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Siegel-Kline Kill Conservation Area Master Plan

Town of Ghent, New York



September 23, 2009

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Purpose and Organization

This Master Plan has been created to guide the development of the Siegel-Kline Kill Conservation Area and its management during the next five years. The Plan's purpose is threefold: to record existing site opportunities and constraints; to document the proposed program and site design; and, to establish the management goals for the site.

Columbia Land Conservancy (CLC) Master Plans are also intended to be working documents that respond to changing conditions. The CLC staff and Board of Trustees have established a policy to review and update Management Plans after a maximum five-year period. Thus, this Plan will be reviewed in the year 2015, or as conditions dictate.

This Plan is organized into three parts:

- I. Site Context and Analysis
- II. Site Design
- III. Land Management

I. Site Context and Analysis

See also: *Location Map*, Exhibit x.x

Protected Lands Context Map, Exhibit x.x

Topography Map, Exhibit x.x

Soils Map, Exhibit x.x

Site Context and Analysis Map, Exhibit x.x

Overall Description

The Siegel-Kline Kill Conservation Area is located in the north-central portion of Columbia County, on County Route 21 in the Town of Ghent, approximately three-quarters of a mile west of the Ghent hamlet. It is also convenient to residents of the Town and Village of Chatham as well as to surrounding towns, especially Kinderhook and Austerlitz. It is easily accessible from New York State Routes 66 and 9H, as well as the Taconic State Parkway via State Route 203.

Nearby, a still undeveloped portion of the Harlem Valley Rail Trail passes through the Ghent hamlet, where CLC owns a parcel that has been potentially identified for future public parking for that trail. The former Boston and Albany rail bed runs through the same

approximate location. Also in the Town of Ghent, the 62-acre Borden's Preserve is less than three miles away, outside the Village of Chatham. Other nearby destination sites include Art Omi, a few miles to the west, and cultural and recreational sites in the Town and Village of Chatham and the City of Hudson.

The Siegel-Kline Kill Conservation Area consists of 54.6 acres with approximately 1,900 feet of road frontage on County Route 21, within walking distance of the Ghent hamlet, and is the only publicly accessible open space or conservation land located within that population center. It features a ± 25 -acre open field with excellent agricultural soils, and a flood plain oak-sycamore forest with 1,800 feet of frontage on the Kline Kill, a NYSDEC Class C(TS) (trout spawning) stream stocked with brown trout.

The property is bisected by a utility corridor owned by New York State Electric and Gas (NYSEG). Agricultural use of these lands is permitted as a deeded right.

Larger farmed and forested parcels surround the property, whereas smaller residential lots line the route to the Ghent hamlet, along with the local and county highway garages and the Ghent Town Hall. There are open views into and from the property. There is also easy access into the property from Route 21, which along with the relatively flat topography, open views and rich conservation values, makes this an ideal site for environmental education programs and Conservancy events.

The overall management goal for the property is to maintain it as a working agricultural landscape that is compatible with its qualities as a natural area offering excellent bird watching and fishing opportunities. The site will be managed for non-motorized recreation and nature study and as an outdoor classroom for CLC's environmental education program.

Natural and Scenic Features

See also: *Rapid Ecological Assessment Form(s)*, Appendix x.x.

The Siegel-Kline Kill Conservation Area is part of the Kinderhook Creek watershed. The Punsit and Indian Creeks form the Kline Kill in the Village of Chatham, after which it passes southwest through the Ghent hamlet and then flows approximately north through and beyond the Conservation Area, emptying into the Kinderhook Creek in the Town of Kinderhook. The Kinderhook Creek then flows southwest until it drains into the Hudson River in the Town of Stockport.

A 100-year Floodplain extends over most of the northern half of the Siegel-Kline Kill property. The Kline Kill banks are vulnerable to scouring and tree damage from flooding during heavy rains. The Floodplain includes a ± 11 -acre portion of a 295-acre NYSDEC-regulated wetland system. There is also a ± 1.4 acre National Wetlands Inventory "Freshwater Emergent Wetland" on the southwest portion of the property that is regulated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and an additional field observed wetland on the northeast portion, an area of approximately 1.9 acres.

