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December 4, 2020

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Peter D'luhosch (R6.UMP@dec.ny.gov)
NYS DEC Region 6, Potsdam Sub-Office
190 Outer Main Street, Suite 103
Potsdam, NY 13676

RE: Public Comments on Draft Kildare Conservation Easement Recreation Management Plan and Five Mile Tract Conservation Easement Interim Recreation Management Plan

Dear Peter D'luhosch:

Protect the Adirondacks has reviewed the new draft Kildare Conservation Easement Recreation Management Plan and Five Mile Tract Conservation Easement Interim Recreation Management Plan promulgated by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). The two RMPs concern the 12,500-acre Kildare conservation easement, purchased by the State of New York in 1988, as part of the state's first major conservation easement acquisition, and the 18,500-acre Five Mile Tract Conservation Easement, purchased in 2006. The 1988 conservation easement provided certain exclusive rights for hunting on the Kildare easement, which ended in 2019, opening the tract to greater public use in perpetuity.

These lands are difficult for the public to access. The Five Mile Haul Road through the Five Mile Tract is often in challenging conditions. This tract allows for private ATV riding by members of leased hunting camps. The public, which has limited rights to the tract purchased by the state that run from May to September, is often made to feel as an intruder. In many ways the Five Mile Tract shows the flaws of the "Easement B" class of easements that contain restricted and circumscribed public recreational rights. We note that while the Kildare easement now has more extensive public recreational rights, its location will unfortunately limit full public use and enjoyment.

In general, Protect the Adirondacks supports the objectives and recommendations in these RMPs. Our specific comments are listed below.

New 1.25-Mile Connector Road: The plan seeks to construct a new road that will connect the two easement tracts. This road will be 1.25-miles long, with 2,500 feet of new

road built through managed deciduous forest and roughly 4,000 feet on existing logging roads. This new road will open the full range of 16.1 miles of motor vehicle roads throughout the two easements. PROTECT supports the construction of this relatively short new road on actively managed conservation easement lands. This type of road construction would not be possible on forever wild Forest Preserve lands.

Spruce Grouse Protection/Restoration: Protect the Adirondacks supports the goals in this part of the Adirondacks as outlined in the 2012 Spruce Grouse Recovery Plan. We recognize the need to try and stabilize this population through habitat protection and recovery efforts in boreal forests. A priority should be given to the protection of spruce grouse.

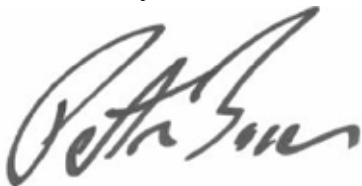
New Public Use Facilities: The RMPs include a new American with Disabilities (ADA) campsite, an information kiosk, and four new parking areas on the Kildare Tract, which provides more public recreational rights in the easement. PROTECT supports the development of these facilities.

The parking areas and public access points all along the West Branch of the St. Regis River, where under terms of the easement the public enjoys extensive recreational use all along the west shore of the West Branch, should be well marked to clearly inform the public about their rights. The main kiosk to the tract at the north end should also clearly inform the public about their rights.

No Public ATV Access: PROTECT supports restrictions on public ATV use. However, we note that conservation easements are suitable for ATV use, whereas the Forest Preserve is not. While this form of intensive recreational use is detrimental to natural resources, ATVs are widely used on the Five Mile tract by dozens of leaseholders. It is our understanding that ATV use is limited to forest management activities and is not allowed by leaseholders on the Kildare tract.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Protect the Adirondacks, please accept our gratitude for the opportunity to submit these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Bauer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "B".

Peter Bauer
Executive Director