

Conservation groups ask for more rangers, mandatory boat washing and ATV ban on adk. state lands

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Photo courtesy of the Governor's Office.

Four major conservation groups vested in the Adirondack Park want Gov. Andrew Cuomo and lawmakers to prioritize the park in the state budget for next fiscal year.

In an open letter to the governor and lawmakers, they are asking to expand the state's Environmental Protection Fund, increase the staff at the New York State Department of Conservation and provide more state funding to improve water and sewage systems in the park, among other things.

The letter was sent to state officials by the Adirondack Council, Adirondack Mountain Club, Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, and Protect the Adirondacks.

"The Adirondack Park is a national treasure and the birthplace of the wilderness movement in the United States," the groups wrote in the letter. "It is, also, the largest intact temperate deciduous forest in the world, making it a

primary source of our state's clean water, a refuge for wildlife and biodiversity, and a sponge for greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide."

The letter recommends the following for the budget:

- Increase the Environmental Protection Fund over the next few years to bring it to \$500 million, and increase the land acquisition account to \$40 million this year.
- Require free state boat inspections prior to launch, to prevent the spread of invasive species from one water body to another.
- Amend and update the Adirondack Park Agency Act to make Conservation Subdivision Design of development mandatory for the largest subdivision applications. The groups say speculative, large-scale subdivisions are a threat to the contiguity of state forests and the wildlife habitat they provide.
- Pass a general ban on recreational use of all-terrain vehicles on state lands, improve enforcement and offer safe legal riding on non-state lands. According to the letter, " For three decades, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Forest Rangers have confirmed that illegal ATV use has been the 'most problematic activity' on state lands." The organizations state that these vehicles cause a great deal of damage to natural resources, therefore generating a high risk to public health and safety.
- Hire new forest rangers and other DEC personnel to keep up a 24-percent influx of visitors over the past decade. This would involve hiring at least 20 new full-time D.E.C forest rangers, as well as more assistant forest rangers and backcountry stewards.
- Appointing new members on the Adirondack Park Agency's decision-making board who "have strong planning, legal and scientific expertise." The board consists of 11 people and the letter recommends seven appointments by June 2019 to fill two vacancies and five expired terms.

The Director of Protect the Adirondack, Peter Bauer, stated "The High Peaks Wilderness is seeing historic high levels of public use, with mountains seeing 40,000 hikers a year, yet many trails are in terrible condition. Trails are heavily eroded and poorly maintained. The High Peaks Wilderness, the most popular area in the Forest Preserve, needs a major public investment. The status quo is not working."