

STATE OF THE PARK

Poised for Action | 2024-2025



**ADIRONDACK
COUNCIL** PRESERVING WATER,
AIR AND WILDLANDS

Raquette Lake

Poised for Action

Dear Friends,

As the Adirondack Council prepares to celebrate our 50th Anniversary in 2025, we reflect on the significant milestones in advocacy and conservation that have helped shape the Adirondack Park over the past five decades. And how the challenges facing the Park and the communities of the greater North Country have evolved over the years in unique and demanding ways. Climate change impacts, technological advancements, invasive species, increased housing demand, evolving recreational patterns, and cultural shifts regarding wild spaces are but a few of the pressures we navigate today as an organization. While complicated, we continue to draw inspiration to take on these issues from the very lands and waters we work to protect. Perhaps now more than ever, these places connect us to our wilder selves and the healing, restorative power of nature that has always been core to the Adirondack experience and the Council's mission.

As we embark on this milestone year, our North Star remains protecting the ecological integrity and wild character of the Park. For the Adirondack Park to thrive, we need more people to know it exists and to care about its future. We need a diverse coalition of people across the state and country who support and appreciate the Park for the globally significant ecological habitats that define it. Those who take advantage of the multiple recreational opportunities that it provides, understand the unique water resources it stewards, and value the cultural and historical significance of our rural communities. As climate change impacts, and weather patterns shift, the larger ecosystem services that this Park provides will prove to be even more important to the health and well-being of people here, downstate, and much farther afield.

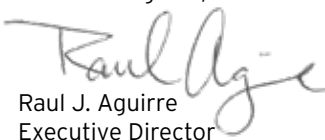
Poised for Action is a call to mobilize all those who care about this national treasure. The discourse around our place in wild spaces is changing – and may have unintended consequences on this iconic

landscape. Perhaps nothing speaks to this more directly than the Adirondack Park Agency seeking the first major review of the 53-year-old Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, which governs the classifications of state lands in the Park and how Wilderness is managed. We will work to ensure that natural resource protection remains the driving force for the Master Plan, one of the most successful wildlands management tools in the nation and an international model for landscape-scale conservation.

Clean water, the defining hallmark of the Adirondack Park's iconic lakes and rivers, remains one of our region's most precious resources. But as threats to Adirondack waters increase, including recent rulings by the Supreme Court, changing federal budget priorities, warming lake temperatures, increasing spread of invasive species, and aging septic infrastructure, a new model is needed to help protect these fragile resources. In the coming years, the Council will strengthen its clean water advocacy efforts in order to bring more dollars, support, science, and policy into the North Country to protect New York's most pristine waters.

As we look ahead to our 50th year of advocating on behalf of the Adirondack Park and its communities, we are **Poised for Action** and pursuing results! We look forward to working with you to achieve our conservation goals. With your support, the next 50 years of Adirondack Park protection can be as successful and powerful as the last 50 years.

Warmest regards,


Raul J. Aguirre
Executive Director



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This summer, the Dept. of Environmental Conservation expanded the list of eligible lakes for which shoreline owners will be offered financial assistance to clean up failing septic systems. The announcement expanded from the current list of a dozen waterbodies to 125 lakes inside the Adirondack Park. These are substantive additions that will have real impacts on local communities to address non-point source pollution across a much broader region of the Park.



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Our Mission

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

On the Cover: Overlooking Raquette Lake in early fall
 PHOTO © CARL HEILMAN II/WILD VISIONS INC.

Written and Edited by Adirondack Council Staff
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ABOUT THE PARK

PHOTO © CARL HEILMAN II/WILD VISIONS INC.

The Adirondack Park is one of the largest intact temperate forest ecosystems left in the world. It is also the largest park in the contiguous United States. It contains six million acres (9,300 square miles) of interspersed public and private lands, 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.

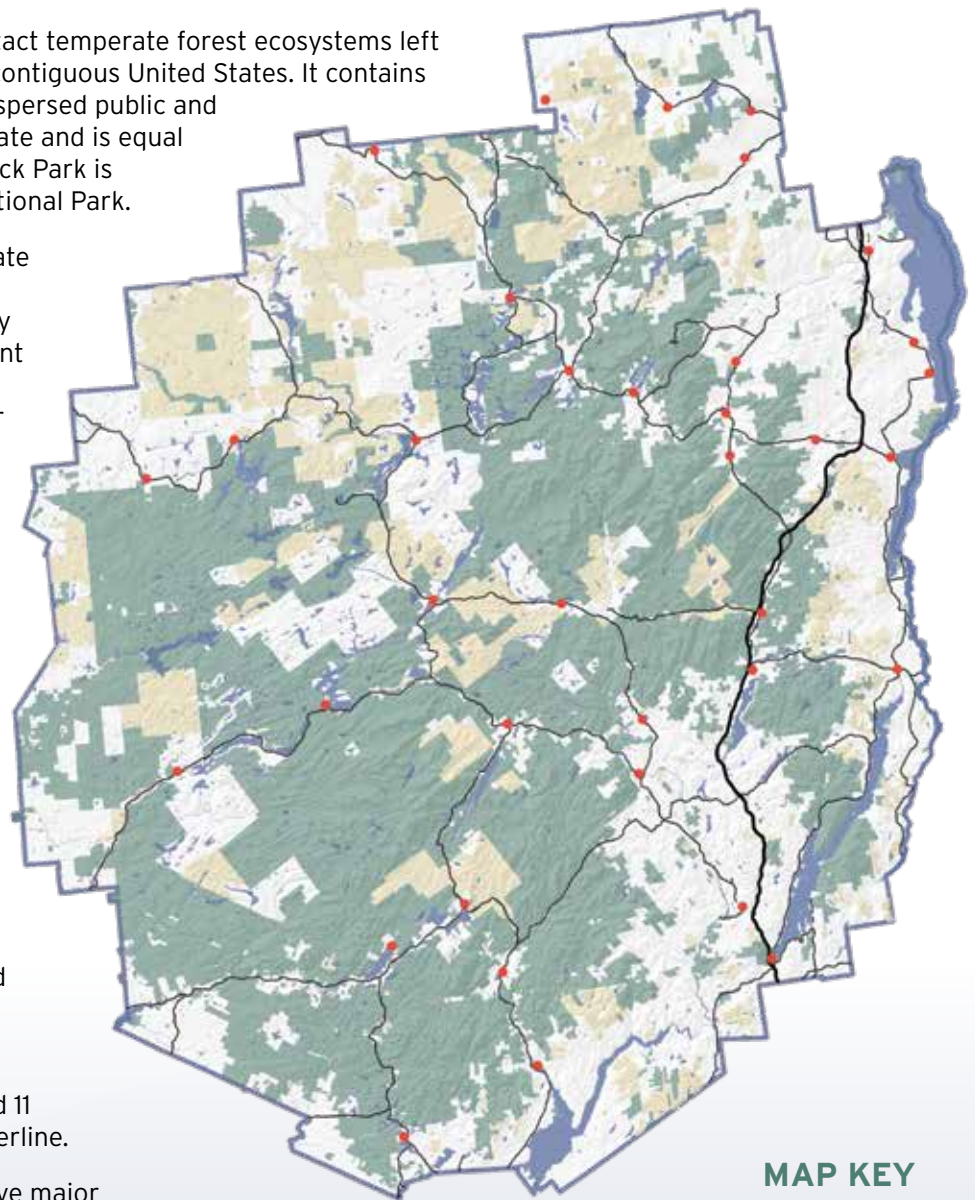
More than half of the Adirondack Park is private land, devoted principally to hamlets, forestry, agriculture, and open-space recreation. Nearly 775,000 acres are protected from development by conservation easements held by the state or private organizations. The Park is home for 130,000 permanent and 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
- Private Land
- State Conservation Easement
- Waterbodies
- Select Communities

2024 REPORT CARD

PHOTO © CARL HEILMAN II/WILD VISIONS INC.

Elected and appointed government leaders made decisions late in 2023 and in 2024 that affected the legacy of the Adirondacks. Here is a report on the 2024 State of the Park priorities (issued Sept. 2023).

VISION 2050

Incorporated VISION recommendations throughout the organization to advance new conservation funding, Park governance, and sustainable communities' priorities across the Adirondack Park and in Albany.

Forever Adirondacks Campaign

Secured additional funds/more action on Clean Water, Wilderness, Green Jobs.

Park Governance & Funding Upgrades

Adirondack Park Agency Act upgrade/legislation, fresh appointments to the APA board, new funding structures or models.

Clean Water

Acted on road salt, aquatic invasive species, wastewater infrastructure, aging septic systems, and gathering new data from the Survey of Climate and Adirondack Lake Ecosystems (SCALE).

Wilderness Preservation & State Land Stewardship

Encouraged conservation plan for the Whitney Estate, new information from DJ&A (formerly Otak) as it works to create the state's first Visitor Use Management Framework and Plan.

Rewilding in the Adirondacks

Improved habitat and wildlife connections inside the Park and between protected areas outside the Blue Line.

Federal Funds & Policy

Secured funds for Adirondack clean air and water monitoring/science support.

Defending Forever Wild

Nurtured favorable Constitutional Amendments, discouraged bad ones, and monitored state and public compliance.

Sustainable Working Forests & Farms

Promoted local food security, green economy, and improved conditions for farm laborers. Engaged state officials on private land management focused on sustainable forestry.

Adirondack Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

Increased state funding and broader regional justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts.

THE GOVERNOR



LARRY MASTER, MASTERIMAGES.ORG

Doubles Down-Payment on Park Wastewater Grants

In her January State of the State message, Gov. Kathy Hochul announced that she had doubled the cap on state grant funding made available to Adirondack communities for wastewater systems and improvements, from 25% of the total cost to 50%. Given the costs of these major systems, small rural communities have traditionally been unable to cover the large amount of project costs necessary to build this critical infrastructure. This increase has made it affordable for many more villages and towns to build, rebuild, or expand systems designed to prevent wastewater pollution in rivers and lakes.



HOCHUL

Early Budget Stumble Over Park Priorities

The Governor's initial budget plan for fiscal year 2024-25 included deep cuts for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act's grants to communities for wastewater systems, as well as cuts to the Adirondack Diversity Initiative, Timbuctoo Summer Climate and Careers Institute, and the Survey of Climate and Adirondack Lake Ecosystems (SCALE). It also called for the state to raid the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) for day-to-day state expenses, such as state employee salaries. The EPF was created to finance capital projects only.

Cuts, Then Patches, Budget Holes

After a shaky start, the Governor negotiated a final budget that included another \$500 million for clean water grants to communities, and steady funding for the Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI), and Survey of Climate and Adirondack Lake Ecosystems (SCALE) programs. The budget also included funds for the Timbuctoo Summer Climate and Careers Institute, although less than last year. The Environmental Protection Fund received \$400 million and was not raided for day-to-day state expenses, as had been proposed in January.

Birds and the Bees All Safer from Pesticides

In late December 2023, the Governor signed a bill protecting birds, bees, and people from the ill effects of neurotoxic pesticides used to pre-treat seeds for widely planted crops. The law bans specific insecticides on any corn, soybean, or wheat seeds for planting, application, or treatment of outdoor ornamental plants and turf. The loss of pollinator species poses risks of ecosystem-wide damage, as fish, amphibians, and birds rely on pollinators for food. Cornell University reports that pollinators perform \$439 million in ecosystem services for farms and other food crops annually. Sponsors of the bill were Sen. Brad Hoylman-Sigal, D-Manhattan, and Assembly Environmental Conservation Chair Deborah Glick, D-Manhattan.



