

SUMMARY

**Comments on the 2025 (IHG) Six Senses Documents submitted
to the Town of Clinton Planning Board (Dutchess County, New York)**

**by
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**Prepared for the Town of Clinton Planning Board
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The following is a summary of the main findings from the report prepared by Erik Kiviat from Hudsonia at the request of the Town of Clinton Planning Board. Hudsonia reviewed selected documents (Biodiversity Survey Report), submitted by **LaFever, A.A. (2025)**, in support of the proposed IHG Six Senses resort project in the towns of Clinton and Hyde Park. Dr. Kiviat twice visited the proposed resort site and included his findings in the submitted report. His report principally comments on the applicant's (IHG) 2025 submitted documents, including wildlife and wetland reports and the Incidental Take Permit application to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Erik Kiviat, PhD & PWS is a co-founder (1981) and Executive Director of Hudsonia. Hudsonia is a nonprofit institute for research and education in the environmental sciences. It does not take advocacy positions for or against land use development proposals. Its function is to make observations, collect data, review relevant documents and other existing information, assess potential impacts of proposed development on wildlife, plants, and their habitats, and make recommendations for avoidance and reduction of land use impacts. Hudsonia's assignment in this matter included a site review of wetland boundaries and Blanding's turtle potential, as well as other wetland-using species of conservation concern known or likely to occur on the site. (p. 3)

Background

According to Common Senses HV, IHG's project (Six Senses) will include the following, taken from the developer's (IHG's) own plan document.

- 240 overnight guests, 150 employees, plus 400 event guests;
- 600+ cars in & out daily, plus delivery/service trucks;
- 54 buildings totaling 148,000 sq ft footprint (think big-box store);
- 10 swimming pools, 21,000 sq. ft. spa, outdoor event spaces, retail shopping, restaurant, bar & grill (all guest-only); and
- 18,500 gallons/day of wastewater released into Crum Elbow Creek. ¹

¹ Common Senses Hudson Valley, found at <https://commonsenseshv.org/#publicity>

Hudsonia: Summary/Findings

- In general, the applicant's documents **do not cite or make use of existing information about the site and its vicinity, do not fully credit sources of information, and render some incorrect arguments regarding the significance of the wetlands and the potential Blanding's turtle habitat complex.** (p. 2) [Emphasis added.]
 - The Blanding's turtle, a New York State Threatened Species, while so far not documented onsite, is known from 10 occurrence records within three miles, seven of which are within two miles of the site. Blanding's turtles in Dutchess County are known to move such distances. A potential habitat complex on the site includes a high-quality, deep flooding shrubby pool (Wetland K), at least one floodplain pool near Crum Elbow Creek, an isolated wetland suitable for young turtles (Wetland F), permanent ponds for drought refuges (including Wetland E), and Hoosic gravelly loam soils for nesting habitat. This habitat complex spans the entire site, indicating that Blanding's turtles may be crossing the site in various ways to access appropriate seasonal habitats. (p. 2)
 - Dr. Kiviat made a number of recommendations aimed at reducing the adverse biological impacts. Chief among these is that the proposed construction should be moved away from the vicinity of Wetland F which supports important species requiring both wetland and upland habitat. Also important is the creation of a conservation easement (*) embracing those areas of the site not currently proposed for development. (p. 2)
- (*) A conservation easement A conservation easement is a voluntary, legally binding agreement where a landowner permanently restricts land use (like development) to protect natural, scenic, or historic values.
- Planning land use with attention to conservation of biological resources requires science. This requires using previous studies and data with full citation, making original observations and collecting appropriate data, integrating information from diverse sources, constructing logical, informed arguments, and conducting these studies prior to project design. **The biodiversity assessment (LaFever 2025) performed for the Six Senses resort proposal does not meet these standards.** [Emphasis added.] (p. 2)
 - (a) The study was done after the site design.
 - (b) Previous published environmental studies were not used or cited in the report to the Town of Clinton.
 - (c) Some key information about rare species was overlooked.
 - (d) The science is not supportive of many of the assertions made by the applicant. (p. 2)
 - There are questionable statements in the report concerning the state-listed threatened Blanding's turtle, and no literature about the turtle is cited in support. **Appropriate conservation science dictates that, in a region where a threatened species occurs and maintains some viable populations, potential habitat complexes should be managed to remain suitable for Blanding's turtle occupancy now or in the future.** [Emphasis added.] There are still some vibrant local populations, including at least one in the Town of Clinton three miles from the Six Senses site. (p. 3)

