



Sarah B. Foulke Friendship Trails Master Plan Summary Report

for the Southern Palmertown Range

PREPARED FOR

Palmertown Guidance Committee

PREPARED BY

Lead Consultant: Penn Trails LLC

Project Team:

Barton & Loguidice

Wilderness Property Management

Tahawus Trails LLC

Strong Outcomes LLC

Community Consultants LLC

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Draft Date: July 2, 2021

Acknowledgements

Prepared for:

Palmertown Guidance Committee

Including representatives of the following organizations and agencies:

- Saratoga PLAN
- Open Space Institute
- Town of Corinth
- Town of Greenfield
- Town of Wilton
- Town of Moreau
- Village of Corinth
- City of Saratoga Springs
- NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
- NYS Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
- Skidmore College



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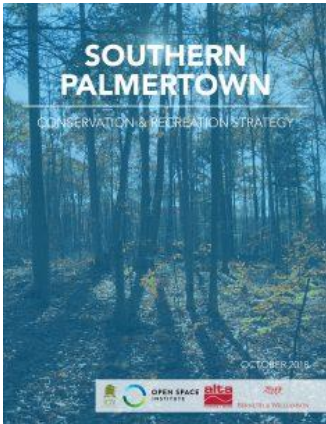


1. Background, Vision, and Goals

The Sarah B. Foulke Friendship Trails (the Friendship Trails) are envisioned as a network of interconnected and stand-alone trails traversing a mosaic of public and private lands dispersed throughout the Palmertown Region. The trails will be located on public land (Moreau Lake State Park, Lincoln Mountain State Forest, Daniels Road State Forest, Saratoga County Forests, and potentially town and county owned tracts), as well as on institutional lands (Skidmore College, Open Space Institute, Saratoga PLAN), and on private landowners' properties protected by conservation easements¹ that permit public access. The trails will consist of long-distance connector trails and shorter loop trails, multi-use, and, in aggregate, collectively accommodate the spectrum of trail users of all abilities, as feasible and appropriate.¹

The trails will foster friendship, as well as opportunities for personal solitude and renewal. The Friendship Trails will provide enjoyment through an inclusive spectrum of outdoor activities, providing opportunities across the system for walking, running, wheel-chairing, dog-walking, mountain-biking, horseback-riding, birdwatching, hunting, botanizing, forest-bathing, paddling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, and learning about nature and local history. The Master Plan is a precursor to site-specific design and development of trail segments and trail networks for individual properties in the future.¹

Development of a master trail plan emerged as the Palmertown Guidance Committee's top priority for implementing the recommendations in the Southern Palmertown Conservation and Recreation Strategy² produced in October 2018, with the help of consultants Alta Planning and Design and Bernuth & Williamson.



Right: Saratoga context maps from www.DiscoverSaratoga.org and Saratoga PLAN

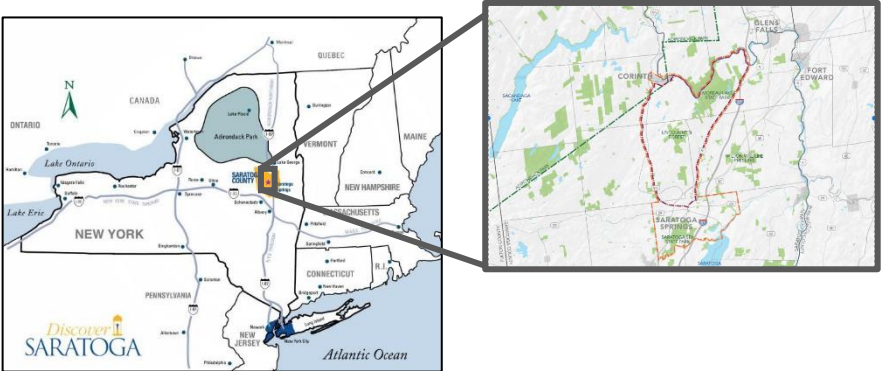
Master Plan Goals

The Master Plan provides a mile-high view. While over 30 miles of trail alignment were scouted in the field and over 50 miles are defined as part of the proposed trails system, the corridor is conceptual in nature, and is subject to change as circumstances shift. Any number of factors could result in a realignment of the corridor as conceptual and detail design is undertaken for each trail segment and site.

Through the development of trail design guidelines and recommendations surrounding community use preferences, amenity standards, and physical trail parameters, this master plan strives to provide the tools to empower project partners to:

- Create relationships with new stakeholders to inform the direction and priorities of the Friendship Trails
- Visualize Core and Peripheral Trails that embody the vision of the Friendship Trails
- Prioritize trail development
- Guide fundraising
- Shape programming
- Respond to new challenges and opportunities as they arise in an informed and structured manner

Lack of access to the outdoors and nature can impact a community's desire to conserve and protect the landscape. As Jane Goodall famously said, "Only if we understand, will we care. Only if we care, will we help. Only if we help, shall all be saved." Trails are an important way for people to have personally meaningful first-hand experiences in nature—experiences that build a conservation ethic and a foundation of understanding the need for and importance of the natural world.



