

**PROJECT TITLE**

**INTEGRATED SERIES OF PROPOSED STATE LAND MANAGEMENT ACTIONS IN  
THE VICINITY OF DEBAR LODGE**

**DRAFT GENERIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (DGEIS)**

**CONTENT OF DGEIS:**

Overview of Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement

Attachment 1: Map of Proposed Reclassification of Lands in the Vicinity of Debar Lodge

Attachment 2: Proposed Draft Unit Management Plan, Debar Management Complex,  
December 2020

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**DGEIS is available on the web at:**

<https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/109817.html>

<https://www.apa.ny.gov/>

**Comments on this DGEIS will be accepted from December 11, 2020 until February  
12, 2021 at the following addresses:**

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**Hearings by video and telephone will be held at the following times:**

Tuesday, January 19, 2021, from 1:30 pm to 4:00 pm

Tuesday, January 19, 2021, from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm

For further information on attending the remote hearings, visit the APA website:

<https://www.apa.ny.gov/>

**Date of Acceptance of DGEIS:** December 10, 2020

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## **I. General Description of the Action**

The New York State Adirondack Park Agency (APA) and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) propose a comprehensive, integrated series of related actions for the geographic area known as the Debar Mountain Complex (DMC) located in the Northwest corner of the Adirondack Park.

The DEC proposes individual unit management plans (UMPs) for the Debar Mountain Wild Forest, Madawaska Flow Quebec Brook Primitive Area, Deer River Primitive Area, and a newly proposed Debar Lodge Intensive Use Area. DEC also proposes rivers area management plans within the management complex according to the Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act (WSRRA) including the Deer River, East branch of the Saint Regis River, and St. Regis River.

The APA proposes an amendment to the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (SLMP or Master Plan) based on DEC recommendations developed in the Debar Lodge Day Use Area (DLDDUA) UMP, which includes the reclassification of lands for the creation of the new Debar Lodge Intensive Use Day Use Area in the vicinity of the Debar Lodge. Though it is understood that actions identified in any unit management plan must conform to the guidelines and criteria set forth in the Master Plan and cannot amend the Master Plan itself, the rationale for reclassification of certain State lands was derived from over 15 years of community engagement and planning efforts for the Debar Mountain Management Complex and the Debar Lodge site.

The keystone element of the proposed final UMP for the Debar Mountain Wild Forest is the recommendation to reclassify the lands adjacent to Debar Lodge from Wild Forest to Intensive Use so that the Debar Lodge facility can be reconfigured into a new Day Use site under Intensive Use guidelines, thereby enhancing the opportunity for accessible outdoor day use gatherings in a wild forest setting, and providing greater flexibility to interpret the historic resources of the site with interpretive displays, repurposed components of the lodge, and sufficient visitor capacity at the site to protect resources and offer a valuable recreational resource. The proposed reclassification action upholds a balanced approach to the management of the area based on characteristics of the land and its capacity to withstand use.

The Agency proposes to make its determination regarding Master Plan consistency of the Debar Mountain Complex plan and the Intensive Use Day Use Area UMP at the same time as the proposed reclassification action. However, final adoption by DEC of the unit management plans will necessarily be contingent on the Governor's prior approval of the proposed amendments to the Master Plan. A more detailed description

of the inter-related actions is provided below in the order by which the actions must be approved.

#### **A. State Land Reclassification**

The Debar Lodge Day Use Area UMP, which is an appendix to the Debar Complex UMP, proposes that Wild Forest lands in the vicinity of the Debar Lodge be reclassified to Intensive Use, as provided by the Master Plan. This reclassification would allow for the creation of a new and unique Intensive Use Day Use area. The Adirondack Park Agency Act, the Master Plan and the Final Programmatic EIS regarding Guidelines for Amending the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, dated February 28, 1979, all identify the reclassification of State lands from a more restrictive to a less restrictive area classification as a potentially significant action. In recognition of the potential impacts of this proposal, the Department and the Agency have solicited comments on a Draft Scope that further describes the reclassification action. Comments from the Draft Scope were carefully considered during the development of both a Final Scope and this Draft Generic EIS. Another opportunity for public comment will be available in conjunction with the publication of the Draft UMP and this Draft Generic EIS. The reclassification action and the Alternatives considered for the site are further described below. The location of the reclassification proposal is shown in Attachment 1: Map – Proposed Reclassification of Lands in the Vicinity of the Debar Lodge.

#### **Proposed State Land Reclassification Area Boundaries**

The proposed DLDUA encompasses approximately 41 acres around the Debar Lodge compound and associated improvements including, the access road, the powerline, and the dam. The boundary of the area to be reclassified will be 50 feet beyond the western edge of the dam, the eastern edge of the wetlands along Debar Brook, 100 feet on either side of the access road, the eastern edge of the powerline, and following the fence line that marked the northern and eastern boundaries of the former leased area. This area will encompass the southern portion of the old airstrip. The area includes approximately 800 linear feet of shoreline on Debar Pond including the dam.

