

Adirondack Daily Enterprise
October 6, 2011

Groups to meet on post-Irene AuSable River study

By CHRIS MORRIS - Staff Writer

ELIZABETHTOWN - Lawmakers from Essex County will convene in AuSable Forks next month to discuss a long-term mitigation plan for the AuSable River after major flooding significantly altered its character.

Essex County Chairman Randy Douglas, D-Jay, said a meeting has been scheduled for 6 p.m. Nov. 1 at the town of Jay Community Center on School Street, AuSable Forks. He made the announcement during Monday's Board of Supervisors meeting, following the unanimous passage of a resolution urging Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Congress to help initiate an immediate inspection of all rivers and brooks in Essex County that changed course following Tropical Storm Irene.

"There have been a lot of calls for politicians, state agencies, federal agencies and environmental groups to meet regarding future long term plans for the river," Douglas said. "I know there are a lot of differences of opinion on where we should be at right now."

Douglas said he's been working with Brian Houseal, executive director of the Adirondack Council, to try and bring all parties with a stake in the river's future together. He said many green groups and local governments have reached out to Cuomo, pleading for help in creating a long-term river management plan.

Keene town Supervisor Bill Ferebee said he and Douglas have taken a lot of heat in the press over the work that has been done in rivers and streams over the last month.

Ferebee said he met last week with officials from the state Department of Environmental Conservation, and they agreed with much of the work that happened.

"However, they would have liked to have seen us do the work differently," he said. "I found it odd that they waited three weeks to approach me in the town of Keene about what we have been doing for three weeks."

But Ferebee said looking ahead, towns and state agencies can and will work together.

"We did what we needed to do at that time, and these things can be corrected," he said.

Douglas said towns, counties, environmental organizations and state agencies can't be divided.

"We are willing to listen, but we need to work together," he said.

According to Douglas, disagreements over the kind of work that has already occurred need to be put aside.

"It is time for all the groups to come together and share suggestions," he said, adding that the prospect of more flooding next spring means action needs to be taken immediately.

Adirondack Council spokesman John Sheehan agreed.

"It always keeps raining in the Park, and it could be as early as next spring or even sooner when we see big problems again because of rainfall," he said. "I think, essentially, what we have to do is get together on how to fix things in a way that they will stay fixed for a while."

Sheehan said some of the bridges damaged by Irene were also impacted by Tropical Storm Floyd in 1999.

"We lost them back then, we lost them again - we've got to be prepared for the fact that that's going to happen more and more often around the Park," he said. "We have to think about larger culverts, we have to think about bigger openings for bridges, and we have to think about where it is appropriate to keep having people build houses and businesses. We need to rethink what we're doing in some of those places."

Douglas said long-term planning can help avert some of those problems in the future. He said having support from groups like the Adirondack Council is critical because local governments are stretched thin.

"Our towns have one backhoe, one excavator that we share," he said. "We don't have the equipment or the manpower."

Sheehan said the Council doesn't have the resources to help with river mapping, but he added that the green group, one of the most influential in the region, "know(s) some folks."

"We can help work in Albany to get some action out of the governor's office, to see if we can't get APA, DEC and other state agencies involved as soon as possible," he said.