

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

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"The legislature hereby finds and declares that the New York State Canal System is one of the state's greatest assets . . . it is essential that the beauty, historic character, and environmental integrity of the canals be preserved for future generations."

*"Thruway 2000"*  
New York State Legislature  
Chapter 766 of the Laws of 1992,  
as amended

The Canal Recreationway Plan was prepared for the Canal Recreationway Commission and represents the Commission's recommendations to the NYS Thruway Authority and its subsidiary, the NYS Canal Corporation, for transformation of the New York State Canals into a Recreationway.

An important impetus for the Plan came in 1989, with publication of the NYS Barge Canal Planning and Development Board report, "Development of Tourism and Economic Potential on New York's Canals," which contained wide-ranging recommendations for reuse of the canals for recreation and tourism.

In 1991 the citizens of the State of New York voted to amend the state constitution to authorize, for the first time, long-term leasing of lands that are part of the state Canal System. The following year, the State Legislature enacted "Thruway 2000," legislation that transferred the Canal System from the NYS Department of Transportation to the NYS Thruway Authority. It established the Canal Corporation as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Thruway Authority to operate, preserve and renew the Canal System for recreation and economic development.

Thruway 2000 also established the Canal Recreationway Commission, a 24-member body consisting of state, local, and private citizens who are broadly representative of diverse canal interests and geographic areas of the Canal System. The Commission was mandated to prepare and periodically revise the Recreationway

Plan, and advise the Canal Corporation in carrying out its duties related to the Canal.

### *The Planning Process*

County and regional input to the Plan has been provided through regional canal plans prepared by Regional Planning Boards in the seven canal planning regions. The canal regions include: Erie - Niagara, Genesee - Finger Lakes, Eastern and Central Southern Tier, Central New York, Herkimer - Oneida - Montgomery, Capital District, and Lake Champlain - Lake George. In total, 25 counties are represented. As prescribed by Thruway 2000, the regional canal plans have been incorporated in the State Plan to the extent practicable.

The state planning process began with two initial studies:

- The Canal System Inventory, completed by the firm of The Saratoga Associates. The Inventory took the form of a geographic information system documented on computerized maps and text, and includes the historic, environmental, land-use and recreational features of the Canal.
- A study of tourism and marketing potentials of the Canal System, completed by the firm of Marshall Macklin Monaghan.

In the fall of 1993, the Canal Corporation contracted with a consortium of eleven consulting organizations, led by Beyer Blinder Belle, to provide technical support and develop the Plan.

As part of its direction to the consultants, the Canal Recreationway Commission prepared "Policy Perspectives," a document embodying the Commission's goals for the Recreationway. Commission policies and recommendations were developed for thirteen key subject areas.

The Beyer Blinder Belle Consortium began its work with the preparation of a series of technical studies in the thirteen subject areas identified by the Commission:

1. Regional Planning and Land Use
2. Urban Design
3. Historic Preservation
4. Recreation (nonboating)
5. Boating
6. Conservation, Wetlands and Wildlife
7. Economic Development
8. Canal Infrastructure
9. Water Management
10. Transportation
11. Cultural Resources and Archeology
12. Adirondack Park
13. Commercial Shipping

The technical studies include very detailed analyses of each subject area and were the foundation for Plan preparation. The Canal Recreationway Plan is a summary document of both the technical studies and the Commission's policy directives.

### ***Public Outreach***

In addition to the local input provided through the regional canal plans, the Commission solicited public input through a series of focus-group and other meetings held to encourage participation in the planning process.

Focus groups composed of private citizens, business persons and representatives of canal interest groups were formed in each of the seven regions. Three meetings were held with each group to review the Plan as it progressed. The outreach effort also involved meetings with local political leadership and a wide range of interested citizens in the 25 counties contiguous to the Canal, including: eight regional planning agencies, four major metropolitan areas (Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Albany), and thirteen smaller cities (Lockport, Geneva, Ithaca, Oswego, Fulton, Rome, Utica, Little Falls, Amsterdam, Schenectady, Glens Falls, Plattsburgh, and Mechanicville); 57 villages and

hamlets and over one hundred towns along the 524 miles of the Canal System.

A final opportunity for public comment is ensured by the public hearing process held at the completion of the draft plan.

### ***The New York State Canal System***

The NYS Canal System encompasses both navigable and non-navigable portions. Components of the Canal System include: the Erie, Champlain, Oswego and Cayuga-Seneca Canals and their associated canalized-natural waterways; the central channels of Oneida, Onondaga, Cross, Seneca and Cayuga Lakes; short canal sections at Ithaca and Watkins Glen; reservoirs; feeder canals; canal terminals on Lake Champlain; and canals and rivers not accessible by boat from the Canal.

The Canal Recreationway Plan includes recommendations for the 524-mile navigable section of the Canal System, as defined in the "Glossary of Terms" at the end of this chapter. Other pertinent terms used in the Canal Recreationway Plan are also defined in the glossary.