#### **B. Unit Management Plan Review and Adoption**

The Debar Mountain Management Complex UMP provides a description of historical use, a detailed inventory of existing resources and an assessment of the capacity of the land to withstand use. It also identifies recreational opportunities and provides an analysis of a broad range of management actions for the 88,300-acre area. Every proposal within the complex plan must conform to the guidelines and criteria of the Master Plan and recognize that protection of

the natural resources of the unit is the paramount concern: recreational use should be encouraged and promoted so long as the activities do not degrade the area's resources. The Debar Lodge Day Use Area Unit Management Plan is especially important in consideration of the significant actions contemplated in this DGEIS. It is described in more detail below.

### **Debar Lodge Day Use Area Unit Management Plan**

The Day Use Area Unit Management Plan describes an accessibly designed and carefully scaled Day Use site on the shore of Debar Pond. Proposals in the UMP include efforts to retain and highlight elements of the historic Debar Lodge whenever possible to uphold the human history in the vicinity of Debar Pond, while simultaneously providing an access point to newly proposed trails and facilities planned for the surrounding Debar Mountain Wild Forest lands.

DEC and Agency staff have reviewed the proposal and believe the action is carefully balanced to ensure resource protection, historic preservation, and recreational access on a scale that is appropriate for the site.

The action will also involve the Agency's review and determination that a draft unit management plan for the newly created Intensive Use Area, to be named the Debar Lodge Day Use Area (DLDDUA), is consistent with the guidelines and criteria of the State Land Master Plan, pending final approval of the recommended reclassification action by the Governor. The Master Plan, under the Basic Guidelines for Management and Use of Intensive Use Areas, specifically directs that:

*7. Any request for classification of a new acquisition or reclassification of existing lands from another land use category to an intensive use area will be accompanied by a draft unit management plan for the proposed intensive use area that will demonstrate how the applicable guidelines will be respected.*

Consequently, the draft Debar Lodge Day Use Area UMP developed by the Department is integral to the Agency's decision on the proposed reclassification action involving the creation of the proposed new Intensive Use Area. It is included as appendix H of the *Debar Mountain Management Complex Unit Management Plan*, dated December 2020.

The key elements of the DLDDUA Intensive Use Area UMP

1. The proposed creation of an Intensive Use Area that is approximately 41 acres in size including:

- Approximately 1 mile of dirt road into the site;
- A dam impounding Debar Pond;
- All the buildings associated with the Debar Lodge site, including the Debar Lodge; and
- A portion of the former airstrip.

2. A phased site design plan featuring group use pavilions, picnic tables and fire pits, a caretaker cabin and a hand launch boat launch designed to use the existing footprints of structures and improvements currently in place at the site,

3. A description of the desired conditions for the Debar Lodge DUA that will be used to carefully monitor the site pursuant to a Visitor Use Management plan,

4. A commitment to the prohibition of motorized watercraft, except for those with an electric motor rated at five horsepower or less, on Debar Pond through the implementation of a new regulation,

5. A discussion of the alternative proposals for the management and use of the site pursuant to the New York State Historic Preservation Act and SEQR that further elaborates on the classification alternatives described herein.

### **C. Materials Forming Part of the DGEIS**

The set of interrelated proposals constituting the “action” is provided in greater detail in the following documents, which by attachment form part of this DGEIS:

*-MAP OF PROPOSED RECLASSIFICATION OF LANDS IN THE VICINITY OF DEBAR LODGE WITHIN THE DEBAR MOUNTAIN WILD FOREST (Attachment 1)*

*-PROPOSED DRAFT UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN, DEBAR MOUNTAIN MANAGEMENT COMPLEX.* Appendix H within the complex plan is a draft plan for the Debar Lodge Day Use Area that provides details regarding the reclassification of the area to the Intensive Use Day Use Area (Attachment 2).

## **II. Environmental Setting**

A detailed description of the important aspects of the environmental setting is provided in the proposed Draft Debar Mountain Complex UMP. The following summary description is compiled directly from excerpts of the DLDUA plan:

Situated on the northern shoreline of Debar Pond, the Debar Lodge complex occupies an area which has seen a broad spectrum of private infrastructure development that has culminated with the structures and improvements that are present today.

Debar Pond was first visited by its namesake, John DeBar, during a fishing trip in 1817. Debar Pond is approximately 1 mile long by ½ mile wide with its southern skyline framed by the peaks of Baldface, Debar, and Loon Lake Mountains. A more detailed history of the ownership and development patterns that have shaped the landscape around the Debar Lodge over the past 100 years is provided in the DLDUA plan. Debar Pond offers the rare combination of easy access from a public highway and a remote wild character. Visitors and the local community cherish it for those traits. Debar Pond boasts an outstanding cold-water fishery which supports the reproduction of native brook trout as well as the annual stocking of other desirable sport fish such as splake and landlocked Atlantic salmon.

