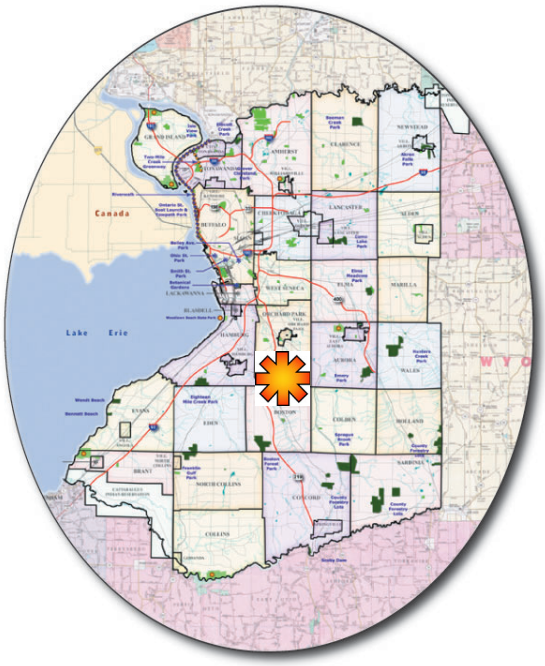


2.2 CHESTNUT RIDGE PARK

DESCRIPTION

Acquired in 1926, Chestnut Ridge Park is the largest and traditionally most heavily used county-owned park. This jewel of a property includes some of the most impressive natural scenery and vintage WPA-era park structures anywhere around. Located in the Town of Orchard Park, the 1,231-acre park is centrally located within the County Parks system, has convenient access and has always been a popular destination to residents all over Erie County. The most well-known portion of the park is the large open grassy hillside, upon which sits the old stone park "casino" building. This north-facing hillside allows for impressive vistas to downtown Buffalo, and has been a favorite in the snowy winter months for its sledding, skiing and tobogganing. Rugged terrain, deep ravines, mature woodlands, open meadows, scenic picnic areas and miles of nature trails has made Chestnut Ridge a popular getaway from the hustle and bustle of urban life.

A little-known section of the park is the southwest portion, sometimes referred to as the "Shale Creek Preserve." It is within this remote section that nature is at its finest, with its seemingly primitive wooded ravines and a most unique natural feature, the "Eternal Flame Falls."

PARK AND AREA HISTORY

Chestnut Ridge Park is one of the original Erie County Parks, beginning its development back in 1926. Much of the park construction was handled through the WPA work force through the 1930s.

LOCAL CONTEXT

At one point not too many years ago, Chestnut Ridge Park sat relatively isolated in the southtowns countryside south of the Village of Orchard Park. However, in recent years, dramatic residential growth and suburban sprawl has begun to move closer and closer towards the Park, engulfing much of the surrounding natural open space, including the expanding "Scherff Estates" subdivision of

large, stately homes, which is now bordering the park to the east. Route 277, running north-south between the Village of Orchard Park and hamlet of North Boston, divides the park into two halves, with the park's most developed section lying to the east of the state highway. From a context standpoint, Chestnut Ridge Park is strategically located at the center of the County's overall park system holdings, and has easy and well-signed access from the local highway system *(Route 219 to Armor Duells Road to Route 277 southbound).* It also lies just off a major access route to the nearby ski areas of Ski Tamarack and Kissing Bridge, as well as off of the main route to Holiday Valley Ski Resort from points north (Route 219).

RECREATIONAL CONTEXT

At one point, Chestnut Ridge served as a central recreation facility for the local residents, including both active and passive forms of activities. It also has always been a magnet for regional park users for certain types of recreation (i.e. tobogganing, hiking, etc.) and special events. Although still utilized for some organized sports, the Town of Orchard Park and the Orchard Park School District have since developed their own recreational facilities that now tend to offer many of the active recreational courts and fields at a local level.

Refer to the side-bar for a listing of nearby Town and /or Village Parks that offer various forms of recreation to the puiblic.

