

Morning Read: Did the Adirondack Park Agency gloss over Big Tupper wildlife concerns?

By Brian Mann
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Last month's decision by state officials to allow construction of the massive Big Tupper resort continues to simmer out there. A legal challenge could still come, with the deadline for a decision by green groups set for April 1st.

[In today's Adirondack Almanack](#), [David Gibson](#) – co-head of the group Adirondack Wild — points to what he views as a glaring shift in how the Adirondack Park Agency treated wildlife concerns on the 6,200 acre property.

Gibson points to this passage, in official documents prepared by the APA in late October 2011.

“A comprehensive biological inventory of the project site was not conducted, so it is not possible to make specific findings concerning impacts to habitat from the proposed project or to identify the presence or location of specific areas on the project site that should be prioritized for protection.”

Gibson argues that just a few months later, the APA was sounding a very different tune. In official documents prepared in January 2012, that paragraph is deleted and replaced with this:

“Site investigations to evaluate wildlife and wildlife habitat on the project site followed standard Agency guidelines and procedures. In addition to reviewing historical records for threatened and endangered species, qualitative biological surveys including on site visual assessments as defined in Agency guidance ‘Guidelines for Biological Surveys’ were completed during site visits. Other than identifying the deer wintering area as a key wildlife habitat, no other wildlife habitat was identified as containing threatened, endangered or species of special concern on the project site.”

During debate and discussion by the APA commission over the last several months, it became clear that wildlife surveys on the property were rudimentary at best, a fact that prompted a lot of concern even from board members who ultimately voted Yes.

State officials reported that when an independent scientist visited the property, a significant number of new amphibians were identified in a single day. (The developer's review team failed to identify a single amphibian.)

APA board member Judith Drabicki, who represents the Conservation Department, pointed out during public discussions that DEC guidelines for evaluating endangered species concerns are significantly more rigorous than the methods used by the APA.

This may seem like yesterday's news. But the issue Gibson raises could inform whether or not green groups sue to challenge the Big Tupper permit.

These questions could also be key to any discussion of reforming the Park Agency's procedures for reviewing big projects in the future.