### **III. Statement and Evaluation of Potential Environmental Impacts**

The Programmatic EIS regarding amendments to the Master Plan (Programmatic EIS) outlines a number of general environmental impacts associated with revisions to State land classifications and narrative revisions to the Master Plan that could be considered significant and would likely require more thorough environmental review, including:

- changes in existing use levels that exceed the land's capacity to withstand use resulting in significant, adverse impacts on the natural resources or open space character of the State lands;
- changes that diminish the quality of those recreational opportunities requiring large acreages of open space such as hunting, backpacking and wilderness dependent activities;
- changes that significantly decrease the availability of primitive recreational opportunities, which are limited in New York and rare in the northeast;
- designation of large tracts of State lands as wilderness, primitive or canoe and the establishment of intact, connecting wildlife corridors between larger tracts, provide the unusual opportunity for reintroduction of extirpated species requiring significant acreages of habitat;
- changes that would deteriorate the quality or character of wilderness resources and thereby adversely impact the educational or research values of the areas;
- changes that would result in deterioration of the quality of natural or scenic resources of State lands and adversely affect the economy of the Park.

The proposed reclassification action is a zoning change and does not constitute actual physical development of the land. The action does, however, provide the opportunity to change the level or intensity of use of the State lands and therefore may lead to a range of more site-specific impacts to the Debar Wild Forest.

In addition to requirements of the Programmatic EIS, the assessment of potential environmental impacts related to the management actions proposed in the Debar Mountain Management Complex UMP, as evaluated in the Environmental Assessment Form (EAF), is provided below and within the UMP itself, including actions taken at the proposed DLDUA. The UMP forms part of this DGEIS and can be found in Attachment 2.

Impacts related to the following list of subjects were considered and determined not to be environmentally significant:

## **1. Wilderness and Wild Forest Resources**

### Potential Impact

The creation of the new, approximately 41-acre Intensive Use Area would reduce the acreage managed as Wild Forest in the Park. The area may experience an increase in the level of vehicle traffic due to the establishment of a new and more developed kind of day use recreation opportunity. The potential for an increase in use, if not carefully monitored and managed, could diminish the wild and tranquil setting that makes Debar Pond uniquely special.

### Evaluation of Impact

The reclassification action provides a balanced approach to the management of the area based on the characteristics of the land and its capacity to withstand use. The new DLDUA would be managed under clear management guidelines in the Intensive Use category intended to maintain the area's relatively undeveloped character while providing a more intensive level of use in a well-defined area on the periphery of a large contiguous tract of Wild Forest land that is capable of absorbing visitation by groups on a day use basis. The new facilities proposed for the site will be developed in phases to allow for careful monitoring of site conditions while new visitation patterns are established, monitored, and evaluated. Full build-out will only occur if the monitoring effort determines that desired conditions can be maintained.

## **2. Physical and Biological Resources**

### Potential Impact



A potential increase in use level in the vicinity of Debar Pond may increase physical and biological impacts such as generation of noise; introduction of invasive plant species; cutting and loss of vegetation near the shoreline; increase in sanitary waste management issues; and increased soil erosion, sedimentation and related water quality management issues.

The construction of parking areas and the removal of the Debar Lodge will require the use of heavy construction equipment. Impacts from the noise emitted by this equipment will be minimized due to the short-term nature of these activities.

The DMC contains geologic features such as rocky mountain summits and eskers, as well as cliffs that are of interest to the rock-climbing community. Short-term impacts to these features are possible when trails are constructed. Public use on and near these features may also cause small, localized impacts but are not considered significant.

Some of the construction required to implement the UMPs will have the potential for causing short term erosion while the soil is disturbed. Additionally, some facilities are proposed to be located near wetlands and waterbodies, which also increases the risk of erosion and sedimentation. Some of the recreational facilities proposed in the UMPs, particularly trails, will be located in areas that experience seasonal and/or temporary flooding.

### Evaluation of Impact

The unit management plans for both the Debar Mountain Complex and the new DLDUA provide analysis of the resource conditions and commit to improved management practices intended to monitor, protect and restore, where necessary, the natural resources of the area. The impacts to the natural resources resulting from any potential increases in use levels are addressed by developing the Day Use site in a phased approach with careful monitoring of the desired conditions identified for the site and described in the DLDUA UMP. Full build-out of the DLDUA site will not exceed a capacity of 100 people without a new or amended UMP. While the relatively easy access to Debar Pond creates an appealing recreational resource, managing visitor use in that setting will require a higher degree of engagement with the public through staffing presence and carefully managed visitor use facilities. The DLDUA plan assures that a combination of appropriate facilities, staff presence and regulations to protect sensitive resources will be sufficient to protect the physical and biological resources at the site and on the surrounding Wild Forest lands.

Best management practices will be employed during construction activities to minimize impacts such as erosion and sedimentation into nearby wetlands and waterbodies. Additionally, potential impacts from siting features near water and wetlands will be

minimized by siting them in a manner that prevents erosion and sedimentation into water resources by either 1) leaving a vegetated barrier between facilities and the water and/or 2) selectively and minimally hardening surfaces where significant human activity is anticipated, such as the proposed Debar Lodge Day Use Area. Adverse impacts to facilities (mainly trails) located in flood zones and to water resources will be minimized by designing these facilities to withstand this type of flooding by using trail-hardening techniques that rely on natural materials from surrounding areas and that blend in the with surrounding environment as much as possible.

