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Council's State of the Park dishes cheers, jeers

By MIKE LYNCH, Enterprise Outdoors Writer

Local government leaders, the state Adirondack Park Agency and the state Department of Environmental Conservation all received more praise than criticism in the 24th annual State of the Park Report released by the Adirondack Council this week.

In the report, the Council analyzes Adirondack Park issues, ranging this past year from the Forest Preserve tax cap to the appointment of Terry Martino as the executive director of the APA. The Council summarizes the issues and gives either a thumbs up or a thumbs down.

The Council gave the APA eight positive reviews compared to three thumbs down, while the DEC had a ratio of 10 to four, and local government leaders had a ratio of eight to three.

"Several Adirondack local governments can boast of extraordinary achievements this year, doing things that we wish the state legislature would do Park-wide or statewide," Adirondack Council Executive Director Brian Houseal said in a press release. "The Fulton County Town of Inlet this year passed a local law requiring the inspection of existing septic systems when residential and commercial properties change hands. Malfunctioning septic systems can cause water pollution, including bacterial outbreaks, excess nutrients that provoke rapid weed growth and pharmaceutical contamination."

The Council praised the towns of Wilmington, Jay, Elizabethtown and Moriah for taking action to limit or ban low-efficiency outdoor wood boilers, which have been blamed for air pollution since their smoke has more particulate matter than other boilers' smoke.

The Council praised the APA for implementing stricter shoreline development regulations and gave the APA and DEC thumbs up for recommending that lands in the Lows Lake area be designated as wilderness. The appointment of Martino as head of the APA was also lauded.

The Council criticized the DEC for not acting sooner to require the village of Saranac Lake to cover its sand-salt pile, which ultimately led the Council to file an intent-to-sue notice against the village and DEC. The pile, now covered, was allegedly leaching into nearby waters, possibly causing environmental problems.

The Council gave the APA a thumbs down for approving a "frankenpine" cell tower on the Paul Smith's College campus.

"The result is an object that looks neither like a tree nor a cell tower, and calls attention to itself rather than concealing the equipment behind it," the report stated.

At the state level, Attorney General Andrew Cuomo received praise from the Council, Gov. David Paterson got a mixed reaction, the state Senate's ratings were split three to three, and the state Assembly's marks were five favorable mentions to two unfavorable.

"Attorney General Cuomo was also singled out for warning wind power companies that he was watching them after his investigators revealed that some companies had bribed and intimidated local officials when seeking permission to construct wind turbines in rural Upstate communities," Houseal stated in a press release. "He received a perfect five favorable ratings, with no unfavorable ratings, in last year's report. This year, he earned four thumbs-up ratings and zero thumbs-down ratings."

The Council praised Paterson for his proposal to curb carbon dioxide emissions and for signing the new Bigger Better Bottle Bill. The Council also opposed the governor on several issues.

"The Adirondack Council's criticism of the governor stemmed from his proposal to cap the state's property tax payments in communities that host Adirondack Forest Preserve," Houseal said. "In addition, he participated in large raids on the state's Environmental Protection Fund and advanced a plan that would have removed the EPF's most stable funding source, replacing it with an untried revenue source. He also offered to provide extra carbon dioxide allowances to companies that complained about the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, and we were troubled by his announcement that he would review state environmental regulations and throw out the unpopular ones."

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» The 18-page magazine-style report is available online