

Most letters to DEC in favor of fire towers

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Article Photos



The St. Regis Mountain fire tower
(Enterprise file photo — Morgan Ryan)

Most writers who submitted letters to the state Department of Environmental Conservation regarding the St. Regis and Hurricane mountain fire towers were in favor of the keeping the structures.

The letters were submitted during the recent public comment periods for both an amendment to the St. Regis Canoe Area unit management plan and the adoption of the Hurricane Mountain Primitive Area UMP. The Enterprise obtained the letters through a Freedom of Information Law request.

Of the roughly 100 letters submitted on both towers and reviewed by the Enterprise, about 85 were in favor of the fire towers.

The strong support follows a trend at the public meetings and in a Web poll conducted by the Enterprise.

During the two public hearings in March, 31 of 37 speakers at the hearings - 84 percent - called for the fire towers to remain. In an unscientific, week-long poll on the Adirondack Daily Enterprise website in mid-February, 606, or 92 percent, of the 661 votes cast were in favor of the fire towers.

The issue will be before the state Adirondack Park Agency on Thursday, when the board is scheduled to continue discussing options to potentially save the towers, a topic initiated at last month's meeting. Among the options it is considering is to designate land under the tower as historic.

The APA board will also be considering a first reading for the Hurricane Mountain UMP, which includes the DEC's proposal to remove the fire tower. But APA spokesman Keith McKeever said the fire tower proposal will be pulled from the UMP for now.

Neither fire tower is being used by the public, and both would require maintenance to reopen. Supporters of the fire towers have included a wide array of people: boy scouts, hikers, historians and former and current DEC employees.

"I do not believe this tower takes away from the 'essence of wilderness' and actually helps more people become aware of the 'wonder of wilderness,'" wrote renowned nature photographer Carl Heilman II in a letter to the DEC about the St. Regis tower. "I expect rehabilitating the tower would be less expensive than its removal, and would best serve future generations. It sure provides some great photo opps and makes a great destination for both children and adults."

The controversy inspired Boy Scout Troop 107 from Perryville to write letters in favor of the towers.

"It is a place of history," wrote Boy Scout Brad Lucas about the Hurricane fire tower. "It should be there for future generations to see. These fire towers are symbols of the Adirondack Park and they are slowly disappearing. I hope you take my request and the other requests from my scout troop into consideration."

The fire towers' historical value is the most commonly used reason by letter writers for keeping them. Both are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Other organizations or individuals who either submitted letters or resolutions in favor of the towers included the town of Brighton, Essex County Board of Supervisors, Local Government Review Board and Assemblywoman Teresa Sayward, R-Willsboro.

"The presence of the (St. Regis) fire tower as a hiking destination brings tourists to our town and thus has an economic value to a community which has recently suffered the closer of one state facility and is facing yet another at year's end," stated a resolution from the town of Brighton. "We feel the fire tower should be restored to its original state for the future benefit of local citizens and tourists and the economic well-being of our community."

Among the handful of people or organizations calling for the towers to be removed are the three major Adirondack environmental organizations: Protect the Adirondacks!, the Adirondack Mountain Club and the Adirondack Council. The organizations have said the towers should be removed in order to comply with the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan.

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