### **3. Fish and Wildlife**

#### Potential Impact

A potential increase in use levels could create potential impacts to fish and wildlife, including disruption or displacement of species more sensitive to increased human presence such as fisher, marten and certain interior forest birds.

#### Evaluation of Impact

The evaluation of potential impacts to wildlife is strongly related to the conditions of the physical and biological resources identified above. Estimating the significance of the potential impacts to wildlife is also similar. The DLDUA site has been continuously occupied by humans for over 100 years to varying degrees. Permanent occupation on the site was only recently ceased when Department staff who had been living in the lodge and maintaining the property relocated in anticipation of a new management directive. Since the property is no longer occupied full time by Department staff, public use at the site has only increased, and the potential impacts to wildlife have increased along with it. Configuration of the site as a Day Use area would assure that visitor use is adequately managed and confined to appropriate areas. This approach will reduce the likelihood of loud and disturbing use that could impact wildlife on and in the vicinity of the site.

DEC and APA have used existing natural resource information, Natural Heritage biologists and databases, and existing reports documenting the locations of rare, threatened, or endangered species in order to examine the potential impacts of operational and construction activities in the DMWF and have determined that potential impacts to these resources are not significant.

DEC wildlife and fisheries staff have also been consulted and conclude that impacts to wildlife and fisheries will not be significant. While recreation may cause minor displacement of some wildlife species, it is not anticipated to effect wildlife populations overall. The timing of construction activities can be controlled, if necessary, so that nesting/breeding periods of relevant wildlife species are not impacted. Public education,

with signs and kiosks, about adjacent significant natural communities, or wildlife nesting areas, and the need for protection of such places, can also be implemented.

#### **4. Scenic Resources**

##### Potential Impact

Debar Pond and its environs hold remarkable scenic resources that are uniquely accessible from a public roadway. The presence of a great camp on the shoreline of the pond has been a part of the landscape for over a century, and the design of the existing lodge suits the rustic and wild character of the landscape well. In addition to being an important historic resource with local significance, the lodge and the surrounding landscape are a defining feature of the Debar Management Complex that helps shape the identity of the region. Removal of the camp or excessive recreational development in the area threatens to negatively impact the wild and unconfined scenic resources of the site, along with the historic character of the great camp.

##### Evaluation of Impact

The proposal to reconfigure the site into a Day Use area has been undertaken with careful consideration given to how the facility would uphold and respect the unique historic character of the lodge and the human history of the site. Design details will include the repurposing of certain components of the lodge such as the chimney, and the footprint of existing buildings will be carefully repurposed to assure that site disturbance and vegetation removal is minimized wherever possible. New structures will be designed to reflect the aesthetic of the historic lodge, and motor vehicle access will be planned in a manner that minimizes earth disturbance and the possibility of visual impacts observed from the water. Shoreline vegetation will be protected through the development of a hand launch site in the vicinity of the boat house, and defined foot paths set back from the high-water mark of the pond in areas where mountain views can be achieved with minimal site disturbance. The dam is also proposed to be maintained, thus assuring that the water level of the pond is stabilized.

#### **5. Open Space Resources - Public Access and Recreational Opportunities**

##### Potential Impact

The State land management program in the Adirondack Park, pursuant to the Master Plan, is designed to protect open space while providing a broad range of recreational opportunity, from intensive use ski centers to the remote core areas of the region's wilderness areas. While opportunities for intensive recreational use are relatively abundant in the State and the larger northeast region, opportunities for the wilderness

experiences of solitude and primitive forms of recreation are very rare. Open space protection also provides essential ecosystem services that provide extensive, but often unrecognized, benefits. These include maintenance of water quality, flood control, maintenance of wildlife and habitat diversity, and carbon sequestration.

The proposed action includes reclassification of 41 acres of Wild Forest to Intensive Use. Intensive Use classified lands do not directly uphold the broad directive of the SLMP described above in the same manner as lands classified as Wild Forest.

### Evaluation of Impact

The action would have an insignificant impact on the State land resources of the Park by assuring that impacts occurring at the site which are associated with intensive use types of recreation are confined to facilities in a setting that is suitably designed to have them. The current condition of the site does not conform to Wild Forest guidelines due to the presence of non-conforming structures associated with the Debar Lodge. In order to uphold the broad directive of the SLMP described above, there is no doubt that rare opportunities for solitude and Wilderness values must be preserved. However, the management strategy to protect these critical resources is often complex and must involve the careful siting of more developed DEC facilities on the periphery of those broad expanses of Wild lands that may serve as gateways for visitors seeking to appreciate the Forest Preserve, but needing a slightly more developed and accessible facility that will not diminish the uniquely special open space resources described above. The proposed DLDUA aspires to uphold this necessary task as part of the broader vision for the Debar Mountain Wild Forest. Meacham Lake Campground is located 12 driving miles away from the Debar Lodge site, and Buck Pond Campground is located 23 miles from the Debar Lodge. There are no other Intensive Use facilities within the Debar Mountain Management Complex, and the existing developed condition of the Debar Lodge site combined with easy access from a public roadway makes it a fitting access point for the surrounding Wild Forest lands.