HOYLMAN-SIGAL

Halting Unsupervised Pre-Teen ATV Riding

In October 2023, the Governor signed a bill that will help curtail tragic injuries and deaths by raising the age at which a person may legally operate an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) without supervision from age 10 to 14. Sponsors were Senate EnCon Committee Chair Pete Harckham, D-Mount Kisco, and Assemblymember Amy Paulin, D-Scarsdale.

New Talent at Lake George Park Commission

The Governor appointed four new members to the Lake George Park Commission, a land-use agency that oversees and enforces a watershed protection plan to supplement the regulatory protections of the Adirondack Park Agency. Appointed were Walt Lender and Michelle Jebb of Essex County and Jeff Zappieri and Tom Jarrett of Washington County.

No Help on Horizon for APA Board

For the second consecutive year, the Governor let the Senate adjourn its session without nominating a slate of candidates to replace those currently serving on expired terms at the Adirondack Park Agency (APA). By the summer of 2024, six of its eight citizen members on the 11-seat APA board were serving on expired terms. The other three members are the Governor's staff. While the law allows APA board members to continue serving after their terms expire, it also makes them vulnerable to political pressure and end-of-session negotiations and shifting priorities that don't allow nominations to move forward. With the Governor and Senate leadership being members of the same political party,

there is no reason for expired terms on the APA board. The agency board would benefit from additional expertise, including wilderness management, recreation planning, pesticide/herbicide use and impacts, open space protection, and others.

👍 Mahar Lands on Top Branch

In April, the Governor appointed Exec. Deputy Commissioner Sean Mahar to be the Interim Commissioner of the Dept. of Environmental Conservation. He took over for Basil Seggos, who served for almost a decade under both Governors Cuomo and Hochul. Mahar is a graduate of Siena College, who served as Director of Government Relations and Communication for Audubon NY before entering state service. Prior to becoming the Executive Deputy Commissioner in 2022, Mahar was Chief of Staff overseeing external agency affairs and operations and guiding implementation of key agency priorities.



MAHAR

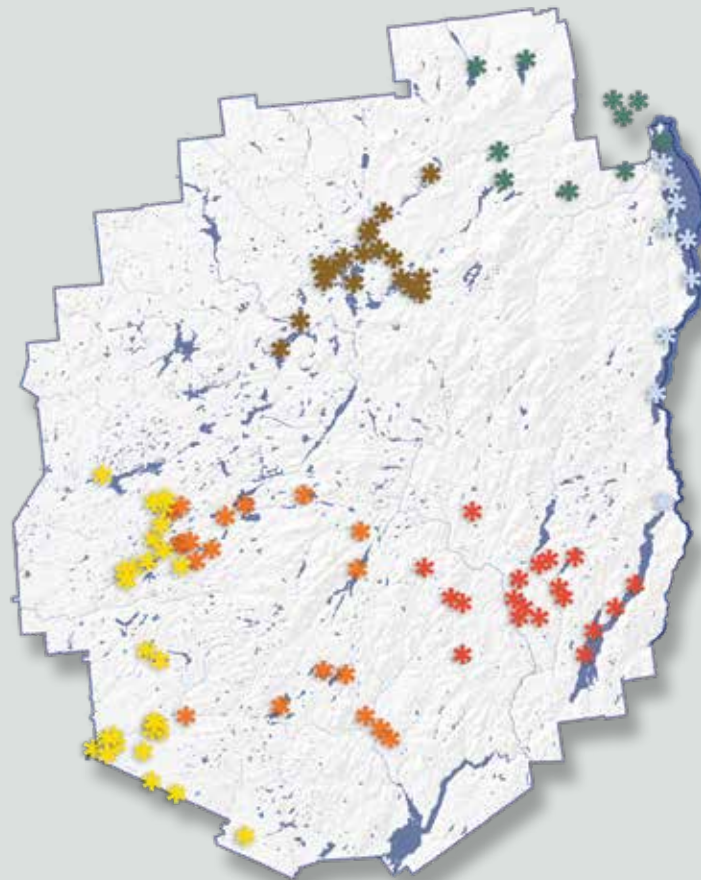
**👍 Wind, Sun: Good
Fire: Bad**







In the fall of 2023, the Governor appointed a working group to monitor safety in lithium iron phosphate (LFP) batteries for large-scale storage of electricity from renewable sources. LFP batteries are less likely to catch fire and don't contain heavy metals (unlike lithium ion counterparts). But the risk of fire was worth watching, the Governor said. The state has a goal of 3,000 megawatts of power storage in the NY grid by 2030. As of August 2023, it had created 2,400 megawatts of capacity. Battery storage stabilizes grids that use renewable power such as solar and wind by storing power when people aren't using it and making stored power available when the sun isn't shining or the wind isn't blowing. Concerns over fire dangers were among the reasons local residents rejected a plan for a battery storage facility in the hamlet of Raquette Lake in 2023.

👍 Casting a Wider Net for Septic Cleanup

Under the leadership of Governor Hochul, the Department of Environmental Conservation increased the number of waterbodies in the Adirondacks from a dozen to more than 100 to be eligible for funding assistance from the NYS Septic System Replacement Fund. This means that more residents will be able to get funds to help them replace faulty and outdated septic systems around more lakes to prevent them from leaking nutrients into waterbodies that cause harmful algal blooms and other water quality problems facing Adirondack waters.

ADIRONDACK LAKES & TRIBUTARIES ELIGIBLE FOR NYS SEPTIC SYSTEM REPLACEMENT FUNDS



-  **Clinton County**
-  **Franklin County**
-  **Hamilton County**
-  **Essex County**
-  **Warren County**
-  **Herkimer County**

The official state-wide list of eligible waterbodies by ADK county is available on the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation website: <https://efc.ny.gov/septic-replacement>. If your lake is not currently listed and in need, you can work with your lake association and county to petition the DEC to add it.

Adirondack Priorities Restored in Final State Budget

- **\$400 MILLION** for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) without offloading for staff.
- **\$39.5 MILLION** for open space protection and land conservation, including **\$3 MILLION** for the Land Trust Alliance Conservation Partnership and **\$1.5 MILLION** for their Conservation Easement Programs.
- **\$2 MILLION** this year for the Survey of Climate Change and Adirondack Lake Ecosystems (SCALE).
- **\$1.25 MILLION** for the Timbuctoo Summer Climate and Careers Institute.



- **\$1 MILLION** for Visitor Centers with **\$250,000** each for Paul Smith's Visitor Interpretive Center, the SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry Adirondack Interpretive Center, the ADK High Peaks Information Center, and the Catskills Visitor Center.
- **\$600,000** for Forest Preserve research and monitoring, **\$100,000** for Adirondack Watershed Institute, **\$100,000** for Atmospheric Sciences Research Center Whiteface Mountain Field Station, and **\$180,000** for Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies.



- **\$10 MILLION** for Adirondack/Catskill Wilderness Protection and Visitor Safety.
- **\$500 MILLION** for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act to assist rural communities with gap-closing grants that will support clean water, affordable housing, and business development.
- **\$18.55 MILLION** for invasive species prevention and eradication programs, including **\$500,000** for Cornell's New York State Hemlock Initiative.
- **\$420,000** for the Adirondack North Country Association's Adirondack Diversity Initiative.



Killing Contests Coming to End

In the last week of December 2023, the Governor signed a bill outlawing the killing of non-game wildlife species for cash prizes, awards, or entertainment. The bill excluded managed game species such as deer, bear, turkey, and fish. The law will improve the feasibility of natural repopulation by wolves from the Great Lakes and Canada to potentially viable habitats in the Adirondack Park. Without genetic testing, it is hard to distinguish some larger Eastern coyotes from gray wolves. In 2021, an 85-pound wolf killed in Otsego County was mistaken for a coyote. Gray wolves are protected by state and federal laws, as an endangered species. In New York State, coyotes are still considered a nuisance and may be hunted year-round and at night, with lights.



GLICK

Sen. Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, and Assemb. Environmental Conservation Chair Deborah Glick, D-Manhattan, sponsored this bill. The new law takes effect Nov. 1, 2024.

Sands of Climate Hourglass Disappearing

Governor Hochul's agencies have been slow to incorporate the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act into their day-to-day operations, despite a clear legal mandate to do so. This is especially clear at the Adirondack Park Agency, which continues to approve large-subdivision plans that contain unneeded roadways and inappropriate scaled-development which do not meet the goals of conservation design principles. Such principles include clustered development that preserves forests and requires fewer road miles and less wasted energy, while allowing the construction of an equal number of new homes. In July, Comptroller Tom DiNapoli warned that the state was falling behind schedule in its climate goals.

New Tool in Work Against Invasive Species

In September 2023, the Governor signed a bill granting town boards the authority to establish aquatic-growth control districts to reduce infestations of aquatic plants and aquatic invertebrate species. The bi-partisan bill authorized the creation of taxing districts that allow municipalities to apply a special tax assessment that the town collects and spends on a specific purpose. The bill gives local officials a new and different way to fight invasive species. The bill's sponsors were Sen. Dan Stec, R-Queensbury, and Assemblywoman. Carrie Woerner, D-Round Lake. ■



WOERNER

STATE LEGISLATURE

PHOTO © CARL HEILMAN II/WILD VISIONS INC.

ALL HOUSES

Legislature Re-Greens the Budget

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, D-Yonkers, and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, D-Bronx, restored state clean water grants to municipalities, which had been reduced from \$500 million to \$250 million in the Governor's budget proposal.

They also restored \$2 million in funding for the Survey of Climate Change and Adirondack Lake Ecosystems.



STEWART-COUSINS

Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee Chair Deborah Glick and Senate EnCon Chair Pete Harckham, D-Peekskill, also went to bat for Adirondack priorities in budget talks, reclaiming \$1.25 million in funding to the Timbuctoo Summer Climate and Careers Institute.



ADIRONDACK COUNCIL
PRESERVING WATER, AIR AND WILDLANDS

We Don't Pass the Hat ...

The Adirondack Council advocates for the appropriation of public funding for Adirondack conservation and community-sustainability purposes. However, the Adirondack Council is a privately funded independent voice for conservation. The Council doesn't solicit or accept government grants for itself.

Fostering the Next Generation of Advocates

The Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus secured another year of funding and actively participated in the three cohorts for the Timbuctoo Summer Climate and Careers Institute. During each two-week program, high school students were introduced to many environmental career pathways that they could pursue after graduation. They visited the Adirondack Park and learned about its ecological and historical significance. The program is named in honor of the Adirondack Black Suffrage Settlements of the mid-1800's.

EPF Intact, Unraided

The final state budget contained \$400 million in total funding for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) because the Legislature rejected the Governor's proposal to divert millions of dollars to pay for day-to-day state expenses. It also contained \$10 million for Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve Visitor Safety and wilderness protection which helps keep open visitor centers in both regions and fund critical visitor use management activities such as trail building, planning, and essential shuttle services.

Time to Capitalize the Fund

The EPF is a powerful tool for good. Each year, it provides a reliable source of capital project funding for major priorities such as, purchasing land for the Forest Preserve; restoring historic sites; conserving farmland; restoring wildlife habitat; and controlling invasive species. Advocates have called for this capital fund to grow to \$500 million by next year.

