

MOUNTAIN WATCH

What's Happening...?

...with the proposed mega-resort for Belleayre Mountain—and with the fight to save our mountain?

The next few months should see critical activity—an alphabet soup of administrative milestones in the SEQR process (under the State Environmental Quality Review law) and important opportunities for both public response and collective as well as individual action. The timing of these events remains tentative and at the discretion of the state Department of Environmental Conservation, the DEC, which is the lead agency for reviewing the process. Here's what's going on:

Reading Matter

Three important documents are due to be issued soon—the DEC hints April—and probably simultaneously.

One is the Unit Management Plan (UMP) for the state-owned Belleayre Mountain Ski Center (BMSC), the largest designated Intensive Use Area within the blue line of the Catskill state park and forest preserve. Scheduled to have been issued in 2002, the UMP, created by DEC planners, is supposed to address a five-year plan “assessing” the resources in the unit and identifying “opportunities for recreational use...consistent with the land classification guidelines and the wild character of these lands,” according to the DEC.

In fact, a draft UMP emerged in 2002 and was discussed in a public forum held at the BMSC's Lodge. The plan urged the development of new ski trails on the eastern side of the BMSC, where the steepest runs would be available, on adding lifts, and on construction of a new base lodge.

Meeting Schedule

Catskill Heritage Alliance membership meetings are held on the **last Sunday of each month at 4 pm** in the Pine Hill Community Center, Main Street, Pine Hill, New York. All are welcome. If you would like to be on the email list for meeting announcements and other alerts, please submit your email address to info@catskillheritage.org.

Few actions were as powerful in making our case against the 2003 resort proposal as the overwhelming public participation in administrative hearings. We need to do that again—even more so if we can.

The DEC has never explained why that draft UMP was withdrawn from consideration, nor has it commented on the striking coincidence that the original proposal for the commercial Belleayre mega-resort was issued in 2003, which is when the draft UMP more or less faded from sight.

For the resort proposal itself, Crossroads Ventures, the would-be developer, is required to submit a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) on the revised resort plans, and the DEC must submit its DEIS for the expansion of the public BMSC. The simultaneous issuance of these two documents confirms the public-private marriage orchestrated by former Governor Spitzer in last year's Agreement in Principle (AIP). The Crossroads SDEIS must present a layout of the redesigned resort and should answer all the issues raised in the scoping phase of the process. The DEC's DEIS must address the environmental impacts of its UMP.

The offspring of this marriage of a public agency and a private developer is the cumulative impact of their mating—social and economic impacts on nearby communities, traffic, noise, night sky, water supply and purity, wildlife, public recreation, and the like. A statement on such impacts is required along with the developer's SDEIS and the state's DEIS.

Once the documents are issued—again, presumably in March—a minimum 30-day public review and comment period is required. That may include a public hearing, but that is at the discretion of the lead agency, the DEC, which is also a participant



Catskill Heritage Alliance
www.CatskillHeritage.org
A member of Save the Mountain

From CHA Chairman Rich Schaedle

As you've read, the next few months present us with formidable challenges. Public participation—writing to elected leaders and the DEC, attending hearings—is our first line of action, and it is crucial. But we are also going to need the participation of experts in making the technical case before an administrative judge. We need hydrology experts, wildlife experts, economists, sociologists, and more to tell the true story about the cumulative impacts of this proposed resort. Yes, our cause is just, and the expertise is on our side. But making the case requires that we gather the right authoritative sources to present the facts and figures that prove the point.

And needless to say, such expertise costs money.

Will you reach down once again and help us move forward toward our objective? We've included a coupon below. Please contribute whatever you can; your donation is tax-deductible. And please be sure to include your email address so you receive instant alerts on next steps.

Help our experts tell the real story of 'cumulative impacts'...

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Please make your check payable to CHA and send it, **along with this form**, to:

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in the development — one reason we will strongly urge that some form of open community forum be held.

Following the review of these documents, administrative hearings may be held to adjudicate specific issues.

What You Can Do

The most important thing is to write comments to the DEC on the UMP, SDEIS, and DEIS when they are issued; all will be available at the DEC website: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/permits/6061.html>, but CHA will also post it on our website and email an alert (be sure we have your email address; see the form on the front). Comments may be mailed at any time — not just to the DEC but to your elected representatives; see the sidebar for addresses. In addition, it's always useful to talk to your neighbors and/or write a letter to the editor about the consequences of this ill-conceived project.

We will also let you know if a public hearing is to be held, and if that happens, we urge you to make every effort to attend. Few actions were as powerful in making our case against the 2003 resort proposal as the overwhelming public participation in administrative hearings. We need to do that again — even more so if we can.

Making the Case

As a community and environmental organization, our case has always been that the size, scale, and high-elevation location proposed for this resort — some of it above 2500 feet — render it environmentally unsound and, for the communities along the Route 28 corridor, economically disastrous.

We object to the use of taxpayer dollars to enhance a private commercial venture; those dollars should go instead to enhancing the public facility, BMSC.

We particularly object to this use of public money for private profit in these times of universal belt-tightening and re-thinking our economy. We would like to see the money used to develop our economy, not threaten it by ravaging the wilderness character that is the economic engine of the region.

We also hold that the closed-door negotiations resulting in the AIP constitute an attempt to evade the SEQR process mandated by law. In particular, this alliance between a private commercial venture and a public government agency should be transacted in public view.

And we want BMSC to remain a public recreational facility accessible to all. ■

Contact Them

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Office of Rep. Maurice Hinchey
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Kingston, NY 12401
845- 331-4466

Find and contact your state legislators:

Assembly:

<http://assembly.state.ny.us/mem/>

Senate:

<http://www.senate.state.ny.us/senate-homepage.nsf/senators?OpenForm>

Live in New York City?

If so, among other things, your water is under threat. Tell:

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg
City Hall
New York, NY 10007
FAX (212) 788-2460
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/mail/html/mayor.html>

Commissioner, Department of Environmental Protection
59-17 Junction Blvd.
Flushing, NY 11373

City Council member:

<http://www.nyccouncil.info/>

Click on FIND MY COUNCIL MEMBER

SAVE THE DATE!

2009 Memorial Day Weekend Concert by pianist Idith Korman

Music Celebrating the Environment!
Schumann, Ravel, Messiaen, and more...

At the Galli-Curci Mansion
(home of Idith and Ben Korman)

Audience limited to first 85 ticket-buyers. Details to come...



The Catskill Heritage Alliance is a grass-roots organization dedicated to preserving the harmony between the villages of the central Catskills and the surrounding wilderness through community revitalization and open space conservation. The CHA is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization, and your donation is tax-deductible to the full extent provided by law.

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