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Bulk-water project has new foe

PROPOSED PLANT: Adirondack Council joins opposition in Greig, Turin to commercial draining of spring

By STEVE VIRKLER, TIMES STAFF WRITER

GREIG — An Adirondack watchdog group has joined the opposition to a controversial bulk-water project in the towns of Greig and Turin.

"We have never seen a proposal like this one," Brian L. Houseal, executive director of the Adirondack Council, said in a statement on the Hidden Falls Spring Water project. "We are troubled that a commercial enterprise could so easily circumvent local zoning and find a way to exploit one town's water supplies by pushing a straw under the river and draining these springs from miles away."

For the better part of the past decade, John T. and Lynn L. Smoke of Bangor, Pa., have been working to develop a facility for collection, bulk storage and shipment of spring water in Greig. Following a public outcry against the project by many Greig residents, the Town Council and Planning Board both rejected the Smokes' plans.

In response, the Smokes have proposed to build a facility off Burdicks Crossing Road in the town of Turin and construct a water line under the Black River connecting a spring on their property off Sweeney Road in the town of Greig with the proposed building. The projected maximum flow would be 288,000 gallons per day.

The Smokes are seeking three state Department of Environmental Conservation permits: excavation and fill in navigable waters, freshwater wetlands and Clean Water Act water quality certification.

DEC officials are reviewing the project's draft environmental impact statement.

The Adirondack Council recently submitted a 31-page letter to DEC urging the state agency to reject the document and require the Smokes to "measure the true impact of the proposal," which could take years to complete, the release states.

The nonprofit agency expressed concerns about the project's impact on water resources, underground water flow, wetlands, local water purity, native plants that may become threatened in the near future, water levels at Brantingham Lake and stream temperatures.

"We believe the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation already possesses the legal authority to regulate commercial water extraction," Mr. Houseal said. "DEC is reluctant to do so because of the costs involved in enforcement. Leaving water extraction unregulated will be far more costly in the long run."

Greig town Supervisor Marilyn E. Patterson, a longtime foe of the water project, said she is pleased with the support of the Adirondack Council.

"They're ready to stand up and take action," Mrs. Patterson said. "I know some of the people here will be tickled to know that."

Another environmental group, Save Our Adirondacks, also submitted negative comments on the proposal to DEC, she said.

A committee of Greig town officials and residents last year developed a proposed commercial water law that would severely restrict the Smoke project. However, town officials in October sent the draft back to the committee for possible reworking after hearing misgivings about its constitutionality from several people, including town Attorney Mark G. Gebo and Lewis County Planning Board members.

A revised water law was submitted recently to the county Planning Board, but it likely won't be reviewed by that board until next month, Mrs. Patterson said.

The new proposal is less restrictive than the original, and some of the terminology has been altered or better defined, she said.

"I just hope the outcome is good for everybody," Mrs. Patterson said. "We're trying to do the right thing."

Without county Planning Board approval, support by a supermajority of at least four out of five Town Council members would be needed for adoption of the proposed zoning law.