Moose, Bears Get the Right of Way

In May, the Legislature passed a bill to begin the process of protecting wildlife from cars and trucks by improving wildlife crossings on highways. If approved by the Governor, this bill would give New York a brand-new tool for reducing habitat fragmentation and the related impacts on wildlife across the state, particularly in the Adirondack Park. It will allow for critical habitat corridors to be maintained in high-traffic areas, reconnecting habitat now divided by roads while also protecting public safety and reducing motor vehicle accidents and fatalities. Rising temperatures and precipitation caused by climate change are expected to change habitat ranges for many species. The easier it is for wildlife to reach more suitable conditions, the more likely they will survive the trip. The bill would also give New York access to federal grants designated for improving wildlife crossings. Sen. Leroy Comrie, D-Queens, and Assemblymember Robert Carroll, D-Brooklyn sponsored this legislation.



COMRIE



A moose crosses a heavily trafficked road outside Lake Placid, Essex County

LARRY MASTER, MASTERIMAGES.ORG

Three of a Kind May be a Winning Hand

The Legislature started talks too late in the session to make real progress on plans to pass a Constitutional Amendment that would allow the state to find new uses for former prisons located on state lands inside and adjacent to the Adirondack Park. Camp Gabriels near Saranac Lake, Moriah Shock Incarceration Facility in Mineville and Mount McGregor in Moreau, Saratoga County, are all located on Adirondack Forest Preserve lands protected as “Forever Wild” by NY’s Constitution. They can’t be sold or used for non-public purposes without permission from the voters. Most conservation advocates are willing to remove the land beneath these buildings from the Forest Preserve in exchange for a substantial amount of acreage nearby that could be added to the Forest Preserve.

Causing Floods? Replace the Bridge

Both houses approved the Climate Superfund Act to require fossil fuel companies to pay for municipal project costs associated with climate change mitigation and adaptation. Supporters of the bill argue that this program could raise as much as \$3 billion per year to be financed by the companies whose products are most responsible for climate change: the nation’s biggest multinational oil, gas, and coal companies.

Diversity Initiative Gets a Boost

The budget again included an extra \$120,000 for the Adirondack Diversity Initiative, which is part of the Governor’s efforts to promote a safer, more equitable Adirondack Park. This funding supports the work of an in-Park advocate committed to improving important diversity and equity work across the region. The diversity initiative also provides critical anti-bias training to Environmental Conservation Officers, local police, retail workers and others working with diverse populations.

Lack of Follow Through, Tough to Call

Spotty cell phone coverage across the North Country is often blamed on the Adirondack Park Agency’s (APA) policy requiring telecommunications towers to be “substantially invisible.” Yet a comprehensive state task force report (that did not include any environmental representatives) concluded in 2021 that a lack of customers was the prime reason for coverage gaps by Adirondack and Catskill Park cell providers. It noted that the APA had never denied a cell tower permit request. It also noted that it would cost New York State almost \$700 million to close the remaining gaps. No bills have passed in the Assembly or Senate to fund better coverage which would help Adirondack locals and visitors alike.

SENATE

Harckham Heralds Good Things

Sen. Pete Harckham, moved a bill through the Senate that would create a new Road Salt Reduction Council and Advisory Committee to facilitate interagency cooperation while implementing the recommendations of the Adirondack Road Salt Reduction Task Force. The task force report called for numerous changes in how salt is handled, applied, and stored at the state and local level. New York needs a mechanism to ensure that those changes are made at the relevant state agencies. This is a critical need for communities that are facing significant burdens from road salt pollution in wells and water sources, together with rivers, lakes, and wetlands that are paying the price.



HARCKHAM

We’d Rather Not Act

Senate leaders declined to act in June on a bill sponsored by Sen. Stec that would have potentially changed the state land classification and therefore the management plans, for all parcels of state land listed on the national register of historic places. The entire Forest Preserve is currently listed as a National Landmark, exposing Wilderness lands to potential reclassification. The Council has long been on record opposing this legislation because it places a thumb on the scale in a classification process that has served the state well for 50 years.

New Path to Clean Land Deals

The Senate passed a bill that would streamline part of the state’s labyrinth of land-purchasing rules by allowing the state to purchase title insurance rather than completing a title search reaching back centuries. A bill sponsored by Sen. Rachel May, D-Syracuse, would create the New York Title Guaranty Program to provide title insurance for real property within the state. State title searches have delayed some land acquisitions for years.



MAY

One Easy Location for Water Quality

The Senate passed a bill designed to centralize and standardize water quality data from around the state into a single, publicly accessible platform. If approved, this legislation would make water quality data more accessible to researchers, water quality experts, and the general public. This legislation would similarly enable advocates to better hold polluters accountable. The bill was sponsored by Sen. Rachael May, D-Syracuse.

Bipartisan Solution in Brighton

The Senate passed a resolution authorizing a Constitutional Amendment that would remove the campus of the former Camp Gabriels correctional facility in Brighton, Franklin County, from the Adirondack Forest Preserve in exchange for a large tract of land to be newly added to the Forest Preserve. The resolution was sponsored by Sen. Dan Stec, R-Queensbury, and Assemb. Billy Jones, D-Chateaugay. The Assembly didn't act on this resolution.



JONES



STEC



Camp Gabriels, Town of Brighton
PHOTO © CARL HEILMAN II/WILD VISIONS INC.

Language, Please

At a rally in August against the planned closure of state prisons in Washington and Sullivan counties, incarcerated individuals in local state prisons were referred to in remarks by a local legislative leader in an inappropriate manner. The issue of diversity and racial equality is complicated in the North Country, where prisons have provided an economic boost to Adirondack communities facing the loss of traditional industries like mining and forestry. Legislative leaders have a responsibility to understand this complicated history and advocate on behalf of all the constituents

in their district and treat all the people who live and work in their communities with respect, including those incarcerated in these facilities. To do otherwise undermines our collective values and fails to appreciate how terms like this foster resentment, bias, and racial inequality in all our communities. We urge the legislature to work for reforms that make prisons safer for all, including state-funded mental health care for both inmates and corrections officers.

Adds Four, All Onboard

The Senate confirmed all four of the Governor's appointees to the Lake George Park Commission, allowing the agency to maintain the quorum needed to conduct its meetings and hearings. The board now has a full complement of members serving on new terms. See "New Talent" in the Governor Section for a list of appointees.

ASSEMBLY

Olympic Legacy Shines for the Speaker

After the end of the session in June, Assembly Speaker Heastie spent some time touring the Olympic sports venues in Lake Placid and soaking in some Adirondack summer. New York State has spent more than \$500 million over the past decade on upgrades at the Lake Placid facilities and state ski centers at Whiteface, Gore, and Bellayre mountains, all located on the state Forest Preserve. He said the Assembly would work hard in 2025 to pass a Constitutional Amendment allowing the state to sell the former prison campus Camp Gabriels in Brighton, Franklin County, in exchange for lands to be added to the Forest Preserve.



HEASTIE

Let's See What Eco-Tourists Will Pay For

In July, Assemblyman Jon Rivera, D-Buffalo, visited the Adirondacks, where he explored the area's recreational opportunities and potential for sustainable eco-tourism. He said his "tour reinforced the critical role that environmental tourism plays in the economic vitality of upstate New York. It is essential that we continue to support and promote sustainable tourism practices to preserve these stunning landscapes for future generations and ensure that they too have access to this wealth of recreational opportunities." The Adirondack Council was proud to host the Assemblyman during his visit.



Adirondack Council stands with Assemblyman Jon Rivera and the Police Benevolence Association, Forest Rangers Union

History Repeats but Landmarks are Forever Wild

The Assembly inexplicably passed a bill that would invite conflict in how state officials manage state lands containing buildings that might someday be considered historic. State officials long ago decided to avoid conflicts such as this by obtaining National Landmark status for the entire 2.8 million acres of the Forest Preserve, including lands that will be added to the Preserve in the future. This recognizes that the forest is the historic resource protected by the landmark designation, not the buildings located on it or used to manage the land. The Senate didn't pass the bill. ■

THE COURTS & ATTORNEY GENERAL



PHOTO © CARL HEILMAN II/WILD VISIONS INC.

Court Endangers Public Health, Environment

In late June, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) prohibited the EPA from enforcing the Clean Air Act's Good Neighbor Rule for air pollution in 13 states upwind of the Adirondacks and Appalachian Mountains. The court said EPA must wait for a lower federal appeals court to decide whether those 13 states must abide by special rules designed to keep their power plant smokestacks from causing a health hazard in states next to them. All 13 states had refused to submit plans to comply with air pollution standards dating back to 2015. Under the Clean Air Act, the EPA is directed to create implementation plans for states that don't file their own. The EPA did so and was sued by the 13 states. Emissions from those 13 states directly contribute to the rate of lung diseases in other states, causes premature deaths, and contributes to acid rain. Three of the 13 states are chronic polluters of the Adirondacks (Kentucky, West Virginia, Arkansas) while several of the rest pollute less frequently, depending on prevailing winds.



SCOTUS Undermines All Regulations

In July, SCOTUS overturned a unanimous 1984 decision and, with it, four decades of legal precedent guiding how courts handle challenges to government regulations protecting public health and the environment. The 1984 case *Chevron USA vs. the Natural Resources Defense Council* established that if Congress had not addressed the issue directly, courts must uphold a regulatory agency's interpretation of the law and defer to its expertise in making regulations to enforce the law. By overturning this landmark case, the court has invited judges (who are mostly non-scientists) to substitute their own judgment for the expertise of the agency being sued. The decision undermines the authority of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and calls into question the authority of state regulators. Over the past 40 years, *Chevron* has been cited in more than 15,000 cases, most often to uphold stronger regulations.

Flawed APA Decision Rationale

In May, the Appellate Division of the NY Supreme Court's Third Department in Albany ruled that the Adirondack Park Agency could authorize the use of a chemical herbicide to kill plants in Lake George without first holding a hearing. In sum, the court concluded that the APA had made a rational decision based on evidence it had in hand, even if that decision was wrong. The court deferred to the APA's expertise and allowed the agency to decide how much information to give its own decision-making board.

