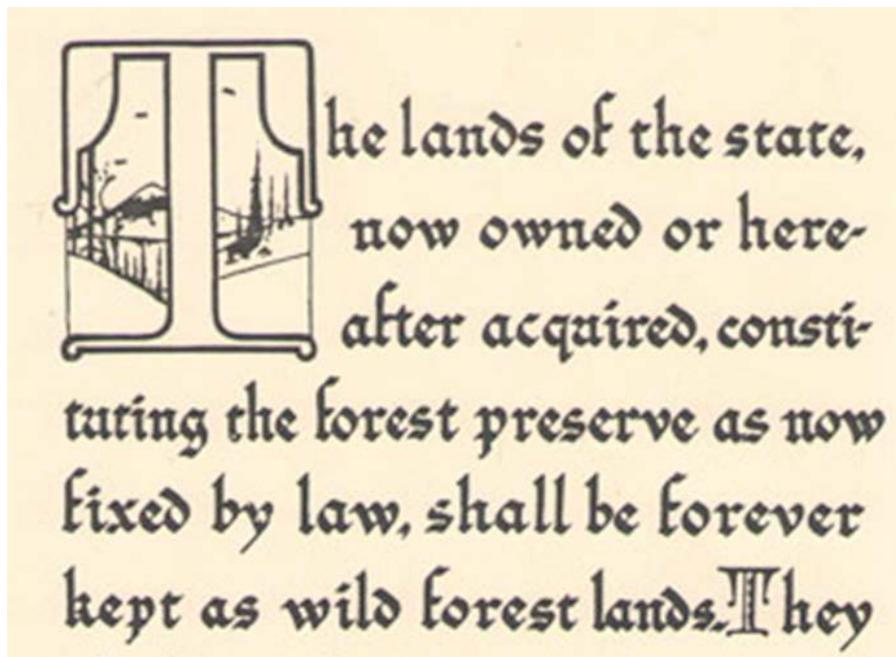


Would a State Constitutional Convention Threaten NY's "forever wild" Land?

Green groups worry that a state constitutional convention could lead to ill-conceived changes to New York's "forever wild" open space protections.

By Brian Mann, Adirondack Bureau Chief
North Country Public Radio

July 6, 2017



Text of Article XIV in a pamphlet created by the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks

Environmental groups in the Adirondacks have joined the coalition lobbying against the idea of a constitutional convention. Their main worry is that the "forever wild" clause of the state constitution - Article XIV - could be amended without proper deliberation or scientific study.

David Gibson heads a group called Adirondack Wild. Gibson spoke about the prospects of a convention with Brian Mann.



David Gibson with Adirondack Wild. Photo: Provided by subject

David Gibson: New York State has a forever wild provision in our constitution affecting so much public forest that no other state has, and frankly, no other country in the world has. This is something that we value in the state of New York and have since 1895. When you consider what the potential of a casual or even a friendly attempt to amend Article XIV that may not have been well thought through, you risk something that's unique in America, and in the world.

Brian Mann: So let's remind people of some context, we're actually in the middle right now of a proposal to do another amendment to the state constitution; this would set up a land bank that would allow local communities some flexibility in doing public works projects, especially relating to safety and utilities. So right now there is already a mechanism in place that changes can be made, if necessary.

DG: The amendment that's going to come to the voters in November - because it's gone through two legislative approvals so far - is narrowly defined, specific in purpose, and it's limited in scope. And I think it's a model for the way constitutional amendments should be deliberated, and we don't think that the constitutional convention is the appropriate place to consider amendments, because it could happen in a very quick period, and there's not enough time for deliberation. So we're content with the legislative process to amend Article XIV and we're a little worried about what could happen at a convention to Article XIV.

BM: In your essay that you wrote for the Adirondack Almanac, you write that there are commercial interests that do still oppose the concept of forever wild. How serious is there a concern here that someone would come in and, and propose some significant weakening of those protections?

DG: Well I think weakening can come from your friends as well as your enemies, right? Well-meaning people, such as happened 50 years ago at the 1967 convention when the campgrounds were discussed, proposed that maybe those camp grounds - state campgrounds - were unconstitutional. And suddenly there was an amendment being considered to amend Article XIV to allow a state campground. It was thought then - and I would think now - that that wasn't a good idea, and that was coming from people friendly to Article XIV. In addition, I think there are some commercial interests around the state that would like to tweak Article XIV. The majority of delegates are from upstate senate districts and there are plenty of commercial interests that would have an eye on the forest preserve and want to change it. So yeah, there is concern both from our friends and from our people that would be opposed to even the philosophy of Article XIV.