



# **Mill Creek Recreation Area Black Hole Trail System 2025 Recreation Assessment Report & Map by: Wilderness Property Management May 13, 2025**

## **Recreation Assessment**

This assessment evaluated the Mill Creek Black Hole area of Town of Johnsbury property south of Mill Creek for the development of human powered recreation and nature experience while maintaining the environmental and historical integrity of the site. Unique aspects of this property are the dramatic and scenic water falls on Mill Creek and the relatively gentle topography, and natural forest environment. The information acquired through the site assessment allows informed discussion on the development of a sustainable and modern high quality trail system on the designated site.

The assessment creates a starting place for an environmentally sound and recreationally valid trail system and gathers the information necessary to establish a working relationship between collaborating parties and funding sources. The assessment also provides the information necessary to move forward with the development of recreational infrastructure in a timely and fiscally prudent manner (phased development) while maintaining open communications. A continuous tuning process will naturally take place as more information is gathered and issues are identified throughout the project.



Dunkley Falls on Mill Creek.

## Community Interests

It is important to note that we don't start the planning process by laying out trails, rather we start by integrating the client's recreation interests with the natural environment and historical uses of the site. The intent is to create a working relationship between the site-specific environment and the forms of recreation that are desired for this specific property. There is interest in offering unique high quality nature experiences that are accessible to a large cross section of residents and visitors in the mountainous northwestern region of Warren County.

Interest in trail based recreation experiences such as nature observation, and hiking by residents and visitors has always drawn people to this area. The type of extraordinary nature experience that this section of Mill Creek possesses is the reason why a lot of people visit and live in the Adirondacks. The trail access that this site allows is currently very limited in in the Adirondacks. Trails with less than 5% avg grades are very accessible for families, outdoor enthusiasts of average fitness and mixed groups are rare in the Adirondacks. The creation of high quality nature experiences with grades that are assessable to a large cross section of users was a design objective of the Mill Creek Rec Area trail system.

## Recreation Economy

Creating accessible destinations gives people a reason to visit Warren County and differing types of destinations and recreation forms attracts a large cross section of outdoor enthusiasts. The Black Hole Trail System provides a unique and powerful experience. Providing high quality trails with reasonable grades and awesome natural experiences is integral to successful trail systems that draw users and repetitive visits.

The Black Hole Trail System is a worthwhile nature experience for anyone visiting Warren County. It has the benefit of being very accessible and able to be experienced in approximately an hour. With the adjacent Riverside Station Road Trail System a visitor can experience the natural splendor of waterfalls and hike or bike to a remote section of the Hudson River.

Wilderness Property Management has developed a Trail Implementation map showing the areas capable of meeting the above interests and maximizing nature experiences, while making the interests interact smoothly with the environment, and provide high level recreational experiences. Individual trail design, needs to be done onsite, to appropriately correspond with administrative requirements and the site-specific micro-environment of terrain, soils, vegetation, site distances, etc. A Design-Build approach should be taken for trail construction to allow each individual trail to meet a specific experience and difficulty rating.





## Recommended Recreation Development

The Mill Creek Rec. Area Trail Implementation Map illustrates the recommendations for trail corridors and recreational use. The conceptual intent is to provide an environmentally sound trail system, viewing access to the waterfalls and stream corridor, the least arduous level of recreation possible, and trail corridors that allow a reasonable build and cost.

The trail system was designed so that the visitor to the site is allowed to experience the natural wonders that they traveled to the Adirondacks for. If access isn't provided for them the visitors will seek it out for themselves in an unmanaged way that is generally bad for the site environment.

Four short trails radiate out from a single trailhead point that provide all the above criteria: 1. Mill Creek Trail, 2. Dunkley Falls Trail, 3. Black Hole Trail, 4. Fisherman's Trail.

Trail side benches should be located along the trail for nature contemplation. To have an undisturbed experience the back of the bench should be towards the trail and the view be of the creek or waterfalls. No camping or picnic sites are recommended. The trail should be clear for walking and experiencing the site and walkers should not have to travel through a group that is picnicking. Visitors should be encouraged to utilize local establishments for dining.