Leave a Check On Your Way Out

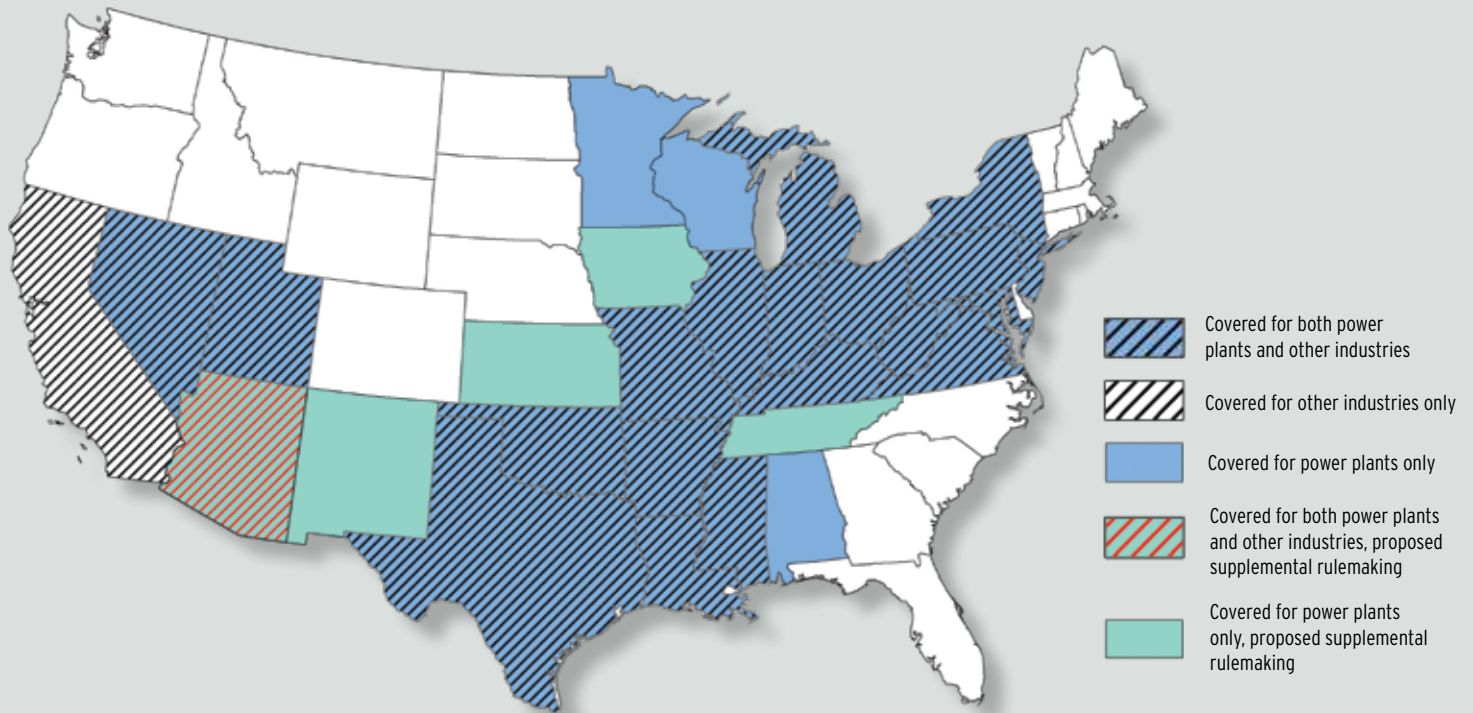
In September of 2023, New York Supreme Court Justice Gerald Connolly of Albany County ordered the Adirondack Park Agency and Dept. of Environmental Conservation to pay \$32,000 in legal fees and court costs to the organization Protect the Adirondacks! The two agencies had lost a 10-year legal battle over their decisions to allow the construction of new snowmobile trails that the court said violated the NYS Constitution's ban on destroying the Forest Preserve. The decision definitely settled the issue of material impact caused by cutting trees on public lands and has redefined management activities related to trail maintenance and creation. (See "High Court's Ruling...", in DEC section)



Snowmobile trail on Forest Preserve lands

States Covered Under the Final Good Neighbor Plan and the Proposed Supplemental Rulemaking

The Good Neighbor Plan secures significant reductions in ozone-forming emissions of nitrogen oxides (NO_x) from power plants and other industrial facilities. Under the Clean Air Act's "Good Neighbor" requirements, 23 states must reduce pollution that contributes to problems attaining and maintaining the EPA's health-based air quality standard for ground-level ozone (smog).



Source: US EPA

Good Regs Make Good Neighbors

New York Atty. Gen. Letitia James led a coalition of attorneys general and localities in submitting an amicus brief to the US Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit in the case of Kentucky vs. EPA. She was defending the US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) authority under the Clean Air Act to ensure that each state does its fair share to reduce the air pollution that travels into other states. The coalition supports the EPA's disapproval of Kentucky's state implementation plan for failing to satisfy the Clean Air Act's Good Neighbor



JAMES

Rule, which requires each state to halt emissions that cause a health hazard in other states. The US Supreme Court has suspended the enforcement of the Good Neighbor Rule until the lower court rules on Kentucky's appeal.

Claims of Safety Lead to Penalty

In 2023, Attorney General James secured \$6.9 million from Bayer and Monsanto for falsely claiming that certain Roundup consumer herbicides were safe and non-toxic. Scientific studies have determined that these herbicides may be toxic to wildlife, particularly pollinator species such as honeybees and butterflies. The funds will be used to protect pollinators in New York from the impacts of toxic herbicides.

Heads-Up When Winter Gets Deadly

In September 2023, Attorney General James called on the National Weather Service (NWS) to send Wireless Emergency Alerts to all cell phones warning the public about severe winter weather events such as major blizzards, ice storms, and other dangerous winter weather conditions. The NWS currently sends regionalized wireless alerts to cell phones for other kinds of extreme weather but not for winter storms. ■

ADIRONDACK PARK AGENCY

PHOTO © CARL HEILMAN II/WILD VISIONS INC.

No to Big Booms and Increased Noise Pollution

In May, the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) issued its fifth Notice of Incomplete Application to a Town of Lewis landowner who wants permission to test a 155mm military field howitzer on a new firing range spanning his property and one of his neighbors. Adjoining this property is the Adirondack Forest Preserve unit Taylor Pond Wild Forest. The project site is also home to a former nuclear missile silo. The Adirondack Park already pays a high price in terms of noise from US military and National Guard training exercises. Estimates are that firing the cannon would create 127 decibels of noise in a forest where typical noise levels are below 40 decibels.

New Memo Reminds DEC of Old Memo

In November of 2023, APA Executive Director Barbara Rice took her first enforcement action against the Dept. of Environmental Conservation (DEC) for violating a 20-year-old agreement to not use motor vehicles for administrative tasks in Wilderness Areas. Motorized access to the land and water within Wilderness Areas is illegal under the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, except under emergency conditions. Rice cited the DEC for ignoring a Memorandum of Understanding signed by both agencies under a federal lawsuit that preserved New York's right to ban public access by motorized vehicles in state Wilderness Areas. The DEC was required to sign a compliance agreement outlining corrective actions. No further disciplinary action was recommended.



Former nuclear missile silo in Lewis, Essex County

PHOTO: TOM FRENCH

Lack of Hearings Hinders Review

The APA has continued to pass on holding necessary adjudicatory hearings on important issues that come before the Agency that merit the opportunity for the public, permit applicant, local government, and other stakeholders to provide evidence to an impartial hearing officer. The lack of adjudicatory hearings on sensitive issues over the past 14 years has led to the granting of permits for actions that have had significant impacts. It is unacceptable that the agency charged with the full review of complex applications that include long-term impacts on sensitive natural resource protection has not held a single hearing in over a decade. Especially given that the APA may only deny a Class A permit application after it first holds an adjudicatory hearing.

Powering Up for Battery Banks

In anticipation that large-scale batteries will be needed to create a local micro-grid or to store power from renewable energy sources, the Adirondack Park Agency is developing a permit application specific to battery power storage facilities. Battery safety is improving and held to stringent international fire code standards, but the APA will need to evaluate additional criteria based on the potential impacts to natural resources when reviewing proposals in the years ahead.

Feasible Or Not?

After announcing plans to explore moving the APA headquarters to downtown Saranac Lake, the Agency has still not released the feasibility study that was conducted to analyze the move into town. The move would involve major renovations and the transfer of dozens of staff from a state office campus in Ray Brook to a former hydro-power plant most recently used as the village police station. Releasing this report is necessary so that all parties can officially weigh in on the proposal and associated alternatives as part of the public input process regarding the future location of the Agency.



Proposed APA headquarters site in downtown Saranac Lake

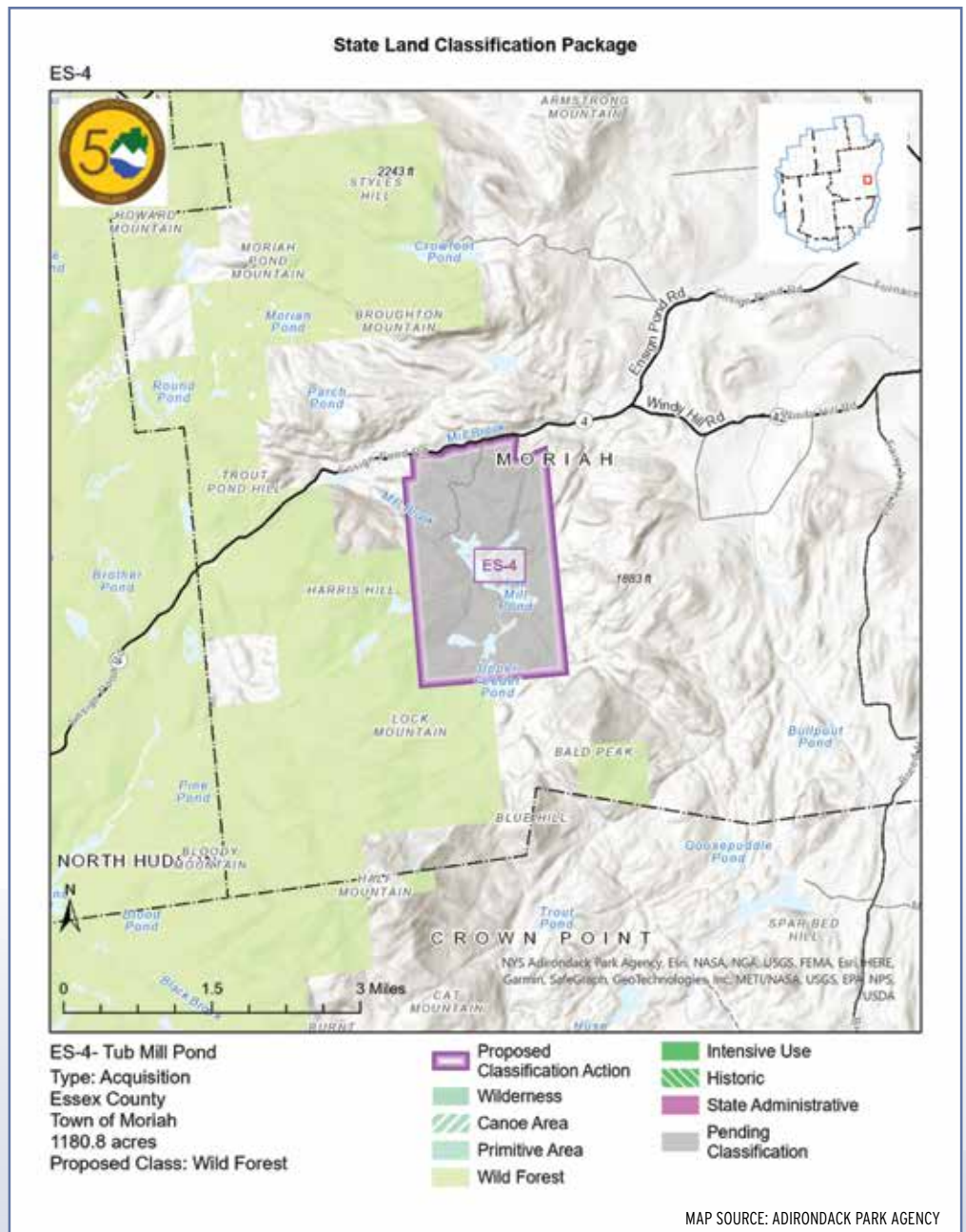
Lone Voice Against Herbicide

In June, the APA approved the use of a chemical herbicide in Lake George, Highlands Forge Lake, and Chateaugay Lake. The Agency refused to hold an adjudicatory hearing to dispute the merits and risks of the herbicide ProcellaCOR, even after recent evidence by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture that it had found the carcinogen PFAS to be an ingredient and calls by board members for better herbicide permit standards.

