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# Forest Preserve Advocates Modify Boreas Ponds Proposal

<http://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2016/08/environmentalists-modify-boreas-ponds-proposal.html#more-63422>

by [Phil Brown](#)



*Map: BeWildNY's proposal for classifying the Boreas Ponds Tract and expanding the High Peaks Wilderness.*

A coalition of environmental groups that includes the Adirondack Council, Adirondack Mountain Club, and Adirondack Wild has significantly altered its proposal for the recently acquired Boreas Ponds Tract, calling for less of the region to be classified Wilderness.

Under the [original proposal](#), about 15,000 of the tract's 20,758 acres would have been added to the High Peaks Wilderness. This included land north and south of Gulf Brook Road, a durable logging road that leads to Boreas Ponds. The road itself would have been designated a Primitive Corridor, allowing visitors to drive as far as LaBier Flow, some six miles from County Route 2.

Under the new plan, Gulf Brook Road and the land south of it would be Wild Forest, a less-restrictive classification that allows motorized use. Thus, it would not be necessary to designate Gulf Brook Road a Primitive Corridor to allow people to drive to LaBier Flow. Some 13,000 acres north of the road would be Wilderness.

Willie Janeway, executive director of the Adirondack Council, said Gulf Brook Road could not be designated a Primitive Corridor because the Adirondack chapter of the Nature Conservancy, which sold the land to the state in April, never opened it to the public. Finch, Pruyn & Company, which owned the land before the conservancy, also prohibited the general public from using the seven-mile road.

“If the Nature Conservancy had opened the corridor as far as LaBier Flow, that would have been a pre-existing use and that would have opened the door to a Primitive Corridor,” Janeway told *Adirondack Almanack*.

Asked if the [BeWildNY coalition](#) requested the Nature Conservancy to temporarily open the road, Janeway said he would not comment on any talks with the conservancy.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation has maintained that even pre-existing motorized use by private leaseholders can be used to justify continuing such use after land is acquired for the Forest Preserve. Janeway, however, said the Adirondack Council disagrees with this interpretation of the law.

“A prior private use of a road does not grandfather future use when the property transfers to the Forest Preserve,” he said.

With one important difference, the modified plan is similar to [that set forth by Protect the Adirondacks](#). The state intends to build a snowmobile trail between North Hudson and Newcomb that may run through the Boreas tract. Protect proposes to use Gulf Brook Road for the so-called community-connector trail, whereas BeWildNY recommends creating a trail on the north side of Route 2, close to and paralleling the highway.

Peter Bauer, executive director of Protect, argues that creating a trail from scratch rather than using the road would necessitate cutting thousands of trees, possibly violating Article 14, the clause in the state constitution that protects the Forest Preserve as forever wild. He added that less than a half-mile of new trail would need to be cut under Protect’s proposal, but it would go through “recently cut, former Finch lands rife with tote roads and haul roads.”

Janeway counters that BeWildNY’s route also would utilize old woods roads. Moreover, he said, it would keep snowmobiles far from Boreas Ponds and out of the interior of the Forest Preserve. “That’s a huge benefit,” he said. “And it looks like there is similar or less tree cutting than under any other option.”

Janeway also contended that Protect’s plan would violate the state’s guidelines for Adirondack snowmobile trails, which call for keeping snowmobiles near the periphery of the Forest Preserve.

BeWildNY is urging the state to add roughly 33,000 acres, including Boreas Ponds, to the High Peaks Wilderness. The acreage includes other lands bought from the Nature Conservancy as well as state lands now classified as Wild Forest. In addition, the coalition wants to combine the High Peaks Wilderness with the adjacent Dix Mountain Wilderness. If the state were to adopt these recommendations, the High Peaks Wilderness, already the largest in the Adirondack Park, would grow to more than 280,000 acres from 204,000 acres.

Some wilderness advocates, including John Davis of the Wildlands Network and Bill Ingersoll, publisher of Adirondack guidebooks, argue that Gulf Brook Road should be closed in its entirety and allowed to revert to a footpath. However, this would require paddlers to undertake [an arduous journey](#), carrying or wheeling their boats more than six miles to reach Boreas Ponds.

Although the road is closed now, many observers think it likely that the Cuomo administration eventually will open at least part of the road.

Other organizations in the BeWildNY coalition are the New York League of Conservation Voters, Environmental Advocates of New York, Natural Resources Defense Council, Wilderness Society, and Citizens Campaign for the Environment.