VISION 2050

FULFILLING THE PROMISE OF THE ADIRONDACK PARK

ADIRONDACK COUNCIL
PRESERVING WATER, AIR AND WILDLANDS

"The lands of the state, now owned or hereafter acquired, constituting the forest preserve as now fixed by law, shall be forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be leased, sold or exchanged, or be taken by any corporation, public or private, nor shall the timber thereon be sold, removed or destroyed."

– NYS Constitution, "Forever Wild" Article XIV

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We are deeply indebted to the participants of interviews and charrettes. Their perspectives shaped this project for the better, and their passion for the Adirondacks is an inspiration.

2021

Many experts participated in interviews and charrettes to inform the project and its findings. They were scientists, environmentalists, advocates, local government officials, state elected officials, former staff, former commissioners of the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) and Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), former chairs of the Adirondack Park Agency, teachers, guidance counselors, school administrators, business people, trail builders, planners, National Park Service resource managers, those in the tourism sector, rural development specialists, and community development professionals. We have withheld the names of participants, but not our gratitude to each and every one of them.

The ideas that they shared helped guide our understanding of the forces at work in the Adirondack Park today and opportunities for the future. We are deeply indebted to the participants of interviews and charrettes. Their perspectives shaped this project for the better, and their passion for the Adirondacks is an inspiration.

We are also grateful to the Board of the Adirondack Council, and particularly for the guidance of the Steering Committee and former Chair Michael Bettmann throughout this project. Steering Committee members Emily Bateson, Charles Canham, Laurel Skarbinski, Georgina Cullman, Tom Curley, Bob Kafin, and Craig Weatherup gave generously of their time to see this project to completion. Charles Canham and Tom Curley provided their leadership as Committee co-chairs. The co-author team, comprised of the aforementioned Steering Committee members with the addition of Meredith Prime and Mike DiNunzio, worked through many ideas, drafts, questions, and revisions. They gave of themselves to make VISION 2050 the best project that it could be. Theirs was a labor of love that the Adirondacks will benefit from for years to come.

Julia Goren

Adirondack Council staff members went above and beyond to support the VISION project. We thank Vice President of Conservation Megan Phillips for shepherding this report through production, Executive Director Willie Janeway for his ongoing guidance, and Senior Advisor Diane Fish for her thoughtful facilitation of the stakeholder charrettes.

VISION Project Director Julia Goren and VISION Project Consultant Thomas Woodman conducted dozens of interviews and charrettes and sifted through heaps of background material. They served as the lead authors and editors on this project. The high degree of care and attention to detail that they brought to this iterative process have yielded this final report—a bold, aspirational vision for the future of the Adirondack Park.

Lake Placid High School students conduct field research.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Adirondack Park is a national treasure—a legacy we inherited more than 100 years ago—that we must collectively protect for current and future generations.

Today, the Park is in a race against visible and invisible threats to its natural and human communities. Current management structures do not support the long-range planning necessary to fulfill its promise.

In the decades ahead, all who love the Adirondacks and are invested in the Park's future must take bold actions to protect it.

The Adirondack Council, with input from experts and other stakeholders, offers VISION 2050 to achieve a future with intact natural systems, vibrant and diverse human communities, and cutting-edge management. This proposal for a long-range strategy for the next 30 years of the Adirondack Park offers a path forward.

This publication organizes discussion into three principal sections:

- Preserving natural communities
- Fostering vibrant human communities
- Managing the Park

The following major recommendations are among the dozens of proposals described in the report.

To preserve its natural communities, the Adirondack Park must elevate the importance of ecological integrity and wild character in its management.

Such management must be based on regular monitoring, research, and the public dissemination of information. A reimagined and adequately funded Adirondack Park Agency should coordinate and oversee a robust research and monitoring infrastructure. Funding for research would come from an independent mechanism.

Prioritizing ecological integrity and wild character sets the stage for rewilding (recovery of species and ecosystems). Many species rely on being able to move across the landscape for their survival. As climate change worsens, the ecological health of the Park will rely on species being able to shift their ranges. They all will depend on connectivity among regions inside and outside the Park.

The Adirondack Park must build a broad and diverse constituency for nature and the Adirondacks.

Human communities within the Adirondack Park must have the resources to thrive economically and demographically and fit the character of the place.

In the decades ahead, all who love the Adirondacks and are invested in the Park's future must take bold actions to protect it.

This relies upon fostering a sense of identity, so that those currently in the Park maintain their connection to their home through places of importance and local history. Pride in place helps youth envision themselves as part of a community's future.

Communities must also prioritize welcoming diversity. Adirondack communities of the future should resemble those of the rest of the state. This includes embracing the work of the Adirondack Diversity Initiative.

Communities must have aid from the state and others to plan and build infrastructure to support individuals, local businesses, and communities. Infrastructure needs are varied by community, but include roads, wastewater treatment, communications, and housing.

There must be a concentrated focus on the importance of education in its many forms, including school, workforce development, visitor interpretation, and local history.

Management creates a structure that can accomplish these goals. One important change is for the Adirondack Park to manage itself as a singular entity rather than a collection of disparate units.

This requires a change in planning and management strategies. Approaches for both public and privately owned lands should be based on watershed management and emphasize more holistic, regional planning that integrates beyond the current state unit management plans. Legal and structural changes are necessary to accomplish this.

The Adirondack Park requires dedicated and increased funding. An Adirondack Park Trust should be established.

The Adirondack Park Agency should be strengthened and reimagined. It must have more funding to accomplish research, monitoring, and to work with communities.

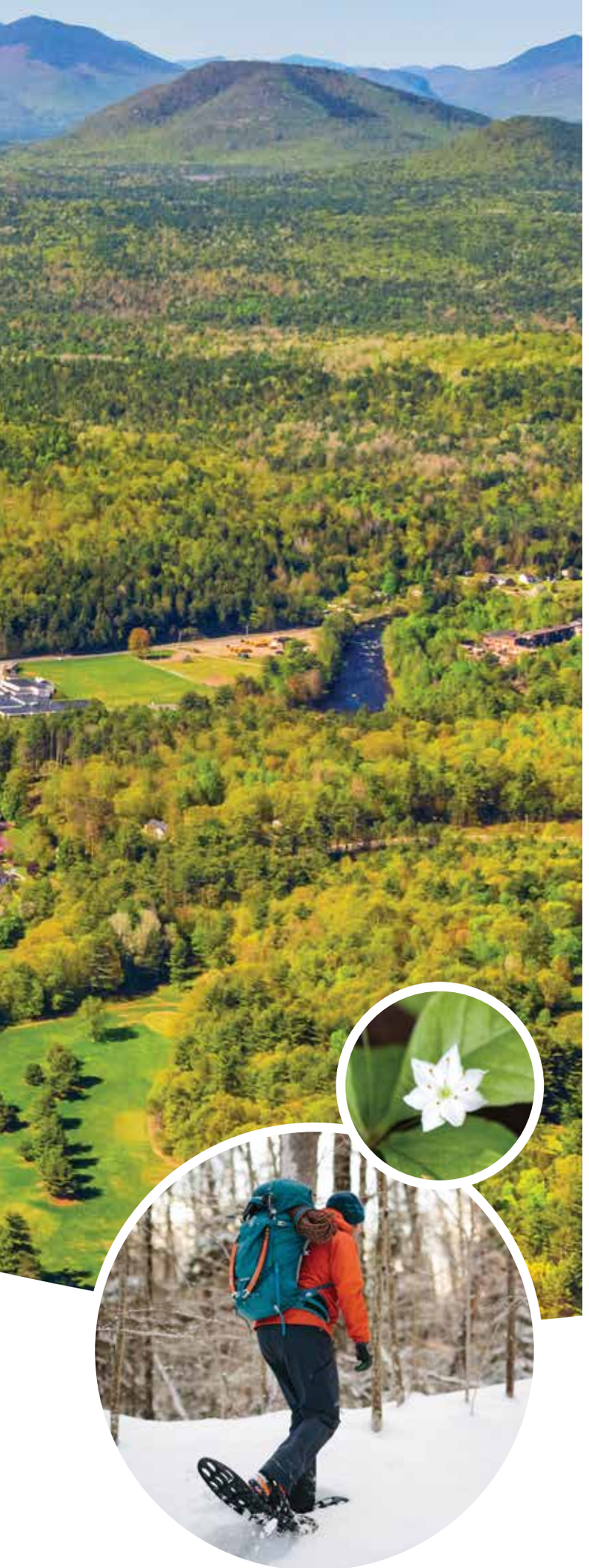
Public lands within the Park should be managed as an integrated whole by experts in wilderness and recreation management under the Adirondack Park Agency.

The following pages describe these and many other recommendations in-depth as the Adirondack Council offers this VISION 2050 to lay a path to fulfill the promise of the Adirondack Park.

Boating on Lake George

INTRODUCTION

Lasting protection will require a long-range vision that guides all management decisions year after year. A new vision is necessary to chart a course to a brighter future.



Ausable Forks—Human communities are interwoven with wild nature throughout the Adirondack Park.

The promise of the Adirondack Park belongs to all, today and for the future. In the Adirondack Park, people and nature do coexist and can thrive together. Public and private landscapes model the success of people and nature rather than people versus nature. The scale of this effort is hard to comprehend—six million acres, forests sequestering carbon, protecting waters on which over 11 million people and countless wild creatures depend.

It is a landscape where plants and animals are abundant, abiding on their own terms. Here, opportunities for solitude and wildness endure, in hidden patches of sun-dappled forest, on snowy summits, under a star-filled night sky, or as the call of the loon echoes over an otherwise silent pond.

Unlike other parks, the human element is interwoven through the fabric of the Adirondack Park. Here there are towns and villages with 130,000 year-round residents working in forests, farms, and communities. While surviving, let alone thriving, in the Adirondack Park requires perseverance, whether to withstand the cold winters or working to support families in challenging circumstances, people have done so for generations.

The Adirondack Park has inspired many to be passionate advocates for wild places. Bob Marshall, Howard Zahniser, Anne LaBastille, Barbara McMartin, and Clarence Petty are just a few. It has protected natural systems on a scale unequaled in the eastern United States. The Park has done so while providing for the communities within it. It created a path for the modern landscape conservation movement. It has shifted the collective understanding of what a park and a living landscape can be.

This place is for all—the wild creatures, the people who live here, those who visit, and those that may never set foot inside the Blue Line. Its successes belong to all New Yorkers. So, too, does the responsibility to take bold action to preserve this legacy for the future.

Coyote and Adirondack River

Protecting the Park's clean and plentiful waters is essential to human and wild residents alike.

Today, the Adirondacks are threatened. Natural and human systems are at risk from climate change, economic forces, and inadequate, under-funded management. Short-term thinking that is too focused on immediate issues can lose sight of larger preservation goals. Lasting protection will require a long-range vision that guides all management decisions year after year. A new vision is necessary to chart a course to a brighter future.

The Adirondack Council's VISION 2050 Project grows out of the need to understand the forces of change within the Adirondacks. We bring long-range strategic thinking about the future of the Park, even as we remember the historical context of today's policies. VISION 2050 embraces a holistic Adirondack Park, where public and private, human and natural, and different aspects of governance are considered as pieces of one whole.

If sufficient effort is taken to preserve the Park's ecosystems and its human communities, by the year 2050 it could look like...

A VISION for the Future

Preserving natural communities by 2050

In 2050, the Adirondack Park stands as an inspiration for a changing world. The ecosystems of the Park remain intact, thanks to actions taken to mitigate climate change, invasive species, and air and water pollution. All of the pieces are in place to support abundant wildlife populations, from small amphibians to large mammals. This is a testament to New York's commitment to conservation and respect for the creatures who make this place home.

Adirondack Forests, public and private, are largely healthy. They sequester carbon and use natural solutions to combat climate change. Efforts have been successful at keeping emerald ash borer, Asian longhorn beetle, and hemlock woolly adelgid out of the interior of the Park.

The Park provides critical wildlife pathways for the migration of species along both east/west and north/south corridors. These wildlife corridors allow new species into the Adirondacks as they seek refuge from a changing climate. Wildlife corridors allow boreal species to remain in the Adirondacks as these populations are connected to those to the north. Sightings of charismatic species, such as moose, bobcat, and coyote, are common.

Fostering vibrant human communities by 2050

It is still the human element that makes the Park special. The Adirondack Park in 2050 is home to thriving small towns, celebrating and capitalizing on their natural setting. Towns and villages have charted dynamic courses for their own future, with various partners supporting them.

Authentic, walkable communities draw people to the area. Populations have increased. New jobs, housing and infrastructure, and education have been carefully cultivated. Communities have worked hard to become welcoming to all.

Young people with children come (or come back) to the small towns of the Adirondacks because they provide an opportunity to raise families in a unique setting.

Outdoor recreation is a big economic driver within the Park. Many new jobs have been created in this field that are high-paying career positions. Year-round work in health care, education, infrastructure, farming, forestry, and research draws more young professionals to the Adirondacks.

Towns and villages have mitigated where possible and adapted to climate change in infrastructure and planning.

Managing the Park by 2050

When the Adirondack Park was created, it was an innovative, even revolutionary idea. So, too, when the Adirondack Park Agency was established. By 2050, transformational change has been wrought again.

Residents, visitors, and government at all levels recognize the purity and abundance of the Park's water as one of its main assets. Protecting this critical resource is a matter of policy and law. Clean water protects wildlife, drinking water and human health, as well as recreation throughout the Adirondacks.

Management of water, air, and wildlife is based on a coordinated program of research and monitoring. The success of human communities is an important component. The Adirondack Park is a unified entity with resources dedicated to managing it.

By 2050, these changes would result in an Adirondack Park that again represents the most innovation in conservation thinking. A place like no other requires a plan that unites environmentalists and politicians, scientists and farmers, and residents and visitors to ensure that the promise of the Adirondack Park is not lost. All who love the Park are called to take action to achieve success.

The Adirondack Council and the VISION series

The Adirondack Council has undertaken long-range planning before. The four volumes of *2020 VISION: Fulfilling the Promise of the Adirondack Park* articulated a goal of a Park with all its ecological diversity protected, its wilderness enhanced, and recreational opportunities realized. Volumes 1–3, published in 1988 and 1990, emphasized a common strategy (state land acquisition) to address a pressing concern (development). It was the work of a partnership between staff of the Adirondack Council and the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Adirondack Park Agency. The fourth volume, published in 2007, stressed the importance of private land stewardship.

The series put forth a vision for the future, of which much has been achieved. Working with the New York Natural Heritage Program, we found that more than half of the lands recommended for

Lake Flower—Saranac Lake is among the many Adirondack communities that have grown up along shorefronts.

different levels of protection have been secured. This accomplishment grew from the successful collaboration of property owners, state agencies and non-profits, notably the Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

The success of the 2020 VISION series is remarkable, but the same vision will not carry the Adirondack Park through the future. The challenges the Park will face in the next 30 years are different from those faced in the 1980s, requiring a broader range of tools for planning and management.

Arriving at a VISION

Recognizing the need for a new plan, the Adirondack Council launched the VISION 2050 project. Its goal was to engage with stakeholders and experts to create a narrative of the Park's future that inspires support and specific actions to preserve natural communities, foster vibrant human communities, and manage the Park.

From the beginning, listening to and learning from a variety of different voices was essential. While VISION 2050 is not the result of a consensus approach, its recommendations are shaped by the experience, expertise, and opinions of the various participants.

We learned from past efforts. These helped the project team understand some of the disparate factors impacting the Adirondacks.

We conducted interviews and discussions with approximately 100 subject matter experts. Participants included those from many different sectors:

- Business owners;
- Educators;
- Scientists;
- Local and state government officials;
- Past Adirondack Park Agency staff, APA board members and chairs;
- Retired Commissioners and staff of the Department of Environmental Conservation; and
- Environmental advocates.

The purpose of these interviews was to learn. Every effort was made to be as open-minded as possible. After interviews, the project team hosted online charrettes, or workshops, to discuss key questions arising from the interviews.

After the workshops, we arrived at recommendations, which were revised and refined into the recommendations that follow.

The Council's VISION steering committee members shaped questions, participated in the charrettes, and helped draft and revise the findings that led to this report. Members of the Board of Directors of the Adirondack Council took part in small group discussions of the charrette questions. They vetted and provided feedback on the findings themselves.

We gratefully acknowledge and appreciate the time and expertise that interview and charrette participants shared. A constant theme throughout the endeavor has been the passion so many have for the Adirondacks. We learned from, appreciate, and were humbled by the participation in the project.

VISION Project principles:

- Adaptive management, including ongoing monitoring, is critical to ensure the long-term success of the Adirondack Park.
- Both public and private lands preserve ecological integrity and wild character of the Adirondack Park.
- Human communities are an essential part of the Park.
- The Adirondack Park should be considered holistically. All aspects for its preservation and success are interconnected. Big-picture thinking is required.
- The public has the right to use publicly owned land but the state needs to limit or regulate use when necessary to protect wild lands, character, and ecosystems.
- The state has the right to regulate the use of private land within the Park in order to protect wild lands and wild character.

Influential projects:

- The Temporary Study Commission on the Future of the Adirondacks: The Future of the Adirondack Park
- Adirondack Council: VISION 2020 series
- Commission on the Adirondacks in the 21st Century: The Adirondack Park in the 21st Century report
- Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages: Adirondack Park Regional Assessment Project
- ADKFutures Project
- Adirondack North Country Association: Growing the New Economy
- Adirondack Park Agency's Hamlets 1, 2, and 3
- Protect! The Adirondacks: Adirondack Park and Rural America

THE ADIRONDACK PARK

The Adirondack Park is the world's largest intact temperate deciduous forest. It is also the largest park in the contiguous United States. It contains six million acres (9,300 square miles), covers one-fifth of New York State and is equal in size to neighboring Vermont. The Adirondack Park is nearly three times the size of Yellowstone National Park.

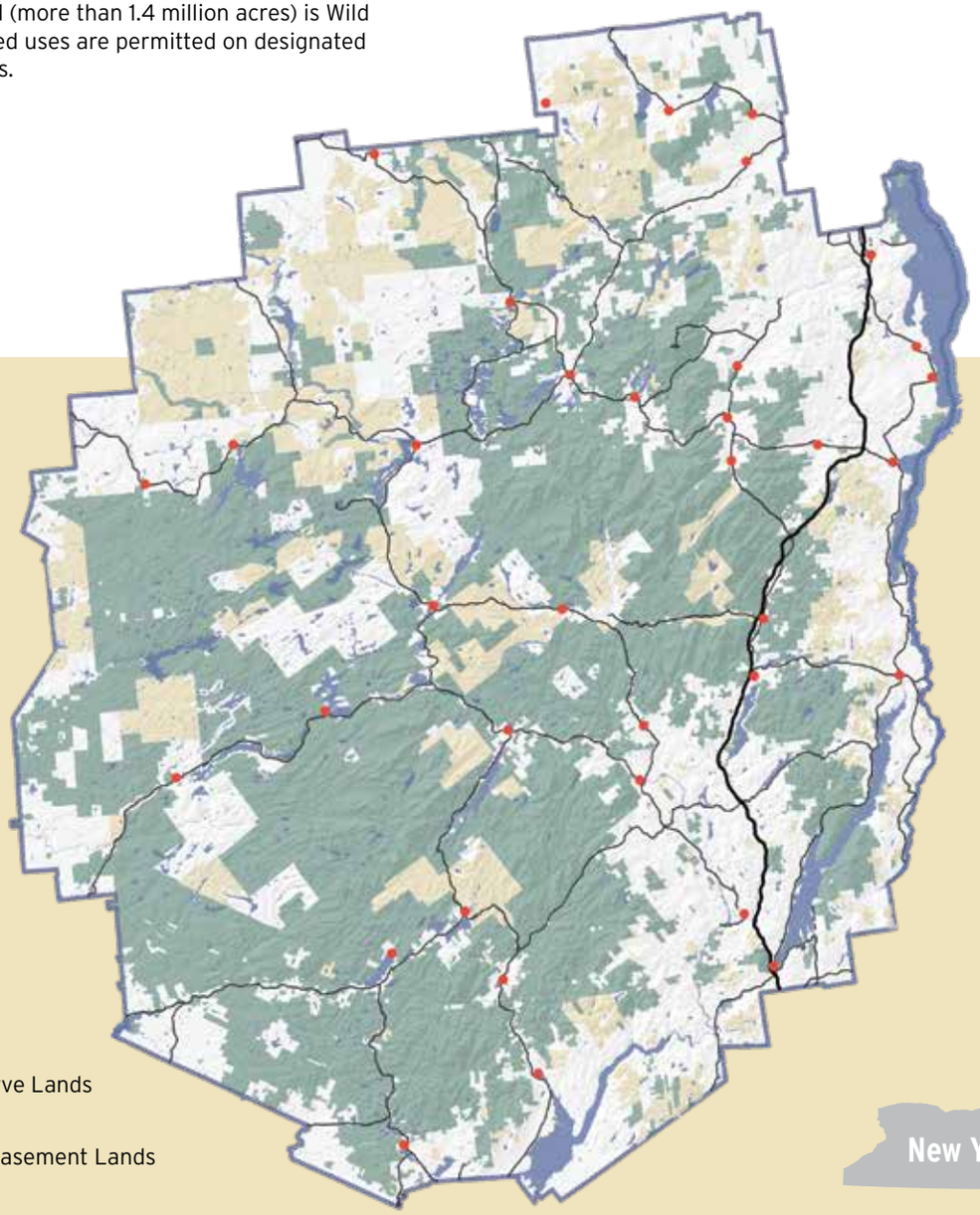
More than half of the Adirondack Park is private land, devoted principally to hamlets, forestry, agriculture, and open-space recreation. Nearly 775,000 acres are protected from development by conservation easements held by the state or private organizations. The Park is home for 130,000 permanent and 200,000 seasonal residents in 120 hamlets and 9 villages. The Park hosts 12.4 million visitors yearly.

Nearly half of the Park is publicly owned Forest Preserve, protected as "Forever Wild" by the NYS Constitution since 1894. About 1.1 million acres of these public lands are protected as Wilderness, where non-mechanized recreation may be enjoyed. Most of the public land (more than 1.4 million acres) is Wild Forest, where motorized uses are permitted on designated waters, roads and trails.

Plants and wildlife abound in the Park. Old growth forests cover more than 100,000 acres of public land. The western and southern Adirondacks are gentle landscapes of hills, lakes, wetlands, ponds, and streams. In the northeast are the forty-six High Peaks. Forty-three of them rise above 4,000 feet and 11 have alpine summits that rise above the timberline.

The Adirondacks include the headwaters of five major drainage basins. Lake Champlain and the Hudson, Black, St. Lawrence, and Mohawk Rivers all draw water from the Adirondack Park. Within the Park are more than 2,800 large lakes and ponds, and more than 1,500 miles of rivers, fed by an estimated 30,000 miles of brooks and streams.

Through public education and advocacy for the protection of the Park's ecological integrity and wild character, the Adirondack Council advises public and private policymakers on ways to safeguard this great expanse of open space.



MAP KEY:

- Public Forest Preserve Lands
- Private Land
- NYS Conservation Easement Lands
- Waterbodies
- Select Communities

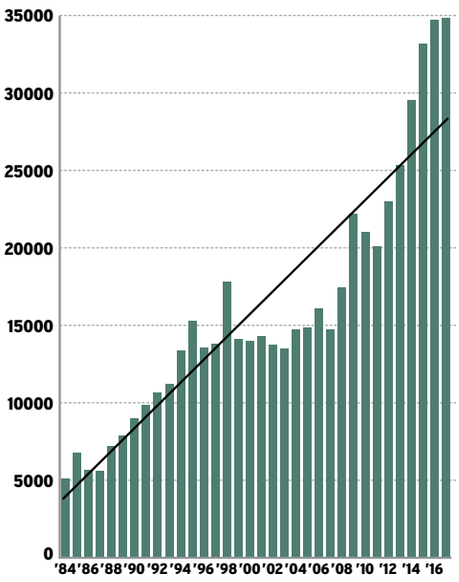
HIGH PEAKS WILDERNESS HIKERS

Increases in Park visitation in recent decades have been a benefit to local economies. At the same time, it threatens visitor safety and the wilderness that draws people here. Planning, education, new trails, more rangers, and visitor use management can assure sustainable public access and protect the resource.

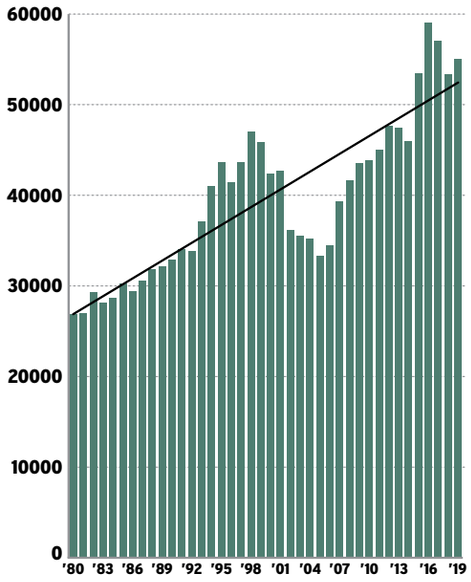
Series 1

Linear (Series 1)

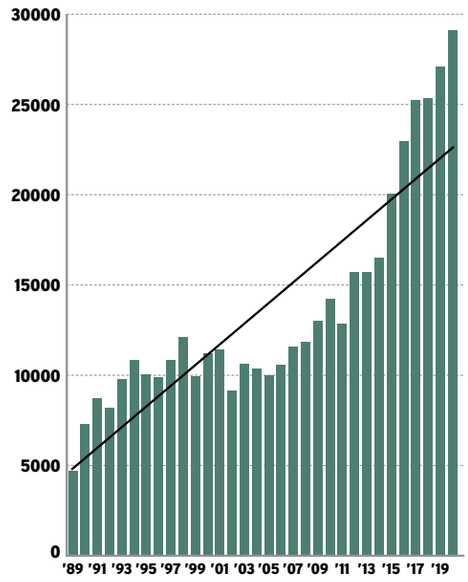
Cascade Mt. Pre Surge
(1984–2016)



Adirondak Loj Trailhead Hikers
(1980–2019)



ADK Mt. Reserve Hikers
(1989–2020)

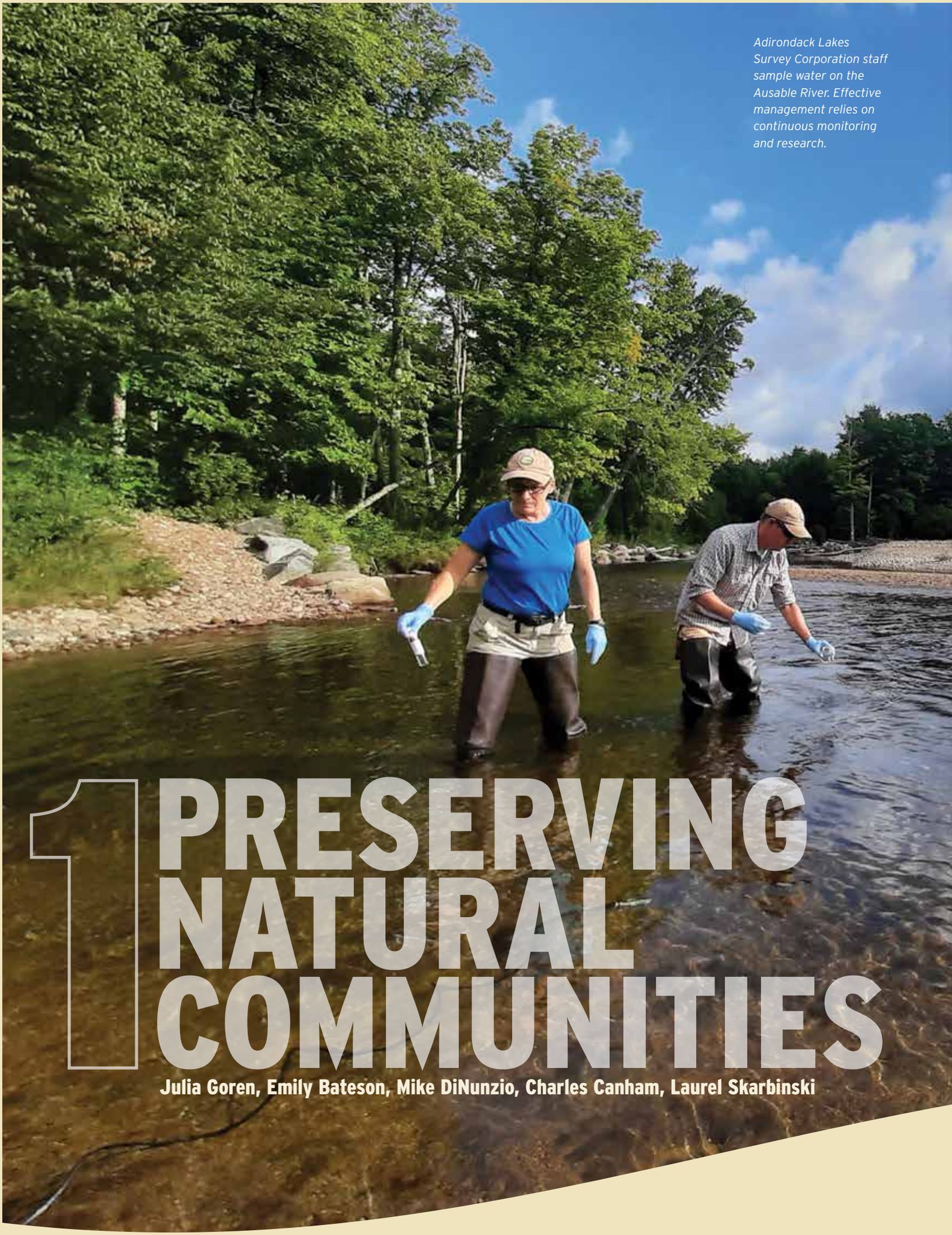


Source: AMR data from Ausable Club. Other charts from NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.