Design Rooted in Community Feedback

The Friendship Trails are unique because of their emphasis on friendship, building community, and connecting people from all walks of life to nature and to each other. To realize that vision, the master planning effort involved an extensive interview and survey process to hear from a wide variety of people who live, work, and plan in the Palmertown Range.

Inclusion through Engagement

In a reflection of the Guidance Committee's insight from the first phase of the Palmertown Range master planning process, as well as the request for proposals for this phase of the Friendship Trails project, the master planning process worked to "ensure that vocal interests are not overrepresented, nor quiet interests underrepresented, by consulting demographic data and reaching out to others with an interest in the outdoors and how it might benefit the entire community²." The strategy centered on gaining insights from, and continued engagement with, community groups.

Field-Based Trail Design

With a heavy emphasis on trail sustainability, the design team incorporated the community input as well as feedback from land managers and the Guidance Committee to develop trail design parameters to help the trail take shape. This set of trail parameters are meant to provide welcoming trail experiences for the broadest range of activities and visitors throughout the Palmerton Range. In this way, the Friendship Trails represent a symbolic tool to unify trails within the Palmertown Range and provide a variety of unique, interconnected experiences.



¹ Saratoga PLAN. (2020, December 24). *Palmertown Range*. Retrieved from Saratoga PLAN: <https://www.saratogaplan.org/explore/public-preserves-trails/palmertown/>

² ALTA. (2018, October). *Southern Palmertown Conservation and Recreation Strategy*. Retrieved from Saratoga PLAN: https://spaces.hightail.com/space/B4uMcHNibr/files/fi-554a8506-35ec-4e6d-b995-97e9a435a0d7/fv-0eb9eff2-e853-4d71-a352-ad12be9cde3c/FINAL_Palmertown_Report_20181011_Small.pdf

2. Community Input

Americans face significant gaps between their interests in spending time in nature and their opportunities to do so.³ The community input sought to clarify those gaps in Saratoga County, as well as who has access to trails close to home, or trails that are accessible and welcoming. Working with the Guidance Committee, a multi-faceted approach was used to identify non-conservation-oriented community organizations and individuals who could share their understanding of barriers to trail and conservation area use - and turn challenges into opportunities. The process involved a series of interviews with representatives of these community organizations, followed by an online survey.

Community input via both the community interviews and the online survey surpassed expectations. Community leaders from 20 organizations volunteered their time to share their insights. These organizations serve thousands of people who are not typically considered outdoor enthusiasts and are often left out of the trail experience discussion. The broader community responded with enthusiasm as well: over 1,000 people completed the online survey.



Community Organization Interviews

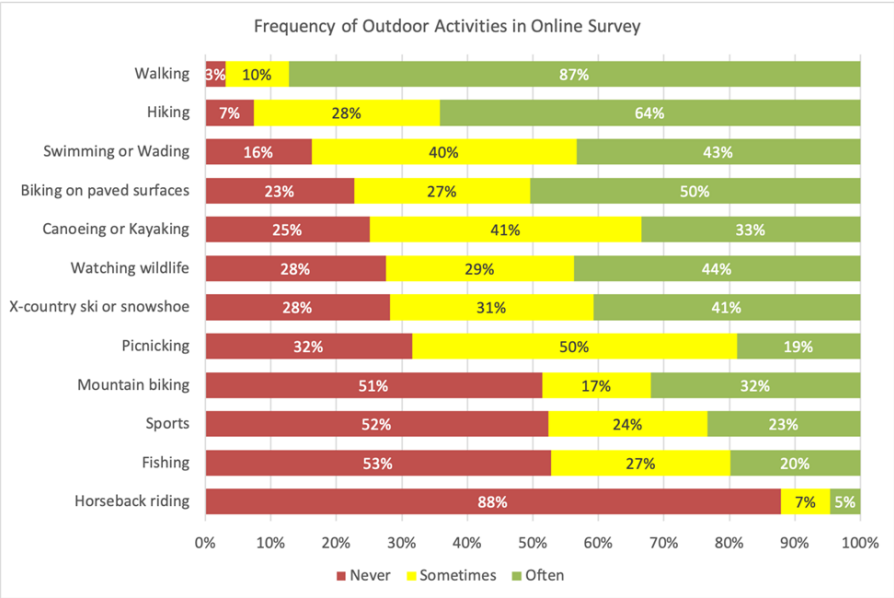
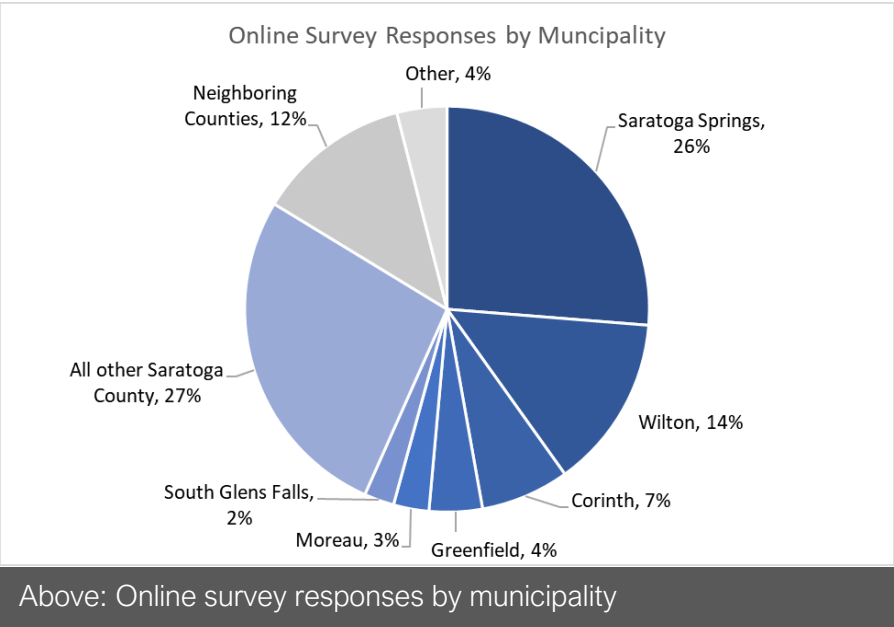
Talking with organizational staff was an intentional strategy of this community engagement process to learn a variety of perspectives about trails from people who face different kinds of challenges. Interviewees work for organizations that provided a wide range of services and support for thousands of people throughout the Saratoga region:

