

Fire towers on St. Regis, Hurricane mountains

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many people, it's a way of gaining their bearings."

Each group has submitted more than 2,000 signatures and has received support from Assemblyman Chris Ortloff, R-Plattsburgh, Assemblywoman Teresa Sayward, R-Willsboro, Sen. Betty Little, R-Queensbury, and numerous local governments, including the Franklin County Legislature, Essex County Board of Supervisors and the towns of Brighton, Santa Clara and Elizabethtown. It's still unclear, however, how influential that support will be.

"We take that support very seriously, and it will weigh in on any decision-making process," APA spokesman Keith McKeever said last week. "Ultimately, the decision whether or not to reclassify will be made through the unit management planning process."

The state Department of Environmental Conservation is in the process of drafting UMPs for both wilderness areas, and DEC Region 5 spokesman Dave Winchell said the department is not far enough along in those processes to comment on whether reclassifying the area surrounding the towers as historic is a possibility.

Reclassifying the land will require a revision of the State Land Master Plan, which McKeever said is a long and somewhat difficult process that will take cooperation from the DEC, APA and state government.

For Petrelli, all fire tower supporters can do now is keep bringing the issue to the forefront of the APA and DEC's discussions.

"I'm not sure what our next step will be," Petrelli said, "but we've purposely put it on their plates in the hopes that they'll address it."

"Of the utmost importance in everyone's consideration is the fact that, once they are removed, they will never come back again," Longware added.

Many environmental advocates say fire towers definitely have a place in the Adirondacks, but not all need to be saved.

"Essentially, we believe those (St. Regis and Hurricane) areas ought to maintain wilderness characteristics," said Adirondack Council spokesman John Sheehan. "As much as it's rustic,

nostalgic and tugs at the heartstrings of many, it's a structure that doesn't conform."

According to Peter Bauer, executive director of the Residents' Committee to Protect the Adirondacks, there are 31 fire towers still standing in the park, and at least 20 of them have a bright future. Unfortunately, he said, St. Regis and Hurricane Mountain fire towers are non-conforming and threaten the natural, expansive view that outdoor enthusiasts are looking for when they visit these areas.

For those trying to save the

towers, they say the opposite is the case and that having the towers, which have been staples of those views since the early 1900s, can serve to remind people of Adirondack history and also remind of the destructive power of fire.

"The bottom line is that you have two competing public values: historical and recreational," Bauer said. "But this tower-by-tower argument doesn't do us much good. We need to look parkwide."

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Formerly used as viewpoints, fire towers now debated as views

Citizens' tower-support groups determined not to let issue drop

By **ANDY BATES**
Enterprise Staff Writer

RAY BROOK — Which is it? Eyesore or reminder of home and history?

That's the question many have been asking about the place of mountaintop fire towers in the Adirondack Park, many of which have been slated for removal by the state.

Two such towers, on St. Regis and Hurricane mountains, have found coalitions of citizens willing to fight to keep them where they are. Representatives of each group have addressed the state Adirondack Park Agency during the past two months in an effort to ensure their survival.

The St. Regis tower's location in a canoe area and Hurricane's designation as a primitive area make them both non-conforming structures according to the

State Land Master Plan.

In order to keep them from being removed, both groups advocate reclassifying the portions of land on which the towers sit as historic areas.

"We are not officials; we have no political agenda," said Gretna Longware, of the Friends of Hurricane Mountain Fire Tower, during the APA's February meeting. "We are people who were born here, worked here all our lives and love the area. We are also people who feel that the locals should have a say about certain things in our park."

David Petrelli, who has helped organize the efforts to save the St. Regis Mountain Fire Tower, also addressed the APA in March, saying that "it's refreshing to see the fire tower, and for

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