Land Classification Package a Positive

In 2023, the APA put forth 5,818 acres spanning eight counties for classification or reclassification. The land classification package included corrections for several mapping errors, classifications for newly acquired lands, and changes to classifications due to draft management plans for both Golden Beach and Cranberry Lake Day Use Area and Campgrounds. Notable parcels acquired by the state were the Champlain Valley Hills, Tub Mill

Pond (see classification map below), and a portion of the Marion River that were all classified as Wild Forest. A 17.9-acre parcel on Thirteenth Lake, purchased from the Adirondack Land Trust, was designated as Wilderness. In total, 5,408 acres were newly acquired as Wild Forest and roughly 48 acres were acquired as Wilderness with additional acreage for reclassifications and corrections. The Agency utilized an interactive mapping tool that guided public input and heightened transparency during the land classification process. ■



DEPT. OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

High Court's Ruling Brings Changes

In September of 2023, the Dept. of Environmental Conservation (DEC) announced a new policy for trail construction following a defeat in the state's highest court in which it was ordered to comply with Article XIV of the NYS Constitution and prohibit "substantial or material destruction" of timber or trees for the construction of new snowmobile trails in the Adirondack Forest Preserve. The new policy requires the DEC's land managers to answer three questions before enacting work plans on Forest Preserve [captured directly from Commissioner Policy 78]:

- 1) *Is the proposed cutting, removal, or destruction of timber "material or substantial" as the court said its prior projects were,*
- 2) *Is the degree of alteration of the existing Forest Preserve terrain permissible, and*
- 3) *Are the impacts of the proposed project on the existing wild state of the Forest Preserve permissible?*


The new and improved policy requires a draft work plan to be publicly available on the DEC website and published in the Environmental Notice Bulletin for at least 14 days.

Follensby Pond Cold-Water Fishery Protected

In February, the DEC negotiated two conservation easements with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) that will permanently protect the ecologically significant Follensby Pond and 10 miles of the Raquette River from development, while supporting Indigenous access and use of the easement lands. The 8,600-acre Follensby Pond Easement creates a freshwater preserve

Long-Serving DEC Commissioner Departs

Commissioner Basil Seggos retired in February after more than eight years in the position under Governors Kathy Hochul and Andrew Cuomo. He departed as the state's longest-serving DEC Commissioner. Seggos ushered in significant new clean air, clean water, and climate standards such as the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, the Clean Water Infrastructure Act, reinstated the Superfund law, and established standards on PFAS - known as forever chemicals. Sean Mahar (former chief of staff for Commissioner Seggos and Director of Government Relations and Communications for Audubon NY) is the new Interim Commissioner for the DEC while the state undergoes a national search.



SEGGOS

that supports collaborative scientific research while safeguarding the unique cold-water lake trout population by not allowing fishing in Follensby Pond. There are only nine cold-water fisheries that are similar to Follensby Pond in the contiguous United States. The 6,000-acre Raquette River Easement facilitates new public access within the Raquette River and Moose Creek watersheds while also opening new recreational opportunities for public access along the Raquette River.



Follensby Pond
PHOTO © CARL HEILMAN II/WILD VISIONS INC.

More Lakes, More Money

This summer, the DEC expanded the list of eligible lakes for which shoreline owners will be offered financial assistance to clean up failing septic systems. The announcement expanded from the current list of a dozen waterbodies to 125 lakes inside the Adirondack Park. These are substantive additions that will have real impacts on local communities to address non-point source pollution across a much broader region of the Park.

Visitor Management by the Numbers

In 2023, the DEC awarded a two-year contract to integrated design firm DJ&A (formerly Otak) to conduct concurrent Visitor Use Management planning processes for the central High Peaks Wilderness in the Adirondack Park and the Kaaterskill Clove region of the Catskill Park. Over the past year DJ&A, the DEC and stakeholders have reviewed social behavior and use data, and now await the

final data-informed management action recommendation. These are anticipated by the end of the 2024 calendar year. As an inaugural process, the DEC made the right decision to bring in a national expert to study social capacity data to guide future High Peaks management efforts.

Hold the Salt, Thank You

Interim DEC Commissioner Mahar announced this June that the DEC was offering \$15 million in grants to local municipalities to protect and improve water quality by promoting proper salt storage and application. Road salt application rose sharply due to the 1980 Olympics, leading to increased salinization of ground and surface waters, mainly along state roadways. The funding is part of up to \$215 million in grants currently available through the Water Quality Improvement Project. The grants will help fulfill a recommendation by the Adirondack Road Salt Reduction Task Force to offer incentives that further road salt reduction efforts.



Excessive road salt usage impacts water quality across the Adirondacks

Another Pinch of Finch

In October 2023, the DEC purchased 181 acres in the Town of Newcomb, Essex County, from The Nature Conservancy for \$217,400. The tract is located in a remote area north of Route 28N and south of the Hudson River, near the southern approaches to the High Peaks Wilderness Complex. The land had been part of papermaker Finch, Pruyn & Co. holdings but was not included in the state's 2007 purchase of nearly 100,000 acres of Forest Preserve and easements.

Tragedy takes Ranger, Advocate, and Friend

In April, Veteran High Peaks Wilderness Forest Ranger Robbi Mecus died in a climbing accident in Alaska leaving a legacy of excellence, professionalism, and care for her fellow outdoors enthusiasts. Above all, she was willing to go to great lengths to save stranded and injured hikers in the Adirondack Park's most challenging terrain. She became a role model for fellow climbers, Forest Rangers, and the LGBTQIA+ community as a leader in recreation, rescue, and advocacy. Ranger Mecus was also a profound resource and voice for the trans community. She supported organizing the annual Adirondack Queer Ice Fest and the Pride Fest in Keene Valley, bringing many first-time ice-climbers to the sport and fostering inclusivity in her hometown. Her dedication, skill, and stamina commanded respect from all who knew and worked with her.



PHOTO: EMILY RUSSELL, NORTH COUNTRY PUBLIC RADIO

More Peaks Join the Preserve

In July, the DEC acquired 595-acres in the Town of Jay, Essex County, that will be added to the Forever Wild Forest Preserve. The Four Peaks tract, as it's known, was purchased from the Adirondack Land Trust for \$575,000 with NY Environmental Protection Fund money. The acquisition adjoins the Beaver Brook tract, part of the Wilmington Wild Forest. Currently included in the State's Open Space Conservation Plan, this Forest Preserve addition will support the State's 30x30 goal of conserving 30% of New York lands and waters by 2030 and will allow public access from Jay to 8.5 miles of local mountain bike trails in Wilmington.

In New Rides for Trip Back in Time

In July, Interim Commissioner Sean Mahar announced the DEC would begin offering a Mobility Device Reservation Pilot Program. The pilot program will provide reservations free of charge for two powered wheelchairs to make Great Camp Santanoni Historic Site more accessible to persons with disabilities. Access to the Camp Santanoni Historic Area must comply with

its Unit Management Plan, conform to the Adirondack State Land Master Plan, and meet all other applicable laws and policies.

Wilderness Rules Still Rule

In November of 2023, the DEC was formally held accountable by the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) for violating the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan's prohibition against using motorized vehicles in a Wilderness Area unless there is an emergency. It was the second time in as many years that DEC personnel had been observed using vehicles for routine administrative duties in off-limits areas of the Forest Preserve. The DEC's actions also violated an APA/DEC Memorandum of Understanding requiring the DEC to sign a compliance agreement outlining corrective actions. This incident occurred in the West Canada Lake Wilderness Area, where DEC personnel could have avoided conflict by parking their ATVs outside the Wilderness boundary.

Give Turtles a Brake

In May, Interim Commissioner Mahar issued a statement asking drivers to be especially careful in May and June to avoid hitting turtles as they cross roads during nesting season. Thousands of turtles are killed each year during nesting season, most by automobile strikes. He asked drivers to use caution on roads near rivers, lakes, and wetlands. The Wildlife Crossings Act was passed by the state legislature in May. If signed into law by Governor Hochul, it would require the Department of Transportation to identify locations that need infrastructure updates to make them safer for humans and wildlife alike to cross roadways. Also, New York would become eligible for hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding for wildlife crossings projects, not only helping turtles survive but other wildlife as well.



Painted turtle
LARRY MASTER, MASTERIMAGES.ORG

State Wildlife Action Plan Improved

The State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) is a federally required process that states must undergo every 10-years to identify their most at-risk species in order to be eligible for federal funding for wildlife management and protection. This process also keeps at-risk species from being added to the Endangered Species List through early intervention. New York is in the process of updating its SWAP, building off of the last update from 2015. Earlier this year, the DEC released draft Species Status Assessments for species to be considered for inclusion in the 2025 SWAP. Compared to the 2015 plan, the proposed updates create a stronger plan by including plant species and extirpated species. This more holistic inclusion is more important than ever given the exponential rate of biodiversity loss and habitat fragmentation due to development and accelerated by climate change. Fortunately, the updates to the SWAP come at an opportune time. New York environmental policy has had some significant wins since the 2015 SWAP, including the passage of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act that acknowledges the climate crisis and needed action, 30x30 legislation requiring the state to conserve 30% of its lands and waters by 2030, and the approval of the \$4.2 billion Bond Act by voters. These actions will all support the execution of the 2025 SWAP.



Brook trout in a mountain stream
SOURCE: USFWS

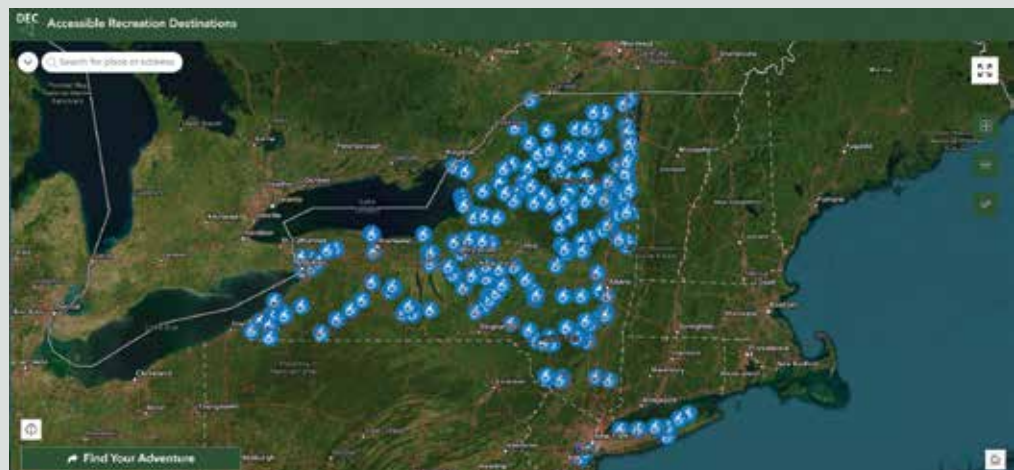
Crafting a Roadmap for Iconic Brook Trout

This spring, the DEC began engaging the public on an update to the Adirondack Brook Trout Pond Management Plan. According to the DEC, “the Adirondack Park is one of only two locations in the lower 48 states that supports ponded brook trout fisheries. That’s why it is essential that the DEC creates a new roadmap to secure the future of these populations and address the challenges facing this valuable ecological and recreational resource.” The last plan was created in 1979, which underscores the need for an updated strategic initiative. A new plan with a 15-year outlook is greatly needed to identify management that’s proactive and responsive to modern day climate and recreational pressures.

