



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**ADIRONDACK WILD CALLS FOR NEW ADVISORY
COMMITTEE TO ADDRESS HIGH PEAKS WILDERNESS
CHALLENGES**

Keene, NY - Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve is calling on the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to re-establish Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) to address overuse and resulting damage to wilderness resources in the High Peaks Wilderness, the largest, most visited wilderness in the Adirondack Park.

The current Unit Management Plan (UMP) for the 194,000-acre High Peaks area was adopted in 1999 and is supposed to be reviewed every five years. The 1999 UMP was informed by a committee that included over 30 stakeholders. That committee last met in 1992. Adirondack Wild sees great benefits in re-establishing the group.

“The explosive growth we are experiencing now in day use and resultant negative impacts on the High Peaks resource and wilderness experience calls for a thoughtful discussion and reassessment of High Peaks management policies and actions by a variety of stakeholders,” stated Dan Plumley, a resident of Keene and a staff partner with Adirondack Wild. “The harm being done to the wilderness resource is significant and the DEC and APA have a number of private partners who can help them focus on today’s and long-term critical problem areas. A focused CAC process could be very helpful in moving forward a discussion to restore wilderness integrity, conditions and characteristics to the High Peaks which are of such statewide, regional and global importance.”

In a letter to DEC this week (attached), Adirondack Wild contends that a myriad of wilderness overuse and crowding issues require reassessment of some management recommendations and actions in the eastern High Peaks. For example, the 1999 UMP established a regulation for a self-issuing travel permit or trip ticket whenever a hiker registered at a trailhead in the eastern zone. The goal was to increase trailhead registration, gather data to assess effects of increase use on natural resources and increase visitor awareness to protect the wilderness. However, that program was ended after just a few years and has not been replaced. Today, visitor use at the popular Van Hoevenberg trailhead has increased some 20% since the UMP was adopted, partly due to the rise in use of social media.

High Peaks perimeter parking, day use, staffing, search and rescue, human crowding, waste, educational information such as leave-no-trace as well as more direct user controls all deserve informed discussion by a committed, collaborative group of citizen advisors and partners of DEC and APA.

“DEC should re-establish the CAC so it can help the department not only to address current issues and problems, but help DEC get out ahead of them,” stated Adirondack Wild’s David Gibson. “The 1999 Wilderness UMP remains a remarkable document, but it’s clearly time to re-examine it as human pressures and damage continue to increase. The state’s most loved Wilderness needs us all to come to its aid and protection and to the aid of the hard working natural resource stewardship and Ranger staff of the DEC. We need to figure this all out together, as we did in the early 1990s.”

“In addition to addressing user impacts, there may be new opportunities and challenges of integrating the existing High Peaks with new and adjacent wild lands at McIntyre East and West and at the Boreas Ponds Tract,” stated Dan Plumley. “Strengthening resource protection in the High Peaks will better assure that adjacent sensitive areas like the Boreas Ponds are also well protected because that tract will start to see increasing use.”

Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve is a not for profit, membership organization which advances New York’s “Forever Wild” legacy and Forest Preserve policies in the Adirondack and Catskill Parks, and promotes public and private land stewardship consistent with wild land values through education, advocacy and research.