

WNBZ
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DEC wants federal money returned for state land purchase

The state Department of Environmental Conservation hopes to restore federal funding to purchase Follensby Pond, a lake immortalized as Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Philosopher's Camp" 150 years ago.

Congress cut about \$6 million in funding earlier this year that would have helped the state buy the pond and 14,600 acres of surrounding wilderness.

The state pledged to purchase the tract from the Adirondack Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, a wilderness preservation group that purchased the land in 2008.

The pond carries a sticker price of \$16 million, and DEC officials worry that, unless funding is restored, the state will have to absorb far more of the cost than it anticipated.

The funding setback threatens to delay the state's purchase and has spurred DEC officials to try and get that money back.

Rob Davies is DEC's director of lands and forests. He told Phil Brown of the Adirondack Explorer that he hopes to get \$6 million to \$8 million for Follensby through the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program, money that was lost when Congress cut the funding as a cost savings measure to pass the state budget this year.

The Follensby Pond tract is listed on the Forest Service's priority list for land preservation, but it was not among the top eleven that retained their funding. Instead, Follensby and dozens of other land preservation targets throughout the country lost federal funding.

Davies believes that whatever funding there is should be redistributed so that a piece of the pie is reserved for purchasing the other lands, including Follensby. Davies said even a \$1.5 million sliver would be better than nothing.

Follensby Pond is located Near Tupper Lake in the Saranac Lakes Wild Forest. The tract has long been coveted by preservationists and recreation groups.

They say its acquisition would link hundreds of thousands of acres of protected lands and 39 miles of riparian habitat, including more than ten miles of the Raquette River; a watercourse recognized by paddlers for its outstanding recreational opportunities and biodiversity.

The Adirondack Council's John Sheehan said it would also put Tupper Lake on the map as one of the most important wilderness gateway communities in the Northeast.

Others oppose the potential purchase, arguing that the state can't afford it.

Local government representatives, including the Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages, have passed resolutions against the purchase of the tract.

They argue that the purchase would harm local communities by taking away valuable forestry jobs and eliminating hunting clubs that lease the land.

-George Earl, 5-11-11