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Groups oppose State plan for new road which would threaten rare boreal forest

Earthjustice and Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve have criticized a plan by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to build a new road in a remote region of the Adirondack Park that would, for the first time, allow public motor vehicle access to a rare and pristine boreal forest.

The forest is located in the Raquette-Jordan Boreal Primitive Area, a remote, state-owned tract of 12,000 acres which includes three rivers protected under the New York Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers System Act; contains eleven habitat types identified by the state's Natural Heritage program as being of statewide significance; and is home to six endangered, threatened, or rare animal and plant species, including the endangered spruce grouse. Boreal forests are a type of northern ecosystem more commonly found in Canada, and the presence of this type of forest in the Adirondack Park is considered unusual.

In a letter submitted to DEC on November 9, [Letter Here](#) the groups pointed out that DEC's management plan for the region prohibits any expansion of public motor vehicle access in the area prior to completing a study of the potential impacts of increased public access on the area's sensitive natural resources. DEC never did the required impact study.

The groups also faulted DEC's assessment of the environmental impacts of the road proposal for failing to identify the numerous rare and sensitive resources in the area, and for ignoring the potential impacts of increased public motor vehicle access on the area's boreal forest, which has been described by DEC and the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) as having "biological resources of Statewide significance."

Earthjustice attorney Chris Amato said, “DEC’s road-building project would be a disaster for this pristine boreal forest and for the rare animal and plant species that depend on the forest for survival. DEC cannot lawfully build the new road without first completing the impact studies it promised it would do before opening the area to increased public access. DEC should withdraw this ill-considered proposal.”

“As the agency in charge of protecting our state’s environment, DEC just hasn’t done the ecological homework it readily acknowledged was important to do back in 2006,” added Adirondack Wild’s David Gibson. “Now, it’s proposing to open up a vast network of old roads to motorized uses without knowing what the impacts are or could be.”

“To date, DEC has failed to study whether opening up the area to motorized uses for the first time would impact local populations of this bird and its shrinking habitat. The total area impacted by the new road access comes very near to sites that DEC acknowledged to be among the best habitats for the species in the entire State. Yet, no analysis of impacts has been done” says Adirondack Wild’s Dan Plumley.

In 2006 DEC and APA found that the area included “unique and significant resource values for its sense of remoteness and outstanding opportunities for solitude.” For this reason, the state-owned lands were classified as “Primitive,” which means they must be managed as wilderness. In 1990, the State of New York Commission on the Adirondacks in the 21st Century recommended creation of a new Boreal Wilderness Area which would include the area now being proposed for motor vehicle access.

“This is a very remote and significant area both for people and wildlife. The failure to recognize its wilderness potential and the commission’s explicit Wilderness recommendation in this 2017 road construction proposal is unacceptable,” added Adirondack Wild’s Dan Plumley. “The DEC should withdraw this draft amendment and proposal and perform the necessary studies and analysis to justify why new motorized access will not impair the area’s ecology, remoteness and opportunities for solitude.”

Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve is a not-for-profit, membership organization which advances New York’s “Forever Wild” legacy and Forest Preserve policies in the Adirondack and Catskill Parks, and promotes public and private land stewardship consistent with wild land values through education, advocacy and research. Much more is on the web at www.adirondackwild.org.