VISION

The chapters that follow lay out paths to reach this vision for the Adirondack Park by 2050. The work to achieve a better future lies ahead.

To preserve the Adirondack Park forever we need consistent principles and a comprehensive plan, based on sound science. The need and the will exist to launch a period of rapid transformation in management within the Park. When those who care about the Adirondacks see beyond the turmoil of the moment to a shared vision, we can fulfill the promise of a Park, where people and nature can thrive together, meeting the challenges of our time.

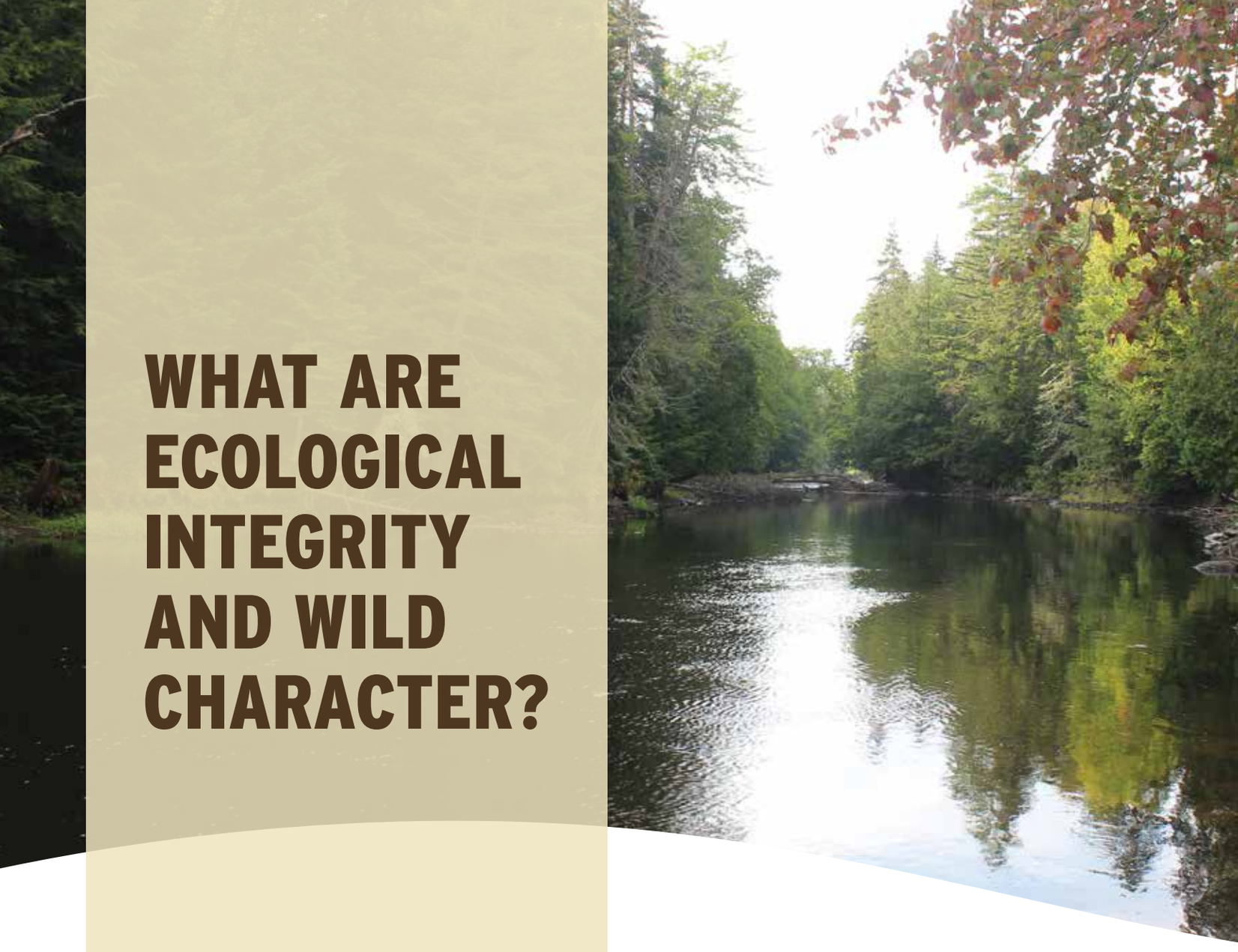


Adirondack Lakes Survey Corporation staff sample water on the Ausable River. Effective management relies on continuous monitoring and research.

1 PRESERVING NATURAL COMMUNITIES

Julia Goren, Emily Bateson, Mike DiNunzio, Charles Canham, Laurel Skarbinski

The mission of the Adirondack Council is to ensure the ecological integrity and wild character of the Adirondack Park for current and future generations.



WHAT ARE ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY AND WILD CHARACTER?

Floating along the Saranac River in summer 2021, the banks are shady; dark green hemlock boughs hang over the water. Red cardinal flowers stand out amidst the green of sedge and rush.

Flipping a rock, one can find stonefly, mayfly, and caddisfly larvae underneath. These three orders of aquatic insects are highly sensitive to pollution. Their presence is a strong indicator of good water quality. They are favored by trout and other fish species darting through the water.

A kingfisher rattles from a branch. It relies upon the fish in this stream for food. Another hunter stands among the shallows. The great blue heron is hunting fish and amphibians, such as frogs and toads. Since amphibians breathe through their skin, they, too, are highly susceptible to a variety of pollutants.

Along the bank, small piles of shells show evidence that otter call this river home. Otter eat fish, crayfish, mussels, insects, and many other things. They are effective hunters and important predators on the river.

Otter are far from the only mammals living here. A lodge of sticks and logs indicates that beaver are part of the system. Fish and aquatic insects hide among the logs the beaver has submerged.

Bald eagle, a top predator, and moose, an iconic northern species, also use this river for food and shelter. Nearby, a loon and her chick make their home in a pond.

This stretch of the river has integrity. It is unimpaired, sound.

In ecological terms, it is able to maintain its composition, its structure, and its function. The composition is its suite of species (fish, heron, otter). The structure is the setting (the geology, large boulders, and overhanging trees, which create a cool, oxygen-rich environment in the river). The function is revealed in the predator-prey relationships, for example. Each component contributes to a whole that is resilient.

Ecosystems with integrity would include clean water and air and a full range of native plant and animal diversity.

Its character is wild. Humans do not dominate. Wild creatures interact with each other, free to live as they would without human intervention. Here, the river itself is free—rain can cause flooding, which will destroy homes for beaver, insects, and fish. Drought may strand fish. Ice jams can uproot the hemlock. Or the river may flow peacefully on. But it will do so without human-imposed constraints.

The river in 2021 is not what it was millennia ago. Different tree species may have overhung the water when the climate was colder. Other predators would have hunted along the banks. More recently, beaver, moose, and eagle were missing from this landscape.

The ecological integrity of this river today, the fact that the river supports life and processes, is a result of management. Forests have returned since the 1880s and the days prior to the creation of the Adirondack Park. With forests providing habitat, herbivores such as moose and beaver, and predators such as the bald eagle and the fisher have also made their return.

As a result of the conservation of forests and water, of careful consideration around human development, and of the protections afforded it, the Adirondack Park has become the greatest example of rewilding in history. Both its ecological integrity and its wild character are greater today than they were a generation ago.

Yet, systems are not static. Threats are not static. In 2021, the integrity of the Saranac River is not complete: downstream dams alter the flow, and some species, such as salmon, are missing. Salt contamination from the nearby road pollutes this river. The hemlocks that overhang the banks are at risk from hemlock woolly adelgid, an invasive forest pest. Hotter weather and shorter winters mean that the water temperatures are rising, making them less hospitable to fish. If nothing changes, this river will have less integrity in 30 years than it has now. Progress made over generations will begin to be lost. The river will be less wild.

Management must remain dynamic in order to preserve this river, not as it is, but as it could be.

The promise of the Adirondack Park can only be met if the Park safeguards and improves its ecological integrity and wild character. All life, human and wild, within the Adirondacks depends on the health of its natural systems.

Ecosystems with integrity would include clean water and air and a full range of native plant and animal diversity. These are functional systems. They can withstand change and still provide benefits of water and air, sequestering carbon, and more. Those with wild character are places where humans do not dominate. Wild creatures interact with each other, free to live as they would, without human intervention.

Focusing on ecological integrity and wild character fosters myriad benefits, not only for the many people who live in the Park, but also those who visit or live in the Northeast. A single example: clean water provides a home to insects, fish, otter, and beaver. It provides food for the heron, kingfisher, and eagle. It also provides drinking water to over 11 million people in New York State, Vermont, and Canada, and livelihoods for the fishing guide, river guide, water quality technician, engineer, and scientist.

Climate change, water and air pollution, and invasive plants, animals, and pests all threaten the Adirondacks. So, too, does gradual erosion of integrity through fragmentation. Each new subdivision built far outside a hamlet destroys habitat and weakens the opportunity for landscapes to be connected. At the same time, subdivisions contribute to additional road miles, enlarge the transportation footprint, and weaken the identity of the hamlets. Threats to the ecological integrity of the Adirondacks are threats to its communities.

Preserving ecological integrity and wild character must be elevated as a concern guiding Park management. Currently, management decisions are based on a series of competing interests—economic, recreational, political, and more. Ecological integrity takes a back seat, seen as a necessary sacrifice to other goals. Protecting the natural systems of the Park need not come at the expense of human systems, nor vice versa. Too often, innovative solutions without tradeoffs are not sought. The window for effective action to protect the natural systems of the Park is narrow. A vision for the future would be of an Adirondack Park where all systems are protected and supported to remain as resilient as they can be, and where management decisions are made in support of that vision.

This holistic approach to mutually supporting values was at the heart of the origins of the Adirondack Park—and must be central to Park management, visible through tangible actions going forward.

PATHS

It will take concerted work to protect the wild character and ecological health of the Adirondack Park, but success will benefit the region for the many generations of wildlife and people to come. Progress along seven key paths is essential:

1 **Ensure that science and monitoring guide Park management.**

2 **Protect and restore the Park's wild character.**

3 **Safeguard landscape connectivity**
within and beyond the Park to ensure ecosystem integrity.

4 **Strategically manage public and private lands**
in the Park to protect ecological integrity.

5 **Manage the Park in recognition that ecosystems have a finite capacity**
to absorb or mitigate impacts.

6 **Manage the Park to mitigate and adapt to climate change.**

7 **Build a broad and diverse constituency**
for nature and the Adirondacks.

Many factors, including climate change and habitat loss, challenge the ability of some species, like the spruce grouse, to remain resilient. Far-sighted management will work to preserve and connect ecosystems that will function and adapt. Educating visitors is an important way to create a constituency for nature.

FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY PATHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS THAT MUST GUIDE THE PARK TOWARD AN ECOLOGICALLY HEALTHY, WILD, AND SUSTAINABLE 2050.

The recommendations that follow are the culmination of over two years of work: consideration of past efforts; interviews with ecologists, naturalists, and experts in related fields; and multiple charrettes with scientists, advocates, educators, and philosophers. The recommendations listed below are related and amplify the impact of others but can also function independently. Individually, each has value, and together, the whole package has power to bring about positive change in the Adirondack Park.

PATH ONE

Ensure that science and monitoring guide Park management.

One cannot effectively manage what one does not measure. Moreover, healthy ecosystems are diverse and changing. Measurements from five, ten, or twenty years ago do not provide accurate information today.

To effectively preserve the structure, function, and composition of ecosystems, **the Adirondack Park must develop the capacity to conduct research and monitor conditions on a Park-wide scale.** This means analyzing results according to scientifically sound standards. It means documenting change over time. Finally, management must adapt based on what the data demonstrate.

Monitoring is recording observations periodically to see trends over time. These trends are important—a single data point doesn't give enough information to see change. Blood pressure is an example of a metric that is measured over time. A single reading gives little information about whether the patient is healthy or unhealthy. A blood pressure reading taken years ago is not assumed to be current today.

Research, in contrast, is conducted by asking a question, taking an action to answer the question (often by experiment or observation), analyzing results, and sharing or publishing the answer. A medical test is an experiment to determine the answer to a question.

There is much to monitor and research in the Adirondack Park. Ensuring that it is done properly will require a coordinated effort. A state agency like a reimagined Adirondack Park Agency (APA), such as proposed in the management chapter, should facilitate the discussions needed among the many stakeholders to set the research agenda. This entails determining which subjects are most important to gather information about, and, which questions most need answers. The Adirondack Park Agency or other state agency would be best able to determine what research is needed to answer the policy and management questions they face. An example of a question on such an agenda would be, "What are the best ways to eradicate hemlock woolly adelgid without using pesticides?" The answer to that research would then be applied directly to management decisions.

Researchers need funding to investigate the prioritized questions. They have to follow the grants that are available, and without a long-term Park research agenda, grant availability may create incentives for work that is interesting and important but not urgent or essential. Providing funding can guarantee that management's most pressing questions get priority attention.

> "The state has an obligation to lead ecological and social science research."
>
> **– Former official, Department of Environmental Conservation**

Once the research is conducted, the results must be shared publicly. If the Adirondack Park Agency were to set a periodic research agenda, the results could similarly be reported annually. This would not take the place of publication in a peer-reviewed journal, but would be for an audience that would include managers and the public. Reporting would be part of the funding stipulation and could be included in a regularly updated, publicly accessible site, such as an Adirondack Park online dashboard. In addition to making certain that the taxpayers who fund the research have an opportunity to see the results, such a requirement could also provide younger researchers and students an opportunity to engage with a broader scientific community.

In addition to the publication of results, the state should have access to the raw data in order to facilitate collaboration, replication, and future research. If a team from Cornell investigates the results of the release of beetles that consume hemlock woolly adelgid and a team from Clarkson wants to reinvestigate after a number of years, access to the original raw data is essential. Such requirements are already in place in federally funded research projects.

In addition to coordinated research, regular, long-term monitoring is essential. Monitoring can identify points of fragility in an otherwise resilient system. It allows management to reduce or eliminate sources of stress. Monitoring is also essential to assessing the recreational carrying capacity of natural areas.

The Adirondack High Peaks Summit Stewardship Program engages in regular monitoring of alpine areas damaged by human trampling. The monitoring has been able to demonstrate recovery of those areas over time as a result of a specific management action (presence of a Summit Steward), and to apply that information to decisions (expanding staffing to other peaks). This is one example of a monitoring program of the type that should exist across multiple disciplines and should be coordinated through the Adirondack Park Agency.

Long-term monitoring should draw upon multiple ways of knowing. Indigenous peoples have longstanding knowledge of the Adirondacks' natural systems and their management, sometimes referred to as Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Indigenous partners should be included in setting monitoring and research priorities in order to inform management.

Assessing Ecological Integrity

We need indices for comparing ecological systems to carefully established benchmarks to understand and track the myriad factors that contribute to ecological integrity. To again use a medical analogy, once monitoring has revealed trends about a patient's blood pressure and weight, a doctor would compare them to what is known about the health

of individuals with similar vitals. That comparison would help the doctor assess whether the patient is doing well or whether they should alter their diet, routine, etc.

Such biological indices exist and are widely used both nationally and globally, although largely for aquatic systems. An index of biological integrity (IBI) should be developed for the many different terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems of the Adirondacks. The "Forever Wild" nature of the Forest Preserve means that Adirondack Wilderness areas may be quite close to the benchmark (unmanaged and unimpaired) state. We also need to evaluate the health of the wild character, which will require developing a very different type of index.

Elements impacting ecological integrity, both human and otherwise, must continue to be mapped. Some human impacts include large infrastructure, such as highways, roads, and developments, which seriously affect wildlife. They also include more localized factors, such as small trails and driveways, which may have an impact on birds, insects, and other smaller species. Mapping must allow examination of both the whole of the landscape and individual tracts within the landscape.

Ecological integrity and ecological indices are far from the only ones needed to assess the health of the Park. We also need equivalent indices for assessing the vitality of the human communities of the Park. These might include metrics such as population, employment, housing prices, etc.

Informing the public

These data should be coordinated and shared on an easily accessible public dashboard that has a mandate for regular updates. Contribution to this dashboard from multiple sources would lead to collaborative responsibility for maintaining the ecological integrity of the Adirondack Park. The National Park Service's "Vital Signs" monitoring program is one model to consider for developing a set of Adirondack standards.

The creation of these indices and a public dashboard would require collaboration between the scientific community and the coordinating agency. Since the National Park Service system is already well-established, the opportunity to draw from outside experts exists. The dashboard itself would have immense value to the public, to educators, and to Adirondack Park managers.

Ever-evolving

Benchmarks do not imply a return to a specific point in natural history. VISION 2050 does not aspire to a mythic idea of primeval conditions. Natural systems are not static. A resilient ecosystem is one that is biologically diverse and functionally intact. Such systems adapt to and survive forces like climate change, even as individual species come and go.

Park planning and management should promote ecologically functional landscapes, not predetermined outcomes or end-states. Natural processes such as floods, predation, and free-flowing waters should be allowed to operate as they will, with minimal intervention. But science-based policies and actions should also adapt as needed. As climate change and regional habitat fragmentation increase, policies may have to change based on what the science demonstrates. For example, policies around management of forest fires may need to change depending on what science suggests will promote an ecologically functional landscape. Scientific advances will change management options.

Adaptive management

Research and monitoring can generate data and inform understanding. This, however, is only part of the equation. **Management must modify its actions based on findings.** Once actions are taken, monitoring and research must continue to evaluate the effect of those actions. Actions may need to be adjusted or revised based on what the data demonstrate. This process is known as adaptive management.

Adaptive management requires a commitment to an iterative process. An example might be modifying campfire restrictions based on measures of resource damage. Continued commitment to research and monitoring is necessary for adaptive management to be successful.

Targeted management may also be necessary to maintain ecological integrity. Examples include restoration of a locally extinct species, removal of dams, and control of invasive species. The presence of the bald eagle is an example of highly successful active management to improve ecological integrity. Such management will require partnership between government, academia, and the private sector and will be based on shared goals.

PATH TWO

Protect and restore the Park's wild character.

Ecological integrity and wild character go hand in hand. The Park's wild legacy must be protected and enhanced to protect the progress made within the Forest Preserve. The significance of this legacy of progress should not be underestimated.

The Adirondacks are already a model for what is increasingly and internationally framed as "rewilding"—restoring the ecological functions and wild character of landscapes too long influenced and degraded by human influence.

> "Will processes and creatures be free or will they be constrained?"
>
> **– Global and regional rewilding leader**

Forests, lakes, ponds, streams, trees, alpine tundra, moose, marten, fisher, bobcat, turkey, eagle, and beaver—all have recovered from harms imposed in the past. Many other gaps remain, however. Species that were once present are gone. Their absence is a loss to all and diminishes the integrity of the whole.

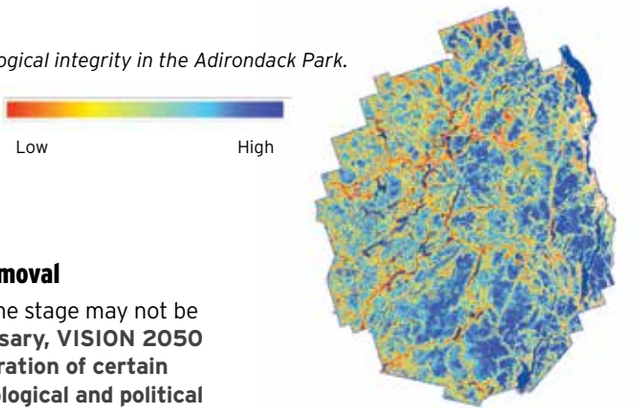
It is both ethically and scientifically imperative to right the damage that people have done and treat wild nature as having the right to live as it would undisturbed. The relationship between humans and the environment cannot be one-sided; humans are part of a reciprocal relationship with wild nature.

Maintaining ecological integrity is key to successful rewilding. Ecosystems with intact structure, function, and composition have resilience. **Ecological restoration should primarily focus on creating the conditions for species to return or recover on their own.** Resilient systems are essential both for species to return

Examples of old-growth forest can still be found in the park while pathogens like beech bark disease (inset) present threats.

The Adirondack Forest Preserve comprises 2.6 million acres of mainly wild and ecologically intact land amidst one of the most populous states in the country.

Ecological integrity in the Adirondack Park.



and, importantly, for species that are here to cope with new threats. A more resilient system will better withstand the coming onslaught of threats. Climate change, introduced pests and pathogens, airborne pollutants such as mercury, and water pollutants such as salt and phosphorus all threaten the future character of the Adirondack Park. Anything that degrades an ecosystem degrades its wild character.

Management of the Adirondack Park needs to assist the process of rewilding. Ecological connectivity is the degree to which landscapes allow species to move freely across them. It also includes the degree to which ecological processes can function unimpaired across a landscape. Gaps in the protected landscape should be filled. The state should continue purchasing land and easements in order to enhance connectivity, wildlife corridors, and wilderness areas. Wildlife corridors are infrastructure that help connect landscapes and waterbodies. Examples include crossings over or under roads and fish- and amphibian-friendly culverts.

Private lands are essential to this effort. They can be managed by their owners to promote connectivity and movement of species across the broader landscape. Many landowners already manage their lands in ways that are friendly to wildlife and help promote connectivity; many others would likely do so if technical expertise and incentives were provided.

Rewilding must extend to the Park's waterways. As of 2021, practically all major Adirondack rivers are dammed. Dams are ecologically damaging, changing the structure and function of the river. They prevent the flow of nutrients and movement of species. Many of the dams on Adirondack rivers are unnecessary. Removing obsolete dams, such as those on the Saranac and Raquette rivers, would restore the ecological integrity of those waterbodies. Dam removal on the Boquet River has allowed the return of wild salmon. Conservation work on trout-friendly culverts and roadways shows the way to design infrastructure for ecological health. Fish and wildlife corridors are gaining momentum and mainstream attention because of their critical ecological importance.

Reintroduction and removal

In some cases, setting the stage may not be sufficient. **Where necessary, VISION 2050 suggests assisted migration of certain keystone species if ecological and political conditions favor success.** Keystone species are those that have a disproportionately large impact on the ecosystem relative to their abundance. Keystone species include some that have successfully returned to the Adirondacks (such as the beaver), some that are currently here but might need help (such as lake trout, eastern hemlock, and American beech), and others that might need help to return (such as the American eel and American chestnut). Keystone species have the greatest potential for large-scale ecological impact. This provides a powerful argument for focusing on such species.

On the opposite end, introduced pests and pathogens are the greatest current threat to both the ecological integrity and wild character of Adirondack forests. American beech are an iconic dominant species of Adirondack hardwood forests. Their smooth bark stands out even in the dark understory of an old-growth forest. Beech bark disease has decimated this species, fundamentally altering the structure and function of Adirondack forests.

Other pests and pathogens have already or will devastate key species, including ash, elm, chestnut, and hemlock. Restoring these species will require many decades of dedicated work, so efforts at the state and national level to stop the introduction of new pests and pathogens are essential.

PATH THREE

Safeguard landscape connectivity within and beyond the Park to ensure ecosystem integrity.

Natural systems are not meant to function in isolation. Animal and insect species need connected landscapes in which to roam, to find adequate food and shelter. Even plants and fungi need the ability for their offspring to shift range or establish themselves in a different microclimate as conditions warrant.

As large as it is, the Adirondack Park does not best serve the organisms living within it if it is an island. The natural systems within the Park will only be robust and resilient in the long term if they are part of a larger whole. Connections must exist within the Park so that a moose, for example, can safely move from the shores of Lake Champlain to better habitat in the western part of the Park in a hot, dry, summer and back again during a snowy, cold winter. There must also be connection with the larger Northeastern region of the United States and Canada beyond the boundaries of the Park. That same moose would not exist within the Park in 2021 had moose not migrated into the Adirondacks from Vermont and Canada and reintroduced themselves.

> "The more you treat the Park as an island, the harder it is to have the movement you need to have."
>
> **– Adirondack ecologist**

The Blue Line does not divide natural populations within the Park from those outside. Nor is it a protective moat against exotic species, invasive or otherwise, moving into the region. Just as the Park's boundaries are porous and unclear to human visitors, they are and should be so to other living things.

To fulfill its promise, the Park must respond both to the benefits of existing within a larger regional landscape and to the threats this brings.

Rewilding and restoration have been happening piecemeal across the Northeast since the mid-1800s. As the largest, most ecologically intact deciduous forest in the region, even in the 19th Century, the Adirondack Park has played an outsized

role in the region. Ecosystems and species have survived here when the rest of the Northeast has been inhospitable. Climate change decrees that this will be true in the future as well. In current mapping of landscape connectivity and climate refugia (areas that will remain buffered against climate change), the Adirondack Park continually stands out as an island of green.

