

Letter to the Editor

Reasons rails with trail is not possible

To the editor:

In the debate over the best use of the Adirondack travel corridor from Remsen to Lake Placid, railroad advocates have repeatedly stated that we can have both a tourist train and a recreational trail. In reality, both the attempt at a parallel trail between Lake Placid and Saranac Lake and the proposed route of an alternate trail from Tupper Lake to Saranac Lake clearly demonstrate that such a trail is not feasible.

Here's why:

- The current line is just a single-track corridor, built before there were any environmental regulations.

- A parallel trail would need an entirely new road bed that would have to overcome the natural constraints of wetlands, lakes and rock cuts while also conforming to current environmental regulations.

- The 1996 unit management plan for the rail corridor recognizes these constraints, saying "the potential for the development of a continuous parallel trail within the Corridor is severely limited." (page xviii)

An existing proposal by the Trails and Rails Action Committee for a 32-mile route (8 miles longer than the corridor) to bypass the natural constraints has the following problems:

- Thirteen miles are parallel trail, requiring much additional fill and an extension of all culverts and bridges to maintain proper drainage.

- Nine miles are rough and sometimes steep existing trails suitable only for skilled mountain bikers.

- Five miles are private roads with no assurance that appropriate permissions could be obtained.

- Four miles are busy, paved highways with limited shoulders for bicycles and not suitable for a key target user group — families with young children. The highway also does not provide an alternate route for snowmobiles in low-snow winters.

- One mile is new trail that would have to be constructed to the standard of the 9 miles of improved existing trails.

- There is no cost estimate for the TRAC proposal.

- The town of North Elba ultimately abandoned its effort at a parallel trail between Lake Placid and

Saranac Lake when engineering studies determined the cost for the initial 4.2-mile segment would be greater than the \$2.6 million allocated for that section. This works out to more than \$600,000 per mile over terrain generally easier than that between Tupper Lake and Saranac Lake.

With regard to the possibility of an alternate trail, rail supporters have repeatedly assured us that "If we can put a man on the moon ... we can make a parallel trail." Sure we can, assuming the governor is willing to fund a parallel trail no matter what the cost. Let's get real. That's just not going to happen. The total cost of the Apollo program to put men on the moon back in 1973, by the way, was \$25.4 billion.

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