- Service for people with low incomes
- Service for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities
- Service for people experiencing addiction
- Service for people experiencing domestic violence
- Anti-racism organization
- Service for veterans
- Public Schools and Public Libraries
- Recreation, health and wellness organizations
- Faith Group

Online Survey Respondents

The goal of the online survey was to get feedback from as many people as possible, including those organizations and individuals who focused on conservation and outdoor recreation as well as the constituents of the community groups previously interviewed. The survey was designed to gather detailed information about the respondent's outdoor activities, the types of trails they value, barriers to trail access, and their ideas for making trails more welcoming. The chart on the right shows how survey respondents reported using trails.

Most of the respondents were from Saratoga County (84%), primarily from Palmetown Region municipalities (57%). This indicates online survey respondents live, work, or play in Saratoga County and are prime potential users of Friendship Trails, if the system meets their needs.



³ Kellert, S., Case, D., Escher, D., Is-Carrasco, M., & Seng, P. (2017). *The Nature of Americans: Disconnection and recommendation for reconnection*. Retrieved from DJ Case: <https://natureofamericans.org/>

Comparing Interviews and Survey Responses

Though there are some key differences between the interviews and the survey responses, when asked what they were looking for in trail experiences, or how they might use trails, there was considerable overlap between the community organizations and survey respondents.

- Trails for Casual Walking
- Trails for Socializing
- Trails for Staying Healthy
- Trails for Connecting with Nature
- Trails that Provide Different Experiences
- Trails that are Close to Home and Work

These findings are consistent with other data surrounding trails and trail preferences.

Although there was a strong interest in trails, there are community organizations who don't yet talk about outdoor recreation and trails with the people they work with in part because they haven't considered how it might be beneficial in achieving their primary mission. They also noted that suitable trails are hard to find or too far away.

Interviewees cited the following additional benefits of trails for the people they worked with:

- Trails are seen as economically inclusive
- Trails as transportation
- Serving and connecting with youth



Photo courtesy Karen Strong

Key Findings

People are excited about the Friendship Trails concept because they see a need for:

- **More trails:** There was a recognition that trails are getting more crowded, which showed a growing demand for trails. Many community groups are seeing an increased interest in trails.
- **Inclusive nature trails:** People recognized that there are hundreds of existing trails in the region that aren't accessible to a broad spectrum of the community. Those who are more mobility challenged want to experience nature.
- **Social trails:** COVID-19 clarified that people are looking for trails where they can socialize with friends and family. These trails tend to allow people to be side-by-side.

There is a need for more trail experiences and programs, for those with and without mobility challenges.

- **People want walkable and mobility-friendly trails:** The survey showed that most respondents primarily used trails for walking (compared to running, biking, etc.). Most interviewees expressed interest in trails that also work for strollers and self-propelled or electric wheelchairs. This and the survey showed most people visit trails to walk.
- **People who have been left out** of the trail experience include youth, elders, people with physical mobility challenges, and people without access to reliable transportation.
- **More trail options are needed:** People who are mobile have hundreds of options for trails in the region, yet people who face different kinds of challenges have access to significantly fewer trails in nature. For example, people with challenges such as limited mobility or visual impairments do not feel comfortable or safe on most existing trails in the region.
- **Not all trails need to serve every person** but there should be an emphasis on creating additional trails that address the current shortfall of walkable trails that allow for side-by-side conversations. The similarities between responses from people who use trails and don't yet use trails showed that trail design that is inclusive and welcoming will serve a broad sector of the community.

- **Programming and interpretation** are important in making people feel welcome on trails. Simply building trails, and expecting people to use them, will not be adequate if the goal is to build a broader constituency of trail users.
- **Trails are needed close to home.** Trails and related conservation areas that are distributed throughout the region will provide access to a variety of communities and neighborhoods. This diversified trail and conservation area strategy would be particularly helpful for those with mobility or transportation challenges. People who are more mobile and able-bodied also appreciate the convenience of more local trails. Only 22 people mentioned wanting longer distance, connected trails.

