



Adirondack Wilderness Advocates, Inc.
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AdirondackWilderness.org

January 25, 2021

Karyn Richards, Forest Preserve Coordinator
NYS DEC, Albany, NY

Robert Davies, Director, Division of Lands and Forests
NYS DEC, Albany, NY

Kris Alberga, Region 5 Regional Forester
NYS DEC, Ray Brook, NY

Dave Smith, Region 6 Regional Forester
NYS DEC, Watertown, NY

Re: Cabins in the Forest Preserve

Dear Ms. Richards,

I am writing to you on behalf of Adirondack Wilderness Advocates (AWA) in regards to an Adirondack Forest Preserve management issue we have been tracking, and we are hoping you can provide us with information on how the Department of Environmental Conservation plans to address the three “problem sites” we have identified.

Specifically, we have observed the presence of three cabins standing at separate locations throughout the Forest Preserve. Based on our understanding of the history of these cabins, they stand on parcels of land acquired by the State of New York during the period of approximately 1979 through 1990 and have never been removed. Two were former leasehold cabins for which exclusive rights expired circa 2005-2006, and these same two cabins now stand in areas designated as Wilderness by the Adirondack Park Agency.

Summaries of each cabin are as follows:

Otterbrook Tract: This cabin stands on the 7500-acre tract acquired circa 1989-1990 from the Otterbrook Timber Company, on land added to the Five Ponds Wilderness in 2009. Located on Sucker Brook near the Cranberry Lake 50 hiking trail, it has been abandoned since 2005 after the expiration of an exclusive lease.

The structure was still standing as of our most recent site visit in December 2020. It appears to be in a state of extreme disrepair, and in addition to its non-conformity with Article XIV it poses obvious public safety hazards and liability concerns.

Little Moose Lake: This cabin stands on land acquired in 1988 from International Paper and added to the West Canada Lake Wilderness in 2010. An exclusive lease expired at the end of 2006, and the cabin has been standing in a state of abandonment ever since. It exhibits signs of severe structural damage, but nevertheless has been attracting public camping use. Like Otterbrook, this deteriorating structure is a safety and liability hazard.

Hillabrandt Vly: This cabin stands on land acquired in 1979 from the Hillabrandt Rod and Gun Club. It is now part of the Ferris Lake Wild Forest. We are not aware of any exclusive lease agreements that would've legally extended the life of this cabin - and if this assessment is correct, the cabin has been allowed to stand in the Forest Preserve for 42 years. Although several outbuildings have collapsed, the main structure seems to be in comparatively good condition, suggesting maintenance has been ongoing since 1979. This should not be a surprise, considering the cabin stands prominently along a well-used snowmobile trail and appears to be a familiar local landmark. On-site evidence suggests it is regularly used by the public for recreation.

If you are unfamiliar with these structures or their current condition, please view the maps and photos we have posted on our website: <https://adirondackwilderness.org/forgotten-cabins-of-the-forest-preserve/>.

What we wish to know is DEC's plans to remove these structures. Each cabin has been allowed to remain far beyond any standard timeline for removal of structures on newly acquired land - and in the case of the two Wilderness sites, the three-year window for the removal of non-conforming facilities has also long since passed.

We acknowledge that none of these sites have been included in the unit management plan process, and this may be one factor in DEC's inaction to date. However, according to our understanding of Article XIV of the state's constitution, as well as the State Land Master Plan, these structures have no possible legal justification for their continued existence, and thus their removal should have been automatic once all private rights to them were extinguished. Therefore the presence or absence of an approved UMP should be irrelevant; by any measure, these are illegal, undesirable, and unsafe structures.

Our preference as an advocacy organization for the Forest Preserve is to see all three cabins removed in 2021, or at any rate as soon as logistically possible. As mentioned above, two of the structures pose immediate liability hazards, and the third seems to be a "well known secret." All three show signs of continued recreational occupancy by campers, and all three are surrounded by detritus left behind by the former sporting clubs - features which further magnify the undesirability of each site.

At the same time, we would also like to remind DEC that all State Land Master Plan (SLMP) guidelines are in effect, and that these would apply equally to any effort to remove the

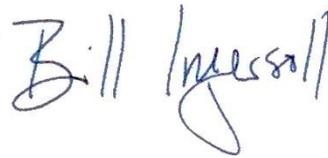
cabins as they would any other routine maintenance project. None of these cabins exists along a way recognized as a motor vehicle road by DEC, including the Hillabrandt site in the Ferris Lake Wild Forest; the two Wilderness sites may now only be accessed by air, because the three-year windows allowed by the SLMP expired in 2012-2013.

Thus, not only does their removal matter, but so does the method of their removal; failure to remove these cabins in a timely manner in the past does not constitute an emergency situation in the present, nor does it warrant the use of ground-based motor vehicles in areas classified Wilderness.

Therefore we look forward to reviewing DEC's anticipated schedule for the removal of all three structures, as well as the work plan for each project. Additionally, please advise whether there are additional structures of a similar nature elsewhere in the Forest Preserve that require this same attention.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns, and we look forward to working with you in the future.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Ingersoll". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "B" and "I".

Bill Ingersoll
Chair, Adirondack Wilderness Advocates