

Proposed Franklin County Multi-Use Recreational Trail System

DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENT FOR A DRAFT GENERIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

May 2, 2024

SEQRA Lead Agency: Franklin County
Legislature

1. A Brief Description of the Proposed Action

The County proposes to establish and continually develop a Countywide system of trails and roads for recreational use by off-road vehicle (ORV), foot, bicycle, horseback, dog sled, ski, and other outdoor activities. The Project consists of the development of a multi-use recreational trail system to be administered by the County in cooperation with the Towns and Villages contained therein. The trail system will be located on various County-owned lands, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) owned lands, Adirondack Park Agency (APA) owned land, and privately owned parcels. Portions of the Project will utilize existing County, Town, Village, and New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) owned roadways within Franklin County, and a small segment in St. Lawrence County. The Project involves establishing an integrated trail system spanning roughly 500 miles throughout Franklin County, accommodating both motorized and non-motorized users. Franklin County expects such development to make the County a destination location for outdoor enthusiasts, while providing a structured recreational trail system for both County residents and non-residents. Additionally, by placing the trail system under the County's authority and supervision, potential environmental impacts and public safety issues can be managed by utilizing the combined resources of the County and local municipalities. The goal of the Project is to provide a safe, environmentally responsible multi-use recreational trail system that provides a network of diverse experiences in as many different areas of the County as possible. The Project will include the adoption of a Trail Master Plan. Franklin County will secure easements for trail use on lands they do not own. Local Laws will be passed to allow for ORV use within local rights-of-way, as needed. The trail network will result in economic benefits by linking notable destinations through trail linkages across the County. Additionally, the proposed trail network will connect to multi-use trail networks in St. Lawrence and Clinton Counties, creating a regional trail network. In light of the significant growth in ORV sales nationwide and statewide over the last decade, a need exists within the County to provide a safe network of trails upon which ORV enthusiasts can legally ride. The proposed multi-use trail network will additionally offer designated routes for bicycle and pedestrian traffic exclusively. A map of the proposed trail network can be found in Figures 1-3.

Through the Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) process, the County will establish a foundational network of trails for its multi-use trail network. Anticipated expansion of the trail network in the future will result from collaborative efforts between the County, local town governments, private landowners, local ORV trail clubs, the New York State Off-Highway Recreational Vehicle Association (NYSORVA), and other stakeholders within the ORV industry. Any proposed new trail segment, whether on private or public land, will undergo specific environmental evaluations before potential inclusion in the existing trail system. A comprehensive checklist of these required reviews and evaluations will be outlined in the GEIS.

2. State Environmental Quality Review Act Status

Part one (1) of a State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) Environmental Assessment Form (EAF) was completed for the proposed project. A coordinated review process was completed, in accordance with 6 NYCRR Part 617, and resulted in the issuance of a positive declaration by the Franklin County Legislature, acting as Lead Agency. The following agencies and groups have been identified as involved agencies, as this term is defined in 6 NYCRR Part 617, for this Project: Town of Bangor, Town of Bellmont, Town of Bombay, Town of Brighton, Town of Brasher, Town of Burke, Village of Burke, Town of Chateaugay, Village of Chateaugay, Town of Constable, Town of Dickinson, Town of Duane, Town of Fort Covington, Town of Franklin, Town of Harriestown, Town of Malone, Village of Malone, Town of Moira, Town of Santa Clara, Town of Waverly, Town of Westville, Franklin County Highway Department, St. Lawrence Recreational Trails Advisory Board, NYSDEC Region 5, NYSDOT, and the Adirondack Park Agency. The following agencies and groups have been identified as interested agencies, as this term is defined in 6 NYCRR Part 617, for this Project: Town of Tupper Lake, Village of Tupper Lake, Town of Brandon, Clinton County Legislative Office, Town of Saranac, Village of Saranac Lake, Village of Brushton. Other entities not subject to the SEQRA Regulations but receiving a copy of the Part 1 EAF include: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Franklin County Recreational Trails Association, the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, New York State Off-Highway Recreational Vehicle Association, Franklin All-Terrain Riders, Inc., and ATV Ruffriders Club, Inc..

2.1. Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement (DGEIS)

The DGEIS will be the principal document that describes the general technical and environmental information and impacts associated with the proposed Project. This document will help to establish specific conditions or criteria under which future trail segments can be added and approved for addition to the Countywide trail system, including requirements for any subsequent SEQR compliance. This may include thresholds and criteria for supplemental GEISs to reflect specific significant impacts, such as site specific impacts that were not adequately addressed or analyzed in the initial GEIS.