Safety, and a perception of safety, is paramount. When people do not feel safe, they do not visit trails.

- There are a wide range of issues that cause people to feel unsafe, and not all of them are addressed by trail design.
- Examples include concerns about falling, getting lost, interacting with unleashed dogs, harassment by other trail users, and ticks,
- To make a trail system more welcoming, focus on design features and amenities that expand the community of people using trails, by addressing perceptions of safety in the design and location of trails and trailheads.

People don't know where to find the trails they want to use.

- Both interviewees and survey respondents said it is unclear what kinds of experiences, views, and amenities are provided by different trails before they go.
- There are many people in the region who are not yet using trails because they do not know where trails are that would be interesting and appropriate for them.

When taken within the context of the high level of development pressure facing Saratoga County, these findings reflect an urgency to capture opportunities to ensure inclusive and high-quality nature-based experiences throughout the region. Insights from this process indicate a need and desire for establishing new opportunities for people to be outside in nature in a manner that is convenient and welcoming. This approach "rebalances" the number, proximity, availability, and onsite experiences of trails for those with mobility challenges as well as those looking for "social" trails in nature close to home and work when compared to trails accessible to more mobile or able-bodied members of the community.

3. Inventory & Analysis

The inventory and analysis process identifies existing conditions and explores how those conditions will impact the trail system. The map at right illustrates the spectrum of identified Opportunities and Constraints. It is important to note that a trail master plan level study does not capture every factor influencing final trail design. This Master Plan identifies opportunities and constraints that are the most salient to forming the basis for additional considerations at the later detail design level. In the formal detail design process, additional opportunities and constraints will be further identified.

Opportunities and Constraints

Opportunities and constraints were organized into four categories to aid in analyzing their respective impacts to the proposed trail system.

- Site Features
- Existing Infrastructure
- Access
- Topography

Key Conserved Lands

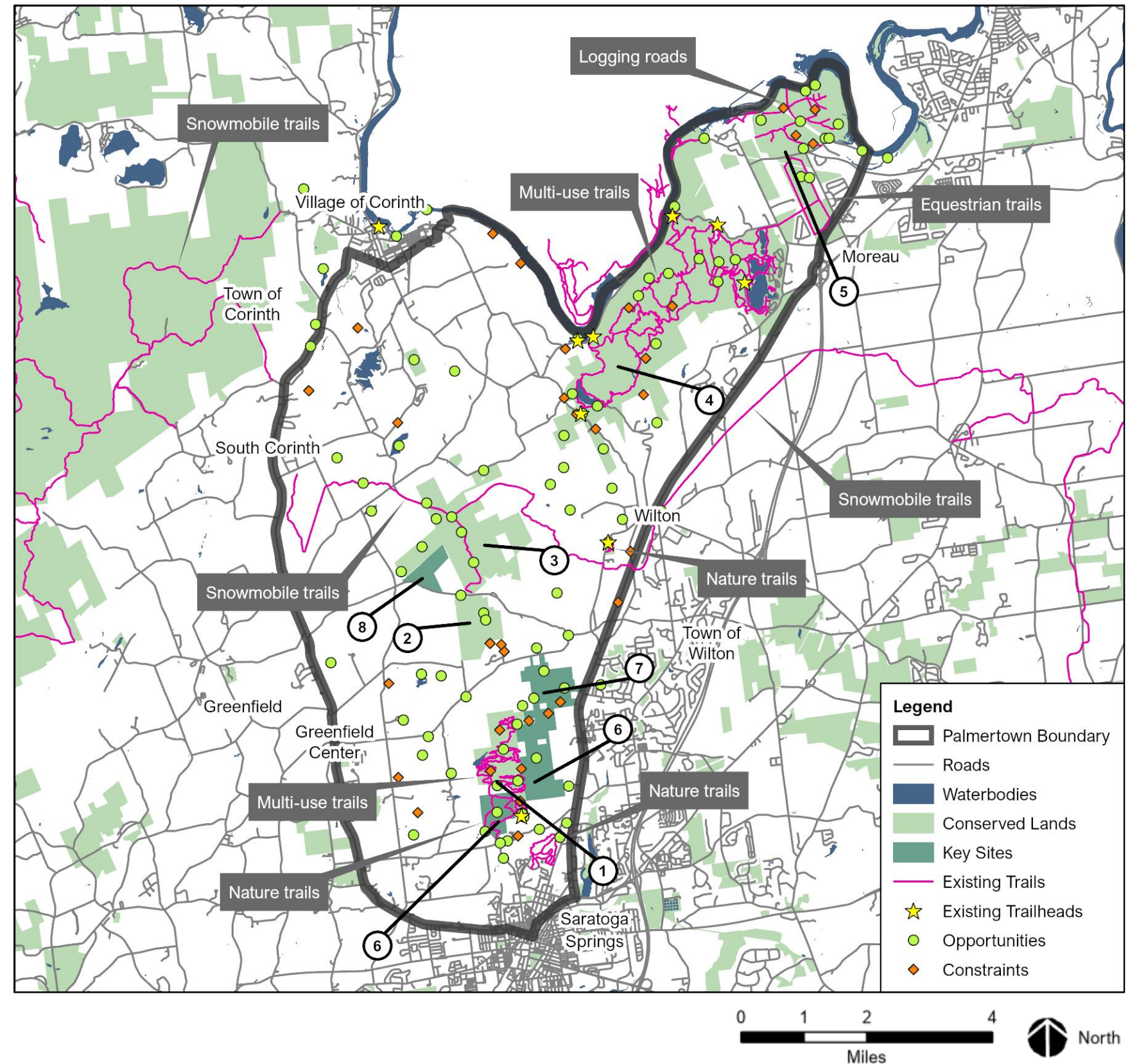
Conserved Lands considered for the Friendship Trails system include both State-owned land that is publicly accessible, as well as privately conserved properties. Both types of sites contain existing trails.

