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## Moose River Plains changes in the works

By MIKE LYNCH, Enterprise Outdoors Writer

**RAY BROOK** - A new proposal would reconfigure the layout of campsites in the Moose River Plains and convert 15,000 acres of wild forest land to wilderness.

The plans were presented to the public for the first time Thursday by state Department of Environmental Conservation Region 6 Forester Keith Rivers at the Adirondack Park Agency's monthly meeting. They will be subject to a public comment period, the dates of which are still to be announced.

The plans are part of the unit management planning process, which originally went to public comment in 2006 when the DEC received more than 5,000 letters and had about 100 people show up for a public hearing in Inlet.

What is generally referred to by its old name of the Moose River Plains Recreation Area, part of the 85,000-acre Moose River Plains Wild Forest, currently consists of 50,000 acres, more than 40 miles of roads and about 170 campsites, 140 of which are along roads. It is located in Hamilton and Herkimer counties.

The DEC is proposing to create a new intensive-use area called the Moose River Plains Camping Area, made up of about 2,900 acres. It would consist of a strip of land along 20 miles of roads, starting at the Cedar River Flow Headquarters and continuing along Rock Dam Road, Loop Road, the Bradley Brook Loop and Helldiver Pond Road.

This camping area is being created to allow the campsites to remain. Otherwise, they would not conform to the State Land Master Plan.

The campsites would remain primitive in nature, have fire rings, pit privies, picnic tables and parking for a vehicle and one trailer. Rivers said the intent is to retain the primitive nature of the sites and not to create another Fish Creek, a crowded camping area next to the St. Regis Canoe Area and Upper Saranac Lake.

One major change would be to eliminate many current campsites because they are either too close to one another or too close to natural resources such as streams.

The plan would ultimately leave 108 of the current 174 campsites in place after the first round of changes. Eighty-three of the 116 campsites in the new camping area would remain while the surrounding wild forest area would retain 25 where there are currently 58.

However, if it is deemed necessary, the DEC would have the option of having up to 150 campsites in the intensive camping area.

This proposal is considerably scaled back compared to the one in 2006, which would have eliminated about 100 campsites. The current changes were made after public pressure to keep the sites. The Plains and its visitors are vital to the economies of Inlet and Indian Lake because of the amount of snowmobilers and campers it attracts. A plan is also in place to create a snowmobile trail that would go through the Moose River Plains to the hamlets of Raquette Lake and Long Lake.

Rivers noted that a large percentage of Hamilton County is under state control, either as state-owned Forest Preserve or under conservation easement.

"What we do there really has an impact on everybody in that county," Rivers said.

Inlet town Supervisor John Frey expressed concern about losing campsites that may never be replaced.

"We need to keep those open until there are alternatives," Frey said. "Any loss of campsites has a drastic effect on the economy of both Indian Lake, Inlet and Hamilton County."

Indian Lake town Supervisor Barry Hutchins also emphasized that any lost campsites need to be replaced, even if the usage is down for a period of time.

"We have to remember that, and just because there's only 50 campers in there maybe this summer on a particular weekend doesn't mean that all 99 or 116 wouldn't be needed next year," he said. "This is an area that doesn't cost a lot for maintenance other than maintaining the road, and local government is committed to helping."

Another key component of this proposal that is likely to be debated in coming weeks is whether 15,000 acres from the Moose River Plains Wild Forest should be added to the neighboring West Canada Lakes wilderness.

John Davis, of the Adirondack Council environmental group, supported the idea of adding the acreage to wilderness and said the overall plan looks good, although his organization would have to scrutinize it further.

"At first glance it seems to me that the APA and DEC have done a good job in this case in the Moose River Plains area of trying to consolidate the more intensive uses, the heavier uses, the motorists' uses," Davis said. "At the same time, it creates larger areas of strict wilderness-level protection (in the) interior forests. So the direction they are going makes good sense."

Frey expressed concern about the wild forest land becoming wilderness because it would restrict certain users from going there, such as mountain bikers and snowmobilers, but Indian Lake town Supervisor Barry Hutchins didn't think it would be a problem.

Hutchins said he was glad the state "worked with us" and "listened to us," but he wanted to point out that in the end, 2,900 acres would be added to the intensive camping area while 15,000 would be added to the wilderness area.

"That should be brought out," Hutchins said. "They are gaining wilderness all the time, which is fine in some areas. This one here is going to be fine. It's going to work out. But the next issue, when they are looking to put wilderness into the Forest Preserve, these trades should be remembered."

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(Editor's note: This article has been corrected. There are 58, not 38, campsites in the wild forest area surrounding the proposed intensive-use camping area.)