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Council sues over snowmobile plan

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ALBANY—The Adirondack Council has filed a lawsuit against three state agencies over a snowmobile trail plan it says will damage the “forever wild” character of the Adirondack Forest Preserve and endanger riders.

The lawsuit alleges that the agencies - the Adirondack Park Agency (APA), Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) - did not follow proper procedures last November for changing the management plan for snowmobile trails on public lands.

It also accuses the agencies of approving a management plan that violates state laws and rules. The lawsuit seeks to halt implementation of the plan until these issues are resolved.

GAVE INPUT

The Adirondack Council, an environmental group based in Elizabethtown, participated in a planning process to create community-connector snowmobile trails, which it agrees are important to the winter economy of Adirondack communities.

Adirondack Council Executive Director Brian L. Houseal said in a prepared statement, “That process called for removing existing snowmobile trails from the interior of Wild Forest [lands] and placement of wider, safer community connector routes on the periphery of public lands, adjacent to roads.

“The whole idea was to move the hamlet-to-hamlet traffic away from remote interior trails ...”

CHALLENGE FILED

The Article 78 petition challenging the agencies’ decisions was filed in State of New York Supreme Court in Albany.

Houseal said, “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 [zoned] lands.

“None of these changes can be made without amending the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, which these agencies didn’t bother to do.”

The Council believes its petition will prove the snowmobile trail plan approved by the APA Nov. 13, 2009, at the request of the DEC, violates the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, which these agencies enforce and administer; and also violates the State Environmental Quality Review Act by contradicting the terms and findings of the only environmental impact statement prepared in advance of the new rule changes.

CONNECTOR TRAILS

Local connector trails planned to connect the towns of Indian Lake, Long Lake and Newcomb are extremely important to the towns and the businesses in those towns.

When Adirondack Council spokesman John Sheehan was asked where the council stands in regard to the proposed connector trails, Sheehan replied, “We are fine with them, if they are sited legally.

“Conservation easement lands will be especially easy. [Trails in t]he Forest Preserve will have to comply with the State Land Master Plan.”

Sheehan added, “We still don’t have a GIS map of the park’s snowmobile trails from DEC. They won’t give it to us.

“We had to make the map for our lawsuit on our own. Our estimate of actual trail mileage on the Forest Preserve is somewhat higher than DEC’s.”