Wildways

The Algonquin to Adirondacks Collaborative (A2A) provides one model for building on the benefits of regional connectivity. Inspired by the journey of a moose from Long Lake in the Adirondacks to Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, the collaborative is working to create a 400-mile greenway connecting the parks.

Such greenways along north-south and east-west lines will be critical in the years to come when species must be able to migrate to more hospitable climates. A population with no safe path is like a fish stranded in a pond that is drying up: eventually when the conditions are bad enough, it will die. Landscape-level connectivity places that same fish in an undammed river: it can move to where the water is cooler and the insects are more plentiful.

Similar to A2A, the Split Rock Wildway is working to form a wildlife corridor from the Adirondacks to Lake Champlain and Vermont with the goal of restoring and protecting wildlife diversity and habitat.

Linkages across the Black River and Tug Hill, and from the Catskills provide critical paths for migration of species stressed under a warming climate.

A2A, Split Rock Wildway, and other efforts such as the Staying Connected Initiative should be supported, both for the health of wild individuals and also for the ability of species as a whole to shift their ranges to adapt to climate change.

Land protection

The state and others must use both conservation easements and fee purchases when feasible to protect ecological functionality and to fulfill the promise of the Park. The 2020 VISION series identified many key parcels for preservation. It was a tremendously successful plan. Overall, more than half of the 907,000 acres the Council recommended now has some form of legal protection against fragmentation and development. This accomplishment grew from the successful collaboration of property owners, state agencies, and non-profits, notably the Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. The science supporting parcels recommended for protection in 2020 VISION was sound; parcels that are still available today have ecological value and merit protection. But today we also have new information about climate change, about ecological integrity and resilience, and about the narrow window we have to protect the natural world we love and rely on. Many studies have noted the ecological urgency of conservation in the next 30 years to keep ahead of escalating development and habitat degradation. Protection must be an important Park conservation strategy while this finite opportunity exists.

While landscape-level connectivity can be enhanced through land protection, infrastructure such as wildlife crossings and trout-friendly culverts can provide pathways for wildlife within a system.

All of these efforts recognize the need for wildlife to roam freely, and sometimes widely, within a healthy ecological network.

Finally, ongoing monitoring and research in the Park can support these efforts by measuring what input Park ecosystems receive from the outside (including those that are unwanted) and what they send elsewhere.

PATH FOUR

Strategically manage public and private lands in the Park to protect ecological integrity.

Both public and private land management must be approached together and holistically to achieve long-term ecological integrity. Integrity of the whole requires a shift in thinking and recognition of the role that each plays.

> "When the Legislature said easements could be enforced and provided for the state to pay 50 percent of the property taxes, that led to easements making an enormous difference in the future of the Park."
>
> **– Former Adirondack Park Agency Commissioner**

Forest Preserve

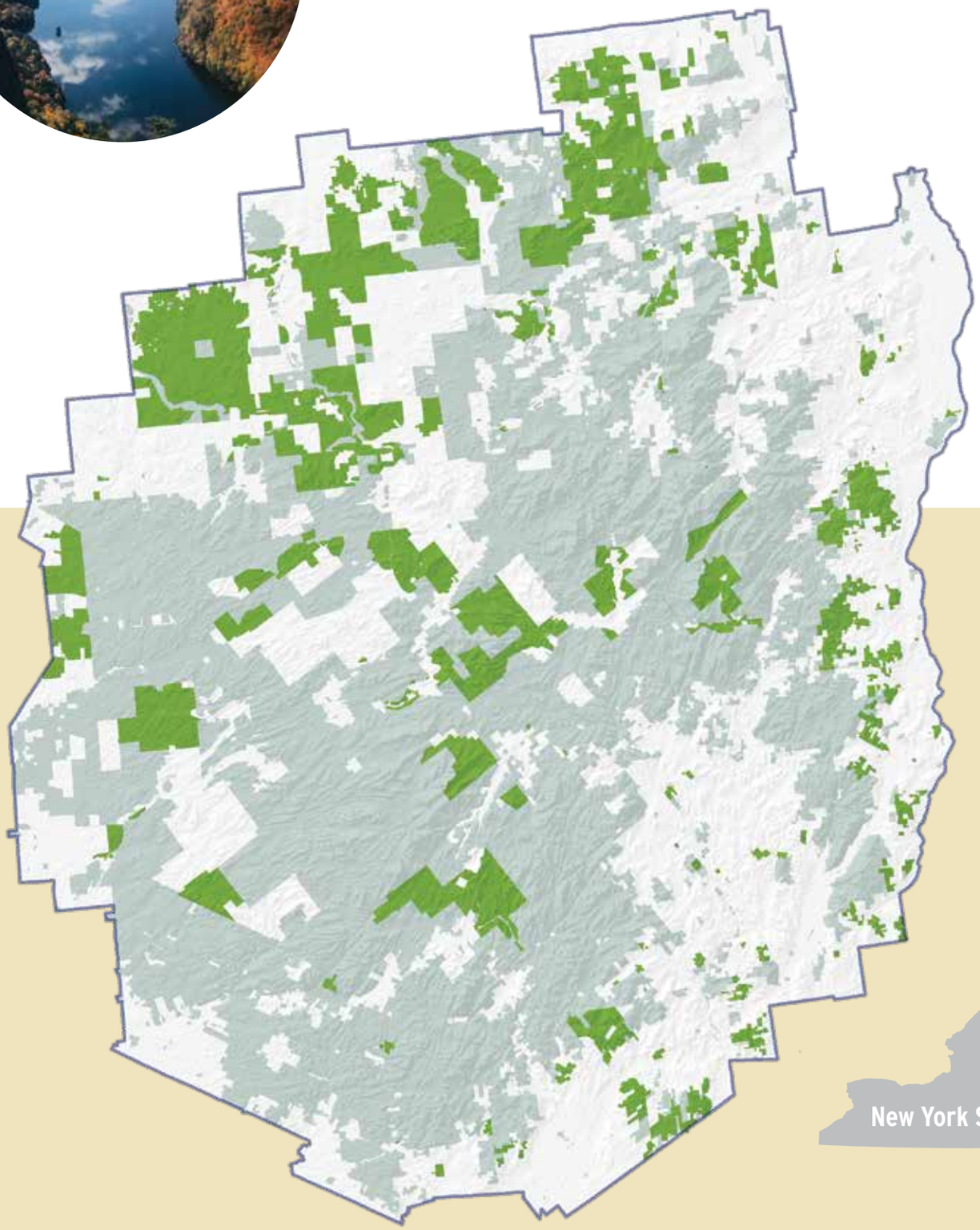
The public lands and waters of the Adirondack Park must be managed to prioritize ecological integrity, habitat connectivity, wilderness values, and wild character. These provide multiple co-benefits to humans and wildlife.

The Adirondack Forest Preserve comprises 2.6 million acres of mainly wild and ecologically intact land amidst one of the most populous states in the country. Regionally, these lands play a pivotal role. They provide protection for species across the Northeast. Wild creatures are threatened by escalating habitat loss and fragmentation and by inappropriate and excessive use of public lands. Individually these threats are usually localized and seemingly small or incremental: overuse on a popular trail or summit, a new house or two in what was once a forest or a field, an area that was previously quiet being "discovered" and tripling in recreational use. Cumulatively, however, the impact adds up and degrades the natural landscape for the species that make it home. The Forest Preserve can provide a refuge for these species if it is managed to prioritize its own integrity.

The Forest Preserve also provides important non-recreational benefits for humans across the globe. Older,

Conservation Easements

- State Forest Preserve
- State Conservation Easements



The role of Adirondack communities, farms, and forests in carbon sequestration and reduction in emissions is vital.

undisturbed forests have substantial value for sequestering carbon; they provide ecological values not found in the younger forests that predominantly characterize the Eastern United States and Canada.

Unit Management Plans and on-the-ground stewardship should not favor recreation over the protection of the ecological integrity of the landscape. A variety of recreational opportunities should exist. These include hiking, snowmobile, horse, ski, and bike trails. But they must not degrade the integrity of the ecosystem beyond rigorously defined limits of acceptable change.

Comprehensive planning that looks at all of the units within the Park as parts of a whole, rather than disconnected islands, will be an important component of management that prioritizes ecological integrity. (This idea is explored in greater depth in the management chapter.)

Private lands

Park management must also reflect the equally important role of private land stewardship within the Blue Line. Much of the stewardship of private lands goes back for many decades. Often it is part of the ethos of families that have lived and worked here for generations, as well as the families that have purchased land for conservation.

Sustainably managed private farms and woodlands can and must make an essential contribution to landscape connectivity and ecosystem health in the Park. They must be protected from subdivision, development, over-harvesting, or changes in use.

These same areas make a key contribution to the economic, cultural, wild character, and overall scenic qualities that help make the Park a global model of public/private conservation and community on a landscape level.

Conservation easement provisions and land-use regulations should be structured to ensure that ecological health is safeguarded and restored as needed on private lands while providing additional benefits. The Department of Environmental Conservation should pursue easements and acquisition on specific, priority lands. Such priorities must be identified through a science-based process that is updated to meet current challenges and needs. The 2020 VISION series helped identify priority lands that may be worth considering for stewardship, depending on the best understanding of today's needs. These easements must have provisions that ensure ecological integrity, climate resilience, habitat connectivity, and wild character.

Incentive programs should be developed and implemented to actively encourage, support, and reward best management practices, particularly on working farms and forests. These should be available both on lands protected by easements and on private lands not so encumbered.

PATH FIVE

Manage the Park in recognition that ecosystems have finite capacity to absorb or mitigate impacts.

Ecosystems have a finite capacity to absorb or mitigate human, biological, or climatic impacts without loss of integrity. As with a human under stress, at some point, the ecosystem will reach its breaking point. In 2021, impacts are cumulative and compounding. They are also legion: they include recreational overuse; pollutants in the soil, water, and air; excessive levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere; and biological impacts from exotic invasive species and pathogens. Individually and collectively, these stressors can cripple the integrity of ecosystems.

> "It's hard to tell someone that the next cup of water that goes in a boat will sink it. It's subjective and hard to measure."
>
> **– Former Adirondack Park Agency Counsel**

One example: Compaction of soil caused by hikers is cumulative—each footfall adds a small amount to the problem by further compressing the soil. If hikers walk around the edge of a muddy spot in the trail, they will trample the plants growing at the trail's edge. Even the hardiest grasses can withstand only so much trampling: too much will kill them. Without living plant roots to absorb water, the edges of the trail get muddy and the wet spot in the center of the trail will continue to grow. The footfalls are cumulative, but the growth of the muddy area (and the eventual erosion) is compounding. The system (grasses, etc.) can absorb impacts for a while, but eventually, it will reach its limit and succumb.

Advocacy, policies, and funding must recognize the complex nature of impacts and not allow Park degradation through "one thousand cuts." An effective Park protection strategy must take a comprehensive and holistic approach in order for both human and natural communities to thrive in 2021 and into the future. **This requires long-range, proactive planning to prevent impacts rather than reacting to damage that has been done.**

Both management and advocacy efforts need to include communication and outreach to the public. Public support

is vital to maintain funding to address threats to the ecological integrity and wild character of the Park.

Many of these threats originate far outside the Blue Line. Examples include acid precipitation, air pollution, climate change, and invasive species. Solutions to these threats require broad-based public support and recognition of the global significance of the Park beyond New York State. They will also require local Adirondack groups to engage at the federal level to encourage policies related to clean air, water, and funding. Fortunately, the fight against acid rain demonstrates the effectiveness of this work at the federal level.

Monitoring and reporting on impacts to ecosystems can enable warnings that trigger management action when those impacts reach predetermined thresholds. Thresholds are indicators of when a resource condition has degraded to a point that management must take action.

The 2018 High Peaks Unit Management Plan Amendment provides examples of such a system. The plan sets thresholds for concentrated use of the Boreas Ponds Tract. Activity exceeding the threshold would trigger the DEC to build additional campsites to disperse users at Boreas. This is an example of adaptive management in action.

PATH SIX

Manage the Park to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Fulfilling the promise of the Park cannot be achieved without mitigating and adapting to the challenges of escalating climate change.

The role of Adirondack communities, farms, and forests in carbon sequestration and reduction in emissions is vital. Increasingly, scientists recognize that natural climate solutions have a major role to play in global carbon sequestration. Natural climate solutions that focus on conservation, restoration, and improved land management are critical to increase carbon storage and prevent greenhouse gas emissions. They are a key component of meeting both state goals articulated in the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act and global goals of the Paris Accords.

Mature forests are particularly important in this work both because mature trees sequester more carbon than young trees and because mature forests have less-disturbed soil layers. Intact soil itself is now known to be important in the sequestration of carbon. The Forest Preserve provides important sequestration value.

The Adirondacks can play a major role in addressing climate change through the conservation of mature forests, climate-focused management of private lands, and a strategic, science-driven emphasis on conserving climate-resilient and connected landscapes.

Forests working for all

In 2021, working forests within the Park are the most intensively harvested of any in the Northeast outside of Maine. **As a result, the current climate mitigation value of Adirondack forests is low compared with those in surrounding regions.**

This can be improved. Adirondack forests are an important source of fiber to the paper mills in Ticonderoga and Glens Falls, and those mills are currently an important component of the region's economy. But there are clearly opportunities to develop new forest management practices that increase both rates of carbon sequestration and the production and local use and manufacture of higher-value forest products.

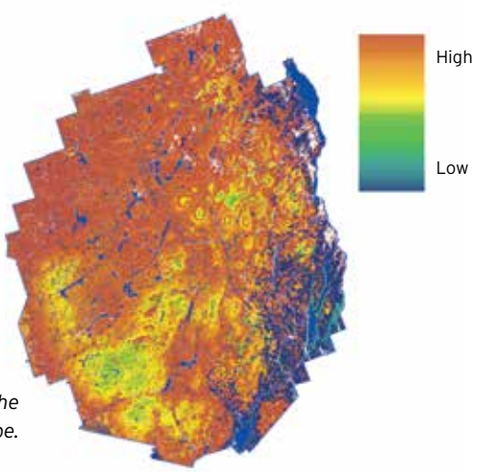
To incentivize new forest management, the Adirondack Park should promote a market for higher-value forest products (such as furniture grade lumber and high-quality veneer). Marketing strategies could brand such products as "Adirondack produced." Low-carbon forestry could also be marketed. Incentives could be provided for those who manage forests to increase rates of carbon sequestration, including longer forest rotation periods. Some of these forest management practices exist, and others need greater development. Incentives provided to landowners are key to making this work. Private forest owners within the Adirondack Park can contribute to carbon sequestration that benefits all.

> "Climate change is a huge issue we have to face—not because we can stop it but because we can help people understand the process."
>
> **– Former Adirondack Park Agency Commissioner**

Climate adaptation

Climate adaptation is likely to be as important as climate mitigation within the Adirondack Park. Adaptation includes the built and the natural environment. For the natural environment, adaptation requires accommodation and connectivity to allow the migration of species in a warming climate. For successful migration, favorable conditions must exist based on the underlying geology, microclimates, and local and regional connectivity. Preservation of routes connecting different ecotypes is important. Efforts are already underway in 2021 to identify such areas.

In terms of the built environment, adaptation to climate change requires significant changes to infrastructure. Features such as bridges, sewage systems, and buildings susceptible to the impacts of climate change must be modified. Funding for this infrastructure upgrade and for the planning to properly execute it must come from the state and federal government.



Future climate stress in the Adirondack landscape.

Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act

New York's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, passed in 2020, envisions a dramatic build-out of renewable energy facilities throughout the state over the next 30 years. **Responsible renewable energy development should be encouraged within the Adirondack Park.** The Adirondack Council's renewable energy principles provide one example of a responsible renewable energy policy that should be followed. These principles include consideration of the scenic qualities of the Park and the need for renewable energy projects to benefit the communities in which they are sited.

PATH SEVEN

Build a broad and diverse constituency for nature and the Adirondacks.

Preserving the integrity and character of the Adirondack Park in a way that allows it to achieve its promise requires cooperation and participation from the larger community.

It will also require shared values concerning the natural world. Sharing values isn't a question of setting rules and restrictions. It's an educational imperative to help institutions and people understand the cumulative impact of their individual actions, both positive and negative. This allows individuals to build their own conservation ethic.

The goal of the Adirondack conservation message should be to ensure that all people, including those in under-represented communities, feel welcomed here and understand that the Adirondacks are theirs. People of color, people from marginalized communities, disabled individuals, people from the LGBTQ community, and urban dwellers are all part of the Adirondack constituency. The Park is for everyone. All people have a right to feel at home here, for a weekend or a lifetime.

> "Can we have a conversation with people to affect their behavior, how they vote, what they bring to the Park? It all feeds back and forth."
>
> **– Former Adirondack Park Agency Commissioner**

With great power comes great responsibility

The Adirondacks are a shared landscape. Residents and visitors share it with the larger community of life. Humanity has tremendous power to change the landscape; with that power comes the responsibility to be judicious and consider the consequences of our collective actions.

Places like the Adirondack Park help people develop their own ethics through encounters with the natural world. Ethics are a personal code of conduct. Personal experience is a powerful component of developing conservation ethics. The joy of discovering a pristine campsite may lead a visitor to pick up trash when they encounter it elsewhere.

However, education also has a role to play in helping all understand the effects of their actions. Education can foster an awareness of nature in its fullness, which may lead the individual to develop the sense of the shared responsibility to protect it.

Such learning should be part of a Park-wide education effort, conducted by a corps of interpreters. Visitor education could be conducted in each community through either a state program or a partnership between the state and a local organization. For those living within the state, the public school system can contribute to these goals.

Embracing the science

Conservation requires action, both collective and individual. It must also be science-driven. For conservation policies to be successful, **people need to have a greater understanding of the methods and principles behind science so that they can have confidence in its guidance.** People themselves will embrace the values and take the actions necessary for success. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a global example of the importance of trusting science and the catastrophic implications of failing to do so.

An effective way to help more people understand and embrace science is to involve people of diverse backgrounds, ages, and communities in citizen science projects and other scientific work. The results of this work must be accessible to all. It is especially important to involve people from communities and demographic groups now underrepresented in the Park.

There are several popular programs in the Adirondacks that can serve as models for ongoing, interactive research involving all ages. These include surveys for invasive species through the Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program, the Adirondack Loon Census, monarch butterfly monitoring, and seasonal bird counts (for example, Audubon's Christmas Bird Count). Through such programs, science becomes something that is done by everyone.

Public dashboard

A public science dashboard should be available, showing key indices for ecological integrity in specific ecosystems. This would be tied to long-term monitoring efforts coordinated through the Adirondack Park Agency. Such a dashboard could be modeled on the National Park Service's Vital Signs project or public COVID-19 dashboards. It would give people the ability to learn and follow progress on a wide range of Adirondack research. It would also be a place to link to reporting on state-funded research projects.

This dashboard, in combination with comprehensive education and outreach, can create exciting opportunities for learning nature ethics and scientific exploration.

One program that was originally envisioned to engage citizen scientists and individuals from across disciplines was the Adirondack All-Taxa Biotic Inventory. If reactivated and reinvigorated, this effort could provide useful information for a public science dashboard. It is also an exciting project in which to engage the public in accessible science.

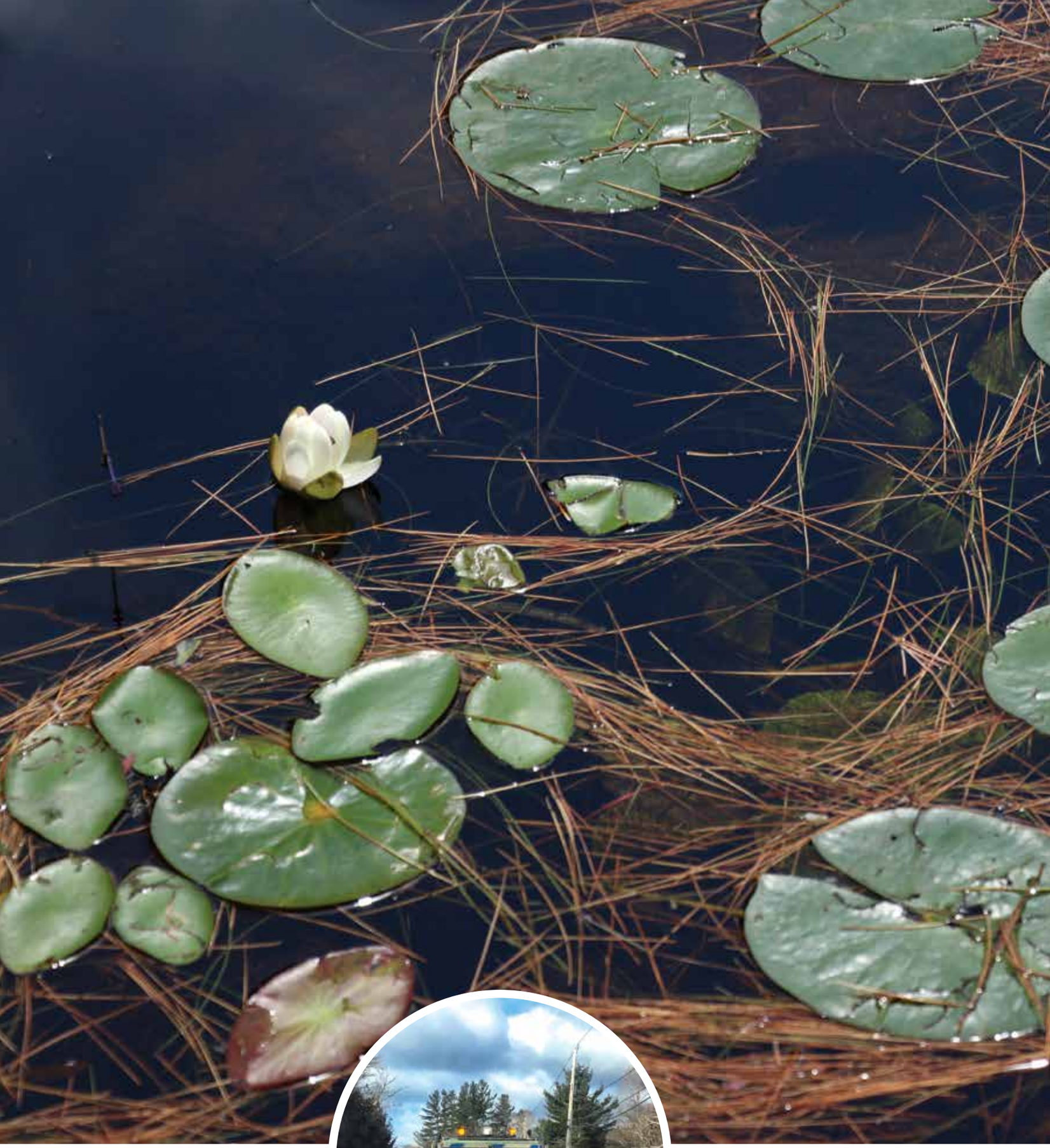
TOGETHER, THESE SEVEN PATHS AND ASSOCIATED RECOMMENDATIONS CAN MOVE THE ADIRONDACK PARK TOWARD A FUTURE WHERE ITS ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY AND WILD CHARACTER ARE CELEBRATED AND PRESERVED, NOT SIMPLY BY A HANDFUL OF PARK MANAGERS AND SCIENTISTS, BUT BY ALL.

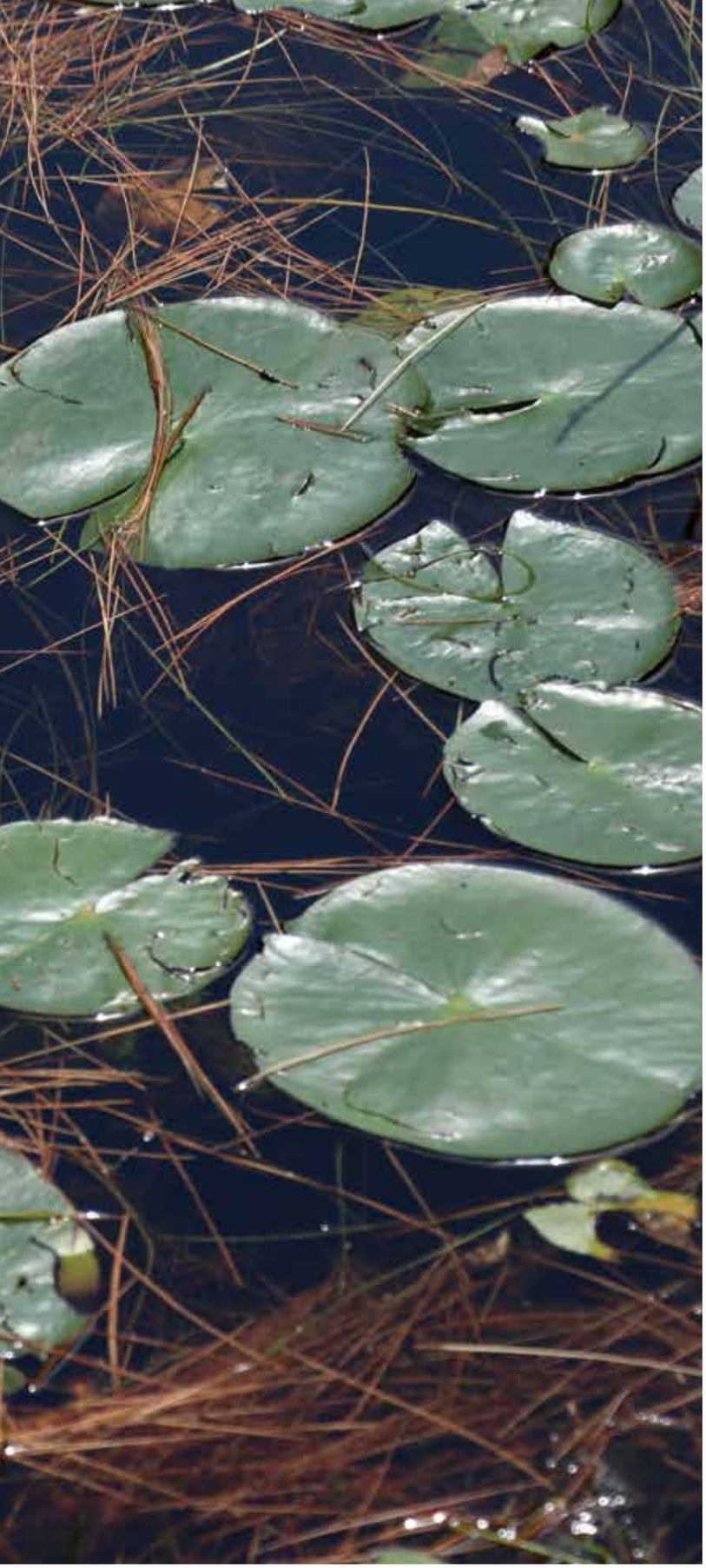
The Adirondack Park, the inspiration for the federal Wilderness Act of 1964, could again become the inspiration of a landmark change in thinking—where science and shared conservation values drive an agenda for fulfilling a promise: that of an intact landscape, where humans exercise restraint to live alongside natural systems and processes, and where all creatures, wild and human, feel at home.

Young visitors, like these explorers from Girls Inc., may grow to be influential advocates for protecting the Park.

