

WNBZ
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Proposed Lyon Mountain Classification would Save Fire Tower, Roads

The fire tower on Lyon Mountain may be safe for now as the Adirondack Park Agency is proposing classifying the recently acquired 17,000 acres tract as wild forest instead of the more restrictive primitive or wilderness designations.

Located in the Clinton County towns of Dannemora and Saranac, the Lyon Mountain tract is the largest of the agency's 2010 classification package, which totals in excess of 32,000 acres covering 94 parcels within 10 counties.

New York State acquired Lyon Mountain in 2008 from the Nature Conservancy.

According to APA Senior Planner Kathy Regan, the history and ecology of Lyon Mountain are the primary factors for the Wild Forest recommendation.

"This particular land can withstand a fair amount of human use," Regan said. "There is an extensive trail system throughout the parcel with logging and snowmobile trails. Some appear to still be in use."

Much of the parcel is under working forest easements, allowing selective tree harvesting and vehicle access.

Included in numerous structures on the parcel are a historic fire tower and several roads and trails – some overgrown, others still in use.

And if classified as either wilderness or primitive, the tower and trails would be considered non-conforming structures and would be destroyed.

But some environmental organizations don't agree with the agency's take.

Any parcel greater than 10,000 acres can be classified as wilderness and green groups are arguing that Lyon Mountain is all but tailor-made for this classification.

The Adirondack Council is calling for the land to be classified as primitive, which is usually applied to cases where the ultimate goal is to classify it as wilderness, but non-conforming structures must be first removed.

Local officials have long slammed the Wilderness designation for limiting the types of allowable uses and stripping the land of historic structures.

Another fire tower may be spared the axe due to a private in-holding on another parcel up for classification.

Regan said most of the 6,800 acres Tawawas-Henderson tract would be added to the adjoining High Peaks Wilderness Area, but a single-acre private in-holding, on which the tower sits, will likely be its savior.

Over the last several years, 16 fire towers have been destroyed or removed from reclassified state land.

The APA Board of Commissioners approved a resolution Friday to send the entire 32,000 acres classification package to public hearing.

Staff said they hoped to get the public hearings under way in late December or early January.

-Jon Alexander, 11-18-09