



For Immediate Release

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High Peaks Recommendations Should Connect to Wilderness Management Plan

Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve recognizes the initial efforts of the High Peaks Strategic Planning Advisory Group which issued an interim report this week. “An advisory body of diverse stakeholders, all volunteers, has been meeting distantly during the pandemic but nonetheless has reached consensus on recommendations to address some key existing pressure points in the High Peaks Wilderness region. During these tough times, that is an impressive accomplishment,” said Adirondack Wild’s David Gibson.

However, Adirondack Wild is concerned that the group’s recommendations be better connected with the 335-page, approved 1999 DEC High Peaks Wilderness Complex Unit Management Plan, or UMP. “Almost every one of the advisory group’s interim recommendations, including expanded use of Leave No Trace, Human Waste, Education and Messaging, Trail Inventory and Assessment, Data Collection and Visitor Information, and Limits on Use can be traced back to policies and actions in the adopted Wilderness UMP. Yet the interim report makes no mention of the UMP and that’s a worry,” Gibson added.

Adirondack Wild believes that ignoring the High Peaks Unit Management Plan invites management and user conflicts. “The UMP, which took years of stakeholder efforts and was adopted by the Adirondack Park Agency and DEC, is the coordinating document that ties otherwise disparate management activities together to benefit an enduring Wilderness resource. We know the UMP may need to be updated to meet current challenges. The Advisory Group ought to be devoting part of its time to recommend specific parts of the UMP that require updating,” he continued.

To quote from the DEC’s High Peaks UMP, “without a UMP, wilderness area management can easily become as series of uncoordinated reactions to immediate

problems. When this happens, unplanned management actions often cause a shift in focus that is inconsistent and often in conflict with wilderness preservation goals and objectives. A prime objective of wilderness planning is to use environmental and social science to replace nostalgia and politics. Comprehensive planning allows for the exchange of ideas and information before actions, that can have long-term effects, are taken.”

“One concern we have is that the task force has recommended that the Limits On Use pilot study be conducted on private land adjacent to the High Peaks when, in fact, it is the overused eastern High Peaks Wilderness – public land – that is in need of a well-designed pilot program limiting use. The 1999 UMP called for a working group to develop a camping permit system, with any decision to implement based upon public input and UMP amendment. That was never done. A pilot program on private land over the next three years further deflects time and attention away from a critical High Peaks management tool that ought to be tested on public land.”

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. More on the web at www.adirondackwild.org.

High Peaks Wilderness Complex Unit Management Plan

Wilderness Management
for the High Peaks
of the Adirondack Park

March 1999

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
George E. Pataki, *Governor*

John P. Cahill, *Commissioner*