

## HUNTERS CREEK PARK

### (SGT. MARK RADEMACHER PARK)

#### DESCRIPTION

Officially named Sgt. Mark Rademacher Park, this park is more commonly referred to as Hunters Creek Park. This is a 756-acre park within the Town of Wales. This property has seen much activity over the past few years in the way of nature trail use by hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians and cross-country skiers. In particular, Hunters Creek has become extremely popular for mountain biking, which is one of the fastest growing sports in the country. The sloping terrain and Creek gorge help to define the park's character, as well as a primarily forested interior.

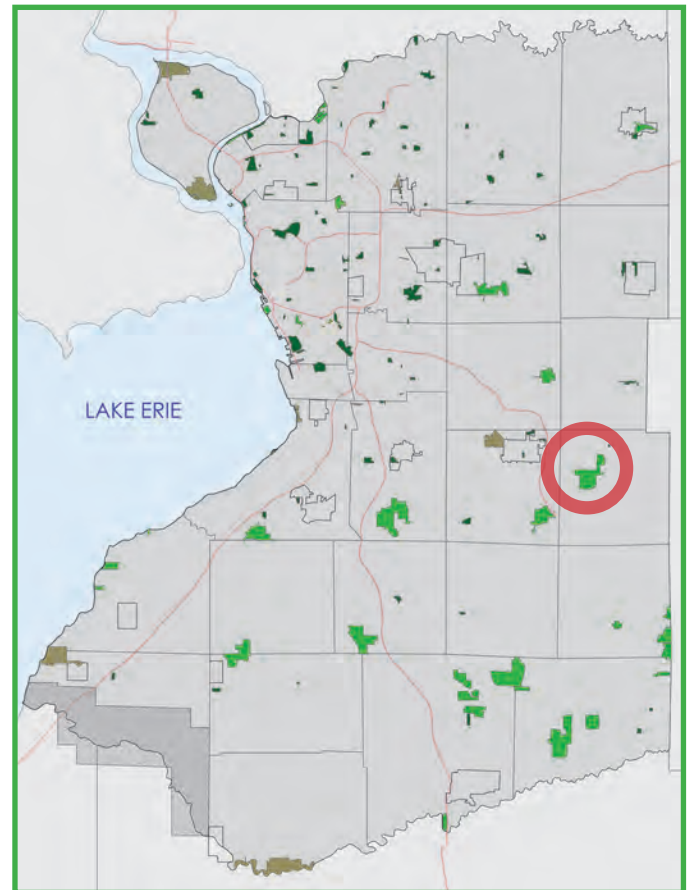
The main park area is roughly square, with a "panhandle" extending to the northeast. The Creek divides the park into an east half and west half (accounting for roughly two-thirds of the area). After flowing off park property, the Creek re-enters the park at the northeast corner, roughly paralleling the narrow north property line. The Park currently has dirt "service" roads and an extensive trail network throughout the park. Two parking areas exist: one off of Hunters Creek Road and another near the intersection of Centerline and Vermont Hill Road.

Hunters Creek Park has adopted and implemented many of the recommendations proposed in the 2003 plan, however some still need to be improved and expanded further. Thanks to many contributions from user groups, the park now features over 20 miles in multi-purpose trails. These trails include the "Orange Blazes" trail (The Conservation Trail); which is part of the greater "Finger Lakes Trail" which extends all over New York State spanning over 1,000 miles of hiking. The trails are for all non-motorized users, and feature hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and snow-shoeing.

#### PARK AND AREA HISTORY

The history of the area we now refer to as Hunters Creek Park began tens of thousands of years ago with the formation of the area topography and dramatic creek gorge. Hunters Creek bisects this undeveloped park and cuts an impressive gorge through a portion of it. Following the area's settlement, this property consisted of farm land and woods. Foundations of old homesteads and barns can still be seen. In the park's interior, a large log cabin was constructed by Sanford Hubbard for the Kellogg family as a hunting lodge. Only the fieldstone chimney and foundation remain.

