



Adirondack Park Agency

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

TERRY MARTINO
Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

To: Terry Martino, Executive Director

From: Richard E. Weber, Deputy Director, Planning

Date: November 7, 2019

Re: 2019 Sentinel Range Wilderness UMP

Agency staff have reviewed the Proposed Final Unit Management Plan for the Sentinel Range Wilderness and Bartlett Primitive Area and River Area Management Plans for the West and East Branches of the Ausable River, dated November 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).

The Sentinel Range Wilderness is comprised of approximately 23,874 acres of generally rugged, mountainous terrain in the northeastern portion of the Adirondack Park. It features few waterbodies and wetlands compared to other areas of the Adirondack Park, and most public use is concentrated in certain peripheral areas, most notably Copperas and Owen Ponds, Pitchoff Mountain, and along the Bartlett Primitive Area (the planning for which is also included in this UMP).

The more significant proposals in the Plan involving APSLMP issues include:

- Removal of the Town of North Elba's golf-course water supply infrastructure;
- Achievement of adequate primitive tent site separation distances and construction of a sustainable foot trail to replace the degraded one in the vicinity of Copperas and Owen Ponds;
- Development of a separate, new trailhead/parking area for the Pitchoff Mountain foot trail, which will be rerouted (one degraded section closed, a new section constructed) so that it will become a loop trail;
- Designation of a trailless area in the heart of the unit to help ensure this wilderness area continues to offer outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive, unconfined recreation;
- Undertaking efforts to stabilize and restore severely degraded natural resources at a number of popular rock climbing sites;
- Rerouting some short sections of the Jackrabbit Ski Trail to remove them from wetlands and flooded areas;

- Categorization of the Plan's backcountry ski-trail construction proposals as conceptual and contingent upon future resolution of still outstanding APSLMP issues related to such trails.

Also, throughout the Plan the Department generally commits to address carrying-capacity concerns by means of wildlands monitoring efforts that will focus on some existing high-use areas, as well as the limited number of new trails and other improvements proposed for construction. These are likely to include the proposed new foot trail and all primitive tent sites in the vicinity of Copperas and Owen Ponds, as well as the proposed loop trail to Balanced Rocks and Pitchoff Mountain.

On September 13, 2019, the Agency Board authorized staff to proceed to public comment on APSLMP conformance of the Proposed Final UMP. The comment period ran from September 14 through October 11, 2019, during which five public comment letters were received. Of those letters that focus on APSLMP conformance, the comments are, overall, generally positive, although one commenter contends the Plan lacks essential detail in terms of how carrying-capacity concerns will be addressed by DEC staff during the upcoming five years, particularly regarding management of new and certain existing trails, primitive tent sites, and other improvements. This commenter also notes the Plan does not address some significant, regional loss of certain bird life in the unit or climate change and its various, serious impacts as they might be occurring there.

Concerning the perceived lack of detail regarding carrying-capacity, staff view this Plan as a step in the process of developing comprehensive wildlands monitoring. Staff believe the language of the Plan is sufficient to express the Department's commitment to this work as reflected on page 124 under "Annual Maintenance and Other Activities":

Monitor conditions at new and selected existing facilities throughout the unit. Implement action steps where necessary to protect natural resource integrity and desired social conditions, which may include relocation or closure. Management actions that are dependent or conditional upon one another will be monitored, and if conditions are not optimized, then dependent/conditional facilities may not be constructed.

In regard to recently documented losses of vulnerable bird populations and impacts of climate change, staff recognize these are broadly regional and national issues, and are greater in scope than planning for any specific unit.

Subsequent to the end of our public comment period, some minor map errors in the Plan have been corrected, but no substantive changes have been made to the UMP.

A draft resolution for the Agency Board addressing the Plan and its conformance with the APSLMP is attached to this memo for your consideration.

REW:WWL:mp