

# Under the radar?

■ Some park users struggle to keep tabs on agency moves.

By Tim Rowland

As powerful Adirondack environmental groups were mobilizing a well-publicized campaign against snowmobiles on the Cedar River, a far smaller but no less anxious contingent was equally angry about the potential loss of a little boat launch on an eastern Adirondack lake that practically no one has heard of.

But if they were angry with the loss of their boat launch, they were also angry about something deeper: They felt disenfranchised by the process, receiving no notice that meaningful changes were in the works and, consequently, shut out of the public information and comment periods where their voices might have been heard.

“The (Department of Environmental Conservation) is making some sweeping changes that they seem to be trying to push through under the radar,” wrote the president of the Eagle Lake Homeowners Association to his membership late last year. “There was a notice released and a public meeting held in November, neither of which any of us knew about.”

Others blamed the Adirondack Park Agency—a convenient if sometimes misplaced target—even though the APA had had little if anything to do with the plan at that point. Still others feared this was an opening salvo in a battle to outlaw motors on Eagle Lake altogether. Successful communication might have allayed these fears, but in the Adirondacks there can be both too much and too little information—often at the same time.

There had indeed been a public hearing on the Hammond Pond Wild Forest Unit Management Plan in North Hudson in November, and Department of Environmental Conservation officials say they were asked about the boat launch, answering questions to the apparent satisfaction of those in attendance.

But obviously, word didn’t reach the constituency that mattered most, until it unofficially cycled through the 50 or so camps around the lake. “I know a lot of people were concerned, but what gets out by word of mouth is usually worse than the reality,” said DEC spokesman Dave Winchell. The good news, said Winchell, is that there are increasingly easy ways for residents to become informed.

## Knowing where to look

Restrictions to the Eagle Lake boat launch were no secret, if you knew where to look. It



PHOTO BY TIM ROWLAND

Changes to use at Eagle Lake boat launch angered some unaware users.

was all right there on page 82 of the Hammond Pond Wild Forest Draft Unit Management Plan, available in PDF form after a handful of clicks on the DEC website: “This (launch) will accommodate the approach to the water’s edge of small and light trailered boats, but will not provide float-off or float-on trailered boat launching.”

To prevent trailers from backing into the water (for fear of transporting invasive species), a roller would be placed across the launch, stopping the trailer before it could enter the water.

Hale and hearty outdoors enthusiasts would be able to slide an average fishing boat over the roller and into the water and, after a day of fishing, drag it back.

But many of the residents of Eagle Lake are not as fit as they used to be, with old hearts or new knees. So the revamped launch, they feared, would keep older fishermen out, just as surely as it kept out the milfoil. Anglers began to feel like an invasive species themselves.

Read the Adirondack Park Agency’s public comment rules:  
<https://on.ny.gov/2WONm9F>

Find projects currently open for comment: <https://on.ny.gov/2I08VAI>

Sign up for Department of Environmental Conservation notices:  
<https://on.ny.gov/2UQctav>

“I used to be able to carry a canoe 10 miles into the woods, but I can’t do that anymore,” said Rolf Tiedemann, treasurer of the Homeowners Association of Eagle Lake, a picturesque 420-acre sheet of island-studded water halfway between Schroon Lake and Ticonderoga.

Tiedemann also worried that the new ramp would lower property values, restrict access to camps on the far side of the lake and hinder rescue boats in the event of an emergency. But Tiedemann, who lives in Rochester in the winter, was unlikely to get word of the changes.

## The informed crowd

The Adirondack Park often seems awash in information, at least for eager consumers of social media, news digests and blogs, who hang out at The Adirondack Loj. But for another group of local or summer residents not plugged in to the noisier Adirondack channels, changes can sneak up seemingly unannounced. For a variety of reasons, public notices often go unobserved by the people who might be affected by changes to state land management. They may not be fluent in Twitter, or read the right paper. Many aren’t around in the winter to hear the scuttlebutt over a cup of coffee at Stewart’s.

This makes some residents feel as if the Adirondacks are a club to which they have not been invited.

“I might be wrong about this, but it feels like, unless you are clued in to whatever project it is, there are things that happen where the word never seems to get out,” said former North



Hudson Supervisor Ronald Moore, who was in office in late fall when the Hammond Pond public hearings were held in the Town Hall on a lonely stretch of NY 9. “Overall I think the DEC does a good job, but there are improvements that could be made.”

Moore said he might have expected, at the least, that other town supervisors affected by Hammond Pond would have attended the DEC hearings. But even community leaders hadn’t gotten the word. “I might not have known myself if the hearings had been held in Newcomb,” he said.