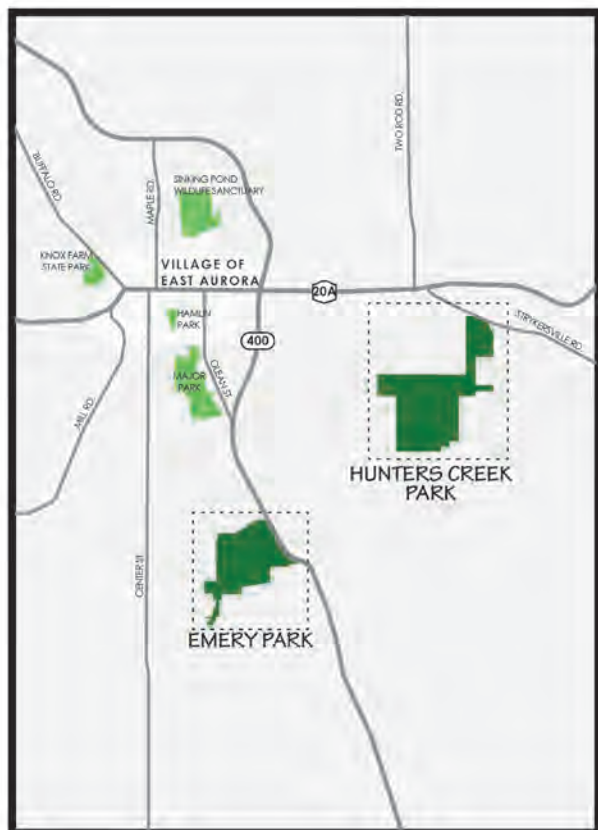
In the 1950s parallel underground gas transmission lines were constructed through the area in an east-west direction and a major transmission station was constructed on Rieter Road. In the early 1970s, several parcels totaling approximately 760 acres were purchased by Erie County using Federal and State funds for a future park. Around that same time, a number of roads and trails were constructed by county-sponsored groups and the Boy



Park Location Map: Hunters Creek Park is located in the Town of Wales, 2 miles from Emery Park

#### PARK SPECIFIC PRIORITIES

- **Routinely inspect and provide upkeep of all trails;**
  - Remove dangerous tree limbs and other potential hazards;
  - Improve drainage and divert water away from trails where necessary.
- **The top priority for the County at Hunters Creek Park is the preservation and enhancement of the environment.** Long-term environmental sustainability should be considered for all future use proposals.
- **Provide a large trail map at all trailheads,** identifying only the official marked trails with proper distance postings, trail conditions, and user difficulties should be provided.



Local context map

Scouts planted thousands of evergreen trees. In recent years some of these roads and trails have eroded and deteriorated, while other trails have been further developed and improved.

In 1983, the Erie County Legislature voted unanimously to approve a resolution to rename Hunters Creek Park to “Sgt. Mark A. Rademacher Memorial Park.” Mark Rademacher, a 20 year old Town of Wales resident, was one of the few US Army Rangers killed in the Grenada Invasion in November, 1983. Reflection of the new park name is not found within the park, i.e. no signs were erected or no other verification can be found, but there are other memorial remembrances within the Town of Wales. Today, other than a trail that bears the Rademacher name, most still refer to the park as “Hunters Creek Park.”

With the growth of mountain biking as a recreational activity, the use of the park has dramatically increased as it has been termed “ideal” for single track riding. It has become a regional draw for trail activities including mountain biking, hiking, and wildlife observation.

Currently this property receives limited county maintenance. Volunteers and local organizations have maintained the park on a regular basis by removing trash, maintaining the trails, improving trails, designing trails, etc. These groups include the Western New York Mountain Biking Association, Friends of Hunters Creek, Foothills Trail Club, and the Western Chapter of the NYS Horse Council.

## LOCAL CONTEXT

Within the Town of Wales in eastern Erie County. The site is approximately 20 miles to the south and east of downtown Buffalo, and is about 3 miles southeast of the Village of East Aurora. Also, the park is only 2 miles north of Emery Park, another major County facility. Access to the park is from either Hunters Creek Road on the east or on Centerline Road near Vermont Hill Road to the south. The area surrounding the park is largely rural in nature with active farms and large open tracts of undeveloped land. Residential properties are scattered along both Centerline and Hunters Creek Roads.

## RECREATIONAL CONTEXT

Few other parks equal the use and beauty of Hunters Creek Park. Other area park facilities that complement the passive recreational uses at Hunters Creek are Kenneglenn Scenic Nature Preserve which lies adjacent to the park, Emery Park in Aurora and the Knox Farm State Park in East Aurora. Town parks and schools in Wales and Aurora/East Aurora offer active recreational opportunities.

