

# Adirondack Daily Enterprise

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## Adirondack Park Agency talks carry capacity

Dawson voted no on wild forest plan due to concerns over water bodies



Jason Labonte, of Saranac Lake, looks out over Lower Saranac Lake from atop the cliff on Bluff Island. (Enterprise photo — Justin A. Levine)

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RAY BROOK — The state Department of Environmental Conservation’s plan for roughly 75,000 acres around the Tri-Lakes was approved by the Adirondack Park Agency last month, but one board member voted “no”

due to his concerns over how the DEC will track just how many people the area can support.

Carrying capacity, the landscape's ability to withstand recreation, has become more of a hot topic in recent years due to the ever-increasing number of people visiting the Adirondacks. The DEC is tasked with monitoring and determining how much the landscape can accommodate, and adjusting management as needed.

In its 2017 unit management plan for the Saranac Lakes Wild Forest, the DEC included a number of measures that will track carrying capacity, including the use of trail registers, watershed steward reports and evaluation of campsites.

But APA board member Chad Dawson, while commending the DEC on its terrestrial carrying capacity plan, said the department has not taken enough steps to address use on water bodies within the Blue Line.

*"I believe that you have done phenomenal improvement to the monitoring ... pushing forward the whole monitoring process. I think the whole wild lands monitoring process has taken a giant step forward,"* Dawson said. *"(But) I'm deeply concerned that (water body carrying capacity is) not making progress.*

*"There is no underlying process. Here we have the Saranac Lakes Wild Forest (with) 142 water bodies; it could have been the flagship example of this. I think the ability is there. Maybe the political willpower isn't there; maybe the priority is not there."*

DEC Region 5 Director Bob Stegemann, who is the department's representative on the APA board, said he was glad that Dawson was raising concerns on carrying capacity.

*"I want to just thank you for the attention you bring to this matter, because it's more important today than it's been in the history of the management of this unit,"* he said. "We need to attend to it. (But) this plan has been in the works for quite some time, and I think it's extremely important to get it out there and get some of the management decisions that are already identified which deal with some of the issues you've addressed.

*"This is not a perfect solution because it's still maturing, but it is a very strong solution to moving forward in the right direction. So I would urge that we get behind this, but we keep the attention and feet to the fire of both agencies."*

John Sheehan, director of communications for the Adirondack Council, also said he was pleased with the discussion, but that carrying capacity needs to be dealt with beforehand, not once management actions have already taken place.

*"Recreational activities that will be allowed can be managed to avoid damage to natural resources and the park's wild character and water, including the Saranac lakes,"* he wrote in an email. "The state is required to determine carrying capacity and manage accordingly.

*"This also requires the careful collection of baseline data, prior to the establishment of new recreational opportunities. Without data, it isn't possible to judge what is being lost or gained through recreation management. Too often, new recreational opportunities have been approved for Forest Preserve units and waters where no baseline data has been collected,"* he continued. "This troubling trend has been excused by a promise to collect the data later.

*"Baseline data cannot be collected and carrying capacity established after-the-fact."*

Dawson “*respectfully*” voted no on whether the SLWF UMP conformed with the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, but the rest of the board approved the plan.

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