

APA sends High Peaks, Vanderwhacker plans to public comment

Shortened comment period, lack of public meetings draw criticism

JUSTIN A. LEVINE, Staff Writer
Adirondack Daily Enterprise

May 11, 2018

RAY BROOK — The state Adirondack Park Agency board voted Thursday to send two significant unit management plans to public comment, but a 45-day comment period and just two public meetings have drawn fire.

The APA and state Department of Environmental Conservation will hold a joint comment period, meaning the public can submit comments to both agencies until June 27, and there will be two public meetings on May 23, one in Albany and one in Newcomb.

But with the addition of tens of thousands of acres of land and the most significant updates in more than a decade, several environmental groups — and an APA board member — raised concerns about the shortness of the public comment period.

The APA had floated the idea of a 30-day comment period, but extended it to 45 days for the High Peaks Wilderness Area and Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest.

“The additional 15 days, while appreciated, still does not deal with a rushed, simultaneous public comment and review period for consequential decisions affecting management of these substantial, controversial new State Lands for many years to come,” David Gibson, of Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, wrote in an email. *“To show how complex this is, APA is supposed to review the appropriateness of, by my count, 16 new proposed motorized access parking areas for these new lands leading to the High Peaks Wilderness, and that’s just for starters.”*

“It’s also a very weak precedent for these key UMP amendments to only include two public hearings,” Dan Plumley, also of Adirondack Wild said. *“With the High Peaks being by orders of magnitude the most visited wilderness in the Adirondack*

Park, citizens and interest groups from New York City [and] Long Island to Syracuse and Niagara are being denied essential public hearing and understanding opportunities."

The two UMP amendments work in conjunction and include the hotly debated Boreas Ponds Tract, which was purchased by the state in 2016. The DEC used several new tracts of land to join the High Peaks and Dix Mountain wilderness areas into one large complex of over 260,000 acres.

Public meetings will be held on May 23 at DEC headquarters in Albany at 10 a.m., followed by a meeting at the Newcomb Central School at 6 p.m.

Written comments regarding Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan compliance of either of the Draft UMP Amendments may be mailed to Kathy Regan, Deputy Director for Planning, NYS Adirondack Park Agency P.O. Box 99, Ray Brook, NY 12977.

Comments regarding the management proposals in either of the Draft UMP Amendments and their compliance with the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan may be emailed to Info.r5@dec.ny.gov.

Both plans can be found on the APA website at www.apa.ny.gov/Mailing/2018/05/stateLand.htm.