



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Pepperbox Wilderness Area

Amendment to

the

1985 Pepperbox Wilderness Area Unit Management Plan

Herkimer and Lewis Counties

June 2015

Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor

Joseph Martens, Commissioner

For further information contact:

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MEMORANDUM

JUL 23 2015

TO: The Record
FROM: Marc S. Gerstman 
SUBJECT: Pepperbox Wilderness

The amendment to the Pepperbox Wilderness Unit Management Plan has been completed, and the Adirondack Park Agency has found it to be in conformance with the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan. The amendment is consistent with Environmental Conservation Law, and Department Rules, Regulations and Policies and is hereby approved and adopted.



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

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LEILANI CRAFTS ULRICH
Chairwoman

TERRY MARTINO
Executive Director

**RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY
THE ADIRONDACK PARK AGENCY
WITH RESPECT TO PEPPERBOX WILDERNESS AREA
UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT**

JUNE 12, 2015

WHEREAS, Section 816 of the Adirondack Park Agency Act directs the Department of Environmental Conservation to develop, in consultation with the Adirondack Park Agency, individual management plans for units of land classified in the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (“Master Plan”) for management of state lands and requires such management plans to conform to the general guidelines and criteria of the Master Plan; and

WHEREAS, in addition to such guidelines and criteria, the Master Plan prescribes the contents of unit management plans and provides that the Adirondack Park Agency will determine whether a proposed individual unit management plan conforms with such general guidelines and criteria; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Environmental Conservation has prepared a draft unit management plan amendment dated April, 2015 for the Pepperbox Wilderness Area in the Town of Webb, Herkimer County, and the Town of Watson, Lewis County and includes proposed management actions for the Pepperbox Wilderness Area; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Environmental Conservation as the lead agency, has filed a SEQR Negative Declaration and published a notice in the Environmental Notice Bulletin on June 10, 2015; and

WHEREAS, the Adirondack Park Agency is an involved agency whose staff have been consulted in the preparation of the proposed plan amendment; and

WHEREAS, during the review and consultation of the Draft Amendment, the Department of Environmental Conservation modified the amendment to propose the designation of a primitive tent site near Gregg Lake instead of a lean-to; and

WHEREAS, the Agency is requested to determine whether the final Pepperbox Unit Management Plan Amendment (the Amendment), dated May, 2015, conforms with the standards and guidelines of the Master Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Adirondack Park Agency has reviewed the proposed Amendment; and

WHEREAS, the 1985 Pepperbox Wilderness area UMP includes 14,600 acres of land owned by the state of New York since 1932; and

WHEREAS, since 1985 the Pepperbox Wilderness area has grown to 22,560 acres in size and the proposed Amendment involves lands added to the Northern Portion of the unit; and

WHEREAS, the trail-less character of the lands included in the 1985 Pepperbox Wilderness Area UMP is uniquely important to the management strategy for this area; and

WHEREAS, improvements proposed in the Amendment are consistent with the character of Wilderness as defined in the Adirondack Park State Land master Plan and do not encroach upon the trail-less lands described in the 1985 UMP; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that pursuant to Section 816 of the Adirondack Park Agency Act, the Adirondack Park Agency finds the Pepperbox Wilderness Area Unit Management Plan Amendment, dated May, 2015, conforms with the general guidelines and criteria of the Master Plan.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Adirondack Park Agency authorizes its Executive Director to advise the Commissioner of Environmental Conservation of the Agency's determination in this matter.

AYES: Chairwoman Lani Ulrich, Richard Booth, Sherman Craig, Karen Feldman, Arthur Lussi, William Thomas, Dan Wilt, Brad Austin (DED), Deidre Scozzafava (DOS), Robert Stegemann (DEC)

NAYS: None

ABSTENTIONS: None

ABSENT: None

UMP AMENDMENT #1

INTRODUCTION

The Pepperbox Wilderness Area is comprised of approximately 22,560 acres in the Town of Watson in Lewis County and the Town of Webb in Herkimer County. A Unit Management Plan (UMP) was completed for the unit in 1985, and to date, no amendments or revisions have been made to the Plan.