CURRENT ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

- *The park is showing deterioration in its older, historic stone structures*
- *The arrival to the park near the casino is disappointing and "out of character" for this magnificent, natural park. A "sea of pavement" and views to the maintenance structures now greets all visitors to the east side of the park.*
- *There is a lack of directional and interpretive signage highlighting the wonderful park structures and natural features*
- *As resources and funding dwindle, a new strategy for lawn mowing needs to emerge. Currently, most of the open space in the park is mowed, including areas that are beyond the recreational use areas.*

EXISTING PARK FEATURES AND FACILITIES

- *Superintendent's residence*
- *Sheriff's Underground Sub-station*
- *Fire Training Tower Complex*
- *Casino Building with Concession stand, rest rooms, and central area with large fireplace*
- *Approximately 60 shelters and Picnic Groves*
- *Numerous comfort stations*
- *Approximately 12 tennis courts*
- *An abundance of "Old, outdated" Play Equipment with numerous newer play pieces and structures.*
- *Large Maintenance Complex*
- *Older Exercise Warm-up Court*
- *Commissioner's Cabin and Pond*
- *Two Toboggan Chutes with skiing/sledding hill, including Tow Rope*
- *Baseball Diamond and numerous informal diamonds with old backstops*
- *Soccer field*
- *Horse Trail*
- *Large Trail system (including winter use for snowmobiles and cross-country skiing).*

NEARBY PARKS WITH UNIQUE FEATURES *(WITHIN A 5-MILE RADIUS)*

TOWN OF ORCHARD PARK:

- Brush Mountain Park, 75 acres
  Baseball diamonds
- Orchard Meadows Playground, 15 acres
  Soccer field, tennis courts, baseball diamonds and basketball courts

Village of Orchard Park:

- Yates Park (Green Lake), 51 acres
  Baseball diamond, little league fields, basketball courts, bocce court and beach area with swimming

Town of Boston:

- Boston Town Park, 50 acres
  Football field, tennis courts, baseball diamonds, basketball courts, and swimming
- South Boston Park, 4 acres
  Football field, tennis courts, baseball diamonds, basketball courts, and swimming

Town of Hamburg:

- Orchard Acres Park, 25 acres
  Tennis courts, baseball diamonds, basketball courts, and roller hockey
- Sagamore Park, 8 acres
  Soccer field, tennis & volleyball courts, baseball diamonds and basketball courts
- Carnegie Park, 10 acres
  Football field, tennis & volleyball courts, baseball diamonds and basketball courts
- Fairgrounds Village Park, 9 acres
  Tennis & volleyball courts and basketball courts
- Hamburg Golf Course, 141 acres
  18-Hole golf course
- Penn Dixie Quarry, 33 acres
  Private park offering fossil collecting
- Steelton Park, 6 acres
  Soccer fields, running track, tennis & volleyball courts, baseball diamonds and shuffle board
- Taylor Road Park, 9 acres
  Family recreation facility for private functions and baseball diamonds
- Tomaka Park, 8 acres
  Tennis courts and basketball courts
- Willow Run Mini-Park, 5 acres
  Tennis courts

- *There is an apparent underutilization of some of the park facilities, i.e. main casino building, concession stand, Martin Lodge, etc.*
- *The park is "littered" with old, dilapidated wooden picnic tables*
- *There are numerous outdated play structures that do not meet current safety or accessibility codes.*

RECENT PARKS DEPARTMENT PROJECTS / IMPROVEMENTS

- *Replaced and repaired waterlines for various comfort stations*
- *Installation of new plumbing and glass block windows, and painting at various comfort stations*
- *Bridal Path was cleared in lower end of park*
- *Enclosure of Fuel distribution center into storage barn*
- *New water lines into lower end of park*
- *New water line to the Casino*
- *Improvement of roadway to shelters 23 and 30 park roads and parking lot partially paved*
- *New roof on Superintendents house*
- *Installed new playground equipment*
- *Rope tow spliced for ski hill.*

MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Preserve and enhance original Heritage Areas, particularly the area around the Casino building. Restore historic stone structures, picnic shelters, pump houses and original park buildings;*
  - Restore old stone picnic shelters and structures before building new picnic shelters and structures. (Consider the heritage "value" of these old park features for future tourism and visitor appreciation). Consider the entire park for eligibility on the **National Register of Historic Places.**
- *Provide an enhanced "gateway" into the park from the main Route 277. This would include restoring the stone "beehive" structures at the east entrance, providing much more welcoming entry signage and providing additional appropriate landscape treatments.*
- *Investigate new uses for the old casino structure that are compatible with "heritage" park setting*
  - Potential Visitor Information Center for Overall Erie

County Park System. This could house information for all of the parks in the system and offer exhibit space and/or office space for various county park user groups, "Friends of" groups, environmental-related organizations, etc. In addition, the restored casino could be the "headquarters" and central administrative "clearinghouse" for picnic shelter and facility rentals/ reservations for all of the parks, and could function as a meeting and conference center, facility for weddings and special events, etc;

- *Look for additional seasonal uses for the Martin Lodge and other park facilities, i.e. possible revenue generation for meetings, special events, parties, etc.*
- *Consider a rehabilitation / enhancement program for the Commissioner's Cabin, which takes advantage of its beautiful and isolated location, rustic charm, natural setting, etc. and puts it into a more advantageous "revenue generator" for the County i.e. structural and architectural improvements to accommodate corporate retreats, weddings, special events, large reunions, etc.*
- *Reconfigure/re-organize maintenance yard and access to screen "arrival" views to the facility. Provide appropriate buffers and screening , such as landscaped berms, etc.;*
- *Develop appropriate landscaped setting and arrival area for historic casino building. Relocate building maintenance/service areas to the side of building; Current arrival sequence is quite unattractive and not in character with the beautiful heritage setting.*
- *"Soften" the appearance of the existing large parking area between the casino and tennis courts by introducing landscape treatments and trees to this important visual setting. Better organize and define the parking lot with painted spaces and driving lanes, landscaped islands, etc.*
- *Promote natural and cultural heritage interpretation and enjoyment throughout the park through an expanded trail system and park signage; provide new wayfinding system to bring awareness to existing hidden park features, e.g. "Eternal Flame," the 100 stone steps (now 97), stone monument area, impressive ravines, waterfalls, Commissioner's Pond, etc.*
    - Provide ADA access to these important and scenic vista locations.
    - Promote 'eternal flame' as a unique park feature.

Establish safe trail connection from main park area with appropriate signage and safety information. Upgrade trailhead, interpretive signage and develop small informal parking area on Seifert Road;

- Provide better wayfinding signage throughout, particularly on the peninsula between the two major ravines behind the tennis courts.

· *Consider restoring and utilizing the numerous small stone pump shelters throughout the park as new interpretive signage and informational kiosks that would tie into the heritage park setting and the "Visitors Center" concept.*

- Throughout the park, provide a interpretive "story-line" for the Park's geological and post-settlement history, i.e. How and when the ravines and rock formations were formed?; How did the park get its name?; When was the Village and Town first Settled?; What's the history behind the Eternal Flame? What were some significant historic happenings in the area, or in the park?; When were the old stone structures built?; What is the history behind the Round Barn site?; etc.
- Provide interpretive signs or markers at key historic and natural sites, such as at the Old stone monument along the drive in the southwest section of the park, the 100-stone-steps, etc.
- Consider offering local business establishments the opportunity to provide information that would cater to park users and offer a stronger linkage to the Village.

· *Upgrade toboggan chutes as necessary to maintain proper safety standards and continued recreational value. If future liability concerns become too costly for the County, recommend removing the elevated toboggan chutes and returning the hill to just a passive sledding and tobogganing hill.*

· *Promote four seasons use of the park, including winter use – e.g. tobogganing, sledding, cross-country skiing, weekend sleigh rides. Investigate opportunities for flooding area for ice-skating. Current snowmobile trails should be properly posted to avoid future multi-use conflicts.*

· *Consider offering new campsites, similar to Sprague Brook Park, in the lower western section of the park, which is currently "little-used" by the general public. This could also be an attraction for horseback riders who would like to enjoy a weekend in the park.*

· *The former horse paddocks / riding-ring off of the main*

road (Route 277) could be rehabilitated as a horse facility once again, with trail connections into the park horse-trail network. This facility would have easy trailer access and could offer a few parking spots for trucks and horse trailers. This area could also provide ample parking for hikers wishing to access the "Shale Creek Preserve" area and "Eternal Flame Falls."