Given the above evaluation, the impacts to open space resources of the Debar Mountain Wild Forest area and the broader management complex are in general considered to be insignificant.

## **6. Local Economy**

### Potential Impact

The recreation and tourism industry is one of the key elements of the Adirondack economy, and its continued importance is dependent upon protecting the quality of public lands in the Park. The Debar Mountain Management Complex is easily accessible from a collection of larger communities surrounding it such as Malone,

Saranac Lake, and Plattsburgh. A significant number of visitors come to the area from Quebec and Ontario where larger communities are just across the Canadian border.

The proposed reclassification action would potentially create the following key impacts:

Improve the overall accessibility of the Debar Lodge site for people with disabilities while simultaneously protecting the tranquil character of the setting. Debar Pond and the lodge site is a locally cherished resource that will continue to provide uniquely easy access to scenic and historic resources in a Wild Forest setting.

Assist in supporting visitation to the area that reflects the goals and values of a quiet rural Adirondack community, while providing an economic benefit to the surrounding communities that is consistent with their recreational development priorities and community character.

### Evaluation of Impact

Evaluation of the potential impacts suggests that the proposed actions would benefit the local economy and would likely improve visitation to the area as the result of improved management for the area.

## **7. Climate Change Potential Impact**

Forest Preserve lands offer an array of significant benefits to mitigating the impacts of climate change including carbon sequestration, core habitat and habitat connectivity for native species, and soil and watershed protection in the face of ever more extreme weather events.

New York State agencies are committed to ensuring all programs consider the future physical risks from climate change in order to protect New Yorkers and our environment. Under the 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, New York State committed to eliminating greenhouse gas emissions in the state and to ultimately achieve net zero emissions. The Act extends and enhances a number of New York's successful clean energy initiatives to accelerate the development of wind and solar power, increase energy efficiency, and facilitate the growth of energy storage technology.

In accordance with Section 7 of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, the management actions proposed in the GEIS will take climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, and the 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act into consideration. The reclassification of 41 acres of Wild Forest to Intensive Use will diminish the capability of the land to return to a fully wooded and undeveloped state.

However, DEC and APA do not anticipate significant adverse impacts to air resources due to project construction or public use resulting from the implementation of the UMPs.

Several potential impacts have been considered including the reduction in air quality due to continued snowmobile use and a potential increase in motor vehicle use, and acceleration of CO<sup>2</sup> emissions due to a potential increase in fossil fuel combustion from these activities.

#### Evaluation of Impact

The land area proposed for reclassification strikes a balance between the need to envelope the developed features and terrain in the vicinity of the lodge where there is the capacity to withstand intensive use activities, and the need to minimize any removal of Wild Forest classified lands. The DLDUA plan provides for the integration of solar power generation at the site and incorporation of electric car charging capability within newly developed intensive use areas such as DLDUA. The plan also incorporates a caretaker cabin on the site. Having Department staff available on site reduces the need for daily staff vehicle use, both personal and work related, thus decreasing the carbon footprint associated with routine land management activities in the area.

Additionally, DEC does not anticipate an increase in snowmobile use and have determined that any potential increase in motor vehicle use as a result of the creation of new recreational facilities will not cause a significant impact to air quality or CO<sup>2</sup> emissions.

#### **IV. Potential Adverse Impacts**

The DGEIS must evaluate those potential adverse environmental impacts of the interrelated actions of reclassification and the UMP that cannot be avoided or adequately mitigated if the proposed action is implemented.

Adverse impacts on the resource quality and character of State lands within the Park are avoidable. The Master Plan and individual unit management plans for any given State land area are specifically designed to allow only those uses that will not significantly degrade resource quality or character, while at the same time providing public recreational opportunities where appropriate. The Intensive Use Day Use area proposed for the Debar Lodge site avoids adverse impacts to natural resources by being appropriately scaled and designed for the site.

The assessment of any potential adverse impacts related to the significant actions proposed in the DMC unit management plan is also provided within the unit plan itself. The assessment of the proposed actions in the DLDUA unit plan for the new Intensive Use Area is provided within that UMP.

## **A. Historic Resources**

The removal of the Debar Lodge will be an adverse impact to the historical resources of a site on the State and National Register of Historic Places. Debar Pond Lodge is a ca. 1940 Adirondack camp located at the north end of Debar Pond. The Lodge commands a broad view of the pond and the adjacent Adirondack mountain scenery. The principal building of the camp is the main lodge, a rambling two-story edifice of rustic conception designed by architect William Distin of Saranac Lake; it is of light-frame construction with an exterior veneer of half and full round logs. In addition, a guide/caretaker house is located nearby. Several additional barns and sheds are part of the listing as well. Debar Pond Lodge is listed in the Register as reflecting the broad patterns of history (Criteria A) and as an architecturally property (Criteria C).

A discussion of mitigation measures associated with impacts to historic resources is found below in Section VII.

