

ATTACHMENT A
DESCRIPTION OF ACTION

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Description of proposed State land classification and reclassification action related to the Essex Chain Lakes Tract, Indian River Tract, Blue Mountain Wild Forest, Hudson Gorge Primitive Areas

Description of Action:

The action involves the proposed classification and reclassification of State lands and waters in the vicinity of the Essex Chain Lakes and Hudson Gorge Primitive Area in Essex and Hamilton Counties within the Adirondack Park. The action involves eight State land classification proposals totaling approximately 22,142 acres and three (3) State land reclassification proposals ranging from an estimated 20,216 to 20,261 acres. Total acreage involved in the proposal ranges from approximately 42,372 to 42,417 acres. A summary table and map outlines the scope of all the proposals within this classification package.

This action only involves the classification and reclassification of State lands according to the provisions of the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan ("Master Plan") and related additions and revisions to the Area Descriptions for the areas to be classified. The action has been reviewed according to the guidelines and criteria of the Master Plan and the Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement: Guidelines For Amending the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (1979). A Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement was accepted by the Adirondack Park Agency on May 10, 2013. The proposed action does not authorize the development of new structures or improvements without prior, additional SEQRA assessment by the Department of Environmental Conservation and/or the Adirondack Park Agency.

The Agency authorized its staff to proceed to public hearings and to receive written comments from the public until July 19, 2013 on the classification and reclassification proposals contained in the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. The proposed classification and reclassifications presented seven alternatives which had been prepared after consultation

with the Department of Environmental Conservation as required by a Memorandum of Understanding Regarding the Implementation of the State Land Master Plan for the Adirondack Park.

Staff has evaluated the alternatives presented in the public hearings and recommends the following series of individual classification and reclassification proposals as the preferred alternative. The proposals are described in a more detailed narrative below and in the adjoining map and summary table. The components of the action include 12 basic parts:

- Classification of the northeastern portion of the recently acquired Essex Chain Lakes Tract east of the center line of the Hudson River and north of and including the Iron (Polaris) Bridge for inclusion in the Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest;
- Classification of the northern portion of the recently acquired Essex Chain Lakes Tract west of the center line of the Hudson River and north of and including the Iron (Polaris) Bridge for inclusion in the Blue Mountain Wild Forest;
- Classification of the eastern portion of the recently acquired Essex Chain Lakes Tract into a new Polaris Mountain Primitive Area;
- Reclassification of the Hudson Gorge Primitive Area to become the Hudson Gorge Wilderness Area;
- Classification of newly acquired lands within the Hudson Gorge Primitive Area known as the OK Slip Falls Tract to Wilderness and to be added to the Hudson Gorge Primitive Area;
- Classification of the southeastern portion of the recently acquired Essex Chain Lakes Tract near the confluence of the Cedar and Hudson Rivers as Wilderness to be added to the Hudson Gorge Wilderness Area;
- Creation of two Primitive corridors in the Hudson Gorge Wilderness Area for private access to an

inholding and for a powerline in the vicinity of State Route 28;

- Classification of the eastern portion of the recently acquired Indian River Tract between the Chain Lakes Road (South) and the Hudson River as Wilderness to be added to the Hudson Gorge Wilderness Area.
- Classification of the western portion of the recently acquired Indian Lake Tract including the Chain Lakes Road (South) as Wild Forest to be included in the Blue Mountain Wild Forest;
- Reclassification of a portion of the Blue Mountain Wild Forest lying between the recently acquired Indian Lake Tract and the Essex Chain Lakes Tract from Wild Forest to be part of a new Primitive Area;
- Reclassification of a portion of the Blue Mountain Wild Forest along the western boundary of the recently acquired Essex Chain Lakes Tract from Wild Forest to be part of a new Primitive Area; and
- Classification of a large portion of the recently acquired Essex Chain Lakes Tract as a new Primitive Area or Areas.

