



PRESS RELEASE

December 6, 2013

APA-DEC Classification of Finch Lands brings Good News and Bad News for the Forest Preserve

*PROTECT heralds APA classification proposal to create a new 23,572-acre
Hudson Gorge Wilderness Area*

*Bad news comes in the form of a significant Wild Forest corridor through the
heart of the new Finch lands and a missed opportunity to create a new Lake
Motorless Wilderness area for the Essex Chain Lakes*

For more information:

Peter Bauer, Executive Director, Office 518.685.3088, Cell 518.796.0112

Albany, NY – The Adirondack Park Agency (APA) has released its preferred alternative for classification of over 21,000 acres of new Forest Preserve lands around the Essex Chain Lakes and Hudson River and reclassification of over 18,000 acres of existing Forest Preserve lands. This recommendation was the product of ongoing negotiations between the APA senior staff, senior staff at the Department of Environmental Conservation, and Governor Andrew Cuomo and his Executive Staff. The APA Commissioners will be asked to approve this alternative next week.

This classification package creates a new 23,572-acre Wilderness Area that includes more than 15 miles of the Hudson River. “The new Hudson Gorge Wilderness Area is a welcome addition to the central Adirondacks. This will preserve the wonders and beauty of the Hudson Gorge for all time and protect the Hudson at its wildest,” said Chuck Clusen, chairman of Protect the Adirondacks.

The APA preferred alternative also creates 10,000 acres of new Primitive Areas for the Essex Chain Lakes that bans motor boat use and float plane use except where it currently exists on 1st Lake. The alternative also calls classifying over 8,000 acres as Wild Forest.

Protect the Adirondacks called for the classification of the Essex Chain Lakes as a new motorless Wilderness Area. Public comments from the APA’s public hearings in the summer of 2013 ran 4 – 1 in support of a new Wilderness Area for the Essex Chain Lakes. “We’re disappointed that the Essex Chain Lakes will not be classified as

Wilderness and that motorized use will be permitted all around the lakes and possibly into the core of the Essex Chain Lakes. The public overwhelmingly backed Wilderness, but their comments fell on deaf ears at state agencies and at the State Capital” said Peter Bauer, executive director of Protect the Adirondacks.

The proposed Primitive Areas and the Wilderness area will be separated by a Wild Forest corridor that runs through the heart of the new lands. This corridor will likely facilitate mountain biking, automobile traffic and snowmobiles use in the future. “This process was clearly driven by motor vehicle uses. The protection of natural resources was a secondary consideration. Outside of the new Wilderness area the APA recommends classifying lands to facilitate a checkerboard of various motorized uses around and in between the Primitive and Wilderness areas,” said Chuck Clusen. “It’s a real failure of management and planning that a motor vehicle route runs through the heart of these wild lands.”

The guiding law and principles for state Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park is the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (SLMP), which states that natural resource protection “should be paramount” to guide land classifications decision. The recommendations of the APA are clearly an effort to include a variety of motorized public motor vehicle recreational uses on these public lands.

This Classification by the APA Changes 40 Years of Practice

The APA’s preferred alternative raises many questions, but seems to mark a sharp departure from 40 years of established process for Forest Preserve classifications and management. Four things stand out from the management of this classification process by the APA and DEC.

1. This is the first Forest Preserve classification package where motor vehicle uses drove much of the entire classification process.
2. The APA’s proposal could fundamentally change the Primitive classification. In the past, Primitive areas were used as a temporary classification for future Wilderness Areas. Here, the APA is looking to create new Primitive areas, which are likely to be permanent.
3. The classification is predicated on a large Wild Forest corridor through the heart of the area. This is a novel use of a Wild Forest corridor.
4. Lands are being left unclassified as “Pending classification” to facilitate future motor vehicle use. These uses will likely require revisions to existing state laws, policies and official regulations. When this happens, it will mark the first time that existing laws, policies and regulations will be changed to facilitate public motor vehicle uses on the Forest Preserve.

Polaris Bridge should be Removed, No new bridge for the Cedar River

The Polaris Bridge spans the Hudson River on the Finch lands. The road leading to the bridge forms the northern Wilderness-Wild Forest boundary in the APA proposal. This bridge was built as a temporary bridge 15 years ago by Finch Paper for logging purposes. Protect the Adirondacks believes the Polaris Bridge over the Hudson River should be removed. The APA's preferred alternative calls for keeping the Polaris Bridge.

The Wild Forest corridor proposed by the APA leads to an area where a bridge over the Cedar River once stood. Many have called for this bridge to be rebuilt to facilitate a variety of motorized and non-motorized recreational uses. PROTECT opposes new bridge construction over the Cedar River.

"PROTECT believes that the Polaris bridge over the Hudson River should be removed once the private leased rights end and that no new bridge over the Cedar River should be built," said Peter Bauer.

Protect the Adirondacks

Protect the Adirondacks is a privately funded, IRS-approved not-for-profit organization dedicated to the protection of the 6-million-acre Adirondack Park in northern New York. PROTECT was formed through the merger of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks and the Residents' Committee to Protect the Adirondacks in 2009. PROTECT pursues its mission to protect the Adirondack Park and defend the public "forever wild" Forest Preserve through citizen advocacy, grassroots organizing, education, research, and legal action. PROTECT is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. PROTECT maintains an office in Lake George. For more information see www.protectadks.org.

##