This amendment proposes the designation of a primitive tent site near Gregg Lake and a designated trail to the tent site. The tent site location has historically been and continues to be a destination for anglers, hunters, and other outdoor recreationists and has two established but undesignated access trails.

This amendment is not meant to alter the character of the Pepperbox Wilderness Area or the management philosophy outlined in the 1985 UMP. The 1985 Plan identified the Pepperbox Wilderness Area as a “trail-less” Wilderness that is unique to New York State, and identified a long term goal for public use management to “retain the unit as is with no trails or other facilities within it.” The original UMP addressed management of the unit as it existed in 1985, and did not address lands which have since been added, including Gregg Lake.

Lands added to the Pepperbox Wilderness Area following the release of the 1985 UMP include several facilities in the north, some of which were on lands of Watsons East Triangle that were reclassified as Pepperbox, and as such, differ in character from the unit as described in the 1985 Plan. The Alder Creek and Tied Lake Primitive Corridors, which access inholdings, protrude into Pepperbox, the Bear Pond Primitive Corridor is adjacent to the northeast boundary, Jakes Pond Foot Trail, Sand Pond Accessible Trail, a parking area off of the Tied Lake Primitive Corridor, and a primitive tent site near Tied Lake are all located within lands added to the Pepperbox since the original UMP was released. The proposed tent site near Gregg Lake is consistent with the character of this northern section of the Pepperbox Unit, and conforms to Wilderness Guidelines of the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan.

II. RESOURCE AND PUBLIC USE INVENTORY OVERVIEW

A. Natural Resources

1. Physical

- c) Terrain: The Gregg Lake area is surrounded by rolling slopes, with flats and low areas containing numerous wetlands, beaver flows, and ponds. Boulders are common throughout much of the landscape.
- d) Water: Gregg Lake has a surface area of 17.2 acres (7.2 ha), a mean depth of 11.8 feet (3.6 m), and a maximum depth of 32 feet (9.8 m; ALSC, 1986).

2. Biological

- a) Vegetation: Softwoods are found in many low and wet portions of the Gregg Lake area, with a spruce-fir mix being most dominant around Gregg Lake itself. Hardwoods including red maple, birch, and beech with occasional white pine are found upslope. In general, the forest has a limited number of large, old-growth trees due to past forest management activities.
- c) Fish: The Pepperbox Wilderness Area is located in a region of the Adirondack Park heavily affected by acid precipitation. Many ponds in the unit do not support fish, and fishing opportunities were described as limited in the 1985 UMP. Gregg Lake represents a unique recreation opportunity in the area, in that it supports wild brook trout populations. The inlet to Gregg Lake also supports brook trout, and in the past, trout were identified in the outlets of Loon Hollow and Twin Ponds, both upstream from Gregg Lake (NYSDEC Bureau of Fisheries, 51).

E. Public Use of the Area

A Forest Preserve Visitor Study for the northwestern Adirondacks (Dawson & Graefe, 2011) identified the majority of visits to the area as occurring in July and August, with more than half of all visitor groups having less than three individuals, and 80% having less than 6 individuals. In 2008, the Pepperbox Wilderness Area had 449 trailhead registrations at the Raven Lake Primitive Corridor Trail Register. This register is located in close proximity to Stillwater, and likely attracts a much higher number of visitors than the Tied Lake Primitive Corridor and Gregg Lake area. Watson's East Triangle Wild Forest provides access to the northern portion of the Pepperbox Wilderness Area. The Bergren's Clearing Trail Register located in this unit recorded 250 visitor registrations in 2008, though this register is located at the end of a Town road and is more easily accessible than Gregg Lake. Overall, public use near Gregg Lake is believed to be much lower than at either of these trail registers.

It is anticipated that public use will continue to be low in the Tied Lake Primitive Corridor and Gregg Lake area. The Tied Lake Parking Area is located more than 10.5 miles from the end

of Long Pond Road (where the Bergren's Clearing Trail Register is located), over the unpaved Bear Pond and Tied Lake roads. No issues related to overuse are expected from the proposed tent site, however the Department will carefully monitor visitor use moving forward.