1. Daniels Road State Forest
2. Greentree Lake
3. Lincoln Mountain State Forest
4. Moreau Lake State Park
5. Big Bend Property

Other Key Sites

Other key sites for inclusion in the Friendship Trails system consist of privately owned land where public trail development is underway or proposed. These sites were identified by the Palmertown Guidance Committee for inclusion in the Friendship Trails system. Both types of sites also include existing trails, though some are existing roadbeds for logging or other historic industrial purposes.

6. Skidmore
7. Wilton Partners
8. Aldrich Community Forest



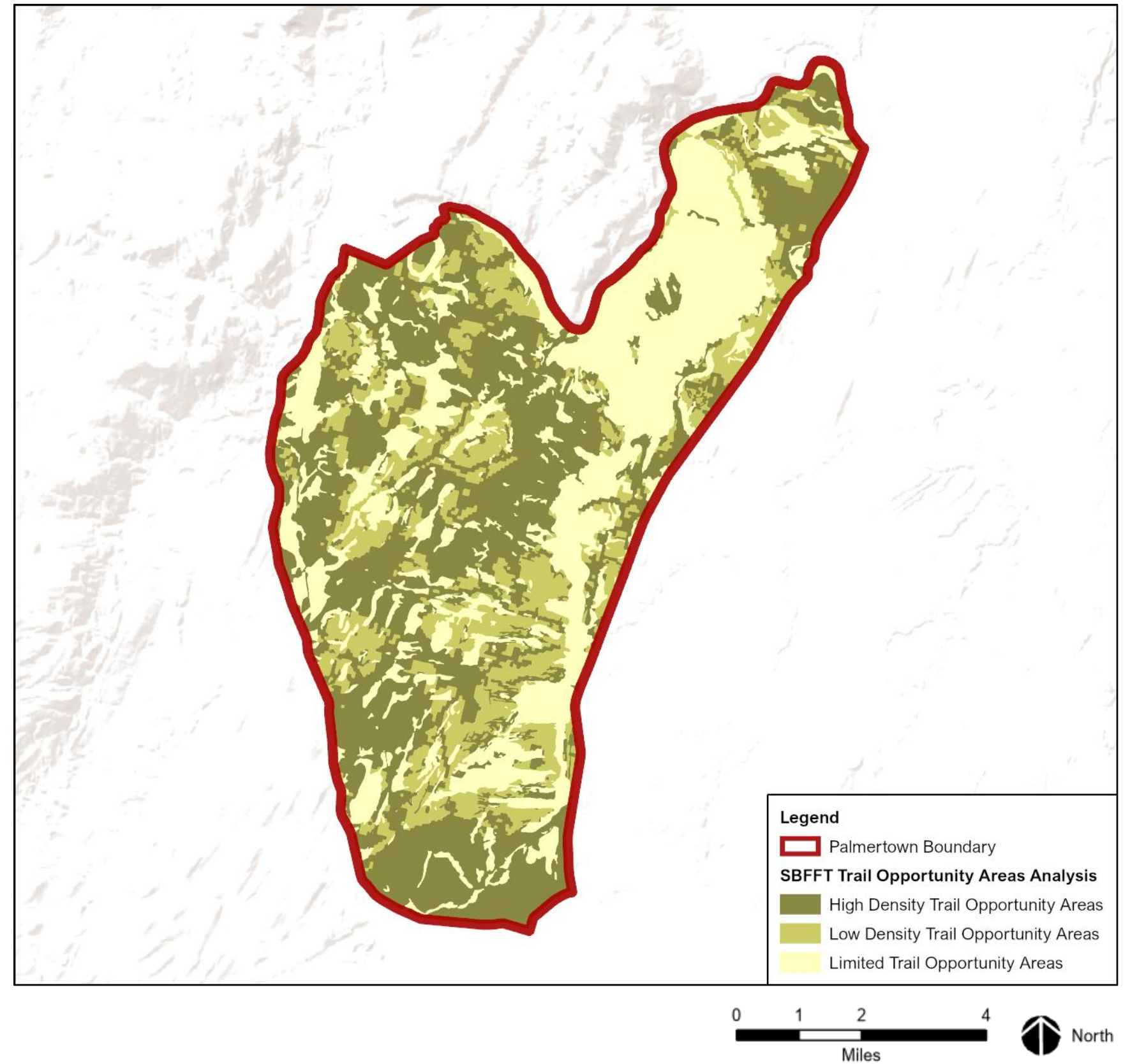
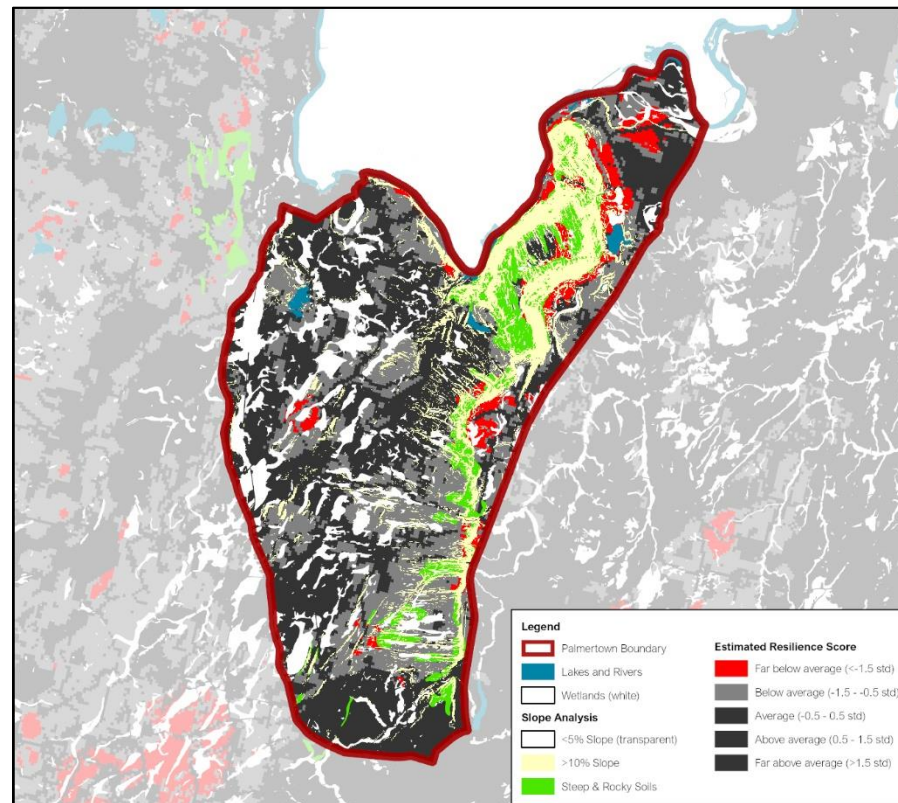
Trail Opportunity Areas

