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Mountain Club rejects Cathead land swap

BY THOMAS RIGATTI Gazette Reporter

A proposed land swap between a local hunting club and the state that would reopen the Cathead Mountain trail has been rejected by a key environmental group.

The Adirondack Mountain Club's board Saturday voted to oppose the legislation, which would allow the land swap through a state constitutional amendment.

The measure, sponsored by state Sen. Betty Little, R-Glens Falls, and Assemblywoman Teresa Sayward, R-Willsboro, would have to be approved by two consecutive sessions of the state Legislature before a general election referendum.

Thomas Gang Inc., also known as the Hatchbrook Sportman's Club, made additional concessions in the proposed legislation. The proposal now calls for the club to exchange 480 acres for 80 acres from the state. The club would forfeit its right to sell commercial space on the communications tower now leased to the state police. They have also agreed to build only one new hunting camp on its remaining 400-plus acres, forfeiting an earlier plan to build up to six.

Despite the concessions, ADK Executive Director Neil Woodworth said the board members were concerned that supporting a constitutional amendment would "set a precedent that other private individuals would use to build roads and power plants in the Adirondack forest preserve." Woodworth said in the past, the ADK board has supported amendments "that had a clear public benefit" for the park.

Woodworth also said he had "no idea" what impact, if any, the board's vote would have on state lawmakers. "I can't speculate what weight the vote will have," he said.

Another advocacy group, the Adirondack Council, has fully endorsed the land swap, saying it would provide a "net benefit to the Adirondack Forest Preserve." A third organization, Protect the Adirondacks, was also scheduled to vote on the matter Saturday.

The deal sought by the hunting club would allow its greater use of the property it retains, while reopening public access to the mountain summit, now blocked by private land.