

# APA writes draft permit for Tupper Lake resort

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Developers want to build a huge resort near Big Tupper Ski area. Photo by Carl Heilman II

After six years of public debate, the Adirondack Park Agency's staff has written a draft permit for the Adirondack Club and Resort in Tupper Lake, finding that the resort would comply with the law if it meets all the conditions of the permit.

The APA board, which is scheduled to vote next Friday, could approve the draft permit, approve it with modifications, or reject it. Among other things, the board must decide whether the project will cause an "undue adverse environmental impact."

Two environmental activists disagree on whether the project as described in the permit passes the test.

Brian Houseal, executive director of the Adirondack Council, said he is happy with the changes required by the draft permit. "The developer has designed the project within the existing regulations," he said.

Houseal said he is especially pleased that no further subdivision will be allowed on the land occupied by the so-called Great Camps. As a result, he said, the fragmentation of wildlife habitat will be limited.

"The changes imposed by the APA will probably avoid undue adverse environmental impact," Houseal said. "Is that a win for the environmental community? Yes."

But David Gibson of Adirondack Wild contends that the board should reject the permit. Most of the Great Camps will be built on lands classified as Resource Management, where typical uses are forestry, agriculture, and recreation. Residential development is allowed only "on substantial acreages or in small clusters." Gibson said many of the Great Camps will be built on fifteen- or twenty-acre lots. "It doesn't meet the criterion for Resource Management," Gibson said. "Most of the Adirondack Club and Resort could not be defined as being on substantial acreage or in small clusters."

Gibson also said the developers failed to conduct a thorough study of wildlife on the property. Houseal, however, pointed out that the draft permit now requires the developers to undertake an amphibian study.

Adirondack Wild wants adjudicatory hearings reopened to address wildlife impacts and other issues, but Houseal disagrees.

"It's time to have a decision here," Houseal said. "I appreciate Adirondack Wild's motion to put it back in the hearing, but we need to have a decision."

Preserve Associates wants to build a 719-unit resort—a mixture of single- and multi-family homes—on some 6,200 acres near the Big Tupper Ski Area. It would be the largest development ever approved by the APA.

Despite writing a draft permit, the APA staff did not make a recommendation to approve or reject the project. APA spokesman Keith McKeever said this was due partly to the complexity of the project. "It's up to the board to make a decision," he said.

If the developers win the APA's go-ahead, they will still need to obtain water-quality permits from the state Department of Environmental Conservation and financing approvals from the Franklin County Industrial Development Agency. Houseal argues that one lesson of the drawn-out process is that permits for future projects should be considered together, not separately.