- Promote the new Horse Trail on the western section of the park
- Consider a location for overnight "Horse camping" expeditions in the park.

· *Relocate trailhead parking location from alongside Seufert Road to a new location on Route 277 at the former horse paddocks. Establish and/or improve trail access into the existing park trail network.*

· *Remove the numerous old metal playground structures and equipment that dot the landscape throughout the park. These pieces of equipment are outdated, most are unsightly, and many do not meet any current playground safety requirements.*

- Consider earthtone colors in the Heritage park setting rather than bright, primary colors.

· *Improve ADA access throughout the park wherever is reasonable and feasible.*

· *Remove all old, dilapidated wooden picnic tables throughout the park. Dispose of rotten and decayed tables, and repair all those that can be salvaged.*

· *Establish a stronger linkage between Village of Orchard Park and Chestnut Ridge Park through new recreational trails, streetscape enhancements, wayfinding signage, maps in local businesses, etc.;*

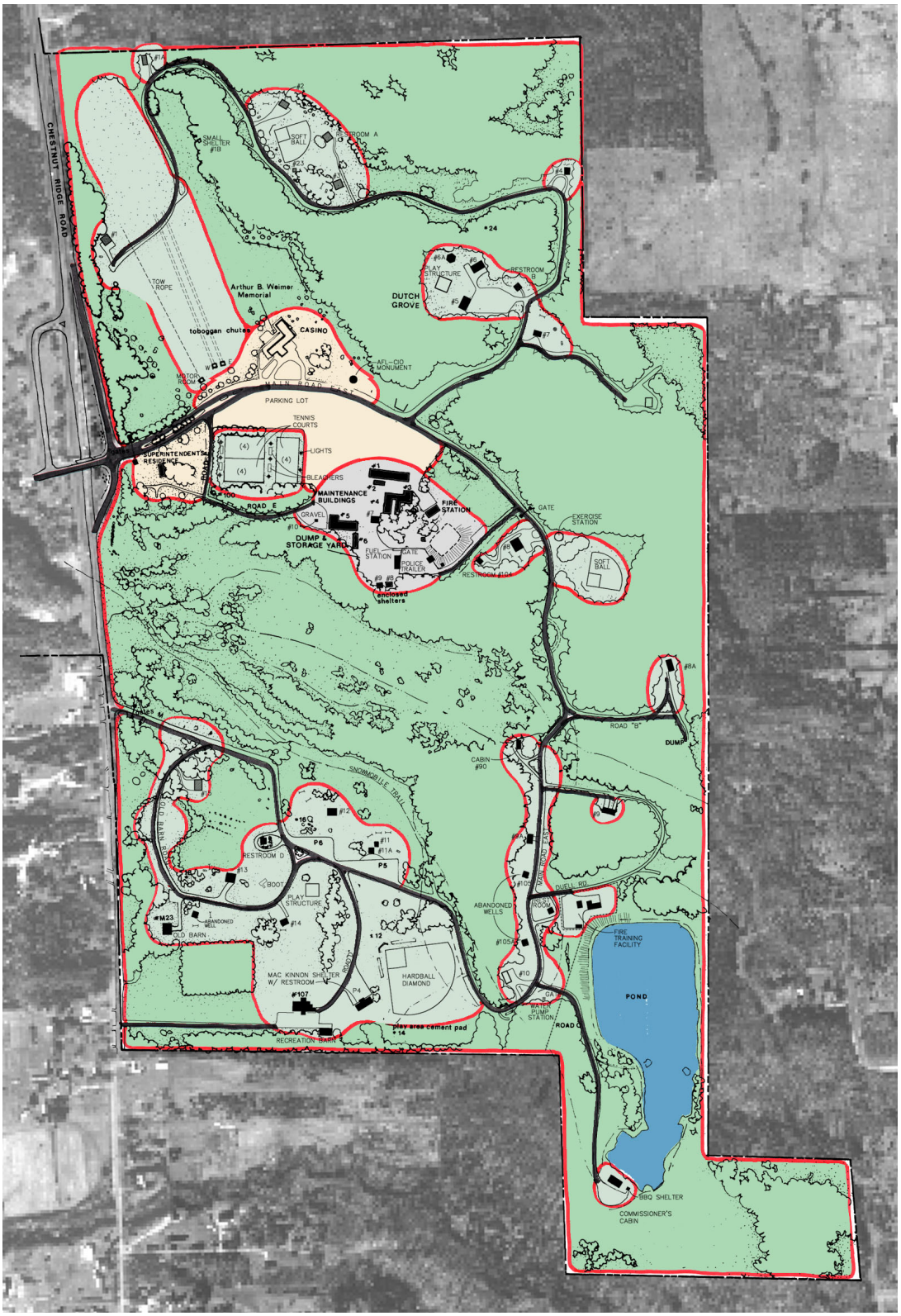
· *Consider a "Corporate Sponsorship" program which encourages local businesses and organizations to get more involved with the Park, including sponsoring certain events, restoring older facilities and park features, setting up an interpretive signage program, contributing to the Visitors Center staffing and funding, etc.*