Trail construction of the Black Hole Trail System will generally be easy due to the level topography, close road access and existing roadways and trails. The utilization of suitable existing roadways reduces construction costs. The one exception to this situation is a 300 foot section of the Black Hole Trail that will require extensive retaining wall and cribbing to create a trail tread on a very steep side slope. This section of trail will be new trail that will connect an existing roadway near the trailhead to the Black Hole viewing site. An element making this intensive trail construction work reasonable is its very close proximity to the road.

All trail corridor locations are located above the easily identified mean high water mark so that high water events won't impact the long term sustainability of the trails system or impact the physical stream environment. The soils on this site are well drained and the trail grades are minimal preventing erosion.



Black Hole on Mill Creek

## *Mill Creek Recreation Area - Riverside Station Road Trail System*

Three trail building phases have been identified.

### I. Mill Creek & Dunkley Falls Trails

1. Mill Creek Trail – 850 ft. approx.: Surfaced walking trail design. Full Machine built trail construction, less than 5% avg. grade, with 5 ft. trail tread, 6 ft. cleared width surfaced with 3-4” of Item #4 covered by 3-4” of shoulder stone (#1 stone & stone dust 50/50 mix). This trail will start at the parking lot and follow the old roadway to the trailhead then continue northerly on the roadway to a viewpoint and old picnic site on Mill Creek. The trail is shown as a heavy solid black line on the map.

2. Dunkley Fall Trail – 850 ft. approx.: Surfaced walking trail design. Full Machine build trail construction, less than 5% avg. grade, with 4 ft. trail tread, 5 ft. cleared width, surfaced with 3-4” of Item #4 covered by 3-4” of shoulder stone (#1 stone & stone dust 50/50 mix). This trail will start at the trailhead traverse an old trail corridor to Dunkley Falls then continue past an old picnic site by large rocks then end at the viewing point at the north end of the Mill Creek Trail. A large percentage of this trail is based on existing single track trail following the stream course above the high water mark. The trail is shown as a thin solid black line on the map.

### II. Black Hole Trail

3. Black Hole Trail - 625 ft. approx., Surfaced walking trail design. Machine build trail construction with approx. 4 ft. trail tread, 4-6 ft. cleared width, surfaced with 3-4” of #2 stone covered by 3-4” of shoulder stone (#1 stone & stone dust 50/50 mix). This trail starts at the trailhead and follows an old roadway southeasterly 315 feet. Then new trail construction starts on the side of a steep bank below the town road for 300 ft. and ends at a viewing site for the Black Hole\*\*. A viewing platform should be constructed at the viewing site to reduce site impact and provide a reasonable visitor experience. The trail is shown as solid dark red lines on the map.

\*\* This section of trail should have engineered plans due to the extensive trail work necessary and the difficult site.

### III. Fishermans Trail

4. Fisherman’s Single Track - 1,100 ft. approx.\*: Natural surface hiking trail design. Machine/Hand built single track trail construction with approx. 2-2 1/2 ft. trail tread, 4-6 ft. cleared width. This trail will start at the trailhead and head northwesterly and end at the north end of Mill Creek Trail. The trail is shown as red dashed on the map.

\*track distances plus 5% for the twists and turns of single track.

### Parking Lot/Trailhead

One parking lot is proposed to support the trail system and control access to the area. The area designated on the attached map was a homestead site in the past. The parking area would be directly off the Town Road. The topography is flat, and the vegetative cover is small white pine and aspen trees so building a parking area will be relatively easy. It is reasonable to believe that parking lot construction is within the scope of the local municipality’s ability. I suggest a 6 car parking lot.





Hudson River looking upstream at Picnic Mtn.

