

## Adirondack Council commends regulators for listening to public

The Adirondack Council has thanked the Adirondack Park Agency for postponing action on a controversial plan to ease regulations on clear-cutting for more than two million acres of private forests inside the six-million-acre park.

Park Agency Spokesman Keith McKeever told North Country Public Radio Thursday evening that the agency had removed from its Jan. 10 meeting agenda a proposed General Permit that would have eliminated the requirement for a formal environmental review before the state grants permission for clear-cutting more than 25 acres at once.

The Adirondack Council, Citizens Campaign for the Environment and Sierra Club issued a joint statement in December objecting to the proposal. While all three organizations support commercial forestry inside the Adirondack Park, all three believe it should be carefully regulated to ensure that it remains sustainable and environmentally friendly.

The Adirondack Council's members responded to its mid-December Action Alert with dozens of mailed letters to the agency, which had made no provision to accept comments via email. The letters objected to the APA's plans to fast-track clear-cutting permits by eliminating public comments and participation; and, by allowing private, third-parties to judge whether clear-cutting was justified. The groups urged the APA to show why such changes were needed in the first place. They objected that the proposal set no limits on the acreage that could be clear-cut under the new permits, and that the proposed permits would never expire.

The Adirondack Council also noted that there was no environmental assessment included in the materials made available to the public, which is required when the agency itself avoids a formal hearing on a regulation change by stating that no significant environmental harm is expected. When it filed a formal request for the assessment, the agency responded that it would make the assessment available on Jan. 28, more than two weeks after it planned to vote on the proposal. The damage done to the forests and waters of the Adirondack Park by widespread clear-cutting was the reason why the public voted to protect the park's public forests via the NYS Constitution, declaring them to be forever wild in 1894. Private forests have been under the jurisdiction of the Adirondack Park Agency since 1971.

The Adirondack Park was the first region of the United States where the public took action to stop the widespread damage poorly regulated clear-cutting can do. Forests, water quality and wildlife all suffered. All of the park's major rivers got muddy and slower. The Erie Canal and Hudson River were in danger of drying up, essentially halting commerce on the only level water route from the Atlantic Ocean to the cities of the Midwest.

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 have eliminated those requirements by allowing agency staff to issue permits, without a vote by the board of commissioners.