## CURRENT ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

The rapid increase in popularity and use at Hunters Creek Park has also come with numerous issues and concerns. Some of these include, but are not limited to:

- A concern for perimeter properties / trespassing
- A lack of respect for boundary private properties by certain park users.
- A concern for emergency services access
- A concern over trail use and long-term maintenance
- Improvements needed with signage and clear trail markers
- A concern for safety and liability.
- Emerging invasive species

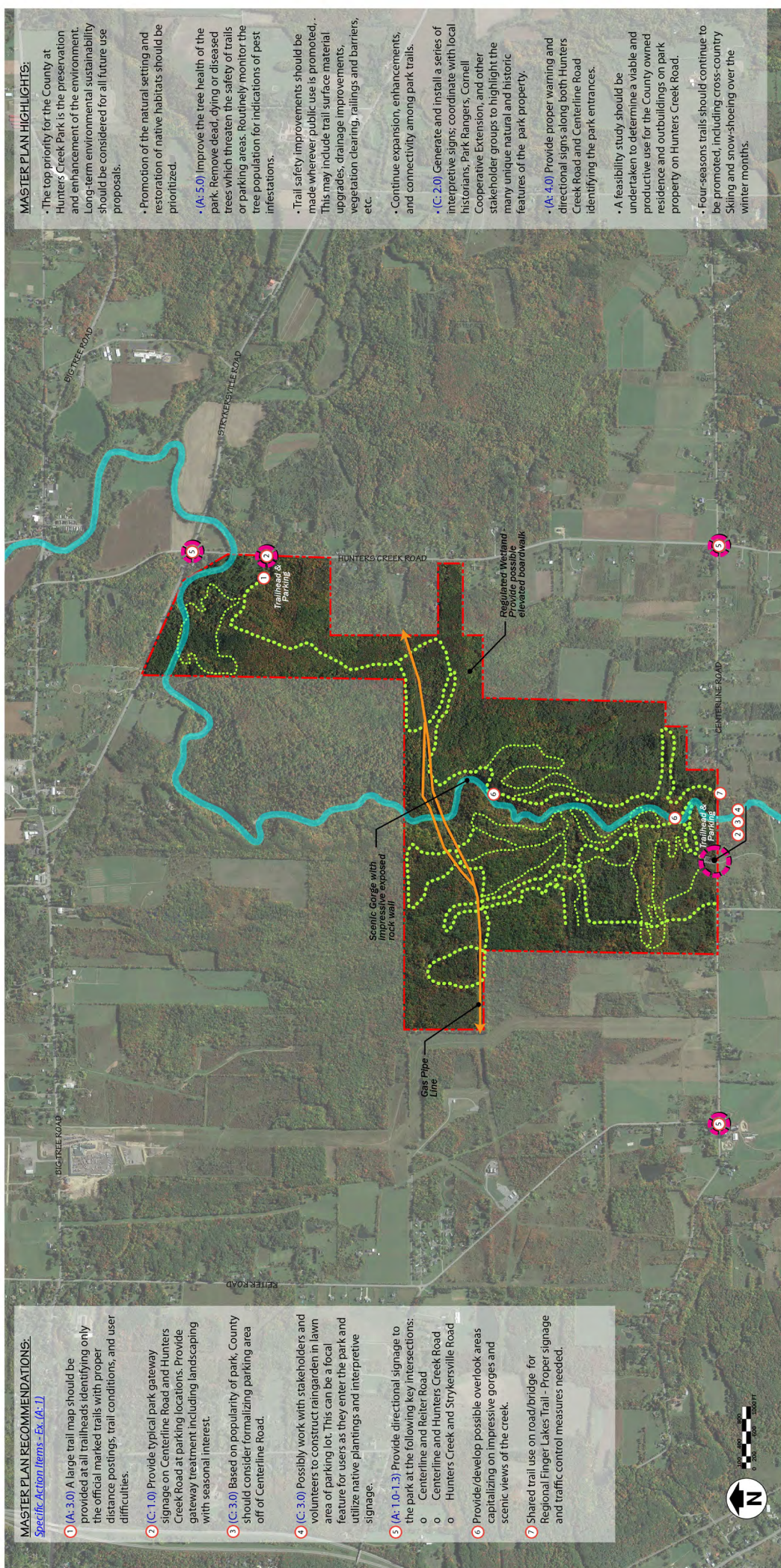


Small creek





# ERIE COUNTY PARKS MASTER PLAN UPDATE





## MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

### Key - (Project Type: Project Number)

A - Action Item: Completed at low to no cost by Parks Staff

P - Assistance or completion of project by potential partner/user group

C - Capital project

### Trails:

- **Routinely inspect and provide upkeep of all trails;**
  - Remove dangerous tree limbs and other potential hazards;
  - Improve drainage and divert water away from trails where necessary.
    - Priority: High
    - Partner: WNYMBA/In-House
- **(A: 3.0) A large trail map should be provided at all trailheads** identifying only the official marked trails with proper distance postings, trail conditions, and user difficulties.
  - Trail map should also explain the meaning of the orange blazes “conservation trail”.
    - Priority: High
    - Partner: WNYMBA/In-House
- **All trail markings/signage need to be clearly understandable from a non-experienced trail user** (hikers, mountain bikers and horseback riders)
  - Priority: Medium
  - Partner: WNYMBA/In-House
- **Trail safety improvements should be made wherever public use is promoted,** . (In addition to proper signage of potential hazards and user difficulties) This may include trail surface material upgrades, drainage improvements, vegetation clearing, railings and barriers, etc.
  - Priority: Medium
  - Partner: WNYMBA/In-House
- **Provide/develop overlook areas capitalizing on impressive gorges and scenic views of the creek.**
  - Priority: Low
  - Partner: In-House/WNYMBA
- **Proper warning signage and/or physical barriers should be placed at specific points where the trail travels through difficult or steep terrain.**
  - Priority: Low
  - Partner: WNYMBA/In-House



One of the many park trails



- **Four-seasons trails should continue to be promoted, including cross-country skiing and snow-shoeing over the winter months.** (Seasonal trail closures, or temporary closures due to wetness or erosion, should be adhered to for environmental sustainability.)

■ **Priority: Low**

■ **Partner: In-House**

