



Memorandum of Opposition A.7537a (Jones)/S.7868 (Kaminsky)

Don't Privatize the Public Forest Preserve

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND ASSEMBLY proposing an amendment to section 1 of article 14 of the Constitution, in relation to conveying land to Debar Pond Institute in order to facilitate the preservation of historic buildings.

Protect the Adirondacks opposes A.7537a (Jones)/S.7868 (Kaminsky). This legislation states as its purpose: “Amends the constitution to convey land to Debar Pond Institute in order to facilitate the preservation of historic buildings.” There is no enabling legislation that provides information on how this amendment will be administered. No Article 14 amendment should ever receive “first passage” without accompanying enabling legislation.

This legislation seeks to take six acres of public Forest Preserve on the north shore of Debar Pond, and make these public lands private, to be used exclusively for paying guests. While amendments to Article 14 make sense in some situations, they should only be pursued for legitimate public purposes. In this case, these lands will be taken away from the public and turned into a gated private enclave.

This amendment is a bad deal for the Forest Preserve. Thousands of people have used this site in the last 10 years after the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) made it more accessible with a public parking area. This amendment will sharply restrict public access and enjoyment to Debar Pond by privatizing the best access points to the lake and monopolizing in private hands the splendor of the wild beauty of this part of the public Forest Preserve. This proposal makes no sense for various procedural and substantive reasons and represents harm to our forever wild Forest Preserve – the People’s Lands in New York.

No First Passage without Enabling Legislation: There is no enabling legislation that spells out the details about how this transfer of public lands will be operationalized.

Replacement Lands are Inadequate, Not of Similar Value: The amendment talks about a transfer of “not less than 400 acres” in compensatory land on “condition that the legislature shall determine that the lands to be received by the state are at least equal in value to the lands and buildings to be conveyed by the state.” This criteria cannot reasonably be met. The Debar Lodge property, despite the conditions of the buildings, is a property worth millions of dollars. Proponents of this project are lowballing the price of compensatory lands.

Protect the Adirondacks!
PO Box 48 North Creek NY 12853 (518) 251-2700
info@protectadks.org www.protectadks.org
Like Us on Facebook Follow Us on Twitter @ProtectAdkPark

Constitutional Amendment to Preserve Debar Lodge Will Strip Public Recreational Rights and Use: Protect the Adirondacks does not see how creating a private six-acre complex around the Debar Lodge buildings will not undermine and greatly weaken long-enjoyed public access to Debar Pond. The Debar Lodge Institute seeks to create a private compound for its guests and staff where public access to the open meadow and Debar Pond will be greatly diminished.

Great Camp Social and Architectural History Already Adequately Preserved and Interpreted: The central purpose of the proposed amendment is that it's necessary in order to save an historic Adirondack "Great Camp." The State of New York has already taken extraordinary efforts to maintain Great Camps in the Adirondack Park, through two amendments in the 1980s to preserve Great Camp Sagamore in Hamilton County and the state's work, and millions of dollars, to preserve Great Camp Santanoni in Essex County. Moreover, there are two dozen Great Camps in private ownership. Great Camps have been adequately protected.

Debar Lodge is Not Large Enough for a Conference Center: Unlike other numerous conference facilities in the Adirondacks, neither Debar Lodge nor any of the other smaller buildings on the property are large enough to house a conference of 100 people in one meeting room. The facility simply does not have to requisite size to facilitate a conference or large gatherings. Without accommodating large gatherings, we do not see how the Debar Lodge Institute can be financially viable. This project is a poorly conceived pipe-dream.

Public Educational Use Envisioned at Debar Lodge Can be Undertaken at Other Sites Through New Partnerships: One reason advanced by supporters for saving Debar Lodge is that the facility will be devoted to things like working with the wounded warriors project or to promote racial diversity in the Adirondacks. These are terrific goals, but it should be pointed out that there are many educational facilities in the Adirondack Park that would eagerly make their facilities available to collaborate on these worthy programs.

Debar Lodge Will Be A New Drain on Environmental Protection Fund: Just as the restoration of Great Camp Santanoni has been a drain on the Environmental Protection Fund for decades, amendment supports will seek to make sure that restoration of Debar Lodge is similarly funded through annual EPF appropriations. This is a poor long-term investment by the state.

Staffing Will be Difficult: Given the remote location, more than an hour's drive from Saranac Lake and Lake Placid, and 45 minutes from Malone, it will be very difficult to find staffing.

Wildness is the Overriding Forest Preserve Value at Debar Pond: There is a better way than privatizing the Debar Lodge property. Debar Pond should be a place where all the buildings are removed and the land is managed to grow even wilder in the future than it is today. In our vision, Debar Pond would be another Lake Lila or Boreas Pond or Little Tupper Lake or Henderson Lake, a motorfree and wild lake where the public can canoe, hike and camp, in a landscape that grows wilder decade after decade. We note that public use at Debar Pond has tripled in the past several years as word got out about great flatwater canoeing and camping on Debar Pond.

Protect the Adirondacks opposes A.7537a/S.7868

For more information: Peter Bauer, Executive Director/518-796-0112