



Board of Directors

May 20, 2023

Charles Clusen
Chair

Hon. Deborah Glick
Chair, Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee
LOB, Room 624
Albany, NY 12248

James McMartin Long
Michael Wilson
Vice-Chairs

Barbara Rottier
Secretary

RE: Proposed Article 14 Amendment for Debar Lodge in the Debar Mountain Wild Forest, Adirondack Forest Preserve

David Quinn
Treasurer

Dear Chairwoman Glick:

Nancy Bernstein
John Caffry
Andy Coney
Dean Cook
James Dawson
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Robert Glennon
Roger Gray
Evelyn Greene
Sidney Harring
Dale Jeffers
Mark Lawton
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Protect the Adirondacks opposes a legislation for an amendment to Article 14, Section 1, of the New York Constitution to remove six acres of public Forest Preserve encompassing roughly two dozen buildings on the shores of Debar Pond in the Debar Mountain Wild Forest area A.2816 (Jones)/S.3030 (Stec). This bill would privatize an area that has been used by the public seeking remote, wild experiences on an otherwise undeveloped lake. The existing buildings are dilapidated and will cost tens of millions of dollars to restore for some kind of private institute. Public access will be sharply reduced from what we enjoy today. This is a bad deal for public recreation, for wild places, for the forever wild Forest Preserve.

Debar Lodge Should be Removed, Site Should be Restored to a Wild Forest Setting

Supporters aim to privatize 6+/- acres of public Forest Preserve to create a private institute that will utilize the buildings on the property to focus on various private pursuits. There are many reasons why the effort to save Debar Lodge and remove these lands from the Forest Preserve is a bad idea.

Peter Bauer
Executive Director

A Constitutional Amendment to Preserve Debar Lodge Will Strip Public Recreational Rights and Use: Protect the Adirondacks does not see how creating a private 6+/--acre complex around the Debar Lodge buildings will not undermine and greatly weaken public access to Debar Pond. Supporters seek to create a private compound for where public access to Debar Pond will be greatly diminished. The buildings around Debar Lodge are currently vacant and many are dilapidated. The Debar Lodge area at the north end of Debar Pond is principal access point for the public to Debar Pond and the public should not see their access stripped away, and limited to a narrow pathway around a private compound, and made into second class citizens banned from what would

Claudia K. Braymer
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and Counsel**