#### Structures:

- **(C: 5.0) In the short-term, County should provide porta-johns at each parking area, until a more permanent comfort station can be built.**
  - Usergroups should provide additional restroom accommodations for any events that may take place at the park.

■ **Priority: High**  
■ **Partner: In-House**
- **Determine a viable and productive use for the County owned residence and outbuildings on park property on Hunters Creek Road (2003 Master Plan).** Consideration should be given to turning this building into a parks-related facility, including the potential for revenue generation. Potential future uses could include:
  - Possible seasonal residence for a park ranger to monitor the park and oversee public use of the park.
  - Meeting rooms for parks and environmental groups, local organizations and educational programs, etc.
  - Park Comfort Station / restroom facility; could include interpretive information, park related maps, etc., and could be a stop along the Finger Lakes Trail.
  - Warming Hut for winter activities and cross-country skiing
  - If remodeled, one of the outbuildings could be utilized for the storage of emergency equipment and trail maintenance tools, etc.

■ **Priority: Low**  
■ **Partner: In-House**



*One of the many park trails*



*Picnic table near Hunter's Creek*





Trail symbols

- **(C: 4.0) Accommodate a modest comfort facility (restrooms) at one or both of the parking lots/trail head locations.**
  - Priority: Low
  - Partner: In-House

#### Maintenance/Safety:

- Improvements should be made within the park to assure adequate emergency vehicle access, consult with local fire department and sheriff to determine what types of equipment they would need to get through.
  - Priority: High
  - Partner: In-House
- **Establish a natural buffer of varied width around the entire park property,** with the special exceptions of park entrances, trail heads, “public” trail linkages to adjacent properties and emergency access points along both Centerline Road and Hunters Creek Road. Buffers should also be established around state or federal regulated wetlands.
  - The provisions for setbacks are designed to be flexible due to the varied conditions along the perimeter of this and other county owned properties. There will be specific cases where natural barriers, vegetative screens or fences may be the best solution.
  - Exceptions to the recommended perimeter buffer may be made where the park property abuts or adjoins other publicly held lands where public access and linkages would likely be promoted, such as from the adjacent Kenneken Scenic and Nature Preserve Property.
  - Consideration will be given to establishing an even wider buffer around sensitive environments such as official wetlands or areas with unique vegetation, etc.
    - Priority: Medium
    - Partner: In-House

