

NCPR

NY to restore Hurricane, St. Regis fire towers

BY [BRIAN MANN](#), IN RAY BROOK, NY



A new plan for Hurricane and St. Regis fire towers was reviewed Thursday by the Adirondack park Agency.

Photo: Brian Mann

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Nov 15, 2013 — State officials are moving forward with plans to restore two historic fire towers in the Adirondacks.

The towers on Hurricane Mountain near Keene and St. Regis Mountain north of Saranac Lake will be rebuilt and opened to the public according to a plan unveiled yesterday.



Josh Clague with NYS DEC presents the new tower plan to the APA. Photo: Brian Mann

Fire towers have emerged as a popular hiking destination and a popular political cause in the Adirondacks. These structures on Hurricane and St. Regis were slated to be torn down.

But that triggered a public firestorm. Under a deal struck in 2010, they were instead granted their own historic areas under the Park's zoning rules. Now the DEC's Josh Clague says they'll be restored and reopened to the public.

"We are proposing to resume maintenance of both the Hurricane and St. Regis towers to accomodate full public access," Clague said at the APA's monthly meeting yesterday in Ray Brook.

Both towers will include educational signage. The tower on Hurricane will also serve as the anchor for a radio antenna that will boost emergency communications in the High Peaks area.

DEC officials say restoring the towers will cost roughly \$15,000 apiece. They say a pool of special fire tower restoration funding remains from the Pataki administration.

That price tag drew criticism from APA commissioner Dick Booth.

"When we discussed this several years ago, the argument was that this was not going to be costing the state money, or at least not much money."

During the debate over the future of these two fire towers, local residents suggested that they would form support organizations to help pay for maintenance and upkeep.

DEC officials say those arrangements are still possible but haven't happened yet.

Speaking yesterday, Booth suggested that the towers should be left standing but unrestored until citizens groups step forward willing to pay the restoration cost.

"All the things that aren't being done in this state that need money, reopening access to the top of firetowers in the Adirondack mountains doesn't strike me [as a priority]," he said.

Other commissioners noted that the towers, once restored, would serve as attractions for hikers. Chairwoman Lani Ulrich praised the plan.

"If there are designated funds out there solely for the restoration of firetowers, it's a win," she said.