Eagle Lake is in the town of Ticonderoga, but Ticonderoga Town Clerk Tonya Thompson said she was unaware changes were in the works until a ranger stopped by and asked if the people on Eagle Lake were aware of the proposals. After a couple of calls, it became apparent that they weren’t, and Thompson’s office became an informational clearinghouse for concerned residents. “The biggest thing, I think, was that they just didn’t know what was going on,” Thompson said. She agreed there is room for improvement. One idea, she said, is the town’s Everbridge alert system that notifies town residents of critical information by email. But town officials never had the chance to use it because “I don’t think (the state) notified anybody around here,” she said.

The Hammond Pond Wild Forest is a sprawling and somewhat disjointed designation mostly sandwiched between the Northway and Lake Champlain between Ticonderoga in the south and Elizabethtown to the north. It is governed by a Unit Management Plan that hadn’t been seriously updated since its inception in 1988. In the update are a number of details that might scarcely cause a ripple in the Adirondacks writ large, but could be meaningful to vacationers or to people here and there who call the Adirondacks home. Campsites are rearranged, trails are built or closed and boat launches are eliminated.

The Hammond Pond Wild Forest’s management plan is no different from any other unit’s plan in the way that it is amended.

### Requesting notice

After charting proposed changes, the DEC holds public hearings and open comment periods, and tries to get the word out to the communities as best it can. As with all hearings, “We did put out a press release regarding the availability of the draft UMP and announcing the (North Hudson) meeting,” Winchell said in an email. “I believe it was sent statewide but obviously not all of the media outlets that receive it publish it.”

And even if it’s published, not everyone with an interest in the issue will see it. For that reason, Winchell said, it’s best if those with an interest in the park do so electronically. On the DEC homepage is an abbreviated calendar and a link to the full DEC calendar, which lists not just upcoming hearings, but also activities such as



PHOTO BY NANCIE BATTAGLIA

2016 APA public hearing for Adirondack land classifications held in Ray Brook.

winter hikes and seminars. But those who want to keep up with DEC activities don’t even have to track that. Instead, the agency will email DEC activities directly to interested parties.

“The best way for people to keep informed of the DEC’s actions and proposed activities is to subscribe to our listserv DEC Delivers. They can sign up on the DEC homepage [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov),” he said. “There is a box where they can enter their email address and submit. They can then choose the topics of interest.”

To receive notifications, Winchell said, “They should choose the following topics to ensure they receive all the notifications, including:

- Adirondacks under Natural Areas & Wildlife and Forest Preserve; this includes the weekly Adirondack Outdoor Recreation Bulletin and other information about activities in the Adirondacks.

- Region 5 News under Announcements & Press Releases and Press Releases & News; this includes all press releases issued out of the Ray Brook office (Region 5) covering the eastern Adirondacks. Those in other areas can see which Region they are a part of on a state map.

- Statewide Press Releases under Announcements & Press Releases and Press Releases & News; this includes all press releases distributed statewide.

- Environmental Notice Bulletin under Announcements & Press Releases; this includes the weekly bulletin announcing permits and DEC activities including unit management plans. (There are plenty of other areas of interest to check including fishing, hiking, boating etc. But an inbox can get full pretty fast.)

But just because one has a handle on the DEC side of things doesn’t mean there isn’t more information that might be of interest.

### APA hearings

Keith McKeever, spokesman for the APA, said he can understand how things can get confusing. The APA has public hearings on top of the DEC hearings, but they serve two different purposes. The APA functions almost as would an appellate court: it does not argue the facts, but it decides whether those facts, as presented, are consistent with the law. The DEC hearings involve the nuts and bolts of the management plan, while the APA—which has its own public hearings and comment periods—focuses on larger issues, specifically whether the proposed changes comply with the overall Adirondack master plan.

Often, McKeever said, people will show up at an APA hearing with a particular bone to pick about an item in a plan (a boat launch, for example), not understanding that the time for that sort of comment has passed. Sometimes, too, people will see an item on the APA agenda and assume they can show up and throw in their two cents. Many years ago, that was indeed the case. But the APA eventually agreed with critics who contended that this policy gave unfair advantage to people who lived close to the agency’s Ray Brook headquarters and could pop in for the last word. That penalized people in, say, Old Forge, for whom the trip was too much of time commitment.

The APA still has opportunity for general comment at the beginning and end of each monthly meeting and people still attend to, for example, advocate for more wilderness designations or more backcountry ski trails. But official comment must be submitted at designated public hearings, in writing or online during designated comment periods.

Anyone can also sign up for the same notifications that go out to the press, by emailing McKeever at [Keith.McKeever@apa.ny.gov](mailto:Keith.McKeever@apa.ny.gov) and being asked to be added to the list. ■