The DGEIS document will focus on issues that are common to the entire proposed trail network, as well as those specific to a certain jurisdiction or regional location. In addition to the components described in Section 3 of this document, the DGEIS will also include a cover sheet, a table of contents, a summary of the document's contents, and a discussion of the project's background, purpose, and public need and benefits, including social and economic considerations.

2.2. DGEIS Scoping Process

A formal Public Scoping process will be undertaken as outlined in Part 617.8 of the SEQRA Regulations. This Draft Scoping Document is being prepared for review and comment by the public, as well as by involved and interested agencies. Comments received will be evaluated and may result in changes to this draft scope. A Final Scoping Document that incorporates any such changes will be issued, prior to the preparation of a DGEIS.

3. Identification of Potentially Significant Adverse Impacts

Potential environmental impacts that could be associated with development of the proposed project have been identified. Outlined below are the potential environmental impacts that will be addressed in the Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement (DGEIS). This list of potential impacts may be modified, following the County's consideration of comments submitted during the DGEIS scoping process.

3.1. The subsequent list of overarching activities may result in environmental impacts:

- Construction activities for existing trail upgrades, new trails, and trailhead parking areas.
- Environmental impacts related to use (air quality, noise, wetland/stream impacts, etc.).
- Operation of ORVs on designated trails and roads and compliance with laws.

These activities could potentially have impacts the following environmental and ecological resources:

3.1.1. Fish, Wildlife, Plants, and Ecologically Sensitive Areas (including threatened or endangered species, other (non-threatened) species of plants and wildlife)

Some wildlife species may be disturbed by human intrusion and noise associated with ORV activity. In addition, it is anticipated that increased ORV use will result in direct mortality of some wild animals, birds, and plants. Small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians are particularly susceptible to impacts by ORVs. The extent of these impacts will be evaluated in the DGEIS.

State and Federal agencies have indicated that there is the potential for a State and Federally listed endangered wildlife species, and a State listed rare plant species and a significant natural community to be located within the project site. Field surveys will be conducted to determine the presence or absence of these species and this community type along the proposed trail

corridor (i.e. areas other than existing roadways). Methods to avoid, minimize and mitigate potential impacts to these resources will be evaluated, should they be identified within the trail corridor.

3.1.2. Significant Historical or Archaeological Resources

A review of available data regarding historic and archeological resources located along the proposed trail corridor will be conducted to determine whether any impacts to such resources will result from the proposed project.

3.1.3. Surface Water Resources

Portions of the proposed trail system may cross streams or run adjacent to ponds or lakes. If mitigation measures are not employed, the operation of ORVs and the construction of trails through streams or other water resources may lead to siltation of these resources, direct mortality of wildlife and plants, erosion of the bed and banks of the water bodies, and introduction of invasive species. Mapped streams, lakes, and ponds along the proposed trail corridor will be identified and methods to avoid, minimize and mitigate potential impacts to these resources will be evaluated.

3.1.4. Wetlands

Portions of the proposed trail system may cross designated NYSDEC Freshwater Wetlands or federally regulated wetlands. Operation of ORVs and construction of trails through wetland areas can cause degradation of this habitat through direct mortality of fish, wildlife, and plant species, sedimentation of surface waters, compaction of wetland soils, introduction of fill, and introduction of invasive species, among other impacts. A field survey will be conducted to identify any State or federally regulated wetlands located within the proposed trail corridor, as described in section 3.3.2, below. Methods to avoid, minimize and mitigate potential impacts to these resources will be evaluated.

3.1.5. Soils

ORV use has the potential to cause erosion and compaction of soil, depending on the soil type. In addition, trail construction activities have the potential to cause soil erosion. Environmental analyses (review of local soil maps, where available, and field walkovers) will be undertaken to assess potential impacts upon soils.

3.1.6. Noise

The heavy vegetation in the forested areas will help to buffer much of the noise from ORV traffic, potentially making it less obtrusive to neighboring landowners and other forest users, depending on their distance from the noise source. Noise from ORVs operated on local roadways, which are designated as part of the trail system, may be more noticeable to nearby residents due to the likely closer proximity of the noise source to the receiver and the potential for less vegetation to buffer the noise from nearby receptors. Mitigation measures that may be used to reduce any potential noise impacts will be described in the DGEIS.