The property's soils consist of deep alluvial floodplain soils and acidic, mostly silty loams. These vary from typically well-drained Prime Farmland* soils throughout the field area to shallow glacial till over shale bedrock in a small upland area along the road frontage. The open field area is primarily suited for grasses, according to the County Soil Survey, and historically has been farmed for hay alternating with corn.

The property's open field, floodplain forest and riparian corridor contain important habitats including the following: Deciduous Upland Forest, Upland Meadow, Intermittent Woodland Pool, General Wet Meadow, Perennial Stream and Riparian Corridor. Targeted inventories include Vernal Pools, Sensitive Habitats (Floodplain, Kline Kill), Diversity Rich Areas and Areas of Special Habitat Management Concerns. Invasive Japanese Knotweed is also extensive throughout the floodplain area and it presents an ongoing management challenge.

Observed plant species that are representative of the property's habitats include American sycamore, red maple, elm species, green ash, white oak, skunk cabbage and gray-stemmed dogwood in the floodplain area, as well as cottonwood in both the floodplain and upland forest area. Observed bird species include American crow, pileated woodpecker and dark-eyed junco. Other plant species observed include joe-pye weed, goldenrod species, and Canada thistle. Mammals include white-tailed deer, beaver, gray squirrel, eastern chipmunk, and raccoon, and possibly river otter (scat observed but not positively identified).

Cultural History

The Siegel-Kline Kill Conservation Area is named after prior owners Bob and Susan Siegel, who acquired the property at auction and made it available to CLC at below market value. The acquisition was made possible through gifts and a no-interest loan.

The property was originally part of an extensive dairy farm operation, with the farmhouse located southwest of the proposed parking area. A large barn that has since burned was situated near the road, just west of the area proposed for visitor parking. The land has historically been farmed, with corn/hay production in addition to the dairy operation, but it has not been worked by an on-site farmer since the late 1980's.

Current neighbor Ann Taylor worked on the farm during the 1960's when John Aiken was the owner. According to Ann, the field was known as the "40-acre lot," and the farm also included the land across the road and a barn on nearby Church Street. A small trailer was located near the road for farm helper Jim Moore.

* Soil designation determined by the United States Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

More recently, George Kittle operated the dairy farm from the late 1960's to the late 1980's. George is now a cattle dealer who lives nearby in Ghent. He states that his family grazed dairy cows, grew corn and hay, and sold cattle.

Jim Moore, the former tenant and farm worker, now 75-years old and still living in the area, recounts that he helped run the farm from about 1968 to 1985. He remembers that the Kline Kill was used as a local "swimming hole" by neighbors, and that the water table was so high that when a water source was needed for the trailer, a "point" was driven only about 10 feet in the ground before finding water.

Jim also remembers that individuals who lived in the nearby county "poor houses" (formerly located where the current post office, real estate and furniture offices are located on Route 66 in the Ghent hamlet) also came to the farm to work.

The property east of Siegel-Kline Kill was formerly owned by Jim Grantasio, who operated the Circle Saddle Riding Club and was known as the "Drakes" man, delivering snack food in the region.

Existing Structures and Recent Use

There are two locations that currently provide vehicular access from County Route 21, both located midway along the parcel frontage, with rough asphalt aprons in the County right-of-way. The remains of an old metal septic tank were discovered recently near the location of the proposed parking area, and it was filled with clean fill.

Existing trails show evidence of ATV use on the property, including crossing of the Kline Kill at the western end of the property. Neighboring hunters encountered on the property state that they have hunted there for many years.

II. Site Design

See also: *Site Plan*, Exhibit x.x

Overall Design Objectives

1. Provide a recreation area for residents of all ages within walking distance of a populous hamlet. Most of the site's topography is flat and suitable for easy walking trails for bird watching, nature study, running, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. The eastern portion of the site, closest to the hamlet and to the proposed parking area, offers an opportunity for a permanent community-oriented amenity such as an exercise course, and possibly a community garden area. The hilly topography along part of the road frontage is an opportunity for an overlook as well as for winter sledding.