Invasive species threaten the future of the Adirondacks. They can interfere with natural processes, degrading ecosystems and making them less able to withstand other threats, such as climate change. Inspecting and decontaminating boats as they move from one waterbody to another is an important strategy for combatting aquatic invasives.

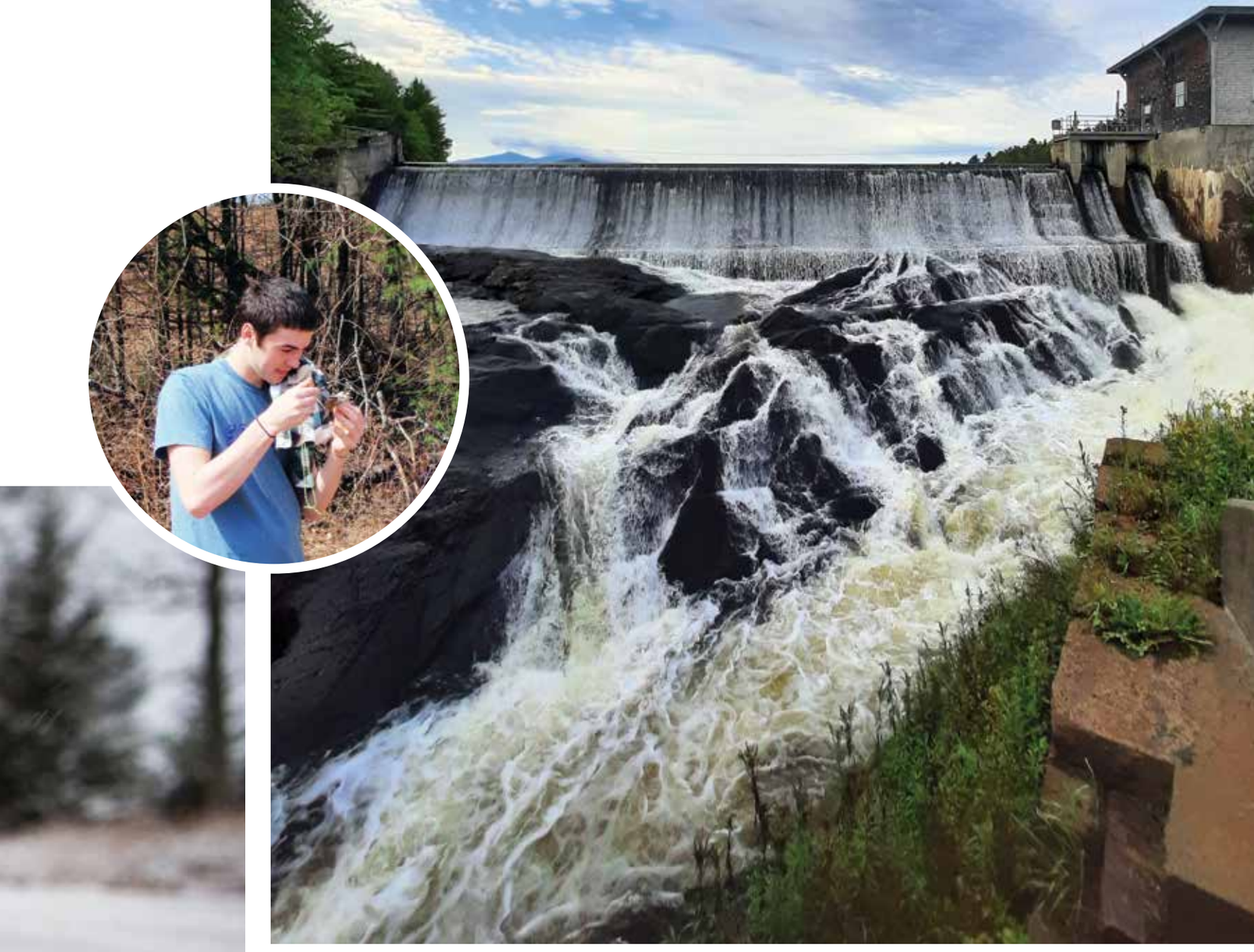
Sustainable local farms provide food for Adirondack communities while creating environmental benefits in the Park and surrounding region. They also help diversify the Park's economy by providing jobs outside the tourist industry. These scenes are from Wild Work Farm, bottom left, Oregano Flats Farm, right, Echo Farm, inset, and Adirondack Hay and Grain, top left.





Improving culverts and other human infrastructure as the Ausable River Association and others did here, protects water quality and the species that depend on it, and human communities. Trout-friendly culverts permit fish to adapt to weather by moving into streams where conditions are favorable. Salt applied to roads in winter poses a long-lasting threat to water quality.

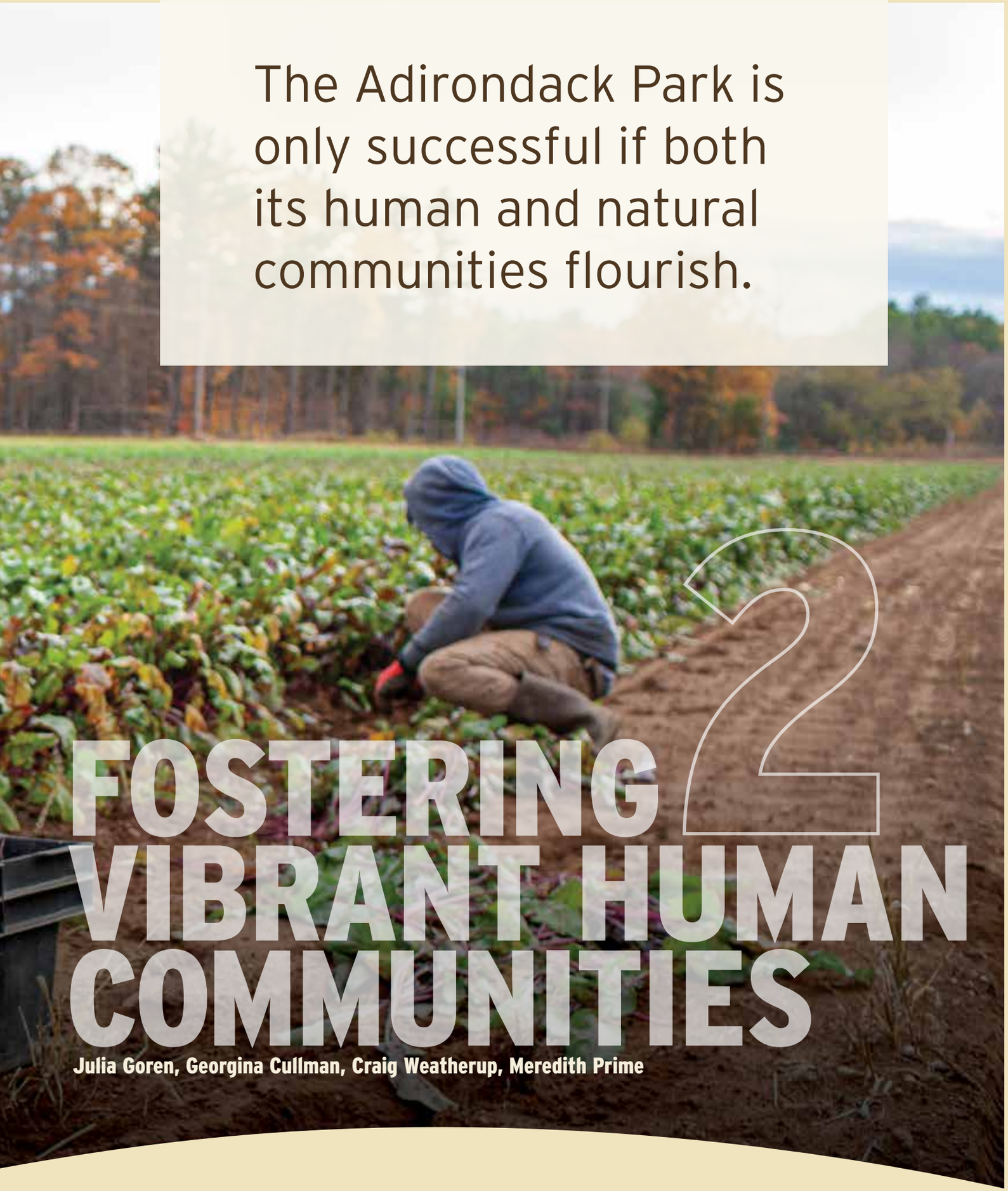
Threats to the ecological integrity of the Adirondacks take on many forms. Road salt enters groundwater and finds its way into waterbodies. Dams across the Park's rivers are obstacles to species that need to move freely. And beech bark disease attacks the American beech, as seen on this tree under the trail sign. Researchers, like this Elizabethtown student, work to understand nature's processes.




STOP
BARRIER
AHEAD
STOP
TRAIL

Successful Park communities embrace local enterprises like Juniper Hill Farm in Wadhams and the Campstore in Lake Pleasant, and local leadership as demonstrated by the Common Ground Alliance of the Adirondacks.

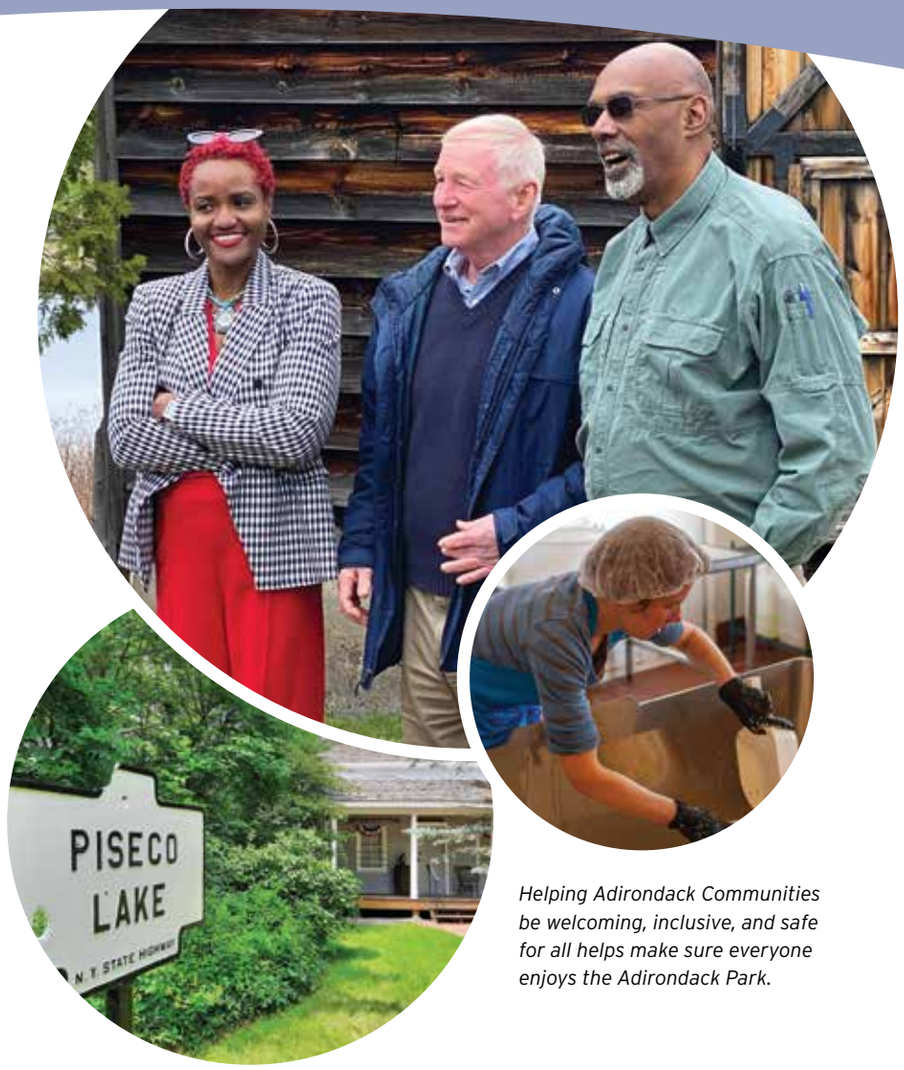
The Adirondack Park is only successful if both its human and natural communities flourish.



2 FOSTERING VIBRANT HUMAN COMMUNITIES

Julia Goren, Georgina Cullman, Craig Weatherup, Meredith Prime

This place is a powerful example for the world of a landscape that can provide an abundant home for its human and non-human residents, where both can prosper. As people across the globe increasingly embrace this model of conservation across large, peopled landscapes, the Adirondack Park shines as an early and premier model—and a model that we collectively need and want to succeed. More than ever, the world needs this model to succeed. However, to do so requires recognizing and acknowledging past and present challenges and moving forward to build new opportunities.



Helping Adirondack Communities be welcoming, inclusive, and safe for all helps make sure everyone enjoys the Adirondack Park.

The human communities of the Adirondack Park have suffered loss over the past decades. The population of the younger generation has fallen, both as a result of declining birth rates and of people leaving the Park. In a self-reinforcing cycle, young people leave because they perceive a lack of opportunity, leading businesses to close, reducing opportunities, and causing more people to leave.

While real, this trend is not unique to the Adirondacks. As with climate change, large forces from outside the Park have threatened the human communities within, and the Park is experiencing the same economic trends that challenge much of rural America.

In the Adirondacks, changing this story is possible. The Adirondack Park has advantages that few, if any, areas have across the country and the world. Protection of clean air, water, and open spaces are enshrined in the State Constitution, upheld by the people of New York State. For those who treasure access to wild places, the quality of life in the Adirondack Park is unmatched in the lower 48 states. For those who thrive in small, close-knit communities, those of the Adirondack Park have the potential to offer everything that is best of small community life.

PATHS

It will take work to reach these goals. While Adirondack communities are different and specific solutions will vary, progress along five key paths will lead to a better future.

1 Foster a strong sense of identity

so that residents and visitors feel connected to the place.

2 Ensure there is a diverse spectrum of jobs that pay well.

3 Create infrastructure of all kinds

to provide the backbone that supports individuals, local businesses, and communities.

4 Provide first-rate educational pathways

of various kinds to help students of all ages thrive.

5 Work together as communities,

either in small-scale collaboration or across the region, to share expertise and resources.

The VISION 2050 project lays out recommendations to help achieve the goals of economic and demographically vibrant communities. While these are not the only paths to reaching these goals, these recommendations, if implemented, will help make progress. They come from interviews, discussions, and workshops with experts in community development, education, business, local and state government, tourism, and rural development.

The Adirondack Council will be a supporter, champion, partner, and sometimes a leader in this work. As an environmental advocacy organization, its expertise lies outside the traditional work of economic and community development. Yet, this work is essential to the success of the Adirondack Park, and the Council is committed to that success. The Council seeks to work in collaboration with partners to achieve the dream of VISION 2050.

Under that vision, by 2050 the human communities of the Park will be thriving in the many and diverse ways that describe human communities. Residents will share a sense of optimism about their prospects that comes to replace the hopelessness that is all too common today, especially among young people.

Job opportunities will entice residents to make their future in the Park and draw others to establish their homes here. Non-exportable jobs in Park infrastructure, education, research, clean water, and recreation will form the core of the new economy, but wellness, farming, forestry, trades, and remote work all have an important place in the Adirondack economic future. The burgeoning culture of distributed workforces will protect the Adirondacks from vulnerabilities that arise from over-reliance on tourism as a singular economic engine.

Economic strength will center on the Park's villages and hamlets, which will develop the infrastructure needed to concentrate development to protect open natural areas around them and remain connected to the Park's wild legacy. Residents outside the hamlets, including those working in sustainable agriculture and forestry, will maintain their ways of life without being threatened by unfettered development.

Five interconnected paths help achieve this reality. No two Adirondack communities are the same; specifics for success will be unique to each individual community, but the factors that create an environment allowing a community to thrive are similar.

"As difficult as it is to revitalize our small town in the Adirondack region, things like bringing art downtown [are] really a signal to people that live here and people who visit here that this is a place that has a community behind it."

– Community activist

PATH ONE

Foster a strong sense of identity to create common bonds among residents, inspire young people to stay and make their lives here, and attract people from outside the Park to settle within.

Identity and a strong connection to place are central to thriving communities. When residents love their town, it shows, and visitors feel it. Expressions of this are found in hometown pride in a local parade, a well-maintained and often-used playground, honoring of local history, a well-attended home game, and main street beautification. These are attributes of a thriving community. As an added benefit, strong local pride and identity are attractive to visitors and can boost tourism.

To create an atmosphere where a sense of place and hope abound, communities must have programs to protect popular public gathering spaces and revitalize main streets. New programs should help young people find career pathways that enable them to stay close to home. Schools, colleges, and non-formal education centers should help forge connections between people and the cultural and natural histories of the Park.

Revitalizing hamlets

The first strategy to foster identity is to **assist hamlets and villages in nurturing strong communities centered on walkable neighborhoods with appealing main streets.** Such places have amenities that serve residents as well as visitors.

To do so, VISION 2050 recommends supporting training for community development specialists throughout the Park. These specialists can find funding and provide assistance with grant writing, planning, and administration. They would work on behalf of community members to help achieve shared goals. They can help a community figure out how to highlight its unique strengths. These might include public gathering places such as farmers' markets, local parks and playgrounds, and nature trails. Currently, community development specialists are few and far between in the Adirondack Park, but the impact of these individuals is substantial.

While it is clear that individual communities should have ownership over their own projects, support can also come from regional efforts. Grant writers with expertise in state and federal programs, as well as private funding, should work regionally to assist communities. Within the Park, Cloudsplitter Foundation hired a grant writer to work with regional non-profits, leveraging $13 for every dollar invested in the same projects. A similar program across the Park would empower projects driven by volunteers or part-time staff to secure needed funds.

Each community knows its needs best. Development programs should prioritize meeting each community's need and letting each community determine what its most pressing needs are. Access to housing, fresh food, healthcare, child care—local voices are best equipped to determine which needs are top priority.

Create a Park-wide program to identify and redevelop abandoned industrial or commercial sites that once formed the economic and social hub of communities. In addition to providing crucial jobs, these sites were the gathering places that fostered community identity and engagement. Before its decline, the Hotel Saranac was the visible icon of the Village of Saranac Lake. Countless weddings, graduations, and winter carnival parades were celebrated from its ballroom balcony. Redevelopment has restored it as the centerpiece of the village. Similar sites exist in almost every community.

These sites should be redeveloped in a way that preserves their historical significance to the community and restores their economic importance to the area. Examples could be former mills, hotels, or worker neighborhoods that grew up with mining and logging enterprises. The Oval Wood Dish factory is a current example of a redevelopment project that has great potential and significance for Tupper Lake.

In order to create the density and critical mass for businesses to flourish, some **modest expansion of hamlet boundaries should be considered.** These would need to keep in mind the hamlet's own plans and capacity, as well as natural borders such as streams and wetlands, topographic and elevation changes, fragile adjacent ecosystems, and human features such as roads and utilities.

Where practical and needed, hamlet boundary expansion could allow for pedestrian infrastructure and additional housing within walking distance of a business district.

Enhancing main streets

A second strategy for fostering a strong sense of identity is to **renew and protect main streets.** In many communities, existing main street storefronts are vacant, underutilized, or otherwise in need of investment. These detract from a sense of community vitality. Meanwhile, some communities lack essential businesses, and new entrepreneurs may struggle to find storefront locations whose rent they can afford. Deteriorating downtown storefronts encourage some businesses to build on the edge of a hamlet or village, facilitating sprawl. Such sprawl detracts both from the character of the hamlet and from the wild character of the Park.

A program could be developed and piloted to combine private donations and state grant monies to protect and use existing storefront structures in Adirondack hamlets. The program could own buildings and rent them at a reduced rate to small, independently-owned businesses.

This would accomplish four important goals. First, more occupied, well-maintained storefronts would help revitalize main street business districts. Second, assisting independently owned businesses helps preserve and create jobs. Third, development would remain concentrated in hamlet areas. Fourth, upstairs units could be updated as needed to provide housing, furthering the concept of walkable neighborhoods. While hamlet-centered development has been a goal since the creation of the Adirondack Park Agency, additional financial resources could help

it become a reality. Different avenues exist to support such a program, including donations of money, purchases of property, easements, etc.

Across the Northeast, the Northern Forest Center has attempted something similar by purchasing and renovating a storefront in Lancaster, NH and purchasing, renovating, and renting housing in Millinocket, ME. These efforts have been part of larger revitalization efforts in these communities and have had positive impact.

Keeping history alive

A third strategy to foster identity is to **ensure that cultural and community history is available to residents and visitors.** The human history of the Park is deep, abundant, and often little understood. In particular, the history of indigenous peoples and people of color within the Adirondacks is often overlooked.

A Park-wide interpretive plan would create a framework to help capture and share each community's unique stories. Such plans are a common tool of museums and National Parks to lift up the narratives about a place. These can also include natural history so that visitors better understand the area. Local residents should be the voices that explain how current generations connect with their past. Telling the stories of a place builds local identity and pride. These accounts can also help strengthen the Park as a whole—visitors learn about the rich cultural history of the Adirondack Park, and residents reaffirm how the community stories are intertwined. Such a plan would work in partnership with local, county, and regional history museums, helping to ensure that collectively, key stories are shared.

Young people have to be part of the vision. Communities should partner with school systems, camps, museums, and others that share a mission of educating and working with youth to help them craft a fresh vision for the future. They will be the ones to help fashion communities where they want to put down roots.

Community engagement

A fourth strategy to foster identity is to **encourage active engagement with the cultural and political life of the community.** Being part of something larger than oneself creates a sense of belonging, whether that entity is a sports team, a musical group, the school or library board, or any other entity. Participating in a group that contributes to the life of the community invests individuals in their community's achievements.

To encourage this engagement, communities should **leverage public and private funding for events that make hamlets and villages centers of creative life.** Traveling or "pop-up" performances and event spaces can provide intergenerational and diverse cultural experiences. These can be scaled to any size community. Examples from across the Adirondack Park include traveling plays produced by the Adirondack Lakes Center for the Arts in Blue Mountain Lake, Shakespeare in the Park, performances by musicians in local band shells, events like Tupper Lake's Woodsmen's Days, commissioned murals, and art installations in libraries. During COVID-19, even greater creativity produced events such as Saranac Lake's Dance Sanctuary's "drive-in" dance recital at Tucker Potato Farms, the Wild Center's drive-in movie nights, and more.

In addition to broad participation in the arts, **community decision-making must include greater and more diverse involvement.** This should include town and village government, school and planning boards, advisory groups, and governance of important institutions such as libraries. Many of these groups express a desire for greater community participation, whether through attendance at a meeting, public comment, or running for elected office. Participation in these processes invests individuals in their community.

Often, logistics become obstacles to wide participation. Meetings scheduled when many cannot attend, in venues that lack childcare, or in places that are hard to get to can create unintentional barriers to greater involvement. Working to remove these obstacles can foster greater participation and civic engagement. Again, through the COVID-19 pandemic, alternatives like webcasting meetings, providing opportunities for asynchronous participation, and other creative solutions became commonplace.

Internship opportunities for youth to engage in community decision-making should be available across the Adirondack Park. Schools and local government could partner to make this possible. Civic-minded young people bring fresh ideas to the table. They are the next generation of community leaders, and it's important to encourage their participation early. One example of success is the Wild Center's Youth Climate Summit, which has helped high school students participate in Climate Smart Communities task forces, helping their communities to take steps toward reducing their carbon footprint.

Finally, to foster identity, we must **celebrate what is unique about the Adirondack Park.** Clean water and air are essential to life and desired by all. The Park's commitment to protecting these necessities forever, and the wildlands that make these necessities possible, are attractive. Telling this story should be a part of cultivating and deepening appreciation of this unique place for residents and visitors alike.

PATH TWO

Both public and private sources must pull together talent and financial capital to create and sustain a spectrum of well-paying jobs. A diverse, well-paid workforce will be able to afford necessities like food and housing and sustain a high quality of life. This will retain and attract residents from all backgrounds and circumstances.

Job opportunities and people to fill those positions are the twin challenges at the heart of community vitality. Currently,

there are too few people occupying particular jobs (to name just a few: skilled tradespeople of all types; doctors; surveyors; hospitality workers). Moreover, there are well-paying, career-track jobs that could and should exist within the Adirondack Park, jobs that could attract new residents from across the country to make their homes here.

> "We have to have a multi-level, multi-faceted economy. An over-reliance on tourism, for instance, brings vulnerability."
>
> **– Local government leader**

Job opportunities that center on an outdoor recreation economy and expanding opportunities in green infrastructure will entice people to make their future in the Park. Locally owned retail and service businesses will continue to contribute to their communities, both tangibly and in the character of the place. Technology and an expanded culture of remote work will protect the Adirondacks from an over-concentration on tourism as a singular economic engine.

Appropriate growth goals

One strategy to create jobs is to **use comprehensive plans to guide the creation of growth goals appropriate to each individual community's resources and capacity.** Communities such as Long Lake, and many others have comprehensive plans which lay out the community's own goals for the future. Those goals can help articulate how many new people (and thus new jobs) the area seeks.

Managing the Adirondack Park appropriately would **create non-retail jobs in the recreation economy, Park management and infrastructure, environmental sciences, and education. Beyond these, green technology and skilled trades, farming, and forest products all have growth potential.** Forest Rangers, trail workers, researchers, and educators of all kinds are the type of jobs necessary to manage the Park. These are career jobs with tremendous appeal, as applications for trail crew positions demonstrate.

Many other jobs, from guides and outfitters to shuttle services and gear manufacturers, directly support the recreation economy. Positions in hospitality and retail also serve this economy.

Clean-water infrastructure provides a new source of potential jobs in building, engineering and maintaining new wastewater treatment, drinking water, and septic systems. Clean-energy jobs include solar, wind, and hydro-engineering, installation, and maintenance. Given New York State's ambitious energy goals through the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), these jobs will continue to grow in importance in the coming years. The Adirondack Park is well situated to host many of these positions.

Federal and state initiatives, such as the Biden administration's Infrastructure Plan and the CLCPA, **create opportunities to build jobs in green construction, renewable energy, and clean water infrastructure.** Such work includes research, facilities design and management, construction, and operations.

Finally, teleworking is a new reality that's likely to last. The Adirondack Park witnessed an influx of seasonal residents making a longer-term stay during COVID-19, as remote work was the norm for many. Some of these individuals may choose to stay, deciding that remote work from a remote place is more appealing than living in a crowded city or suburb. The Adirondack Park should **incentivize the relocation of remote workers** as Vermont has done.

The quality of life within the Park, with access to wild places, outdoor spaces to roam, and clean water and air, may also persuade Adirondack young people to remain here, working remotely at jobs that in the past would require them to move.

Four-season recreation

Another strategy is to **build a four-season recreation economy that is diversified and resilient in the face of climate change.** Winter recreation is likely to be threatened in decades to come due to warming winter temperatures. Now is the time to plan for alternatives to recreational activities that depend on snow. Efforts should focus on small businesses, including camps, and not simply major resorts. Some camps are already using their facilities for alternative programming, such as retreats, experiential education, and events to build a year-round business with year-round employment.

Vocational education

Initiatives should be created and funded to expand education and vocational training to create a trained workforce ready for these projects. Educational institutions such as North Country Community College and Franklin-Essex-Hamilton County BOCES are already creating training programs to ensure that a workforce is ready for green-technology jobs, but more support for such training is necessary. Additionally, there is already a shortage of skilled labor in the trades. These jobs are critically important, pay well, and will always be relevant. Expanded vocational training can help close this gap.

