

APA moves toward saving fire towers

By MIKE LYNCH, Enterprise Outdoors Writer

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The state Adirondack Park Agency's State Lands Committee voted Thursday to move forward with plans that could save the St. Regis and Hurricane mountain fire towers.

Both towers are slated for removal by the state Department of Environmental Conservation because they are not in compliance with the State Land Master Plan. The St. Regis tower is in a canoe area, which is managed as wilderness. The Hurricane tower is in a primitive area, which is slated to eventually become wilderness, a land designation that doesn't allow for structures like fire towers.

In order to allow the fire towers to remain, the APA would have to amend the State Land Master Plan, which requires the agency to go through the State Environmental Quality Review process.

Under SEQRA, the APA has come up with three alternatives for the future of the fire towers. If given final approval today at the full agency meeting, which is expected, the alternatives will be discussed along with the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, be put out for public comment and be the subject of public hearings. The towers are on the National Register of Historic Places.

The first alternative would be to reclassify a small area around the fire towers as historic, while simultaneously classifying the land around Hurricane's tower as wilderness. St. Regis is in a canoe area, so no change would be made to its classification. A power line in the Hurricane area would also become a primitive corridor.

The second alternative would be to revise the State Land Master Plan to allow fire towers in primitive areas under certain conditions and include the creation of small primitive areas around the fire towers in the State Land Master Plan. This alternative would also revise the "canoe area" definition to allow fire towers. Like the first alternative, the area surrounding the primitive area under the fire tower would be reclassified as wilderness.

The third alternative would be to leave the State Land Master Plan as it currently stands and to remove the fire towers. This step, called the "no action" alternative, has to be explored by law.

The public comment period and hearings on these alternatives will be announced at a later date.

The decision to explore options to save these two towers was made after a request by the Local Government Review Board and strong public opposition to the removal of them.