- (b) Blanding’s turtles are often active and moving overland during mid-October and mid-April, even during warm spells in winter. Thus, the proposed barrier installation at any season requires attention to the possibility that turtles might end up confined within the barrier, or that mechanized work (e.g., mechanical ditching for the base of the barrier) which might cause injury to turtles. (p. 6)
 - (c) Accurate wetland boundary delineation and surveying for Blanding’s turtles each requires long periods of concentration without multitasking, and time spent delineating wetlands should not be considered time spent surveying for turtles. (p. 6)
 - (d) No survey for breeding amphibians, egg masses, or larvae has been conducted in Wetland F, Wetland K, or any other wetland onsite. Thus, it cannot be stated that there is no pool that meets the new DEC criteria for a “productive” vernal pool. (p. 7)
 - (e) There is another area where the flagged wetland boundary appears to be conservative - the Crum Elbow Creek floodplain swamp west of the big W-shaped horse barn. Boundary flags were missing from this area when I saw it in spring 2024. I believe the applicant has not addressed this. (p. 8)
- The applicant’s biodiversity study (LaFever 2025) is based on a generalized scheme from New England. Habitat affinities of wildlife of conservation concern often vary geographically; the scheme used may not accurately represent (or may not be specific enough to address) Dutchess County biodiversity. This is an important reason to refer to the substantial body of information about Dutchess, which has not been done. (p. 8)
 - Moreover, biological surveys should be conducted prior to development design and during the season appropriate for reptiles or another group of organisms. (p. 8)
 - Fishman (2025a, page 3) stated “Hours of machinery operation will likely be limited to between 9 am and 5 pm, no nocturnal and crepuscular...wildlife are not likely to be disturbed.” This will not prevent noise disturbance to diurnal (daytime) wildlife of conservation concern such as the red-shouldered hawk, brown creeper, and rusty blackbird. (p. 9)
 - The Indiana bat is a federal and state listed endangered species. A conservation easement held by Winnakee Land Trust on the Adriance Farm, located 700 m South of the Six Senses site, was created to preserve Indiana bat habitat as migration for activity elsewhere in Dutchess County. The existence of this easement and its associated habitat assessment should have been addressed in the environmental documents for the Six Senses proposal as an important piece of biological information close to the Six Senses site. (p. 9)

Suggestions for Reduction of Adverse Impacts to Biodiversity

The Planning Board asked Hudsonia to suggest measures to reduce impacts of the proposed project. Six Senses wants to be an environmental leader in the resort industry, and to collaborate with the town government on the proposed project. Now that there is some (albeit incomplete)

knowledge of biologically important habitats and species of conservation concern, the proposed resort layout should be revisited. (p.10)

- The Six Senses site has potential habitats for a number of listed rare animals and plants. (p. 10)
- Hudsonia recommends that the property be surveyed for bats, breeding birds, herpetofauna (amphibians and reptiles), butterflies, odonates (dragonflies and damselflies), and especially rare plants. (p. 10)
- Surveys should be conducted by appropriately experienced, independent biologists at the correct seasons, times of day, and survey durations and techniques. (p. 10)
- A monitoring plan should be developed, based on the information in this report and cited documents, and the results of the recommended surveys. The purpose of the plan would be to track the welfare of key habitats and species, and the effectiveness of mitigation measures. (p. 10)
- Wide buffer zones are especially important around Wetland F, given the proximity of proposed development and the presence of potentially wide-ranging wetland-upland wildlife such as ribbon snake, wood frog, and spotted salamander. (p. 10)
- Wide buffer zones should be established, bordered by rail fences, and permanently protected, e.g., by conservation easement. (p. 10)
- Whatever width buffer zone is decided on, the outer (upslope) borders of the buffer zone should be marked with permanent fences. The objectives are to keep mowing machinery, other equipment, and vehicles out of the buffer zone and wetland, and discourage adults and children from entering the wetland on foot. (p. 11)
- The single most important measure that can be taken is to move all development away from Wetland F. The reptiles and amphibians of concern that are using Wetland F (Kiviat 2025) are almost certainly also using uplands near the wetland and possibly 100 m or more away from the wetland boundary. Increasing the buffer width to 100 m (about 330 feet) would conserve more habitat for wildlife use and help to protect animals that use both wetland and upland habitat. (p. 11)
- If it is necessary to enlarge the permanent pond (Wetland E) near the entrance road, the resulting pond should be designed to have gentle shore slopes enabling easier wildlife movement, and an area of emergent vegetation such as cattail (*Typha*) to provide habitat and help maintain water quality. This is a potential Blanding's turtle drought refuge pond that could also be used for rehydration by female Blanding's turtles during the nesting season. The pond is also part of potential habitat complexes for wood turtle and spotted turtle. This pond should be left the way it is unless it can be demonstrated that enlarging the pond would not be harmful to turtles and would provide a better drought refuge. (pp. 11-12)