3.1.7. Air Quality

ORVs create exhaust, which in turn creates odors. Some trail users may consider these odors objectionable, as might some people participating in recreational activities or living in close proximity to the trail. These odor impacts, however, will be short term in nature.

Under specific circumstances, the operation of ORVs may produce dust. Dust generation is not anticipated to be substantial within forested areas, as they naturally suppress dust generation. However, fugitive dust impacts might be more noticeable on gravel or dirt roads used by ORVs during dry summer months. Measures to mitigate fugitive dust will be investigated in the DGEIS.

3.1.8. Traffic

ORV traffic on local roads open to ORV use may increase with the implementation of the County's ORV trail system. Impacts to motor vehicle traffic caused by the increased ORV usage on these roads will be examined in the DGEIS.

3.1.9. Recreational Activities

County and State lands are accessible for a range of recreational endeavors, encompassing hiking, bird watching, hunting, mountain biking, and cross-country skiing, among others. Some individuals engaging in these forms of recreation may perceive ORV riding as encroaching upon their use of these public lands. Strategies aimed at mitigating conflicts between proponents of non-motorized recreation and those of motorized recreation will be deliberated in the DGEIS.

3.1.10. Growth and Character of the Community

The envisioned ORV trail system is poised to draw numerous ORV enthusiasts, especially given the limited areas in Franklin County where ORVs are currently permitted. With a surge in ridership, there arises a demand for expanded amenities such as food, apparel, equipment, fuel, and so forth.

3.1.11. Community Services

Establishing a Countywide trail system for ORV riders will increase the amount of time spent by law enforcement officials to monitor the trails and enforce regulations. In addition, it will increase the demand on emergency service providers due to the increased potential for more ORV incidents with a larger ORV population. The ability of the local law enforcement and emergency service providers to handle this increase in ORV traffic will be evaluated in the DGEIS.

4. Information Needed to Address Potential Impacts

Potentially significant environmental impacts will be assessed through review and analyses of information obtained from the sources listed below. Methodologies for obtaining new information will be in accordance with accepted standards and procedures applicable to each specific area of environmental analysis. This listing of information resources is subject to change, as deemed necessary or appropriate by the SEQRA Lead Agency during preparation of the DGEIS.

4.1. Available published maps, reports, and other documents on file with various local, County, State, and Federal agencies will be utilized to the extent they provide relevant information. This information may include:

- Topographic Quadrangle Mapping (USGS Quadrangle Maps)
- Mapped soils (NRCS Web Soil Survey)
- Mapped federal wetlands (USFWS National Wetland Inventory (NWI) maps)
- Mapped state wetlands (NYSDEC ERM)

- Archeologically sensitive areas & state and national register listed properties (New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (NYSOPRHP), Cultural Resource Information System (CRIS))
 - Mapped streams, ponds, lakes (USGS Quadrangle Maps and NYSDEC ERM)
 - Adirondack Park Data (APA mapping for portion of County within Blue Line)
 - State Recreation Areas/Parks/Forest Lands (NYSDEC Info Locator and GIS layers)
 - Agricultural Districts (NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets and GIS layers)
- 4.2. Information provided by the County and previous studies related to ORV use in the County and the nearby Tug Hill Region, as well as larger-scale studies will be assessed. Existing studies such as those listed below will be reviewed and relevant portions will be utilized during preparation of the DGEIS.
- Camoin Associates. Economic and Fiscal Impact - Tug Hill Region's Snowmobile Activity. 2021. Available at: https://naturallylewis.com/images/News-Images/Tug_Hill_Region_Snowmobile_Activity_-_Economic_and_Fiscal_Impact.pdf.
 - Karasin, Leslie N. All-Terrain Vehicles in the Adirondacks: Issues and Options. WCS Working Paper No. 21, April 2003. Available at: <http://www.wcs.org/adirondacks/>.
 - New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Draft ORV Policy for Public ORV Access to Recreational Programs on the Forest Preserve, Reforestation, Multiple Use, Unique, Wildlife Management Areas, Environmental Education Centers and Conservation Easement Lands. 2005. Available at: <https://www.tughill.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/DECATVPolicy.pdf>
 - New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. Improving our Visitors Experience through Inclusivity, Diversity and Resiliency. 2020-2025. Available at: <https://parks.ny.gov/documents/inside-our-agency/20202025StatewideComprehensiveOutdoorRecreationPlan.pdf>
 - Office of the New York State Comptroller. The Economic Impact of the Great Outdoors. June 2022. Available at: <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/files/reports/pdf/economic-impact-great-outdoors.pdf>.
 - Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism. Franklin County Visitor Focus - Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism. 2018. Available at: <https://www.roostadk.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2018-Leisure-Travel-Study-Franklin-County-FINAL.pdf>.
 - United States Environmental Protection Agency. Frequently Asked Questions: Environmental Impacts of Recreational Vehicles and Other Nonroad Engines. Document No. EPA420-F-01-030. 2001. Available at: <https://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyNET.exe/P1002K1T.TXT>
- 4.3. Field investigations and studies to be undertaken specifically for preparation of the DGEIS are listed below.
- 4.3.1. Submission to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) system, NYSDEC Nature Explorer, NYSDEC ERM has indicated that there is the potential for a State and Federally listed species to occur within the County. In addition, the NYSDEC identified a rare plant species and significant natural communities within the County. A literature search and field survey of the proposed trail corridors will be conducted to determine whether the proposed ORV or bike trail system will have an impact on protected species or natural communities.

