

# Boreas plan draws mixed reactions

Town leaders, most green groups praise compromise, but some decry lost opportunity

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*Dan Plumley of Adirondack Wild speaks in a panel discussion on the Boreas Ponds tract in February 2017 at Schroon Lake Central School. Beside him from left are Jason Kemper of the New York State Conservation Fund Advisory Board, Peter Bauer of Protect the Adirondacks and North Hudson town Supervisor Ron Moore. (Enterprise photo — Justin Levine)*

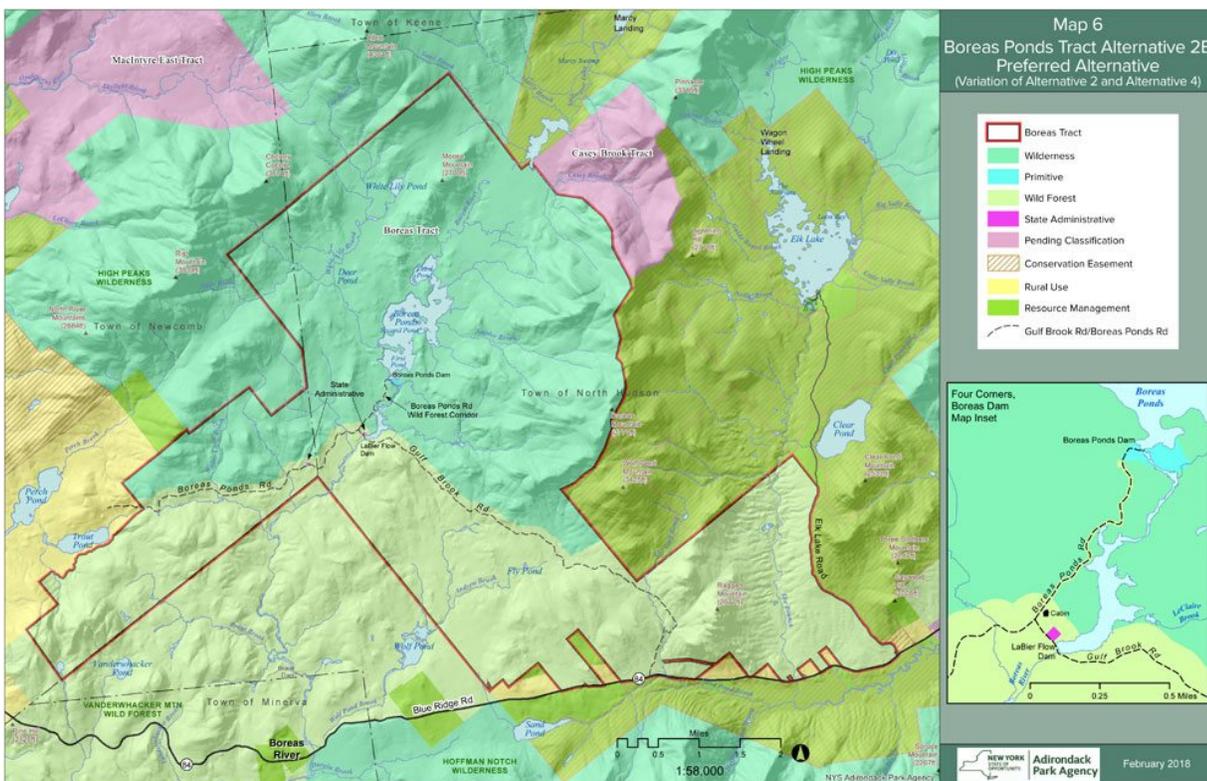
Reaction to the state Adirondack Park Agency's proposed plan for the 20,000-acre Boreas Ponds Tract was swift and largely united in praise, with a vocal factor expressing disdain.

Last week the APA released its proposed classification, which would add more than 11,000 acres to the High Peaks Wilderness while leaving more than 9,000

acres as mechanized-recreation-friendly wild forest. The classification of Boreas has been a hot topic since the state purchased the property from The Nature Conservancy in 2016.