Reclassification of the Hudson Gorge Wilderness Area:

This component of the proposed action creates a Wilderness Area of approximately 23,494 acres in the Towns of Newcomb and Minerva, Essex County, and the Town of Indian Lake, Hamilton County. It encompasses the wildest and most remote section of the Hudson River, as well as a spectacular white water gorge.

There are two designated foot trails within this area. From the south, a trail leads from Route 28 to Whortleberry Pond, with short spur trails to Ross and Big Bad Luck Ponds. From the north, a trail begins on Northwoods Club Road and ends at Blue Ledge above the Hudson River. There are no public roads or access routes to this section of the Hudson River. In the past relatively few people were successful in navigating the waters by canoe, boat or raft. These factors had served to retain this portion of the

river and its immediate surroundings in a near wilderness condition. River access has significantly increased with the development of commercial rafting since the early 1980's.

Although there are no established foot trails that parallel this section of the Hudson River, the Blue Ledge Trail receives considerable use. There is an existing trail network on the lands acquired which had been developed by previous landowners, including trails to OK Slip Falls.

Unlike the majority of the Adirondack Park, much of the underlying bedrock in this area is calcareous which is reflected through the species and natural communities that occupy these lands and waters. The river corridors along the Hudson and Cedar Rivers, along with limey cliffs and wetlands, feature a large diversity of bryophytes and vascular plants. In addition to its biological diversity, Blue Ledge provides dramatic cliffs enjoyed by those who run the river or hike into the ledge. Opportunities for good fishing are available along the river and at several interior ponds.

The river trip from Newcomb to North River is the most dramatic white water run in the Adirondacks. Commercial white water rafting has increased dramatically on the lower portion of this route since the early 1980's with the support of releases from Lake Abanakee Dam on the Indian River. This use is now close to the maximum carrying capacity of the river and present use levels should not be exceeded.

This area had been classified as Primitive because of the substantial amount of private land in the area and the critical relationship of that land to the river gorge. The Master Plan provides that the area should be upgraded to Wilderness as soon as the private lands are acquired or their uses limited by conservation easement so as to be compatible with the adjacent State lands. This area is now proposed for reclassification as Wilderness because the private lands were acquired.

Expansion of the Vanderhacker Mountain Wild Forest:

This component of the proposed action involves an addition of approximately 1,023 acres of newly acquired land from the Essex Chain Lakes Tract to the Vanderhacker Mountain

Wild Forest in the Town of Newcomb in Essex County. The addition to Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest is bounded on the west by centerline of the Hudson River, on the south by the Hudson Gorge Wilderness and the Polaris Mountain Primitive Area (to and including the Iron (Polaris) Bridge), and on the North by private lands. It includes a corridor between the Hudson Gorge Wilderness and the Polaris Mountain Primitive Area to the Cedar River.

The Hudson River is a designated scenic river. White water stretches, interspersed with still waters, provide a variety of scenes to hold one's appreciation. Consistent with the Master Plan Guidelines for Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers, the waters of the Hudson River shall be free from motorized activity.

Proposed creation of a new "Polaris Mountain Primitive Area":

This new Primitive Area consists of 953 acres of land on the east side of the Hudson River in the Town of Newcomb, Essex County purchased by the State in 2013. Although the land is owned by the State, the lessees of these camps have exclusive use of a one acre parcel surrounding each camp until October 1, 2018. Following the termination of the lease and the removal of the structures, this area will be reclassified as Wilderness and added to the Hudson Gorge Wilderness.

Proposed additions to the Blue Mountain Wild Forest Area.

This existing Wild Forest area is located in Hamilton and western Essex counties. It is bounded by Route 30 on the west and south, the Indian River and the Chain Lakes Road (South) on the east and Essex Chain Lakes Primitive Area on the northeast.

