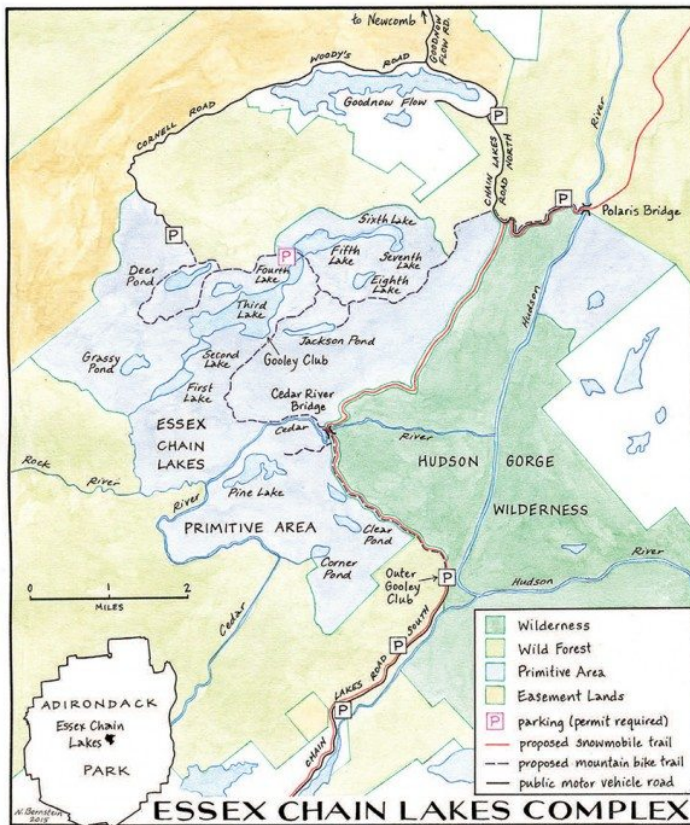


Court rejects challenges to snowmobile routes

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Essex Chain Lakes Complex. Map by Nancy Bernstein

A midlevel state court has rejected challenges by environmentalists to the Adirondack Park Agency's 2016 decision to allow a new snowmobile trail in the Essex Chain Lakes region.

Protect the Adirondacks and Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve sued in State Supreme Court in Albany contending that the management plan violates the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, the state Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers System Act, and state snowmobile-trail policy.

Named as defendants are the state Department of Environmental Conservation, which drafted the management plan, and the APA, which approved it.

The Appellate Division justices, upholding the lower court, ruled that part of the challenge was premature since other administrative approvals, including permits and variances, are needed before a new snowmobile bridge can be built over a segment of the Cedar River and before the public can drive motorized sleds across the Polaris Bridge on the upper Hudson River.

The environmental groups also argued that the snowmobile trail would duplicate an existing trail that extends from Indian Lake to Newcomb and Minerva, in violation of snowmobile-policy guidelines. The justices, however, said the the 2009 guidelines are not binding.

The majority upheld the APA's decision to use a one-mile segment of Chain Lakes Road as part of a proposed snowmobile connector trail, finding there was a rational basis for that decision.

However, two of the five justices disagreed, rejecting DEC's conclusion that allowing the public on a trail used by hunting club members' snowmobiles and vehicles wouldn't impermissibly expand its use.

The groups could appeal to the Court of Appeals, the state's highest tribunal.

The decision is online at:

<http://decisions.courts.state.ny.us/ad3/Decisions/2018/525165.pdf>