

Adirondack Daily Enterprise
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Lyon Mountain highlights classification package

By MIKE LYNCH, Enterprise Outdoors Writer

For years, Lyon Mountain and some of the surrounding land have been used by skiers, hikers and snowmobilers.

Now, after a 17,190 tract was bought by the state from the Nature Conservancy in October 2008, parts of Lyon Mountain will be subject to state regulations that will dictate the future use of the property.

The first stage of determining what those regulations will be is currently under way as the state Adirondack Park Agency - which has worked in collaboration with the state Department of Environmental Conservation on this project - has proposed to classify the tract as wild forest, the least restrictive state land classification in the Adirondack Park.

Lyon Mountain is part of a package that includes 91 classification proposals covering 31,056 acres and four reclassifications covering 258 acres. The parcels range in size from .13 to 17,190 acres.

A series of five public hearings on the classifications started on Monday and will continue into early February. The first meeting drew about a dozen people and very little public comment. It was held in Newcomb, where a wilderness classification is proposed for a 6,800-acre tract near Upper Works, between the hamlet and the High Peaks Wilderness.

The next meeting is at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Saranac Town Hall on state Route 3.

Classifications determine how the land is managed by the DEC and dictates whether motorized use and manmade structures are permitted there. A wild forest designation would allow for some motorized uses such as snowmobiling. Wilderness, the most restrictive, allows for no motorized uses or manmade structures.

The wild forest classification is important to many living in the Lyon Mountain area, located in the northeastern part of the Adirondack Park, because they have snowmobiled on the property for years. Plus, there's a fire tower on top of the mountain.

"Snowmobiling is big in this area, and we wouldn't want (it restricted)," Saranac Supervisor Jim Facteau said. "Number two, the fire tower has been up there for years and is basically part of our history. If it went to primitive or wilderness, all that stuff, being a sign of man, would be down eventually."

Facteau said his town has written a resolution supporting the wild forest classification, and he expects the meeting in Saranac will be well attended.

The large tract of land is located in the Clinton County towns of Saranac and Dannemora. In general, it is surrounded by private land to the north, Chazy Lake Road to the east, True Brook Road to the south and Standish Road on the west.

There are a number of existing structures on the tract, including the privately owned bed of the former D&H Railroad that runs through the eastern portion of the tracts, remnants from the former Lowenburg Ski Area and commercial forestry operations. Much of the land was managed for timber and was owned by the Canadian lumber company Domtar Industries until 2004, when it sold the land to The Nature Conservancy. About 2,000 acres were also used as a sugar bush.

Two rare birds - the Bicknell's thrush and Tennessee warbler - nest above 2,800 feet on Lyon Mountain and would require special management protections, according to the APA. Studies have also indicated that peregrine falcons and bald eagles may also nest in the vicinity.

About 1,200 acres, or 7 percent of the land, are two or more miles from public roads.

Because portions of the land are considered remote and home to some rare bird species and headwaters, environmentalists have asked the APA to consider stronger protections than what wild forest would afford.

"We're simply asking them to take a harder look, possibly with stakeholders, at that tract because it's so large. It's in a very unique location in the Park," said Dan Plumley of Protect the Adirondacks! "You've got the highland ecosystems up there, with rare and endangered bird species, moose, black bear, other valuable wildlife species to protect."

Plumley said it would make sense to consider the possibility of a core primitive area within the 17,000 acres to protect these species.

"It's worth to look at," Plumley said. "The Lyon Mountain range is a very stand-alone range. It's surrounded by timberlands that have been logged on and off for many years, but taking a long-term view in that portion of the Park, there is no designated wilderness there."

Plumley said he wouldn't have problems with the snowmobile trail in the lowlands and the fire tower on the peak being retained, with the summit wild forest. The lands he is focused on are on the "east and southeasterly flanks of Lyon Mountain, Averill Peak, in the Brushy Knob area towards the southwesterly extent of the ranges highlands."

Another environmental organization, the Adirondack Council, has asked the APA to consider that the tract be considered primitive and eventually wilderness, though the classification of Lyon Mountain is not one of its primary focuses, according to spokesman John Sheehan.

Sheehan the Council would have no problem with a wild forest corridor for a snowmobile trail.

"We can understand the need for the travel corridor through there," Sheehan said. "That doesn't trouble us all that much."

But in a guest commentary in the January edition of the Adirondack Explorer, Adirondack Council Executive Director Brian Houseal asked that the fire tower eventually be removed.

"This (primitive and eventually wilderness) classification makes eminent sense, given the wild, remote nature of the landscape and the rich, fragile biological diversity that exists there," Houseal wrote.

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Fact Box

CLASSIFICATION HEARINGS

Today at 7 p.m., Park Avenue Building, 183 Park Ave., Old Forge

Thursday at 7 p.m., Town Hall, 3662 Route 3, Saranac

Feb. 2 at 7 p.m., St. Lawrence County Human Services Center, 80 SH 310, Canton

Feb. 5 at 1 p.m., NYDEC, 625 Broadway, Albany

Further detail may be obtained by contacting Richard E. Weber, Adirondack Park Agency, P.O. Box 99, Ray Brook, NY 12977; (518) 891-4050.

Written comments to the attention of Weber will be accepted until March 19: by mail to the address above, by fax to (518) 891-3938 or by e-mail to apa_slmp@gw.dec.state.ny.us.