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## Hunt club alters land swap plan to get preservation groups' nod

BY JIM MCGUIRE Gazette Reporter

The hunting club that closed the Cathead Mountain trail a decade ago in a dispute over motorized access to its camp has sweetened the land swap proposal it offered a month ago as it tries to win support from Adirondack preservationist groups, the state Legislature and the public.

The new proposal, outlined in legislation sponsored by both Assemblywoman Teresa Sayward and state Sen. Betty Little, R-Glens Falls, has already persuaded the Adirondack Council to move from a neutral position to a full endorsement.

The board of directors of the Adirondack Mountain Club, which rejected the prior proposal for failing to offer sufficient public benefit to warrant altering the Forest Preserve, will vote Saturday on the new version.

To accomplish a land swap with the state, the measure must be approved by two consecutive legislatures and then by the public in a general election.

Thomas Gang Inc., also known as the Hatchbrook Sportman's Club, has revised its proposal so that it is now willing to swap 480 acres of land for 80 acres while also forfeiting the right to sell commercial space on the communications tower now leased to the state police. The club has also revised its proposal to forfeit the right to build up to six hunting camps on its remaining 400-plus acres, instead settling for the right to build one new camp. And, instead of demanding the full 160-acre great lot where the club driveway crossed, the club is asking for the 80 acres through which an old logging road winds its way to the existing camp.

Even if the state police abandon the communications tower they have long leased, said club spokesman Ron Palmer, "we agreed no private communications will ever be allowed on top of the mountain."

Noting that the club is willing to relinquish the possibility of future income from the tower, Palmer said, "These are very significant concessions. The club has conceded and we hope this permits the ADK to recognize the benefits involved," Palmer said.

ADK Executive Director Neil Woodworth said Thursday he cannot speak for his board, but said forfeiting the right to sell tower space addresses one of the concerns expressed by his organization.

As part of the plan, the state police would be able to replace the solar and wind power generation equipment attached to the fire tower with electrical lines run from nearby North Road in Benson.

As Woodworth pointed out, that scenario would lead to the removal of the wind and solar apparatus and restore the old fire tower to its original condition.

The Adirondack Council statement, issued as a memorandum of support for the legislation the club hopes can be passed before summer recess, said the bills would resolve “a long-standing issue between the state ... and a private landowner, while providing a net benefit to the Adirondack Forest Preserve.”

The Council memo cites the land swap, the restrictive conservation easement limiting development on the remaining 400 acres to one camp and the forfeiture of the right to sell space on the tower.

“As part of this exchange, the public will once again have access to the hiking trail leading to the summit of Cathead Mountain and its fire tower, along with Grant Lake,” the Council said.

The council touted the added reliability of state police communications powered from the grid and the ability thereafter to remove the wind and solar equipment.

Sayward called the swap plan a strong proposal offering a strong public benefit — the standard often cited to justify an exchange of private and state land. She noted the club is willing to give up about half its land while making the other concessions.

She said the support of the Adirondack preservationist groups is crucial to the success of such a measure, and everyone involved is waiting for a verdict from the ADK board.

“At least one of the groups is in agreement,” Sayward said, citing the Council support.

With the ADK support, she predicts she would be able to move the bill to the floor from the Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee where it now sits.

In the upper house, Little said the proposal would benefit the public with its significant transfer of land to the Forest Preserve and the reopening of the trail.

The long stalemate at Cathead and other similar disputes, Little said, could be addressed if her land bank legislation were adopted. In her proposal, Little said, private land would be acquired and banked in the Adirondacks so that it would be available to swap for Forest Preserve land needed for justifi - able reasons. She cited the recent swap that allowed an Adirondack community to take a small parcel of Forest Preserve land to drill municipal wells. Another community needed to expand a cemetery.