With the addition of the Nature Conservancy/Finch land acquisition, some existing portions of the northeastern section of this unit near the Essex Chain Lakes will be reclassified to Primitive and added to the Essex Chain Lakes and Pine Lake Primitive Areas. At the same time, a major block of the newly acquired lands north of the lakes, extending from the Cornell Road in the west, eastward to the centerline of the Hudson River and northward from and

including the Iron (Polaris) Bridge toward Newcomb, will be classified as Wild Forest and added to the unit. Wild Forest access along the Boots to Cornell Road to the south shore of Fifth Lake will be possible for the purpose of Universal Access only.

A 1/10 mile wide corridor extends from the southeast edge of the Unit south following the Camp 6 Road to the Cedar River. This corridor divides the Essex Chain Lakes Primitive Area and the Hudson Gorge Wilderness. An additional 452 acres of land from the Indian River tract west of the Chain Lakes Road (South) will be added to this unit at the same time, including the road itself from the edge of the Unit northwest to the Essex Chain Lakes Tract boundary.

In the event the Pine Lake Primitive Area is merged into the Essex Chain Lakes Primitive Area, the corridor of Wild Forest in this area south of First Lake and north of Pine Lake will be reclassified to Primitive from the old boundary of the Essex Chain Lakes Tract to the confluence of First Lake outlet ("The Chain Drain") with the Rock River.

Proposed creation of a new Primitive Area to be known as the Essex Chain Lakes Primitive Area.

This 6,955-acre¹ area is located in the Towns of Newcomb and Minerva in Essex County and the Town of Indian Lake in Hamilton County. The dominant feature of the landscape is the Essex Chain Lakes, a series of eight interconnected lakes. Together with nearby ponds, this tract has eleven lakes and ponds that are interconnected or within portaging distance of each other to provide a six- to seven- mile canoe route.

Significant wetlands surround many of the waterbodies and are also found throughout the upland area. Rivers in the unit include portions of the Cedar and Rock Rivers. The Rock River is designated Scenic and the Cedar River is designated Wild from the southeast edge of the area to its confluence with the Rock River, at which time its designation changes to Scenic.

¹ This area will be 9,940 acres in size if the Pine Lake Primitive Area is merged with the Essex Chain Lakes Primitive Area.

Prior to transferring these lands to the State, The Nature Conservancy granted an easement to the Towns of Minerva and Newcomb over portions of the Essex Chain Lakes Tract which will allow, as determined by DEC, for float plane access to First and Pine Lakes. The easement also grants the Towns access to, and use of materials from, two gravel pits located on the periphery of the property in order to provide gravel to maintain roads, trails and other infrastructure in this Area that may be open for motorized use. These activities would be nonconforming on lands classified as Wilderness. Even on adjacent lands and waters, such as the Essex Chain Lakes other than First Lake, the presence of float planes in such close proximity to the Chain Lakes would remove the sense of remoteness expected in Wilderness.

Proposed creation of an alternative Primitive Area to be known as the Pine Lake Primitive Area.

This 2,912-acre area is located in the Towns of Newcomb and Minerva in Essex County and the Town of Long Lake in Hamilton County. This area includes lands from the TNC/Finch acquisition and a portion of the Blue Mountain Wild Forest that is being reclassified. The western boundary follows the Cedar River north to a point where a bridge once crossed the river. The boundary then follows, but does not include, the western edge of the Chain Lakes Road (South).

Prominent features of this area include Pine Lake and Mud, Clear and Corner Ponds. The reserved rights held by the Towns for float plane landing on Pine Lake prevent this area from being designated as Wilderness or Canoe, but the sensitive natural resources require wilderness management.

Pending resolution of legal and regulatory issues concerning potential recreational uses and resource impacts of a potential Wild Forest corridor, the unclassified lands between this Primitive Area and the Essex Chain Lakes Primitive Area may be classified as Wild Forest. If this Wild Forest Corridor is not created, the unclassified lands will be classified as Primitive and the two Primitive Areas will be merged as the Essex Chain Lakes Primitive Area.