A history of healing

The Adirondack Park has a legacy as a place of healing, wellness, and intellectual and creative retreat. With a renewed global interest in wellness and well-being, there is an opportunity to **build upon this legacy.** Communities within the Park have a tremendous opportunity to create destinations for nature therapy, nature retreats, forest bathing *(shinrin-yoku),* yoga, meditation, and wellness.

Climate sanctuary

As climate change renders more places across the country and globe inhospitable, the Adirondack Park will increase its appeal as a potential home. There's an opportunity to **welcome those migrating due to climate change** and see a more diverse population in communities across the Adirondacks. Doing so will require communities to be ready and willing to embrace newcomers and build a reputation for being safe, welcoming, and inclusive.

Job opportunities that center on an outdoor recreation economy and expanding opportunities in green infrastructure will entice people to make their future in the Park. Locally owned retail and service businesses will continue to contribute to their communities, both tangibly and in the character of the place.

Small and local

Another strategy to build jobs in Adirondack communities is to **support programs and initiatives that help small local businesses, either existing or new.** Locally owned businesses offer year-round employment opportunities in the Park. In addition to providing jobs that enable individuals to support the local economy, local businesses give back to their communities. Sports teams, charities, scout troops, and schools are just a few entities that benefit from the generosity of locally owned businesses. These community pillars also contribute to the unique identity of a place. Examples abound across the Adirondack Park, such as the Old Forge Hardware Store, the Speculator Department Store, the Northville 5 & 10, Hoss's Country Corner, Saranac Lake's Village Mercantile, and many others.

A well-capitalized source of funding should be developed to encourage local ownership of such important assets. In addition to the above-mentioned stores, these can include co-working and business incubation spaces that nurture employers who may grow in the community. The Carry in Saranac Lake is one such example.

Funding for branding and marketing of Adirondack-made and Adirondack-grown products should be increased. Vermont has been highly successful in marketing Vermont-made and grown products. Ubiquitous branding and highly publicized locavore challenges have made Vermont a model that the Adirondack Park could emulate. Region-wide funding would benefit individual growers and producers. More business would allow these owners to expand and provide employment to others.

In a related vein, **incentives should be created for investment in new, Adirondack-grown technologies.** One example would be investment in furniture grade veneer production to create processing capability for high-grade Adirondack wood products. This would help create a market for a unique product that can be environmentally and economically sustainable.

PATH THREE

Provide infrastructure to support economic, social, and environmental sustainability. This includes achievable and affordable housing, universally accessible communications networks, and clean water and energy.

Economic strength will center on the Park's villages and hamlets, which will build the infrastructure needed to concentrate development in a way that protects open natural areas around them. Doing so protects and connects to the Park's wild legacy. Rural residents outside the hamlets, including those working in sustainable agriculture and forestry, will be able to maintain their ways of life without being threatened by development.

Achievable housing

One critical strategy to achieve this is to work **with federal, state, and local authorities to address the housing need.** Lack of quality housing for rent or purchase is a major concern in many communities across the Park. Affordable housing is defined as costing less than 30 percent of a household's income. Achievable or attainable housing is defined as affordable to households with an income between 80 and 120% of the area's median income. Both are necessary to create an environment where communities can thrive and attract residents from across the socio-economic spectrum.

The housing crisis makes it difficult to attract new residents or hire for positions as prospects cannot find a place to live. In some communities, this trend has been exacerbated by a growth in short-term rentals, which change the character of neighborhoods and price out young families and other potential buyers. In other communities, houses are primarily second homes. Throughout the Park, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically energized the real estate market. Housing (and materials such as lumber) increased substantially in price, further exacerbating housing inequities. A similar trend was seen after September 11, 2001, suggesting that the Adirondacks will continue to be seen as a place of refuge in a crisis.

To combat this, **public and private lending institutions need to see quality, attainable housing as essential to equal opportunity and key to economic development.** If the Adirondack Park is to retain or attract workers, especially young families, it needs places where they can afford to live. This will make it possible to address the twin challenges of population decline and income inequality.

> "We need quality affordable housing. We don't have a lot of land to build on and where we do have land, we have to overcome roadblocks."
>
> **– Local government leader**

Planning and land-use regulation must not be a barrier to creating housing; they must create incentives for its construction. For example, localities could strengthen requirements for developers to include affordable housing for both

North Country Creamery, a Keeseville dairy, is an example of a small, locally owned business that can offer year-round employment beyond the tourism industry.

full-time residents and seasonal workers in their plans. Permit requests before the Adirondack Park Agency in 2021 from Saranac Lake and the Village of Lake Placid include affordable units in the development plans. Expansion of hamlets, where done with care for the natural borders, should be tied to creating quality, affordable, and attainable housing.

Robust communications

A second infrastructure strategy is to **ensure that the Park provides universal access to communications technology that is at least of the quality that's available outside the Blue Line.** Communications are essential for all aspects of community life, including school, healthcare, remote work, and commerce. Efforts to retain and attract residents and businesses cannot succeed without adequate communications.

VISION 2050 cannot predict what the communications technology of 2050 will look like, but the communities of the Adirondack Park must have access to service that is equivalent to what communities outside the Park have, at a price that is affordable for all. This would require careful foresight and planning.

Climate plans

A third strategy to ensuring quality infrastructure is to **identify the risks that climate change presents and embark on a Park-wide program to respond to the changing environment.** Climate change will threaten essential infrastructure. A collaborative workforce with local, state, and federal support should create and implement climate resiliency and hazard mitigation plans. Every community within the Adirondack Park should have a plan that identifies and upgrades threatened transportation, utility, communications, and other critical networks.

Consideration of hamlet boundary expansion must take into consideration infrastructure that is currently within a floodplain.

The time for planning is now before a crisis hits. Proactive and natural solutions can be more cost-effective than reactive and engineered solutions. For example, stream dredging completed after Hurricane Irene later required additional work and engineering to restore the natural functioning of the Ausable River.

Visitor flow

A fourth infrastructure strategy is to **use travel and recreation information technology to manage visitor flow and levels of use.** Education and information are critical infrastructure needs for a successfully managed visitor experience. Technology exists to help meet visitors where they are, provide them

with information to plan for a safe and satisfying recreational experience, and prevent overcrowding and natural-resource degradation. Key elements are already in place. New York State's Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation has an app that provides information and trail maps for each of the units in its system. Google Maps provides real-time traffic information for most roads in the country. While New York State is best equipped to manage such a system, a public-private partnership could help fund the technological infrastructure needed to get it going.

Managing visitor use is a significant challenge facing the Department of Environmental Conservation and many Adirondack communities today.

One way to manage visitors is to **design travel routes to make it easier and more inviting for visitors to disperse around the Park.** Possible examples include routing travelers through Elizabethtown rather than along the Route 73 corridor so that they would have access to additional trailheads and amenities. **Providing real-time information about travel, parking, and backcountry conditions before visitors arrive** can help manage overuse. It will also more evenly distribute the financial benefits of the recreation economy, improve the visitor experience, and reduce degradation in overused natural areas.

To manage visitors successfully, the state must have a **comprehensive Visitor Use Management Plan** for the Adirondack Park and the expertise and funds to enact such a plan. Such plans are tools to help describe desired conditions and to set goals and objectives to help a place achieve and maintain those conditions. They are common in National Parks. Thinking comprehensively about the Adirondack Park will prevent unintended consequences in one area as a result of actions taken in another. For example, reducing parking at one trailhead may simply push visitor traffic to another location. A comprehensive plan would ensure that the location to which visitors are dispersed has the appropriate parking and trails to receive those visitors.

Locally set goals

A fifth strategy is to **provide funding and technical assistance to help communities set their own targeted goals for infrastructure.** Existing programs to provide support and fund water quality, wastewater management, renewable energy, and community parks should be expanded. Planning should rely upon local voices, and programs need to be scaled for small and large communities.

PATH FOUR

All must have access to educational pathways to diverse career opportunities. Vocational training and higher education are equally important. School systems should create lasting connections to Adirondack communities and should engage students with the natural and cultural history of the Park.

Strong schools serve as the centers of community life, prepare students for success along diverse career paths, and can connect young people with the Adirondacks as the place to make their future. The goal of strengthening Adirondack communities is inseparable from the goal of strengthening Adirondack schools.

> "Schools are the central nervous system of a place. Rally around the schools."
>
> **– Park business leader**

Every aspect related to communities within the VISION 2050 project benefits schools. A strong sense of place, diverse job opportunities, and infrastructure are all critical to schools. Schools also contribute to these efforts by strengthening the social networks of a community. These networks can include needed services, such as meal programs or civic events that celebrate the community and its members. In every sense, the school can be the heartbeat of the community.

Park advantages

One strategy is to **help schools use their unique advantage of being located in the Adirondack Park.** From partnerships to training to an incredible laboratory for field work, the Adirondack Park provides unique opportunities for schools. Some schools more readily use the Park than others; all are charged with adhering to state and federal standards and standardized testing regimes. Schools must have support in order to do their work, and in doing so, create connections that improve the future for the Adirondack Park.

One advantage of being in the Adirondack Park is the number of philanthropic programs to support students and schools. These efforts should be supported and strengthened.

The first thousand days of a child's life are critically important in setting them up for success in school and later life. The **Adirondack Foundation's Birth to Three Alliance has pioneered ways** to support Adirondack children and families in this important period and can be a model for

future efforts. Healthy children and families will be better students, residents, and potential leaders within the Adirondacks in the future.

Curricula should be developed to connect students with the natural and historical aspects of the Adirondacks. This should be done in partnership with state and local historic sites and private entities such as the Adirondack Experience and the Wild Center. Earlier efforts such as the Adirondack Curriculum Project helped educators design their own program and could be revived and revised. Efforts from individual sites could be aggregated and shared. For residents, such programs showcase unique attributes and strengthen connection to place. For prospective residents, they hold the promise of study in the world-class natural science laboratory that is the Adirondacks. In addition to the environmental sciences, these programs can include wilderness management, recreation management, and guiding.

Teacher training in citizen science projects should assist schools in attracting and retaining first-class faculty. Citizen science offers an exciting opportunity for students and teachers to participate in hands-on research, contributing to a greater effort. There are many different projects of this kind currently underway in the Adirondacks: the Adirondack All-Taxa Biotic Inventory, climate change monitoring, and efforts to monitor for invasive species such as hemlock woolly adelgid are three examples.

Elementary, middle, and high schools should **partner on Adirondack programs with colleges that share those interests.** Paul Smith's College, North Country Community College, St. Lawrence University, SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and SUNY Adirondack, Potsdam, Canton, and Plattsburgh all have programs that take advantage of being situated in or around the Adirondack Park. These are by no means the only institutions that do so. Local schools could partner with these programs to have faculty share their research and expertise with teachers and students, providing an opportunity to engage in research far beyond a typical school experience.

High schools can focus on building expertise in subjects like environmental science, climate science, and outdoor recreation management to differentiate themselves and build a reputation for Adirondack schools. Excellent schools are a major factor as families decide whether to settle into a community.

Schools and communities should **develop innovative ways to make the Park an education destination** serving non-residents, including international students. Both public and private schools within the Adirondack Park have successfully diversified their student bodies by drawing in international students. If the right curricula exists, excellent programming can help draw non-resident families to send their children to Adirondack schools.

Vocational training

A second strategy to ensure educational pathways is to **create more opportunities for career training and workforce development as an alternative to the college-preparation pathway.** College is not an appropriate or necessary option for every student, nor every career. Even so, vocational training is often overlooked as a desirable educational course. This problem is not unique to the Adirondacks, but Park communities could address this and the economic and population challenges at the same time.

A source of funding must be established to provide paid apprenticeship and internship opportunities for high school students. The programs must respond both to the career interests of the students and the needs of employers. Not every student can afford to take an unpaid internship for the experience, and not every employer can afford to pay a high school student. Providing these funds could diversify both the experience of the students and of the employers.

Vocational training should be strengthened at the high school and community college levels, with programs tied directly to the local job market. Trade schools can provide a direct path to well-paying jobs in a region that traditionally has a demand for skilled workers. While institutions such as Franklin-Essex-Hamilton BOCES and North Country Community College do some of this work already, these efforts could be further supported.

There are never enough skilled contractors, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, painters, masons, etc. Skilled workers of all trades are in high demand, and the jobs pay well.

There should be a **structure for business leaders to advise and work with school teachers and counselors to create a shared understanding of the opportunities in the community.** Again, some institutions are already undertaking this work to ensure that they're training students in the fields that are needed in the future, but a more formal structure could invite other educational entities to participate.

Social history

A third strategy for ensuring educational pathways is to **encourage schools to convey the importance of the social history of their communities as well as Park history.** This is essential to strengthen the individual student's sense of identity and pride in place and to help community members see the school as an important partner. Schools can keep important community traditions and stories alive.

Personal connections should be created by **asking families who have lived in the community for generations to share their stories.** This family heritage is important to the whole community. Teaching about that legacy can help overcome a sense among long-time residents that their history has been lost in the development of the Park.

Institutions, such as the Wild Center and the Adirondack Experience have an important role to play in **creating an appreciation of place.** Their education staff are often experts and highly creative in using the Adirondack Park as a way to teach to the state's mandated learning standards.

Local curricula must emphasize diversity to recognize the contributions of many groups, including the indigenous communities for whom the Adirondacks are ancestral lands and people of color, whose stories are not widely known. Students in rural communities of the Adirondacks can benefit from hearing diverse voices and perspectives. This will help foster communities more welcoming of diversity. Also, they will be the ones to create more welcoming communities in the Park.

School programs, like this field research by Lake Placid High School students, take advantage of the unique opportunities that come with living in the Park.

PATH FIVE

Encourage inter-community collaboration and regional initiatives on a variety of scales ranging from a small number of towns to the Park as a whole. These will provide the resources for communities to work together toward economic, social, and cultural goals.

Many factors make it hard for the Park to see itself as an entity and solve problems across the entire region. First, the geographic span of the Park is enormous, larger than many states. Second, there are significant economic disparities among and within communities. Third, a culture of localized identity can make it hard for some communities to see value in collaboration. Successful exceptions, such as the Common Ground Alliance, the Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism (ROOST), and the Five Towns show the great potential of collective efforts. The five towns of Long Lake, Indian Lake, Minerva, Newcomb, and North Hudson have developed a marketing and development strategy for their region.

> "Stories that strengthen cross-Park connections are very important. We need ways to tell these stories regionally. We need to get out of our silos."
>
> **- Local business owner**

Shared experience

One strategy to help achieve greater collaboration is to **create an information-sharing system that would help communities learn from each other's experiences. This would also strengthen Park-wide connections and foster regional collaboration. Local officials, non-profits, and community volunteers** have a lot they could learn from each other. A community in the northern part of the Park may have addressed a challenge now facing a community in the south, for instance, parking problems caused by intensive visitor use. There is no need for the second community to reinvent the wheel if it has a network of shared experiences to draw on.

An institution with Park-wide reach, such as the Adirondack Park Agency, Adirondack North Country Association, or Adirondack Foundation, should **create the organizational structure and technical expertise** for Adirondack communities to work collaboratively and to learn from the experiences of similar communities outside the Park. The Adirondack Non-profit Network, hosted by the Adirondack Foundation, pulls together non-profits of all sizes and missions across the Park to share experiences and resources. The Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages is another entity that could supply the organizational structure to foster this collaboration.

Local programs should be **empowered to serve wider areas.** Examples of such programs include the Adirondack Youth Climate Summit, an effective demonstration of both collaboration and youth engagement organized through The Wild Center, and the Adirondack Community Recreation Alliance, a small, ad-hoc group of individuals and organizations supporting community-based recreation.

Streamlined development

A second strategy that would help achieve greater collaboration is a **reorganized Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) focused just on the Adirondacks.** REDCs help distribute state funding to localities. The Adirondack Park is currently split among three REDC regions that include communities outside the Blue Line. A single Adirondack region would streamline economic development opportunities. Adirondack communities are different from those outside the Park. They have different types of development needs and opportunities, and a unique regulatory structure, and should be treated accordingly. Splitting the Park into multiple regions also makes it nearly impossible even for state agencies to see the Adirondack Park as an entity.

Additional public funding should provide for shared resources and problem-solving. Certain types of problems, such as overuse in particular areas, are experienced by many different communities. Sharing experiences and expertise can save community leaders time and lead to better solutions. Collaboration can also take the form of pooling financial resources to help address a more regional problem.

Public funds should be leveraged by creating incentives for private investment in regional initiatives. Within Adirondack Park communities, there are many creative ideas that lack capital to get off the ground. If sources of capital large enough to make a difference on a regional scale were created, that could leverage additional funds, including those from public sources.

Recreational connections

A third strategy to encourage inter-community collaboration is to **link communities through regional recreation networks.** Local outdoor recreation economies can be bolstered in many

ways that are in accordance with Article XIV of the State Constitution. Community collaboration should be supported and encouraged. Opportunities for community connection include biking, hiking, snowmobiling, and cycling trails, "hamlets to huts" lodging networks, and interconnected waterways. If on public land, these networks need to comply with Article XIV, and state laws, regulations, and policies. Opportunities for year-round recreation should be pursued.

Cultural connections

A fourth strategy to encourage inter-community collaboration is to **seek funding and organizational support for regional cultural offerings.** Communities can work together to organize traveling and "pop-up" exhibits, performances, and film screenings in local venues. This creates an opportunity to bring arts to communities too small to support permanent art spaces. One example of such sharing: Indian Lake, Blue Mountain Lake, and Long Lake have shared services to present Fourth of July Fireworks. While the fireworks would be done in a different community each night and not necessarily on the 4th, each community was able to host its own event.

Together, these ideas represent potential paths to vibrant, thriving Adirondack communities, where people of all ages can mingle at a farmer's market, stand together on a sidewalk to watch a parade, or walk down main street. These are main streets where storefronts are full of locally owned businesses that offer year-round employment. These businesses support the local communities that support them. These are communities that people move into because there's a real feeling that something exciting is happening, and they want to participate.

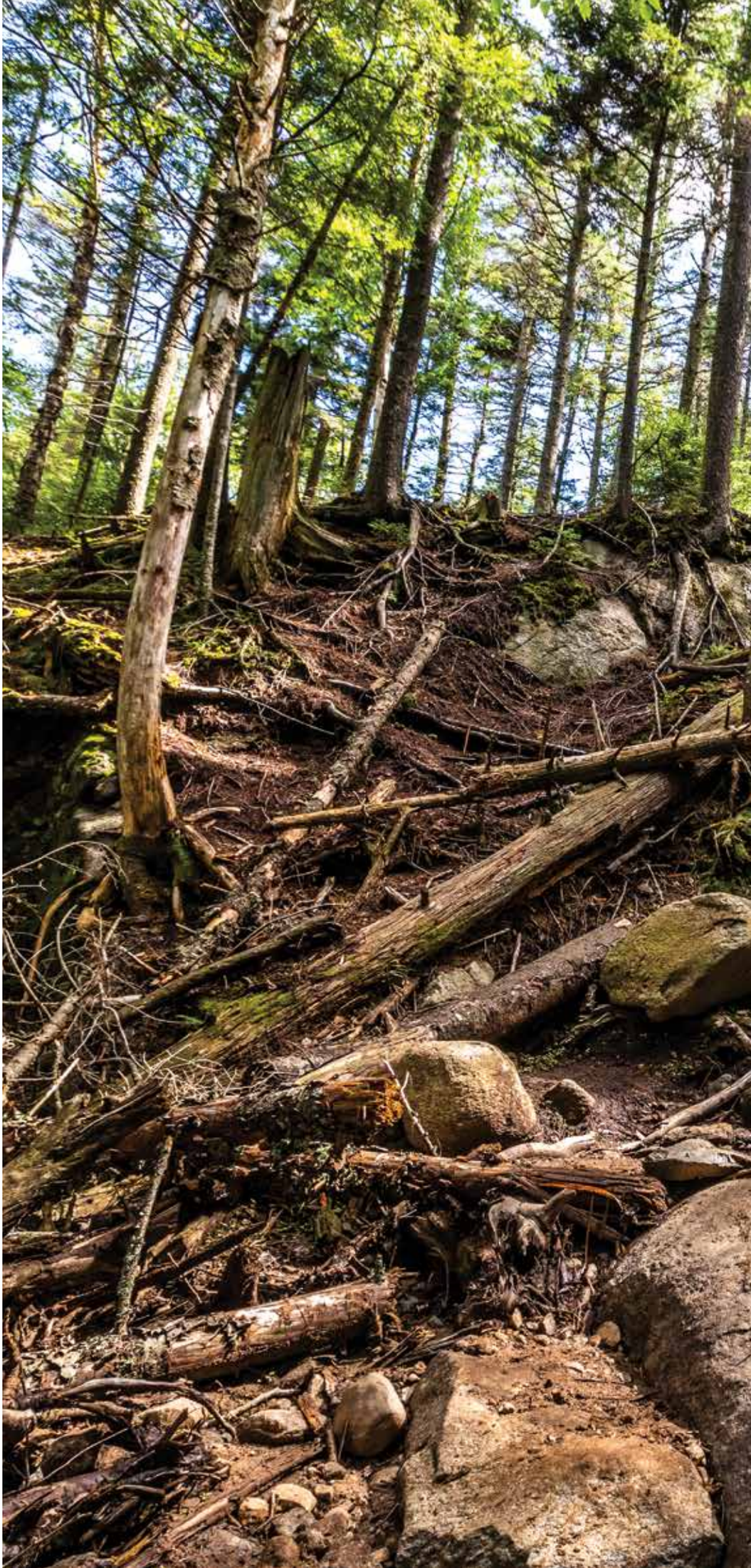
Events like the Dreaming of Timbuctoo exhibition at John Brown Farm in Lake Placid (above) and the annual gathering of the Common Ground Alliance (right) draw communities together and encourage a common sense of place. Opposite page: Then-Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul speaks to the Common Ground Alliance.

Sustainable agriculture is part of a growing trend toward small local enterprises like Wild Work Farm, left, and Essex Farm that work with concern for the Park's environment and create opportunities beyond the traditional reliance on hospitality.

Popular support for protecting the Park depends on people's engagement with nature, which can take place in communities as well as in the wild. A pollinator garden in Indian Lake, the Visitor Interpretive Center at Paul Smith's College, and a field trip by Girls Inc., all present opportunities to make connections with nature.


MUSIC TELEVISION

Severely eroded trails, like this one on Ampersand Mountain, detract from hikers' experience and damage the natural environment. Modern trail-building techniques create far more sustainable trails and Park managers should use them throughout the Adirondacks.



Adirondack Park management should have three goals:

- Protect its natural systems
- Create circumstances for vibrant communities suited to the character of the Park
- Provide excellent stewardship of its public lands

Actions toward each of these goals should be based on what science and data demonstrate.

3 MANAGING THE PARK

Julia Goren, Bob Kafin, Tom Curley

While these goals are straightforward, achieving them is not. The Adirondack Park is a complex landscape. The challenges it faces are thorny. Achieving its potential will require an evolution in Adirondack Park structures and governance.

A truly world-class protected landscape, modeling careful stewardship of public and private lands, requires cutting-edge management. It requires creativity and long-range thinking. It will set the conditions for the success or failure of both the ecological and human systems. Visionary management is what will help the Adirondack Park accomplish its goals over the next 30 years.

In considering the future, look to the first principles of the Park.

Protection of clean water, essential to all life, was the basis for creating the Adirondack Park in 1892. Ecological integrity, human health and communities, and the wild character of the Park rely upon the preservation of its waters.

Historically, however, protection of the Adirondack Park, like its management structures, has been primarily concerned with use patterns on the land—development of private lands and protection and recreational use on public lands—without sufficient consideration of these impacts upon the lifeblood of the Park: its waters.

The waters of the Adirondack Park connect residents and the rest of New York State. They also connect human and natural systems. The Adirondack Park of 2050 must have both a renewed emphasis on protecting water quality and a change from conceptualizing the Park as a series of plots of lands to thinking of the Park through the lens of its watersheds.

Today's Adirondack Park suffers because management cannot adequately protect its ecosystems or meet the needs of its people. Various factors have led to today's challenges; six paths lead to a better future. These were identified through consideration of past planning efforts and dozens of interviews with experts on Adirondack Park governance, land use, science, local government, and advocacy. Three different charrettes brought together authorities, including former Adirondack Park Agency (APA) Chairs and Commissioners, former Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioners, and experts from regional planning entities outside of the Adirondack Park.

The recommendations that follow are related and amplify the impact of others, but are also meant to function independently. Each of these recommendations has value individually, but all of them together will bring about positive change in Adirondack Park management over the next 30 years.

In 2021, management of the Adirondack Park is highly complex, with many different agencies and structures playing a role. Generally, the recommendations of VISION 2050 seek to unify, and in some places, simplify the governance structures of the Park. Ultimately, however, the goals are concerned with the natural and human systems of the Adirondack Park. In some instances, VISION 2050 suggests that accomplishing these goals requires new structures and reorganization. Every recommendation seeks to move the Adirondack Park closer to attaining these goals and fulfilling its promise by 2050.

PATHS

to better Adirondack Park management

1 Strengthen and restructure the governance of the Adirondack Park

to focus on protecting the natural resources and wild character while providing a better experience for those who live within and visit the Park.

2 Create dedicated funding for the Adirondack Park,

both in the state budget and through additional funding mechanisms. This will pay for a variety of needs: stewardship of lands and waters, including needed staffing; infrastructure and adaptations for climate change; and technical assistance to communities.

3 Create a structure to ensure that scientific research

and regular long-term monitoring are conducted to understand current states, future threats, and possible mitigation strategies; use the findings to inform management decisions.

4 Create a comprehensive education program

that addresses needs for different target audiences, from Park visitors to New York State voters to APA Commissioners. Work to attract, secure, and retain new, visionary leadership from within and beyond the Adirondacks, consistent with the global significance of the Park. Use education to change the paradigm in the Adirondacks from piecemeal to holistic consideration and management of both the individual resources and the overall character of the Park.

5 Strengthen legal protections for waters and wildlands.

6 Change public-lands management to include comprehensive watershed and broader regional planning.

Change private-lands planning to incentivize appropriate hamlet-centered development and protect the wild character outside of these areas.

Large, systemic challenges prevent the Adirondack Park from reaching its full potential and best serving its natural and human communities. Fortunately, unlike threats to the ecosystems and human communities, the challenges are largely political and confined to New York State. Solutions exist and are within grasp if the political will exists to enact them.

As clean water is one of the defining characteristics and assets of the Adirondack Park, several aspects of shoreline protection should be strengthened to provide adequate protection.

PATH ONE

Strengthen and restructure the governance of the Adirondack Park to focus on protecting the natural resources and wild character while providing a better experience for those who live within and visit the Park.

Reimagining the Adirondack Park Agency

While several past planning efforts within the Adirondack Park have considered the idea of creating a new agency, such as a Park Administration, with new powers to streamline governance, this idea is not advisable. Staff and commissioners of existing agencies, including the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Adirondack Park Agency (APA), are against the idea. Experts from a variety of different disciplines identified and interviewed for this project, offered a range of reasons as to why such an idea should not be pursued. A single agency would be even more susceptible to political pressure, and would lose the important checks and balances that currently exist. A single super-agency under one administrator could have too much power and, in the wrong hands, could cause too much damage. Agency missions could be diluted in a combined administration. It is politically out of favor in Albany and locally within the Adirondacks. The administrative effort alone would be nearly impossible.

