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## Council sues APA over trail plan

By MIKE LYNCH, Enterprise Outdoors Writer

The Adirondack Council has filed an Article 78 lawsuit against three state agencies, claiming the snowmobile trail management plan adopted by the state Adirondack Park Agency in November violates the State Land Master Plan.

The lawsuit is directed at the APA, the state Department of Environmental Conservation and the Office of Parks and Recreation and Historic Preservation.

Filed Monday in state Supreme Court in Albany, the lawsuit focuses on three aspects of the Adirondack Park Forest Preserve snowmobile trail management plan, which builds off the Park's Snowmobile Plan from October 2007. The snowmobile plan is intended to improve the safety of snowmobilers while lessening the environmental impact during the process of constructing, maintaining and locating trails.

The Council objects that the plan would allow community connector trails as wide as 12 feet around curves. Previously, they were only allowed to be eight feet wide.

The Council also claims that motorized, tracked groomers are not allowed in the Forest Preserve in the SLMP. They would be allowed, under permit, on community connector trails in this plan.

The organization's final objection is the definition of the words "adjacent" and "periphery." The plan says "adjacent" can mean up to 1 mile and "periphery" can mean up to 2 miles. The words are used in the siting of snowmobile trails in state land classified as wild forest, where some motorized vehicles are allowed.

The Adirondack Council claims that those definitions would allow trails into the more remote sections of the wild forest areas and do not keep them on the edges near roads, which has been the intent of the organizations working on the snowmobile plan in recent years.

"Those connections would be, under the environmental impact statement provided by the Parks Department, no more than 500 feet from the edge of the wild forest area or from a public highway," Adirondack Council spokesman John Sheehan said. "The new plan says 'adjacent' can mean up to a mile away and that the 'periphery' can be as far as 2 miles. We believe Noah Webster would roll in his grave to contemplate those as definitions to the English language. Generally, less than a tenth of a mile has been the rule of thumb for use of the word 'periphery' in the State Land Master Plan."

The Council believes aspects of SLMP should be amended through a public process, including hearings held around the state, before these changes are made in the snowmobile plan.

"We could support all three of these if we felt the public had been given a chance to comment on them and to participate in the decision," Sheehan said. "But our number-one concern is the integrity of the State Land Master Plan, and we believe this threatens that."

The timing of the Article 78 lawsuit is important because it comes just three days before the APA board is expected to start working on the Jessup River Wild Forest Unit Management Plan. The Council, Adirondack Mountain Club and the two organizations that now make up Protect the Adirondacks! sued the same state agencies over the Jessup River Wild Forest UMP several years ago over some of the same issues, including the use of tracked groomers.

This lawsuit could potentially hold up UMPs with snowmobile trails in them.

"At this point, we have not seen the legal papers, so we don't know beyond what the Council is saying in their press release, but it certainly has potential to put a monkeywrench in things," APA spokesman Keith McKeever said. "I would definitely think that UMPs that had snowmobile trails in them would be affected."

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