

# Adirondack Wild Leaves BeWildNY Coalition Over Boreas Ponds Plan

**by Phil Brown**

Adirondack Almanack

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2016



*Boreas Ponds by Phil Brown.*

Adirondack Wild has left the BeWildNY coalition, saying it disagrees with the coalition's proposal to allow the public to drive to within a mile or so of Boreas Ponds.

**Adirondack Wild** announced its decision as the Adirondack Park Agency prepares for public hearings on the classification of the 20,758-acre Boreas Ponds Tract, which the state bought from the Adirondack chapter of the Nature Conservancy in April.

The classification decision could influence how much motorized access is allowed on the tract.

Much of the debate over Boreas Ponds has focused on the future of **Gulf Brook Road**, a dirt road built for logging trucks when Finch, Pruyn & Company owned the land.



*Kayakers wheel their craft on the road that leads to Boreas Ponds. Photo by Phil Brown*

BeWildNY favors a plan that would allow the public to drive about six miles up the road, as far as LaBier Flow, an impoundment of the Boreas River. From there, hikers would need to walk a mile to reach Boreas Ponds. Canoeists and kayakers would have the option of paddling across the flow to reduce the portage.

Eight organizations still belong to BeWildNY: the Adirondack Council, Adirondack Mountain Club, Environmental Advocates of New York, Natural Resources Defense Council, Wilderness Society, New York League of Conservation Voters, Audubon New York, and Citizens Campaign for the Environment.

Protect the Adirondacks and the Nature Conservancy, though not part of the coalition, support plans that also would allow the public to drive to LaBier Flow. In reaction to the positions of these groups, three Forest Preserve advocates – including Bill Ingersoll, author of the *Discover the Adirondacks* guidebooks – formed a new group, Adirondack Wilderness Advocates, to lobby for closing the entire road to motor vehicles.

Though Adirondack Wild belonged to BeWildNY since its founding about a year ago, it never endorsed the idea of opening Gulf Brook Road as far as LaBier Flow.

In an email to *Adirondack Almanack*, Dave Gibson, a partner in Adirondack Wild, said his group favors classifying the entire Boreas tract as Wilderness, a designation that precludes the use of motors and mountain bikes. The tract

borders the High Peaks Wilderness Area.

Adirondack Wild notified BeWildNY of its decision in a letter on Tuesday. "The issues behind the classification at Boreas Ponds has [sic] been unfortunately limiting and framed by how far motorized and mechanized uses should reach for relative ease of recreational access to the Ponds instead of what we believe should be the primary consideration – the future wilderness restoration and integrity of this wild landscape and its ecological connectivity to the High Peaks and Dix Wilderness areas," the letter states.

The letter, written by Gibson and Dan Plumley, goes on to assert that opening Gulf Brook Road to LaBier Flow "seriously compromises the ecological functioning of this area."

Under an interim access plan, the state is allowing people to drive 3.2 miles up the road. From there, it's a 3.6-mile hike along dirt roads to the ponds. The APA plans to hold its first hearing next week on **four alternatives** for classifying the Boreas Ponds Tract. Under three of the proposals, the entire road would be classified Wild Forest, a designation that could allow the public to drive all the way to the ponds. Under the fourth proposal, the road between LaBier Flow and the ponds would be classified Primitive, meaning only officials could drive on this section and only for administrative purposes. Environmental organizations do not endorse any of the four proposals.

A Wild Forest classification does not necessarily mean the public would be allowed to drive the entire length of the road. Decisions about motorized access will be made later by the state Department of Environmental Conservation as it drafts a management plan (which the APA would have to approve). However, a Wild Forest designation gives DEC the option of allowing motor vehicles, snowmobiles, and mountain bikes on the property. Local towns favor a Wild Forest classification for the road and the land in the immediate vicinity of Boreas Ponds. This would allow motorized access, mountain biking, and possibly motorboats. North Hudson Supervisor Ron Moore, whose town includes Boreas Ponds, argues that a variety of recreational opportunities is necessary to maximize tourism.

Pete Nelson, one of the founders of Adirondack Wilderness Advocates, said he had no comment on Adirondack Wild's decision to leave BeWildNY, but he welcomed an ally in the fight to close Gulf Brook Road.

"Like all environmental organizations, they get to determine for themselves the best way forward to most effectively advocate for the Adirondack Park," Nelson said in an email to the *Almanack*. "But we stand shoulder to shoulder with them in demanding uncompromised Wilderness protection for the Boreas Tract. That means closing Gulf Brook Road."

Willie Janeway, executive director of the Adirondack Council, said he was

grateful for Adirondack Wild's participation in the BeWildNY coalition over the past year. "The Adirondack Council and Adirondack Wild agree that this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to protect the legacy of the Adirondacks and make sure that the Boreas Ponds are completely enclosed in and protected as part of an expanded High Peaks Wilderness Area," he told the *Almanack* in an email.

Janeway said the coalition believes its plan balances the protection of natural resources with reasonable access for public recreation.

The APA will hold the first hearing on the classification of Boreas Ponds and other newly acquired state lands at its office in Ray Brook at 7 p.m. next Wednesday. Eight other hearings will be held around the state. [Click here to find the dates and times.](#)

The agency may make a decision in early 2017. The governor would then have to approve it.