

## Common Ground calls for Park stimulus

LONG LAKE - A coalition of local government officials, environmentalists, business groups and other stakeholders in the Adirondack Park is calling on Gov. David Paterson to create a new economic development program for rural areas of the state that would give a boost to small businesses.

The Adirondack Common Ground Alliance, in a press release, said Paterson should establish a new rural economic development program as he carries out his plan to replace the Pataki administration's Empire Zone Program with a new "Excelsior Zone" program, that would provide businesses located inside such zones with incentives to boost job creation.

Empire Zone program was mainly aimed at big cities and big employers, the group's letter to Paterson reads. While that is not unusual in a state with 20 million residents, the group says programs and businesses that work in big cities don't always work in small villages and hamlets, where the need for economic development is just as urgent.

The Common Ground Alliance is recommending three policy changes that could be incorporated into the new Excelsior Zone program to benefit the Park:

Designate the entire Adirondack Park as a special economic development zone. The zone should be responsive to issues of scale and respect the Park's natural character. Incentives are needed to overcome increased development costs associated with remote, mountainous areas, as well as limited infrastructure.

Create a comprehensive program specific to the Adirondack Park. It should include development of shovel-ready sites, capital investment tax credits, wage credits (similar to the federal program) and a task force to administer a state-supported seed-capital fund.

The Adirondack Planning Initiative, a group that was created at the Local Government Day in Lake Placid in 2008, should work with the Empire State Development Corporation to develop a specific plan by September 2011.

"There is widespread agreement on the establishment of an Excelsior Zone because the benefits not only accrue to individual businesses, but to the welfare of the citizens of and visitors to the Adirondacks as well," said Ross Whaley of the Adirondack Landowners Association. "A new or expanded business that adds a handful of jobs might not qualify for state assistance if it was in a city, but those five or six jobs would be welcomed and appreciated in any Adirondack town."

Lani Ulrich of CAP21, an economic and community development organization based in the southwestern Adirondacks, said 63 percent of businesses in the Park employ four people or fewer, with a high percentage of them self-employed.

"Small and micro-businesses must be seen as the bedrock of development and employment in the Park and be given strong attention in terms of state support and incentives," Ulrich said. "Ventures in retail, hospitality and other tourism-related services will remain crucial."

Brian L. Houseal, executive director of the Adirondack Council, said there's no inherent conflict between boosting small businesses and protecting the Park's environmental health.

"Most of the Park's small, private businesses rely on the protected forests and waters of the Adirondack Park for their long-term survival," Houseal said.

Kate Fish, executive director of the Adirondack North Country Association, said the recommendations may also be appropriate for other parts of the North Country.

"This should make the program even more attractive to the Legislature, which we will call upon for financial support," she said.

Among those signing on to the letter to Paterson were Cali Brooks of the Adirondack Community Trust; Carol Brown, president of North Country Community College; Michael Conway, executive director of the Adirondack Economic Development Corp.; William Farber, supervisor of the town of Morehouse and chairman of the Hamilton County Legislature; Dr. John Mills, president of Paul Smith's College; Frederick H. Monroe, executive director of the Adirondack Park Local Government Review Board; Robert Perry, president of the New York State Snowmobile Association; and Brian Towers of the Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages.

The Common Ground Alliance of the Adirondacks is composed of a diverse set of local leaders from the Adirondacks, including elected officials, private entrepreneurs and representatives of education, economic development, health and environmental nonprofit organizations who are dedicated to identifying solutions that benefit Adirondack communities, their economies and the environment.