To evaluate the entire project area for areas conducive to trail development, a Trail Opportunity Area Analysis was conducted. This analysis layered landscape features that typically limit or result in more costly trail development including steep slopes, steep and rocky soils, wetlands along with landscape resilience score data generated by The Nature Conservancy. This resilience score information was included at the request of the Guidance Committee to weight the sensitivity of the landscape environment, with areas of higher resilience thought to be able to better withstand trail impacts as well.

The major geological and hydrological factors affecting trail development on the Palmertown Ridge are associated with wetlands, streams, rock outcrops and occasionally steep slopes.

While it is possible to build a trail anywhere given enough funding and fortitude, focusing new trails and conservation areas in High Density Trail Opportunity Areas results in trails that are less costly and cause less environmental impacts over time.

The map below shows these features layered together within the project area, while the map at right shows the aggregate analysis that was conducted to inform peripheral trail development opportunities.



4. The Friendship Trails System

The map at right summarizes the proposed Trail System. While many segments within this system are interconnected, it is not recommended that they all be built to the same standard. In the later stage of formal design, each trial segment should be built to accommodate the desired activity types and respond to the site conditions.

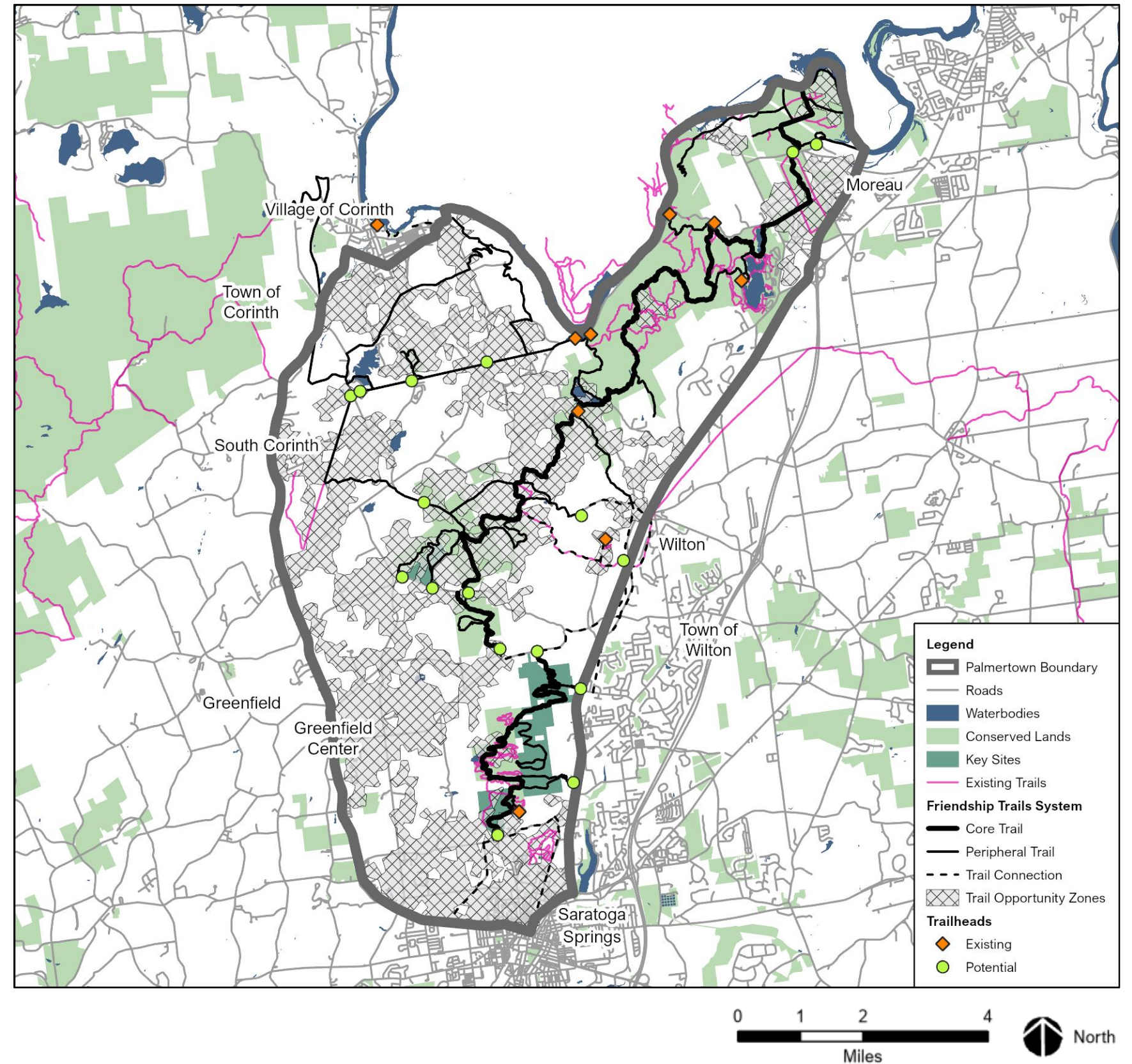
Trail Hierarchy

Trail systems without hierarchy tend to resemble plates of spaghetti. To give structure to the trail system, trail alignments have been defined as either Core Trails or Peripheral Trails. This will help visitors visualize and understand the trail system and will assist land managers in making decisions about how to build and manage individual trail segments. The Core Trail connects key sites and runs North to South, while Peripheral Trails and Trail Connections provide connectivity to the Core Trail and create opportunities to develop alternate types of trail experiences.