Protect the Adirondacks

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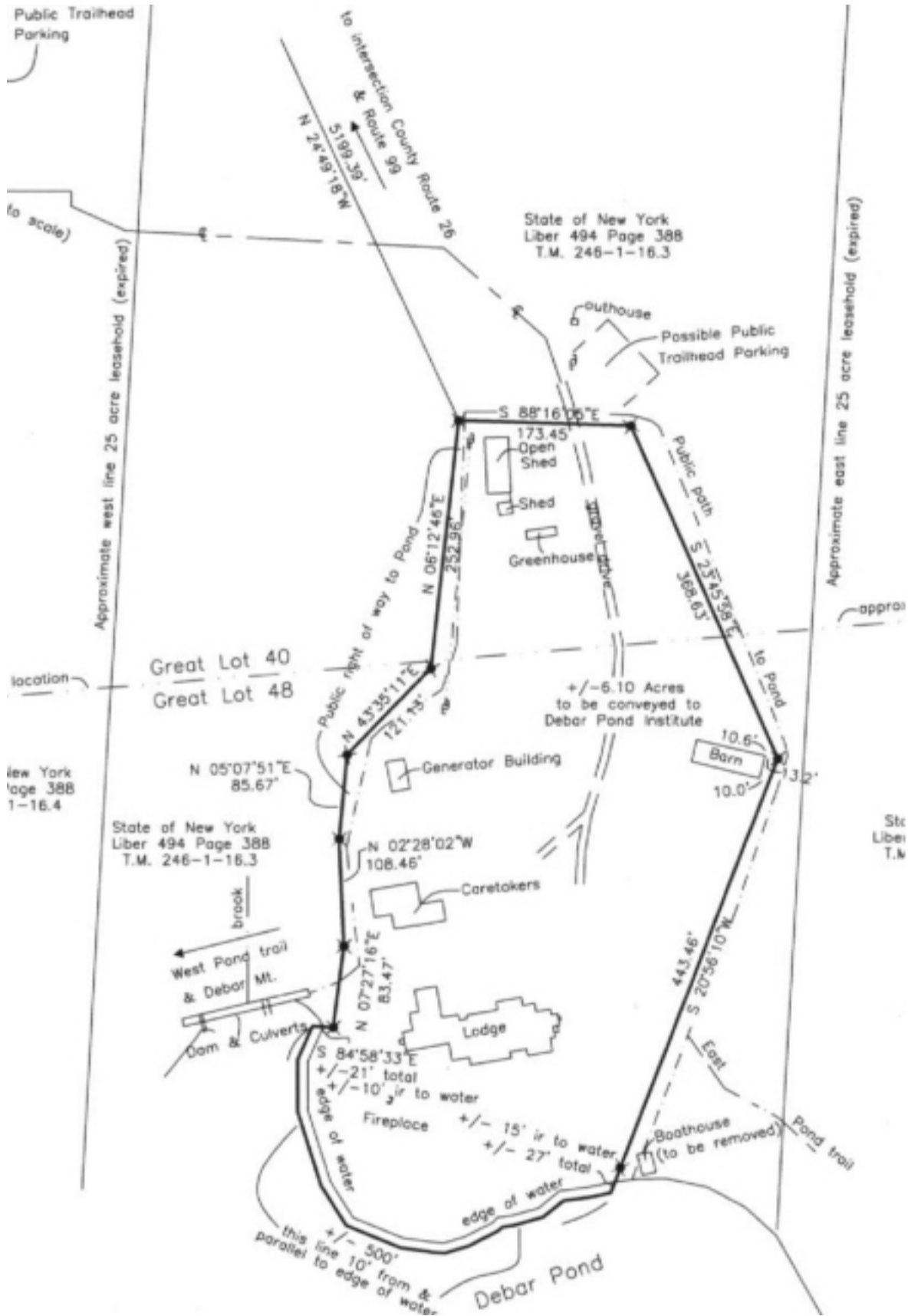
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Debar Pond



become private lands. The public will not be allowed on these lands once the land is transferred, unless they are paying guests. We cannot support a proposal that strips away the rights of New Yorkers to the best access for Debar Pond.

The public has greatly enjoyed carte blanche access to the Debar Lodge lands for more than a decade. State taxpayers purchased these lands more than two decades ago and have paid all local taxes on these since during that time. The public has enjoyed the parking area and short walk or canoe carry through the grounds to Debar Pond. Public use has significantly increased in the last half dozen years since the DEC has stopped using the site to house its staff. We are greatly concerned about efforts to privatize and abridge the public's access to these lands. We simply do not see how the Debar Lodge complex can be transferred to private ownership without seriously and irreparably damaging public access and enjoyment of Debar Pond.



This is a map put forth by project supporters that shows public access reduced to a pathway around the private enclave, which monopolizes the open meadow and most of the accessible shoreline access.



In our meetings with amendment supporters, they were adamant that they needed exclusive privately-controlled access to the Debar Lodge site to conduct their activities. This means that the short canoe carry and open lawn access to Debar Pond will no longer be available to the public. Project supporters made it clear that unfettered public use, a hallmark of the Forest Preserve, is incompatible with the development of the Debar Lodge through this amendment.

