.” Of the 15 Byways identified, there are multiple that traverse Hamilton County. In addition to providing an opportunity to utilize existing resources (such as maps of cycling events, shops, and paths along trail segments in Hamilton County), this also provides an opportunity for the County to leverage its role in a larger regional cycling attraction and take advantage of promotional opportunities that come with it.





ADVANTAGE Adirondacks: Advancing Economic Opportunities Across the Adirondack Park

ADVANTAGE Adirondacks is a comprehensive plan to advance economic opportunities across New York’s six million acre Adirondack Park. Developed for the Adirondack Partnership, it views “environmental and economic sustainability as mutually dependent and reinforcing.” It advances a planning agenda for the new people-and-place-based economy where collaboration is the “silver bullet,” addressing key goals to:

- Inspire a culture of entrepreneurship, globally competitive workforce and diverse business base
- Promote a sustainable and connected rural life with quality infrastructure and amenities
- Reinvent traditional industry across working landscapes in forestry, natural resources and agriculture
- Advance the Park as a world-class destination

Although the plan focuses broadly on various economic development strategies, it does include some opportunities that can inform this Adirondack Cycling Strategy. For example, the plan mentions that municipalities can enhance their attractiveness to the growing number of companies that support healthy lifestyles as a key way to attract and retain talent by adopting policies and practices that help make residents and visitors healthier. This includes “complete streets” that accommodate all modes of travel (pedestrian, bicycling, automobiles, transit, and freight) as part of hamlet revitalization to enhance opportunities for walking and biking and interconnecting hamlets with multi-use trails. It also mentions target improvements and upgrades to existing accommodations to provide amenities (for example, secure bike storage, rentals, repair, information/mapping resources).

SWOT Analysis





SWOT Analysis

S	Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Characteristics of the Great South Woods representing an advantage to the advancement of biking.• What about the Great South Woods is good for biking?
W	Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Characteristics of the Great South Woods representing a disadvantage to the advancement of biking.• What about the Great South Woods is bad for biking?
O	Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elements in the environment or marketplace that the Great South Woods can take advantage of to advance biking.• What trends or circumstances in Great South Woods communities are good for biking?
T	Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elements in the environment that or marketplace that could cause trouble for the biking in the Great South Woods.• What competition or challenges are potential setbacks to biking in the Great South Woods?

SWOT Results

This SWOT analysis was developed with input - initiated on local government day in the spring of 2018 - from a wide variety of stakeholders throughout the Great South Woods and greater Adirondack Park. In addition to representatives from local government day, inputs include detailed follow up interviews with business, advocacy and government stakeholders in the region. The SWOT results in this diagram represent a prioritized list of the most frequently discussed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Strengths

- Natural scenery and viewsheds
- Varied terrain
- State campsites
- Good distances and ride times between communities
- Existing trail network

Weaknesses

- Lack of focus on marketing the park as a bike tourism destination
- Lack of overnight accommodations
- Lack of bike shops and rentals
- Poor road conditions and inadequate accommodations for bicycles
- Lack of maps and wayfinding
- Black flies



Opportunities

- Proximity to the Empire State Trail route
- Growing interest in cycling and bicycle tourism
- Combining multi-sport activities
- Seasonal workforce development

Threats

- Lack of funding for bike improvements & trail maintenance
- Regional job market
- Population loss
- Too much land designated as "wilderness" where bikes are not allowed

Types of Cyclists & Cycling

A scenic view of a paved road winding through a mountainous landscape. Two cyclists are riding on the road. The background shows rolling hills and mountains under a clear sky. The road has a white line on the left and a double yellow line in the center. Large rocks are visible in the foreground on the left.