## Glossary of Terms

### *Canal*

Unless otherwise noted in the text, for the purposes of the Canal Recreationway Plan, terms "Barge Canal," "1918 Barge Canal," "Canal," "Canals," "Canal System" or "System" generally refer to the navigable Canal as defined on page 1.5.

### *Canal Access Points*

Locations where a single activity occurs, such as a park, fishing access, or a boat launch.

### *Canal Blue Line*

The statutory definition is the boundary of canal lands owned by the State previous to the approval of Chapter 147 of the Laws of 1903 (Barge Canal Improvement Laws).

### *Canal Corridor*

Canal-owned land and the cities, villages and towns immediately adjacent to the navigable canal. Also known as the secondary study area.

### *Canal Harbor*

A major canal port designated in the Canal Recreationway Plan to provide boating and landside amenities at key canal locations. Seven Canal Harbors, one in each canal planning region, are proposed. Locations include Tonawanda, Rochester, Seneca Falls, Oswego, Little Falls, Waterford and Whitehall. An eighth Canal Harbor at Syracuse is currently being implemented by the Thruway Authority and the City of Syracuse.

### *Canal Infrastructure*

Approximately 2,000 structures along the Canal including locks, guard gates, bridges, dams, etc.

### *Canal Landing*

Destination point along the Canal where canal-related amenities and services can be accessed. Landings projects as proposed in the Canal Recreationway Plan include Canal Harbors, Service Ports and Locks, and Local Projects.

### *Canal-Owned Land*

All lands and waters forming a part of the Canal System, title to which was originally vested in the

State, acquired by the State, or which may in the future be acquired by the State for canal purposes.

### *Canal Planning Regions*

The seven canal study areas, with boundaries coincidental or intersecting with the Canal System, for which regional canal plans were prepared by regional planning boards, as was required by law. Each regional planning board is represented on the Canal Recreationway Commission. Regional plans were incorporated in the State Plan to the greatest extent practicable. The canal regions include: Erie - Niagara, Genesee - Finger Lakes, Eastern and Central Southern Tier, Central New York, Herkimer - Oneida - Montgomery, Capital District, and Lake Champlain - Lake George. The seven regions encompass a total of 25 counties.

### *Canal Ports*

All cities, villages and hamlets with waterfront docking facilities along the Canal.

### *Canal Recreationway*

A linear park to be developed for boating and other recreational use, taking advantage of the Canal's historic heritage, conserving its beauty and natural character, and utilizing recreationway improvements to enhance the economic development potential of the Canal.

### *Canal Recreationway Commission*

A 24-member advisory body consisting of state, local and private citizens who are broadly representative of diverse canal interests and geographic areas of the Canal System. The Commission was constituted to develop, maintain and periodically revise a statewide NYS Canal Recreationway Plan and to advise and assist the Canal Corporation and the NYS Thruway Authority in carrying out its duties and obligations related to the Canal.

### *Canal Scenic Byway*

A network of existing roads parallel to the Canal Recreationway, to be consistently signed and improved for use by motorists and cyclists.

### *Canal Service Port or Lock*

A canal port or lock in the Canal Recreationway Plan proposed as a location for services to

boaters, hikers and cyclists and others using the Recreationway; 96 in number.

#### *Canal Study Area*

The study area of the Canal Recreationway Plan is divided into three components:

- Primary Study Area - canal-owned land.
- Secondary Study Area - the cities, villages and towns immediately adjacent to the navigable canal; this area includes the Primary Study Area. Also known as the canal corridor.
- Tertiary Study Area - the seven canal planning regions, encompassing 25 counties and including the primary and secondary study areas.

#### *Canal Terminals*

Canal-owned docks available for commercial shipping and used for recreational boating tie-ups. There are 47 terminals within the present Canal System.

#### *Canalway Trail*

An end-to-end trail following the route of the Canal. The trail is designed to accommodate a variety of uses, including hiking and biking, and in some places rollerblading, horseback riding, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing.

#### *Charter Boats*

Boats that are skippered by renters, generally for trips of a duration of a week.

#### *Economic Development*

For the purpose of the Canal Recreationway Plan, includes direct revenues to the Canal Corporation, indirect revenues to the state and municipalities, new jobs, tourist expenditures, and induced development within the canal corridor resulting from the implementation of the Canal Recreationway Plan.

#### *Eligibility for Canal Investments*

The Canal Corporation is limited to making investments within the legally defined boundaries of the Canal System. In addition to the boundary requirements, the Canal Corporation can only commit resources if it possesses a sufficient

property interest. With respect to activities, projects eligible for financing by the Corporation must enhance waterborne transportation or have a purpose consistent with traditional and historical usage of the Canal System and its facilities.

#### *Enlarged Erie Canal*

The Erie Canal after a series of 19th-century enlargements completed in 1862.

#### *Excursion Boats*

Boats that offer day-trip itineraries, primarily for sightseeing. Excursion boats generally do not have overnight accommodations and return home to port after each trip. Excursions range from one to twelve hours and often offer either lunch or dinner.