2. Protect the Kline Kill and the floodplain habitats while making the stream available as a public fishing area. The Kline Kill offers excellent opportunities for trout fishing, and it is not accessible to the general public elsewhere in the surrounding area. At the same time, the property's habitats will be protected by conserving this land, maintaining a vegetated buffer, and through appropriate land management. Over time, there is the opportunity to improve these habitats through stabilization, invasive species removal and replanting.
3. Conserve the site's prime agricultural soils for farming. The site is currently hayed, and can also accommodate livestock at specific times of the year. Using a Request for Proposals process, a resident farmer and appropriate agriculture activity can be selected that will be compatible with the property's other management objectives.
4. Demonstrate how these differing rural land uses can complement one another and be managed in a compatible way. The site offers diverse opportunities for environmental education with the added value of being able to demonstrate how conservation, agriculture, and recreational and educational uses can be compatible and even complementary.

Proposed Site Uses

Siegel-Kline Kill's central location in the county, accessibility, and relatively flat, open topography make it well-suited as a site for a variety of activities as well as public programs and CLC events. The following are proposed site uses:

Recreational Uses. Non-motorized recreation, e.g.

- Walking
- ADA compliant trails
- Cross-country skiing
- Snowshoeing
- Birding
- Fitness Course
- Fishing
- Sledding
- Picnicking
- Hunting (by CLC approved monitors only)

Educational Uses. Senior, adult, youth and children's programs, e.g.

- Environmental education programs
- Nature study and wildlife observation
- "Trout in the Classroom" program
- Water quality testing
- Agriculture-related and gardening education
- Astronomy

- Fitness programs

Agricultural Uses. Uses with management requirements compatible with other site uses and habitat conservation, e.g.

- Hay
- Field crops
- Vegetable crops
- Rotational livestock grazing
- Community Supported Agriculture
- Community garden

Specific Design Proposals

Proposed Access

The property has two existing driveway locations on County Route 21, approximately 245 feet apart. Both currently have rough asphalt aprons within the approximate County right-of-way. The topography along this road frontage is flat and the sightlines are good. The easternmost access is preferred as a location for the primary driveway entrance and parking area. It offers the best sightlines and good visual orientation to the site, as well as good visibility for the conservation area sign. The Highway Division of the County Department of Public Works has approved both locations as pre-existing driveways. All improvements will be at CLC's discretion and expense.

There is existing vegetation to screen a parking area from the residential properties across the roadway. A 10-space, single-loaded (facing away from the road) parking lot is proposed, with a ± 50 foot driveway, including the County right-of-way. The Information Kiosk is proposed to be located adjacent to the lot, on center with the driveway. The conservation area sign is proposed to be located alongside the driveway, just inside the property line.

The westernmost access location is proposed as a secondary driveway for emergency access, maintenance and agricultural uses, overflow parking, and a potential exit-only for school buses and trailers. If funds become available, a one-way loop driveway can be considered to connect the two access locations and provide easy ingress/egress and parallel parking for these longer vehicles.

Trails and Nodes

Loop Trail. A mowed loop trail approximately one-mile long is proposed around the perimeter of the agricultural field, with spur trails to the Kline Kill and hilltop overlook. The trail will begin at the parking area and head north and northwest along an existing route inside a hedgerow and outside of the floodplain forest. Northwest of the NYSEG-owned utility corridor, two spur trails to the Kline Kill are proposed using existing mowed areas. A pleasant glade located between the two spurs is proposed for a picnic area. The loop trail will circle close to the northwest property line, around the agricultural

field and back southeast to the parking area. A minor loop trail will be established as a spur off the main trail, up and over the hill located along the road. An Overlook with benches is proposed for the hilltop. The northwest slope of that hill is proposed as a Sledding Area, with minor brush clearing required.

Fitness Course. The southeast portion of the site adjacent to the parking area is proposed for a community-oriented activity. In the short-term, this could be included as part of the farm area. As funds become available, a one-quarter mile Fitness Course, or Par Course is proposed. This ADA compliant course or trail would be constructed with compacted crushed stone dust on a stone base. The fitness “stations” or equipment would be chosen to be suitable for a range of abilities. A variety of manufacturers provide pre-constructed stations including associated signage. Grant funding is available for development of “healthy trails,” and this feature could also be attractive for corporate or private sponsorship.

