

NEWS RELEASE



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**PARK AGENCY THROTTLES AHEAD WITH CLEAR-CUTTING PLANS
WHILE SLASHING PUBLIC NOTICE, PARTICIPATION**
Park Agency Board & Public Would be Cut Out of Review of Clear-Cutting

RAY BROOK, N.Y. – The Adirondack Park Agency is expected to vote on Thursday (Feb. 14, 2013) whether to approve a new system of fast-track permits allowing landowners to clear-cut private forests of 25 acres or larger inside the Adirondack Park.

“The Adirondack Park Agency proposed this change without any ecological justification,” said Diane W. Fish, Acting Executive Director of the Adirondack Council. “The agency’s proposed ‘general permit’ would eliminate the current formal review, minimizing public notice and public participation, and substituting a rubber stamp for a formal vote by the APA Board of Commissioners.”

Fish said the agency announced its plan in November 2012. It had been planning to approve the new permit system at its January meeting.

During the brief public comment period in the midst of the holiday season, the agency received a flood of negative comments from the public and from forest ecology experts. In late January, the APA held a meeting with timber companies and environmental organizations, where it heard further concerns.

Following that meeting it modified part of its proposal, but the plan is still badly flawed, according to the Adirondack Council, the park’s largest environmental organization.

“For example, the APA offered no evidence to back its assertion that this would encourage landowners to seek permits or enroll their lands in green-certification programs. Many landowners say they can’t afford those,” Fish said. “While there is a new, three-year time limit proposed on the life of each permit, there are no criteria for judging whether a permit caused ecological damage. The time limit serves no purpose if the results are not tested.”

“Worse,” Fish explained, “the plan curtails public notice and participation so severely that each is effectively eliminated.”

A little more than half of the six-million-acre Adirondack Park is private land. Most of the private land is commercial timberland, managed largely by timber investment companies. The Council has championed working forests with conservation easements and third-party green-certification as an important part of the Adirondack Park’s large landscape conservation efforts.

“We agree with timber company representatives that the APA rules and regulations for sustainable forestry need updating. But, this general permit is the wrong vehicle for achieving that goal,” Fish explained. “This should be part of a comprehensive overhaul of the APA’s regulations.”

Logging is not allowed on public lands inside the park. It is a violation of the NYS Constitution to cut down a single tree on the public Adirondack Forest Preserve. Article 14, Section 1 – known as the Forever Wild Clause -- was adopted in 1894 in reaction to widespread damage from unregulated, commercial clear-cutting.

Fish noted that only one of the park’s half-dozen of major timber companies had even sought a permit to clear-cut its lands in the past decade. Only three such permits have been requested in the past 20 years. All were approved.

Under the proposed plan, once an APA staff member declares an application is “complete” he or she will have only 10 days to issue a final clear-cutting permit. If the APA doesn’t act within 10 days, the applicant can demand automatic approval under the current rules. (Section 809-6a)

Currently, timber companies and other landowners must get a permit from the Adirondack Park Agency for any clear-cut above 25 acres on non-wetlands. Clear-cutting is the practice of removing all of the trees from a parcel of land. An acre is about the size of a football field without the end zones.

In order to get that permit, current applicants must undergo a formal environmental review that includes public notice and public participation and approval by the Adirondack Park Agency’s Board of Commissioners. The new plan would eliminate those requirements by allowing agency staff to issue permits, without a vote by the board of commissioners.

This new fast-track approval process would apply even to lands where the state has purchased a conservation easement to ensure that the lands are managed responsibly and sustainably.

The Adirondack Council is a privately funded, not-for-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the wild character and ecological integrity of New York’s 9,300-square-mile Adirondack Park. Founded in 1975, the Council carries out its mission through research, education, advocacy and legal action. Adirondack Council members live in all 50 United States.

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