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## [Hurricane, St. Regis fire towers get historic half-acre](#)

KIM SMITH DEDAM, [Press-Republican](#)

RAY BROOK — Two bastions of Adirondack history and public sentiment earned a Historic spot where they sit on top of mountains.

Adirondack Park Agency commissioners approved staff recommendation to designate as Historic use a half-acre under fire towers on Hurricane and St. Regis Mountain.

The other 13,449 acres of the Hurricane Mountain unit will be designated Wilderness, a switch from its long-held Primitive land-use classification.

The lands around St. Regis will remain Canoe Area.

### 'SPOT ZONING'

The decision at APA's meeting Thursday did not sit well with environmentalists, who plan to lobby Gov. David A. Paterson to challenge the ruling.

Dan Plumley, a partner with Adirondack Wild, said they are assessing options at this point. He was not sure if they would sue to force court review.

"We will appeal this decision at the governor's office," Plumley said after the meeting.

The precedent, he says, is "spot zoning," which Adirondack Wild suggests makes a "mockery of the APA Act and the nearly 40-year history of the (State Land Master Plan.)

"These vast areas would be severely compromised by permanent restoration and maintenance of man-made steel structures that stand in high contrast to Wilderness, Primitive and Canoe area criteria," Plumley said in a statement to APA.

"Historic classification and permanent retention of these towers pre-empts the state's own wilderness management goals."

## NEW VIEW

Not so, according to Commissioner Richard Booth, chairman of the State Lands Committee.

Booth has swung at least 90 degrees in his thinking about the towers under review over the past few months.

After approving the change to the Master Plan, Booth said it was a hard decision for a number of people.

But he sees it as an adjustment to a decision to remove the towers made 37 years ago.

Historic resources hold a much different place in the eyes of community than they did in 1975, Booth said, noting that other than their visibility, fire towers have very little impact on wilderness.

## POLICY VIOLATION

Environmental groups straddled that stance.

"This is not an aesthetic issue; it is a matter of fundamental wilderness policy under the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan," said Dave Gibson, a partner at Adirondack Wild.

"The required actions to restore and maintain the 0.5 acres to Historic criteria would directly violate the management guidelines for the Primitive and Canoe areas that lie just outside that tiny footprint (and) constitute gross mismanagement and violation of the state's responsibilities for wilderness, which the APA and DEC are duty bound to administer and implement."

## CONCERNS

Allison Beals, director of government relations and conservation for the Adirondack Mountain Club made a final pitch, asking APA to use Primitive classification under the towers.

"We remain very concerned about the legal precedent inherent in the establishment of Historic areas inside Wilderness, Primitive and Canoe Areas," Beal said, wary of what they think could come next out of land-use amendments.

"Some advocates have even expressed a desire to use Historic area designations to re-open old roads in the Wilderness for motorized use."

## DESIGNATION ALLOWED

In presenting the Master Plan change to commissioners, APA Staff Planner James Connolly said the half-acre reclassification is not spot zoning.

"Spot zoning is where zoning change is implemented to be exclusionary, to stop something from happening."

Historic designation is allowed, he said, for buildings and structures owned by the state that are significant in the history of the Adirondack Park.

The Historic designation also allows the fire towers to be managed for historic objectives.

## FRIENDS PLEASED

APA commissioners were careful to insert language saying that while the new classification allows for restoration and maintenance, it "does not anticipate use of state funds for that purpose."

Fire towers restored in recent years each earned financial support from "friends groups," a coalition of private individuals who organized the workload and raised money for repairs.

After the APA decision, David Petrelli, coordinator of Friends of St. Regis Fire Tower, said he was very happy their long-held hope to restore the tower has seen the light of day.

"I'm glad that we're being heard. We still have a lot ahead of us."

The APA Master Plan amendment has to be approved by Paterson first, and then the Department of Environmental Conservation has to develop a Historic unit management plan for each tower site.

That process involves another public-comment period before final approval by APA.

Connolly advised commissioners, "no improvements at historic areas can begin before approval of the Historic management plan."

Petrelli, who successfully helped rebuild the fire tower on Azure Mountain, is confident they can raise enough funding — an average \$5,000 to \$10,000, in his experience — to complete restoration.

"The main obstacle is the process in getting there."

St. Regis fire tower is comparable in shape to the Azure tower when they began restoration, Petrelli said. "It took two hours of helicopter time to airlift material to Azure. Adirondack Mountain Club shuttles in material to (John's Brook Lodge) by helicopter all the time. You can get a ton of supplies up a mountain very quickly."

After the decision, Melvin "Stubby" Longware, coordinator of the Friends of Hurricane Mountain Fire Tower, viewed the APA's amendment as progress.

"We're a lot further ahead now than we were five years ago."

E-mail Kim Smith Dedam at: [kdedam@pressrepublican.com](mailto:kdedam@pressrepublican.com)