

# Fire towers are in flux

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By MIKE LYNCH, Enterprise Outdoors Writer

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RAY BROOK - Despite overwhelming public support to save the St. Regis and Hurricane mountain fire towers, the fate of the two structures is still unsettled.

During a discussion of the Adirondack Park Agency's State Lands Committee Friday, APA staff recommended a solution that would ultimately lead to the removal of the two structures. But several board members continued to speak in favor of allowing them to be restored.

The staff recommended that the land around the fire towers be classified as primitive, which it already is for Hurricane. The classification would mean the structures couldn't be restored and that they would ultimately be removed if they are determined to be unsafe. The big change for Hurricane is that land surrounding a smaller primitive plot would become designated as wilderness.

## Article Photos



Hurricane Mountain fire tower

(Enterprise file photo — Mike Lynch)

"Basically it's an attempt to balance the concept of wilderness with historic preservation," said APA Deputy Director Jim Connolly. "It's a difficult judgment call, but our staff is basically saying that they are recommending to you that this is the best balance. It provides a mechanism under the Master Plan, without major changes to the (State Land) Master Plan, that allows these structures to remain indefinitely until it were determined they were unsafe in their present locations."

The APA is considering four alternatives for the fire towers. One includes removing both fire towers, while the other would allow the St. Regis Mountain fire tower to remain. Another would allow the structures to remain on land that would be classified historic.

During the board discussion, APA board members Lani Ulrich and William Thomas appeared to favor the alternative that would allow the fire towers to remain and be restored.

Ulrich said friction between old-time residents and the APA has been generated by decisions like this one that have gone against the wishes of residents. Ulrich said she would prefer that volunteers be allowed to restore the fire towers.

A vote on the fire towers could take place at the APA's October meeting.

Both fire towers are currently slated to be removed by the state Department of Environmental Conservation because they were found to be inconsistent with the State Land Master Plan. The Hurricane Mountain fire tower is currently on land classified as primitive, and St. Regis Mountain tower is in the St. Regis Canoe Area, which is managed as a wilderness area.

Since the DEC's proposal to remove the towers has been made public, there have been two public comment periods - one for the DEC and one for APA - and the majority of the public has been in favor of keeping them.

After Friday's meeting, Elizabethtown resident Melvin "Stub" Longware said he was against the APA staff recommendation. Longware and his daughter A.J. are leaders of the Friends of the Hurricane Fire Tower group that has been fighting to save the fire tower for years. His wife, Gretna, was also a key member, but she passed away several months ago.

"I was informed to only accept proposal number one," said Longware, referring to the proposal to classify the land historic.

Longware has said he would pay for the materials to repair the Hurricane fire tower, which, like the St. Regis tower, has been in disrepair and off-limits to the public for years.

Cost will be a determining factor, no matter what the APA decides. The DEC has said it would cost \$50,000 to repair one of the fire towers. With the state's current financial crisis, finding that money in the near future could be extremely difficult.

But before fixing the fire towers is a real consideration, the APA must make a choice of what to do with them.

Environmentalist Dan Plumley, a member of Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, believes the state should remove the fire towers and put them in hamlets. But with the way things stand that won't happen soon, either. Plumley said the APA staff recommendation is one that neither environmentalists nor those in favor of saving the towers are happy with.

"What they are ending up doing is, for them, a middle-of-the-road decision that doesn't get them to implement the requirements of the State Land Master Plan, and it also doesn't make the people who want to restore the towers very happy," Plumley said. "They are making a recommendation that ultimately leaves the issue relatively unresolved."

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Contact Mike Lynch at 518-891-2600 ext. 28 or