Agriculture. The existing farm field is proposed to be maintained for an agricultural use under a term lease with a qualified farmer. CLC will undertake a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process in order to select a farmer, farm use, and lease term that will be compatible with other objectives and planned uses for the site. The RFP will set forth the following at minimum:

- Site map, to include:
 - Area available for farming
 - Resource Protection Areas
 - Recreation improvements
 - Access and associated improvements
- Description of area available for farming including acreage, soils information, historic and current uses, opportunities and constraints
- Description of recreation and education uses that will take place on the site
- Statement of CLC objectives for farming on the site, to include:
 - Component to engage the public, such as Community Supported Agriculture, community garden, agricultural education or agri-tourism
 - Practices that support or demonstrate the compatibility of agriculture with other site uses and conservation goals

Site Elements

- Split-rail fencing, around parking area and along driveway and overflow/bus and trailer parking.
- Gate or removable fencing separating main driveway from overflow/bus and trailer parking.
- Two (2) benches and an interpretive sign at Overlook/Sledding Hill
- Three (3) benches along Fitness Trail
- Two (2) picnic tables in Glade

Interpretive Content and Signage

Signage will include:

- Site identification sign
- Triangular Information Kiosk with display boards for trail map and educational material
- Fitness Course station markers
- Trail directional signage
- Interpretive sign at overlook
- Interpretive sign explaining fishing opportunities and stocking and lifecycle of brown trout

Interpretive signage and content will focus on the flora and fauna of the site's grasslands, forested wetlands, and riparian corridor habitats; and on the "farmscape ecology"* of the conservation area.

Design Language

The design of site improvements will be consistent with those at other CLC-owned public conservation areas in order to establish site identity. This includes rustic pole-mounted custom signage, rustic Information Kiosk, split-rail fencing at the trailhead and vehicular areas, rustic cedar benches and picnic tables. Fitness Course equipment and signage, which would be packaged by the manufacturer, would be chosen to be compatible with other site improvements.

At the initial opening, the driveway and parking lot are proposed to be established on the existing ground with regular mowing. As the budget permits, they would be constructed with graded, compacted stone. The overflow and bus/trailer parking areas will also be established as mowed areas. If future budgets permit, and it is justified by the frequency of use, these areas can be converted to graded, compacted stone, or possibly to a structural paving system such as Grasscrete or Grass-Pave.

III. Land Management

See also: *Land Management Map*, Exhibit x.x

The Siegel-Kline Kill Conservation Area offers the opportunity to achieve multiple objectives -- recreation, conservation, education, and even agriculture -- within the limited financial resources available for land management.

* Claudia Knab-Vispo and Conrad Vispo have established the Farmscape Ecology Program as a component of the Hawthorne Valley Association to foster an understanding of how agriculture and the natural world interact.

Overall Management Goals

- Protect and manage the site's natural resources and diverse habitats while maintaining access for all ages and abilities.
- Establish and maintain improvements that highlight the site's special features and opportunities.
- Allow for and manage farming on the site in a manner compatible with conservation goals as well as recreation and education uses.
- Demonstrate the value of farming as a land use providing conservation gain.
- Take actions to stabilize and improve the riparian corridor, within available financial resources.
- Partner with other agencies and organizations to achieve management goals.

Natural Feature Management Objectives

Floodplain and Riparian Corridor

Ongoing Objectives:

- Locate trails to avoid sensitive floodplain locations
- Stabilize identified areas in floodplain and along Kline Kill, and conduct invasives removal and re-planting
- Partner with Hudson River Estuary Program "Trees for Tribs" program
- Close access to floodplain trails during large rain events
- Leave standing snags that do not endanger proximate trails
- Maintain transitional habitat
- Partner with NYSDEC through its Public Fishing Rights program
- Partner with Trout Unlimited for education programs such as "Trout in the Classroom" and for habitat improvement projects

Long-Range Objectives:

- Investigate cooperation with NYSEG for invasives removal and replanting
- Investigate options for in-stream restoration
- Improve trout habitat
- Partner with others for further flora and fauna investigations (e.g. River Otter, Muskrat; narrow-leafed sedge)

Wetlands

Ongoing Objectives:

- Maintain vegetative buffer around wetlands limits
- Locate trails outside of vegetative buffer

Long-Range Objectives:

- Monitor wetlands for invasive species
- Inventory flora and fauna
- Control invasives

Upland Habitat

Ongoing Objectives:

