

Two public hearings scheduled on controversial Essex Chain Lakes management plan

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North Country Public Radio



From the Deer Pond shoreline in the Essex Chain Lakes tract. Photo: [Roy Saplin](#), Creative Commons, some rights reserved

Jul 07, 2015 — New York's Department of Environmental Conservation will hold the first of two public meetings tonight on its plan for a large swath of new state land in the central Adirondacks. The proposed Essex Chain Lakes Management Complex includes a new community-connector snowmobile trail, paddling access, and bicycle and horse trails. State officials said the plan will bolster tourism in nearby towns, but some environmental groups and at least one Adirondack Park Agency official have raised a list of concerns with the DEC proposal.

Rob Davies is the director of the DEC Division of Lands and Forests. He outlined the department's plan at last month's APA meeting. "This is the largest or part of the largest addition to the Adirondack Forest Preserve in over 100 years, and this is the culmination of over nine years of work," Davies said.

The DEC plan includes a community connector trail for snowmobiling and other uses from Indian Lake to Minerva, a new bridge over the Cedar River, and additional primitive tent sites along the upper Hudson River. There are bicycle and horse trail networks, and proposed access for people with disabilities.

However, some of what DEC has proposed is based on "legal fictions," according to APA commissioner Richard Booth. "I don't think DEC has adequately thought out a number of significant issues and this is not ready for the public, but they're going to go ahead and get public comment, which they have an absolute right to do," he said. Booth said he didn't feel DEC had done a full analysis of alternative snowmobile trails for the Indian Lake-Minerva connector and he questioned the DEC plan to run the connector over the Polaris Bridge across the Hudson River. "You're going to hear a lot of controversy about a number of these topics," Booth said.

Some of the same issues were raised by Adirondack environmental groups.

Protect the Adirondacks called for removal of the Polaris Bridge and said it violates the Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act, DEC regulations, and the State Land Master Plan.

In an online commentary, David Gibson of Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, said recreational considerations like snowmobile connectors and bike routes are supposed to be secondary to protection of the natural resources of the Forest Preserve.

Adirondack Park Agency Chairwoman Lani Ulrich said she was aware some DEC plans would take a "Herculean effort by all legal minds," and that work will continue. "I think everybody at this table believes there are ways forward to accomplish certain things," she said. "We just may disagree on those ways."

The public comment period on the Essex Chain plan runs through July 27. A public hearing on the Essex Chain Lakes Management Complex is scheduled for Tuesday at 7 pm in the auditorium of Newcomb Central School. Another session is set for 7 pm Thursday at the Indian Lake Theater.