

Subject: Re: Recreation Plan

Date: Mon, 14 Jan 2002 22:02:31 -0500

From: Jon Sundquist <jsundqui@buffnet.net>

To: Dave Sinclair <dmsincla@gw.dec.state.ny.us>

Dave Sinclair wrote:

>
> Jon,
> Thanks for making the trip to Syracuse the other night, to give us your
> comments on the plan. As I mentioned, once we gather all the comments
> and get a sense of where people are at, we can sit down and discuss the
> mountain biking section.
> A thought occurred to us, as we evaluate the comments we're getting from
> mountain bikers; we're wondering if people are misinterpreting the plan
> regarding bike trails.
> The "existing trails" as listed on page 200, we intend to keep open and
> the "proposed trails" on page 202 will be new additions. So when we
> finalize the plan, the bike trails will include the "existing " plus
> "proposed" trails. Based on the feedback we're getting, some of the
> mountain bikers, may have interpreted that the "proposed trails" will
> be all they are left with when the plan is finalized. We do want the
> correct information to be circulated however maybe we did not make that
> clear in the plan.

Thank you for the information. As I have pledged before, I will make sure that as accurate as possible information get out to all who are responding to the plan.

We appreciate the plan's designations of either "existing" or "planned" trails. Further, we realize that you are in a difficult situation developing this plan. As Howard Beye correctly pointed out in Syracuse, your first responsibility is to protect the resource. Beyond that starting point, you then have many competing interests from different users that you have to balance. As we have made clear, there are but rare situations where bicycles should not be allowed on any trail that is suitable for hiking from a resource protection standpoint. And we support the closure of trails that are inherently unsustainable. However, given the competing pressures you are under, we realize the need to work with you to develop some sort of compromise situation. I believe that is what you were getting at during our brief conversation in Syracuse when we talked about solitude in the forest. I interpreted your discussion to refer to the "State Forests Without Designated Recreational Trails" section of the plan because I had recalled it designated those 29 forests as trailless because "Many people ... go to the state forests to seek solitude" (p. 21) (no, I couldn't have recited it from memory that night -- I've read the whole plan but haven't memorized it verbatim!) But what I think now you were referring to was accommodating people who don't want to see bicycles on the trails because of personal preferences. While I argue that that preference shouldn't outweigh the preference of many to not to be told to leave their bicycles at the trailhead, I realize the need to come to certain compromises on the final management plan. I am sure we can work out something that may include designation of some trails as not open to bicycles, even if they are completely sustainable, based solely on some users'

preferences.

The one issue that by its binary nature can't be compromised upon is the plan's intention to change the management policy from open-unless-designated-closed to the other way around. This issue is by far the most important issue, and overshadows entirely how many specific miles are designated as "existing" or "proposed". I can not overemphasize our concern over, or the depths of our objection to, this proposed management policy reversal. It is the single most important revision that needs to be made before the plan goes final. I will be submitting a comprehensive comment package later this week, but briefly, here are some of the reasons we so vehemently object to this proposed change in management:

- We are concerned that the DEC does not have an adequate inventory of the trails in the state forests. Neither the "existing" nor the "proposed" lists in Appendix 6 covers the amount of trails that I know to exist, and I don't even get to Region 7 that often. And no, these are not trails that have been made by cyclists. They are trails that have been there for years. There will be cyclists who have been riding responsibly for years on sustainable trails that suddenly find they are law-breakers because nobody stuck up for his or her trail.

- Cyclists will be required to go only on trails that the DEC foresees as attractive loops. I made my comment about Robert Frost at the meeting not because I am a literary scholar, but because it just struck me as so relevant. Never again can a cyclist explore the trail less traveled when he or she comes upon it in the woods. Maybe it is just a spur trail that nobody ever thought would be taken since it just dead ends. Maybe few knew it was there. Maybe it even has a few wet spots, but if it genuinely is so unused, then the occasional user will not impact it in any measurable way. Maybe they would never take it again because it wasn't very scenic. This is too much freedom to lose, and can only be justified if it were significantly impacting the resource. Perhaps because the plan itself assumes that for the typical cyclist "enjoyment of the surroundings is secondary" this tremendous loss was not apparent when the draft plan was written.

- This designation conciously or unconsciously will lump bicycles in the same category with horses and motorized users in some people's minds, even though they naturally belong in the same group as other human-powered users of trails. This is inappropriate and we object to being included in that category, even if we are not included explicitly.

As I have said above, we are willing to sit down and discuss what sort of revised mountain bicycle section should be included in the final plan. We are sensitive to the various pressures you get from other user groups, and will take that into consideration in our discussions. The only issue that needs to be at the basis of the management plan is retaining the current open-unless-closed policy. I look forward to discussing this further with you when more comments (including mine!) are recieved.

Jon Sundquist
IMBA State Representative
NYMBC Chair