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old logging road and then bushwhacking for hours through thick balsams to the river. Because it had rained for several days beforehand, his boots and pants got soaked during the bushwhack. By the time he reached the campsite, it was 2:30 p.m.—he had been hiking for 5½ hours. He then made a disheartening discovery: His canoe was missing.

Skalak suspects the canoe was stolen, since he had tied it down. He now contemplated the risks of bushwhacking back to his truck. Because he was unsure whether he could find the old logging road as easily as he found the river, he thought he might have to bivouac in the woods, probably in subfreezing temperatures. He didn't want to attempt the trip in wet clothing and wet boots.

He had notified the local forest ranger that he expected to be out of the woods on Saturday. He also left a topo map on his truck's dashboard outlining his route. He hoped rangers would come to his rescue once they realized he was missing. And so he decided to stay put—at least until his clothing and boots dried.

"I figured the smartest thing to do was to sit tight," he said. "I was warm and dry inside my sleeping bag and tent."

He had enough food only for an overnight trip: a sandwich, a box of rice and 8 ounces of salmon. Nevertheless, he made it last from Friday night until Monday. Meanwhile, the temperature was dropping into the teens. To keep warm in his bag, he put warm water in bottles and placed them between his thighs.

Nobody came to his rescue, and his boots and clothing never dried out. At 5 a.m. Tuesday—cold, hungry, out of food—he activated the beacon again.

Twelve hours later, Skalak was picked up by helicopter and flown to Fort Drum. The

next day, he said, he was arrested and handcuffed after an interrogation conducted by several DEC rangers and investigators. He pleaded not guilty in town court in Old Forge and plans to continue to fight the charges. He is due in court again this month.

"They suggested that I should be walking out of the woods with wet boots in subfreezing temperatures," he said. "I didn't think that was a prudent thing to do."

Steve Litwhiler, the DEC spokesman, refused to discuss the case except to say that the agency believes Skalak could have got out of the woods both times without help.

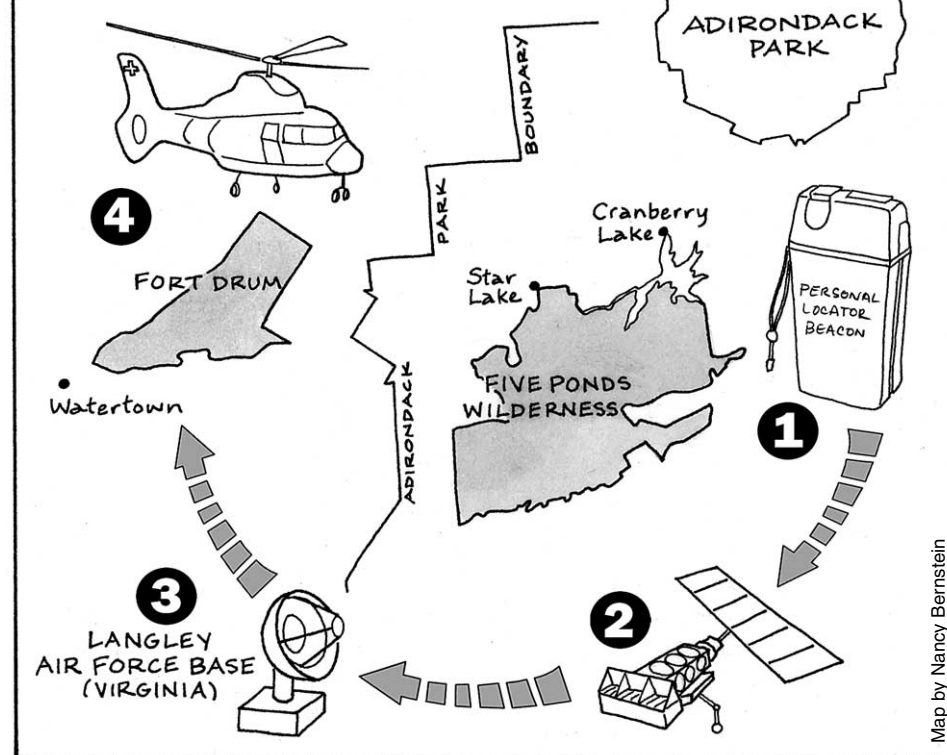
The federal government seems to take a more lenient attitude toward the questionable use of PLBs. Similar devices have been used for years on ships and planes, but there have been few arrests for misuse, according to Lt. Karlson of NOAA. "We'd rather that people have confidence in the system and not worry about making that judgment call when they're at risk," Karlson said.

