

Groups protest plan for oil car dump

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TAHAWUS — Environmental groups want Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo to intervene and stop railroads from using Adirondack rails to store old oil cars. Iowa Pacific Holdings wants to store 300 derelict oil-tanker cars on tracks between Saratoga Springs and Newcomb.

"The tankers could cause environmental damage to three scenic rivers and the 'forever wild' Adirondack Forest Preserve," the Adirondack Council charged in a news release.

"We and other Adirondack advocates are deeply concerned about this plan to use New York's greatest natural wonder as a scrap yard for the oil and rail industries," Director William C. Janeway said.

The railroad tracks follow along the Upper Hudson, Boreas and Opalescent rivers, which are all protected under the state's Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers System, the Adirondack Council noted. The tracks also traverse Adirondack Park state land to the private railroad lines proposed for storage.

"The Adirondack Park is a national treasure because it is wild, beautiful and unspoiled. This should be the last place anyone should consider parking and emptying obsolete oil tankers," Janeway said.

The green group's outcry came after a railroad official told the Warren County Board of Supervisors that it plans to stow the tankers first and then inspect them. At that point, Iowa Pacific would drain the cars and decide what to do with the unused crude oil.

"The plan to store these cars in the Adirondack Park was troubling enough," Janeway said. "Waiting until they are here to inspect and attempt to clean them out is even worse and should be the subject of a state environmental review."

The Adirondack Council said "no one ever mentioned oil-tanker storage and oil salvage facility as a use for the Saratoga and North Creek Railway" when the rail company received government permission to reopen in 2012.

Environmentalists at Adirondack Wild expressed similar outrage and disputed Iowa Pacific's claim that its plan is not subject to state environmental quality review or approval. David Gibson, a co-founder of Adirondack Wild, said the

company's proposed storage for discarded oil cars requires permits from the state Department of Environmental Conservation and the Adirondack Park Agency.

"The discarded oil tank cars that would be stored are DOT-111 rail cars, which have been involved in numerous derailments resulting in fires, explosions and spills," Gibson said in a letter to Gov. Cuomo.

DOT-111 cars are being phased out for safety reasons.

"Iowa Pacific has conceded that the discarded tank cars will contain an unspecified amount of oil," Gibson said, indicating that the junkyard proposal lacks important details.

"As far as we have been able to determine, the only information regarding the proposal was provided in a July 28, 2015, presentation by Ed Ellis, president of Iowa Pacific, to the Warren County Public Works Committee.

"In that presentation, Mr. Ellis stated that Iowa Pacific plans to move DOT-111 oil tank cars along the Sanford Lake section ... for storage at Tahawus; that it plans to store 300 to 500 DOT-111 cars along the Tahawus rail spur; and that the cars will be stored on the tracks for at least one year.

"Mr. Ellis acknowledged that the oil tank cars would contain 'a few gallons' of oil and other petroleum product residue but was unable to specify how much product would remain in the cars," Gibson said.

Press-Republican calls to Ellis and Iowa Pacific Operations Manager Mike McConville were not answered.

But environmental groups call the scheme "hazardous and ill-advised."

"Iowa Pacific's proposal to turn the Tahawus Tract and High Peaks area of the Park into an oil train junkyard shows a shocking lack of sensitivity to the ecological, scenic and tourism values of this unique region," Adirondack Wild's acting chairman, Christopher Amato, said in a prepared statement.

"We urge the governor to take action and to work with federal officials to eliminate this hazard," Janeway said.

The tracks to Tahawus were built beginning in the 1800s and designed to move iron ore and foundry products from the MacIntyre Works near Henderson Lake.

But during World War II, the site was used by National Lead Co. to mine titanium for war ships. It was abandoned in 1989 before reopening as a scenic railroad.

"We have no objection to its use as a scenic railroad for tourism development, or the removal of rock from an old iron mine in Tahawus, which were the

activities the company said it wanted to pursue in 2012," Janeway said.

But the storage of used railroad cars is already becoming a problem at the edge of the Adirondack Park.

"Old passenger rail cars that are currently stored on side tracks near the Hudson River and North Creek have been repeatedly vandalized and are becoming an eyesore.

"This summer, a teenager released the brakes on a locomotive in a secured rail yard, which crashed into Union Station in Utica, causing millions of dollars in damage," the council said.

There is no fencing around the tracks where the used oil tankers would be stored, Janeway said, "making them vulnerable to vandalism, tampering and theft.

"New York is spending tens of millions of dollars acquiring and opening new public lands and waterways in this area of the Adirondack Park right now," Janeway said.

"We would hate to see this pull the rug from beneath that effort."