## **B. Community Character**

The removal of Debar Lodge will also cause adverse impacts to the community character of the area, as the building has been a fixture in the local community for many decades. These impacts will be mitigated, in part, through the proposed mitigation measures related to the lodge's removal identified in the DLDUA UMP, particularly the installation of interpretive elements throughout the site. A discussion of these and other mitigation measures associated with impacts to the community character of the site is found below in Section VII.

## **V. Alternatives**

The DGEIS provides a description and evaluation of the range of reasonable alternatives to the action that are feasible, considering the objectives and capabilities of the project sponsor. The evaluation also includes a discussion of the no-action alternative and an evaluation of the adverse or beneficial changes that are likely to occur in the reasonably foreseeable future, in the absence of the proposed action. The evaluation of the significant actions and their alternatives are discussed below.

Classification alternatives include reclassification of the land surrounding the Debar Lodge as Intensive Use, Historic or State Administrative. The "No Action" alternative would leave the lands as Wild Forest. Wilderness, Primitive and Canoe classifications are not being considered because the size and characteristics of the land do not meet the criteria for those classifications.

Information on the potential beneficial and adverse environmental impacts associated with each option is presented. This section provides a clear and thorough explanation of the alternatives and explains why the recommended alternative is the most appropriate choice.

Each of these classification alternatives correlates directly with the alternatives described in the Debar Lodge Day Use Site Unit Management Plan. Additional information regarding management actions associated with each alternative can be found in the DLDUA UMP.

- **Intensive Use (Alternatives IU1 and IU2 within the DLDUA Plan)**

An Intensive Use alternative could potentially accommodate the proposed day use area or a campground. The APSLMP requires that "[a]ny request for classification of a new acquisition or reclassification of existing lands from another land use category to an intensive use area will be accompanied by a draft unit management plan for the proposed intensive use area that will demonstrate how the applicable guidelines will be respected." APSLMP at 42.

Intensive Use/ Day Use Area (IU1/Preferred Alternative): Reclassify the Debar Lodge site as an Intensive Use area with a Day Use Area. The SLMP provides for several ways that Day Use Areas may serve the recreating public. The character of the Debar Lodge site makes it an appealing destination for gatherings in a natural setting. The closest DEC Day Use Area is within the Meacham Lake Campground 12 miles away. Soils and Slopes on the site are generally conducive to this type of development. Conversion of the site from a Day Use Area to a Campground will require an amended UMP.

Intensive Use/ Campground (IU2): Reclassify the Debar Lodge site as an Intensive Use area with a small campground. The closest private campground is located approximately 7.5 miles away, and the closest public campground is 12 miles away. The site is easily accessible from County route 26, and power is available at the site. Soils and Slopes on the site are generally conducive to this type of development. Internal consultation with the DEC Department of Operations has determined that a small campground is not viable at the site due the occupancy rates of other DEC campgrounds close to the site.

- **Historic (Alternative H1 and H2 within the DLDUA Plan)**

Reclassify an area around the Debar Lodge to Historic Area classification under the State Land Master Plan. The primary management guideline for historic areas is to preserve the quality and character of the historic resources. If reclassified as a historic



area, the Debar Lodge and supporting structures would be maintained in a manner that preserves their historic character. Public use and access to the site would also be carried out in a manner where historic preservation was the primary objective. Public access to the site does not need to be prioritized in a historic classification due to the risk of vandalism or other inappropriate uses at the site. Redevelopment of the lodge to accommodate overnight visitors from the public on a commercial basis is likely to be inconsistent with Article 14 of the New York State Constitution. The significant limitations on disposition alternatives for the Debar Lodge and the surrounding grounds within a historic classification make this alternative undesirable.

- **Administrative (Alternative A1, A2, A3 and A4 within the DLDUA Plan)**

An administrative classification would allow use of the DeBar Lodge for "a variety of specific state purposes that are not primarily designed to accommodate visitors." APSLMP at 46. The APSLMP provides that "[t]he primary management guideline for state administrative areas should be to provide facilities for the administration of state lands or programs in a setting and on a scale that is, to the greatest extent feasible, in harmony with the relatively wild and undeveloped character of the Adirondack Park." The DeBar Lodge could be used as a ranger station or a facility for administering state lands, similar to the headquarters buildings at Little Tupper Lake, which were formerly part of a private camp, and is now used for a training base, housing, and support facility for the Student Conservation Association (Alternative A4 in DLDUA UMP). Other possibilities include:

- Adirondack Lake Survey Corporation offices (Alternative A2 in DLDUA UMP);
- Eco-Tourism Educational Facility, if run by the state as a non-commercial enterprise (Alternative A1 in DLDUA UMP);
- Natural resource training and conference facility for DEC staff (Alternative A4 in DLDUA UMP); or
- Environmental Education Camp, similar to Camp Colby in Saranac Lake or the Pack Forest near Warrensburg (Alternative A3 in DLDUA UMP).

The APSLMP Guidelines also require that:

All state administrative facilities should be located, designed and managed so as to blend with the Adirondack environment and to have the minimum adverse impact possible on surrounding state lands and nearby private holdings. Whenever possible, such facilities should be adjacent to or serviceable from existing public road systems within the Park.