- **(C: 3.0) Based on popularity of park, County should consider formalizing parking area and entrance drive off of Centerline Road.**
  - Possibly expand lot to accommodate a growing number of park users.
  - Possibly work with stakeholders and volunteers to construct rain garden in lawn area of parking lot. This can be a focal feature for users as they enter the park and utilize native plantings and interpretive signage.
    - Priority: Medium
    - Partner: In-House/WNYMBA/Volunteers



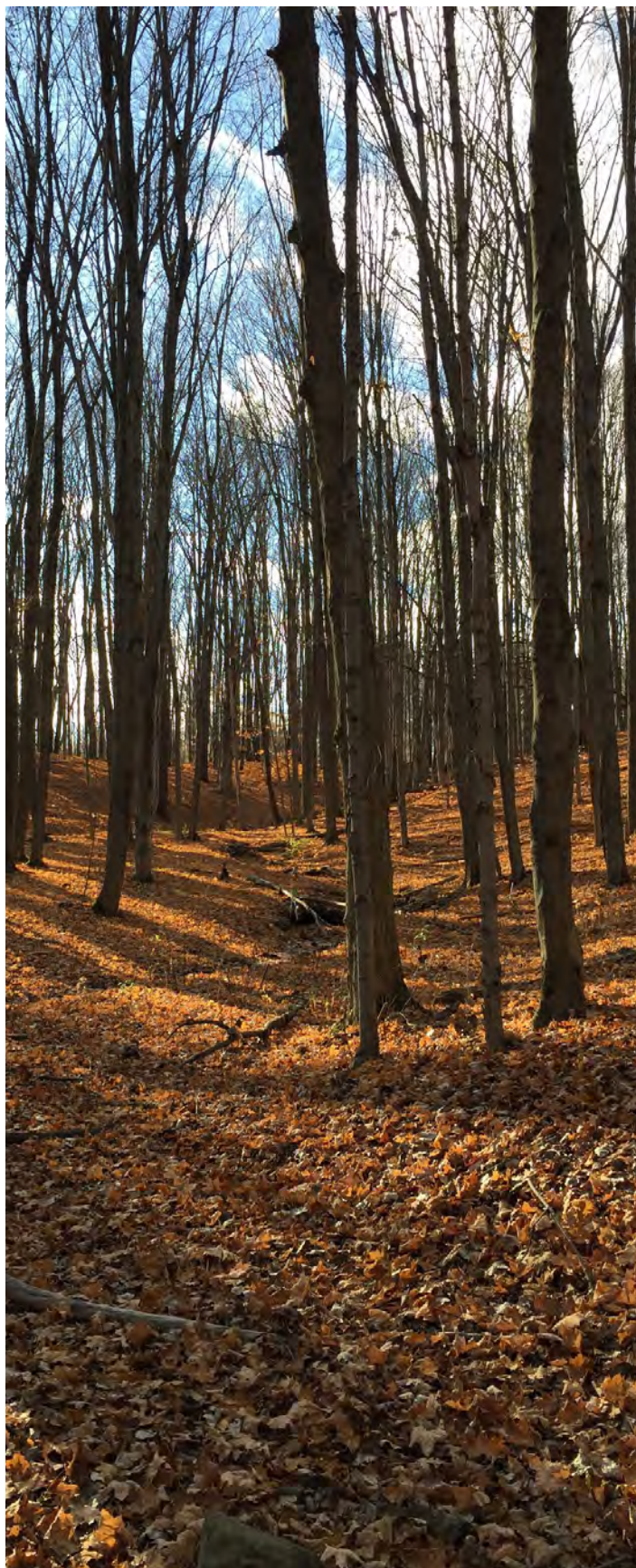
**Signage:**

- **(C: 1.0)** Provide typical park gateway signage on **Centerline Road and Hunters Creek Road at parking locations**. Provide gateway treatment including landscaping with seasonal interest. Develop sign in compliance with typical park gateway signage.
  - **Priority: High**
  - **Partner: In-House**
- **(A: 4.0)** Provide proper warning and directional signs along both Hunters Creek Road and Centerline Road identifying the park entrances. Recommendations should be made to the County's DPW to study the traffic along Centerline to decide whether further safety enhancements/traffic calming provisions are warranted. (i.e., is a flashing yellow light warranted?). It is recommended that reduced speed limit signs be placed at the park entrances.
  - Shared trail use on road/bridge for Regional Finger Lakes Trail - Proper signage and traffic control measures needed.
    - **Priority: Medium**
    - **Partner: In-House**
- **(A: 1.0-1.3)** Provide directional signage to the park at the following key intersections:
  - Centerline and Reiter Road
  - Centerline and Hunters Creek Road
  - Hunters Creek and Strykersville Road
    - **Priority: Low**
    - **Partner: In-House**
- Undertake a formal perimeter/boundary survey, with permanent boundary markers set at regular intervals and at critical points around the entire park property.
  - Partner with an area college to utilize students to assist with these survey efforts as part of their field education.
    - **Priority: Low**
    - **Partner: University At Buffalo/Consultant**



Narrow park trail





View into the woods

- **(C: 2.0)** Generate and install a series of interpretive signs; coordinate with local historians, Park Rangers, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and other stakeholder groups to highlight the many unique natural and historic features of the park property, such as:
  - History and geology of the Creek/gorge
  - Local history of the area (early settlers, early trails and routes, Holmes farm and other area homesteads, cemeteries, etc.),
  - Kellogg Cabin site (log cabin built in 1940 by Sanford Hubbard – son of Roycroft’s Elbert Hubbard)
  - Potential map showing earlier farm properties on the current park land
  - Story behind the gas pipeline, which originates in Texas.
  - Unique park flora and fauna
  - Potential ancient forest groves on park property
  - Story of natural succession, i.e. second growth forests, open meadows, etc.
