

# No glamping in Forest Preserve

By **David Gibson**, Adirondack Wild  
Adirondack Daily Enterprise

July 10, 2017

In reply to DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos' Guest Commentary, "*DEC wants to help more NYers experience the outdoors,*" the conceptual goals the commissioner expresses of "*combining exceptional outdoor recreation with authentic local culture*" and providing "*an economic boost to local communities*" are broadly shared. The "*Hamlets to Huts*" initiative the commissioner is heavily promoting is just the latest example of such goals.

"*Forever wild*" in our state constitution is the only reason we have an expansive Forest Preserve wilderness left in the Adirondacks and Catskills. Such wilderness by law so close to so many millions of us makes New York state unique, not just in the USA but in the world. The fact that our state wilderness offers tourism benefits for nearby human communities is hardly news. It's been true since the Forest Preserve was created by law in 1885. Rural towns and villages near Forest Preserve, many studies show, benefit economically more than similar rural communities far away from it.

It's the details about Hamlets to Huts that potentially land DEC and the governor in legal quicksand. Hamlets to Huts, we are told, are designed to accommodate 24 to 36 people per night in "*temporary lodging*" on the Forest Preserve in structures that have walls, floors, cooking stoves in kitchen areas, sleeping bunks and are "*dry, insect free, warm in winter, clean and staffed at all times.*" This constitutes impermissible glamorous cabin camping (or "*glamping*") on public "*forever wild*" land. The details spring from a plan contracted by the state in 2015 but never aired at public hearings to assure compliance with existing laws. The problem is that our state constitution and legal guidelines in the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan as well as other laws prohibit glamping on Forest Preserve.

Glamping introduces artificial conveniences and comforts in overnighting on the Forest Preserve at the expense of wild forest character and conditions, and the solitude and self-reliance that have for over a century been at the heart of the Forest Preserve experience and law. Article XIV must be amended to

authorize glamping. Second, the State Land Master Plan authorizes intensive use state campgrounds, but here campers are expected to bring their own weatherproof tents or campers, and provide their own ground protection, sleeping bags, insect protection and cooking gear. There is no allowance for glamping in the State Land Master Plan. It also would need to be amended to authorize it.

For 130 years, state agencies have proven quite good at providing for recreational tourism in the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve. Gov. Cuomo is just the latest governor to use their powers to promote it. But the governor and his commissioners should stay well away from glamping on Forest Preserve where the park's laws and unique wild character say it does not belong. Instead, the governor's economic team (not his DEC commissioner who bears legal responsibility for protecting the Forest Preserve) should promote glamorous camping where it can most benefit the region — with willing private landowners who may be eager to share in the *“\$28 million in economic activity and \$25 million in out-of-state expenditures”* that Commissioner Seggos touts.

—

David Gibson is the managing partner of Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, based in Niskayuna.