

WNBZ

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## Green groups support removal of two fire towers, others should remain

Environmental organizations throughout the park are supporting a state Department of Environmental Conservation proposal that would require the removal of the fire towers atop St. Regis and Hurricane mountains.

Adirondack Mountain Club Executive Director Neil Woodworth said Wednesday there's little, if any, legal reason to allow the towers to remain.

"The Hurricane Mountain tower is keeping the area from being designated Wilderness, you don't need the tower for a view and it's a non-conforming structure," Woodworth said. "Same is true for the St. Regis tower, you have a 360 degree view from the top of the mountain and it's a non-conforming structure."

Woodworth says the mountain club does not support amending the state Land Master Plan to exempt towers from state lands that fall under the wilderness designation.

Some local officials and several Adirondack Park Agency commissioners have suggested reopening the SLMP and removing fire towers from the list of non-conforming structures outlined within the definition of Wilderness.

Woodworth notes his organization initiated some of the first restorations of fire towers within the last two decades. Roughly 20 towers have been restored with support from the mountain club.

The St. Regis and Hurricane Mountain towers are on the state and federal Registers of Historic Places.

But ADK argues that carving out small historic designations within the Forever Wild lands throughout the Adirondacks would set a dangerous precedent.

Adirondack Council spokesman John Sheehan says his group only wants three towers removed from state land – the two towers slated currently, and a third tower topping Wakely Mountain in Hamilton County.

Sheehan notes there hasn't been a legally compelling case to either amend the SLMP or change the land use designations of the St. Regis Canoe Area or the Hurricane Mountain Wilderness Area to allow the towers to remain.

"In this case, I don't think we have seen a compelling reason to do it," Sheehan said. "In fact, there has been some interest from local municipalities in owning these towers when they come out."

The Wakely Mountain tower was spared because without it, there's not much of a view from the summit. It was instead designated as Wild Forest, which allows fire towers to remain.

Several Adirondack county boards of supervisors have passed resolutions opposing the DEC proposal.

A public hearing regarding the proposed Hurricane Mountain Primitive Area UMP will be held at 6:30 p.m. tonight at the Keene Central School.

A similar hearing concerning the proposed amendments to the St. Regis UMP will be at the Paul Smith's College Freer Science building also tonight at 6:30 p.m.

-Jon Alexander, 2-25-10