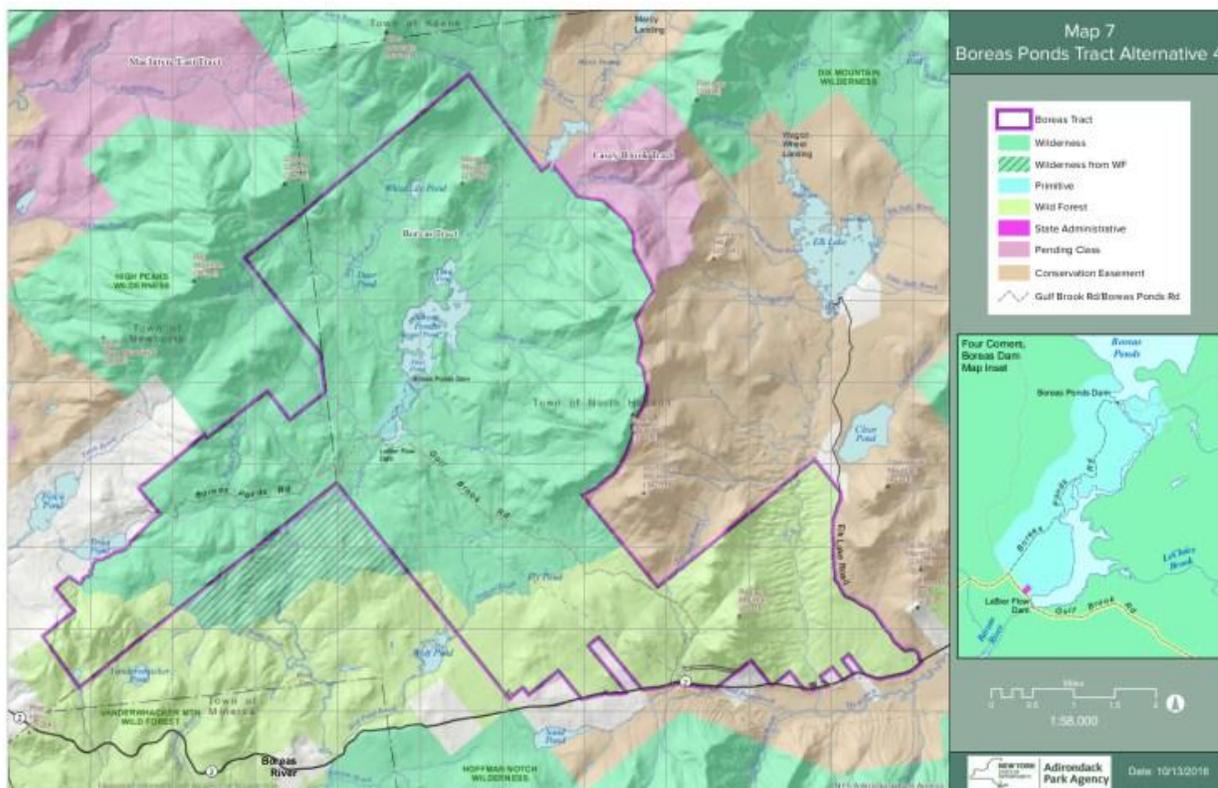


# APA Fails To End Criticism Over Boreas Ponds Options

by Phil Brown

Adirondack Almanack

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2016



Map provided by APA: Alternative 4

In response to public criticism, the Adirondack Park Agency staff came up with a fourth option for classifying the Boreas Ponds Tract, but it hasn't ended the controversy.

The APA board is expected to vote Friday to hold public hearings on the four options, despite complaints that the staff failed to present a full range of alternatives for the tract and failed to properly analyze the alternatives it did present.

On Thursday, the State Land Committee voted to approve the hearing schedule and the four options, setting the stage for a vote by the full board, which is expected to follow suit.

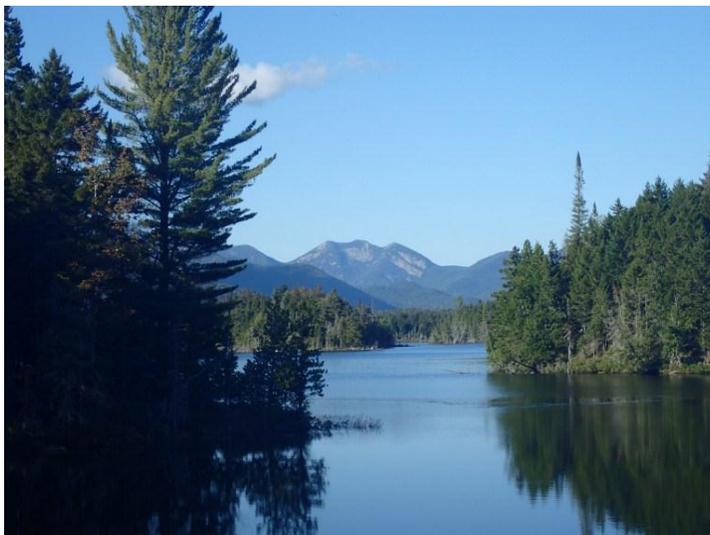
Peter Bauer, executive director of Protect the Adirondacks, called the

committee's vote "a low day for the APA."

