

# Iowa Pacific: No Plans Now To Store Oil Cars

**by Phil Brown**

Adirondack Almanack

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*Photo by Peter Bauer: Abandoned railcars on the Tahawus line.*

Iowa Pacific is nearing an agreement to move waste rock from an old mine in Tahawus and has no immediate plans to store empty oil railcars on its tracks, according to Ed Ellis, the railroad's president.

Ellis touched off a controversy in late July when he told a committee of Warren County supervisors that Iowa Pacific was exploring the possibility of storing hundreds of oil tankers on its tracks, which run twenty-nine miles from North Creek to Tahawus.

At the time, Ellis said revenue from the storage would help keep afloat Iowa Pacific's tourist train, the Saratoga & North Creek Railway, which operates on leased tracks south of North Creek.

In an email to journalists this week, Ellis said the railroad now hopes to move rock from the mine—something it hoped to do when it purchased the tracks in 2011. Such an operation presumably would prevent the storage of oil tankers. "As you probably know our intent has always been to move aggregate [stone] from the Tahawus mine to New York City, and I'm happy to say that Saratoga and North Creek Railway is now close to an agreement with all parties to do

that," Ellis wrote.

The announcement pleased environmentalists who complained that Iowa Pacific would in effect turn the rail corridor into a junkyard. About half of the

"The Adirondack Park should not be a waste dump for any outside garbage," said Peter Bauer, executive director of Protect the Adirondacks. "This proposal ran contrary to everything the Adirondack Park is all about. Hopefully we're done with this bad idea."

The state Department of Environmental Conservation had said little about the plan other than to assert that it was concerned. In light of Ellis's announcement, however, DEC spokeswoman Lori Severino issued the following statement: "We are happy to hear that the Saratoga and North Creek Railway is working to address the state and local communities' concerns and is close to a deal to prevent oil-tank-car storage in the Adirondacks as we have been urging the railway to do. We look forward to reviewing the railway's amended proposal."

Adirondack Wild and the Adirondack Council both issued statements Thursday praising the state for facilitating the deal.

"The state made it clear that this [oil-car] proposal was not consistent with the governor's pro-wilderness, pro-community vision for the Adirondacks," Willie Janeway, the council's executive director, told *Adirondack Almanack*.

The details of the deal and the state's role remain unclear. Severino declined to comment beyond the department's formal statement except to say the state has had "multiple discussions" with the railroad.

Ellis told the *Glens Falls Post-Star* this week that he had received no offers to store oil cars. "While we were considered, we never got a proposal," Ellis told the paper. "We would rather move the rock anyway."

In his email to journalists, Ellis said Iowa-Pacific is in talks to temporarily store covered hopper cars on the tracks. "It keeps coming up, so let me be clear that this time, there are no plans to store any oil tank cars along the line," he wrote.

It is unclear whether Iowa Pacific would store oil cars on the line in the future if the opportunity arose.

In his presentation to the Warren County supervisors, Ellis asserted that the tanker cars would contain only a few gallons of oil and would pose "virtually no risk" to the environment. The oil cars, known as DOT-111s, are vulnerable to puncturing and explosions when full. Owners are taking them out of service

until they are either modified to meet more stringent safety regulations or sold for scrap.

Iowa Pacific leases the tracks from Saratoga Springs to North Creek from Warren County and the town of Corinth. It owns an easement and the tracks on the corridor running north from North Creek to Tahawus on the edge of the High Peaks Wilderness.