The Lake Lila Model is the Best Historic Precedent for Debar Lodge and Debar Pond: The State of New York purchased Lake Lila and several thousand acres around it in the 1970s. Part of the purchase included Nehasane Lodge on the west end of Lake Lila. Peter Berle, then DEC Commissioner, oversaw the demolition and removal of that Great Camp and associated buildings. Today, Lake Lila is a treasured part of the William C. Whitney Wilderness area and has been enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of people for more than four decades for its beauty and wildness. Had Nehasane Lodge remained, the entire Lake Lila experience today would be fundamentally different and significantly diminished.

Protect the Adirondacks believes that Lake Lila's restoration and its classification as Wilderness is one of the great success stories in the Adirondack Park. Today, Lake Lila provides a stunningly beautiful Wilderness landscape and experience, and provides more than two dozen wilderness campsites. The lake is heavily used by the public all summer long, year after year. We believe that former DEC Commissioner Berle's vision for Lake Lila was prescient and was the right decision because wild, motorfree lakes have only grown rarer and more precious in the last 50 years. Lake Lila would be a very different place today had Nehasne Lodge been preserved and/or privatized.

Protect the Adirondacks believes that the Lake Lila model is the best model for Debar Lodge and Debar Pond.

Wildness is the Overriding Forest Preserve Value at Debar Pond: Protect the Adirondacks has a fundamentally different vision for the Debar Lodge property than amendment supporters who seek to privatize the property. In our vision, Debar Pond would be a place that 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. The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) says that this is because Debar Lodge was no longer used as a private residence by a DEC staffer/caretaker, making the site more open and welcoming to the public. Perhaps this is so, but more likely it is the fact that word got out about great flatwater canoeing on Debar Pond once it was more fully open to the public.

In our vision, we see Debar Pond a special and accessible wild area, a place where grandparents can one day bring their grandchildren to experience wildness in much the same way, unchanged and beautiful, as they experienced Debar Pond as children themselves. There is nothing better to illustrate the promise of the public Forest Preserve in New York State than this kind of generation after generation enjoyment of wild nature at beautiful and timeless locations.

Adirondack Great Camp Social and Architectural History Already Adequately Preserved and Interpreted: Many Adirondack Great Camps, recognized for their architectural and social history, are protected and have been restored by private owners across the Adirondack Park. Most of these camps today are located on relatively small acreages, with a few exceptions, where it is unlikely that they would be part of any future public land purchases for the Forest Preserve. The future of these several dozen Great Camps is reasonably secure as these camps are privately owned and maintained. Many of these camps have been recognized for their architectural significance and have been showcased at times for public tours.

Great Camp Santanoni on Newcomb Lake is an inholding of sorts within the High Peaks Wilderness. This Great Camp was purchased in the 1970s as part of a 12,000-acre purchase of lands that were added to the High Peaks Wilderness. Great Camp Santanoni existed in a state of benign neglect for decades. State laws were passed to allow its buildings to remain on the Forest Preserve if they met a specific purpose. The Great Camp Santanoni complex, and its access road, remain in the Forest Preserve and were classified as a Historic Area under the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (APSLMP).

Great Camp Santanoni was eventually stabilized with state funding beginning in the early 2000s. The first iterations of the APSLMP in the 1970s did not have a Historic classification, but it was added in subsequent revisions. The State of New York has spent millions of dollars to stabilize and restore Great Camp Santanoni, which functions today as a living museum. The most recent state budget allocated another \$500,000 from the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) for Camp Santanoni in this year's budget!

The continued existence of Great Camp Santanoni, which we acknowledge is an attraction for many people and is considered as an important cultural resource in the Town of Newcomb, has diminished the



Great Camp Sagamore



Debar Lodge

public experience on Newcomb Lake. The Historic Area has also created management tensions from use of snowmobiles to ferry staff and supplies to the Great Camp on the 5-mile-long access road in the winter and state administrative use of that road with motor vehicles in summer months. Despite these problems, we foresee the continuation of Great Camp Santanoni and recognize that it provides a viable public education and interpretation experience for Adirondack Great Camp architectural and social history. That said, we see no need for the preservation of another Great Camp on the Forest Preserve.