· *Open up and improve fishing access and opportunities to the edge of the Commissioner's pond - work closely with local Sportsmans/fishing advocacy Groups.*

· *Possibly close (phase out) the park road on the bottom of the toboggan slope. Eliminate or relocate the large*

picnic shelter at the end of this long access road – this would reduce the future needs for such lengthy road repairs for such a remote picnic site.

- *Reduce lawn mowing to provide more natural setting in non-use areas, and help to shift park maintenance towards restoring older park structures. One significant area to begin the naturalization process would be along the woodland edges of the toboggan hill, etc.*
- *Provide new tree plantings throughout the park. Promote native plantings and habitat restoration wherever possible.*



Legend

- Nature Reserve Zone
- Recreation Zone
- Heritage Zone
- Service Zone
- Zone Boundary

Nature Reserve Zones

Includes significant natural features or areas that require management to ensure the long-term protection of the natural heritage, i.e. woodlands, wetlands, natural open space areas (meadows), waterways, ravines, gorges and escarpment faces, steep slopes, etc.

Recreation Zones

(Active and Passive)

Includes the 'maintained' landscape areas of the parks in which facilities development is permitted to support low to moderate intensity recreation activities, i.e. sports fields, specialized activities, picnic areas, campgrounds, parking lots, etc.

Heritage Zones

Includes areas of significant cultural heritage or archaeological features that require management to ensure the preservation of these important heritage assets.