Construction and development activities in state administrative areas should:

- avoid material alterations of wetlands;
- minimize extensive topographical alterations;
- limit vegetative clearing; and,
- preserve the scenic, natural and open space resources of the state administrative area.

APSLMP at 47. The Debar Lodge is a log structure located near the shore of Debar Pond. The building is accessible on a short spur road from County Route 26, an existing public road. There are several outbuildings which could be used to store equipment and vehicles, if needed. Use of the existing buildings for administrative purposes would not require alterations of wetlands or topography or require extensive tree cutting. The use of log in the exterior of the lodge serves to blend the building with the natural environment. The retention of trees around the lodge and the view of the Pond from the lodge could be found to preserve the scenic, natural and open spaces of the area, as required by the APSLMP.

Lastly, additions to the State Administrative category should come either from new acquisitions or from the reclassification of appropriate Wild Forest or Intensive Use areas. APSLMP at 47. The Debar Lodge and surrounding lands are currently classified as Wild Forest, and reclassification to State Administrative would be consistent with the APSLMP.

In conclusion, the Debar Lodge would be eligible for a State Administrative classification if there was a need for administrative facilities at that location. Following considerable deliberation described in the UMP and summarized here, it has been determined that a new Administrative facility at the site of the Debar Lodge is not the preferred alternative.

- **“No Action” (Alternative WF1, WF2, and WF3 within the DLDUA Plan)**

SEQR regulations require an assessment of the “no action” alternative. If no classification action, UMP development, or removal of the lodge buildings is undertaken at this time (Alternative WF1), it has been suggested that the Department, Agency and other interested agencies and parties could continue to explore alternative courses of action that would allow retention of some or all of the buildings for purposes consistent with Article XIV of the NYS Constitution and the Master Plan. A pause in taking any kind of action in order to re-engage with community stakeholders leaves the site in a non-conforming condition with a significant risk for vandalism and abuse. The agencies have spent 17 years exploring alternatives with a broad spectrum of interest groups and stakeholders. More detail on these efforts is provided within the DLDUA UMP in the introduction to the “Alternatives” section. Since significant efforts have already been

expended evaluating every possible alternative for the site, this is not the preferred alternative.

Under the WF2 alternative, no classification action is taken and non-conforming, existing facilities inside the boundary of the Wild Forest area are removed, meaning the lodge and any associated outbuildings are taken down. This alternative would have benefits to the restoration of Wild Forest character and restoration of the site. However, feedback received from multiple interest groups, individuals and community organizations have made it clear that this is not the preferred alternative.

Alternative WF3 from the DLDUA UMP envisions a conversion of the lodge and some of the associated buildings to a Ranger Station. This alternative would still require the development and adoption of a UMP, even though no reclassification of the land would be required. Conversion of the lodge into a Ranger Station would provide benefits for the administration of the surrounding lands, but the size and necessary maintenance on the building is difficult to justify for a Ranger Station. While each of these three “no action” alternatives offers something of value, a Wild Forest classification precludes the kind of accessible group facility envisioned for the site and would severely limit the ability of the Department to maintain the grounds in a manner that will retain the great camp character that has helped define the site as a historic and grand estate. It is for these reasons that none of the “no action” alternatives were selected.

- **Alternative Boundaries**

An alternative reclassification area could be considered. The 41-acre proposed reclassification area was designed specifically to accommodate the proposed DLDUA. The proposed reclassification areas is described in detail on Page 5 of this document. There are other boundaries that could be considered for a proposed Intensive Use area. A different configuration may also be appropriate when considering potential alternative classifications.

## **VI. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources**

The DGEIS must identify whether any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of environmental resources will be associated with the proposed action should it be implemented.

The 1979 Programmatic EIS regarding amendments to the Master Plan recognizes the development of intensive use facilities as a potentially irreversible commitment of resources, since it is essentially impossible to restore the undeveloped character of the land after construction of such facilities. This

proposed action minimizes irreversible commitments or resources by requiring the siting of new structures within the footprint of historical structures and incorporating a management strategy that directs intensive use activity to a setting that is capable of absorbing that use while simultaneously improving and restoring, where necessary, the character of the wild forest setting on the surrounding Wild Forest lands.