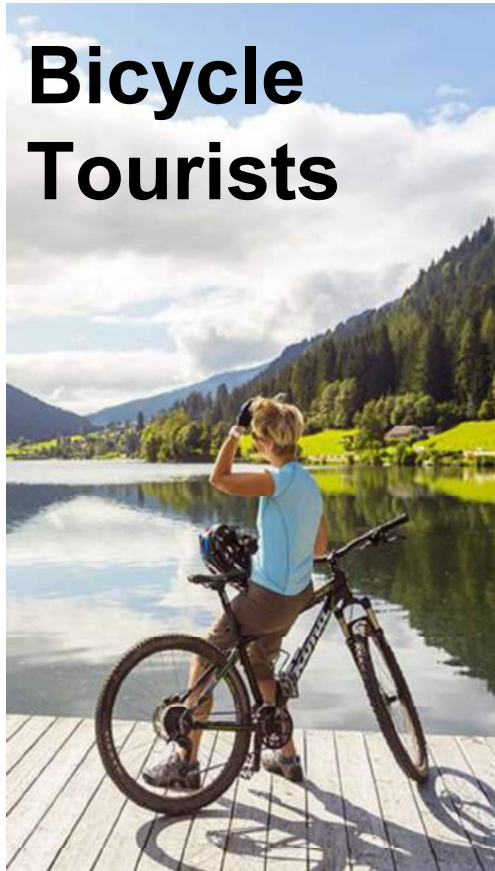


Types of Cyclists

The purpose of this report is to produce a series of recommendations which advance biking in the Great South Woods for all users. There are many types of cycling that accommodate a wide variety of skill levels and purposes. In this section, we dissect these groups in terms of both geographic origin and type of bicycling activity. For the purposes of this strategy, cyclists are divided into two groups:

1. **Local Cyclists** - Bikers originating in the Adirondacks who ride for commuting or recreational purposes.
2. **Bicycle Tourists** - Bikers originating outside the Adirondack region visiting for varying recreational experiences.

Both of these groups engage in a variety of different types of cycling which are detailed in the following pages.



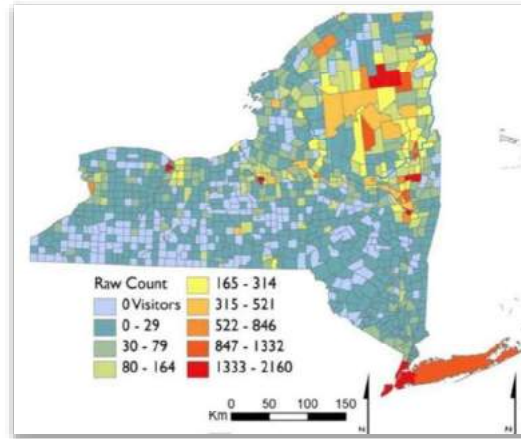


Demographics of Bicycle Tourists

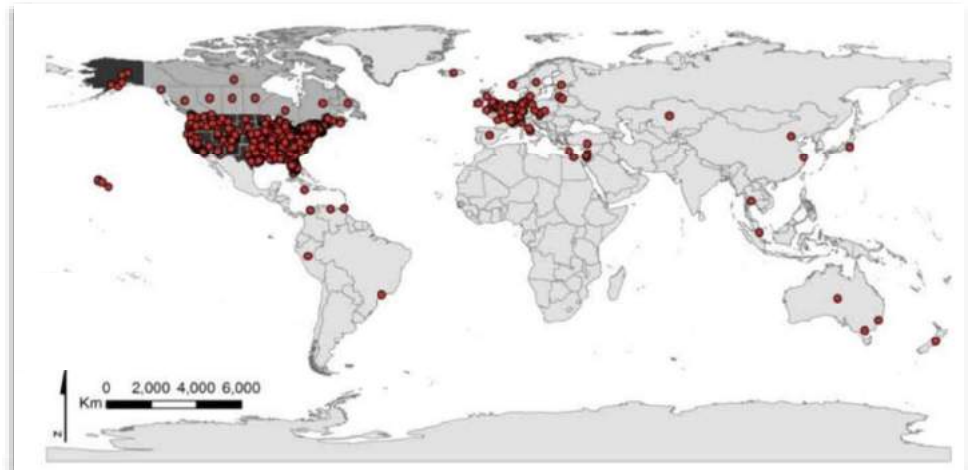
According to the Adventure Cycling Association:

