

Adirondack Council
Adirondack Mountain Club
Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve
Environmental Advocates of New York
Protect the Adirondacks!
Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter

April 15, 2021

Members of NYS Senate and NYS Assembly
Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY

Re. S. 1145 (Senator Kaminsky et. al.) A. 4074 (Assemblymember Englebright et.al.) An Act to amend the executive law in relation to preserving ecological integrity, wildlife and open space in the Adirondack Park

Dear Senators and Assemblymembers:

The organizations listed above urge you to please co-sponsor S. 1145/A.4074 this year and to help to pass it in 2021.

Since 1892, the Adirondack Park has earned a place in the hearts of all New Yorkers as a magnificent Park of people, scenery, natural wonder, vast forests, lakes and rivers. It is a headwaters for our largest rivers and the climatic lungs of New York, acting to sequester and store millions of tons of carbon every year. At six million acres, the Adirondack Park encompasses over 2.6 million acres of public Forest Preserve, the people's lands in New York. The Adirondack Park is the place that New Yorkers depend upon for wilderness, inspiration and wild outdoor experiences.

While large, the Adirondack Park is also highly vulnerable to adverse changes due to human land use and development. That is why fifty years ago, the State Legislature created the Adirondack Park Agency and its zoning plan, the nation's premier example of resource-based regional planning.

Despite the best intent of the legislature, significant private subdivision and development has been ongoing in the Park for the last fifty years, thereby impairing the Park's overall ecosystem function, diminishing carbon storage in its forests, increasing human-wildlife conflicts and fragmenting land ownerships into smaller parcels. That fragmentation diminishes the Park's open space character, recreational options and sustainable forestry and agricultural potential.

A.4074/ S.1145 is designed to preserve the ecological integrity, wildlife health and diversity, and open space in the Adirondack Park. The bill would strengthen the APA by incorporating modern conservation development principles and practices to curtail widely scattered exurban development, or "rural sprawl" in the Adirondack Park.

The bill is fair. It is directed squarely at the largest, commercial, speculative developments in the Adirondack Park, and will not affect small landowners or family operations. The bill is flexible. It includes a variance provision and incentives for developers through a density bonus if they configure a development to maximize open space protection. There is also a transfer of development rights provision.

The bill is also practical. It ensures that the largest residential subdivisions in the Park are conceptually studied in a pre-application process that keeps the applicant's goals as well as ecological principles in mind. The steps specified will ensure early, rigorous analysis of environmental conditions before the Park's largest applicants to the Adirondack Park Agency expend significant dollars on site engineering. By requiring conceptual review of the largest developments, the bill will better protect Adirondack working forests, farms, natural resources and open space recreation while it minimizes infrastructure costs.

The legislation marks an important advancement in the overall conservation of the Park by facilitating human economic development that does not diminish useful blocks of wildlife habitat, working forests, hunting, fishing and other open space recreational pursuits.

Also, this legislation was subject to extensive stakeholder meetings over a two-year period. Those meetings resulted in significant changes to achieve consensus among environmental, local governmental and forest product representatives. Such a consensus is very rare in the Adirondack Park.

Finally, the bill would be a very appropriate and most fitting way for the State Legislature to mark this year's 50th anniversary of the Adirondack Park Agency. Thank you very much for considering helping to pass S.1145/A.4074 in 2021.

Sincerely,

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Michael Barrett, Executive Director
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David Gibson, Managing Partner
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