



PRESS RELEASE
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Draft Amendments to the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan Weaken Wilderness Protections

The Adirondack Park Agency is seeking approval to expand motorized access to Wilderness Areas and to trails across the Forest Preserve

For more information, call Protect the Adirondacks:

Peter Bauer, Executive Director: Cell 518.796.0112

Claudia Braymer, Deputy Director: Cell 703.937.7163

The Adirondack Park Agency (APA) is proposing amendments to the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (Master Plan) that will for the first time open Wilderness, Primitive and Canoe areas to cars, trucks, ATVs, golf carts, Segways and other motorized vehicles for persons with disabilities, even though the Americans With Disabilities Act does not require such drastic actions. APA is accepting public comments on the proposed changes until December 2, 2024.

APA is opening the forever wild Forest Preserve to increased motor vehicle use as a result of proposed amendments that would change the existing definition of “motor vehicle” to exclude “Other Power-Driven Mobility Devices” (OPDMDs). OPDMDs include cars, trucks, ATVs, golf carts, tractors and Segways that are used by people with disabilities to traverse lands and trails. While Protect the Adirondacks (PROTECT) strongly supports the goal of increasing access to Forest Preserve recreational opportunities for persons with disabilities, we oppose the exclusion of OPDMDs from the definition of “motor vehicle,” because it will allow motorized vehicles of every description to be used by persons with disabilities to access remote areas where motor vehicle use has always been prohibited.

Excluding OPDMDs from the definition of motor vehicles would violate Article 14 of the New York State Constitution (the “Forever Wild” clause) and the existing Guidelines for Management and Use in the Master Plan. “Allowing public use of motor vehicles in wilderness, primitive and canoe areas where such use is currently prohibited by Article 14 of the New York State Constitution and the Master Plan would be a fundamental alteration of the very program that provides people of all abilities with a challenging primitive experience and protects natural resources,” said Claudia Braymer, Deputy Director of Protect the Adirondacks.

Protect the Adirondacks!
PO Box 48, North Creek, NY 12853 (518) 251-2700
info@protectadks.org www.protectadks.org
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Fundamentally altering the forever wild Forest Preserve is not required by the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) or the implementing regulations promulgated by the U.S. Department of Justice.

The proposed amendments would delegate to the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) unfettered discretion to permit the use of OPDMDs in every Forest Preserve classification, even though DEC has no written policy concerning use of OPDMDs on Forest Preserve lands. “Granting DEC this authority, without any guidelines or restrictions to govern its exercise, would eliminate APA oversight of motor vehicle use on Forest Preserve lands in violation of both the Master Plan and the APA Act and would be a complete abrogation of APA’s duties to protect the natural resources of the Adirondack Park” said Christopher Amato, Conservation Director and Counsel of Protect the Adirondacks.

PROTECT is pleased to see that APA is incorporating climate change impacts, planning, adaptation and resiliency into the Master Plan’s management prescriptions for Forest Preserve lands and waters. However, APA has thus far failed to incorporate climate change consideration in its review of projects on private lands pursuant to the Adirondack Park land use and development plan, and it does not appear to be considering potential climate change impacts in its proposals to expand motor vehicle use in the Forest Preserve.

“We support adding climate change considerations to the Master Plan, but we believe that the APA has not complied with the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) because it has yet to add climate change impacts to its review of major private land projects and Forest Preserve management. It needs to adopt climate change policies,” said Peter Bauer, Executive Director of Protect the Adirondacks.

Protect the Adirondacks

Protect the Adirondacks is an IRS-approved non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation and stewardship of the 6-million-acre Adirondack Park. Our mission is to protect the Adirondack Park’s wild character for current and future generations. PROTECT pursues this mission through a combination of advocacy, grassroots organizing, independent public oversight, research, water quality monitoring, education, and legal action. Protect the Adirondacks was formed in 2009 as the result of a merger between two long-standing environmental conservation groups in the Adirondack Park, the Resident’s Committee to Protect the Adirondacks (est. 1991) and the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks (est. 1901).

Protect the Adirondacks is managed by a 22-member Board of Directors of Adirondack leaders with expertise in environmental law, local government, Adirondack environmental and cultural history, state agency management, and small business. Protect the Adirondacks maintains an office in a 100% energy efficient, solar-and wind-powered office in Johnsburg in the central Adirondacks. For more information see www.protectadks.org and @ProtectAdkPark.

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