

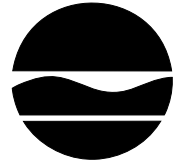
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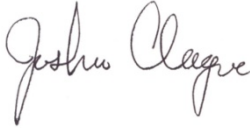


Joe Martens
Commissioner

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Kathy Regan
Senior Natural Resources Planner (APA)

FROM: Josh Clague
Associate Natural Resources Planner (DEC)



DATE: October 15, 2013

SUBJECT: Hurricane Mountain Fire Tower Historic Area
Response to APA's Review and Comments on Initial Draft UMP

This memo is in response to comments provided by you on May 29, 2013 regarding the compliance of the Initial Draft Unit Management Plan (UMP) for the Hurricane Mountain Fire Tower Historic Area with the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (SLMP).

The primary area of concern identified in your memo is the Department's proposal to install solar panels on the fire tower. The purpose of the solar panels would be to provide sufficient electricity to enable a radio repeater, also proposed to be installed inside the cab of the tower, to operate continuously 24 hours a day.

The Hurricane fire tower has been identified by DEC's law enforcement staff as an ideal location for a radio repeater in order to close a gap in radio coverage in the eastern High Peaks region. Every year, law enforcement personnel receive multiple emergency-response calls for this area, including the High Peaks Wilderness, Dix Mountain Wilderness, and Giant Mountain Wilderness. Because of the steep terrain in this region, there are certain areas, most notably the John's Brook valley, that do not have sufficient radio coverage during search and rescue operations. This gap in coverage is usually mitigated by the establishment of a temporary base station in the vicinity of the rescue operation. A functioning radio repeater on Hurricane Mountain would all but eliminate the need for such temporary base stations.

Regarding the solar panels, your memo states on page two:

The panels may distract from the historic area purpose of the fire tower under this state land classification category. The State Land Master Plan (SLMP) states that the “primary management guidelines for historic areas will be to preserve the quality and character of the historic resources, that is, to the greatest extent feasible, in a setting and on a scale with the relatively wild and undeveloped character of the Adirondack Park” (page 41). The SLMP continues by stating that “All historic areas will be designed, managed, and interpreted so as to blend with the Adirondack environment and have the minimum adverse impact possible on surrounding state lands and nearby private holdings” (page 42).

On page three, your memo goes on to say:

The inclusion of the Hurricane Mountain Fire Tower to both the State and Federal Register of Historic Places was a determining factor for the Agency Board when recommending to Governor Paterson that the tower be reclassified as a Historic Area in 2010. At that time, there was no mention of the need for a repeater and solar panel installation or any indication that the tower would be used in any way other...than as a historic resource. Although part of the historic use of fire towers were to meet the Department’s ongoing and emergency communications needs, the use of solar panels may detract from the historic aspects which led to its reclassification.

Federal and State policy with respect to historic properties is made in the National Historic Preservation Act (1966) and the State Historic Preservation Act (1980). Neither requires that resources found to be historic be frozen in time. Both encourage that historic properties continue to be useful and functional in the modern world while retaining the qualities that make them significant. In the case of fire observation towers, they were originally constructed to protect natural resources and provide communication, but they also came to function as hiking destinations which served to enhance public knowledge, appreciation and enjoyment of those natural resources. The Department’s proposal for the Hurricane Fire Tower essentially re-establishes this dual role.

It is the opinion of the Department that the presence of the solar panels, as proposed, would have had no bearing on the acceptance of the Hurricane fire tower onto the State and Federal Registers if the panels had been present at that time. As such, the APA’s decision to use the tower’s status as listed on the Registers as a factor in deciding to reclassify the land to historic would have not been affected by the solar panels had they already been present.

Further, the solar panels do not, in the Department’s opinion, constitute a major change in the appearance of the tower. They don’t require removal of any historic fabric and are a change that is easily reversible. Being attached to a structure made of steel and (at times) glass or plexiglass, the presence of the panels would not cause the tower to “blend with the Adirondack environment” any less than it already does.

While solar panels were not historically part of the overall communications configuration, they are the least costly and most practical option for providing low amounts of power in a remote setting. More importantly, the original means of communication—a telephone line along a maintained corridor—would certainly not conform to the SLMP given the recent reclassification to Wilderness of the lands surrounding the fire tower. As such, a solar panel/radio repeater system may be the only SLMP-compliant means of re-establishing the structure as a communication link which, as mentioned above, is one of the primary purposes for which it was originally erected.