4.3.2. New York State Freshwater Wetlands Maps, APA wetland mapping, USFWS NWI maps, and field investigations will be utilized to determine whether State or Federally regulated wetlands are located along the proposed trail corridors. Field investigations will be conducted to identify areas along the proposed trail system, lying outside municipal roadways, which meet the Federal wetland criteria. This will be done in accordance with wetlands identification criteria outlined in the 1987 Corps of Engineers' Wetlands Delineation Manual and the 1995 NYS Freshwater Wetland Delineation Manual.

4.3.3. Information published by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) was reviewed to determine whether any significant archeological and historical resources are found within the proposed project corridors.

5. An Initial Identification of Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures that could be used to minimize potential impacts associated with the proposed project include, but are not necessarily limited to, the measures listed below.

- 5.1. Identify ORV and bicycle trail routes that, to the greatest extent practicable, avoid impacts to any significant environmental or cultural resources.
- 5.2. Identify ORV and bicycle trail routes that, to the greatest extent practicable, avoid steep slopes or wet areas.
- 5.3. Identify ORV and bicycle trail that, to the greatest extent practicable, avoid passing within close proximity to residential areas.
- 5.4. Limit construction for stream or surface water crossings, to the extent practicable, to times of low flow.
- 5.5. Establish a trail user education program to inform ORV riders about proper trail etiquette, the impacts associated with off-trail riding, and the role ORVs may play in the spread of invasive plant species.
- 5.6. Keep areas of exposed soils to a minimum practicable size during construction, and re-vegetate areas as soon as possible after disturbance to minimize erosion and stormwater runoff impacts.
- 5.7. Use silt fences at construction sites where appropriate and as necessary, to help protect nearby water resources from siltation during storm events.
- 5.8. Require construction equipment to use appropriate mufflers to reduce noise impacts.
- 5.9. Require riders to have appropriate noise emission controls on their muffler systems (in accordance with 40CFR205.166, Subpart E).
- 5.10. Partner with local law enforcement agencies, local ORV clubs, and NYSORVA to patrol the trails to maintain rider's safety, aid in protection of natural resources, and identify maintenance needs.
- 5.11. Install appropriate signage to alert ORV riders about closed trails, sensitive environmental areas, and other trail hazards
- 5.12. Close certain trail segments, as needed, to reduce the potential for trail damage and damage to surrounding natural resources (i.e. spring mud season)