- Treating wastewater to a high level of nutrient (especially nitrogen and phosphorus) removal, higher than the DEC requirement, would help to protect water quality in Crum Elbow Creek. This measure would benefit trout and other fishes as well as downstream water users especially the Hyde Park Fire and Water District. (p. 13)
- Blanding’s turtles and many other small terrestrial and semi-aquatic mammals are at risk of being hit by vehicles on internal roads. This is a serious threat to Blanding’s and wood turtles in particular. Internal roads should be posted with speed limit and “Wildlife Crossing” signs, and possibly also with speed bumps/humps. Traffic calming measures are not addressed in the Incidental Take Permit application. Because specific road crossing points, if any, have not been identified, it is currently impossible to propose wildlife tunnels. (p. 13)
- Noise from project construction and operation should be minimized. The most sensitive times and spaces are probably those where bats, birds, frogs, and many insects depend on acoustic communication for reproduction and other critical activities. (p. 13)
- Night lighting should be minimized to that which is absolutely necessary for safety. Lighting technology that does not attract night-flying insects should be deployed; LED lights may be useful in this regard (Martín et al. 2021) and there may be other suitable options. (p. 14)
- The entirety of all construction areas should be contained in temporary turtle exclusion barriers with gates that turtles cannot crawl under and which remain closed except when vehicles are entering or exiting construction areas. (p. 14)
- There should be no mowing during turtle nesting season including a few days prior when females may begin migrating. The period of concern is 20 May through 4 July. (p. 14)
- Treated wood should not be used for construction of trails, fences, etc. The heavy metals and metalloids used in common commercial wood treatments can leach or otherwise escape into the environment where they are toxic to plants and wildlife. Naturally fungus-resistant woods, such as black locust and eastern red cedar, are acceptable substitutes. (p. 15)
- Whatever protective features and actions are eventually required of the Six Senses project, the town will need a means of guaranteeing compliance. The Planning Board should consider inspections during and following construction, and a performance bond to ensure compliance and an avoidance of environmental damage. (p. 15)
- One of the most important mitigation measures Six Senses can take is to put all portions of the property that are not to be developed under conservation easement. Portions of the site that are to remain undeveloped and without intensive uses, including almost the entire area underlain by the Gallatin Thrust, should be placed under conservation easement that restricts future development and prevents logging and mining. (p. 15)

Additional Resources

For additional information in support of IHG’s Six Senses resort project, see “A Friendly Crowd Gathers in Rhinebeck to Support the Controversial Six Senses Luxury Resort Project,” by Eloise Goldsmith. *The Daily Catch*, September 22, 2025, found at

https://www.thedailycatch.org/articles/a-friendly-crowd-gathers-in-rhinebeck-to-support-the-controversial-six-senses-luxury-resort-project/?customize_changeset_uuid=4a61b835-4dd3-43f0-9c57-b66e9241cade

For additional information in opposition to the project, visit Common Senses HV (Save Our Rural Towns), found at <https://commonsenseshv.org>

To read a summary of the civil complaint by Town of Rhinebeck against the towns of Clinton and Hyde Park, visit the Rhinebeck Democrats Club website, found at

<https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/e53633e7-90e1-4de3-89b1-49e05b825211/downloads/134ed98f-8175-48a7-a87f-5578716ca74e/Speical%20Report%20Common%20Senses%20Civil%20Case%20Summar.pdf?ver=1767889967597>
