



Essex County Supervisors: Leave Fire Towers Alone

Essex County Supervisors want the state Department of Environmental Conservation and Adirondack Park Agency to back off on a proposal to tear down the fire towers on Hurricane and St. Regis mountains.

The county's Ways and Means Committee unanimously endorsed legislation Monday opposing the demolition of the two towers, which DEC announced earlier this month.

Keene Supervisor Bill Ferebee introduced the resolution in opposition to the state's proposal.

"It's a landmark. People hike that area just to look at the tower. It's a visual landmark from Elizabethtown, people can see it and know where they are," Ferebee said. "Even though it's no longer accessible, people can't climb it anymore, it's just something that has always been there."

The Hurricane Mountain tower is located within the town of Keene.

Earlier this month, DEC officials laid out a plan to demolish the two 90-year-old fire towers, because they are considered non-conforming structures located on state land with fairly restrictive designations.

One tower is within the Hurricane Mountain Primitive Area and the other is within the St. Regis Canoe Area. According to the state Land Master Plan, both the primitive and canoe area designations require removal of the structures.

Officials have long argued that Adirondack fire towers are an important part of the region's cultural history and their demolition only works to further

raise the ire of the local population.

DEC foresters said that without an amendment to the SLMP allowing fire towers to remain on lands with restricted designations, their hands are legally bound.

But for Ferebee, considering the dire situation surrounding the state's economic situation, the timing just doesn't make sense.

"I know its part of the master plan to take it out of there," Ferebee. "But in all fairness, considering the economic state that New York is in, why would they spend the money to take down the tower when the money could be spent on something useful?"

APA Chairman Curt Stiles has resisted SLMP amendments, instead arguing that revisions to the APA Act are of greater immediate importance.

The APA Board of Commissioners is expected to vote on the amendments to the two area Unit Management Plans – which would approve the demolition of the towers – within the next few months.

Local governments throughout the park have passed similar resolutions opposing the removal of the two towers.

According to a DEC study released this month, out of the 57 towers originally located in the park, 34 remain and 24 are located on public land or lands under state easements. DEC has removed six towers from Adirondack mountaintops over the last decade.

A public hearing regarding the proposed Hurricane Mountain Primitive Area UMP will be held at 6:30 p.m. February 25 at the Keene Central School.

A similar hearing concerning the proposed amendments to the St. Regis UMP will be at the Paul Smith's College Freer Science building, also on February 25 at 6:30 p.m.

-Jon Alexander, 2-23-10