The APA held a series of public meetings and received more than 11,000 comments on what to do with Boreas. The state Department of Environmental Conservation will have to develop a unit management plan for the property before the public will know recreation details, but the APA's classifications determine what uses are permitted on the lands.

The bulk of the land will be added to the adjacent High Peaks, which, along with two other parcels slated to be classified, would create a wilderness area of more than 250,000 acres. There are no motorized or mechanized forms of recreation or transport allowed in wilderness areas. Wild forest, on the other hand, allows for snowmobile or mountain bike trails to be built.



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Adirondack environmental groups such as The Nature Conservancy, the Adirondack Mountain Club, Protect the Adirondacks and the Adirondack Council all came out in favor of what they see as a compromise between wilderness protection and people's ability to access wild areas.

*"This thoughtfully proposed classification for the Boreas Ponds tract is consistent with the balanced approach that The Nature Conservancy has strived to achieve over last decade, as it has worked with New York State and local communities to conserve the former Finch, Pruyn lands in the Adirondacks,"* Stuart Gruskin, conservation and external affairs officer for The Nature Conservancy in New York, said in a press release.

The Nature Conservancy originally bought the Boreas Ponds Tract from the Finch-Pruyn timber company and then sold it to the state.

*"In an era where public wilderness is greatly threatened nationally, we applaud the proposed classification of the Boreas Pond as Wilderness and Wild forest,"* Adirondack Mountain Club Executive Director Neil Woodworth wrote in a release. *"The classification of substantial acreage as wild forest will expand opportunities for snowmobiling and mountain biking while enhancing access for roadside family camping, hunting and fishing. The 25,000 acres of new Wilderness will provide new places to explore for hikers, campers and kayakers in a breathtaking setting of the finest mountain scenery in the Adirondacks. We are truly grateful for Governor Cuomo's vision and leadership for this historic addition to the Adirondack Forest Preserve."*

In addition to most green groups, local governments were happy with the prospect of increased tourism in places like Newcomb and North Hudson, the two towns where the Boreas tract resides. North Hudson Supervisor Ron Moore called the APA staff proposal *"fair and equitable"* and said it meets the approval of the so-called *"Five Towns"*: Indian Lake, Long Lake, Minerva, Newcomb and North Hudson.

*"We hope that this will provide access to these lands for all, young and old, the physically fit and the disabled, and provide for a vast array of new recreational opportunities to bring visitors to our towns and sustain those businesses we have and to create new opportunities for business growth and the creation of new jobs,"* Moore wrote.

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While most of those above said the plan wasn't perfect, two other Adirondack groups lamented the loss of what they saw as an opportunity to add even more wilderness inside the Blue Line.

Adirondack Wilderness Advocates, which was founded to lobby for a wilderness designation for the entire 20,000-plus-acre property, and Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve claimed in a release that there is an ever-shrinking ability to protect wilderness areas.

*"A diversity of scientific studies and analyses, including the APA's own, suggest that an all Wilderness alternative is both a viable and very desirable option which should be vigorously debated on Feb. 1 and 2 in Ray Brook,"* Adirondack Wild's Dave Gibson said. "Some 84 percent of the statewide public commentary on the APA's Draft classification proposals and 2016 environmental impact statement called for Wilderness and not for a split of Wilderness and motorized Wild Forest.

*"We're deeply disappointed that Governor Cuomo has ignored thousands of citizen comments seeking a full Wilderness alternative which truly reflects the best ecological protection and connectivity between Boreas Ponds and the High Peaks Wilderness beyond."*

*"The State and environmental groups have been very clear about the significance of adding Boreas Ponds to the High Peaks Wilderness, and we agree wholeheartedly,"* AWA co-founder Pete Nelson said. "That makes it hard to understand why allowing motorized access into the heart of the tract, which is antithetical to the very idea of Wilderness, is an acceptable idea.

*"People like to talk about balance. AWA supports foot, ski, equestrian and disabled access to the Boreas Ponds, all of which we can do without compromising a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to expand Adirondack Wilderness with a magnificent tract that is free of motors."*

APA board members are slated to vote on the proposal this week, with their meeting starting at 9 a.m. Thursday and 9:30 a.m. Friday at agency headquarters in Ray Brook.