



An upgraded section of the Fred J. Cusimano Westside Overland Trail is pictured. Submitted photo

Overland Trail Upgrades Are Open For Use

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The Fred J. Cusimano Westside Overland Trail in Chautauqua Gorge State Forest has recently been upgraded with new drainage, reroutes, culverts, and a 1.4 mile "Gorge Loop" that begins and returns to the Hannum Road parking area, just outside of Mayville.

Additionally, for those seeking a longer hike or bike ride, the new trail directly connects to the Chautauqua County Rails to Trails, near the new parking area on Summerdale Road.

According to Jacob Bodway, president of the Western New York Mountain Bicycling Association, the improvements to this section of the Overland Trail will provide trail-users with a fresh perspective of Chautauqua Gorge State Forest.

"Rather than heading straight up and straight down the ravines, the new 'Gorge Loop' hugs

the edge of the ravine, providing trail-users with incredible views of Chautauqua Creek and of the valley below," Bodway said. "This reroute is also far more sustainable, as water will naturally be diverted down the ravine's edge, rather than down the trail itself."

The improvements to the Westside Overland Trail in Chautauqua Gorge State Forest are part of the larger Chautauqua County Overland Trails Revitalization Project, which aims to add sustainability and modern trail design to the overland trails. According to Thom Wright, co-owner of Trail Construction Associates, the trail-building firm in charge of trail construction, drainage should take pride-of-place whenever designing a trail.

"The quickest way that we can get water across and away from the trail,

the better," Wright said.

Bodway said sustainability is at the core of his efforts on the overland trails, with work on out-slopes, grade-reversals, culverts and more efficient drainage adding another 30 years of life to the trails.

"The Overland Trails provide incredible recreation opportunities to Chautauqua County residents and tourists, and they are a huge reason why my wife and I chose to return to this area," he said. "Seeing the transformation of these beautiful trails is an experience that can't be put into words."

To fund this phase of the Overland Trail Project, county legislators set aside \$80,000 of ARPA funds, which were distributed through the Chautauqua County Partnership for Economic Growth. Additional funding has been provided by local foundations and philanthropic organizations.