Service Zones

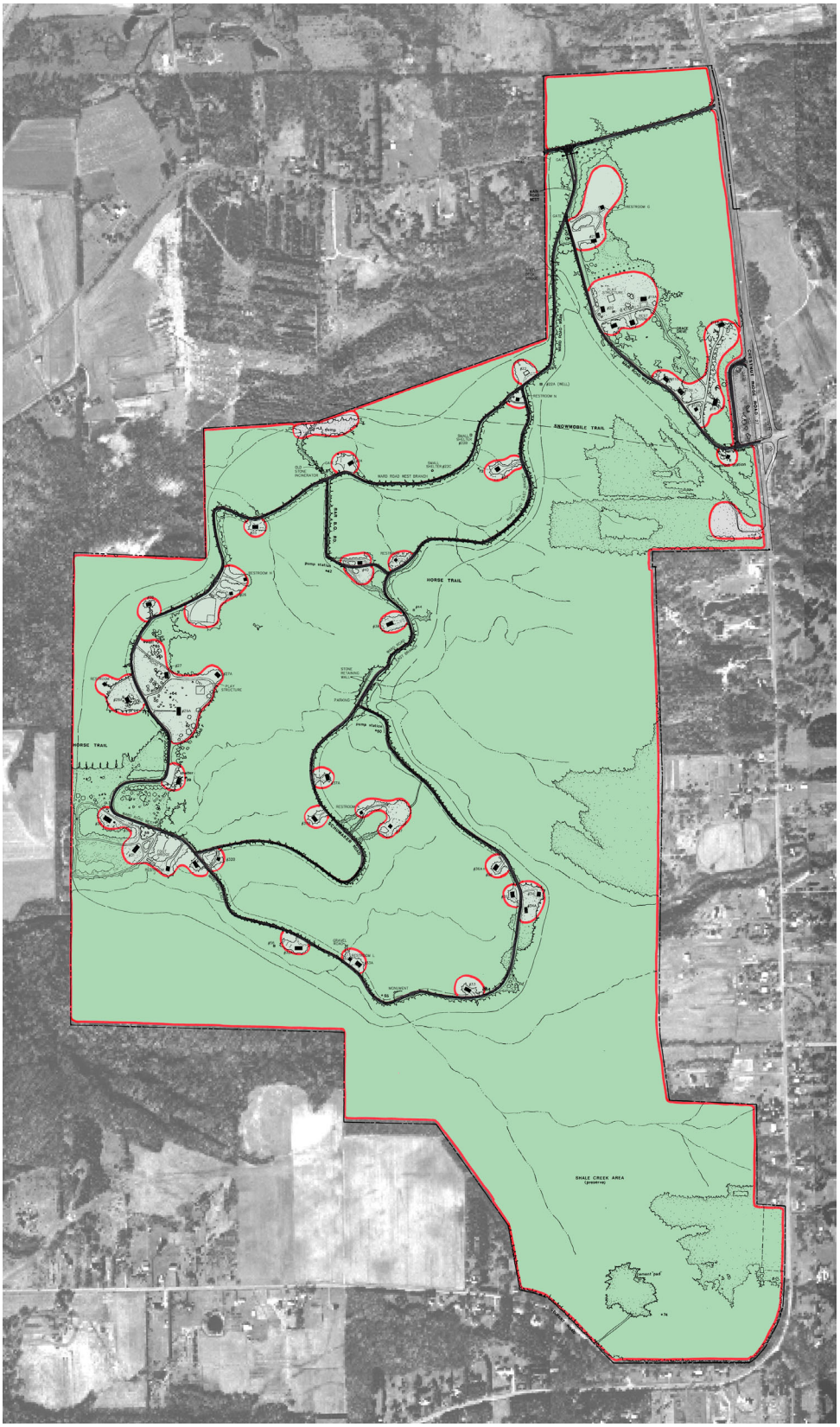
Includes maintenance and service areas for the developed parks, as well as access points or staging areas within the Conservation Parks (e.g. trailheads and parking lots) where minimal use facilities are needed to support allowable uses within the Nature Reserve Zone.

North

Chestnut Ridge Park - "East"

MANAGEMENT ZONES

THIS PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK



Legend

- Nature Reserve Zone
- Recreation Zone
- Heritage Zone
- Service Zone
- Zone Boundary

Nature Reserve Zones

Includes significant natural features or areas that require management to ensure the long-term protection of the natural heritage, i.e. woodlands, wetlands, natural open space areas (meadows), waterways, ravines, gorges and escarpment faces, steep slopes, etc.

Recreation Zones

(Active and Passive)

Includes the 'maintained' landscape areas of the parks in which facilities development is permitted to support low to moderate intensity recreation activities, i.e. sports fields, specialized activities, picnic areas, campgrounds, parking lots, etc.

Heritage Zones

Includes areas of significant cultural heritage or archaeological features that require management to ensure the preservation of these important heritage assets.

Service Zones

Includes maintenance and service areas for the developed parks, as well as access points or staging areas within the Conservation Parks (e.g. trailheads and parking lots) where minimal use facilities are needed to support allowable uses within the Nature Reserve Zone.

North

Chestnut Ridge Park - "West"

MANAGEMENT ZONES

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES / PARK SPECIFIC ACTIONS

PRIORITY KEY

S Short Term *(1 - 3 years)*
M Mid Term *(4 - 10 years)*
L Long Term *(11 - 20+ years)*
O Ongoing *(Continuing Efforts each year)*