- 82% of touring cyclists have a college education
- 52 is the average age
- 58% earn more than \$75,000 per year
- 8.1% are international tourists

Bicycle travelers are older, well educated and tend to be interested in the unique characteristics of place such as the culture, landscape, history, and the well-being of its residents (as defined by National Geographic). These individuals tend to earn more than the national median income and have a preference for spending money locally. They also tend to enjoy developing meaningful connections with locals, and explore *off the beaten path*.



According to the Adirondack Park Trail Register Database (ADK-TReD), the Adirondack Trail usershed extends across the United States, Europe, Australia and several countries in South America and Asia. Based on State origin data, New York City is a key region to target for outreach around trail-based tourism.





Types of Riding

Bicycling is a multifaceted activity with a wide range of utility and recreational opportunity. There are many types of cycling that accommodate a wide variety of skill levels and purposes. For the purposes of this investigation Adirondack Cycling is divided into four categories:





Mountain Biking



Route Type

- Single track
- Double track
- Dirt road

Route Attributes

- Rolling hills
- Climbing trails
- Downhill/flow trails

Rider Preference

- Enough trail distance to ride multiple days
- Multiple access points

Amenities

- On-trail wayfinding with simple maps and regular signage
- Digital trail download
- On-trail rest stops with snacks, water, minor repairs, etc.
- Access to lodging of various types/prices
- Direct trail access is a selling point
- Local food and beverage availability
- Evening activities and events
- Attractions for non-cycling group members (day-time)
- Local bike shop(s)



Organized Riding



Route Type

- Paved road shoulders
- On-road bike routes

Route Attributes

- Low-volume roads
- Scenic corridors

Rider Preference

- Multiple distance options
- Some climbing, but generally avoiding largest hills
- 10-20 mile spacing between rest areas

Amenities

- Local lodging
- Local food and beverage
- Connection to community
- Access to local history, arts and cultural attractions
- Mechanical support
- Medical support
- Staffed rest areas
- Themed rides
- Charity rides
- Clear wayfinding
 - Printed maps
 - Road markings
 - Temporary signage
 - Digital route download



Bicycle Touring



Route Type

- Paved road shoulders
- On-road bike routes
- Dirt roads

Route Attributes

- Rolling terrain with scenic corridors
- Low-volume roads

Rider Preference

- Longer distances from 40 to 60 miles or more per day
- Periodic stops near restrooms, grocery stores and other amenities.

Amenities

- Water stations
- Bike shops
- Downtown retail destinations with bicycle parking.
- Reserved campsites for cyclists which include:
 - Covered bike racks
 - Shower facilities
 - Repair trees
- On-trail wayfinding
 - Maps with location indicators
 - Downloadable maps
- Phone charging stations
- Fire pits



Bicycle Commuting



Route Type

- On-road shoulders
- Bike lanes
- Dirt roads
- Protected bike paths

Route Attributes

- Low-volume roads
- Direct access to commercial and employment centers

Rider Preference

- Routes of 3 to 15 miles
- Flat direct trails/routes that bypass areas with high traffic volume

Amenities

- Secure bike parking/storage at destination:
 - Employers
 - Commercial destinations (grocery stores, restaurants, etc.)
 - Public facilities (post office, library, city hall)
- Changing rooms
- Shower facilities
- Repair trees
 - Tire pumps
 - Tools
 - Repair stand



What Riders Want

Any given cycling experience in the Adirondacks is unique depending on the intents and preferences of riders. Local riders and bicycle tourists may seek similar experiences and challenges in mountain bike, touring and events. This Adirondack Cycling Strategy is designed to be flexible such that it allows different types of bicyclists to *choose their own adventure*.



