

# APA approves Tupper Lake resort plan

## Officials tout economic benefits of massive project

By Stephen Williams, Gazette Reporter  
The Daily Gazette

January 21, 2012

**ADIRONDACKS** — The Adirondack Park Agency on Friday approved plans for the massive Adirondack Club and Resort in Tupper Lake, the largest development proposal in recent Adirondack history.

Plans for the controversial 719-unit project in the remote northwest corner of the Adirondack Park were approved 10-1 after months of intense review, with only commissioner Richard Booth of Ithaca voting against it.

The development would encompass 6,200 acres around the Big Tupper ski area, which would be redeveloped into a year-round resort backers think will draw 100,000 skiers a year.

Ending three days of deliberations, all the APA commissioners acknowledged they wrestled with the resort's environmental impacts versus its potential economic benefits, though they came down in favor of the plans.

"The biggest thing for me is this brings the opportunity for economic development to Tupper Lake," said commissioner William Thomas of Johnsburg.

The representatives of the state departments of Environmental Conservation, Economic Development and State all voted in favor, with one noting that 4,600 acres out of the 6,200 are to remain a permanent open space — though in private hands.

"There are tremendous economic benefits that could accrue to our region from this project," said Empire State Development representative Jennifer McCormick.

Booth, however, said a lack of realistic sales projections or an in-depth

wildlife survey were sufficient grounds to oppose the development. "Approval of this project will send a very negative message about the use of large resource areas," Booth said.

Developer Michael Foxman and partners have proposed redeveloping the ski area and a marina located on Tupper Lake, along with construction of a golf course and 60-room inn. There would also be 453 units of single-family or multi-family housing, and 15 large "Great Camp" lots that would each incorporate hundreds of acres. There are 15 miles of new road proposed.

Construction is expected to take 15 years or longer, with a \$142 million construction payroll anticipated over that time. In addition, more than 200 permanent jobs are anticipated.

APA approval came after a seven-year review that has included negotiations and mediation sessions, and elimination of highly visible ridge-line homes and a shooting range that drew objections from environmental groups.

APA Chairwoman Leilani Ulrich said the development is "thoughtfully designed."

"I believe there are greater protections on this land than if it had been developed one lot at a time, one house at a time," Ulrich said.

The APA set numerous conditions in the 14 project permits it approved — including a prohibition on further subdivision of the great camp lots, and a requirement that the developer pay for independent "environmental monitors" during construction. There are also special protections for land along the Raquette River, near Follensby Pond.

"We believe the permits are strongly conditioned in a manner to ensure this project will not have any undue adverse environmental or community impacts," said APA Executive Director Terry Martino. During the years of debate, many people have come to view the future of Tupper Lake as hanging in the balance.

Foxman's plans have been faulted by critics concerned that there will be permanent environmental harm, and that the plans are financially unrealistic in the current economy.

Most residents of Tupper Lake, a village of about 4,000 in southern Franklin County that once relied on logging and industry, supported

the project.

"I'm going to make sure as long as I'm in office to work with [APA] mandates to make this a project we can all be proud of," said Tupper Lake Mayor Paul Maroun.

The Adirondack North County Association, which promotes tourism and economic development across the region, praised the approval.

"ANCA sees the project as advancing the North Country Regional Economic Development Council's vision of elevating global recognition of the region as one of the special places on the planet to visit, live, work and study," said ANCA Executive Director Kate Fish.

"It's going to bring an economic spurt that Tupper Lake really needs," said Debbie Spezza of Schoharie, a partner in Blue Line Development Group, which has approval to build a 49-unit townhouse development in Tupper Lake. "We hope both projects will boost the economy in the Tupper Lake area."

But Dan Plumley, a partner in the environmental group Adirondack Wild, which has consistently opposed the back-country parts of the development, said the decision betrays the state's "sacred public trust" to future generations to protect the Adirondack's wild lands from adverse environmental impacts.

"I think they issued the wrong ruling, and Commissioner Booth really stated the reasons," said Adirondack Wild partner David Gibson, who said legal action is possible.

Another advocacy group, Protect the Adirondacks!, also blasted the APA as placing economic issues ahead of protecting the fragile Adirondack wilderness.

"With this vote, it is now clear that the park's anti-environment/pro-development forces have achieved their long-term goal of capturing control of the Park Agency," said John Caffrey, a Glens Falls attorney who co-chairs Protect's conservation advocacy committee. "It will be open season on subdividing the park's backcountry lands."

The Adirondack Club and Resort still faces some big hurdles before construction can start. It will need water quality and wastewater disposal permits from DEC, and the developer must finalize bond financing and payment in lieu of taxes agreements with the Franklin County Industrial Development Agency.