- Work with the site farmer to manage activities in order to protect and promote grassland bird populations and diversity
- Control nuisance species
- Leave snags standing that do not endanger proximate trails
- Maintain woody vegetative buffer between farm field and floodplain and wetlands

Long-Range Objectives:

- Inventory flora and fauna
- Monitor invasives and adopt a management strategy
- Replant with native species

Constructed Features Management Objectives

Entrance and Parking

Ongoing Objectives:

- Install compacted fill and graded stone to elevate grade of primary driveway where needed inside property line.
- Mow and to maintain driveway access and parking area.
- Maintain vegetation buffer between parking and tree and shrub screening to protect root zones
- Maintain tree and shrub screening for plant health with pruning and invasives removal as needed
- Mow secondary entrance and overflow parking as needed
- Install gate at secondary entrance to discourage unauthorized vehicular access
- Install and maintain site sign; Information Kiosk with seasonally changing displays (4 times/year)

Medium-Range Objectives:

- Construct and maintain permanent driveway and parking area with graded stone
- Install and maintain split-rail fencing around driveway and parking lot, with opening for snow storage

Long-Range Objectives:

- Optional: Construct and maintain permanent secondary driveway and overflow parking area with a) graded stone, or b) a structural system for grass surfaces
- Optional: Install and maintain split-rail fencing along secondary driveway and overflow parking area

Loop and Spur Trails

- Maintain trails in a safe condition with a minimum clearance free of obstruction of at least 7' overhead and 2' on each side of the mown trail. Line-trim and/or mow trails throughout growing season
- Mow and line-trim picnic glade, around kiosk and activity areas to maintain access; control poison ivy
- Remove dead trees and limbs within falling distance of trails and activity areas
- Walk trails a minimum of twice per month to monitor for maintenance. Train and coordinate volunteer trail monitors
- Create trail detours if needed as a result of storm damage or high impact
- Relocate trails if human impact will permanently threaten the conservation goals for the site such as through disturbance of important habitat
- Install stone, water bars and culverts as needed to repair ruts and wet areas
- Keep a trail log at the Information Kiosk for tracking visits, work needed and user comments.

Built Improvements

Ongoing Objectives:

- Install signage, Information Kiosk, benches and picnic tables per plan
- Regularly monitor and evaluate structural and aesthetic condition of built improvements and repair in a timely manner

Long-Range Objectives:

- When funding is available, provide for installation of manufactured Fitness Course (Note: in the short-term, the area designated for the Course will be included in the agricultural area for farm use.)
- Follow manufacturer's recommendations for maintenance

Agriculture Management Objectives

Immediate Objectives:

- Develop and issue Request for Proposals (RFP) in late fall for area to be farmed.
- Conduct proposal review process including pre-bid meeting
- Negotiate lease and management agreement

- Maintain woody vegetative buffer between farm field and floodplain and wetlands

Long-Range Objectives:

- Maintain regular informal communication with resident farmer
- Meet on an annual basis to review the lease and management agreement and make mutually agreed upon modifications if needed.
- At termination of lease, conduct new RFP process for continuing agricultural use.

Public Access Management Objectives

- Post information that defines public access areas from agricultural and Resource Protection Areas
- Observe sensitive wildlife periods such as nesting times when scheduling group education programs and post information to education general public
- Maintain split-rail fencing and other means as needed to limit vehicular access
- Monitor the site for unauthorized vehicular and other motorized uses
- Post perimeter boundary of site, and walk boundary at least one time per year to monitor conditions. Walk boundary prior to hunting season and renew posting as needed

Process for Five-Year Update

At five-year intervals, or as considered necessary, CLC staff will review the management of the Conservation Area and will make recommendations to the Board as to whether the Master Plan should be updated. If such an update is determined to be necessary, CLC staff will discuss the changes as they relate to the overall management goals established for the Conservation Area by this Master Plan. Any changes in programming, improvements or management will be in accordance with the established management goals.

Sources of Information:

Soil Survey of Columbia County, New York. Soil Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

NYS Regulated Wetlands data, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

National Wetlands Inventory data, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Biodiversity Assessment Manual, Hudsonia, Ltd.

Conversations with Ann Taylor, George Kittle, Jim Moore, Ron Eigenbradt

