

NEWS RELEASE

Coalition Calls for Wilderness Classification in Adirondack Forest Preserve Public Hearings

*Six Regional, Statewide and National Groups
support Alternative 1A for new 38,500-acre Wilderness Area*

*State to hold eight public hearings across New York to gather
public comments on Forest Preserve lands classifications*

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Albany, NY – Six regional, statewide, and national environmental organizations have come together to back a Wilderness classification alternative in the current Forest Preserve classification public hearings administered by the Adirondack Park Agency (APA). The Adirondack Mountain Club, Protect the Adirondacks, Adirondack Council, Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, Natural Resources Defense Council and Environment New York all back wilderness alternative 1A, which would create a new 38,500-acre wilderness area around the Essex Chain Lakes and encompassing 22 miles of the Hudson River in the central Adirondack Park.

If approved, this would be the single largest Wilderness classification since the creation of the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan in 1972.

In April 2013, the APA approved a public hearing to classify over 21,000 acres in three tracts recently purchased as new Forest Preserve lands by the State of New York from The Nature Conservancy. These lands are the first of 69,000 acres that Governor Cuomo committed to buy in 2012. The purchase will be phased-in through 2015. The APA public hearings will also reclassify up to 24,000 acres of existing Forest Preserve lands. The seven APA public hearing alternatives include two Wilderness options, one Primitive option, two Canoe options, and two Wild Forest options. The “Preferred Alternative” of the Department of Environmental Conservation is a Wild Forest option. The APA has no Preferred Alternative.

The six environmental organizations back Wilderness Alternative 1A as the best choice for long-term natural resource protection for these extraordinary lands, for a

wide variety of public access opportunities, and for preserving and providing a wilderness outdoor recreational experience.

“Wilderness alternative 1A makes the most sense because it provides the best natural resource protection for the Essex Chain Lakes and Hudson River while providing good public access. This is the best alternative for balancing the difficult test of protecting sensitive natural resources and providing good public access,” said Neil F. Woodworth, Executive Director of the Adirondack Mountain Club.

“We have the opportunity with alternative 1A to make a new wilderness destination similar to the highly successful and popular places like Lows Lake, Little Tupper Lake and Lake Lila. There are few large wilderness lakes in the Adirondack Park where the public can enjoy a motor-free experience. By making the Essex Chain Lakes wilderness, this would create a new motor-less and wild area that would be preserved and enjoyed for generations,” said Peter Bauer, Executive Director of Protect the Adirondacks.

Wilderness Alternative 1A will create a 38,500-acre wilderness area where the main body of the Essex Chain Lakes are protected as a motor-less recreation area. The Essex Chain includes nearly a dozen lakes and ponds linked by navigable channels or short carries. The Essex Chain Lakes is a prized lake trout fishery.

“The wilderness alternative provides the best long-term protection for the sensitive lake trout fishery. Long-term stewardship of this fishery is vital to the ecology of the Essex Chain Lakes. Motorized access and floatplane access with live bait threaten the ecology of this area,” said Roger Downs, Director of the Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter.

Wilderness Alternative 1A includes reclassification of existing Forest Preserve lands, including parts of the Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest and the Blue Mountain Wild Forest areas. The Hudson River Primitive Area would also be completely reclassified as part of the new Wilderness.

The groups believe that the Wilderness classification provides superior natural resource protection than lesser classifications that allow various motorized uses. “The best protection for the Essex Chain Lakes and Hudson River from a wide variety of aquatic invasive species is a Wilderness classification. The science has clearly shown that the risk of transmitting aquatic invasive species with non-motorized canoes and kayaks is vastly reduced, miniscule really, as compared with motorboats and trailers,” said Eric Goldstein, of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC).

“We live in a world where wild places and quiet places grow more scarce each year. We must seize this opportunity to preserve the Essex Chain Lakes and 22 miles of the Hudson River as a new Wilderness Area. This action will be a great gift to future

generations. Allowing motorized recreation here would be a tragic mistake,” said William C. Janeway, Executive Director of The Adirondack Council.

“A Wilderness classification provides the best natural resource protection for the sensitive fishery on the Essex Chain Lakes. Wilderness also provides terrific long-term recreational experiences as places that visitors can return again and again because these lands will only grow wilder in the future” said Eric Whalen, Field Organizer, Environment New York.

Wilderness Alternative 1A also includes a Wilderness classification for the Hudson River Gorge. This stretch of the river is famous for its whitewater rapids and has long been used by the highly successful Hudson-Indian River rafting industry where a variety of rafting companies provide day-trips and overnight trips through the Gorge. The Wilderness classification would preserve wild experience that the rafting industry provides.

New lands just purchased by the state along the Hudson Gorge will protect the scenic Blue Ledges on the river and open OK Slip Falls for public viewing. These lands have been in private hands until the recent acquisition. The purchase also protects three miles along the Indian River and five miles of the Cedar River.

The groups see Wilderness Alternative 1A as an investment in the local economy as well as the environment. This new Wilderness Area will underwrite the long-term success of the Hudson River whitewater rafting industry by protecting the Hudson River in a wild state.

The groups are uniformly opposed to the DEC preferred option for a Wild Forest area that would provide motorized access to roads all around the Essex Chain Lakes, allow the use of motorboats and allow floatplanes to land on the lakes as well.

Across the 2.4 million acre “forever wild” Adirondack Forest Preserve there is currently 100,000 acres more Wild Forest, which allows various motorized recreational uses, than lands classified as Wilderness.

The APA is taking public comments until July 19th and has organized eight public hearings across the Adirondacks and around the state from June 12th – July 2nd. Here are the hearing locations:

- **June 12, 2013** 6:00 pm at Adirondack Park Agency headquarters, 1133 NY State Route 86, Ray Brook, NY
- **June 17, 2013** 1:00 pm at Minerva Central School, 1466 County Route 29, Olmstedville, NY
- **June 17, 2013** 7:00 pm at Newcomb Central School, 5535 State Route 28N, Newcomb, NY

- **June 19, 2013** 6 pm at Downtown Conference Center, Pace University, 157 William Street, Manhattan, NY
- **June 25, 2013** 6:00 pm at Indian Lake Central School, 6345 NYS Route 30, Indian Lake, NY
- **July 1, 2013** 7:00 pm at the Harley School, 1981 Clover Street, Rochester, NY
- **July 2, 2013** 1:00 pm at NYSDEC, 625 Broadway, Albany, NY
- **July 2, 2013** 7:00 pm at the Warren County Board of Supervisors Meeting Room, Warren County Municipal Center, 1340 State Route 9, Queensbury, NY

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