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## APA looks to overhaul Act

By CHRIS KNIGHT, Enterprise Senior Staff Writer

SARANAC LAKE - Adirondack Park Agency officials want to overhaul the APA Act and are asking for input from town supervisors around the Park.

Agency Chairman Curt Stiles says the APA has tried to make a few modifications to the Act in recent years, but more thorough regulatory reform is needed.

"I think that's what it's going to take," Stiles told the Enterprise in a two-hour interview on Monday. "It hasn't been modified in 35 to 40 years. I don't think you can nibble away at it. You have to take a look at the whole picture."

Stiles said the Act, which governs private land use and development in the Park, needs to be revised in part to make the agency's regulations easier to understand.

"It's jurisdictionally complicated," he said. "It takes a couple attorneys carrying around the APA Act with them every day to interpret a particular application."

But the primary goal of regulatory reform for the agency is to improve shoreline protections. Stiles said some of the shoreline setbacks created in the 1970s are too close to the water and vegetative buffers are not spelled out carefully enough. He also said enforceability of the Act's current shoreline regulations has been difficult.

"The real opportunity is to protect shorelines better," Stiles said. "That is probably the weakest thing in the APA Act and something that really needs to be re-looked at."

Agency officials said protecting the environment, including water quality, is a key to the Park's economic future.

"Water is the oil of the future," said APA Executive Director Terry Martino.

APA spokesman Keith McKeever said the Park's scenic attributes and quality of life give it a "competitive advantage" in attracting businesses.

"But we're not marketing enough," McKeever said. "We need to get out the positives about doing business in the Adirondacks."

Stiles said the Park has been slow to tap into its "competitive advantage" because it hasn't had the necessary infrastructure, including broadband and cell phone service.

As part of the regulatory reform process, APA officials recently sent a letter to all town supervisors in the Park, asking them to rank their issues and concerns with the agency and its regulations. The questionnaire covers local government issues, environmental advocacy concerns, the agency's administration of its rules and other issues. It also asks supervisors to name their priorities for revision of the APA Act.

Stiles said involving local government officials in an overhaul of the APA Act will create a constructive dialogue.

"The 103 towns and villages in the Park are all different," he said. "A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't fit. It's got to be a collaborative approach."

Asked if the governor's office had anything to do with the move for regulatory reform, Stiles said no.

"This is all initiated by us," he said. "We've had little to no direction from the second floor (of the state Capitol)."

Any changes to the APA Act would need to be approved by the state Legislature.

Earlier this year, the agency was pushing the Legislature to enact three bills that would have created a community planning fund, changed density regulations to allow for affordable housing and changed the format of the agency's project review process. But the bills never advanced amid a leadership struggle in the Senate this past summer.

Stiles said they plan to reintroduce those bills next year.

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#### Collusion allegations

The APA was recently accused by attorney Matthew Norfolk of working in collusion with the Adirondack Council to "strategize and plot" against Leroy Douglas, the owner of a Silver Lake resort and campground who was the subject of an agency enforcement action that has since been dropped.

Asked if the agency's enforcement proceedings are free of outside influence, Stiles said the APA has a "fair, rigorous and detached" enforcement process.

"I don't feel we're unduly influenced," he said. "Any communication I've seen does not seem to be inappropriate."

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#### Stiles' ties

Stiles was also asked about his past connections with the Adirondack Council, where he served as a board member.

He said he resigned from that position, along with board positions on the Upper Saranac Lake Foundation and the Adirondack Explorer, when he took over as APA chairman.

He said he has a "healthy respect" for those organizations but said he's able to weigh all sides of an issue during the decision-making process.

Stiles said "background conflicts" are built into the agency board, which also includes people who are current or former town supervisors, business owners, representatives of state agencies or with other backgrounds.

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Contact Chris Knight at 891-2600 ext. 24 or [cknight@adirondackdailyenterprise.com](mailto:cknight@adirondackdailyenterprise.com).