

WNBZ  
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## Council Sues Park Agency Over Snowmobile Trails

The Adirondack Council announced Monday that it's filed an Article 78 lawsuit with the state Supreme Court against the Adirondack Park Agency, claiming that the agency had broken state law in November when it adopted a new snowmobile trail-siting plan.

Of particular concern to environmentalists is a community connector plan that would allow for wider trails in the heart of wild forests.

The trail siting and maintenance guide was a collaborative effort between the APA, the Department of Environmental Conservation and the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Conservation.

Establishing two trail types, it allows for the larger Class II community connector trails to be expanded from eight to nine feet wide on straight sections and up to 12 feet in corners.

Of primary concern for Adirondack Council Executive Director Brian Houseal is a stipulation that allows for the construction of the smaller trails up to a mile from a road or highway.

"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."

The council had lobbied for trails to be kept as close to existing highways as possible in order to limit the amount of motor vehicle access to Adirondack Wild Forests.

They argue that state law clearly dictates that the presence of any motorized vehicle within the wild forests is in direct conflict of the state Land Master Plan.

But snowmobile enthusiasts counter that the machine is just another way to experience the wilderness and that limiting the wild forests to foot traffic would hurt the region's economy.

The guidelines allow for tract groomers to be used on Class II trails, even on state land, as well the removal of rocks and steep grades, but not on the smaller dead-end trails which are allowed in the heart of forest preserve lands.

Prior to the trail guides' November adoption, advocates from local governments and environmental groups alike argued that they may require revision of the SLMP, something the agency has been hesitant to undertake.

APA staff found that the guidelines were in compliance with state law, which do recognize the significant economic impact of the snowmobile industry.

Environmental groups and local snowmobiling clubs had taken part in the creation of the plan, with both groups making concessions.

APA spokesman Keith McKeever said that as of Tuesday, agency legal staff has yet to see the filing documents and couldn't respond directly to the suit.

He did say that the agency believes the snowmobile trail guidelines are well within the limits of state law.

-Jon Alexander, 1-13-10