

# The Adirondack Almanac

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### Council Proposes A Larger High Peaks Wilderness

by Phil BrownNo Comments

The Adirondack Council is proposing a huge expansion of the High Peaks Wilderness Area once the state acquires lands formerly owned by Finch, Pruyn & Company.

Under the council's plan, the state would combine the High Peaks and Dix Mountain Areas as well as twenty-three thousand acres of former Finch lands. If this were done, the High Peaks Wilderness—already the largest Wilderness Area in the Adirondack Park—would grow to 272,000 acres from 204,000 acres.

Council spokesman John Sheehan said enlarging the High Peaks Wilderness would simplify the state's management and planning for the popular region.

The proposal also would require the state to close a long dirt road that leads to Boreas Ponds, which are among are among the former Finch holdings that the state intends purchase over the next five years.

Neil Woodworth, executive director of the Adirondack Mountain Club, contends that closing the dirt lane, known as Gulf Brook Road, would keep paddlers (and many hikers) from enjoying the unspoiled ponds.

"You'd have to portage your canoe seven miles to get to Boreas Ponds," Woodworth said. "That's highly impractical. Boreas Ponds is a wonderful opportunity to see the High Peaks from a canoe or kayak. It would be a terrible waste if the public were deprived of that opportunity."

Sheehan argues that allowing people to drive all or most of the way to the ponds would create pollution and noise and increase the risk that exotic species will be introduced to the waterways. He also said it might lead to overuse.

"We believe that the state's first obligation is to protect the wildlife and natural resources of the area," Sheehan said.

The Adirondack Explorer reported in its November-December issue that the state Department of Environmental Conservation is thinking about keeping most of Gulf Brook Road open. Under this plan, people could drive as far as LeBeire Flow, nearly a mile south of the ponds. Paddlers could put in the flow and paddle to the ponds, while hikers could walk to the ponds via the closed section of the road.

Under the DEC plan, the road to LeBiere Flow would serve as the boundary between Wilderness Area and Wild Forest Area. The road itself would be classified Wild Forest, a designation that

permits motorized use. In winter, it would be used by snowmobilers traveling between North Hudson and Newcomb.

Under the council's proposal, a power-line corridor south and west of the road would serve as the boundary between Wilderness and Wild Forest. The utility lines cross Gulf Brook Road a short distance from its start on Blue Ridge Road. Thus, virtually all of the access road would lie within the motor-free Wilderness Area. Sheehan said the utility corridor also could serve as the snowmobile trail, adding that DEC itself suggested this in 2008.

The Adirondack Nature Conservancy bought 161,000 acres from Finch, Pruyn in 2007. The state has agreed to buy sixty-five thousand acres from the conservancy for the Forest Preserve.

The council presented its proposal today in a letter to DEC Commissioner Joe Martens, along with suggestions for other Finch lands. Among other things, the letter also detailed the council's proposal for a 72,400-acre Wild Rivers Wilderness, incorporating former Finch lands and existing Forest Preserve.

[Click here to read an earlier Adirondack Almanack article on the Wild Rivers Wilderness.](#)

[Click here to read the council's letter and accompanying maps.](#)

Map of Boreas Ponds tract by Adirondack Council. We added the red dots to show the access points under the council's proposal and DEC's tentative plan. The lower dot is where the utility lines cross Gulf Brook Road. The other dot is the south end of LeBiere Flow.

#### Phil Brown

Since 1999, Phil Brown has been Editor of the nonprofit Adirondack Explorer, the regional bimonthly with a focus on outdoor recreation and environmental issues, the same topics he writes about here at Adirondack Almanack.

Phil is also an energetic outdoorsman whose job and personal interests often find him hiking, canoeing, rock climbing, trail running, and backcountry skiing.

He is the owner of Lost Pond Press, which has recently published Bob Marshall in the Adirondacks, an anthology of Marshall's writings, Adirondack Birding by Gary N. Lee and John M.C. Peterson, and Within a Forest Dark, a prize-winning novel by Michael Virtanen.

You can read all of Phil's posts at the Almanack [here](#).