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Brian Nearing
Times Union
Box 15000, News Plaza
Albany, NY 12212

Dear Brian:

I read with interest your story on Lows Lake in Sunday's Times Union. I must say I am surprised at some of the misstatements by the Protect the Adirondacks! organization – and that their claims were taken at face value with so little scrutiny.

Consider:

1. Lows Lake is a man-made lake, a feat of engineering created by two concrete dams. It is not a wilderness and was never classified as a "wilderness" The claim that a "wilderness area" has lost its status "for the first time in memory" is simply false.
2. Lows Lake is, however, completely protected from any kind of development as part of the Forest Preserve. Much of the Forest Preserve land around it is correctly classified as "primitive," affording the same level of protection as a "wilderness."

A "wilderness" is defined in the State Land Master Plan as "... where the earth and its community of life are untrammled by man – where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Lows Lake is beautiful and serene, but it is not a "wilderness" in any sense of the word. Its shoreline contains a mix of public and private land, including private homes, a nine-mile dirt road and a Boy Scout camp, none of which would be found in a "wilderness."

Which brings us to the central question: Why did some private advocacy groups press the APA so hard to change the already highly protected Lows Lake to a wilderness? What was the public to gain by such a change in classification – and what might be lost?

The reality is no persuasive argument was advanced by the proponents for the classification, except that the change would result in a ban on the use of any motorized vehicle on the lake. In practical terms, this ban would apply mainly to small fishing boats because the agency intended to allow private property owners around the lake to continue to use their motorized boats. In practical reality, the ban would affect only those

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individuals – perhaps the elderly or disabled – who were unable to portage a rowboat, canoe or kayak to Lows Lake and who might enjoy dipping a line from a putt-putt.

The natural question is who might benefit from such a change. The apparent answer is a small group of canoeists and kayakers who have wanted for some time to have the lake reserved for their private use without being disturbed by small motor boats. While many of us appreciate the solitude of wilderness, I see no legitimate justification for the commissioners of the Adirondack Park Agency using their awesome classification power to create – manufacture, really – a private wilderness experience for some while denying others reasonable access to publicly owned land – especially when the motorized boats of nearby private landowners would be allowed to continue to use the lake.

In my judgment, this is a case where environmental advocacy organizations sought to pressure the APA into creating a wilderness experience desired by their members in violation of the larger public interest.

The APA made the right decision in rejecting the wilderness classification, not the wrong decision. The revote on the matter was made necessary when a commissioner who voted the first time was determined to be ineligible to sit on the agency, his appointment having expired.

Classifying Lows Lake as wilderness would have been a first. No other body of water in the Adirondacks with mixed shoreline ownership is classified as “wilderness.”

For instance, Lake George and Lake Placid, like Lows Lake, have a mix of public and private lands around their shorelines. If the APA were to classify the lakebed and waters of those lakes as wilderness, the APA’s jurisdiction would automatically extend up to 660 feet onto the surrounding private parcels. The APA could deny permits to make changes on any private home or building on the shores. The bed and waters of lakes with mixed shoreline ownerships should not be classified as wilderness.

Lows Lake has not lost any protection as state-owned Forest Preserve land. DEC staff will still work on the waters, no non-conforming structures or improvements can be built on the state land, and the recreational uses on the Lake, which DEC Commissioner Grannis has directed to be managed as wilderness, are the same as those found on one classified as “wilderness.” In short, nothing about Lows Lake changes, other than the unwarranted expansion of APA jurisdiction on the private lands without state legislative action.

I serve as the executive director of the Adirondack Park Local Government Review Board, established in the APA Act to monitor, advise and assist the APA. The Board has been in operation as long as the APA itself has. It is comprised of representatives of each of 11 counties in the park.

Adirondack issues are complex and nuanced, rarely simple or straightforward. Private advocacy groups are well-financed, well-connected and expert at oversimplifying matters and shaping media coverage to fit their political agenda.

But I trust that you appreciate the complexity and would be interested in other perspectives on Adirondack issues – especially the perspective of local people and their elected officials.

So I would appreciate you keeping me in mind as a source of information when you are writing stories on the Adirondacks. You can reach me any time at (518) 796-2415 or at fmonroe@adkreviewboard.com

Best regards,


Fred Monroe