> "Do we become strictly an agency designed to provide regulatory and service guidelines, or do we start laying groundwork for a park? ... I envision the basic purpose of park planning to be to define the qualities of a park we seek at some date in the future."
>
> **– George Davis, first director of planning for the Adirondack Park Agency (quoted in 1976)**

Among government agencies, only the Adirondack Park Agency is tasked with considering the entirety of the Adirondack Park as a singular entity. Rather than abolishing the Adirondack Park Agency, relocating it within the Department of Environmental Conservation, or creating a new super-agency, **reconstructing and reimagining the APA could accomplish the goals of improved planning, protection, and management.**

A reimagined Adirondack Park Agency would include: 1) increased and independent funding; 2) strengthened and clarified laws; 3) a better board appointment process; and 4) increased expertise in public lands and waters management.

Increased and independent funding

The budget of the Adirondack Park Agency has been steadily and significantly whittled down over the years. From a high of 76 full-time staff, the Agency has just 54 staff in 2021 attempting to accomplish a greater volume of work. The APA must have more financial resources provided through both the state budget and an additional, independent funding mechanism like the Adirondack Park Trust outlined below.

Full funding would allow the Agency to fulfill its current responsibilities in a more timely fashion, including those in permitting and enforcement. It would also enable the Agency to take on new and critically needed responsibilities and reestablish positions that once existed, like circuit riders, and providing other forms of support for Adirondack communities.

A fully-funded APA would interact with and coordinate among the state agencies that have the greatest impact within the Adirondack Park. These include agencies with expertise in public lands management, such as Department of Environmental Conservation, Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and Olympic Regional Development Authority. They also include the Empire State Development Corporation which has responsibility for economic development, and the Departments of Health and Transportation, which have a substantial impact on the daily life of residents and visitors. The APA has a lead role to play in coordinating and assisting these agencies to consider the goals of management of the Adirondack Park in its entirety.

Good management decisions are based on data. Adequate funding would also allow the Agency to coordinate the monitoring of key indicators to provide annual reporting on the health of the Adirondack Park. These indicators would include those related to the condition of the natural systems such as water and air quality and the health of certain species. They would also include

those related to the health and vitality of the human systems, such as population, employment, housing, and statistics on development. The Agency would also be responsible for ensuring the coordination of a research agenda so that outside experts could conduct research and provide answers necessary for informed management. Examples of such research might include economic analyses of the value of different types of recreational trails and engineering analysis of which kinds of septic systems best protect water quality given different types of Adirondack soils.

The Adirondack Park Agency could do more for the communities within the Adirondack Park. Full funding would also allow the Agency to take a greater role in community planning by providing a circuit rider and planning grants program. While New York State makes some money available for planning, community leaders within the Park may not be able to access those funds due to the size of a municipality, lack of time or expertise in grant application and management, or other barriers. The APA should provide technical assistance and funding to communities. It should take a greater role in fostering responsible, hamlet-centered development, and preserving the wildlands of the backcountry.

Both inside and outside the Adirondacks, there are misconceptions about the Adirondack Park. The APA should take a leadership role in educating new and long-time residents, visitors, and all of the people of New York State about the significance of the Adirondack Park. To successfully accomplish this mission, the APA needs the financial resources and the expertise to do so.

Strengthened and clarified laws

According to the Agency, the mission of the APA is to "protect public and private resources of the Adirondack Park through the exercise of the powers and duties provided by the Adirondack Park Agency Act, the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, the NYS Freshwater Wetlands Act and the NYS Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers Act." These laws are the foundation of the work of the Agency. Each has tremendous importance and strength and flaws that, if corrected, would afford the Adirondacks better protections.

The Adirondack Park Agency Act was the best law that could have been passed when it was enacted. The Act created the Adirondack Park Agency and the Local Government Review Board, adopted the Land Use and Development Plan, adopted shoreline restrictions, and created requirements for local land-use programs adopted by local governments and the APA oversight of those plans. It also defined the role of the APA in the management of state lands and in reviewing state agency projects, and more.

Many of the experts we interviewed agree that the shoreline protections provided within the APA Act were and are insufficient to adequately protect water quality. **As clean water is one of the defining characteristics and assets of the Adirondack Park, several aspects of shoreline protection should be strengthened to provide adequate protection.**

The Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan assigns guidance for management of the state-owned Forest Preserve to the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Adirondack Park Agency. It lays out a clear commitment to the Adirondack Park, stating, "The protection and preservation of the natural resources of the state lands within the Park must be paramount." However, it is not codified into the laws of New York State. In that respect, it is different from its sister plan, the Adirondack Park Land Use and Development Plan. As such, **when the state itself chooses not to follow the State Land Master Plan, there is less legal accountability.** Lawsuits are expensive, time consuming, and should be a tool of last resort. However, the state lands of New York belong to all New Yorkers, current and future, and every effort, including legal action as necessary, should be made to preserve them.

The Adirondack Park Land Use and Development Plan was and is a staggering achievement. It is a complicated plan and map that classifies all private lands within the Blue Line into one of six categories. One of the first of its kind, the plan was followed by other regional planning efforts across the country, including the California Coastal Commission and the New Jersey Pinelands Commission.

However, technology has changed in the last 50 years. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and other technologies allow greater information to be easily available to Park Agency staff and developers. **The Agency should update information for the Land Use and Development Plan.**

Better appointment process

The Adirondack Park belongs to all of the people of New York State. It protects drinking water for over 11 million people in New York State, Vermont, and Canada. It sequesters carbon. It provides a home to over 288 species of animals and 1,400 species of plants.

The creators of the Adirondack Park Agency gave the Governor, as the sole representative of all the people of New York State, the power to appoint APA commissioners. There was a concern at the time that other state officials lacked the Governor's state-wide focus. Now, state-wide information is readily and immediately available. Every New Yorker is a constituent of the Adirondack Park. **To make certain that the people's Park is protected by representatives of all New Yorkers, the appointment process should be modified.** The Governor, Senate, and Assembly should each have the power to appoint a number of commissioners. Such rebalancing would help to restore the power of the Park Agency, which has been slowly eroded since its inception.

Currently, the Commissioners of Environmental Conservation, Economic Development, and the Department of State hold ex officio seats on the APA board. Additionally, an *ex-officio* seat should be added for the Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). The Office of Parks clearly has expertise in recreational visitor management. This would add value to the discussion of management of the Forest Preserve. This is one example of an agency that could add substantially to the expertise on the APA board; others may also exist but would need to be balanced with non-state seats.

The balance of in-Park representatives and party registration should be maintained. As the Agency concerned with making decisions for the Adirondack Park, the APA board should also reflect the diversity of the people of New York State.

Forest Rangers and Summit Stewards such as this one are some of the Adirondack Park's most trusted educators, but rangers are not internally considered as such and do not receive training in those skills. They are not given the time necessary to patrol trails and speak with the public.

Increased expertise in management of public lands and waters

Public lands within the Adirondack Park need to be considered and managed holistically. Management decisions in one place impact use elsewhere. For example, a decision to limit parking areas at the trailhead for Cascade Mountain in the High Peaks Wilderness, coupled with information encouraging hikers to disperse to other trailheads, has likely caused an increase in use at other trailheads, including that of Jay Mountain in the Jay Mountain Wilderness. The public lands of the Adirondacks are one system, both from the standpoint of a recreational user and from a wandering deer or moose. Yet, the current management structure treats each separate management unit as an island, with its own land manager, assessment, and plan. For ecological and recreational planning purposes, the public lands of the Adirondack Park currently seem to be approximately 50 separate parks, each with its own rules and regulations, recreational opportunities, and challenges.

Having a variety of recreational opportunities is good, just as protecting a variety of different ecosystems within the Adirondack Park provides the valuable opportunity to encounter different species. But **treating management units as disconnected diminishes their value, ecologically and recreationally.**

The Adirondack Park has unique wilderness character and value for the state, the nation, and the world. It is the largest park in the lower 48 United States. It contains some of the largest wilderness areas east of the Mississippi. It is the largest intact temperate deciduous forest in the world. It warrants management distinct from other public lands in New York, even those managed by the Department of Environmental Conservation.

The state has both staffing and structural opportunities to create distinctive management for the Adirondack Park. On the staffing side, **a Wilderness and Recreation Manager position with required competencies should be created.** According to the National Park Service, a Wilderness and Recreation Manager should have expertise pertaining to wilderness, including the resources and the user experience, as well as visitor use management. These are acknowledged as complex and sometimes competing values. Currently, the title and required competencies for managers of Forest Preserve lands are that of Forester. According to the DEC, a Forester's required competencies are in the management and health of forests and trees. The job description is the same for land managers for every unit within the Department of Environmental Conservation, whether the unit is the High Peaks Wilderness or a state forest on Long Island, even though the job itself is fundamentally different. Both have value.

The public lands and waters of the Adirondack Park require and deserve to be managed by staff with background and training in wilderness and recreational management. The Park has world-class wilderness and recreational opportunities; it should be attracting and training world-class leadership and expertise. Moreover, such expertise does not have to be exclusively home-grown. Opportunities exist to learn from and incorporate best-in-field expertise in public lands management across the country and the world.

The Forest Rangers' division must be expanded, fully staffed, and provided training for interacting with the recreating public. Forest Rangers are some of the Adirondack Park's most trusted educators, but they are not internally considered as such and do not receive training in those skills. They are not given the time necessary to patrol trails and speak with the public. The division should capitalize on opportunities to influence how the public perceives Rangers and the critical role that they could play. Forest Rangers should return to the woods as educators as well as to provide search and rescue.

Management of the public lands and waters of the Adirondack Park would be stronger if they were considered as an interconnected system. This could be achieved through a mandate for land "complex management" similar to the Great South Woods project or a mandate for management at the watershed scale, rather than individual unit management. The Great South Woods project created a recreation management plan for a land complex that included two million acres and 20 Forest Preserve units. In the Adirondack Park, complex management (or wildlands complex management) implies managing across multiple Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) units and adjacent private lands. DEC management units are discrete parcels of public land that are managed under a single Unit Management Plan. Yet, the DEC and APA have already identified planning complexes within the Adirondack Park and should vigorously pursue this shift in philosophy.

Uniform management of the Adirondack Forest Preserve

The Adirondack Park is a distinctive region with its own ecosystems, communities, and institutions. At a minimum, all state lands and waters within the Adirondack Park should be managed as a singular entity. Unfortunately, this is not happening now. The result is uncoordinated and inconsistent policies and a lack of long-term planning and day-to-day administration. Even outstanding efforts by committed staff cannot succeed due to the structural inconsistencies. This is a consequence of a variety of institutional structures and historic inertia. These include unclear division of responsibility between the APA and the DEC, the separation of the Park into two DEC Regions, and the assignment of too many functions over too vast a territory to the DEC's Division of Land and Forests, which precludes a specific focus on the Adirondack Forest Preserve.

The exact tactics to be followed and governmental reorganization that could bring about the desired objective are complicated, politically sensitive, and contrary to many with vested interests in the status quo. Nevertheless, management of the Adirondack Forest Preserve should be in the hands of an entity that does not have the distractions of unrelated responsibilities, divided loyalties, or state lands and waters outside of the Blue Line.

Among the changes that should be seriously pursued over the next 30 years are (a) **moving the Lands and Forests duties and staff of the Department of Environmental Conservation within the Blue Line to the Adirondack Park Agency,** and/or (b) creating one DEC region for the Adirondack Park, thus terminating the DEC's split of the Park into Regions 5 and 6, which extend beyond the boundaries of the Park and include non-Forest Preserve lands. If impossible or impracticable to act in one or two major actions, these recommendations could be implemented incrementally. However, there may be other ways to create a more consistent management of and experience across public lands and waters in the Park. Still, it is clear that the current configuration is not a successful one for the present or future and that "Band-Aid" amelioration will be inadequate.

Clarification of roles and elimination of overlapping permits

Current management allows different agencies to require different and overlapping permits for development in the same type of environment. For example, in some projects, the DEC and the APA require different, but overlapping, stream-crossing permits. This is confusing for developers and inefficient in terms of staff time and taxpayer dollars. Having one agency issue a single permit would build a sense of coherent management of the Park. It would save time, money, and frustration. Clarifying the ecological purpose of the permit could also help vest landowners with their role as stewards of the Park, rather than leaving them with a feeling of being buried in red tape. For example, a DEC stream-crossing permit should be unnecessary in a project that is subject to APA regional project review. Ultimately, the review process should adequately protect the stream from harm from development. If the current process does not adequately do so, then it should be reexamined rather than duplicated.

Water resources law

The Adirondack Park was created in 1892 to protect clean water. It is the Park's most significant natural resource today. Clean water is essential to all life. It is an increasingly scarce resource and, unfortunately, it is easily lost and difficult to restore.

The Adirondack Council recognizes the value of water to all inhabitants and visitors to the Park, human and otherwise. Clean water must be preserved—without it, there are no communities with busy main streets, no thriving farms, no streams to fish, no lakes to swim in, no loons hauntingly calling, and no moose to eagerly watch for—no Adirondacks as we know it. The stakes are just as high for the rest of eastern New York, whose drinking water is kept clean by the Forest Preserve inside a protected Adirondack Park.

Because of its overwhelming importance to the Park and to New York residents, water deserves special protection. Currently, like so many aspects of the Adirondack Park, responsibility for protection of water quality is split over different state agencies with different mandates and non-overlapping regions. To address this, **an Adirondack Park Water Resources Law should be enacted to modernize and consolidate all existing state laws related to the protection, alteration, and potential pollution of lakes and ponds, rivers and streams, wetlands, and groundwater.**

This new law would streamline and coordinate planning—setting of standards, processing of permit applications, monitoring of conditions and compliance across the agencies that currently handle aspects related to water: the Adirondack Park Agency, the Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Department of Health. These agencies would participate in an Adirondack Park Water Resources Board. This Board would centralize and conform the various powers, responsibilities, and functions of these different agencies. It would ensure the highest quality of interconnected water resources for the ecological systems, economy, and communities of the Park.

Together, a reimagined Adirondack Park Agency, restructured Department of Environmental Conservation, a clarified and streamlined permit process, and a new law that consolidates existing laws related to water would help create a unified management of the Adirondack Park as an entity. This would protect the legacy of the Park for future generations.

PATH TWO

Create dedicated funding for the Adirondack Park, both in the state budget and through additional funding mechanisms, to pay for stewardship of lands and waters, research and monitoring, educational efforts, staffing, infrastructure, technical assistance, etc.

Adirondack Park Trust

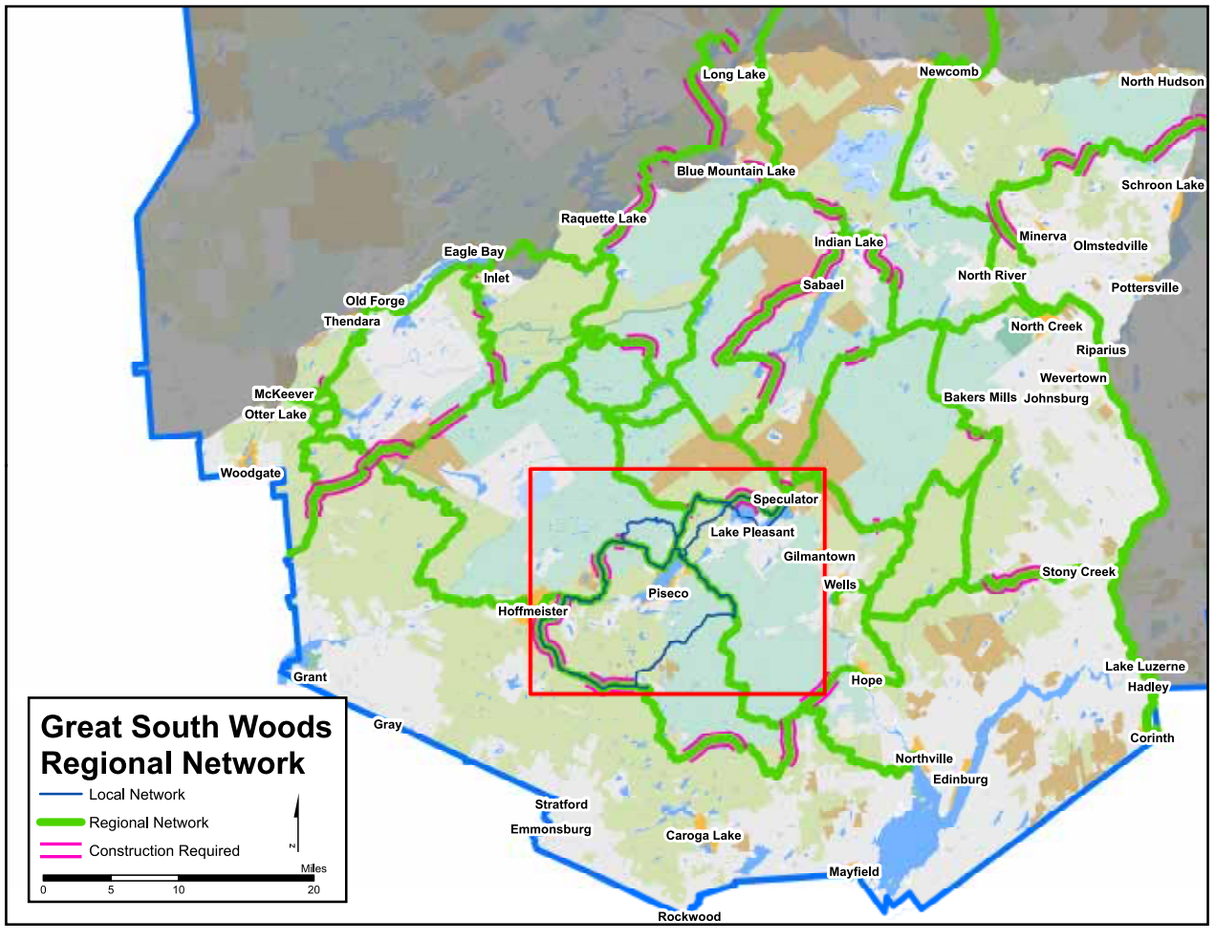
For the Adirondack Park to reach its full potential as a unique protected landscape and globally significant model, it must have adequate funding. Currently, funding for the Adirondack Park comes through different aspects of the state budget: agency operating funds, items within the Environmental Protection Fund, program allocations, competitive grants, municipal funding, tourism funding, etc. These are neither unified nor sufficient to manage a landscape the size of the state of New Hampshire—or a park.

> "Enforcement has fallen by the wayside because the agency has been starved for needed funds."
>
> **– Former APA Chair**

The Adirondack Park needs dedicated funding to allow annual monitoring and regular research related to key indicators about both wild and human communities. The Park needs funding to pay for the maintenance and construction of trails, trailheads, boat launches, bathrooms, visitor centers, and other recreational infrastructure. It needs funding to pay for a distributed team of educators throughout the Adirondack Park, helping residents and visitors to forge connections with this place. It requires funding for planners, Forest Rangers, foresters, technicians, and more. It needs funding for adequate wastewater treatment facilities, and technical assistance to communities. And so much more.

Not only would adequately funded programs improve the quality of the experience within the Adirondack Park for visitors and residents, but they would also create a significant number of non-exportable, distributed jobs around the Adirondack Park.

In order to provide this needed funding, a public benefit corporation (an Adirondack Park Trust) should be created. This Trust



"While the Agency is generally concentrating on reducing the backlog or getting through the day, the week, or the latest project, a plan for a vision of the Park at any scale and determining if we are achieving or deviating from that vision requires these data and analysis."

– APA Monitoring Trends Document (2001)

would receive specific, recurring revenues (such as those from a real estate transfer tax or other mechanisms). These would be public funds dedicated for the management of the Adirondack Park and stewardship of the Adirondack Forest Preserve.

Similar, although not identical, models exist. Examples include the Lake George Park Commission and the Hudson River Park Trust. Key features would be a revenue stream independent from the regular budgeting process (and therefore insulated from the uncertainties of annual state budget appropriations). This revenue stream would have to be sufficient, and the Trust should have the ability to issue bonds for capital projects.

The Trust would need to be governed by a diverse board, with representatives of state and local governments as well as experts in relevant fields, such as park management and facility design. The Legislature and the Governor should share appointment power in order to be widely accountable to the people of the state.

Finally, the Trust should not be seen as a substitute for the traditional public funding of Adirondack needs. New York State must commit to maintaining funding for the Adirondack Park to allow the Trust moneys and other private resources to be an enhancement.

Direct more funding to the Adirondacks

New York State must also better use its existing funding to support the Adirondacks. The Adirondack Park protects the headwaters of a third of New York's watersheds. The importance of its clean waters cannot be overstated. As such, Adirondack water infrastructure projects should have top priority in Environmental Facilities Corporation and other state water quality funding opportunities.

PATH THREE

Create a structure to ensure that scientific research and regular long-term monitoring are conducted to understand current states, future threats, and possible mitigation strategies; use the findings to inform management decisions.

Management should be based on a sound understanding of past trends, current conditions, and potential future implications. **Good management requires a robust system for long-term monitoring and active research.**

Long-term monitoring is a key component of accurately assessing the health of an ecosystem. It involves collecting information on a regular basis to document, track, and understand changes. In human terms, it is the medical records of an organism, population, species, or whole system.

Research, by contrast, is typically defined by a single question to acquire new knowledge. Generally, once the research question has been answered, a researcher may move on to other questions. The human analogy would be a test for a particular disease.

Decisions should be made based on data. Once those decisions are made, monitoring should continue, including evaluation of the effects of the decisions and management actions. Based on what the monitoring reveals, management actions may need to be adjusted and refined. This process is known as adaptive management, and it should be in place across the Adirondack Park.

Monitoring

Regular monitoring of key indicators, ecological and otherwise, should occur. The Adirondack Lakes Survey Corporation is one example of a critically important long-term monitoring program whose data has had significant impact on management within and outside of the Adirondack Park. The work of the Survey Corp demonstrated the impact of acid rain upon the waters of the Adirondack Park and contributed to the federal Clean Air Act amendments of 1990. The return of fish to waterbodies such as Lake Colden, and our knowledge of this recovery, is a result of long-term monitoring programs such as the Adirondack Lakes Survey Corporation.

Long-range monitoring efforts must have consistent funding from the state budget and a mandate to publicize data regularly. These efforts should include monitoring key indicators (a National Parks-style ecological monitoring program for the Adirondack Park as described elsewhere in *VISION 2050)*. Another example of public data is the iMap Invasives online tool, which provides easily accessible, understandable, and regularly updated data on invasive species. Such efforts provide an opportunity for partnership and the chance to create and retain a network of research, researchers, and field technician jobs throughout the Park.

The Adirondack Park has been studied by various researchers and groups, but often the research has not informed management decisions. When management has a say in the research agenda, there is a much greater likelihood that the right kinds of questions are being asked, answered, and applied.

> "Implicit in the mandate for the care of the land is the requirement for data."
>
> **– Former NYS Department of Environmental Conservation official**

Research

The Adirondack Park Agency, as the single state agency concerned solely with the long-term future of the Adirondack Park, should coordinate establishing a research agenda with questions that are most pertinent to the management of the Park.

Research should be carried out by academic research partners, with funding provided by New York State. Academic institutions have access to the top researchers, from students who will conduct the research to the materials and analysis necessary to handle results. The APA is not mandated to conduct research, although it has identified particular research needs that would help better accomplish its mission. Moreover, the Agency is not best suited to conduct research in-house due to lack of appropriate expertise, lack of staff time, and the potential for the results to be perceived as biased.

However, New York State should invest in ensuring that the research is conducted and that it has access to the raw data (to make it possible to share data across research projects). Also, it must require the Adirondack Park Agency to publicly share findings, as research findings that are not shared have limited value. If the people of New York State are funding the research, they should know the results. Currently, there is no mandate that requires state agencies to share findings or data. In fact, agencies may feel that publicizing this information puts them at risk of legal action.

Such partnerships are successful both in New York State and in other places in the country. A theoretical example of how this could work in the Adirondacks would be the following:

The Adirondack Park Agency asks whether privies have an impact on water quality to determine whether new-campsite monitoring guidance should include a water quality component and a requirement for waste removal in campsites located adjacent to a water body.

This question is part of an annually published list of research questions, with funding attached. A researcher at Paul Smith's College creates a study to answer the question. The raw data is shared with New York State. The findings are published as part of an annual sharing of Adirondack Park research, such as the Adirondack Research Forum or the Adirondack Research Consortium's annual conference.

Five years later, the study is replicated by a researcher at Clarkson University. Because the data is available, the researcher is not only able to replicate methodology, but additionally determines that water quality impacts have lessened in the time that has lapsed. This research is published and influences monitoring guidance.

Global significance

The Adirondack Park is a globally significant location for research. With the right infrastructure, it could attract scientists from around the globe to conduct research and learn from those already doing research here. One way to promote the Adirondack Park as a research location and unlock potential federal funding for the research would be to build and strengthen connections within the Park to existing national and global environmental research networks. These include the Long-Term Ecological Research (LTER) network and the National Ecological Observatory Network (NEON) funded by the National Science Foundation; the Global Lake Ecological Observatory Network (GLEON), a global grassroots effort that already includes sites within the Adirondack Park; the Global Ecosystems Monitoring network (GEM); the Global Observation Research Initiative in Alpine Environments (GLORIA), and others.

Establishing sites in the Adirondack Park with links to these networks would raise the Park's global profile, increase globally significant research taking place within the Blue Line, and create additional potential funding for research.

PATH FOUR

Create a comprehensive education program that addresses the needs of different target audiences, from Park visitors to NYS voters to APA Commissioners.

The word "park" summons a picture in most minds. That picture varies upon the audience: for some, it's an area with amenities such as picnic tables, grills for a family barbeque, playgrounds, maintained fields for sports, or perhaps a beach with a lifeguard. It may be a place with a maintained campground, with bathhouses, fire rings, and trash removal. For others, it may be more of a national park model, with an entrance station, visitor center with interpreters and educational materials, and clearly signed scenic vistas. It may be a vast wilderness area, where the only sign of human activity is in the permit obtained before heading out.

The Adirondack Park is all of these things simultaneously. It also encompasses the landscape that is the best chance for the survival of species like moose, Bicknell's Thrush, and Rusty Blackbird; communities where people live and work and have done so for generations; a regional planning entity that was a model for the country when it was created; unparalleled recreation of all kinds; and so much more.

It is nearly impossible for anyone, from multi-generational, full-time residents to a first-time visitor to a New York State voter who may never have been north of Albany or east of Syracuse, to fully understand what the Adirondack Park is and its significance. However, it is possible for all of these audiences to know more and have a better connection with this place. New York State government, tourism entities, environmental groups, development agencies, educational entities, localities—all have an obligation and opportunity to share more of the story and the significance of the Adirondack Park. This is imperative to the Park's future. The Adirondack Park belongs to everyone, and everyone must have an equal opportunity to connect, enjoy, and feel welcomed.

