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September 3, 2014

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RE: Crane Pond Road in the Pharaoh Lake Wilderness Area degrades Natural Resource Protection and is Now a Public Safety Hazard

Dear Chairwoman Ulrich and Commissioner Martens,

Protect the Adirondacks recently visited the Crane Pond Road in the Pharaoh Lake Wilderness area. The history of the management of the Crane Pond Road by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and Adirondack Park Agency (APA) is one of mismanagement and natural resource degradation. The extensive damage to the Crane Pond Road is now creating a public safety hazard.

PROTECT's visit in August found the Crane Pond Road to exist in a state of management limbo. We found no trailhead register at the entrance to the road and parking area. There was not a single Forest Preserve, State Land or Wilderness Area sign all along the Crane Pond Road. A few trailhead signs still remain, though often 10-12 feet high and one has to squint to read them. Thankfully various "No Fire" or "No Camping" signs remain because there are many unofficial roadside camping spots along the road. On the day of our visit no Forest Ranger was seen, though more than a dozen cars were encountered along the road.

As you both know, an earlier DEC Commissioner Thomas Jorling ordered the road closed in 1989. DEC used its authority under the State Highway law. The Town of Schroon sued the DEC, but the DEC's authority was upheld in State Supreme Court. An appeal to the Appellate Court was unsuccessful and the Court of Appeals refused to grant leave for appeal to challenge the Appellate Court decision. DEC authority to close the Crane Pond Road was upheld.

Peter Bauer
Executive Director

Protect the Adirondacks

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The DEC decision to close the Crane Pond Road was made after its official classification as part of the Pharaoh Lake Wilderness area in November 1987 in APA classification recommendations signed by then Governor Mario Cuomo. The Pharaoh Lake Wilderness Area Unit Management Plan (UMP), approved in 1992 by the APA, affirmed that this road should be closed.

The state's attempt to barricade the road with large boulders was unsuccessful in 1991 as boulders were removed as part of local protests.

Crane Pond Road runs for approximately two miles to Crane Pond. There are several trail-heads along the road and two informal parking areas before a parking area, canoe launch, and cluster of campsites at the end of the road on the west end of Crane Pond. The road runs through wetlands and along steep ridge sides.

Throughout this summer there have been reports of motorists stuck in the mud in wetlands that the Crane Pond Road passes through. On the day of PROTECT's field visit, we encountered a motorist stuck in the mud as well. The mud pit had been dug out to a depth of several feet by sustained motorized use. The lack of coherent management by the DEC and APA for the Crane Pond Road is creating a safety hazard for the public.

The pictures attached clearly show what can only be described as exceedingly poor management by the DEC and APA on these Forest Preserve lands, which has resulted in natural resource damage. These pictures were taken at regular intervals along the length of the Crane Pond Road.

There is also an invasive plant species growing alongside the Crane Pond Road in a wetland more than 1.5 miles in, which is tragic for the Pharaoh Lake Wilderness area and shows yet another problem with the haphazard and ineffectual management of the APA and DEC.

It also maybe the case that the badly damaged areas where the Crane Pond Road passes through a major wetland violates the NYS Wetlands Act. The APA should investigate this potential violation.

PROTECT believes that the Crane Pond Road should be closed. This position is clearly supported by the historic record of state actions and court cases. The fact that this road is a safety hazard today from disrepair, misuse and mismanagement clearly creates a moment when DEC and APA leadership is needed to protect both the natural resources of the Forest Preserve and public safety.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Protect the Adirondacks, please let me extend our appreciation for the opportunity to submit these comments on this important project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Bauer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Peter" being more prominent than the last name "Bauer".

Peter Bauer
Executive Director

CC Governor Andrew Cuomo
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Parking area at the start of the Crane Pond Road on the border of the Pharaoh Lake Wilderness Area. The trailhead is unmarked and no Forest Preserve, State Land or Wilderness signs are evident for the public. Boulders have been moved aside from the time in 1991 that the DEC attempted to close this road.



Two sections of the Crane Pond Road that show some maintenance for waterbars and tree clearing is occurring on the road. What work does the DEC undertake to maintain this road, a non-conforming structure in a Wilderness area? Is the Town of Schroon undertaking this work?



Two sections on the Crane Pond Road that show extensive drainage problems due to soil compaction and degradation from motorized uses.



Two views of a highly damaged wetland area that the Crane Pond Road passes through. This wetland is clearly a class 1 wetland and the road has caused significant damage. This wetland also has at least one invasive species in it due to the road.



Though classified as Wilderness, the Crane Pond Road sees a lot of motorized traffic. The picture on top is at the Goose Pond trailhead. The picture above is on the shores of Crane Pond.



*The top picture shows how disrepair has caused natural resource damage where the road is widened by users looking to avoid washouts and puddles. Above is purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), an invasive species, growing in a wetland that the Crane Pond Road runs through.*