#### *Freight House*

At canal terminals, usually a one-story wood structure constructed in the 1920s. Buildings intended for storage of freight. Twelve wooden freight houses are still in existence along the canals; in addition, the Canal Corporation owns three masonry terminal buildings.

#### *Geographic Information System Inventory*

A comprehensive inventory of historic, environmental, land-use, and recreational features of the Canal System intended for planning purposes. The geographic extent of the inventory includes all canal-owned land along the 524-mile navigable system of lakes, canalized rivers and dug sections and along the feeder reservoirs, rivers and canals. Also included is the historic alignment of the Old Erie Canal from Lyons to Romè, numerous reservoirs, lakes, and feeder sections, and other land, public and private, for a distance of one-half mile from the shoreline of the navigable system and feeder reservoirs, rivers and canals. The study area is approximately one million acres or 1,550 square miles.

#### *Greenway*

A protected landscape in a linear corridor of connected open spaces, incorporating natural and man-made features and including appropriate ecological, cultural and recreational resources.

*Heritage Site*

An historic, archeological, cultural, educational or significant natural site.

*Interpretation*

Enhancing a person's understanding of how natural and man-made resources impact cultural and societal development, by stimulating new insights into, and heightened perception of, environmental influences on change and growth.

*Local Project*

The third category of Canal Landings (other than Harbors or Service Ports and Locks). These projects were proposed in regional canal plans. Local proposals, numbering 515, range from major mixed-use developments to small canal-access-point projects.

*Multi-Use Trail*

A trail separated from auto traffic that is designed to accommodate a variety of uses, including hiking, bicycling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and, in some instances, rollerblading, horseback riding and snowmobiling.

*Municipal Canal Development Program*

A matching fund program created in 1993 by the Canal Corporation to encourage municipalities to provide small-scale improvements on canal-owned land during the period when the Canal Recreationway Plan was being developed. The program is proposed for expansion under the Plan.

*Navigable Canal*

The 524-mile navigable canal consists of four canals – the Erie, Champlain, Oswego, and Cayuga-Seneca; canalized natural waterways; the central channels of five lakes (Oneida, Onondaga, Cross, Cayuga, and Seneca); and short canal sections at Ithaca and Watkins Glen. The legally defined eastern terminus of the Erie Canal is in Waterford, and the western limit is Tonawanda. The northern boundaries of the Champlain and Oswego Canals are defined as Whitehall and Oswego, respectively.

*New York State Canal Corporation*

A public-benefit corporation established as a subsidiary to the NYS Thruway Authority. The Corporation was created solely to operate, maintain, construct, reconstruct, improve, develop, finance and promote the NYS Canal System.

*New York State Canal System Development Fund*

A special revenue fund in the custody of the State Comptroller and the Commissioner of Taxation and Finance consisting of all revenues received from the operation of the Canal System, including payments on leases and permits for use of canal-owned lands, tolls received for lock- and lift-bridge passage, payments for hydroelectric easements and sales, and for sale of abandoned canal-owned lands. Moneys of the fund, following appropriation by the State Legislature, can be expended only for the maintenance, construction, reconstruction, development or promotion of the Canal System.

*New York State Thruway Authority*

A body corporate and politic constituting a public corporation. The Authority was created and has the power to finance, construct, reconstruct, improve, develop and maintain or operate a "Thruway System" which includes the Canal, for the benefit of the people of New York State. It is the parent corporation of the NYS Canal Corporation.

*Old Erie Canal*

The original Erie Canal alignment, completed in 1825.

*Stone Dust*

A gradation of small stones which compact to provide a smooth and durable trail surface that accommodates walking, bicycle riding and other activities.

*Thematic Canal Regions*

Fifteen areas located along the canal corridor, identified in the Canal Recreationway Plan as possessing sufficiently distinctive physical characteristics to be recognizably different from one other. The fifteen thematic canal regions are:

- Niagara Frontier
- Ontario Lake Plan
- Metropolitan Rochester
- The Drumlins
- Cayuga-Seneca Canal
- Finger Lakes
- Fish and Wildlife Conservation Area
- Gateway to the Great Lakes
- Oneida Lake Recreation
- Upper Mohawk Valley
- Lower Mohawk Valley
- Eastern Gateway
- Upper Hudson River Valley
- Champlain Canal
- Lake Champlain

*Thruway 2000*

New York State legislation enacted in 1992 and amended in 1993 and 1994, transferring jurisdiction of the NYS Canal System from the NYS Department of Transportation to the NYS Thruway Authority. The legislation also created the NYS Canal Corporation and the Canal Recreationway Commission.

*Tour Boats*

Boats that offer multiple-day cruises, with or without sleep-aboard facilities. Canal tour boats usually accommodate groups of twelve or more.

*Trailhead*

An entry point to a trail.

*Transient Boats*

Boats passing through the Canal en route to more distant points.