- The **Core Trail** traverses the Palmettown Range, beginning at the Saratoga Green Belt in the South, connecting existing major conserved lands, and ending at the Big Boom Trail in the North.
- **Peripheral Trails** provide opportunities for unique experiences and activities, whether as connections to the Core Trail, or as standalone trails.
- **Trail Connections** take advantage of existing trails or routes throughout the region to create points of access to the trail system.

Trail Opportunity Zones

Trail opportunity zones have been defined based on the Trail Opportunity Analysis. These areas are meant to provide guidance to target future conservation and trail development efforts, especially as new trails are developed to meet the needs identified as part of the Community Engagement Process for this Master Plan. These are the best areas to add local, close to home trails in areas without large tracts of existing conserved land.



Recommended Trail Types

Trail parameters have been developed to align with existing trail types present within the Palmertown Region and are adapted from the NY Parks Trail Development Standards⁴. In aggregate, these trail types can accommodate all the use types defined by the Guidance Committee, and can be applied to any trail segment within the trail system. During conceptual and detail design, these parameters should be refined based on the specific activity types and site that is being considered.

Pedestrian-Only Trail like the existing “Nature Trails” within the Palmertown Region. These trails are for pedestrians.








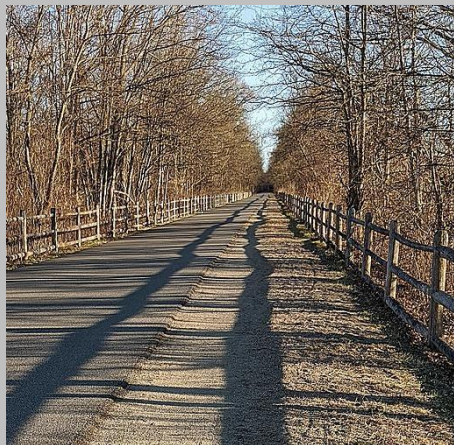
- **Primitive:** Rugged, challenging trails. These trails represent the typical backcountry trail experience with wet crossings and few formal structures.
- **Developed:** Rugged trails with more formal structures such as boardwalk, puncheon, and steps.
- **Highly-Developed:** Also described as front-country trail. Formal structures facilitate crossings and steps are minimized to create a more highly accessible experience.

Mixed-Use Trail is analogous to the existing “Multi-use trails” within the Palmertown Region.