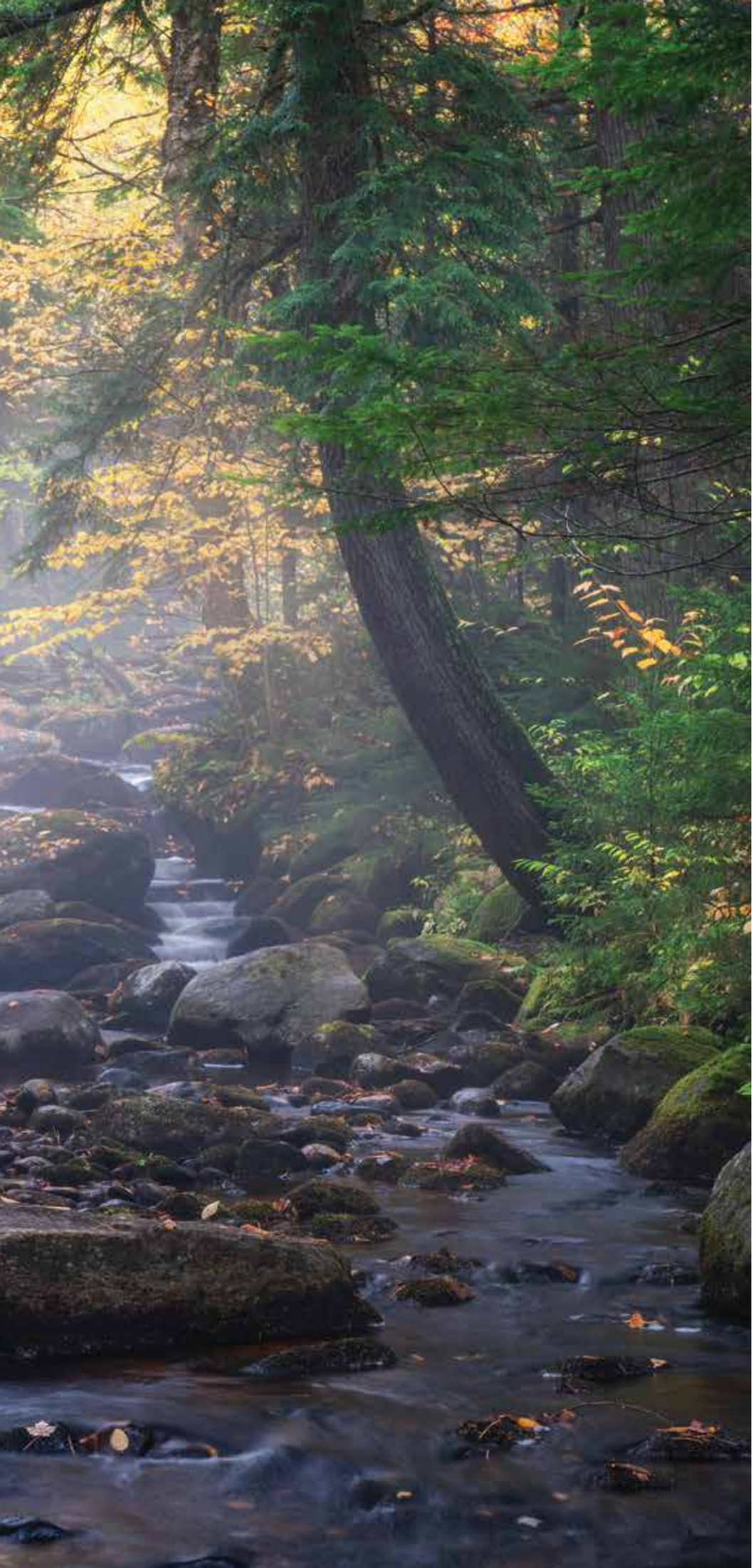
Educate all

An Adirondack Public Information Alliance should be created as an accompaniment of an Adirondack Regional Economic Development Council. This entity would help convey a unified message about the Adirondack Park. Target audiences would be new residents of and visitors to the Park and New York State voters. Stories and information would be shared through digital media, information packets, and on-site interpreters. The Alliance would employ communications professionals to clearly and compellingly articulate the global significance of the Park.

The Alliance would have a robust digital presence and come to be seen as "the website for the Adirondack Park." Stories would help people better understand the Park so that they could connect with the place. Such attachment would build political support for the Park and could help individuals develop their own conservation ethics.

The Adirondack Park is the people's park—New York State taxpayers provide funding for the acquisition and the care of the lands of the Forest Preserve and to local governments within the Adirondack Park. The Park provides benefits to all New Yorkers—clean water, clean air, carbon sequestration, critical habitat for endangered species. If the Park is to achieve its potential in the future, it will need more and continued support from the voters of New York. The job of the Information Alliance would be to ensure that the Adirondack Park feels relevant to all New Yorkers.

New residents in any community struggle to find services, information, and "local intel" about the area. Some neighbors or communities provide welcome baskets. Some towns have helpful "Neighbor Helping Neighbor" groups or "Community News" listservs. The Adirondack Public Information Alliance should send informational packets to new residents.



Park management and planning should focus on waterways as much as terrestrial areas. Planning around watersheds rather than concentrating on separate, individual units will better address the whole natural system, which transcends unit boundaries.

These could describe the significance of the Park, the government structures in place, and the role of private landowners in its stewardship. A new Park resident wouldn't necessarily learn about the Adirondack Park Agency, for example, unless they ran across it in a development permit. They might not know that their address is inside the Park and what that means. Simple information could assist and help new residents.

> "People need to understand the consequences of what they're doing, reframe how they view the Park. Don't just list rules for different areas. Educate them so they can control their own behavior and think of consequences."
>
> **– Former Adirondack Park Agency Commissioner**

Local jobs

A corps of Adirondack Park interpreters or educators should be created. This could be done either as a singular effort (utilizing funding from an Adirondack Park Trust) or a network of partnerships with local entities.

Interpreters would share stewardship, cultural, and natural history messages with visitors. They would be based in towns across the Park, creating a network of highly desirable, non-exportable jobs that could attract a new generation of residents. Currently, similar positions such as the Adirondack Mountain Club's Summit Stewardship Program and Summer Naturalist Program typically attract approximately 9–10 applicants for every position. Since the beginning of the program, 24% of Summit Stewards have stayed and made their lives here full time, a high number given that the salaries for these seasonal positions are fairly low. Many are now raising families of their own here in the Park. That speaks to the enduring appeal of outdoor positions in a beautiful landscape and to the importance of connection to place in recruiting future residents.

Education, when combined with other protections, is known to be an effective strategy for reducing recreational impacts on public lands. In 2021, there are a number of programs that could serve as partnership models for how such a corps of interpreters could be created: the Adirondack High Peaks Summit Stewardship program (a partnership of the DEC, the Adirondack Mountain Club, and the Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy), the Town of Keene Front Country Steward program (previously a partnership of the Town of Keene and Adirondack Watershed Institute), Hadley Mountain Fire Tower Steward (a partnership of Hadley Mountain Fire Tower committee and SUNY Potsdam), Poke-O-Moonshine Fire tower (a partnership of Friends of Poke-O-Moonshine, Adirondack Architectural Heritage, with funding from NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation), etc.

Potential partnership entities could include: County Soil and Water Districts, local history associations, local government, the Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism, I Love New York, non-profits, school districts, libraries, etc. Local entities make strong backbone partners because they have the best understanding of where the particular community education needs and opportunities exist. Further, they have the ability to network to provide support structures such as housing.

Dispersed partnerships do not mean a multitude of diverse messages, however. Communication should be consistent across the Park as it pertains to stewardship of public lands and the significance of the Adirondack Park. Centralized training would help ensure consistent messages like those describing Leave No Trace outdoor skills and ethics.

Consistent education for policymakers

Anyone with responsibility for making decisions about the Adirondack Park, whether at the local or state level, should receive **standard and continuing training and education on the significance of the Adirondack Park.** This should start at the level of local planning boards and local government officials and rise through the highest offices in New York State. Standardizing and requiring this training would help everyone involved in decision making that impacts the Adirondack Park see how those decisions actually affect the Park. Local, state, and stakeholder voices would be essential in making sure such training covers needed topics. Over time, this would change the paradigm from considering aspects of the Park piecemeal (one community decision, one water treatment plant, one funding opportunity, one constitutional amendment) to holistic consideration of the Adirondack Park.

This is of special importance for the staff and commissioners whose decisions have a significant, lasting impact upon the Adirondack Park. DEC staff, APA staff, and commissioners, all must receive consistent, complete training about the place they are serving. From Assistant Forest Rangers working for a season to the Chair of the APA Board, everyone working for the Adirondack Park has the potential to make a substantial impact on this place which belongs to all New Yorkers, past, present, and future.

Finally, Adirondack Park Agency commissioners carry an exceptional burden of responsibility for the future of the Adirondack Park. In addition to the training on the places, people, and statutes of the Adirondack Park, some APA commissioners should have a background in environmental science and/or environmental law. As has been seen with the makeup of past APA boards, this expertise is extremely helpful in conversations about development, recreational use and impacts, etc.

Greater knowledge will increase awareness, opportunities, and connection to the Adirondack Park, ultimately benefitting the natural systems, the people, and the place.

PATH FIVE

Strengthen legal protections for waters and wildlands.

As a result of compromises necessary to see it passed, the Adirondack Park Agency Act did not provide the restrictions needed to protect the ecological integrity of

shorelines and waterbodies. Over the past 50 years, with the exception of progress on acid rain, water quality has been diminished as a result of the development that occurred on shorelines.

There are opportunities to protect water quality in the future, however. One strategy to strengthen shoreline protection would be to re-classify shorelines as Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs), giving a reimagined, fully-funded Adirondack Park Agency greater jurisdiction over those areas. A Critical Environmental Area has "one or more of the following characteristics: a feature that is a benefit or threat to human health; an exceptional or unique natural setting; an exceptional or unique social, historical, archaeological, recreational, or educational value; or an inherent ecological, geological, or hydrological sensitivity to change that may be adversely affected by any physical disturbance" (NYS DEC).

Updates to the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan and Environmental Conservation Law

Two additional changes should be part of changes to the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (APSLMP).

First, the DEC should **determine recreational carrying capacities for waterbodies** to understand how much use their ecosystems can withstand. Then it should manage those waterbodies accordingly.

The importance of managing water quality cannot be overstated. The cascade of negative impacts on water quality are catastrophic: ecological health, human health, economic conditions, and so on, all feel the effects. There are no easy fixes to water pollution. As one example, waterbodies impacted by over-application of road salt can take decades to recover. Groundwater recovery is even longer, meaning that wells contaminated now could take a generation to be usable again.

As such, the lack of comprehensive, fully-funded monitoring of the quality of the public waters of the Adirondack Park is a major oversight that must be corrected. The Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan mandate for the determination of recreational carrying capacity, regular monitoring, and appropriate management needs enforcement.

> "The state owns land and water but takes no responsibility for water. It has no inventory of use for any waterbody in the state and no system in place to be able to conduct that inventory."
>
> **– Former NYS Department of Environmental Conservation official**

Second, the Environmental Conservation Law must be amended so that the Department of Environmental Conservation protects the natural beauty of the entire Adirondack Park. In particular, scenic vistas should be protected as essential to the natural character of the Park and as a legacy for all. Legal mechanisms exist and could be better used to ensure that areas of natural beauty are preserved. Scenic vistas have an outsized role in helping people connect with the Adirondack Park.

Waters and lands of the Adirondack Park must be adequately protected from the threat of invasive species, which cause harm to ecosystems and people, and are significantly more expensive to control and manage than to prevent. The 2021 Aquatic Invasive Species Transport bill is an important step in the right direction, but adequate funding, legal mechanisms, research, and monitoring must be provided to prevent invasive species from damaging the Adirondack Park.

Many of these protections could be streamlined through the **Adirondack Park Water Resources Board.** The function of this board, described in greater detail above, would be to consolidate all planning, standard-setting, permit-processing, monitoring, and compliance related to the waterbodies of the Adirondacks in a single entity. Given the importance of clean water to the Adirondack Park and indeed, to all life, concentrating protection of water resources in one entity is a worthwhile effort. There are currently too many opportunities for water quality to be diminished given the overlapping jurisdictions of the APA, the DEC, and the Department of Health. Not only should water quality be considered of highest priority, but it should be protected at its source, rather than hoping for an engineered solution to correct quality concerns after pollution has occurred.

PATH SIX

Change public lands management to include watershed, comprehensive, and complex planning. Change private lands planning to incentivize appropriate hamlet-centered development and protect the wild character outside of these areas.

Both the public and private lands of the Adirondack Park suffer from thinking that considers individual parcels in isolation. The result has been a fixation on the specific location, challenge, opportunity, or solution, without considering those in the context of the greater whole. Moreover, focus is often terrestrial-based, without consideration of the ways in which watersheds and even single waterbodies transcend political boundaries.

To address this on public lands, New York State must embrace **comprehensive planning for state lands and waters within the Adirondack Park.** Planning should go from the general to the specific: start from the level of the Park, move through watersheds or larger landscape regions, to the particular complex, and finally to the individual unit or waterbody.

Scenic vistas, short nature trails, and other visitor amenities should be part of a comprehensive plan, recognizing the visitors' diverse needs and desires.

A complex is a set of related and adjacent public and private lands that have similar ecology and infrastructure that impact each other. In describing the Great South Woods Complex, the Department of Environmental Conservation notes, "The fundamental interdependence of public and private lands, and the need for stewardship that crosses landowner boundaries and simultaneously considers multiple objectives, is consistent with the intent of both the APSLMP and APA Act" (NYS DEC).

A unit, by contrast, is a contiguous area of public land that is managed as one area. Units may be large or small, but they are not interconnected. Currently, planning within the Department of Environmental Conservation happens at the level of the individual unit through Unit Management Plans. Lands that are connected should be treated as such. Lands that are part of the same watershed are inherently connected.

Comprehensive planning

In developing management strategies, the state should use a tried and tested methodology that includes transparency and a robust stakeholder process. While transparency and stakeholder input do not guarantee a better outcome, they provide greater trust in the process. Whatever the outcome, acceptance of management actions is easier when all sides feel that they have had an opportunity for genuine input.

With such a process, the state should **develop a comprehensive plan for recreation management of the public lands and waters of the Adirondack Park.** Resource damage and management in one area impact other areas. The Park must be seen as an interconnected system.

Inadequate funding and lack of political will have been obstacles to this type of planning. Recent progress toward consideration of Visitor Use Management within the DEC and the APA has been encouraging. The public lands of the Adirondack Park cannot and will never be managed as a singular system without a plan that considers them as such.

A key component of such a comprehensive plan is the consideration of many different types of recreational users and the features they want and need. Scenic vistas, short nature trails, and other visitor amenities should be part of a comprehensive plan, recognizing the visitors' diverse needs and desires.

Conservation easements

Similarly, conservation easements are a tool that should be better employed both for recreational and ecological purposes. **Conservation easements should provide recreational opportunities and community connectivity not desired on state lands. Easements should also be used to protect and connect habitat.**

Easements are a way to offer motorized recreational opportunities not appropriate or legal on state lands. They are an important tool to provide infrastructure to connect communities with each other and with the Forest Preserve. With almost a million acres of easement land in 2021, it should be possible to provide a full spectrum of desired recreational opportunities on these areas. This must be done in concert with state priorities, including those in the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. Such recreation could include snowmobile and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trails as well as mountain-bike connector trails and glamping opportunities.

Examples of successful trail networks using easements from other areas include Vermont's Kingdom Trails (Mountain Biking) and New Hampshire's Ride the Wilds (ATV trails). In 2021, approximately 12 million visitors came to the Adirondack Park. They, in addition to the 130,000 human residents of the Park, are looking for a variety of types of experiences.

Separately, it is important to recognize the significant ecological value of easements to provide habitat connectivity as well as connections between human communities. Wildlife movement has value for the health and integrity of the Adirondack Park. North-south and east-west lines of connection to public lands within and beyond the Park's boundaries will be critically important to the survival of migrating species during a period of increasing climate instability. Easements can help protect these routes.

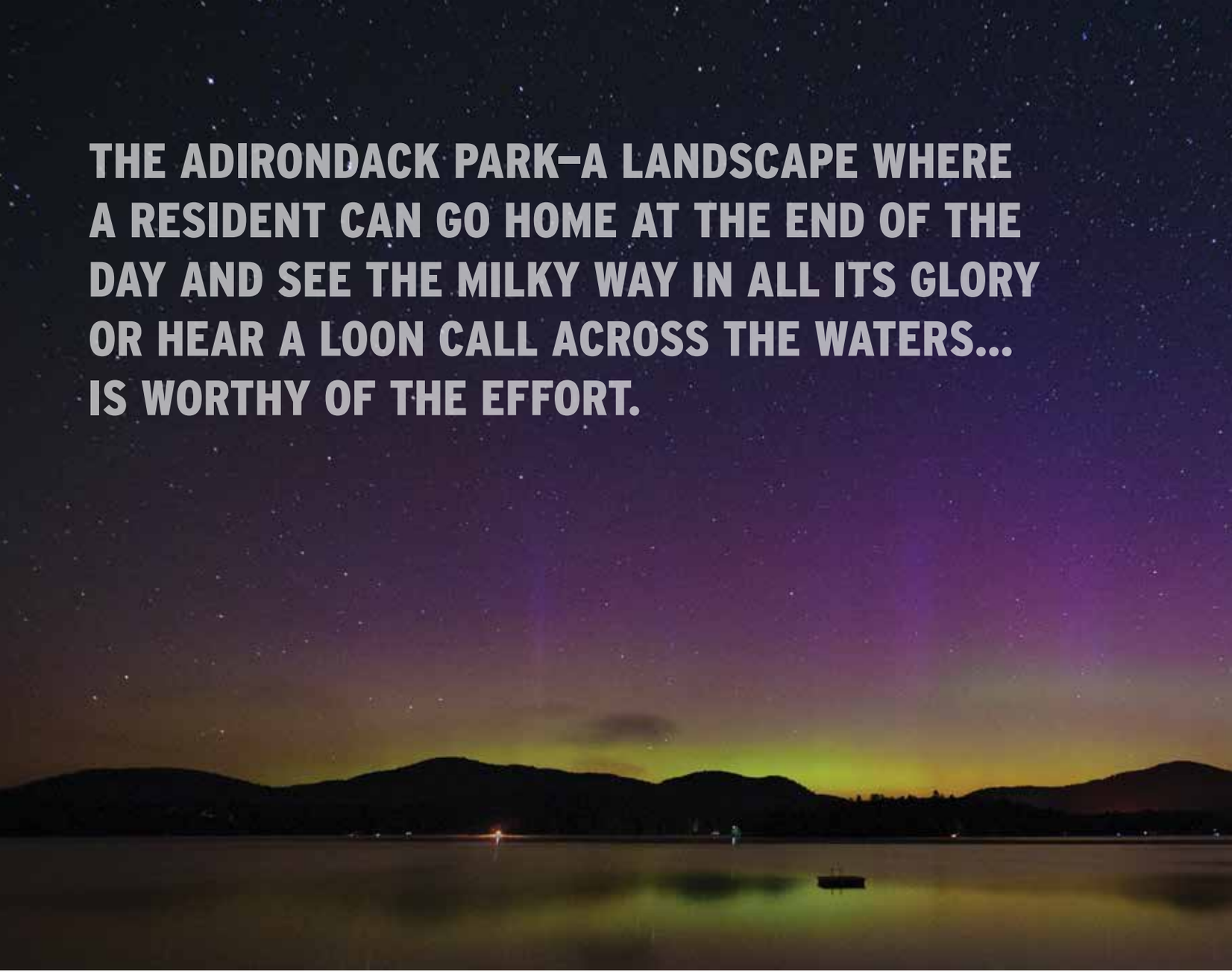
Connectivity easements and recreational easements both have a place within the management of the Adirondack Park.

Easements cannot be effective without monitoring and enforcement. This is complicated and resource intensive, as each easement is individual. However, for easements to be successful, there must be an adequate investment of financial resources in regularly monitoring easement lands and enforcing the terms of the easement. The state should make comprehensive information about easements publicly available, including the records of monitoring inspections.

Local plans

On the private lands, the lack of local land-use plans is analogous to the lack of completed Unit Management Plans for Forest Preserve units. Inadequate financial resources and time are partially to blame in both cases. Certainly, many other factors, including political ones, are also to blame.

A reimagined Adirondack Park Agency should provide a circuit rider program with technical assistance and grant funding to help communities with planning, project implementation, and grant writing. As discussed elsewhere, communities should identify their own needs for projects, and the process must come from the communities themselves, but the state has a significant role to play in providing funding and technical expertise.



THE ADIRONDACK PARK—A LANDSCAPE WHERE A RESIDENT CAN GO HOME AT THE END OF THE DAY AND SEE THE MILKY WAY IN ALL ITS GLORY OR HEAR A LOON CALL ACROSS THE WATERS... IS WORTHY OF THE EFFORT.

> "Planning unit by unit doesn't make sense. You need to start by looking at the whole Park, then at regions within the Park, then complexes, then at units. We have it totally reversed."
>
> **– Former Adirondack Park Agency Chair**

As an interim step, **a non-profit such as the Adirondack Council should help create a private pilot program to provide this technical assistance with planning and grant writing.** The Council or similar organization could partner to accomplish this. One partner would have to be an entity with Park-wide or regional focus. The pilot program should operate for a number of years to demonstrate to the APA and state and local governments the potential benefit of such a program. Working with municipalities would help lay the groundwork for potential future budget requests for such funding.

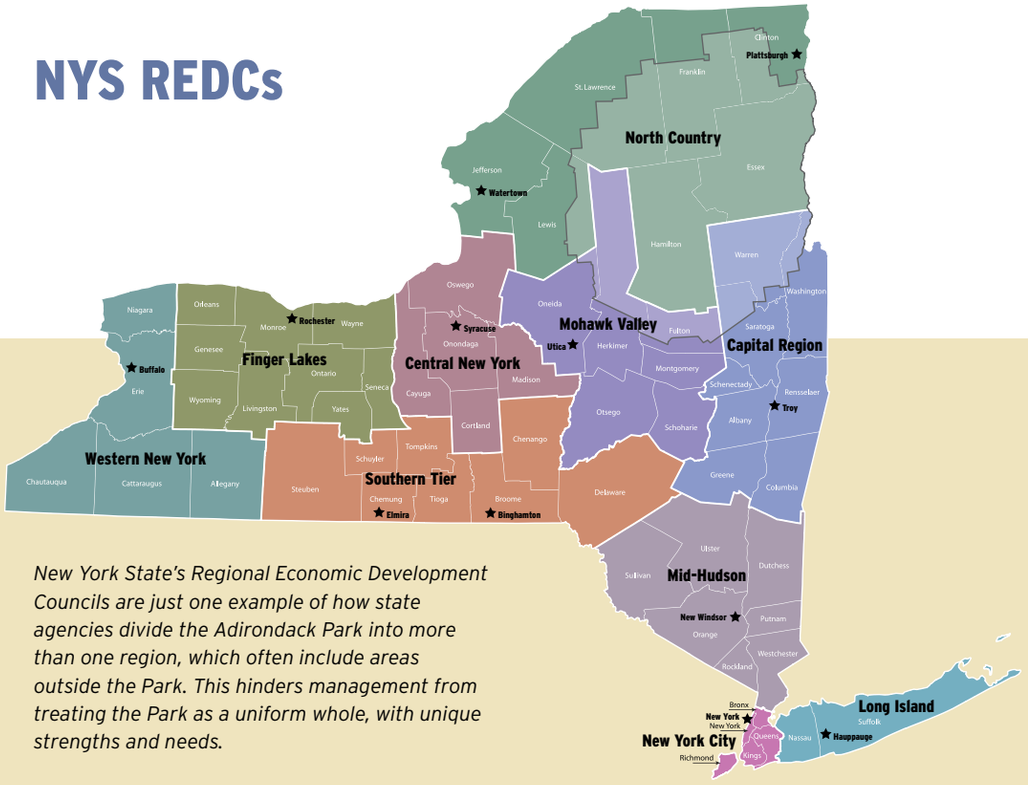
Updating the Land Use and Development Plan

The creators of the Adirondack Park Agency and the Land Use and Development Plan used a planning methodology that was borrowed from urban and suburban landscapes. The landscape design methodology was that of Ian McHarg's *Design with Nature*. The basic idea was to layer complex, spatial data about the land's "fitness" or "suitability" for development or conservation, creating a map that would show where development should occur and where it should be prevented.

This was applied on an enormous scale for the Adirondack Park when the Land Use and Development Plan was created. At its heart, the Plan created a complicated map indicating where development was more suitable or less, based on knowledge of the individual parcels.

This model has not been entirely successful in encouraging development in areas where it is most desired and preventing fragmentation where it is least desired. Nor has it served well at considering the cumulative value of the Adirondack Park or the cumulative impacts of development. It has not been updated to respond to current understanding of the importance of spatial patterns of development and modern conservation science. For example,

NYS REDCs



New York State's Regional Economic Development Councils are just one example of how state agencies divide the Adirondack Park into more than one region, which often include areas outside the Park. This hinders management from treating the Park as a uniform whole, with unique strengths and needs.

research underpinning the principles of modern conservation design suggests that development should be clustered rather than equally spread across a parcel. Clustered development minimizes the fragmentation of habitat for wildlife. But the Land Use and Development Plan as written does not require clustering. Nor have regulations associated with the Plan helped incentivize main street development to keep the human communities successful and thriving.

Several incentives could encourage development in hamlets in order to help human communities thrive.

First, where appropriate, hamlet boundaries should be expanded to create a better location for development and preserve wild areas from fragmentation. This should be linked to addressing the affordable housing crisis in the Park.

Second, the permit process within hamlets should be streamlined. For smaller projects within hamlet boundaries, permits should be simplified, whether the municipality has an APA-approved plan or not. The original idea of having all municipalities go through the process of creating a land-use plan that could gain APA approval has clearly not succeeded. As of 2021, only 18 municipalities have such plans. As a result, there is too great an administrative burden on the APA, which should focus on projects with regional impact.

Streamlining the process, or creating a checklist of standards, would reduce the administrative burden on the Agency and the developer. This will encourage building where it assures affordability for residents, protects the wild character of the landscape that attracts visitors, and preserves the ecological integrity that makes the area worthy of the term "Park."

Third, the Class A/B lists should be amended. The current classification of development projects into "Class A and Class B" within the Adirondack Park Agency Act creates confusion and places responsibility for far too many small projects on the Adirondack Park Agency. The Agency should focus on projects of regional significance, those that impact the character of the Park. Jurisdiction over smaller projects, such as individual residences, should shift to municipalities with established standards.

Fourth, Transferrable Development Rights should be utilized. This system can be used to redirect development from an area that should be protected to another more appropriate for development. While it is complicated to implement successfully, it should be better explored within the Park. Areas receiving development rights must be able to encourage development without degrading the character of the place. Used properly, however, this tool can help direct appropriate development. It has already been used successfully by some municipalities in the Park.

