



### [Commissioners want fire towers to stay](#)

Adirondack Park Agency commissioners directed agency staff Thursday to find a way to let the fire towers remain atop St. Regis and Hurricane mountains – provided that a non-taxpayer-based funding source for their upkeep can be found.

Located in state-owned Primitive and Canoe areas, both towers are considered non-conforming structures under the current draft of the State Land Master Plan.

But considering the public’s affinity for the federally recognized historic structures, commissioners like Dick Booth were torn between the requirements of the SLMP and the preservation of the region’s cultural history.

“The big part of me says, look this is a decision that was made decades ago when the SLMP was crafted and we should finish doing what has been left undone for a long time,” Booth said. “But a part of me also says the towers are there, they are historic and although they have an impact on the wilderness character, it is certainly a bearable impact.”

But for Commissioner Art Lussi, the question of the towers’ continued existence is a little more cut and dry.

“We need to find a way to preserve them and there’s no easy option,” Lussi said. “But that’s my position. We need to find an option to preserve the towers as they sit.”

The Adirondack Local Government Review Board petitioned the agency to find an alternative to their removal, but according to a staff report, each and every method of legally attaining this goal will be time consuming and complicated.

Commissioner Lani Ulrich stressed that doing things right supersedes doing things quickly.

“The number of years that it will take to get it right doesn’t bother me,” Ulrich said. “I don’t like things taking forever, but I’d like to get it right.”

Commissioners directed agency staff to find the most legally viable choice of three options

that would allow for the continued presence of the fire towers in their historic locations. Officials said each would have an impact on the SLMP itself, ranging from creating small historic parcels to an outright amendment that would make the towers conforming in Wilderness and Primitive areas.

Officials said each option is relatively complex – but doable.

Commissioner Jim Townsend chairs the agency State Land Committee and he closed the meeting by summing up what he was hearing from his peers.

“There is sentiment to allow these towers to remain in some fashion,” Townsend said. “There are procedural steps to accomplish that.”

But several commissioners, including Booth, Ulrich and Cecil Wray, were wary of placing the maintenance costs of the towers on the shoulders of the taxpayers. They indicated that saving the towers is likely contingent on the friends groups associated with the towers legally committing to funding the project.

“What are we assuming goes on if we legitimize the towers being there and a corollary concern – who is paying for it?” Wray said.

Review Board Executive Director Fred Monroe said that like a cemetery, it is possible to create a dedicated maintenance fund for each of the towers.

Both towers have “friends” organizations that have verbally pledged to fund their upkeep. The Friends of the Bald Mountain Fire Tower has adopted the structure and covers all of the costs of keeping it open to the public.

The SLMP states the purpose of Wilderness is to provide an experience unadulterated by signs of human activity.

Like DEC, APA staff concluded that there were few legally clean courses of action other than tearing down and relocating the towers.

But APA Deputy Director of Planning Jim Connelly stressed staff is limited to the requirements of the SLMP and not looking to pick fights with the local citizenry.

“We are fully aware of the historic value of the fire tower in the Adirondacks,” Connelly said. “It’s our job to make recommendations based on the State Land Master Plan.”

Staff will present their legal and cost analysis next month.

-Jon Alexander, 4-16-10