

Adirondack Explorer Outtakes  
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BLOG ENTRY

## About-face on Lows Lake

In a victory for local government, the Adirondack Park Agency voted 7-4 Friday to renege on an earlier decision to give a land-use classification to the waters and bed of Lows Lake.

The APA board did the about-face while redoing a vote taken in September. At the earlier meeting, the commissioners voted 6-4 to classify the waters, bed, and surrounding lands of the lake either Wilderness or Primitive. Because of a legal snafu, that vote was later deemed invalid, and so the board took up the matter again at this week's meeting.

In the original decision, the board agreed to classify about 9,620 acres of land Wilderness and another 290 acres Primitive. In addition, Lows Lake itself would have been split into two zones: 1,960 acres Wilderness and 640 acres Primitive. The 200 acres of neighboring Bog Lake also would have been classified as Wilderness.

Fred Monroe of the Local Government Review Board, a nonvoting member of the APA board, strongly objected to classifying the bed and waters of the lake, saying it would set a bad precedent. Although Lows Lake is mostly surrounded by state land, there are private lands on the lake. Monroe feared the decision would extend APA jurisdiction to other lakes with private land.

At Friday's meeting, APA Commissioner Bill Thomas, a former Johnsbury supervisor, proposed amending the resolution to leave the lake unclassified. Betsy Lowe, who represents the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), was among those who supported the amendment. So did the designees from the departments of state and economic development, the other two state agencies with seats on the board. Without their three votes, the amendment would not have passed.

Afterward, Dan Plumley of Protect the Adirondacks denounced the vote. "The retreat by the three state agencies—especially the Department of Environmental Conservation—is shameful," he said.

He and Neil Woodworth, executive director of the Adirondack Mountain Club, contend that since the lakebed is part of the Forest Preserve, the APA is obligated by law to classify it. "It's certainly a possibility that we will challenge the decision in the courts," Woodworth said.

But Brian Houseal of the Adirondack Council, another environmental group, said he supported the decision to leave Lows Lake unclassified. He argues that dividing a lake into two zones goes against common sense. "How would you know when you cross from Wilderness surface waters to Primitive surface waters?" he asked.

Houseal thinks the APA needs to develop a separate classification scheme for waters, analogous to the one it uses for Forest Preserve lands.

Both the Wilderness and Primitive classifications would prohibit the use of floatplanes and motorboats. The less-strict Primitive classification allows for manmade facilities such as the Lows Lake dams and roads.

DEC has already banned the public use of motorboats on Lows Lake and is phasing out the use of floatplanes. Thus, Monroe argued that it was unnecessary to classify the lake.

Woodworth, however, worries that the decision will set a precedent that enables the state to avoid classifying other lakes in the future. He said he would have been satisfied if all of Lows Lake had been classified Primitive.

Besides the state designees, the commissioners who voted for the Thomas amendment were Frank Mezzano, Art Lussi, Lani Ulrich, and of course Thomas himself (all four are residents of the Park). The commissioners opposing the amendment were APA Chairman Curt Stiles, Dick Booth, James Townsend, and Cecil Wray. All but Stiles live outside the Park.