  - Unique amphibious habitats
  - Potential Native American Site (Indian Ridge Trail?)
    - Priority: Low
    - Partner: Local Historian/Cornell Cooperative/In-House

#### Connectivity:

- **Continue expansion, enhancements, connectivity among park trails, and regional trails such as the Finger Lakes Conservation Trail.**
  - Provide interpretive signage along the trails highlighting flora, fauna, and wildlife.
    - Priority: Medium
    - Partner: In-House/Forestry

#### Environment:

- **The top priority for the County at Hunters Creek Park is the preservation and enhancement of the environment.** Long-term environmental sustainability should be considered for all future use proposals.
  - Priority: High
  - Partner: NYSDEC/WNYMBA/In-House
- **(P: 1.0)** Address and remove invasive species such as Japanese Siltgrass.
  - Develop invasive species management plan for the park
    - Priority: High
    - Partner: WNY Prism
- **Promotion of the natural setting and restoration of native habitats should be prioritized.**
  - Priority: High
  - Partner: NYSDEC/WNY Prism



- **(A: 5.0) Improve the tree health of the park.**
  - Remove dead, dying or diseased trees.
  - Routinely monitor the tree population for indications of pest infestations.
    - **Priority: High**
    - **Partner: WNY PRISM/ECSWD/Forestry**
- **“Active” recreation (athletic fields and courts) should not be promoted within the park.**
  - Only “passive” recreational elements and activities should be promoted for Hunters Creek Park. Primary emphasis will be placed on improving environmentally sustainable nature trails.
    - **Priority: High**
    - **Partner: In-House**
- **Encourage and emphasize natural features and opportunities to connect with park ecology.**
  - Prioritize protection and enhancement of sensitive ecological areas;
  - Propose appropriate additional native plantings throughout the park;
  - Prioritize plantings for bird and butterfly habitats;
  - Designate potential native plant gardens to promote educational and interpretive elements while increasing habitats for insect/bird habitats;
  - The County should encourage the development of outdoor classrooms through partnerships with local schools. Outdoor classrooms can be living laboratories for local children to immerse themselves in nature and our local ecosystem.
    - **Priority: High**
    - **Partner: NYSDEC/Cornell Cooperative Extension/ECSWD/In-House**
- **Improve the health of Hunter’s Creek. Work with NYSDEC, Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper, and other local stakeholder groups.**
  - Focus projects should include stream bank stabilization and erosion control, habitat conservation and restoration, stormwater management, and contaminant reduction.
  - Continued improvements to the ecological status of the creek and naturalization of the surrounding wooded areas can contribute to educational nature programs and trail/water recreation.
    - **Priority: Low**
    - **Partner: ECSWD/NYSDEC/Waterkeeper**