Bicycle Tourists



Local Riders

Mountain Biking

Organized Events

Bicycle Touring

Bicycle Commuting

Recommendations

A scenic view of a paved road winding through a mountainous landscape. Two cyclists are riding on the road. The background shows rolling hills and mountains under a clear sky. The word "Recommendations" is overlaid in large white text.



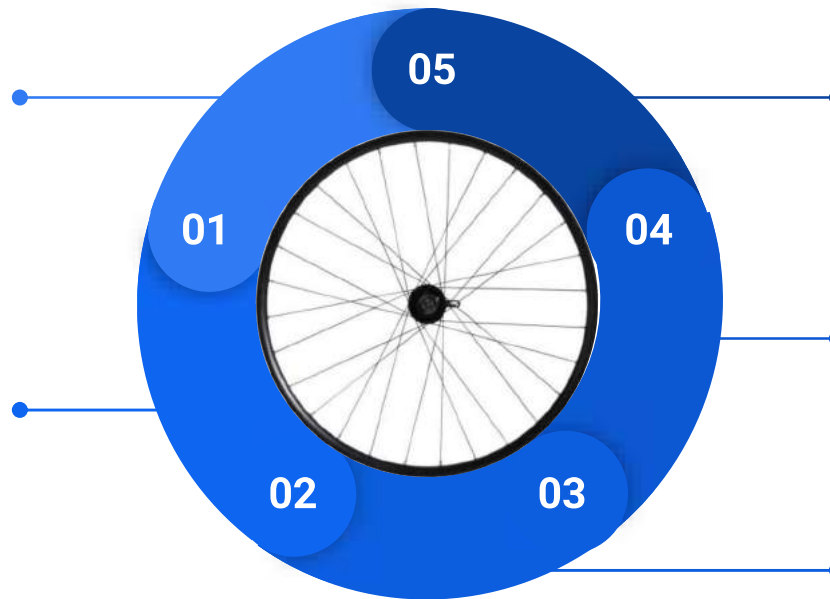
The Great South Woods Strategy

Establish a Regional Coalition

Many of the recommendations in this report are predicated on the establishment of a centralized forum to drive momentum and facilitate action items amongst regional stakeholders.

Establish Vetted GSW Routes

Develop a series of routes of varying distances with a complete inventory of amenities. Work on physical enhancements to these routes for prospective bicycle tourists.



Develop Enhanced Dataset

Work with state agencies to better understand the state of roadways and trails in the GSW to produce prioritized plans for future infrastructure improvements.

Provide Tools & Incentives for Local Businesses

Encourage businesses to earn Bicycle-Friendly Business designations with the League of American Bicyclists.

Create Park-Wide Marketing and Branding Strategy

Research target markets and develop a unified look and feel to draw bicycle tourists to the region.



01 Establish a Regional Coalition

Many of the recommendations in this report are predicated on the establishment of a centralized forum to drive momentum and facilitate action items amongst regional stakeholders. Assembling a regional coalition with regular meetings will mobilize the bicycling, hospitality, economic development and business communities around taking the necessary steps required to capitalize on growing interest in bicycling and bike-based tourism in the Adirondacks and throughout NYS. The lead agency will be responsible for coordinating with relevant agencies to drive the implementation of the recommendation in this plan. The coalition will ideally be comprised of regional authorities positioned to drive implementation of specific recommendations. For example, the

Adirondack Regional Chamber of Commerce is ideally situated to deploy the business toolkit recommended in Task 3. In collaboration with the NYS Departments of Transportation and Environmental Conservation, the Adirondack Glens Falls Transportation Council can oversee the data-driven infrastructure deliverables in task 5. The Adirondack Regional Tourism Council would be a key partner in deploying any Adirondack trail brand strategy. In addition to the recommendations in this report, a coalition will enable collaboration with complimentary efforts such as the Adirondack Wayfinder application and the Hamlets-to-Huts initiative.