"The contrast is startling between the stunning beauty of the Boreas Ponds and the cramped and meager actions by the APA to shun a variety of legitimate proposals advocated for months by the general public," Bauer said in a news release. "In a world of infinite colors, the Cuomo administration is treating the Adirondacks in black and white."

The APA's land classification for Boreas Ponds will help determine how the 20,758-acre tract is managed and how much motorized access is permitted. Forest Preserve advocates **reacted in anger** after the agency's staff released **three alternatives** last week. All three would classify as Wild Forest a former logging road that leads from County Route 84 to the shore of Boreas Ponds. Motorized use is permitted in Wild Forest Areas. A Wild Forest classification would allow the state Department of Environmental Conservation to drive to the ponds to maintain a dam. In theory, however, DEC also could allow the public to drive all the way to the ponds. The fourth alternative, unveiled at Thursday's meeting, seeks to address that concern by classifying the last mile or so of the road as Primitive rather than Wild Forest.

The road in the Primitive classification could then be designated an Administrative Road, meaning state officials and contractors could drive on it to work on the dam. The public, however, would not be allowed to use motor vehicles in the Primitive Area.



*Boreas Ponds. Photo by Phil Brown*

After the meeting, advocacy groups remained disappointed with the range of proposals. Adirondack Wild and a new group, Adirondack Wilderness Advocates, both want the lion's share of the tract to be classified as motor-free Wilderness. They are calling on the state to close the entire road, which would require people to walk nearly seven miles to reach the ponds.

"We need more alternatives," said Dave Gibson, a partner in Adirondack Wild. "This 21,000-acre tract could be looked at as an extension of the High Peaks Wilderness Area."

Gibson contends the state could maintain the dam even if it were in a Wilderness Area. For instance, he said materials could be flown in by helicopter.

Pete Nelson, one of the founders of Adirondack Wilderness Advocates, argued that the state should let the dam deteriorate, obviating the need to keep the road open to the ponds. "Dams in wilderness don't need to be maintained," he said. "Just like at Marcy Dam and Duck Hole, nature will find its way." (Tropical Storm Irene damaged dams at both locations.)

Boreas Ponds had been three separate ponds connected by a stream, but when the Finch, Pruyn timber company built a dam, the ponds merged. The major lobes are still referred to as First Pond, Second Pond, and Third Pond.

The Adirondack Council and Adirondack Mountain Club back a plan that would allow the public to drive to LaBier Flow, an impoundment on the Boreas River. From there, people could hike a mile or so to Boreas Ponds. Under their plan, the land between LaBier Flow and the ponds would be classified Wilderness. Willie Janeway, the council's executive director, called Alternative 4 an improvement over the first three alternatives, but he said he was disappointed that none of the options reflects the council's proposal.

Chad Dawson, a recent appointee to the APA board, told his colleagues that he was troubled by the small range of alternatives and the lack of analysis. He said the Boreas Ponds Tract presents a rare opportunity to preserve wilderness for future generations. Though the land has been logged, he said, "it's not just what it is now; it's what it could be."

"There's no more wilderness unless we let it rewild, and these opportunities do not come along very often," said Dawson, a retired professor and a wilderness scholar.

"We seem to be only focused on the dam and the road and not the whole resource, and I find that troubling," Dawson added, "At one point, Dawson raised the idea of tabling the matter to give the staff more time to work on alternatives and analysis, but other board members expressed no interest in postponing the hearings. In the end, Dawson voted to send the matter to full board.

After the meeting, the Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages issued a news release in favor of a classification that will allow snowmobiles and mountain bikes on old logging roads around Boreas Ponds, electric motorboats on the water, and a small number of parking spots near the ponds. All of these

things would be permitted under APA's Alternative 1.

Under Alternatives 2 and 3, as under the new option, the ponds would be classified Wilderness, meaning no motorboats of any kind would be allowed. Also, the logging roads around the ponds would be off limits to bikes and all motorized use.

The towns of North Hudson and Newcomb have an easement that allows them to extract gravel from two pits on the Boreas Ponds Tract in order to maintain roads on the property. North Hudson Supervisor Ron Moore said the easements do not allow the towns to open the roads for public access. "Anything we do has to be permitted by DEC," he said. "We can't access that property without their permission."