IV. PROJECTED USE AND MANAGEMENT PROPOSED

A. FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT AND/OR REMOVAL

2. Other Development

a) Designation of a primitive tent site is proposed on the western shore of Gregg Lake just south of the outlet of the lake. Access to the tent site will likely be primarily from the parking area just beyond Tied Lake, off of the Tied Lake Primitive Corridor. From this parking area, individuals may travel to the tent site by foot, snowshoes or cross-country skis. The tent site will be sited at an existing clearing, site of a former hunting camp on lands formerly owned by Champion International, which is screened from the Gregg Lake shoreline.

A draft of this amendment proposed the construction of a lean-to near Gregg Lake and the designation of an access trail. In response to public comments requesting a comprehensive revision to the Pepperbox Wilderness Area UMP, this amendment now proposes the designation of only a primitive tent site where the lean-to was originally proposed. Designation of this tent site is desirable to ensure impacts from camping near Gregg Lake are concentrated in an appropriate location. A future revision to the Pepperbox UMP will evaluate the unit as a whole, and address lands added to the unit since 1985.

b) Two old forest management trails are distinguishable that lead to the tent site site from the Tied Lake Primitive Corridor, both starting south of the Tied Lake parking area. Both trails have boulder barriers at the edge of the Tied Lake Primitive Corridor to prevent illegal motor vehicle use. The northern trail is located 0.3 miles south of the parking area and leads 1.3 miles to the tent site. The southern trail is located 1.2 miles south of the parking area and leads approximately 1 mile to the tent site. Trail conditions are generally very similar between the northern and southern routes, with neither route limited by significant rutting, erosion, or other environmental considerations. The northern trail is proposed as the designated trail because it follows a more direct route to the lake, does not require the crossing of any streams or wetlands, and minimizes hiking along the Tied Lake Road. The southern route is 0.6 miles further from the parking area on the Tied Lake Primitive Corridor, follows 0.9 more miles of the Tied Lake Road, and requires crossing Martin Brook. Focusing public use on this trail will allow the alternate trail to revert to a more natural condition, so limit public impact on the area.

PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY AND RESPONSES

The following is a summary of public comments received from April 15th - May 15th 2015 following the release of the Draft Amendment to the Pepperbox Wilderness Area UMP. The Department received 5 comments in the form of letters and emails, summarized below. Where possible, excerpts from public comments are included below. In several cases similar comments have been condensed and paraphrased.

1. The Adirondack State Land Master Plan describes the Pepperbox Wilderness Area as offering “an opportunity to retain a portion of the Adirondack landscape in a state that even a purist might call Wilderness.” It is described as “trail-less” in the 1985 UMP, and management goals identified include retaining the unit “as is with no trails or other facilities.” Designation and/or construction of facilities in the unit are not compatible with these descriptions.

The original UMP does not address land added to the unit since 1985. These lands include the previously existing Jake’s Pond Trail (which was part of Watson’s East Triangle Wild Forest), an accessible trail to Sand Pond, a primitive tent site near Tied Lake, and public motor vehicle access on the Tied Lake Primitive Corridor to Tied Lake. In addition, there are three separate private inholdings near Gregg Lake, so this portion of the Pepperbox is quite different than the area originally included in the unit and covered by the Pepperbox WA UMP.

2. The establishment of a trail and lean-to would complicate the closing of the Tied Lake Primitive Corridor to motorized use should the associated inholding be acquired by New York State.

The Adirondack State Land Master Plan states that should the private inholding associated with the Tied Lake Primitive Corridor be acquired by the State, it “should be incorporated into the Pepperbox Wilderness Area and the status of the road reviewed to determine if the road should remain open to public use.” It is not anticipated that the designation of a primitive tent site and trail proposed in this amendment will complicate this issue, since should the Tide Lake Road be closed it would just mean a longer hike to the Gregg Lake tent site.

