

# Green groups sue over snowmobile bridge plan

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Two Adirondack environmental groups have sued the state Department of Environmental Conservation over a planned snowmobile bridge in the central Adirondacks.

Protect the Adirondacks and Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, sued the state in January over a 12-foot-wide snowmobile bridge over the Cedar River in the Essex Chain Lakes that would be part of a trail network that would connect Indian Lake and Newcomb.

The bridge would span the Cedar River, which is classified as "*scenic*" under the state's Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers System Act. With that designation, the river itself and a half-mile corridor on each bank are supposed to be "*free of diversions or impoundments except for log dams, with limited road access and with river areas largely primitive and largely undeveloped.*"

However, the DEC proposed the bridge in the unit management plan for the Essex Chain in March 2016. In the UMP, the department says the bridge will be used year-round for hiking, biking, horse riding, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. The DEC also cited the fact that a bridge had been in use at the same location until the late 1970s, when it collapsed due to ice damage. Historically, that bridge was on private property — the state bought the land in 2013 — but snowmobilers have continued to cross the river without a bridge present.

According to the UMP, the DEC will "Construct a new bridge over the Cedar River in the vicinity of a river crossing established in the early 1900s. The bridge will be built in conformance with the WSRRS Act and APSLMP (Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan), and be designed and installed in consultation with DEC, APA (Adirondack Park Agency), and any other applicable jurisdictional agencies.

*"No public motor vehicles, except for snowmobiles, will be allowed to cross the Cedar River Bridge."*

Late last year, the DEC issued itself a permit for the bridge, but Protect and Adirondack Wild filed a lawsuit against the bridge plan in mid-January.

*"DEC has previously stated in clear and unambiguous terms that motorized recreational uses and bridges for such uses are prohibited in Scenic river areas,"* the groups' lawsuit says. "Ignoring the prohibition against motorized recreational uses and construction for such uses in Scenic river areas ... DEC has unlawfully issued itself a permit purporting to allow an end run these statutory and regulatory restrictions, thereby subverting the purposes and policies of the Rivers Act.

*"DEC's unlawful issuance of the permit has caused and will cause irreparable harm to petitioners. Construction of the new trails and bridge will require the cutting of trees and operation of heavy machinery, including trucks, excavators and cranes in the protected river corridor and along the banks of the Cedar River."*

As proposed, the bridge would be 12 feet wide and well over 100 feet in length.

The lawsuit was filed in state Supreme Court in Warren County.