## Trail Standards

Trail development discussed in this document is focused on sustainable, modern recreationally valid design and construction of human powered recreational trails. Surfaced trail treads of 4 to 5 feet in width and cleared trail corridors approximately 5-6 feet wide are the standard. Sustainably built trails are required to withstand long term use and provide durability with minimal routine maintenance requirements. Trails of this type require intensive machine and hand construction. Machine construction allows for bigger drainages and maximum trail construction production to produce a superior sustainable trail tread. Surfacing the trail provides a smooth surface with minimal obstruction height allowing use by people of all levels of fitness. See representative pics on page 8.

Rubber tracked Mini Excavators appropriate for trail construction in this environment are less than 3-5 feet in width and weigh approximately 2-4 tons. Trail cutting and clearing is limited to a 6-foot-wide corridor with trees 3 inches in d.b.h. and larger left in the corridor if they are more than 2 feet from the centerline of the trail tread unless they present a safety hazard. Individual trails are separated far enough from each other to reduce cross over and trail density experience impact. Risk management is applied through appropriate trail design measures.

Creating a trail to the Black Hole viewing location allows for management of users. The public is going to that site with or without a designated trail and the environment is negatively impacted by this uncontrolled access and it removes the opportunity to manage the site according to land management wishes. Platform construction at the Black Hole will be determined by the oversight agency and required engineering. The platform should be constructed for trail users and not for the swimming and diving users. Due to long term use patterns and social media swimming and diving at the site will be practically impossible to stop if there was a reason to do that. The site makes it difficult to do any additional infrastructure beyond a platform with entrance trail.

## Maintenance of Recreational Infrastructure

The nature of the forest environment in the areas suggested for trail development will require a reasonable level of maintenance. The forest maturity, the nature of the understory consisting of beech, birch, white pine and hemlock should minimize blowdown but require routine trimming of branches. The majority of maintenance will require low skill and be completed with hand tools. Little chainsaw maintenance will be needed. Trail corridor locations were purposely kept out of wet areas with sub-surface seeps and excessively rocky areas with deep organic duff between the rocks.

Walking trails require an annual walk through in the springtime and after major storms to remove blow down, clear drainages and lightly leaf blow in the early spring (dries the trail tread out so it can become stable). Trimming branches and sprouts back is best done after leaf out.

Access to a local volunteer pool for trail-based maintenance needs is generally a huge asset in taking care of routine maintenance. Trail user group volunteers generally take personal responsibility for keeping the trails in good riding condition. A group of local residents have been assisting with the maintenance of the Black Hole Trail System site for a number of years.

## Cost Estimates

Trail construction of surfaced trails require trail corridor clearing, tread excavation, trail surfacing material application and finish grading. These types of projects are generally publicly funded public works projects requiring prevailing wage and benefit packages for labor.

### *Mill Creek Recreation Area – Black Hole Trail System*

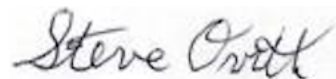
Trail construction of the Mill Creek, Dunkley Falls and Fisherman's trails will have reasonable trail construction costs due to the ease of access and gentle site.

1. Mill Cr. Tr. constructed with a 5 foot surfaced trail tread would be approx. \$40-45,000.\*\*\*
2. Dunkley Falls Tr. constr. with a 4 foot surfaced trail tread would be approx. \$40-45,000.\*\*\*
3. Black Hole Tr. price determined by engineered plans
4. Fisherman's Tr. constructed with a 2-2.5 ft. natural surface trail tread approx. \$14-17,000.

## Summary

The lands in this project would provide an excellent natural experience for a very large cross section of outdoor enthusiasts.

The recreation development discussed in this assessment would provide modern recreationally valid experiences, which are the drivers in a viable recreation-based economy and a community lifestyle improvement opportunity. The development of human powered recreation opportunities tied to the community will improve the local community through healthy recreation and an improved economy.

