



Adirondack Wild Calls for a Permit System to Address Overuse in the High Peaks Wilderness and to Avoid Damaging the vulnerable Boreas Ponds.

Management amendments fail to comply with the State Land Master Plan and State Environmental Quality Review Act.

For Immediate Release

Thursday, June 28 2018

Contact:

Dave Gibson, (518) 469-4081, dgibson@adirondackwild.org

Dan Plumley, (518) 524-7771, dplumley@adirondackwild.org

Keene, NY -- Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve is calling on the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and NYS Adirondack Park Agency (APA) to institute wilderness permit systems for the Eastern High Peaks and the new Boreas Ponds gateway to the Wilderness in order to reduce and prevent human recreational overuse of a highly vulnerable and limited Wilderness resource.

In a [Comment Letter](#) about the DEC's proposed amendments to unit management plans (UMP) for the High Peaks Wilderness and adjoining Vanderwhacker Wild Forest, the group noted that the 1999 High Peaks Wilderness UMP, approved by the APA, called on the DEC to work with stakeholders and "develop the structure and implementation process" for a permit system. That management directive was never carried out.

Adirondack Wild also notes that the DEC and APA have been recommending use of permits to slow or avoid destruction of the area's wilderness resources and character for over forty years.

A Wilderness permit system similar to ones used in places within the National Wilderness Preservation System would institute controls on the number of hikers

per day and/or overnight in specific, heavily impacted areas. To do otherwise, says Adirondack Wild, would violate the State Land Master Plan's requirements that Wilderness have "outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation," and that Wilderness be managed to "preserve, enhance and restore...natural conditions."

DEC is familiar with permit systems, notes the group, as the agency has just instituted a permit system to better control public use at a popular but heavily impacted part of the Catskill Forest Preserve known as the "blue hole" on Roundout Creek.

"There is little question that indirect measures and educational efforts, while helpful, have failed to stop the overwhelming impacts of crowding and overuse that we see everywhere in the eastern High Peaks," said Adirondack Wild's Dan Plumley, a resident of Keene. "Direct controls on hiker numbers have to be instituted through a wilderness permit system. "Moreover, the new wild lands in the Boreas Wilderness especially need to be protected from overuse due to their well-documented ecological sensitivity and vulnerability. The time to institute these controls is now, before there is irreparable damage to the current high degree of wildness at the Ponds and beyond them."

With respect to the Boreas Ponds, the group calls on DEC to close public motorized access at the current Fly Pond parking area and to limit further motorized access to persons with disabilities in order to avoid actual and potential adverse impacts from bringing trash, human waste, and spreading invasive aquatic and terrestrial species into the Boreas Ponds. The entirety of the Boreas Ponds is now classified Wilderness. DEC is proposing that even the able-bodied be allowed to park cars and trucks within 500 feet of the Ponds and that snowmobiles be permitted to ride right up to the Wilderness boundary.

"The bottom line here is that these amendments encourage a lot of new public motorized uses within a sensitive area and a gateway to Wilderness in direct contradiction of legal guidelines in the State Land Master Plan," said Adirondack Wild's David Gibson. "The potential adverse impacts of that new road access on sensitive natural resources and on human safety are not being properly analyzed in advance. Such studies are being promised only after the roads and many parking areas are built. That is not using the precautionary principle. DEC's legal responsibilities for care of the Forest Preserve demands that these studies be conducted in advance of significant recreational facilities development within a presently wild and remote area."

"Permitting snowmobiles all the way to Boreas Ponds would destroy the winter solitude there and would be within ear shot of the State's highest peaks. That is also wholly inconsistent with protecting wilderness values," Gibson added.

For all of these reasons, Adirondack Wild is asking the APA to find that the amendments do not comply with the State Land Master Plan and the State Environmental Quality Review Act. APA should take several additional months to work with the DEC to bring the management recommendations up to approvable standards, the group writes.

Permit systems are effectively used to protect many national wilderness areas. With their use there is the added benefit of increasing the chance to actually experience wilderness conditions through avoidance of overcrowding. Permit systems also provide invaluable information about visitors, their preferences, and provide opportunities to educate users to be better stewards through techniques such as Leave-No-Trace (LNT).

“We believe that the escalating use numbers regionally demand that a wilderness permit system be put in place if we are to protect the High Peaks and the Boreas Ponds for future generations,” stated Chris Amato, board vice president of Adirondack Wild.

Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve is a not-for-profit, membership organization which acts on behalf of wilderness and wild land values and stewardship throughout the region. More on the web: www.adirondackwild.org.

-END-