New Accessible Recreation Map

This summer, the DEC introduced a new interactive Accessible Recreation Destinations Map to highlight more than 260 natural areas with accessible recreation features, such as boating, fishing, camping, and hiking across New York State.

MAP SOURCE: NYS DEC



👍 Land & Water Protection Goals on the Right Track

Following the lead of national and international policy to promote biodiversity and preserve ecosystems, Governor Hochul signed the 30x30 legislation in 2022 to protect 30% of the state's lands and waters by the year 2030. As required this year, the DEC released a Draft Strategies and Methodology document outlining how the state will achieve its 30x30 goals. While the drafted approach needs to include stronger language about permanent protections and detail the steps to achieving them, the DEC is on the right path for identifying how it will meet the remainder of the state's land and water protection goals.

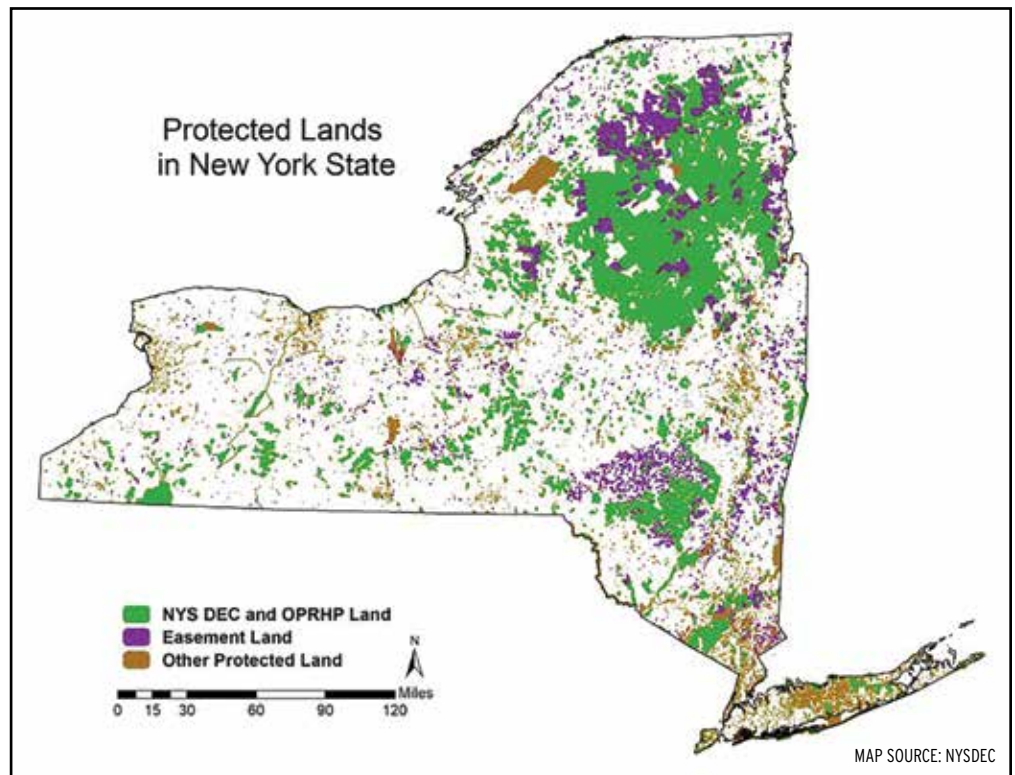
👎 Not Erring on the Side of Caution

In June of 2024, the DEC ignored a finding report by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture that the controversial herbicide ProcellaCOR among other pesticides may contain the carcinogen PFAS. Despite a raft of public criticism and local municipal and landowner opposition lawsuits attempting to prevent the use of the chemical in Lake George, the DEC awarded grant funding to the Town of Caroga, Fulton County, for a "pilot study" of the aquatic herbicide in East and West Caroga Lakes. An Adirondack Park Agency permit approved the use of ProcellaCor on 37 acres to curtail the growth of invasive Eurasian watermilfoil in the two lakes.



The aquatic herbicide ProcellaCOR being applied to Eurasian watermilfoil on Caroga Lakes

TOWN OF CAROGA



New York protected lands held in fee or protected by a conservation easement by state and local governments, and land trusts - this map represents some but not all protected areas of New York State.

👎 Emissions Reduction Goal Misses Target

Earlier this year, the DEC and the NYS Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) released a draft pre-proposal exploring how the state will develop a New York Cap-and-Invest (NYCI) program to help meet the state's climate goals. These goals include reducing economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by 40% by 2030 and no less than 85% by 2050 from 1990 levels. The pre-proposal put forth three regulatory programs for review and input: 1) Mandatory Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program Rule; 2) the Cap-and-Invest Rule; and 3) the Auction Rule. In reviewing the Cap-and-Invest Rule, none of the three price ceiling scenarios proposed would get the state to its 2030 GHG emission reduction targets due in part to canceled clean energy projects and other hurdles. In addition, the pricing and timeline scenarios in the pre-proposal signaled the state was prioritizing industry comfortability over meeting hard-won standards prioritizing human and environmental health needs.

👎 Open Space Plan Lacking Openness

The state's Open Space Conservation Plan, put forth by New York every 10 years to identify lands for protection and potential acquisition using Environmental Protection Fund monies, is under review. The process, led by the DEC and DEC-selected regional stakeholder committees has struggled to be transparent with the broader public of the substantive proposals. ■

OTHER AGENCIES

PHOTO © CARL HEILMAN II/WILD VISIONS INC.

👍 Climate Clock is Ticking, New York

In July, NYS Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli issued a Climate Audit alerting New York officials that the state was behind schedule in its plans to decarbonize its power supply and economy in compliance with the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA). DiNapoli said the Public Service Commission (PSC) and NYSERDA have taken considerable steps in planning for New York State's transition to renewable energy. He cautioned that stronger action was needed to meet the state's clean energy goals. The audit found inadequate planning, monitoring, and assessment of risks and challenges in the PSC's efforts to help the state meet the CLCPA targets, which seek 70% renewably sourced electricity by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2040.



DINAPOLI

👍 NY Rural Counties Need Special Attention

The NYS Comptroller released a report in September of 2023 examining demographic, economic, and quality of living trends in 10 rural counties. Most of the counties had population losses, aging residents, a shrinking labor force, as well as challenges with housing availability and access to health care, food, and broadband. The counties selected as representative of rural New York, include Allegany, Chenango, Delaware, Essex, Greene, Hamilton, Lewis, Schuyler, Sullivan, and Wyoming. Essex and Hamilton counties are inside the Adirondack Park, while Lewis straddles

the Adirondack Park/Tug Hill Plateau region. The report called attention to the need to better serve residents of these counties, through programs funded by federal initiatives such as the American Rescue Plan and the Infrastructure Act.

👍 EV's Get a Power Boost from NYPA

As a component of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection legislation, this June, the New York Power Authority (NYPA) made it easier to drive an electric vehicle in the Adirondack Park. It installed a new four-charger EVOlve NY electric vehicle charging station at the Frontier Town Gateway, a seasonal trading post and café in North Hudson in Essex County, just off Exit 29 on the Northway (I-87) in the Adirondack Park. The station is now open and has eight Tesla charging ports. This location is now the largest high-speed charging station between Albany and Canada. The North Hudson station is built with an island design similar to gas stations to accommodate large vehicles and those towing trailers. A canopy installation is planned for later in the year. The NYPA's EVOlve NY network now has 174 chargers statewide at 43 sites.



EVOlve NY electric vehicle charging station in Schroon Lake, Essex County

👍 Thanks a Million

In November 2023, the Adirondacks Welcome Center received its one-millionth visitor. The gateway, maintained by the NYS Dept. of Transportation, provides a wide range of regional food, beverages, gift items, and hospitality to travelers. It also contains a free boat-decontamination station aimed at preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species in Adirondack waters. The rest area is located between Exits 17 and 18 on the Northway (I-87) in Glens Falls.



Adirondacks Welcome Center

👍 Addressing a Hidden Dilemma

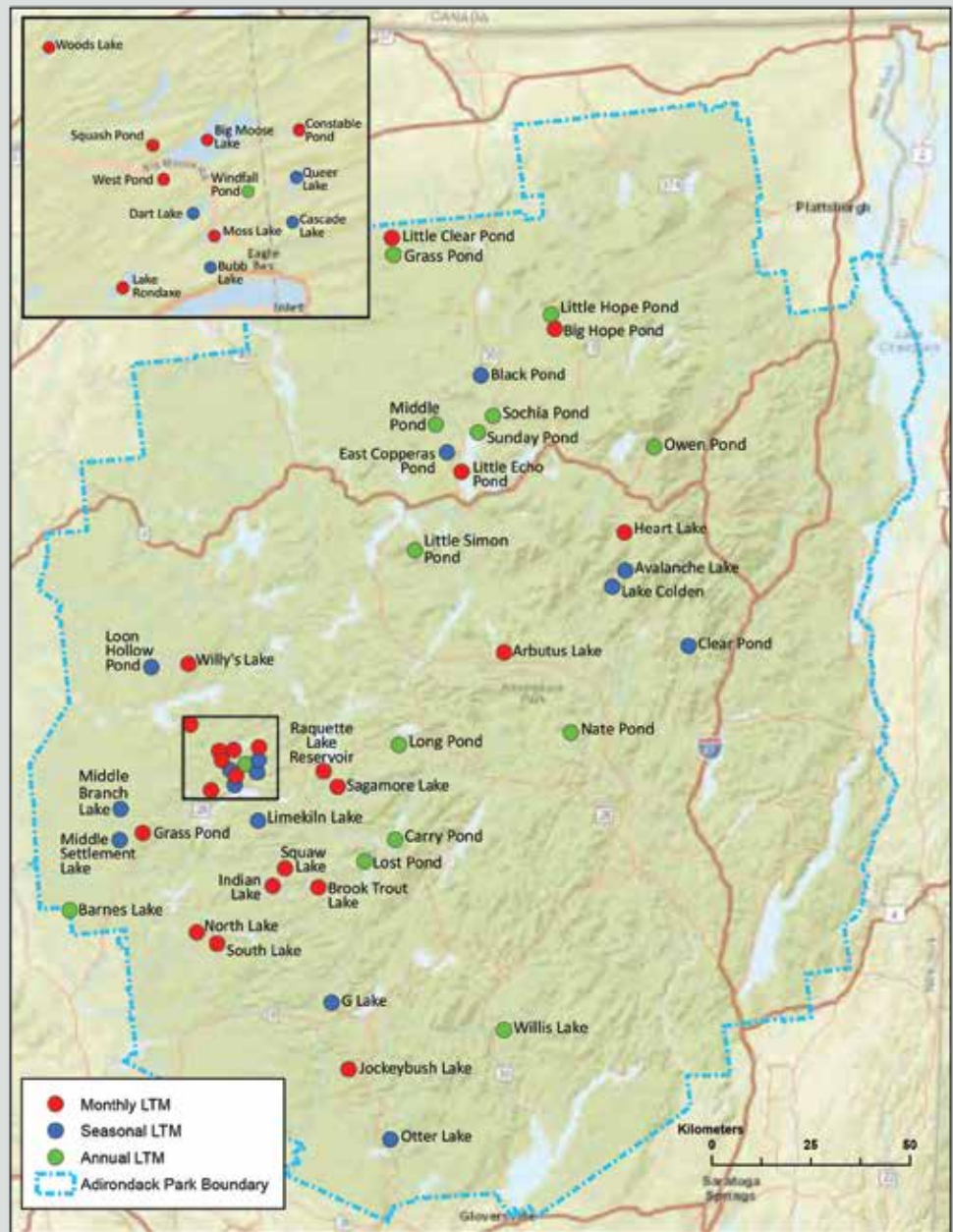
The NYS Dept. of Education and US Dept. of Agriculture teamed up to enhance school-based nutrition programs, allowing local districts to provide both free meals during school and additional food options for weekends and summer break. These programs, and the work of local food banks, have provided a welcome lifeline to low-income families in rural areas, including the Adirondack Park. Local hunger is often overlooked in the Adirondacks, where food deserts, travel costs, and inflated seasonal prices for tourists can force the costs of necessities to be out of reach for residents.

