



KAREN FELDMAN
Acting Chair

TERRY MARTINO
Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

To: Terry Martino, Executive Director

From: Richard E. Weber, Deputy Director, Planning

Date: May 8, 2019

Re: 2019 Hammond Pond Wild Forest UMP

Agency staff have reviewed DEC's Proposed Final Unit Management Plan for Hammond Pond Wild Forest (Plan), dated May 2019, and recommend a determination by the Agency Board that the Plan conforms to the general guidelines and criteria of the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (APSLMP).

Hammond Pond Wild Forest consists of 56 parcels of State land totaling approximately 45,619 acres in the eastern portion of the Adirondack Park. It features 53 ponds and lakes, and – combined with Pharaoh Lake Wilderness Area immediately to the south – offers some of the best pond fishing for brook trout in the Adirondacks.

The more notable proposals in the Plan include the following: construct equestrian trails to complement the newly built Frontier Town Campground, Equestrian and Day-Use Area; construct a significant section of the U.S. National Park Service's "North Country National Scenic Trail" through the area; develop improvements at the very popular Split Rock Falls to help stop erosion and enhance the visitor recreational experience there; construct fishing and waterway access sites at Deadwater Pond and a site one-half mile north of North Hudson's town beach on the Schroon River; restore wild forest character to the lands at Crown Point Bay on Eagle Lake and otherwise bring DEC structures and improvements there into conformance with the APSLMP; address the nonconforming, public boat launching site on Eagle Lake by conducting a study of the lake and its use that will inform further action(s) by the end of the fifth year of the Plan's implementation that will result in APSLMP conformance. Throughout the Plan, DEC also commits in its implementation to address carrying-capacity concerns by means of wildlands monitoring efforts that will focus on some existing high-use areas and the variety of new trails and other improvements planned for construction.

After public scoping in 2017, DEC prepared a draft of the Plan in consultation with Agency staff and sought public comment on the draft in Fall 2018. For SEQRA purposes, DEC, as lead agency, in consultation with APA as an involved agency, determined, in November 2018, that the draft Plan would not have a significant adverse effect on the environment.

On March 15, 2019, the Agency Board authorized staff to proceed to public comment on APSLMP conformance of the Proposed Final UMP, dated March 2019. The comment period ran from that date through April 15, 2019, during which fifteen public comment letters were received. Of those we received that focus on issues of APSLMP conformance, most focus on (and express commenters' objections to) the Plan's recognition that a variety of State structures and improvements at two wild forest classified shoreline locations on Eagle Lake (Crown Point Bay and the "boat access" site) do not comply with wild forest area management guidelines and criteria of the APSLMP. One commenter critiques the Plan, at length and in detail, as being broadly deficient in terms of what the APSLMP calls for unit management plans to include and address.

Concerning the nonconforming public boat access facility found at Eagle Lake, the Plan acknowledges the unusual complexity of the issue and presents a number of alternatives considered by the Department. The preferred alternative, which was selected after extensive consultation with Agency staff, calls for "*an assessment of Eagle Lake access and conditions to inform a future decision to **either** alter the site in accordance with the APSLMP Wild Forest guidelines... **or** propose a reclassification of the area to Intensive Use.*" This decision will be made prior to the end of the five-year planning period, and it will result in the State's provision of public access to the waters of Eagle Lake by means of an APSLMP-conforming facility.

The preferred alternative, above, also provides sufficient detail as to the broad nature of the assessment that will be conducted. Essential information will be gathered in the upcoming years concerning Eagle Lake's natural characteristics, as well as its shoreline ownerships, boating uses, and more. It is our two agencies' understanding that this information will be integrated into and considered as part of a determination to be made concerning Eagle Lake's unique "capacity to withstand various uses" as specifically called for by the APSLMP in order to "maintain and enhance its biological, natural and aesthetic qualities" (APSLMP, p.4). Upon this critical determination, Agency staff anticipate that a decision concerning the appropriate type of facility for providing public boat access to Eagle Lake will then be made.

Subsequent to our public comment period, several substantive changes have been made to the UMP. These were made to add detail to how carrying-capacity concerns will be addressed by DEC staff during the upcoming five years – particularly regarding new trails and other improvements proposed in the Plan for enhancing the public's recreational enjoyment of the area.

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A draft resolution for the Agency Board addressing the Plan, the Agency's compliance with SEQRA, and the Plan's conformance with the APSLMP is attached to this memo for your consideration.

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