



## New Hampshire Fish and Game Department

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Lee E. Perry  
Executive Director

December 6, 2004

R. Sean O'Kane, Commissioner  
Department of Resources and Economic Development  
P.O. Box 1856  
172 Pembroke Road  
Concord, NH 03302-1856

Dear Commissioner O'Kane,

As requested by your Department, the New Hampshire Fish & Game Department conducted a field reconnaissance to evaluate the potential impacts of the proposed Mount Sunapee Ski Resort expansion on wildlife. Two Department biologists visited the state park portion of the proposed expansion on November 8 and hiked the area to look for wildlife sign and the presence of any potentially significant habitats (refer to the attached map to see the exact path that was taken).

The forest canopy at the base of the mountain was found to consist of a mix of northern and central hardwoods including gray and yellow birch and red oak, with a sub canopy consisting of beech and hop hornbeam, and an understory of striped maple and red spruce. From about 1,800 – 2,400 feet in elevation, patches of red spruce forest were observed with sapling spruce occurring at varying densities in the understory. In between the patches of red spruce, stands of northern hardwoods were observed with a canopy consisting of yellow birch, beech, white ash, and sugar maple, with an understory primarily of striped maple and beech. From 2,400 feet to the summit, a vegetation community of black cherry, spruce, fir, and paper birch was observed with an understory of striped maple. A considerable number of snags and considerable amounts of downed woody debris were observed throughout, especially in the red spruce stands. A few intermittent streams were bisected during the ascent to the summit, along with numerous glacial erratics. The only observed species were ruffed grouse, white-breasted nuthatch, downy woodpecker, chickadee, and red squirrel. Observed wildlife sign included snowshoe hare, moose, and deer.

There are no known occurrences of rare wildlife within or near the expansion area. However, we have no knowledge of any standardized wildlife surveys occurring in the area to assess the presence of rare species either. Standardized wildlife surveys would need to occur to adequately evaluate the impacts of the expansion on rare and declining wildlife.

Although no rare species occurrences are known and few wildlife species or sign was observed, a wide variety of wildlife, including many species of conservation concern in the state, are known to use the types of habitat

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observed during the one-day field reconnaissance. For instance, eastern red bats and pipestrelles roost in the foliage of oaks and maples at low and mid elevations. Northern long-eared bats roost in the hollows of snags and under the loose bark of maples and ashes. The federally endangered Indiana bat is unlikely to occur at Sunapee, but it is a possibility. Indiana bats roost in dead or dying trees with loose bark. Hoary bats roost in spruce and fir at higher elevations. Although none of the bats species (except Indiana bat) have an official state or federal designation, many have experienced long-term population declines in the region.

A number of birds also potentially use the habitats found on Mount Sunapee. These include Cooper's hawk, northern goshawk, yellow-bellied sapsucker, eastern wood-pewee, veery, wood thrush, black-throated blue warbler, blackburnian warbler, Louisiana waterthrush, scarlet tanager, and purple finch. Northern goshawk, veery, wood thrush, and scarlet tanager are considered forest interior species that can be negatively impacted by fragmentation caused by development. Only the Cooper's hawk has a state or federal designation (state threatened). Cooper's hawk, northern goshawk, veery, wood thrush, and purple finch are considered species of conservation concern by many bird conservation organizations because they have experienced long-term population declines in the region.

The ski resort is located within the boundaries of the second largest unfragmented forest block in southern New Hampshire (> 26,000 acres). A number of wide ranging species including bobcat, bear, and moose, and a number of birds, including many of those listed above, require large undeveloped patches of forest to maintain sustainable populations. Few very large unfragmented blocks of forest remain in developing southern New Hampshire. The resort expansion could have direct negative impacts on the aforementioned species by splitting large forest blocks into smaller blocks. Indirect impacts may occur if recreational activity is allowed year round on the ski slopes. A number of ski resorts are open year round for horseback riding, hiking, mountain biking, etc. Many of the wildlife that would attempt to use the remaining forested sections of the expansion area or the open slopes for nesting or foraging would likely be displaced if these activities occurred during the spring and summer.

