

Adirondack Council sues state over snowmobile trail development plan

The Adirondack Park's largest environmental organization filed a lawsuit Monday against three state agencies over a snowmobile trail plan that the organization says will damage the "forever wild" character of the Adirondack Forest Preserve and will endanger riders.

The Adirondack Council's lawsuit alleges that the agencies did not follow the proper procedures last November for changing the management plan for snowmobile trails on public lands. It accuses the agencies of approving a management plan that violates existing state laws and rules. The lawsuit seeks to halt the plan's implementation until these issues are resolved.

The Article 78 petition was filed in State Supreme Court in Albany, against the state's Adirondack Park Agency (APA), Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

"This new, state snowmobile trail management plan will allow the widening of foot trails by up to 50 percent to accommodate snowmobiles. It authorizes the illegal use of tracked grooming vehicles. It allows the construction of new trails almost anywhere on public Wild Forest lands," said Brian

L. Houseal, Executive Director of the Adirondack Council. "None of these changes can be made without amending the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, which these agencies didn't bother to do.

"Since 2002, the Adirondack Council has participated in good faith in a planning process that would create community-connector snowmobile trails, which we agree are important to the winter economy of our local communities," Houseal said. "That process called for the removal of existing snowmobile trails from the interior of Wild Forests and placement of wider, safer community connector routes on the periphery of public lands, adjacent to roads," said Houseal.

"The whole idea was to move the hamlet-to-hamlet traffic away from remote interior trails so the people using them would be safer," Houseal said. "Trails that take people miles into the woods and across lakes are inherently unsafe. Getting emergency vehicles to the injured after an accident would be much easier if trails were nearer to public highways too."

Houseal said the new state plan was an illicit attempt by snowmobile enthusiasts to keep existing trails deep inside the Forest

Preserve rather than moving them closer to the edge of public lands, where they will cause fewer environmental impacts.

"We have presented the court with a map showing the impact of the plan, which would allow the construction of snowmobile trails virtually anywhere on Wild Forest lands, up to 12 feet wide on curves," Houseal said.

"Current law requires that trails be no wider than eight feet and requires that they retain the character of a foot trail. It requires new trails, especially those connecting communities, to be adjacent to current roads and at the edges, or periphery, of large areas of Forest Preserve.

"The plan actually says that new trails should be on the periphery of the Forest Preserve. But then the plan defines 'periphery' as up to two miles away from a roadway or the boundary of the Forest Preserve," Houseal explained. "That definition is so broad as to make it meaningless. Nearly all Wild Forest is within two miles of a road. This clearly contradicts the common use of the word 'periphery' in every English dictionary in the world.

"Our petition will prove that the snowmobile trail plan approved by the Adirondack

Park Agency on November 13, at the request of the DEC, violates the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan."

WIC clinic Tuesday

Local residents are reminded that the North Country Children's Clinic WIC program will hold a WIC Clinic at Ivy Terrace on Boyer Ave. from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday, January 19.

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Frosty deer

This frosty-faced deer was braving the 13-degree below zero temperatures in the early morning hours of Sunday to browse for breakfast at the woodland near the Raquette River. The meteorologists are calling for a "warming" trend toward the end of this week and we should see temps in the high 20s by the weekend. (Newton Greiner photo)

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