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Boreas public hearings begin

First meeting at APA and DEC headquarters brought a busload of Wilderness defenders up from Albany

by [Kim Dedam](#)



Dozens gathered at the Adirondack Park Agency headquarters in Ray Brook on Wednesday, Nov. 9 for the first public hearing on the classification of the Boreas Pond Tract.

Photo by Kim Dedam

RAY BROOK — The first round of public comments on numerous proposed Adirondack Park Agency land-use actions drew a crowd that spilled from Adirondack Park Agency to state Department of Environmental Conservation headquarters next door.

A webcast shared the meeting live online.

Some 85 people signed up to weigh-in on state recreational use options.

Their commentary focused largely on Boreas Ponds.

New York purchased the 20,543-acre Boreas Tract last spring and began environmental review for inclusion in the Adirondack State Forest.

Former timberlands owned by Finch, Pruyn & Co., the wooded acres had been logged for a century.

A sea of green shirts marked a few dozen people brought here on a tour bus by Be Wild NY, a coalition of environmental lobbyists that includes the Adirondack Council, Sierra Club and the Adirondack Mountain Club.

The green team shirts spread across APA and DEC's board room last Wednesday, its big white bus from Albany parked outside.

Buzz words culled from Be Wild's letter-writing campaign were recurring in comments, citing a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" that the green groups say is endangered by the four classification alternatives developed by the APA.

In repeated commentary, the green message asserted that "current plans ...would threaten some of the purest waters and wildest, rarest and most fragile wildlife habitat in the (Adirondack) Park."

Tyler Socash parked a map of the park on the easel by the microphone. His illustration of park lands and roadways meant to show what he considers an "alarming disappearance of wilderness."

Socash, of Tupper Lake, said only five percent of Adirondack forest lands are more than five miles from a roadway or travel infrastructure.

"We don't need another unsuccessful compromise like Essex Chain (Lakes plan). We need Wilderness."

His urgent tone drew a loud applause.

But for Chuck Parker, president of the New York State Conservation Council, Wilderness use excludes access for all but the physically fit.

Without Wild Forest pressed closer to the ponds, it would be about a seven mile hike into the ponds.

Parker is working with Access the Adirondacks, a coalition of sportsmen and local officials representing the towns surrounding the Boreas tract.

They hope to create a recreational link from North Hudson to Minerva, Newcomb, Indian Lake and Long Lake.

Their preferred land use plan is encompassed in APA's Boreas Alternative 1 with a Wild Forest area of 9,913 acres below a 10,621-acre swath of Wilderness protecting the northern half.

"Are these parcels with bridges and roads best described as Wild Forest or Wilderness?" Parker asked.

Supervisors from North Hudson, Minerva and Wilmington were among several elected officials who shared comments at this first public hearing.

“This land has two dams and multiple culverts. What (Gov. Andrew Cuomo) was buying is Wild Forest. It’s the people’s land and we want to use it. People in my community are getting older and we want everybody to enjoy this,” Minerva Supervisor Steve McNally said.

Greg Cunningham of ADK Community Works called this classification decision an historic event and compared Boreas to federal land held in the National Park system, which he pointed out is subject at Congressional will to mining, grazing and timber use.

The 20,000 acres at Boreas, Cunningham suggested, “are unchanged since the park’s beginning.”

But as the meeting wound into a third hour, Jason Kemper, who is chairman of the New York State Conservation Fund Advisory Board, shared about a dozen two-by-three foot photos taken at all edges of Boreas.

Common information “is misleading about what exists in and around the Boreas parcel,” he said, sharing his view from four days spent on the property.

“There are 53 miles of road, 17 of which would be used in (APA) Alternative 1,” he said.

In addition, there are over 20 gravel borrow pits in and around the roads, “and 23 culverts underneath the road to make the drainage work.”

He flashed a photo taken at the top of Moose Mountain of a road one-quarter mile from White Lily Pond.

“It’s a highway going down the side of it,” Kemper said, raising another picture.

“This is the road to slide park — pristine isn’t it? Here’s Boreas looking north — again a major road right down the center of it.”

Three to four feet of gravel were used to construct the logging roads, Kemper said.

He flashed a photo of the top of Moose Mountain.

“A 25-foot cut was made through that mountain to construct that road,” Kemper said.

The manmade infrastructure sits at the heart of the State Land Master Plan contention.

The State Land Master Plan requires Wilderness classification applied to an area where the lands are “untrammelled by man.”

But environmentalists think the roads would be absorbed by Wilderness if protected over time.

Besides the logging roads, two dams impound waters that form three Boreas Ponds.

For Adirondack Mountain Club Executive Director Neil Woodworth, the wetlands and shorelines at Boreas “should be protected fully by Wilderness.”

From the Sierra Club’s Adirondack Committee, Roger Gray raised concerns that the Boreas hearing scheduled for New York City has been cancelled.

The meeting, set for Dec. 6, has been relocated to Tomkins Cove, according to APA’s website.

Gray said the city cancellation “disenfranchises a huge portion of (Adirondack Park) users.”

Like the Council, the Sierra Club believes APA should develop an all-Wilderness option for Boreas.

Presumptive Chairman-elect of the Essex County Board of Supervisors Randy Preston, who is Wilmington supervisor, said the county supports a 10,000 acre Wilderness buffer attaching the High Peaks to the northern Boreas Tract.

“The rest of the property does not fit into Wilderness designation. The (APA) maps do not show the road system that’s in there now.”

And that is a problem, Preston said, because the maps “do not allow for a clear vision of what is on the property.”

Preston said Essex County officials and residents care dearly about the environment in their towns.

“The people should be allowed to use it.”

Essex County has 356,761 acres of state forest Wilderness and 167,665 acres of the less restricted Wild Forest state lands.

Local leaders say classification determines only possible uses on the property. And they want APA and DEC to use the Unit Management Plan to apply appropriate environmental safeguards.

UPCOMING HEARINGS

Nov. 16: Newcomb Central School, 5535 NYS Route 28N, Newcomb, 7 p.m

Nov. 21: Schroon Lake Central School, 1125 NYS Route 9, Schroon Lake, 7 p.m.,

Nov. 28: Rochester Institute of Technology Golisano Institute for Sustainability Sustainability Hall, Parking in Lot T, Rochester, 7 p.m.,

Nov. 29: St. Lawrence County Human Service Center, 80 State Highway 310, Canton 6 p.m.,

Dec. 6: Bear Mountain Inn, 3020 Seven Lakes Drive, Tomkins Cove, 7 p.m.

Dec. 7: NYS DEC 625 Broadway, Albany, 2 p.m.

Written comments can be sent via mail or email to:

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