NYSDERDA to the Rescue

The NYS Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) told research scientists this summer that it planned to continue funding the work of the federal Long-Term Monitoring (LTM) Program whether federal funds are still available or not. Since the mid-1980s, LTM has provided funding for monitoring lake chemistry and biological surveys across the Northeast and mid-Appalachians. Here, it monitored the Adirondack Park's reaction to changes in air pollution levels. LTM has carefully documented the recovery of many Adirondack lakes from decades of acid rain and soot damage from coal-fired power plants in the Midwest. It has also shown that some types of Adirondack lakes will require centuries to recover without additional pollution reductions. This data has also been a vital ally in New York's fight to keep federal attention on reducing interstate air pollution. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has protected the funding from across-the-board budget rescissions until this year when it announced it could no longer afford to do that anymore. The EPA's annual grants to NYSDERDA for this work were about \$300,000 per year, with the rest of the costs assumed by the universities and research institutions collecting the data.

MAP SOURCE: NYSDERDA ALTM COMPENDIUM REPORT

Long-Term Monitoring Sites and Sampling Period



It Kills the Weeds; What Else Does it Kill?

The Lake George Park Commission used a chemical herbicide called ProcellaCOR to kill Eurasian watermilfoil plants in two areas of the 32-mile-long water body. The Commission declared the project a success after reports from their divers confirmed that milfoil had been killed. However, the real impacts from the chemical treatment

may not play out for many decades. As a drinking water source, the lake deserves special protection and chemicals should be a last resort. Herbicides and other pesticides that were in common use during the 20th Century have now been found to be carcinogens and endocrine interrupters that mimic the hormones that regulate growth in humans and/or wildlife. This is a particularly charged

issue given local municipal opposition and the fact that this was the first major use of chemical treatments in the "Queen of American Lakes," Lake George. ■

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

PHOTO © CARL HEILMAN II/WILD VISIONS INC.

Biden Move Means Easier Breathing

In February, the Biden administration boosted public health and environmental protection when it enacted tougher soot standards for power plants and other industries as part of an update to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. The change will reduce soot pollution to 33% by 2032. Chemicals within the soot can contribute to heart disease, according to the American Lung Association and the US Environmental Protection Agency. When fully implemented, the air quality improvements are expected to save thousands of lives annually, mostly in the northeast.



BIDEN

It's Better to Know What's Coming

In a summer marked by powerful storms and 23 tornados in Upstate New York in a single month, US Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer, D-NY, is calling for enhanced weather prediction and climate science funding. Speaking at the state's Mesonet Operations Command Center, a network of monitoring systems based at the University at Albany's ETEC campus, he called for technology upgrades and new research capabilities. He is seeking \$30 million, an increase of \$10 million over current funding levels.



SCHUMER

Warren Proposes Regulatory Reset

US Senator Elizabeth Warren, D-MA, proposed a bill in July to support state and federal regulatory agencies negatively impacted by the US Supreme Court's decision to undermine their authority when it reversed the *Chevron USA vs. Natural Resources Defense Council* precedent in June. It would require courts to defer to the judgement of regulatory agencies to create and enforce regulations based on federal law, when Congress is unclear about how the law should be administered.



WARREN

Tonko Defends Clean Air, Clean Lakes

In July, US Rep. Paul Tonko, D-Amsterdam, issued a statement criticizing the US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) decision to stop funding research into Adirondack lake chemistry and biology as part of its duties to monitor the impacts of its acid rain control programs. Tonko noted that the EPA had shifted its clean air focus too exclusively toward urban detection systems, when the nation can easily afford to do both.



TONKO

Gillibrand Urges Ag Support

US Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, D-NY, supported dairy, fruit, and vegetable farms, vineyards and orchards in negotiations over the five-year renewal for Farm Bill. Such funding would help farmers in the Champlain Valley and the burgeoning craft beverage industry. Gillibrand also pressed for funding for rural development and for pollution clean-up, including forever chemicals such as PFAS.



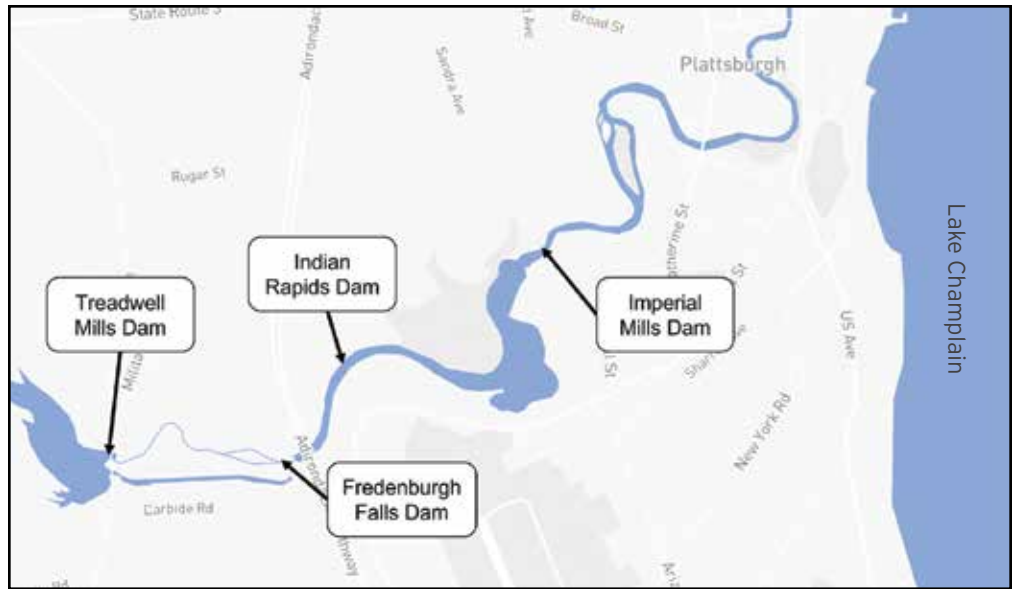
GILLIBRAND

EPA's Pockets Empty After Decades of Cuts

In late 2023, the EPA's Air & Radiation Division announced that it would drop funding for the Long-Term Monitoring Program (LTM), which has been reporting on the biology and chemistry of dozens of Adirondack lakes since the mid-1980s. The LTM maintains an unbroken 50-year record of lake chemistry and biological trends in Adirondack lakes, which allows scientists to judge the real-world efficacy of federal air pollution control programs. The LTM also tracked changes in lakes across New England and Virginia. Most other states have now shut down their LTM programs. New York is urging the EPA to continue LTM funding, but is also working to secure state funding should those efforts fail. The EPA said a decade of budget cuts have depleted its reserves, forcing it to close programs it had been supporting with no-longer-available discretionary funds.

Salmon Inching Closer to Adirondacks

Lake Champlain salmon are closer to their historic spawning grounds in the Saranac River, just outside the northeastern corner of the Adirondack Park, thanks to the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USF&W) and the Lake Champlain Chapter of Trout Unlimited. In the fall of 2023, the USF&W removed the ruins of two dams that had blocked fish passage for generations. Work started in late August on Indian Rapids Dam, while demolition began on the former Fredenburgh Falls Dam site in November. The Saranac River is one of four tributaries in the Lake Champlain watershed where the Fish and Wildlife Service is working to restore naturally producing salmon populations. It is also working on the Boquet River, with the support of the Boquet River Association fully within the Adirondack Park. The Boquet River begins on Dix Mountain in Keene and descends roughly 3,000 feet in only 47 miles, entering the lake in Willsboro.



No Longer Waiting for Goffman

In 2022, President Joe Biden appointed environmental leader Joe Goffman to direct his Environmental Protection Agency's Air Division. Goffman is a long-time EPA air official, following a career leading the Environmental Defense Fund. His appointment lapsed in 2022 without a vote in the deadlocked Senate. In February, Sen. Majority Leader Charles Schumer, D-NY, brought the nomination to a vote in a strategic move that narrowly passed 50-49.



GOFFMAN

Declaration Will Speed Help, Reimbursement

The US Dept. of Agriculture declared official disasters in Clinton, Franklin, and Lewis counties following 2023 tornadoes and floods that tore through communities, washed-out state highways, and had dramatic impacts on Adirondack



Looking upstream at the Indian Rapids Dam on the Saranac River during the fall of 2023

MAP AND PHOTO SOURCE: USFWS

forests. The declarations made it easier for state and local authorities to obtain federal relief funding and accelerated the reconstruction of basic infrastructure.

Growing Energy Demand, Growing Impact

Amidst issues of aging infrastructure and growing energy demand, the US Department of Energy's Grid Deployment Office (GDO) has been in the process of designating National Interest Transmission Electric Corridors (NIETCs) to expedite the deployment of transmission infrastructure projects. A National Transmission Needs

Study was published in October of 2023 showing possible transmission values, a metric for evaluating transmission needs, dividing the Adirondack Park. The Adirondack Council submitted public comment advocating for the designation of NIETCs to be closer to demand centers, sparing impacts to the Adirondack Park. In May, the GDO released a preliminary list of NIETCs that prioritize projects supplying energy to downstate New York, Massachusetts, and New Jersey demand centers, the closest of which begins south of Albany. ■

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

PHOTO © CARL HEILMAN II/WILD VISIONS INC.

Community Rebuilds Better

In July, the Town of Long Lake said it would purchase the causeway and dam that failed during heavy rainfall last summer and drained adjacent Jennings Pond. The town agreed to purchase the causeway, the dam spillway, and a portion of Middle Island. The transfer will enable the town to access federal and state funding to repair the structure and refill the human-made Jennings Pond, which hosts various community events. The town estimates that replacing the dam spillway at the center of the causeway would cost \$3.4 million. As climate change continues to impact our regional communities, innovative projects such as this and the funding needed to enact them will be essential to offset ever more severe storm impacts.

500 Miles of Multi-use Mistakes

Franklin County is headed back to the drawing board after residents and organizations reacted negatively to the county's proposal for a 500-mile off-road vehicle trail network. Of the 90 comments received on the draft plan, 85 were opposed. Commenters reacted to the scoping document the county submitted under the mandatory State Environmental Quality Review. County officials acknowledged that the plan would have an adverse impact on the environment. The Towns of Franklin and Brighton passed resolutions opposing the plan, which didn't include any detailed maps of the trail. Commenters warned that trails used by motorized vehicles would get little use by other groups. In annual surveys of Adirondack Park visitors over the past decade, the desire to ride all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) was expressed by less than 2%.

