

Big decisions dominate outdoors news

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SARANAC LAKE — It was a year of big decisions — some made and some unmade — that ruled the outdoors news in 2017.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation issued management plans for tens of thousands of acres of North Country forest preserve, while the state Adirondack Park Agency put off some highly anticipated decisions.

Unit Management Plans

One of the biggest stories of the year was the release of the long-awaited unit management plan — after a 15 year delay — for the Saranac Lake Wild Forest which encompasses about 75,000 acres from Wilmington to Tupper Lake.

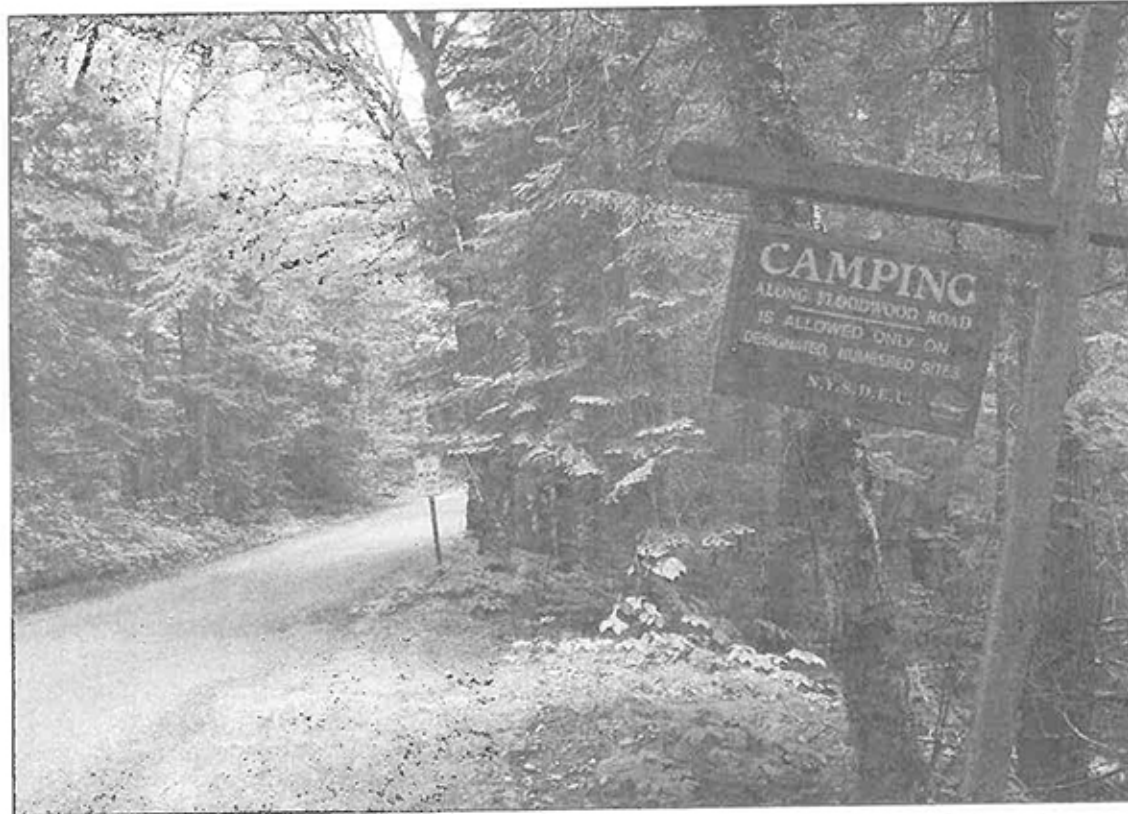
The DEC called for sweeping changes to the land, including the closure or building of dozens of campsites at popular places such as Follensby Clear Pond and Floodwood Road. Trails would be added for hikers, skiers and mountain bikers, while large swaths would also be kept trail-less for the benefit of hunters.

The plan affects everyone who lives or recreates in the Tri-Lakes area, and everything from parking areas to rock climbing areas to boat launches were addressed in the plan.

The DEC also put out management plans for the Sentinel Range Wilderness area, state campgrounds like Buck Pond and a guidance document for primitive campsites.

Boreas Ponds

The APA was far less ambitious this year than the DEC, with the agency holding multiple one-day meetings rather than the standard



The state Department of Environmental Conservation proposed sweeping changes to many popular areas in and around the northern Adirondacks this year, including the 75,000-acre Saranac Lakes Wild Forest.

(Enterprise photo — Justin A. Levine)

two-day monthly meeting, and even canceled the December meeting altogether.

One reason for the short meetings was a delay in deciding on what is perhaps the largest land classification package in the agency's history. Included in that package is the famed Boreas Ponds property. The classification of that roughly 20,000-acre tract has been the source of debate since the purchase was announced last May.

Last year, the APA released four

possible plans for the Boreas property, and local governments were happy with a mix of wilderness and less restrictive wild forest designations. With the plans released in October 2016, public comments, hearings and debates took place well into this year.

Despite the high profile of Boreas and the total classification package, the APA board failed to address any decisions on the fate of tens of thousands of acres of land in the Adirondack Park.

Lake Survey Corp. closing
The Adirondack Lake Survey Corporation, which has been collecting, analyzing and testing water samples around the park since the 1980s said it would lose its funding at the end of the year and shutter its lab and offices at the state office complex in Ray Brook, putting eight full-time employees out of work.

The company, which worked closely with the DEC, has compiled what is in all likelihood the

most complete and longest-running water sample database in the Adirondacks. ALSC got most of its funding from the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.

NYSDA has put out to bid the continuation of the sampling, but at a lower frequency. The state authority has also contracted with a federal U.S. Geologic Survey lab in the Capital region instead of using the lab at ALSC in Ray Brook.

Land Bank

The voters of New York faced two questions on constitutional matters that could have huge impacts on the Adirondack Park.

The first was a vote on whether to have a constitutional convention, which was seen as a threat to the state constitutions Article XIV, also known as the Forever Wild clause. The measure suffered a decisive loss.

The other measure, however, was far closer but passed. The second measure added to the state constitution was the addition of a land bank. The land bank would allow utilities, local governments and the state Department of Transportation to use little pieces of forest preserve land that would be offset by the land bank.

As it stood, if a town wanted to drill a well and needed a few hundred square feet of state land to do it on, that well needed to be approved by voters as an amendment to the state constitution. With the land bank measure, that project could go through without a statewide vote. The land bank approval was cheered by environmental groups as well as local governments.