

## **APA will size up fire tower removal Thursday**

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RAY BROOK - Proposals to remove fire towers on Hurricane and St. Regis mountains have received strong public opposition, and now the state Adirondack Park Agency will have an opportunity to weigh in on the plan at its meeting Thursday.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation says it is proposing to remove the fire towers in order to comply with the State Land Master Plan. The St. Regis tower is located in the St. Regis Canoe Area, and the other is located in the Hurricane Mountain Primitive Area. Both areas are required to be managed as wilderness, which doesn't allow most man-made structures, including fire towers.

In an effort to save the structures, the Adirondack Park Local Government Review Board requested that the APA classify the land under and around the fire towers as historic, which would require an amendment to the SLMP.

"It is important to understand that both towers are also listed on the national and state registers of historic places," Rick Weber, APA assistant director of planning, wrote in a staff memo. "The determination of whether or not to remove the towers therefore must be evaluated not only according to the vision and direction established by the Master Plan but also according to ... the Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Act pertaining to state agency activities affecting historic or cultural properties."

The two towers were identified for removal in the Adirondack Park Fire Tower Study completed by the DEC this winter. Neither tower is currently being used by the public, and both are in disrepair. The study also called for 22 other fire towers in the Park to remain.

Both fire towers received strong support during public hearings held in Paul Smiths and Keene Valley, although environmental advocacy organizations have called for them to be removed.

"Staff believe it is important to consider that while on the one hand, retention of the two towers at the existing summit locations could maximize the protection of cultural resources, it would do so to the detriment of wilderness resources that are directed to be protected and restored to the maximum extent possible under the State Land Master Plan," Weber wrote. "Retention of the fire towers would have certain environmental, social and economic benefits and impacts that have been discussed in the comment record to this point. On the other hand, the removal of these two towers and the retention of 22 other towers in wild forest and private land areas may also be viewed as a balanced approach that minimizes adverse impacts to both the resources and the wilderness resources of the Park."

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