3. The original UMP for this unit was completed in 1985 and significant acreage has been added since. It would be more appropriate to complete a full revision of the UMP than to amend the existing Plan.

In response to public comments, this amendment now solely proposes a primitive tent site near Gregg Lake and a designated trail, concentrating camping impacts in the Gregg Lake area in an appropriate location and also limiting new infrastructure. A future revision to the UMP will comprehensively evaluate management of the unit, including lands added since 1985. This revision may re-evaluate construction of a lean-to and/or designation of a foot trail near Gregg Lake in the context of the entire unit.

4. The Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan states that there is little or no demand for a trail system and this offers an opportunity to retain a portion of the Adirondack landscape in a state that even a purist might call Wilderness.

There are two trails in use to this location, trails that existed before the property became Forest Preserve and that continue to be used. Designation of one trail will reduce the impact and extent of public use by focusing it on the better and less remote route.

5. The amendment of the Pepperbox Wilderness Area UMP is unexpected for the scarcely visited unit, and there seems to be little reason to add infrastructure. NYSDEC should explain the reasoning for siting a lean-to near Gregg Lake.

Public desire for a lean-to in the Bear Pond Road region was communicated during the drafting of the Watson's East Triangle Wild Forest UMP. A 2012 amendment to the Watson's UMP replaced the proposed lean-to near Buck Pond at the northern edge of the Pepperbox with an accessible tent site, at which time NYSDEC considered new locations for a lean-to in the area. Though not within the same management unit, Gregg Lake was selected as a lean-to site accessible from Bear Pond Road and construction was proposed in the draft of this amendment. The location chosen at Gregg Lake is at the site of a former camp that was already being used for camping that was within 150' of the Lake, so is a very suitable site needing little site preparation. However, in response to public comments to this proposal, this amendment now solely proposes the designation of a primitive tent site at Gregg Lake. If the future revision of the Pepperbox directs that existing trails and facilities be removed, it will be a simple thing to remove signage vs. an entire leanto.

6. The Pepperbox Wilderness Area has a history of ATV trespass. NYSDEC should increase efforts towards preventing this type of damage before increasing the desirability of the area. Gregg Lake could become an attractive target for illegal motorized use.

Official designation of a primitive tent site near Gregg Lake is not expected to attract additional ATV trespass. NYSDEC will continue to work to enforce against ATV trespass in the area.

7. The proposed lean-to and foot trail would take away from the wilderness experience in the unit. The Pepperbox Wilderness Area is unique in character and the opportunities it provides visitors.

Lean-tos and foot trails conform to Wilderness guidelines listed in the Adirondack State Land Master Plan. However, in response to public comments, this amendment now solely proposes a primitive tent site near Gregg Lake and designated foot trail.

8. A primitive tent site is more appropriate for this area. There are plenty of lean-tos in the area that provide opportunities for individuals looking for such facilities.

During the public comment period for the Watson's East Triangle Wild Forest UMP the

public expressed interest in a lean-to in the Bear Pond Road area. There are no other lean-tos accessed from the Bear Pond Road. However, in response to public comments for this amendment, a primitive tent site rather than a leanto is now proposed near Gregg Lake.

9. It makes more sense to expand the trail systems in overused areas such as the High Peaks.

Management of the High Peaks is addressed in the High Peaks Wilderness Complex Unit Management Plan.

10. There is an existing NYSDEC foot trail to Gregg Lake from the Tied Lake Primitive Corridor that is not inventoried in the amendment.

There are two informal trails to Gregg Lake, both beginning on the Tied Lake Primitive Corridor. Neither of these trails is or has been an officially designated foot trail.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Adirondack Lakes Survey Corporation. 1986. ALSA Historic Data for Gregg Lake (040181). Available at:
<http://www.adirondacklakessurvey.org/alscscript.inc.php?alscpond=040181&pname=REGG%20LAKE>

Dawson C.P., & Graefe, D.A. 2011. Northwestern Adirondack Forest Preserve Visitor Study.

NYSDEC Bureau of Fisheries. Modern Statewide Database. Version 51.

Gregg Lake Primitive Tent site and Trail Location