He regards false alerts as the down side of operating an emergency system that has a huge up side: He expects thousands of people will be saved by PLBs over the years.

Skalak's rescues sparked much discussion on "Views from the Top," an Internet bulletin board for Northeast hikers. Some of those posting messages fear that personal locator beacons will encourage hikers to go into the woods unprepared, knowing that they need only flip a switch if they run into trouble. "Give it time. Let it become more popular," said one hiker. "Charging for rescues will start. Then the lawyers will get involved—lawsuits when a rescue isn't fast enough."

Neil Woodworth, attorney for the Adirondack Mountain Club, which represents 40,000 hikers, said outdoor enthusiasts should be properly prepared before entering the woods, but he sees nothing wrong with using a beacon in a real emergency.

Rescue in the Five Ponds Wilderness



1. Carl Skalak's beacon sends signal to satellite owned by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
2. Signal is routed to Air Force Rescue and Coordination Center in Langley, Va.
3. Air Force notifies authorities in New York state, who request helicopter from Fort Drum Army Base near Watertown.
4. Fort Drum dispatches Huey helicopter to pick up Skalak in the Five Ponds Wilderness.

"I don't see any difference in using a personal locator beacon, a cell phone or a walkie-talkie," he said. "I don't think the method of communication matters, but any emergency call has to be reserved for true emergencies."

Was DEC being heavy-handed in arresting Skalak? What are the implications of

the arrest for other hikers? If they run into trouble, how can they know if their predicament is a legal emergency or not? Apparently, these questions will not be answered until the case unfolds. DEC is not talking, and Woodworth said he could not comment on the specifics of the Skalak case without knowing all the facts.

No sawing wood around here!

BY RICHARD ROOT
EXPLORER CORRESPONDENT

Keese Mills Road used to define out of the way. Most of the people who make it to the hamlet of Paul Smiths are headed for the College or the Visitor's Interpretive Center. If they happen to turn onto the narrow, sand-shouldered byway, they are either going home or putting a canoe in the St. Regis River.

This summer, though, residents along the road found themselves being roused as early as 3:30 in the morning by a steady stream of logging trucks rattling up the road. The trucks would soon return, this time loaded with logs high up on the bunks—a pattern that continued until 6 or 7 at night. The trucks are coming from Ross Park in Santa Clara, a 28,000-acre tract suddenly being managed more intensively for timber, and in the process, says longtime local Jack Burke, they are turning a quiet road into an "industrial neighborhood."

Unhappy with what they called noise and safety issues, 19 citizens met in late September with the Brighton Town Board and representatives from LandVest, the group managing the

Ross Park cut, and the two contracted logging outfits. The loggers agreed to send in their trucks as late as they could—one company said they would start at 4:30 and the other said they needed to begin by 5:30.

But those compromises didn't please all the residents, especially since the management plan has been set up for a

"How would you like it if I called you up every morning at 4:30 or 5:30?"

—Neil Surprenant

continuous harvest to be happening indefinitely. "How would you like it if I called you up every morning at 4:30 or 5:30 instead of 3:30? That hour or two doesn't really make any difference," says Neil Surprenant, who wrote a book about the history of Ross Park and has lived on the road since 1976.

"I've never heard of anything like this before. In the past there might have been complaints about the speed of trucks, but never about the number of trucks," says LandVest project manager Nathan Gibbs. Their plan is to work through the property in 1,500-acre chunks, eventually coming back to that original lot in time to begin the process over again.

The initial phase of the management plan calls for moving low-grade timber off the lot, and this past summer and early fall the market was just right for those products. "We had two high-production companies in there moving low-grade timber, yet in order for that to be profitable there needs to be a high volume of product moved out of the woods," says Larry Dennis, manager of LandVest in Tupper Lake. The logging groups, Seaway Timber and Paul Mitchell Logging, were each making from seven to 15 round trips a day, depending on whether they were hauling sawlogs to Tupper Lake Hardwoods or pulpwood destined for Ticonderoga. Dennis says that logging activity in the park, and on the road, will always be changing in response to weather and markets: It dropped off considerably later in the fall.

Both Seaway and Paul Mitchell have agreed not only to the later start times, but also to a 25-mph limit while traveling Keese Mills Road. The drivers have also made a commitment to schedule their runs to avoid the local school bus, but some residents think that these compromises are not enough and that the town should step in to pro- ▶▶