6. Reasonable Alternatives to be Considered

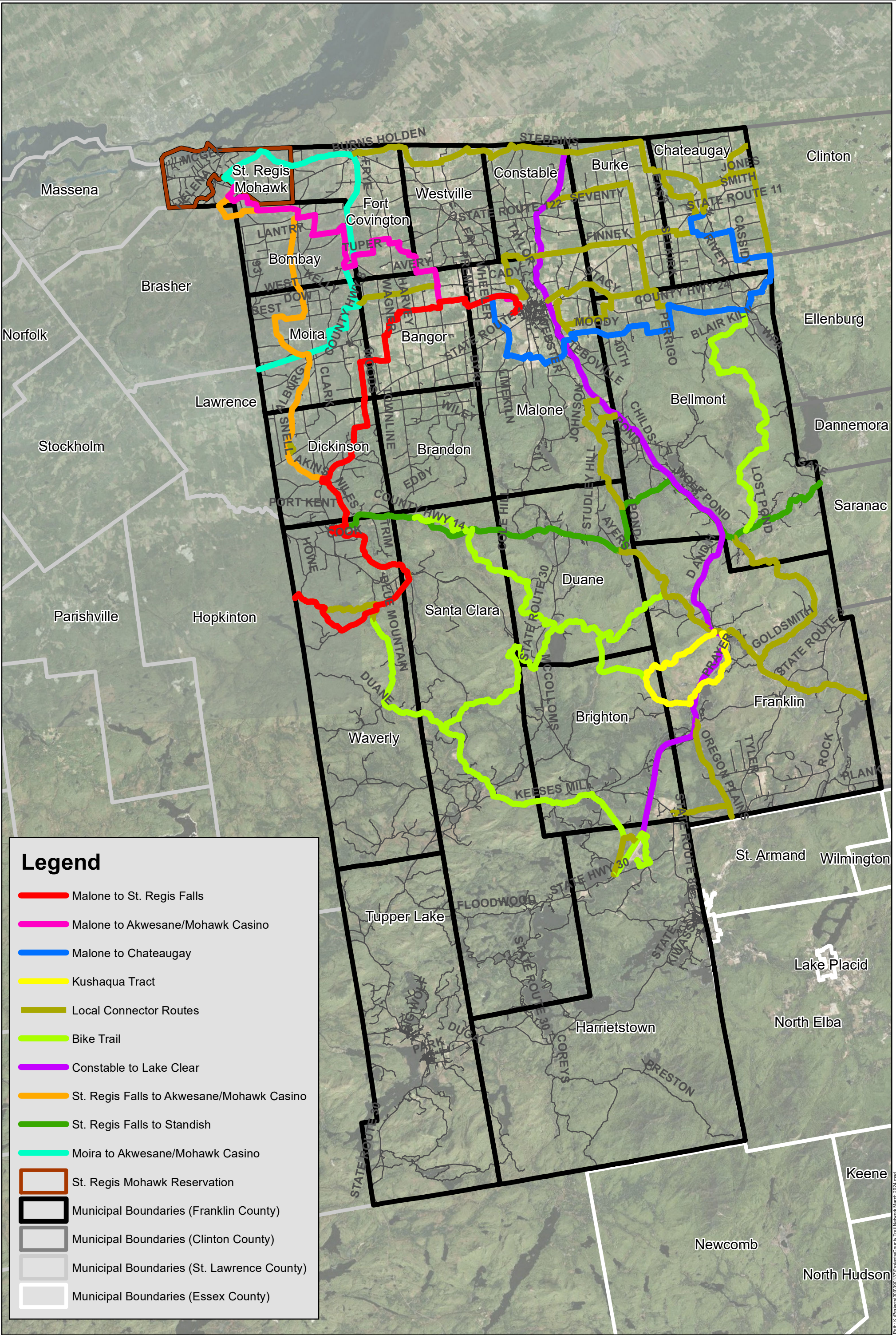
The DGEIS will incorporate an assessment of feasible alternatives to the proposed project, taking into account the objectives and capabilities of Franklin County. The following alternatives will be examined:

- 6.1. The “no action” alternative (i.e., not taking any action to establish a County-wide system of trails suitable for ORV use)
- 6.2. The development of alternative trail corridors will be examined in the DGEIS. Specific alternatives to be evaluated are listed below:
 - 6.2.1. Alternative ORV routes on Adirondack Park and NYS owned lands
 - 6.2.2. Alternative ORV routes on private lands
 - 6.2.3. Alternative ORV routes on municipal or county owned lands

