

Groups Reaffirm Opposition To Forest Ranger Merger

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Adirondack Almanack

JANUARY 20, 2020



Photo of Forest Rangers lead search and rescue courtesy DEC.

In a December 2019 letter to NYS Department of Environmental Conservation ([DEC](#)) Commissioner Basil Seggos, six non-governmental organizations from the Adirondacks and Catskills announced their firm opposition to any future merger of the DEC Forest Rangers with the DEC Environmental Conservation Officers.

"Each time the issue has arisen, a diverse coalition has made the case why such a move would trigger a firestorm of protest and prove a disaster for the State's public lands and the outdoor recreating public," the letter states. "We continue to feel this way – and felt it was timely to write to you as we have to prior commissioners." Signing the letter (See [Letter to Basil Seggos](#)) were the Adirondack Council, Adirondack Mountain Club, Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, Catskill Center, Catskill Mountainkeeper and Protect the Adirondacks!

The letter was prompted, in part, by Governor Cuomo's December order, explained in the name of efficiency, to merge the smaller State Park Police into the much larger NYS Police. The groups wanted their views to be known in case the Cuomo Administration also planned, now or in the future, to merge

the smaller NYS DEC Forest Ranger division with the larger Environmental Conservation Officer division. Such a merger was discussed in the first year of the Cuomo administration in 2011, prompting a similar letter of concern then.

The letter states that DEC Forest Ranger tasks and training are crucial to the public's protection on Forest Preserve and other public lands and that, in addition, "Forest Rangers play an essential role as educators about State Land to a public that is highly technology oriented and often lacking in awareness of their safety, hygiene and broader impacts on trails, lakes, streams, rivers and mountain summits."

"Forest Rangers are known for their local knowledge, competence and ability to rapidly assemble teams to perform search and rescue, fire control and emergency incident response. The hiking, camping and paddling public has come to rely on Forest Rangers as being approachable, communicative, informative, educational and prepared in an emergency," the letter continues.

"We deeply respect the critical, complementary role that ECOs perform...However, we point out that their ECO training, recruitment, supervision and knowledge are not suited to the challenges you and the Governor face every month on our public lands and waters...We are, therefore, united in our support for the Division of Forest Rangers and in firm opposition to any plans, whether now or in the future, to merge divisions with the DEC Office of Public Protection (OPP)."

The organizations are also supporting an increase in the number of DEC Forest Rangers in the 2020 state budget in order to safeguard users of public lands and protect the lands and natural resources. There are just 134 Forest Rangers and supervisors for all of New York's public lands and waters, including the 3 million acres of Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve, a million acres of State Forests and other public lands, and nearly one million acres of land under state conservation easement. This is approximately the same number of Forest Rangers that patrolled a smaller public land acreage in 1970.