## **VII. Mitigation Measures**

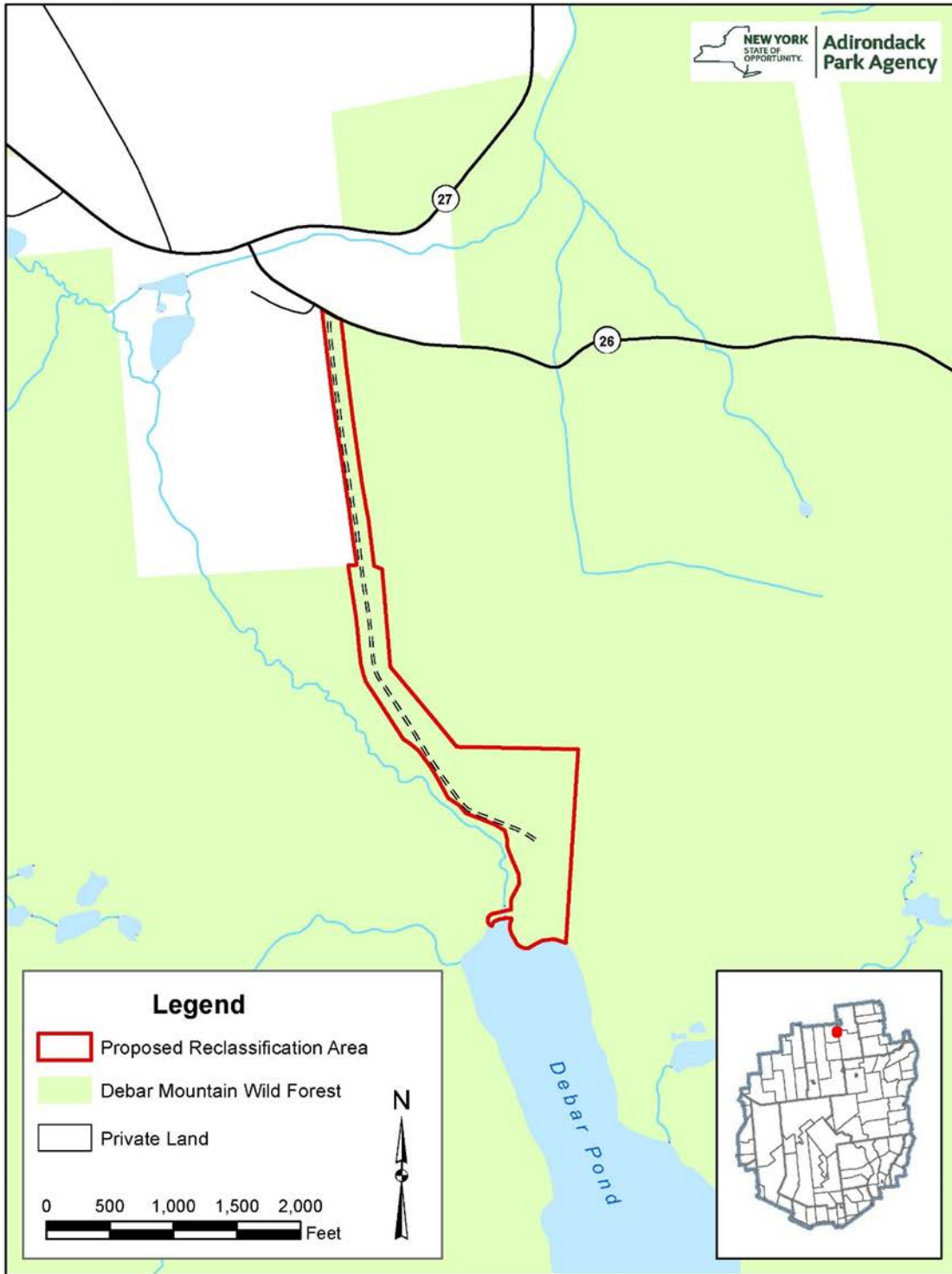
The DGEIS must evaluate reasonable measures to mitigate any significant, adverse environmental impacts associated with the proposed action. In the case of the Debar Management Complex, adverse impacts to a listed property on the State and National Historic Registers are expected through the removal of the Debar Lodge. The removal of the lodge is also expected to impact the community character of the area, as the lodge has been a fixture in the community for several decades.

DEC and APA are consulting with the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) to review the full inventory of contributing historic structures/features associated with the Debar Lodge and are exploring ways to mitigate the adverse impacts caused by removal of the structure. In consultation with OPRHP, a plan will be developed to satisfactorily mitigate adverse impacts to the Debar Lodge in accordance with Section 14.09 of New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law (State Historic Preservation Act).

Potential mitigation measures which may be developed in consultation with the OPRHP may include documentation of contributing historic features (buildings) prior to their removal, and the development of public educational materials throughout the day-use area interpreting the history of the Debar Lodge site and the land surrounding it. Additionally, to the greatest extent practicable, for the purpose of retaining the historical sense of place, the draft UMP proposes that the main pavilion will outline the footprint of the Debar Lodge and will also incorporate elements of the main lodge, including salvaging the main trusses of the lodge and retention of the main fireplace which will be incorporated into the design. This design demonstrates how much of the proposed development of the DLDUA will occur within the footprint of the existing building. DEC proposes to construct day-use facilities that utilize a similar design aesthetic as the current lodge, thereby minimizing the visual impact (loss of community character) caused by the lodge's removal.

# ATTACHMENT 1

## Proposed Reclassification of Lands in the Vicinity of Debar Lodge



**INTEGRATED SERIES OF PROPOSED STATE LAND MANAGEMENT ACTIONS IN  
THE VICINITY OF DEBAR MOUNTAIN WILD FOREST  
DRAFT GENERIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (DGEIS)**

**ATTACHMENT 2**

**PROPOSED DRAFT UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN  
DEBAR MOUNTAIN WILD FOREST COMPLEX  
DECEMBER 2020**