Great Camp Sagamore has also been preserved and fully restored. As we see it, there is no better preservation effort in the Adirondacks, and no better educational effort in the Adirondacks, for Adirondack Great Camps. Great Camp Sagamore is a fully restored Great Camp complex of more than two dozen buildings that sit on Sagamore Lake's shore. Two Article 14 amendments in 1980s transferred Great Camp Sagamore and more than a dozen acres to a private institute for educational purposes. The Sagamore Institute has worked since the 1980s to provide public education and interpretation about Adirondack Great Camp architectural and social history. The facility is also used for private conferences and events such as weddings.

Sagamore Institute provides the most indepth educational opportunity for Great Camp architectural and social history in the Adirondack Park for paying customers and school groups through guided tours. While the Great Camp complex has been fully restored, the public experience on Sagamore Lake has always been circumscribed by the Great Camp. Sagamore Lake is no Lake Lila, though had the Great Camp been removed over 40 years ago, it would be as stunning and wild as Lake Lila is today.

Today, public access to Sagamore Lake is sharply curtailed by the private Great Camp, where only paying customer can roam its grounds. Public parking areas and access to the lake have never been adequately developed, largely because the private institute resisted them. The guests at the Great Camp enjoy easy lake access from a restored boathouse and series of docks, which are off-limits to the public. The Great Camp Sagamore complex dominates the lake where members of the public are in essence second-class citizens.

Protect the Adirondacks recognizes the necessity of compromise in the management of the Adirondack Park. We realize that the Adirondack Park of today is forged from a series of decisions and compromises made decades ago. However, we do not believe that the Great Camp Santanoni model is appropriate for Debar Lodge. Nor do we believe that the Great Camp Sagamore model is appropriate for Debar Lodge. We believe that the Great Camp Nehasane model is the most appropriate for Debar Lodge. We believe that the Debar Lodge complex should be removed and the site restored to a Wild Forest setting. In this way, we're confident that Debar Pond will grow wilder and even more beautiful in future decades. We believe that there is no greater gift to future generations than wild spaces around a restored, wild, and motorfree Debar Pond. The loss of Debar Lodge and associated buildings will not be a great loss to our collective architectural and social history of the Adirondack Park, yet the opportunity to create a new Lake Lila-style public outdoor wild area is rare and should not be passed up.

Public Educational Use Envisioned at Debar Lodge Can be Undertaken at Other Sites Through New Partnerships: One reason advanced by supporters of saving Debar Lodge is that the facility will be devoted to public educational endeavors. This is a terrific goal, 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 is No Great Camp: Despite the proclamations of amendment and preservation supporters, Debar Lodge is no Great Camp Santanoni and it's no Great Camp Sagamore. It does not possess the architectural significance of many other preserved Great Camps in the Adirondacks. We do not believe that it merits preservation when we look at the better alternative or a wild, accessible Debar Pond. The architectural and design qualities of Debar Lodge do not compare with Great Camp Sagamore or Great Camp Santanoni. Moreover, many of the smaller utility buildings dilapidated and are simple garage-type or shed-type buildings with no historic or architectural significance.

Debar Lodge Will be a Drain on Environmental Protection Fund, Just Like Great Camp Santanoni, It Never Ends: 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.

To be clear, Protect the Adirondacks does not see any viable reason to support the restoration of Debar Lodge and associated buildings. These building should be cleared and the site should be environmentally restored to a wild forest setting.

Removal of Debar Lodge is the Only Viable Action: Protect the Adirondacks does not support an amendment to Article 14, Section 1, of the State Constitution to authorize the removal of the Debar Lodge complex so it can be preserved and managed as a private inholding in the Forest Preserve as some type of commercial and educational facility. As stated above, the best long-term use of the Debar Lodge/Debar Pond site is removal of the buildings and restoration of the site to a wild forest setting.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Protect the Adirondacks, please let me express our gratitude for the opportunity to share our concerns with you.

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