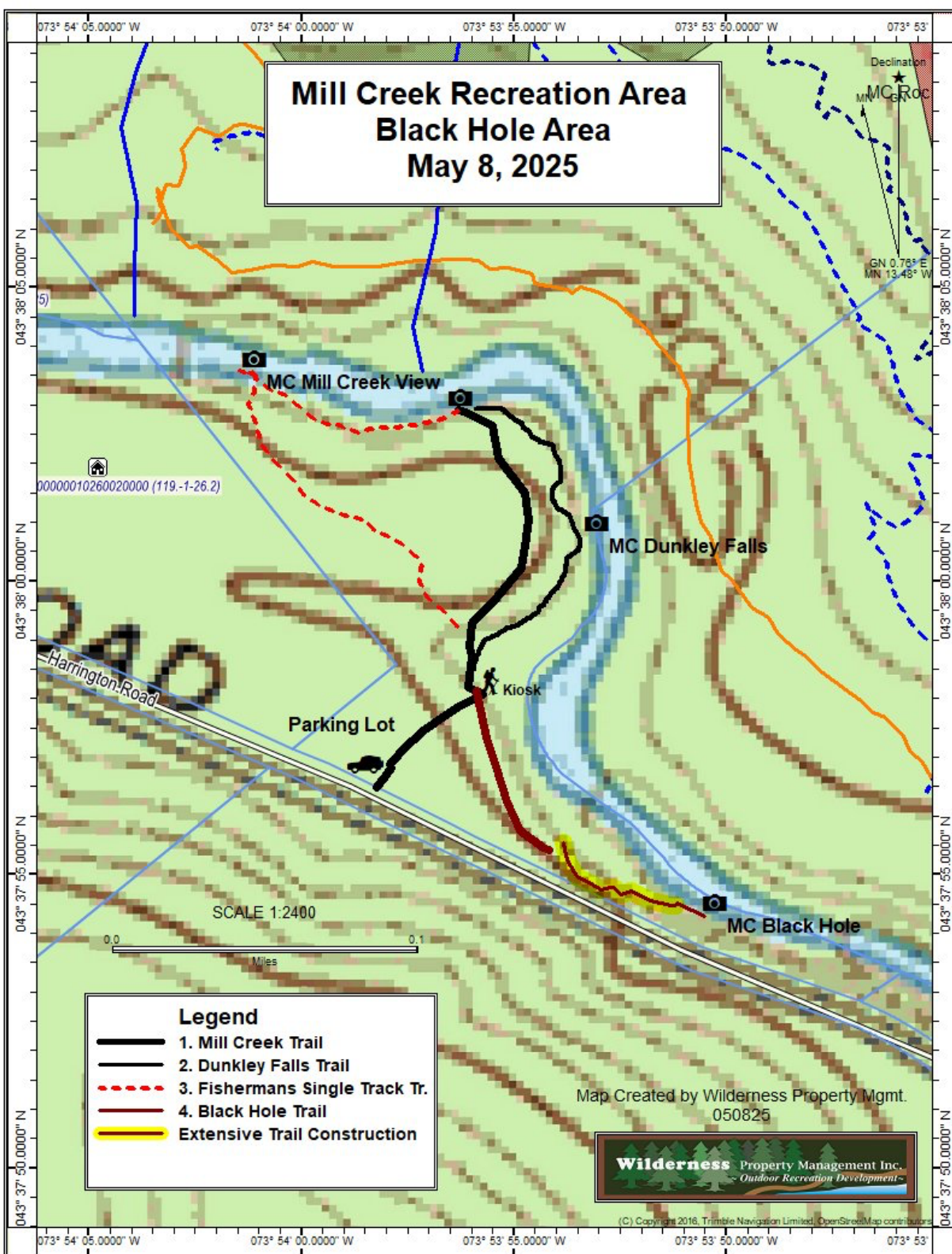


May 30, 2025

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Wilderness Property Management Inc.



# Trail Implementation Map



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**Photo of: WPM Trails - Excavator Built Trail in the Adirondacks**



4-5 ft. wide surfaced trail (Carol Thomas Trail, North Creek)



3-4 ft. wide surfaced trail (Harris Land Preserve, Lk. Luzerne)