*Unique tree in the woods showing signs of poor health*





*Hunter's Creek*



## HUNTERS CREEK PARK: ACTION ITEMS

| Type | Project # | Recommendation  | Implementation Strategies   | Priority | Term       | Estimated Cost     |
|------|-----------|---|---|----------|------------|--------------------|
| A    | 5.0       | Increase tree health and tree canopy throughout the park.   | Remove dead, dying or diseased trees which threaten the safety of trails or parking areas.  | High     | Ongoing    | In-House, Forestry |
| P    | 1.0       | Address and remove invasive species and emerging infestations to prevent spread to other areas.                                 | Work with potential partners such as WNY Prism to develop invasive species management plan for the park.  | High     | Ongoing    | X                  |
| C    | 5.0       | In the short-term, County should provide porta-johns at each parking area, until a more permanent comfort station can be built. | Usergroups should provide additional restroom accommodations for any events that may take place at the park.  | High     | 1-2 Years  | X                  |
| A    | 2.0       | Provide welcome sign and rules for the park   | Coordination between Parks and Highways to develop and produce the sign panels  | Medium   | 3-5 Years  | In-House, Highway  |
| A    | 3.0       | Provide consistent wayfinding and directional signage within the park, including large park trails map at main trailhead        | Coordination between Parks and Highways to develop and produce directional sign panels, trail maps and markers  | Medium   | 3-5 Years  | In-House           |
| A    | 4.0       | Provide proper warning and directional signs along both Hunters Creek Road and Centerline Road identifying the park entrances.  | Coordination between Parks and Highways to develop and produce the sign panels  | Medium   | 3-5 Years  | In-House           |
| A    | 1.0       | Provide directional signage to the park at the following key intersections:   | Coordination between Parks and Highways to develop and produce the sign panels  | Low      | 6-10 Years | X                  |
| A    | 1.1       | Centerline and Reiter Road  | Coordination between Parks & Highways to develop and produce the sign panels, and coordinate with the road jurisdiction regarding placement of the signs. | Low      | 6-10 Years | In-House, Highway  |

## KEY:

A: Action Item: Completed at low to no cost by Parks staff

P: Assistance or completion of project by potential partner/user group

C: Capital Project

POB: Parks Operating Budget



**HUNTERS CREEK PARK: ACTION ITEMS**

| Type | Project # | Recommendation   | Implementation Strategies   | Priority | Term       | Estimated Cost    |
|------|-----------|--|---|----------|------------|-------------------|
| A    | 1.2       | Centerline and Hunters Creek Road  | Coordination between Parks & Highways to develop and produce the sign panels, and coordinate with the road jurisdiction regarding placement of the signs. | Low      | 6-10 Years | In-House, Highway |
| A    | 1.3       | Hunters Creek and Strykersville Road   | Coordination between Parks & Highways to develop and produce the sign panels, and coordinate with the road jurisdiction regarding placement of the signs. | Low      | 6-10 Years | In-House, Highway |
| C    | 1.0       | Provide typical park gateway signage on Centerline Road and Hunters Creek Road at parking locations. Provide gateway treatment including landscaping with seasonal interest. Develop sign in compliance with typical park gateway signage. | Engage a consultant to develop sign types including copy, structure and landscape.  | Low      | 6-10 Years | \$35,600          |
| C    | 2.0       | Provide interpretive signage in the park   | Engage a consultant to develop high resolution graphics and produce sign panels   | Low      | 6-10 Years | \$3,500           |
| C    | 3.0       | Expand and formalize parking lot off of Centerline Road  | Engage a contractor to construct a larger parking lot, and local stakeholder groups to define planting areas and rain gardens                             | Low      | 6-10 Years | \$20,500          |
| C    | 4.0       | Accommodate a modest comfort facility (restrooms) at one or both of the parking lots/trail head locations.   | Engage a consultant to develop plans and a contractor to construct the improvements   | Low      | 6-10 Years | \$75,000          |