On the Right Trail

The Franklin County Economic Development Corp. has launched a Rail Trail Small Business Fund as part of the Adirondack Frontier Small Business Program, aimed at fostering the growth and resilience of small businesses in Harrietstown and Tupper Lake. A total of \$400,000 was awarded in two grants through NYS Community Development Block Grants. The Rail Trail Small Business Fund was designed to boost economic development, job creation, and the overall experience for residents and visitors along the Adirondack Rail Trail. The fund will issue small business development grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$35,000 to qualified microenterprises.



A section of the 34-mile Adirondack Rail Trail

Need for Science-Based Decisions at APA

The Adirondack Park Local Government Review Board, a non-voting member of the APA Board, consistently urged the Park Agency to ensure that the decision to permit the use of chemical herbicides like ProcettaCOR in Adirondack waters should be based on good and long-term science. When the Lake George Park Commission again sought permits to apply the herbicide

in Lake George, the Review Board cautioned how past chemical use has had unintended consequences in the Park. The Lake George permits were approved by the APA Board.

Supporting the Headwaters

The Town of Long Lake supported and engaged in the Headwaters Campaign, a unique partnership between the lake associations of Long Lake, Blue Mountain Lake, and Raquette Lake, the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, and the Adirondack Council, which aims at protecting and promoting the health of the headwaters of the Raquette River. Over the past year, the Campaign worked with the University of Rochester to create and release four videos highlighting the ecological importance of these headwaters and the vital role lake associations play in supporting the ecological and economic health of the Raquette River.

Affordable Living for All

Officials in Tupper Lake, Franklin County, and Jay and Elizabethtown, Essex County, are working with local land banks and regional not-for-profits, like the Northern Forest Center, to clear space and construct new workforce housing in those communities. The programs will establish new, affordable middle-income housing units for long-term rental, aimed at making it easier for people who work for small businesses and local governments to find homes in town. A lack of affordable housing for local workers in the Park's largest communities force those to seek housing in more rural areas, wasting time and fuel, and inducing development in places least able to withstand the damage. ■

AWARDS

PHOTO © CARL HEILMAN II/WILD VISIONS INC.

2024 Conservationist of the Year - Northeast Wilderness Trust

The Adirondack Council presented its Conservationist of the Year Award to the Northeast Wilderness Trust (NEWT) for its efforts to permanently protect forests, reconnect wildlife habitat, and reestablish wilderness areas from Maine to the Adirondack Park. The award was presented at Heaven Hill Farm, in Lake Placid, during the Adirondack Council's annual Forever Wild Day Celebration in July. In New York, NEWT manages 18 preserves covering more than 10,000 acres, including the Eagle Mountain Preserve in the Split Rock Wildway. These wildlands provide a critical connection between the Champlain Valley and the High Peaks Wilderness Complex. NEWT also works in the St. Lawrence River Valley, where it is rewilding landscapes in partnership with local land trusts to create forever-wild habitat linkages between the Adirondack Park and the similarly sized Algonquin Park in southern Canada.



L-R: Forever Adirondacks Campaign Director Aaron Mair, NEWT Executive Director Jon Leibowitz and Adirondack Council Executive Director Raul Aguirre

Special Recognition - Benita Law-Diao

The Council also recognized the work of environmental and justice activist Benita Law-Diao at its Forever Wild Day celebration in July. In addition to her more than 30-year career as a NYS Licensed Public Health Nutritionist/Dietitian, Benita has worked in the environmental space to increase access to and promote environmental stewardship of the Adirondacks. In 2022, Benita was appointed to the Adirondack Park Agency board where she has utilized her state agency, recreation, and environmental experience in her role as a board member. She is also an Outdoor Afro Leader for Albany and Upstate NY, bringing people of all backgrounds to the Adirondacks for connection to nature, community, and fun. Among her many other roles, Benita works with John Brown Lives!, Adirondack Experience, and Eagle Island Camp. ■



L-R: Executive Director Raul Aguirre, Benita Law-Diao and Adirondack Park Agency Executive Director Barbara Rice

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

PHOTO © CARL HEILMAN II/WILD VISIONS INC.

ORGANIZATIONS & PEOPLE

It takes more than government to make this amazing Park work so well. Here are some of the organizations and people who made a positive difference in the Adirondacks this year:

The **Adirondack Foundation** used its Special and Urgent Needs Fund to coordinate and distribute emergency aid and flood support to the communities of Long Lake, Blue Mountain Lake, and Indian Lake during extreme rainstorms this summer that caused locally heavy flooding, washing out of roads, and power outages.

The **Adirondack Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism and the Adirondack Mountain Club** worked with the Adirondack Council's Justin Levine to educate the public how to avoid getting stranded while visiting to view the total eclipse in April. The day passed safely with only one backcountry rescue mission that required Forest Rangers.

John Brown Lives! worked with artist **Wesley Wofford** to bring a powerful statue of Harriet Tubman erected at John Brown's Farm State Historic Site for a limited engagement.

The **Housing Assistance Program of Essex County** is using \$1.3 million in funding from the NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal's Small Rental Development Initiative to build more affordable housing in Wilmington, Essex County. Six apartments in three townhouses are slated to be built with the grant money. The units, as per grant guidelines, will be rented to households at or below 80% of the area median income (\$80,000 in Essex County).

The **Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York** provides food security for elderly Adirondack Park residents and school kids, providing meals and a take-home backpack program for weekends and summer break at 36 Adirondack school districts (the bank serves 103 school districts in upstate NY).

The **Northern Forest Center** is working to provide affordable housing in several Adirondack communities, including the Adirondack Council's hometown of Elizabethtown, where it is renovating the Hale House complex into reduced-rate apartments.

Essex Food Hub (EFH) won a grant of \$730,000 from the New York Food for New York Families program, funded through a US Dept. of Agriculture grant. During the two-year project, EFH will purchase more than \$500,000 worth of local food, injecting these funds into the local economy and providing much-needed support directly to small farms and food producers. The program aims to benefit socially disadvantaged producers in particular. It will bring local food to food-insecure families in two areas: the Western Adirondacks and the Bronx.

The **Nature Conservancy** completed a protection plan for the unique cold-water fishery at Follensby Pond, near Tupper Lake; it signed a final conservation agreement with the state that protects the fishery for scientific research and also opens part of the Raquette River to public recreation.

Lori Fisher who has served with distinction as Executive Director of the Lake Champlain Committee, is retiring after working for nearly 40 years to protect and restore water quality and ecosystem health on the lake that forms a 130-mile-long border between Vermont and the Adirondack Park.

The **Adirondack Land Trust (ALT)** was awarded \$3 million in June from the federally-funded Northern Border Regional Commission to support accessible wildland trails at preserves near Saranac Lake and Lake Placid; it was the largest single grant in ALT's history.

After 25 years of growth, the **Ausable River Association** is expanding its mission, changing its name to the **Ausable Freshwater Center**, and planning a new headquarters in the Town of Jay, which it hopes to open as an education center, home office, and research center by 2030, with construction beginning in 2025.

In 2022 and 2023, the **Adirondack North Country Association**, through the **Adirondack Diversity Initiative**, has provided training to 203 law enforcement officers from 14 agencies, emphasizing cultural consciousness, racial equity training, and trauma-informed policing training that empowers them to foster safe, just communities.

Zoë Smith announced in July that she would be stepping out of her role as Executive Director of the **Paul Smith's College Adirondack Watershed Institute (AWI)** and into the role of Vice President of Strategic Initiatives at the college; **Dr. Brendan Wiltse** has been named AWI's new Executive Director after leading the science team for four years.

The **Adirondack Foundation** awarded \$800,000 in philanthropic support in 2024 to communities across the Adirondack region through its Generous Acts program by addressing three strategic focus areas: basic needs, educational pathways and economic vitality; awards supported food access, health care, housing, early childhood development, and careers. ■

2024-25 PRIORITIES

PHOTO © CARL HEILMAN II/WILD VISIONS INC.

To preserve the legacy of the Adirondacks for current and future generations, 2025 priorities, guided by the VISION 2050 report, include:

50th Anniversary/VISION 2050

Celebrate Adirondack Council's 50th Anniversary year through events and publications. Elevate the VISION 2050 report recommendations and link strategic plan priorities and outcomes to VISION's three main pillars.

Forever Adirondacks Campaign

Complete campaign; celebrate and uplift 3-years of projects that championed North Country green jobs, sustainable renewable resources, and youth engagement and created greater synergy between our unique natural and human communities.

Park Governance

Establishment of larger Adirondack Park management advocacy framework to engage regional stakeholders that will achieve long-term demonstrable changes to the DEC and APA and other state agencies' structure, policies, and actions.

Clean Water

Build clean water advocacy program to push for meaningful action on lake association capacity needs, road salt, aquatic invasive species, wastewater, septic, SCALE (Survey of Climate Change and Adirondack Lake Ecosystems) research and funding.

Hold Agencies & Government Accountable

Maintain robust review of land use, management agency actions, permits, management plans, etc., and provide substantive technical response. When necessary, engage in appropriate legal action.

Advance Wilderness Preservation and Improve State Land Stewardship

Completion of Visitor Use Management process, securing new Adirondack Forest Preserve Coordinator and increased regional engagement by DEC staff.

Rewilding

Elevate staff expertise and leadership on appropriate rewilding efforts at a regional scale for aquatic and terrestrial resources, including a potential wildlands focused conference in 2025.

Federal Funds & Policy

Work with our NY Congressional delegation to secure federal funds and policy for Adirondack clean air and water monitoring/science support (CASTNET); Federal Long-Term Monitoring funding; Inflation Reduction Act.

Defending Forever Wild

Be the leading Adirondack political advocate and technical expert at a state and federal level on the political feasibility and policy impacts of Forever Wild Constitutional Amendments; and monitor state/public legal compliance of Article XIV.

Secure Community Benefits

Renewed commitment to community engagement/VISION 2050-related outcomes that result in tangible "on the ground" projects in communities across the Adirondacks.

Foster Sustainable Working Forests & Farms

Build programmatic capacity that focus on uplifting and empowering commercial working landscapes to foster meaningful climate-positive outcomes through innovative economic initiatives, incentives, and regulatory efficiencies.

Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (JEDI) Efforts

Secure increased state funding for the Adirondack Diversity Initiative, and support broader regional JEDI efforts. ■

The Adirondack Council is committed to our mission, our values and these priorities. We will use the best available science and respect diverse views in order to achieve these results. We will employ our knowledge of the political process to be the leading environmental advocate for the Adirondacks. We work with partners, promote diversity, and find common ground when possible. We carry on the legacy of early conservation visionaries and ensure the Park is known and protected as a national treasure.



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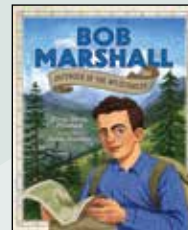
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NEW! 2025 Forever Wild Calendar | \$15 + tax & s/h

12-month calendar featuring Adirondack landscapes from award-winning photographer Carl Heilman II.



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Follow the life of wilderness champion Bob Marshall in this beautifully illustrated children's book. Hard cover, 24 pages, and suitable for ages 8-12.



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