Please recognize that this letter addresses potential impacts to wildlife, based on our field review and professional knowledge of the general area. Neither the two-day reconnaissance conducted by WM. D. Countryman nor the one-day reconnaissance completed by NH Fish & Game is sufficient to adequately ascertain the impacts that the proposed expansion will have on wildlife. More rigorous surveys would need to take place to do so.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Lee E. Perry  
Executive Director

# Mount Sunapee State Park Ski Resort Expansion Recon

## Legend

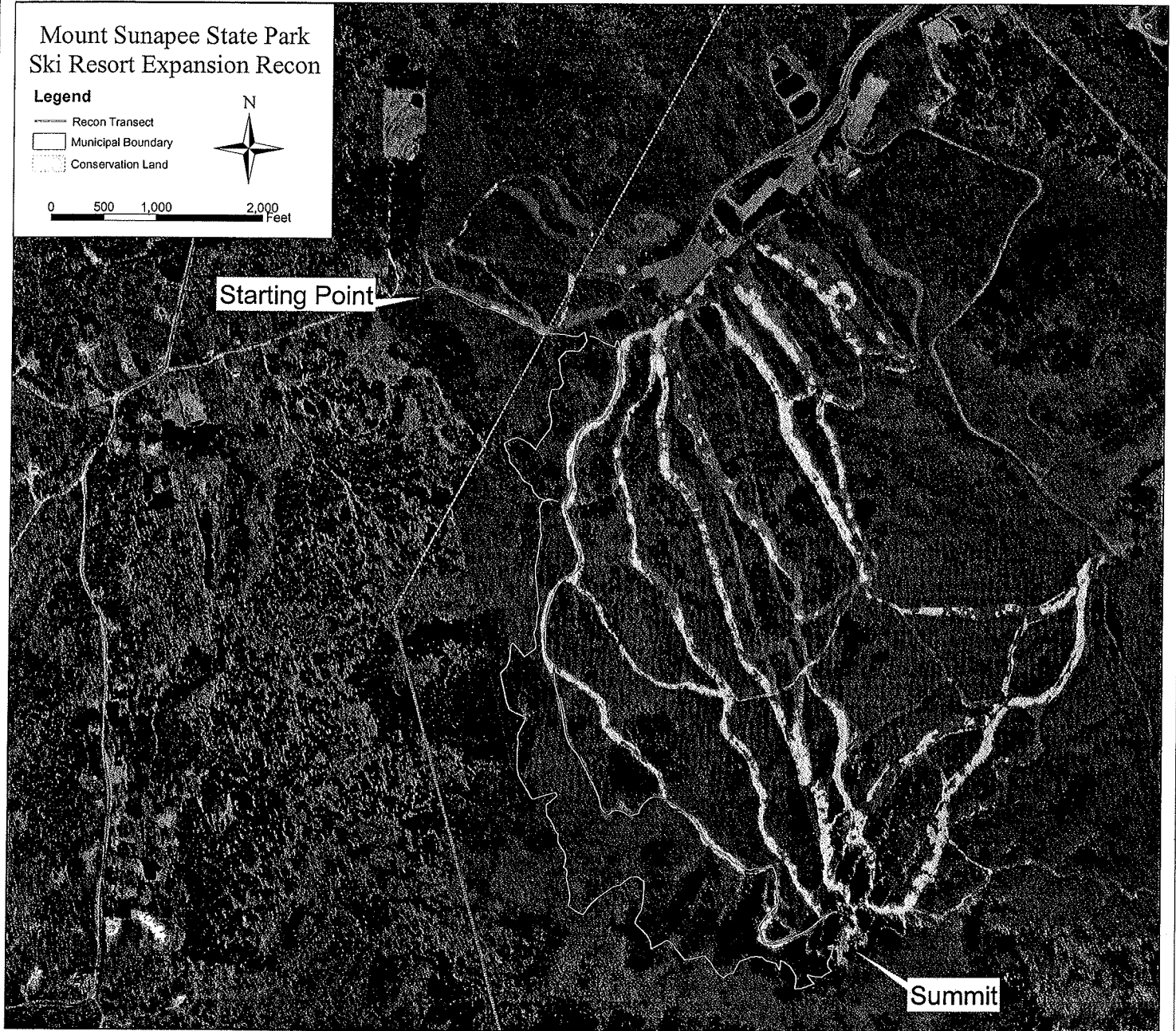
- Recon Transect
- Municipal Boundary
- Conservation Land



0 500 1,000 2,000 Feet

Starting Point

Summit



# Mount Sunapee State Park Ski Resort Expansion Recon

## Legend

- Municipal Boundary
- Conservation Land
- Interior Forest



0 0.5 1 2 Miles