- **Primitive:** Rugged, challenging trails. These trails represent the typical backcountry trail experience with wet crossings and few formal structures.
- **Developed:** Rugged trails with more formal structures such as boardwalk, puncheon, and steps.
- **Highly-Developed:** Also described as front-country trail. Formal structures facilitate crossings and steps are minimized to create a more highly accessible experience. These trails are wider than their pedestrian-only counterparts.

Shared-Use Paths also referred to as multi-use paths, can be built within a highway right-of-way or within an independent right-of-way. In this context, a Shared-Use Path may be used by bicyclists, pedestrians, skaters, wheelchairs, joggers and other non-motorized uses and should be designed to accommodate all desired uses.

- **Primitive:** These trails are like a logging road, with and informal experience, wet crossings and few structures.
- **Developed:** Also described as front-country trail. Formal structures facilitate crossings and a wide tread width allow different uses to take place simultaneously.

	Primitive	Developed	Highly-Developed
Pedestrian-Only Trail			
Mixed-Use Trail			
Shared-Use Path			

⁴ NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. (2021, May 19). *Revised 3-2014Page 1Trails Technical Document #1: Standards and Guidelines for Trails in NYS Parks*. Retrieved from NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation: <https://parks.ny.gov/documents/recreation/trails/TrailsTechnicalStandardsandGuidelines.pdf>

5. Recommendations

This Master Plan is just one step toward implementing the Friendship Trails for the Palmertown Range. While a large amount of data gathering and analysis was undertaken to create the conceptual trail alignments, more study is needed to further refine the design and better understand how each trail segment may take shape. This summary of recommendations outlines other important considerations toward ensuring that the proposed Trail System embodies the spirit of Friendship.



Sustainability and Accessibility

The Friendship Trails System responds to the need for a cohesive trails system that provides high quality recreational experiences for a wide variety of activities. When designing a trail, there are many considerations that impact final alignment and design. Detail on the nuances of these many considerations provides a base understanding of the factors that were considered as part of the trail system design process.

It is recommended that land managers review these items before undertaking any trail development or maintenance to consider how the proposed design can incorporate these concepts. This is especially relevant to incorporating public feedback seeking places to recreate in nature that offer casual, safe, welcoming, and social experiences within the Palmertown Region.

- **Who are the trails for?** Trails that are purpose-built for the intended activity are more enjoyable and more sustainable.
- **Trail Management Objectives** provide a framework for basic information about the level of development of a trail and how it is built.
- **Trail Design and Sustainability** focuses on balancing sustainability priorities and how those impact trail design.
- **Principles of Universal Design** describes how accessibility is a spectrum that can be integrated into the trail in whatever way is most feasible or practical.
- **Progressive Access** describes how trails and trail systems can and should support various types of experience and levels of difficulty.
- **Accessibility and Sustainability** are not mutual exclusive considerations. Trails that are built sustainably tend to also be more sustainable and vice versa.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Requirements** sometimes apply to trail structures, trailheads, and other trail features, and it is important to understand where that is the case.

Generally, it is recommended that trails within 0.5-1 miles of trailheads be designed and managed to a Developed or Highly-Developed design standard. This will create a welcoming experience for novice trail users and create a diverse system of accessible trails within the larger system itself. It also allows for opportunities for progressive access, introducing visitors to less developed and more rugged trails as they gain confidence in their recreation experience. This will concentrate management and trail development work closer to road access, which can reduce overall maintenance costs.

Making Trails More Welcoming

The Friendship Trails can connect key conserved sites and provide opportunities for a wide variety of experiences across the Palmertown Range. The community feedback showed that there are many rugged hiking trails in the region, and few that meet the needs of newer trail users or those with mobility impairments. Creating positive and welcoming trail experiences can be accomplished with new trail development, but there is also an opportunity to improve existing trails to rebalance the available trail experiences throughout the region, so that more people can access the natural beauty and benefits of trails throughout the Palmertown Range (or Saratoga County)

- Address trail safety concerns as soon as possible
- Protect more land to create more trails close to home
- Be adaptive and responsive to visitor desires
- Signage that is welcoming and accessible
- Places to rest or wait for people
- Parking areas large enough to accommodate increasing demand and larger vehicles, and well as bicycles
- Smooth surfaces and well-maintained trails and parking areas
- Interesting destinations, views of water, and things to do on universal access trails
- Open sightlines for a sense of safety
- Trails should be designed to be social
- Better wayfinding signage
- More Programming
- Trails close to home
- Use visuals to convey the character of the area and experiences to expect
- Include maps showing trailheads and access points
- Include a clear understanding of how long it takes to walk or stroll (via a wheelchair or stroller) a given trail at different ability levels

Community Engagement and Outreach

After spending the time and effort to reach out to new audiences, it's important to show that the project partners have listened by starting with projects that serve a broader audience— specifically, those who have fewer options and have traditionally been underrepresented on trails in nature.

- Invest in messaging, outreach, and engagement
- Providing periodic updates, at least quarterly, on the progress of making trails more welcoming and inclusive
- Continue to build relationships with leaders of the organizations interviewed for the master plan process
- Make sure outreach materials are inclusive and show who is welcome
- Partner with area nonprofits and local businesses