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## Park agency to decide on clear-cutting rules

By Stephen Williams

ADIRONDACKS — The Adirondack Park Agency commissioners could make a decision this week on new rules for clear-cut logging in the Adirondack Park.

The APA staff is recommending approval for a new policy allowing larger cuts to qualify for approval under a “general permit.”

The proposal has drawn new criticism from environmental organizations but it is supported by the forest products industry.

With the staff recommendation released last week, the matter will come before the park agency commissioners Thursday in Ray Brook.

The new rules, first proposed in November, would allow clear-cuts exceeding 25 acres to be done under a “general permit” — meaning permission for specific logging plans could be granted with staff review only. To comply, the cutting plans would need to comply with either Forest Sustainability Council or Sustainable Forestry Initiative certification standards for maintaining healthy forests.

“The certification system has a number of restrictions beyond what the APA wants to impose. It is a very high bar the APA has set,” said Eric Carlson, president of the Empire State Forest Products Association, which represents the logging industry. Despite the certification requirement, the association favors the rule change, Carlson said.

Under the proposal, an APA permit could be issued without public hearings or a public comment period — and that has drawn fire from environmentalists.

“The Adirondack Park Agency proposed this change without any ecological justification,” said Diane W. Fish, acting executive director of the Adirondack Council. “The agency’s proposed ‘general permit’ would eliminate the current formal review, minimizing public notice and public participation, and substituting a rubber stamp for a formal vote by the APA board of commissioners.”

More than half of the 6 million acres in the Adirondack Park are privately owned, and much of the private land is commercial timber tracts.

There’s general agreement that the APA’s forest-management policies need to be updated.

“In the last 40 years, a lot has changed in the science of forestry and its application,” Carlson said.

He pointed out that the industry supports as many as 10,000 jobs in the woods and at paper and pulp mills surrounding the park. Cutting can help maintain a diverse forest, he said, and that benefits wildlife.

He said the proposed rules have been in the works for three years. “They’ve thought long and hard, and they’ve talked to everybody,” Carlson said.

But some critics call the process rushed.

“We have been calling for more study and dialogue on these complex forest issues in the Adirondack Park, while the APA staff insists on rushing a general permit through with minimal public scrutiny, no environmental impact assessment, and just brief discussion of the underlying issues,” said Dan Plumley, a partner in Adirondack Wild.

Protect the Adirondacks, meanwhile, released aerial photographs showing clear-cuts that were done on private timber lands on which the state holds conservation easements. Those cuts, mostly in the northern Adirondacks, were kept just below the current 25-acre threshold, Protect the Adirondacks contended.

“There are abundant examples of small clear-cuts, strip clear-cuts and checkerboard patch cuts. This is not what the public envisions when they think about sustainable forestry on conservation easement lands,” said Peter Bauer, executive director of Protect the Adirondacks.

The proposed rules would allow for “shelter-wood cuts,” in which most of the acreage is cut but some large trees are left to provide shelter to the forest below.