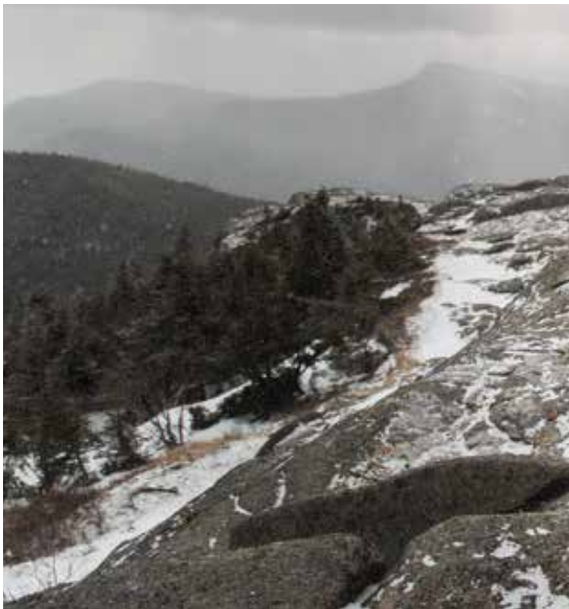
These changes would allow the lands and waters within the Blue Line to be treated as an Adirondack Park, an entity with a goal of protected ecosystems, thriving human communities, and management that enables both to reach their potential. The proposed changes require major and dramatic rethinking of the Adirondack Park as it currently exists.

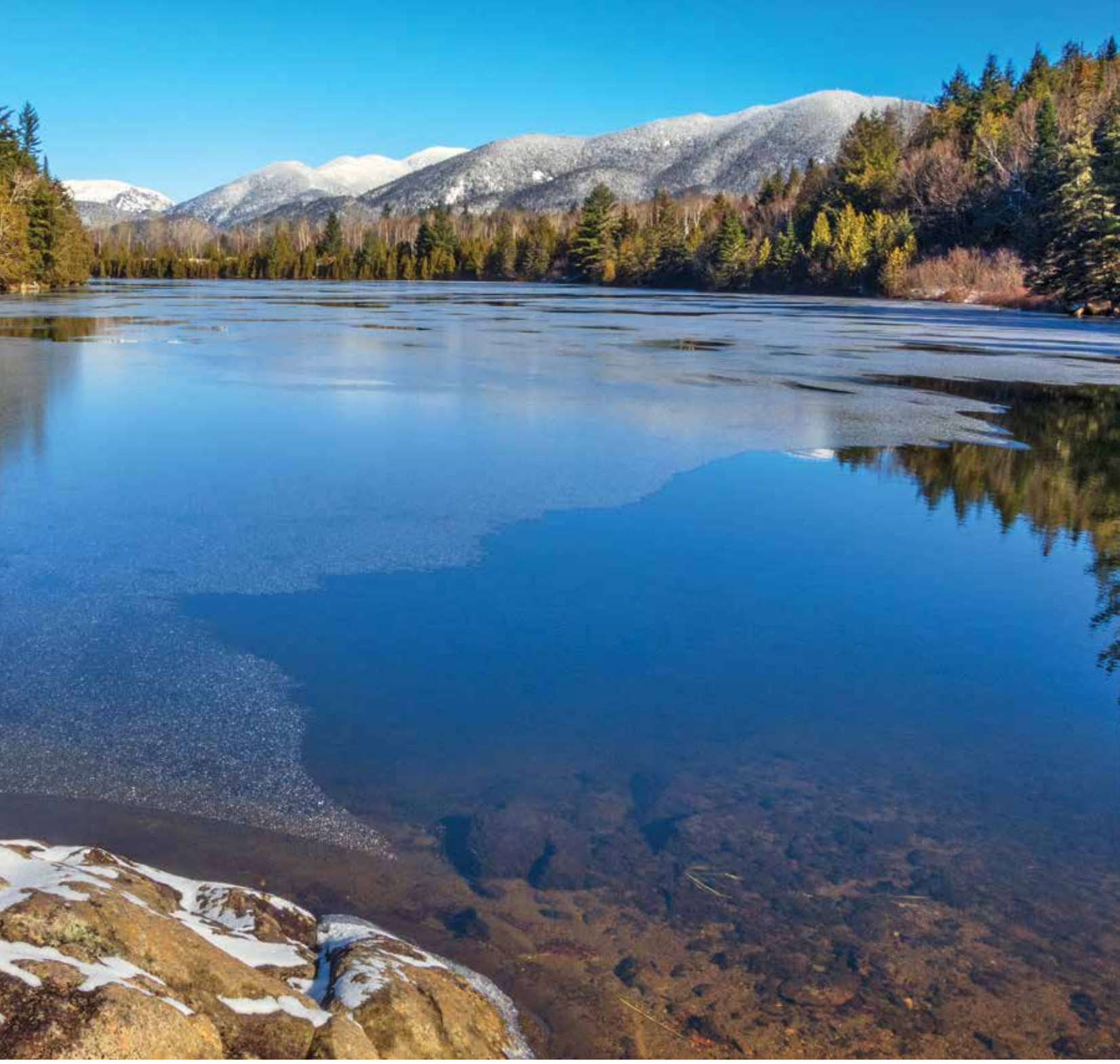
The Adirondack Park—a landscape where a resident can go home at the end of the day and see the Milky Way in all its glory or hear a loon call across the waters, where a visitor can have a rugged experience in the wilderness or participate in a rugby tournament, where a bald eagle can soar over a hamlet and catch a mercury-free fish in a clean mountain lake—is worthy of the effort.

Adirondack wild lands are made up of natural communities that have the best chance to survive if human visitors do all they can to reduce their impact. While beavers leave their mark as they help sustain life in a wetland, people should not.

Planners working to reduce human impact in the Adirondacks include, left to right: Ben Lawhon senior director of research and consulting for the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics; Seth Jones, Adirondack Mountain Club Education Director; and Tate Connor, High Peaks Wilderness Manager for the Department of Environmental Conservation.

Park managers should develop strategies based on continuous research and monitoring. They should also create comprehensive visitor use management plans that reflect a holistic view of the Park, rather than one fragmented into many management units. Such planning would guide development of visitor amenities like new trails and inform educational efforts to encourage visitor use in areas that can best handle it.





The Adirondacks are a wondrous world in all seasons, with winter being notably beautiful. As climate change progresses in the coming years, it will challenge the natural communities to adapt and the human community to marshal all its efforts to prevent or mitigate the negative impacts.

CONCLUSION

Wildlife, plants, and people all depend upon the Adirondack Park. It provides basic needs: water, shelter, food, air, space. People earn a living or visit communities surrounded by forests where animals such as moose, eagle, and snowshoe hare make their home. The Adirondacks have the abundance to provide enough for both hare and human while providing water, air, and carbon sequestration for those far away. It is a story for the world about what the land can be, what a home for all can look like.

Paths forward

VISION 2050 proposes a destination and some paths leading to this future. There are multiple ways to follow these paths. Recommendations are interrelated and support one another, but also have value standing on their own. Some paths will be easier to follow than others. Forward action along any of these paths will mean progress for the Adirondack Park.

Arriving at a destination requires action. Doing nothing is a choice as well, but not a static one. If no change is made, the ecological integrity of the Park will continue to erode, the human communities will continue to hollow out, and management will drift further and further from the cutting edge leadership that is needed.

The role of the Adirondack Council

The Adirondack Council puts forth VISION 2050, but the future does not belong to the Council. It is shared, just as the responsibility to the natural and human communities of the Adirondack Park is held in common. The unique beauty of the Adirondack Park is shared: between wildlife and humans, residents and visitors, those within and beyond the Blue Line.

The path ahead calls for collective action. Fortunately, many are committed to the future of the Park. This project brought together wise and engaged people who treasure the Adirondacks, an experience that demonstrates that there is great reason for optimism. Just as many diverse voices shaped VISION 2050, all who love the Adirondacks must join in taking the bold steps necessary to reach a better future.

The Adirondack Council looks to work in partnership with advocates, local and state officials, agencies, and others to achieve this vision. Neither the staff nor the board of the Council are experts in all aspects of the work of the vision. This work belongs to all, just as the Adirondack Park belongs to all.

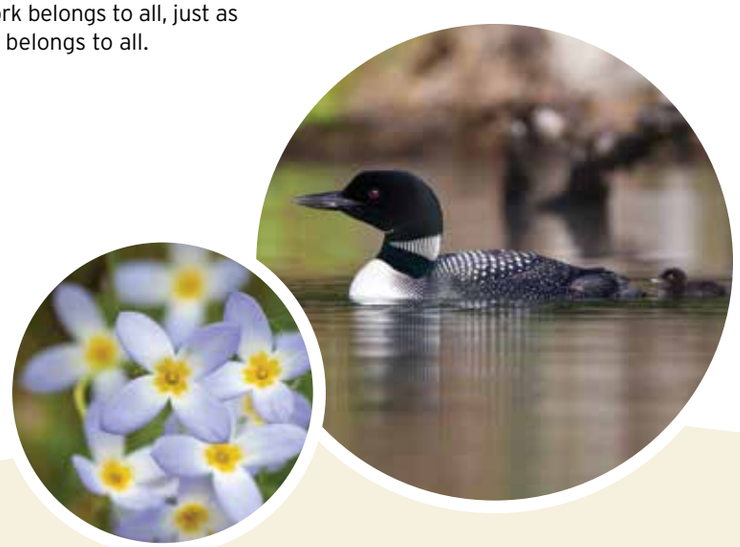
VISION 2050 is a vision for the Park. It can be a 'north star' to help guide the efforts of Adirondack advocates and others including the Adirondack Council over the next 30 years. Its values and principles can be a filter that informs priorities, strategies, decision-making, and work plans going forward.

The Adirondack Park

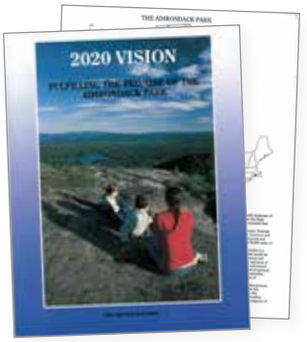
Whether wild or human, this place has special value and is loved by many. It has endured disruption, damage, and difficulties to arrive today, largely intact. It provides spiritual refreshment and nourishment to many.

It is a good home.

For all those who live here, people who visit, and those who may never enter the Adirondacks, it is worthy of the effort ahead.



Appendix: History



The original 2020 VISION

To create a plan for the future, we must look at the past, to clearly understand this moment in context.

In the mid-1980s, the Adirondack Park Agency was just over a decade old. At that time, the Adirondack Council took important steps to create a long-term strategy for the Adirondack Park when it began publication of *2020 VISION: Fulfilling the Promise of the Adirondack Park*. Many of the goals the organization articulated at that time have become reality. This is a testament not only to the insight of the proposals but also to the invaluable collaboration among preservationists and scientists at the Council, at other partner institutions, and within state agencies. The experts who knew the areas of greatest biological richness largely worked for the state. It was imperative that the Council work closely with these experts.

The first volume of *2020 VISION, Biological Diversity: Saving All the Pieces,* was published in 1988. It described more than 200,000 acres of privately owned lands of "extraordinary biological value." The 64-page technical document reported the results of meticulous biological surveys of the Adirondacks supported by maps and photographs. Building on this scientific foundation, the publication proposed priority lands for the state to acquire for the Forest Preserve, placing these ecological treasures under the Forever Wild protection of the New York State Constitution.

The second volume, *Completing the Adirondack Wilderness System,* published in 1990, called on the state to enlarge the portion of the Preserve classified as Wilderness, the most pristine category of state-owned Adirondack parkland. About one third of the new Wilderness would come through reclassification of existing Forest Preserve and the remainder would come through key land acquisitions.

> *The Adirondack State Land Master plan says: "A wilderness area, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man—where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."*

The report envisions a decades-long process but also emphasizes a sense of urgency.

"Time is of the essence," the report reads. "Once wilderness is subdivided and developed, it is wilderness no more."

Also in 1990, the Council published Volume 3, *Realizing the Recreational Potential of Adirondack Wild Forests.* This work calls attention to the importance of Wild Forest areas. These Forest Preserve lands allow a greater variety of recreational use, including motorized activities, and more facilities than Wilderness. Such lands give the public greater access to wild nature and relieve Wilderness from the pressure of more intense use. The report identifies 255,000 acres of private land the Council believed the state should purchase to complete the Wild Forest system.

Published in 2007, Volume 4, *Private Land Stewardship,* explores the important role that conservation easements and other forms of preservation have come to play in guaranteeing the ecological health and wild character of the Park. It emphasizes that "protection" doesn't have to equate to "public ownership."

This represents a major shift that was happening in the field of conservation and a tremendous change from the thinking that informed Volumes 1-3. Today, not only do we recognize that private holdings play an important role in conservation, we also acknowledge that, in certain instances, private owners are better able to protect their lands than the state.

One of the first tasks of the current *Adirondack VISION Project* was to assess how much of the *2020 VISION* has become a reality—and the results are stirring. Working with the New York State Natural Heritage Program, **we found that more than half of the land recommended for protection as biological reserves, motor-free Wilderness and non-Wilderness lands have been protected.**

These protections include purchase by the state and conservation easements held by the state, individuals, or organizations. Overall, 492,300 acres out of 907,000 acres the Council recommended now have some form of legal protection from fragmentation and development. This accomplishment grew from the successful collaboration of property owners, state agencies, and non-profits, notably the Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

Building on those accomplishments, the current Adirondack VISION need not concentrate as much on state acquisition – though there are still lands identified in *2020 VISION* whose purchase would make invaluable additions to the Forest Preserve. The challenges the Park will face in the next 30 years are of a different nature than those faced in the 1980s, requiring a broader range of tools for planning and management.

Learning from history

To set a course for the future, we need to understand where we have been, where we are now, and how we got here.

The people of New York State have been actively debating how to understand the Adirondacks and best govern the region at least since the 18th Century.

For the purposes of the VISION project, the natural starting point for the historical voyage that leads to the present-day Adirondacks is the establishment of the Forest Preserve in 1885. This success was the result of years of advocacy and work by New York State Surveyor Verplanck Colvin and others. It launched a period from 1885 to 1895 which saw tremendous advances in the protection of the Adirondacks. Among other sources, the following historical summary draws on the work of Adirondack historian Philip G. Terrie, particularly his book, *Contested Terrain.*

By the time the state acted to create the Preserve, Adirondack tourism had already become popular during a post-Civil War trend toward seeking physical and spiritual health in nature. A number of influential writers popularized the Adirondacks as a destination for outdoor recreation. The publication that may have had the greatest impact was the 1869 *Adventures in the Wilderness; or, Camp-Life in the Adirondacks,* by William H.H. Murray. The sportsmen and tourists who followed Murray to the Adirondacks were so often unprepared for the conditions in the mountains that they became known as Murray's Fools.

The increasing popularity of Adirondack tourism, and with it the chore of taking care of poorly prepared visitors while inspiring a wilderness ethic, was a trend that grew over the next 150 years. Tourism eventually eclipsed the forest industry and mining as the driving economic force in the Adirondacks.

Those who saw the recreational value of the Adirondacks called for some form of protection of natural resources. But in 1885, the concerns that most inspired action to protect the Adirondacks grew from rampant, irresponsible logging. Careless logging practices denuded hillsides and piled up slash that became a fire hazard.

A state commission working in the 1870s found that logging practices that cleared Adirondack slopes of trees damaged the forest's ability to store and release snowmelt and rainwater in a gradual way. The unreliable flows endangered the water supply for communities and mills and threatened navigation on rivers and canals.

In 1885, the state Legislature took the first of a series of measures critical to the protection of the Adirondacks and created an Adirondack Park Forest Preserve. At 680,000 acres, it was far smaller than the 2.6 million acres the Preserve has grown to, and the lands were scattered. But the action led directly to the creation of an Adirondack Park special in many ways, including its mixture of public and private lands, and to the enshrining of the protection of the Forest Preserve in the state Constitution.

The Forest Preserve law said these forests should be "forever wild" but was otherwise vague and did not end destructive logging in the Adirondacks. In 1890, the state approved funds to purchase more lands for the Forest Preserve. This allowed the state to purposefully choose lands for the Preserve rather than rely on random parcels acquired through tax forfeiture and other means.

After long discussions on how to define the Adirondack Park and its purpose, the state created the Park in 1892 for public use, watershed protection, and a future timber supply. It included both public and private lands. In 1894, voters of the state approved a new state Constitution that included a pledge that the Forest Preserve would "be forever kept as wild forest lands."

In the decades since, that constitutional guarantee has held firm. Over the years, voters have approved amendments, many of them addressing small-scale questions, but have shown a determination to protect the fundamental concept of Forever Wild.

The map of the Adirondack Park has shifted dynamically since its birth in 1892. The original Park contained 2.8 million acres of public and private lands within the Blue Line. Two expansions alone, in 1912 and 1931, added more than 2.3 million acres. Today, the Park encompasses about six million acres.

Crucially, and especially since the mid-20th Century, the amount of land the state owns for the Forest Preserve has increased through acquisitions. The Preserve that began at 680,000 acres now contains 2.6 million acres of publicly owned land. And starting in the late 20th Century, the state increasingly purchased conservation easements designed to protect the natural environment while keeping land in private ownership. Now, 781,000 acres of Park lands are under easement contracts.

Visitor use of the Park increased slowly at first. But beginning with the early 20th Century, wealthy families began to create private preserves and seasonal retreats. And with the end of World War I, the state began creating trails, campgrounds, and facilities to attract the general public.

Tourism became more important to the Adirondack economy at a time when the fortunes of the timber and mining industries were declining. While both the hospitality and forestry industries went through inevitable cycles in the next decades, the die was cast.

By the 21st Century, the large paper companies were selling their land and withdrawing from the Adirondacks, while tourism was the driving force for employment, income, and investment. One study found that in 2016, the tourism industry created one in five Adirondack jobs and generated $640 million in wages. Travelers spent $13 billion in the region.

By the late 1960s, conservationists were growing increasingly worried about the future of private lands. They saw a danger that runaway development would spoil the Adirondack Park. In 1967, associates of Laurence Rockefeller proposed that close to one-third of the Adirondack Park, a mix of public and private lands, be made a national park. Though the idea went nowhere, it foreshadowed an historic step that Laurence's brother, Gov. Nelson Rockefeller, took in 1968. Rockefeller appointed a Temporary Study Commission on the Future of the Adirondacks to propose policies that would govern private as well as public lands. This launched the second period of rapid transformation within the Adirondack Park.

Working in an economic and social environment in which ruinously excessive development loomed as a threat, the Commission proposed the creation of the Adirondack Park Agency (APA). The APA would write one piece of legislation to govern the management of state land in the Park, and a second to govern private lands. The Legislature created the APA in 1971. The Adirondack State Land Master Plan (SLMP) was adopted the following year, such that it has the force of law, and the Private Land Use and Development Plan, extremely controversial within the Blue Line, became law in 1973.

The SLMP categorized state lands with classifications, including Wilderness and Wild Forest, that defined levels of environmental protection and acceptable uses. The Private Land Use and Development Plan created a system of private land classification, essentially a zoning law designed to protect open lands and guide development toward villages and hamlets.

The APA is charged both with approving state management plans for public Forest Preserve lands and regulating private land development. Together with the state Department of Environmental Conservation, the APA is the instrument for state management of the Adirondacks. As such, it has often been the focus of controversy. Some critics have argued that it wields too much influence and hinders economic development. Others contend it is not rigorous enough in enforcing restrictions aimed at protecting both the tangible natural resources and the intangible characteristics of wilderness.

In the years immediately following the creation of the APA, many local residents and their elected officials bristled at the new tools for state control. The language of dissent was often fiery, and some opposition included violence. Though disagreements today often divide along the same lines of local versus state authority, the tone has grown far more civil and constructive. While advocates and leaders within the Park continue to disagree on particular issues, they also keep working to cultivate areas of common ground.

This change represents the beginning of a new chapter in Adirondack history when a shared focus on the future allows for new alliances.

Since the creation of the APA, the Adirondacks have confronted challenges in both the public and private spheres that threaten the character of the Park.

Pollution carried on the wind from outside the Park in the form of acid rain, and mercury contamination has damaged ecosystems in the Park.

The withdrawal of large paper companies from the Adirondacks has weakened a traditional source of livelihood but set the stage for significant enlargement of protected lands through state acquisition and conservation easements.

Subdivisions and residential development projects continue to unfold throughout the Park, often on open lands outside the hamlets. Invasive species, both aquatic and terrestrial, have the potential to devastate native ecological communities.

During this period, the Adirondacks have undergone a demographic change, with an aging population and a shrinking number of young families. Schools have worked to cope with falling enrollments. Services like volunteer first responders are confronting a loss in membership.

And so, dynamic change continues apace in the Adirondack Park, creating the need and the opportunity for the long-range strategy the Adirondack Council's Adirondack VISION Project seeks to develop. Without such strategic planning, the future of the Park will be shaped by piecemeal decision-making subject to the political pressures of the moment.

To preserve the Adirondack Park forever, we need consistent principles and a comprehensive plan based on sound science. The need and the will exist to launch a third period of rapid transformation within the Park. When those who care about the Adirondacks see beyond the turmoil of the moment to a shared vision we can fulfill the promise of a Park, where people and nature can thrive together, protected for all time.

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Legal

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Clean Air Act

Clean Water Act

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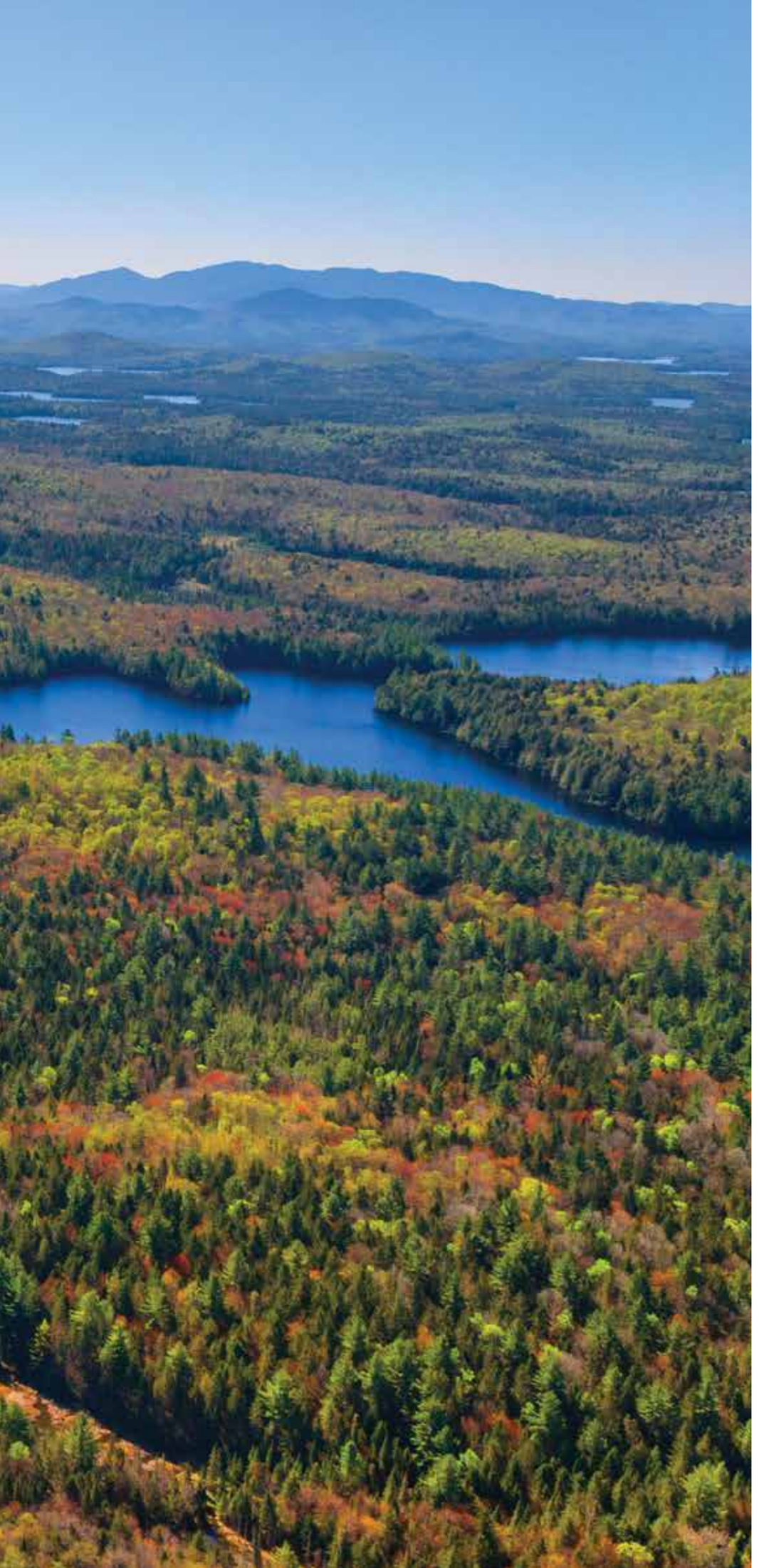
A note on interviews and charrettes:

Many individuals participated in interviews, discussions, and charrettes as part of this project. We promised all participants anonymity in order to facilitate open conversations free from concerns about political implications. We are deeply indebted to these participants for their willingness to engage, their time, their thoughts, and their expertise.

One common theme across all conversations was the passion that participants have for a positive future for the Adirondacks. We believe this place is better for their contributions.



Protected Adirondack Waters including Long, Turtle and Hoel Ponds, and others, in the St. Regis Canoe Area.

Photo Credits: Carl Heilman II/Wild Visions Inc.: Cover: "Round Mountain, Chapel Pond," Page Opposite Inside Cover: "Pines near Brant Lake," page III, "Ausable Forks," page 6: "Birches," page 53: "Lower Cascade Lake," page 65–66: "Night Sky," page 71–72: "Upper Hudson River," page 73: "Young Hiker," page 79–80; Nancie Battaglia: page 6: "DEC Forest Ranger," page 21: "Salt Truck," page 23–24: "Salt on Road," page 45–46: "Eroded Trail;" Larry Master/ Masterimages.org: Acknowledgements: "Bobcat," Table of Contents: "Moose," page III: "Loon," page V: "Coyote," page 2: "Fawn," page 4: "Fisher," page 6: "Spruce Grouse," page 15: "Long Eared Owl," page 49: "Snowy Owl," page 66: "Loon," page 71: "Moose," page 74: "Loon;" Paul Smith's College, Adirondack Watershed Institute (AWI): Opposite the Table of Contents Page: "Lake Placid High School students," page 17–18: "Boat Washing Station," page 37–38: "Lake Placid students doing field research;" Jamie West-McGiver: page II: "Mountain Biker," page IV: "Snowshoer," page 71–72, "Lean To" & "Hiker;" Ben Stechschulte: page 13: "Farm Fresh Produce," pages 19–20, page 25–26: "Juniper Hill Farm," page 27 "Cheesemaker," page 34, "North Country Creamery," page 41–42.

Map Credits: Wildlife Conservation Society, Ecological Composition and Condition of The Adirondack Park, Michale J. Glennon Ph.D., 2018: Page 10: "Ecological integrity in the Adirondack Park," page 14: "Future climate stress in the Adirondack landscape."

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The Adirondack Park

Whether wild or human, this place has special value and is loved by many.
It has endured disruption, damage, and difficulties to arrive today, largely intact.
It provides spiritual refreshment and nourishment to many.

It is a good home.

ADIRONDACK COUNCIL
PRESERVING WATER, AIR AND WILDLANDS

103 Hand Ave. | PO Box D-2 | Elizabethtown, NY 12932

We do this for them. Next generation Adirondackers looking out at Round Mountain, Chapel Pond and Wilderness. © Carl E. Heilman II / Wild Visions, Inc.

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