A Miami, Florida developer has sent the NYS Adirondack Park Agency Part 1 of an application for a proposed 350-acre resort in Jay, NY near Whiteface Mountain and Lake Placid. However, in this Part 1 phase of review the developer has failed to provide the most basic of requested resource information needed to evaluate project impacts.

In their comment letter to the Agency Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, a nonprofit Park wildland advocate, states that the application for up to 120 residential units near the East Branch of the Ausable River fails to comply with the Agency’s review criteria, including protection of open space, wildlife, and habitat resources, and in accordance with the objectives of conservation design.

“APA’s application clearly states on page 1 that review criteria includes protection of open space and wildlife habitats. As for open space, there are no contiguous blocks of
forest designated for protection anywhere in the application. There is no proposed conservation easement identified to ensure forest and habitat conservation for future resource utilization, preservation, wildlife habitat or open space recreation,” said Adirondack Wild’s managing partner David Gibson.

Gibson continued that “the only open space shown lies in wetlands that cannot be developed and in between several miles of new road development, cul-de-sacs and roundabouts for 120 units of housing described as townhomes, villas, estates, mansions and a hotel. That’s not meaningful open space conservation, that’s not good conservation design. It’s merely land left over after development. More sprawl for purely high-end, seasonal homes is the last thing the Adirondack Park needs right now.”

Adirondack Wild’s letter notes that more exclusive resort development like this drives up real estate prices for everyone within small, rural towns like Jay, near Lake Placid. Affordable housing for year-round residents has become an urgent problem in this area of the Adirondack Park. As proposed, this project does not incorporate affordable housing objectives.

“The applicant leaves out requested information about mammals, birds, other sensitive animal and their habitats, and connections between habitats. Also left out is requested information about areas of scenic significance, aquifers and natural habitat corridors. Worst of all, the composite maps requested by the APA to identify areas most suitable for development or valuable for significant resource and open space protection are not provided.”

“You cannot protect what you have never looked for, located and mapped. The first step in intelligent development is to know your resources, to conduct a comprehensive baseline inventory of natural, cultural, historic and scenic resources on a site. Thus far, this application badly fails that crucial first step,” Gibson added. Adirondack Wild is asking the APA not to declare Part 1 of the application as “received” until the Agency’s requested resource information and composite maps are provided.

The APA’s pre-application process for large subdivisions was meant to be cost and time efficient. Its goals were to conceptualize development locations only after resources are comprehensively identified, mapped and impacts to sensitive habitats and blocks of open space avoided.

“Far from being efficient APA’s large-scale subdivision process has become drawn out because the process is entirely voluntary. Large developers deliver incomplete applications, leaving out vital information about what is living and growing on the project site, and beyond it. Good impact avoidance cannot be accomplished without that information. Clearly needed is new legislation which mandates better ecological site analysis and conservation development for these large subdivisions.” That legislation, sponsored by New York Assembly Member Steven Englebright and State Senator Todd Kaminsky, is pending in Albany.

Adirondack Wild’s guidebook *Pathways to a Connected Adirondack Park – Practical Steps to Better Land Use Decisions* written by conservation biologist Michael Klemens offers hard-won advice and steps needed to improve local and APA review of subdivisions like this one. A copy can be downloaded at Adirondack Wild’s website. Hard copies are also available from Adirondack Wild, a not-for-profit, membership advocate acting to
safeguard wilderness and to promote wild land values and stewardship. More is found on the web at adirondackwild.org.