

Motorized access to Boreas Ponds debated at DEC hearing

By Phil Brown,
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About 25 people attended the DEC hearing in Albany. Photo by Phil Brown.

If proposals for new state lands win approval, people could be driving most of the way to Boreas Ponds later this year.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation wants to build a six-car parking area a tenth of a mile from the ponds and a ten-car parking area about a mile away.

Rob Davies, director of DEC's Division of Lands and Forests, said the department hopes to build the parking areas this year.

"I think they will be ready for Columbus Day and hopefully sooner," Davies told the *Adirondack Explorer* after a hearing in Albany Wednesday on various proposals for the former Boreas Ponds Tract and other state lands.

Work cannot begin, however, until the Adirondack Park Agency approves DEC's proposed amendments to the unit management plans (UMPs) for the High Peaks Wilderness and Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest. The APA board may give its imprimatur at its July meeting.

Boreas Ponds—the crown jewel of the former Finch, Pruyn lands—offers a spectacular view of the High Peaks, including Mount Marcy and the Great Range.

Earlier this year, the APA board split the 21,000-acre Boreas Ponds Tract between the High Peaks and Vanderwhacker units. The ponds themselves are in the High Peaks Wilderness, where motorized use is forbidden. The former logging roads leading to the ponds are in the Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest.

DEC hosted hearings in Albany and Newcomb on Wednesday to receive public input on the department's proposals for motorized access, parking areas, trails, campsites, and other amenities in the two Forest Preserve units. The department announced that a third hearing will be held at the Lake Placid Conference Center on June 21, starting at 6 p.m.

Thirteen people spoke at the Albany hearing, and they disagreed over DEC's plans for motorized access to Boreas Ponds.

David Gibson of Adirondack Wild argued that allowing the public to park close to the ponds will destroy the region's sense of remoteness. He contends that the general public should continue to use an interim parking area—built in 2016—that lies more than three miles from the ponds. He said people have got used to hiking and wheeling their canoes over that distance.

Gibson says only the disabled should be allowed to park closer to the ponds. He suggests they could park a mile away and take a wheelchair-accessible trail the rest of the way.

Under DEC's plan, two of the six spaces in the parking area near Boreas Ponds would be reserved for the disabled. The other four spaces would be open to anyone who obtained a permit.

John Sheehan, a spokesman for the Adirondack Council, [criticized the parking plan on Twitter](#): "Universal access is NOT disabled access: Boreas Ponds parking plan pits persons w/disabilities against genl public for parking 500 feet from ponds. Letting EVERYONE park that close will harm Boreas Ponds."

But North Hudson Supervisor Ron Moore, whose town includes Boreas Ponds, praised DEC's proposals. "It's a compromise, and no one got everything they wanted, but from where I stand, it's pretty darn good," he said at the hearing.

Fred Monroe, executive director of the Local Government Review Board, said families with young children or elderly relatives will welcome the opportunity to see Boreas Ponds without having to hike a mile or more to get there.

DEC expects that most people will park at the lot a mile from the ponds, located near LaBier Flow, an impoundment of the Boreas River. The department plans to monitor use and, if warranted, expand the lot to 15 spaces. If the lot fills up, people will have to park at the interim lot three-plus miles from the ponds. In that case, paddlers will be able to drive to LaBier Flow to drop off their canoes and kayaks.



Ron Konowitz of the Adirondack Powder Skier Association. Photo by Phil Brown.

Adirondack Wild and the Adirondack Council complain that DEC and the APA are fast-tracking the proposals so DEC can get to work on projects this summer. The two agencies are soliciting comments simultaneously. DEC is gathering input on the merits of the proposals, while the APA is taking comments on whether the proposals conform to the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan.

"The process is rushed," Gibson remarked, noting that DEC issued its voluminous plans just three weeks after closing an earlier public-comment period. He contended that the department is putting forth public-recreation proposals without fully analyzing their impact on the environment.

"Protection of natural resources is paramount," he said. "Recreational use is very important, but secondary."

Among other things, the plans call for 38 miles of new foot trails, two mountain-bike networks, a rerouting of the Wright Peak Ski Trail, the closure of the Cascade Mountain trailhead on Route 73, new parking areas in the Chapel Pond area, a new snowmobile trail through the Boreas Ponds Tract, and put-ins along the upper Hudson River.

Ron Konowitz, president of the [Adirondack Powder Skier Association](#), praised DEC for its plan to reroute the historic Wright Peak Ski Trail away from the Algonquin Peak hiking trail. However, he urged the department to develop more ski trails on steep terrain. Most of the other backcountry-ski proposals in the two plans, he noted, “are low-angle trails.”

Two others spoke in favor of backcountry skiing at the hearing. “You build the trails, we’ll come, we’ll use them, and spend a lot of money,” said John Furman.

Monica Moss urged DEC to see how backcountry skiers have been accommodated in Vermont and elsewhere—via trails and glades—without harming the environment. “We don’t want to see the Adirondacks,” damaged,” she said.

The Boreas Ponds Tract was the largest parcel of former Finch, Pruyn lands that the state purchased in recent years from the Adirondack Nature Conservancy.

[Click here to read an earlier story](#) on the APA’s decision to fast-track approvals of the amendments to the UMPs. The story contains links to other stories with details of several of the proposals.

Comments on the management proposals themselves should be submitted to DEC: Robert Ripp, forester, NYSDEC, 232 Golf Road, Warrensburg, NY 12885. They also can be emailed to info.r5@dec.ny.gov.

Comments on whether the proposals comply with the State Land Master Plan can be sent to APA: Kathy Regan, deputy director, Adirondack Park Agency, P.O. Box 99, Ray Brook, NY 12977. They also can be emailed info.r5@dec.ny.gov.

The deadline for submitting comments is June 27.