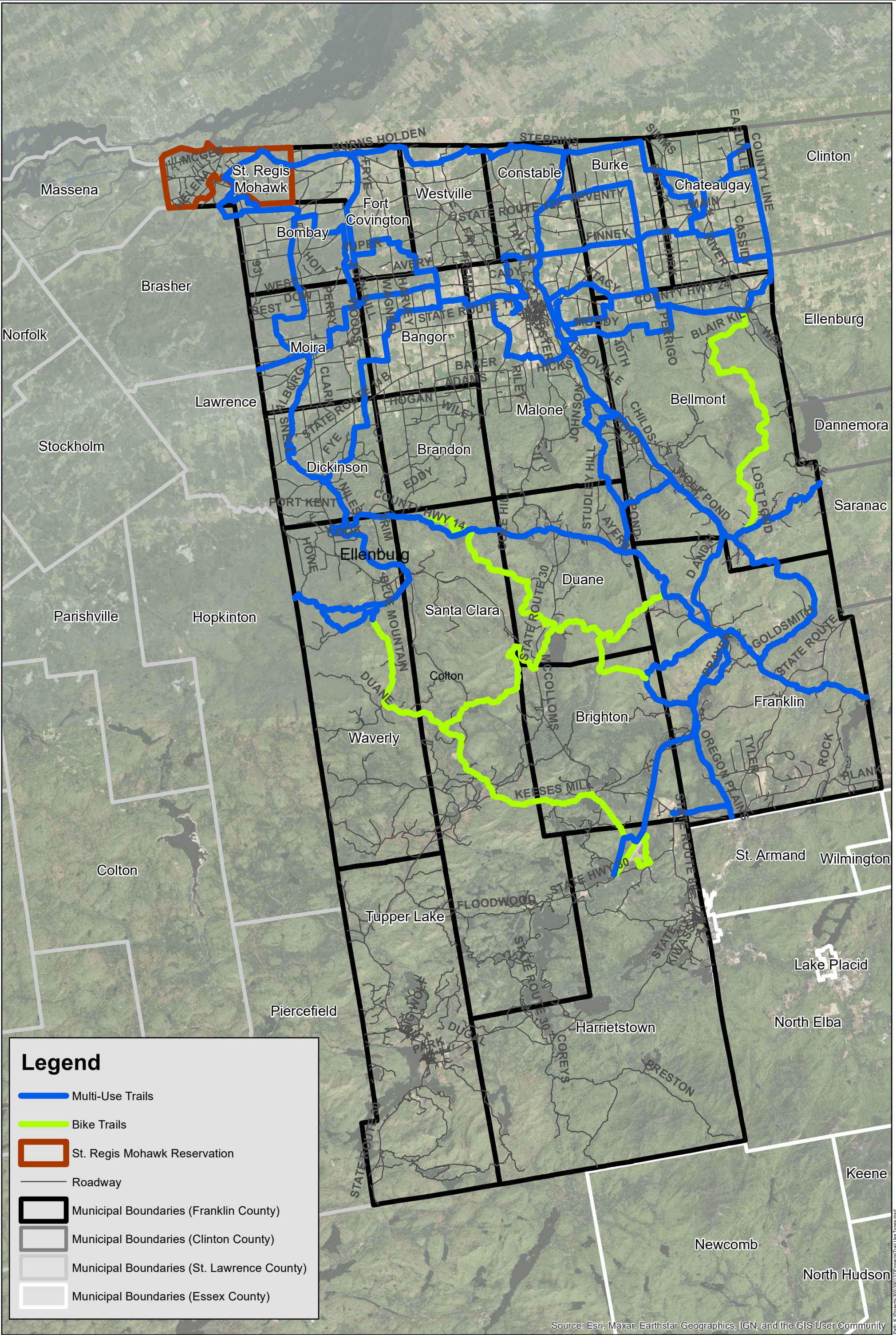
7. Information/Data to be Included in an Appendix to the DGEIS

