



PRESS RELEASE

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## APA approves widely illegal Unit Management Plan for the Essex Chain Lakes Complex

*New Unit Management Plan violates state snowmobile trail policies and regulations*

*New plan violates the NYS Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act*

### **For more information:**

Peter Bauer, Executive Director, Office 518.685.3088, Cell 518.796.0112

Ray Brook, NY – The Adirondack Park Agency (APA) today approved a widely illegal new Unit Management Plan (UMP) for the Essex Chain Lakes Complex. This plan was characterized as a “legal fiction” by one dissenting APA Commissioner and “illegal” by another. This UMP approved a new snowmobile trail through a trailless and wild part of the Forest Preserve that has not seen an axe in 100 years. This UMP continues to implement the greatest expansion of motorized uses in the history of the Forest Preserve.

The Essex Chain Lakes tract was the centerpiece of new Forest Preserve lands purchased by Governor Andrew Cuomo in 2012, which the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) classified in 2013 as a mixture of Primitive and Wild Forest public lands. The UMP approved today sets management priorities and guides public recreational use.

The Essex Chain Complex UMP retains the Polaris Bridge over the Hudson River, principally for a major snowmobile corridor to connect the towns of Minerva and Indian Lake in the central Adirondacks. Retention of the Polaris Bridge violates the Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers Act. The bridge is located in a classified Scenic River area, which precludes public motorized uses. Further, DEC regulations for the Rivers Act call for four-foot wide trails only for non-motorized uses in Scenic River corridors. The state would need to change the law and DEC regulations to retain this bridge, but the new Essex Chain Complex UMP proposes to do neither.

“The new snowmobile trails that will utilize the Polaris Bridge are redundant with other already built or approved trails. These new trails would require cutting of thousands of large trees and tens of thousands of small trees, need to be graded with heavy machinery and would vastly change a wild and trailless part of the Forest Preserve. There are

already perfectly viable trail systems to connect Minerva to Indian Lake –new trails over the Polaris Bridge are duplicative and a wasteful splurge of scarce state resources,” said Peter Bauer, Executive Director of Protect the Adirondacks.

A snowmobile trail over the Polaris Bridge also violates the APA-DEC “Snowmobile Trail Guidance” policy that calls for trails to be located on the periphery of Wild Forest areas, not run through the heart of a wild trailless area. The Guidance also requires that trails not be redundant. There is already a popular snowmobile trail that connects Newcomb to Indian Lake, and the state is working on a trail that connects Newcomb to Minerva that largely parallels Route 28N. A trail using the Polaris Bridge is unnecessary. A Minerva-to-Indian Lake trail that uses the Polaris Bridge would also violate the 2006 Adirondack Park Snowmobile Plan, which listed priority community-connector trails in the Adirondacks. A Minerva-to-Indian Lake trail is not listed as a priority. The state would have to revise this plan before it could approve or build such a trail.

“Through a Kafkaesque denial of reality state agencies have put on their blinders to pretend that there were no other options to cutting a new trail through five miles of a wild trailless part of the Forest Preserve,” said Peter Bauer. “It’s a bizarre world when we have a snowmobile trail that connects Indian Lake to Newcomb and Newcomb to Minerva and yet we have state agencies tell us there is no Indian Lake to Minerva connection and a new trail is needed. This is not honest public policy,” said Peter Bauer.

The Polaris Bridge was rebuilt for forest management purposes in the early 1990s by then landowners Finch, Pruyn and Company, after having washed out decades earlier. The bridge was built to access Finch lands on the east side of the Hudson River, which were landlocked by Forest Preserve lands in the Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest area and by the private North Woods Club. The bridge spans a part of the Hudson River called the Blackwell Stillwater, which includes four miles of meandering flatwater bookended by rapids and whitewater. The Goodnow River, also a gentle meandering Adirondack river, enters the Hudson just north of the bridge.

“The state has done a lot of work to build a snowmobile system where downtown Newcomb is connected to Long Lake, Indian Lake and Minerva. There is a robust snowmobile trail network that does not need to utilize an illegal bridge and build duplicative and unnecessary new trails. A better choice is remove the Polaris Bridge and let the Hudson River run unvexed through the heart of the Adirondacks” said Peter Bauer.

### **Class II Community Connector Snowmobile Trails Unlike any Other Forest Preserve Recreational Trails**

Class II community connector snowmobile trails are road-like “trails” that are built for motorized uses. Trails for hiking, mountainbiking, horseback riding, or cross-country skiing look nothing like a Class II community connector snowmobile trails. No other recreational use in the Forest Preserve requires this type of vast terrain alteration and natural resource damage to build and maintain.

Class II community connector snowmobile trails are 9-12 foot wide cleared trails, specifically designed and constructed to allow regular grooming with large multi-ton motor vehicles and high speed snowmobile travel. Unlike other trails built by hand, these trails are excavated with heavy machinery, utilize extensive bench cutting, remove thousands of trees over 3 inches diameter at breast height (DBH), remove tens of thousands of trees under 3 inches DBH, remove the entire native understory, often replace the native understory with a grass mix, open the forest canopy, often fracture and chip away bedrock, utilize oversized bridges often equipped with reflectors, and are built to handle operation of motor vehicles. No other recreational activity in the Forest Preserve, outside of Intensive Use Areas, requires such profound terrain alteration and destruction of natural resources. Protect the Adirondacks believes that this network of “trails” violates the SLMP and Article XIV, Section 1 of the NYS Constitution.

See pictures of a new class II community connector trail around Lake Harris in the central Adirondacks on PROTECT’s website.

### **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](http://www.protectadks.org).

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