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Conservation group under new leadership

BY STEPHEN WILLIAMS Gazette Reporter

There's been a change in leadership at Protect the Adirondacks!, the conservation advocacy group that owns the Center for the Forest Preserve and Adirondack Research Library in Niskayuna.

Environmental activist Peter Borrelli of Northville has been named president and put in day-to-day charge, following the resignation of David Gibson as executive director in May.

Gibson had been executive director since 1987 but agreed to accept the position of adviser when his position was eliminated in March as the group struggled with financial issues. He resigned after being furloughed from the adviser position for several days a week in May.

"I felt it was time to move on," said Gibson, who lives in Ballston. "I'm sure the organization can recover and hopefully retain professional staff again."

Gibson, an active participant in the debates that have roiled the Adirondacks for decades, said he wants to continue working in some capacity on behalf of the Adirondack Park and Forest Preserve.

"I haven't made any decisions yet, but I definitely want to stay involved," Gibson said.

Resigning at the same time was Dan Plumley of Keene, the group's conservation director since 2005, and a board member prior to that.

Plumley is a graduate of Niskayuna High School and is in the Niskayuna High School Hall of Fame for his international conservation work.

Plumley said he'll be devoting more time to his consulting firm, TOTEM Environmental Consulting Group, which works on wild lands issues.

In addition to working in the Adirondacks, Plumley works with indigenous people in Mongolia and Siberia on land protection issues.

Protect the Adirondacks! was only formed last July, with the merger of the Association for Protection of the Adirondacks and the Residents' Committee to Protect the Adirondacks. Gibson and Plumley were at the Association to Protect the Adirondacks, which also owned the research center located in the former home of Niskayuna conservationist Paul Schaeffer.

In retrospect, Gibson said, the merger was probably rushed through too quickly and occurred at a time when the economy forced donors to cut back on charitable giving.

Borrelli has worked for several prominent environmental organizations, including the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Open Space Institute and the Adirondack Council.

He has also headed the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies in Massachusetts, working on behalf of the protection of marine ecosystems. He wrote a book titled “Stellwagen: The Making and Unmaking of a National Marine Sanctuary.”

Borrelli could not be reached for comment Friday.

Protect the Adirondacks! is one of three significant conservation organizations in the Adirondacks, along with the Adirondack Council and Adirondack Mountain Club.