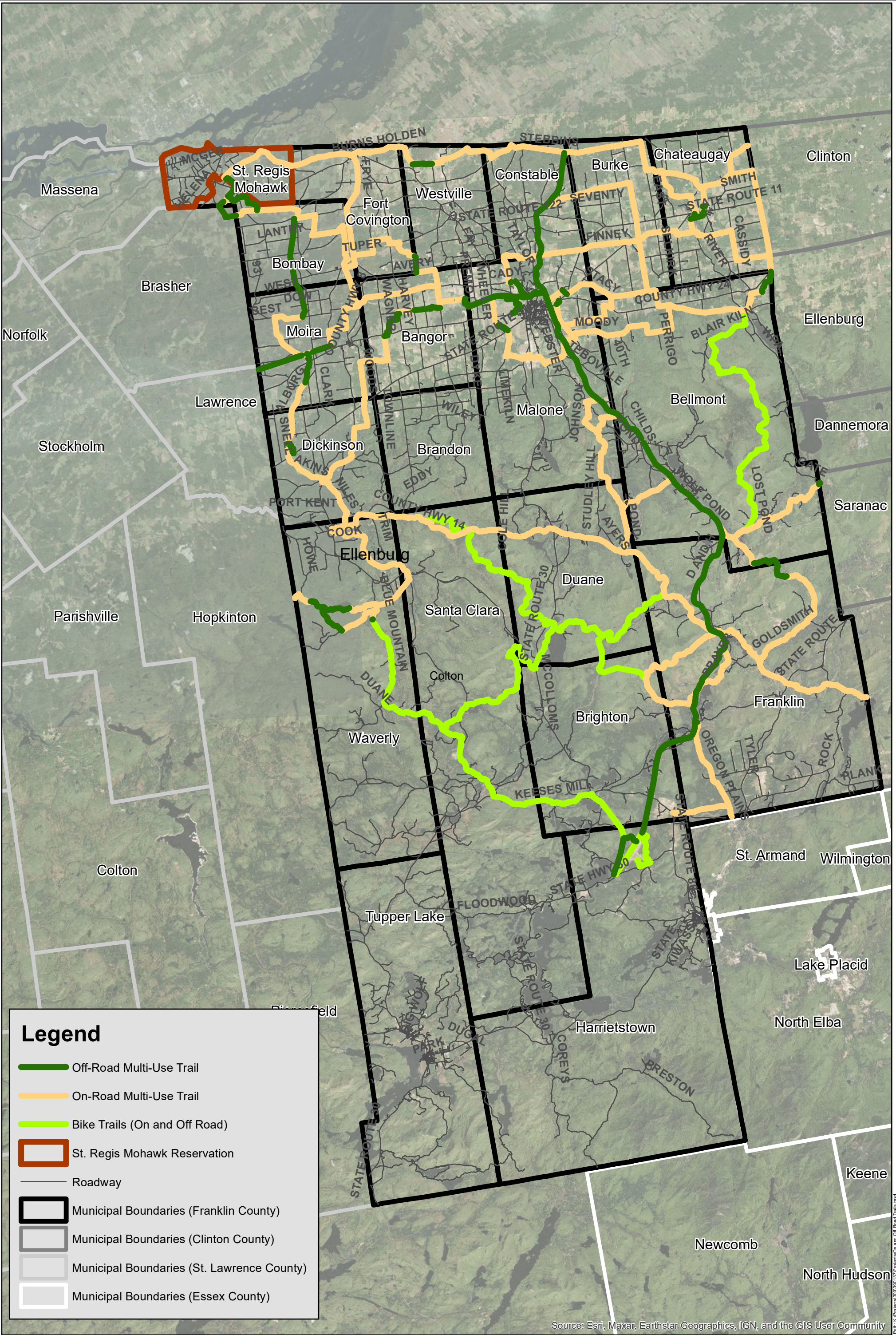
Information/data that will be in an appendix to the DGEIS, rather than in the body of the DGEIS, include the following:

- 7.1. Summaries of previously published reports/studies regarding recreational trail use and OVR use in the region.
- 7.2. Separately bound reports and data that will be referenced in the DGEIS, including but not necessarily limited to the field investigations and studies listed in Section 3.3, above.
- 7.3. A bibliography of references and information sources used during preparation of the DGEIS.



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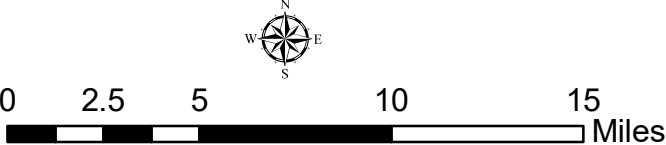




Legend

- Off-Road Multi-Use Trail
- On-Road Multi-Use Trail
- Bike Trails (On and Off Road)
- St. Regis Mohawk Reservation
- Roadway
- Municipal Boundaries (Franklin County)
- Municipal Boundaries (Clinton County)
- Municipal Boundaries (St. Lawrence County)
- Municipal Boundaries (Essex County)

Source: Esri, Maxar, Earthstar Geographics, IGN, and the GIS User Community



Franklin County Multi-Use Trail

Franklin County

On-Road and Off-Road Trails

Franklin County

New York

5/1/2024

Figure

3

Project No.

390.137