

# Adirondack Park Agency clear-cutting proposal met with opposition

Tuesday, December 11, 2012

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Daily Gazette Reporter

ADIRONDACKS — The Adirondack Park Agency may ease rules on commercial lumber harvests in the Adirondack Park, and also make it easier to fight the Asian clam infestation in Lake George.

But the proposal to allow a form of “clear-cutting” in Adirondack forests is generating opposition from some environmental groups.

“Perhaps clear-cutting is a tool that some timber companies favor to regenerate a certain species of tree,” said Diane Fish, executive director of the Adirondack Council, “but in places like the Adirondack Park, with such steep slopes and thin soils, it can do real damage when it is not tightly supervised.”

The APA proposal would allow a simplified approval process for private wood harvests, if the landowners have a certified forest management plan in place for their land. With such a plan, APA staff approval could approve a cutting permit.

Under current rules, the APA must issue a permit for all clear-cuts of more than 25 acres — but APA officials said the agency uses a 40-year-old definition of “clear-cutting” that conflicts with modern forestry practices, which can include removing large trees to allow smaller trees to mature.

The proposed general permit would encourage sustainable forestry practices and healthy working forests, APA officials said at an agency meeting earlier this month. But environmental groups including the Adirondack Council, Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, Citizens Campaign for the Environment and Protect the Adirondacks came out against the change Tuesday.

“Protect believes that a decision by the APA to significantly loosen clear-cutting rules will have wide-ranging implications for long-term forest management in the Adirondack Park as well as seriously undermine public support for the state conservation easement program, among other negative consequences,” Protect the Adirondacks said in a statement.

The APA is also considering rule changes that would allow lakewide general permits for fighting invasive aquatic species like Asian clams. The change could apply to any Adirondack lake — though Lake George currently has the biggest problem.

Under the plan, a general permit could be issued for an entire lake for using benthic barriers — mats that cover the lake bottom and suffocate what's underneath — against the Asian clam and other invaders. There's been a general permit in place for using the barriers against invasive plant species like Eurasian milfoil since 2008.

Soon after Asian clams were found in the lake in 2010, the Fund for Lake George started a benthic barrier project at four locations between Lake George village and Bolton. Each required its own APA permit. This winter, benthic barriers are being used at seven locations, each under its own APA permit.

The proposed change would simplify the application process so only one permit would be needed, allowing APA staff to review and approve individual projects more quickly.

“We felt it would benefit us, and I think it benefits the APA, too,” said Lake George Waterkeeper Chris Navitsky.

Benthic barriers have been effective in some places in the lake, but not others, he said.

“We've had a very good success rate in some locations ... and some instances where they were not as effective,” Navitsky said. “We've been in a learning process.”

Under the proposal, the use of the barriers would be limited to three acres or 10 percent of a lake's surface; the site's biological recovery afterward would have to be monitored. Larger areas could still be matted by seeking a new individual permit, agency staff said.

Comments on the proposed clear-cutting general permit may be addressed to Dan Spada, and comments on the proposed aquatic invasive species general permit may be sent to Edward S. Snizek, both at the park agency, P.O. Box 99, Route 86, Ray Brook, NY 12977.

The deadline for comments on both is Dec. 28. The APA board could act on the proposed permits at its Jan. 10-11 meeting in Ray Brook.