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Adk Council files lawsuit against APA

By KIM SMITH DEDAM, Staff Writer

RAY BROOK — Snowmobile-trail guidelines approved by the Adirondack Park Agency in November came under legal fire Monday.

The Adirondack Council filed a lawsuit in Supreme Court, claiming new guidelines violate the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan.

CONCERNS

"There are really three big problems that we have," said John Sheehan, spokesman for the Adirondack Council.

"One, the widening of the trails and curves up to 50 percent; two, the use of tracked grooming vehicles on park lands; and three, the construction of new trails as far as two miles away from road or the periphery of the Forest Preserve, which is so broad as to make it a joke.

"We believe what (APA and the Department of Environmental Conservation) did violates the intent of the State Land Master Plan. We aren't saying we would stop them from making the changes, but they need public input to do that."

'DISAPPOINTED'

APA spokesman Keith McKeever said they had not been served with the papers as of late Monday afternoon.

"If they do sue us, the agency would be disappointed, because we feel there has been a lot of good work between stakeholders on this issue."

The new Adirondack Park Snowmobile Trail Maintenance Guidelines define Class II trails as a "new class of snowmobile trail to establish and improve community connections."

The definition of Class I trails "intended to preserve a more traditional type of Adirondack snowmobiling experience."

The thrust of the new guidelines, as outlined by APA, is to establish "a park-wide community-connection snowmobile trail system to provide north-to-south and east-to-west routes that will link many Adirondack communities together."

TRAIL WIDTH

Class I trails could be maintained by snowmobile clubs to an 8-foot width, with Class II trails groomed to 9 feet wide but expanding to 12-foot widths on curves and steep running slopes.

The new guidelines allow for removal of some rocks and boulders from trail surfaces.

Sheehan said at issue is not the width, which was designed for safety, but the way the guidelines were approved.

"Are wider trails safer? For higher speeds, yes. If you're out wanting to increase your speed substantially, you'll need to widen and straighten the trail. That's essentially what DEC is trying to do, but they didn't ask the right people. They didn't ask the public; they asked APA.

"We are seeking an injunction from what was approved in November being implemented. The way it was approved does not comply with the State Environmental Quality Review Act.

"It's our contention that putting community connector trails two miles into the woods and across water bodies is inherently unsafe and would make rescue a nightmare."

GROOMERS

Also at issue in the lawsuit is use of motorized grooming equipment on Adirondack Park lands.

"They've got trails; the question is whether they can use groomers to widen them. We believe they need to get the public's permission — DEC and APA have to amend the State Land Master Plan."

PUBLIC INPUT

McKeever said APA went through an extensive public-comment period before approving the snowmobile maintenance plan.

"We had a very public process, which involved a number of hearings, and we received hundreds of letters from people expressing opinions on the issue.

"After years of debate, the (APA) board made a decision. They felt snowmobile guidance is compatible with the State Land Master Plan and is going to be used going forward on (DEC) Unit Management Plans that have been stalled for years."

McKeever said that until they see the paperwork, "we won't know to the full extent how to approach litigation.

"Potentially, a lawsuit could stall the snowmobile plan."

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