

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

Office of Natural Resources, Region 3

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Joe Martens
Commissioner

September 6, 2013

To: Individuals and Organizations Interested in the Catskill Forest Preserve

RE: Big Indian Acquisition Classification Proposal

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (Department) has completed a proposal to classify recently acquired Forest Preserve lands in the Catskill Park. The lands encompass approximately 940 acres of Forest Preserve on the eastern ridge of Belleayre Mountain in the Town of Shandaken, Ulster County, and adjoin the State's Belleayre Mountain Ski Center. A copy of the proposal is enclosed for your review, and it can also be found on the Department's web site at: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/43013.html>.

DEC is responsible for management of the constitutionally protected Forest Preserve in the Catskill Park. The Catskill Park State Land Master Plan, developed by the Department, applies a classification system that ranges from wilderness to wild forest to intensive use, and provides guidelines for the management of those lands. Classification will determine the potential recreational opportunities that can be considered in the development of future management plans for the property while ensuring protection of natural resources.

In December of 2011, New York State acquired 1,204 acres on Belleayre Mountain, commonly referred to as the Big Indian acquisition, as an addition to the Catskill Forest Preserve. Earlier this year, the Department released a draft revision of the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center's Unit Management Plan that included a proposal to classify 263 acres of the Big Indian acquisition as Intensive Use, to be added to the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center. In addition, also included in the revised Ski Center UMP is a proposal to reclassify 149 acres of the Ski Center property, currently classified intensive use, to Wilderness and add it to the adjoining Big Indian Wilderness. This proposal classifies the remainder of the new acquisition, approximately 940 acres. The majority of the remaining lands, approximately 542 acres on the eastern ridge of Belleayre Mountain, to include all lands acquired east of Giggle Hollow Brook and north of the Belleayre Ridge would be classified Wild Forest and added to the Shandaken Wild Forest. Approximately 361 acres in Lost Clove, inclusive of the Lost Clove Trail would be classified wilderness and added to the Big Indian Wilderness Area. In addition, in an effort to allow for the expansion of groomed cross-country skiing opportunities on the Belleayre Ridge, the Department proposes an amendment to the Catskill Park State Land Master Plan to allow the Department to develop **improved** cross-country ski trails on lands to be classified as wild forest on Belleayre Mountain (which, as defined in the Master Plan may be groomed with the use of motor vehicles). The Master Plan currently allows improved cross-country ski trails only in Intensive Use Areas. We propose this exception, specific to the Big Indian Ridge, due to its relationship with the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center Intensive Use Area. Furthermore, this exception from Wild Forest Guidelines would be limited to grooming with a snowmobile with or without a drag or track setter. Grooming would not be undertaken with large, dual track machines more commonly used to groom alpine ski trails.

Interested Parties
Catskill Forest Preserve
September 6, 2013

A public meeting to present a summary of the classification proposal and to receive public comments will be held on Tuesday, September 17, 2013 from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm. at the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center Overlook Lodge located on County Route 49A in Highmount, New York. The meeting will provide an opportunity for the public to meet with Department staff and share their thoughts, ideas, and suggestions regarding management of the newly acquired State lands. Comments on the draft revision of the plan can be submitted to the Department at the Region 3 Office as follows: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, 21 South Putt Corners Road, New Paltz, NY 12561 or by e-mail at wprudge@gw.dec.state.ny.us Written comments will be accepted until **September 30, 2013**.

Thank you for your interest in management of the Catskill Forest Preserve.

Sincerely,



William J. Rudge
Natural Resources Supervisor

WJR/adm
Enclosure

cc: T. Rudolph, Acting Regional Director
J. Wiegert, Regional Forester
J. Rider, Supervising Forester
P. Frank, Bureau Chief, Forest Preserve