Meeting Will Target Expanding Recreation In Adirondack's Great South Woods

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The public has a chance to weigh in tonight at a hearing on ways to improve outdoor recreation opportunities on both private and public lands in the Southern Adirondacks.

Tonight in Speculator, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and The SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in partnership with local governments and the Adirondack Park Agency will take public input on how to improve hiking, biking, and other recreational opportunities in the Great South Woods, a more than two million acre region in the Southern Adirondacks.

Karyn Richards, forest preserver coordinator for DEC, said the regional planning effort hopes to encourage connectedness between public and private lands, as well as communities and the people who live in them.

“In some instances it’s not easy to come here and go out in the woods for two weeks and bike a ways, and paddle a ways, and hike a ways, because our system isn’t necessarily connected. So in recognition of that we thought that if we looked at things on a regional level we could focus more on the connections between units and public lands, and communities which would create a greater
destination for people who travel to this region.”

Bill Farber is chair of the Hamilton County Board of Supervisors. He helped develop the Great South Woods partnership, and says this regional initiative is refreshing to the communities within the Adirondack Park, particularly those dependent on the tourism economy.

“This is really a breath of fresh air in that it gives us the ability to start talking about planning for recreation on a larger landscape, a larger regional scale, and figure out how to tie those recreational opportunities back to our communities in the hope of making sure that not only area we protecting the forest reserve, but we’re sustaining these small Adirondack communities.”

In the Great South Woods region, encompasses portions of Saratoga, Warren, Essex, Fulton, Herkimer, Oneida, and Hamilton counties, nearly two of every three acres is state land. The public’s input will be used to generate a digital map of existing and potential land and water trails, lodging, and other facilities that could support tourism.

Tonight’s kickoff meeting will be followed up by brainstorming workshops in individual communities, from January through March, to determine how to improve access in developed as well as backcountry areas.

One of the stakeholders looking forward to the meeting is Dave Gibson of the group Adirondack Wild, which has a mission to protect the state’s forest preserve resources.

“Understanding what the forest preserve is and its assets and taking advantage of the wilderness that’s there without in any way compromising it is a good thing. We’re supportive of that but we’re interested in the details.”

The Great South Woods initiative meeting begins at 5:30 at the Lake Pleasant Central School in Speculator.

This fall, the Adirondack Park Association held a series of public meetings on updating the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan. This week Adirondack Wild released its own report and policy recommendations for protecting the state’s forest preserve land.

“The paramount mission under the master plan is the protection of natural resources on the forest preserve, so we wanted to say to the APA ‘Okay, you opened these listening sessions, it’s great, it’s constructive, it’s a way to listen to a range of stakeholders.’ But we want to be in a position to strengthen the master plan, and we want to have specific recommendations.”

Adirondack Wild’s report can be found at http://www.adirondackwild.org/