



For Immediate Release

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Contact: David Gibson, 518-469-4081

Conservation of Whitney Park an Urgent Priority, says advocate Adirondack Wild



Forked Lake, near the present Whitney Wilderness. Photo by D. Gibson, Adirondack Wild

Yesterday's announcement by landowner John Hendrickson of his intent to sell the remaining 36,000 acres of Whitney Park in Long Lake ought to command the immediate attention of state and private land conservation and planning organizations, says the non-profit advocate Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve.

"Fortunately, a great deal of work has already been done to prepare for this moment," said Adirondack Wild's managing partner David Gibson. "The Whitney landscape lying at the very heart of the Adirondack Park has been well studied in the past by conservation scientists and planners at the Adirondack Nature Conservancy, the Adirondack Park Agency and by others."

In the early 1990s, members of the Whitney family invited conservationists and regional planners to visit and see the landscape in some detail and appreciate its ecological integrity, environmental context and cultural significance. “At the invitation of the family, I was privileged to tour the property and can attest to the conservation importance of the entire tract, especially its interlacing network of lakes, wetlands and streams. To look north towards the tract from the shores and surface of Forked Lake and then to have had the chance to look south from the main camp, called Deerlands, at Little Forked Lake are unforgettable experiences,” Gibson added.

“Even during the pandemic, this project ought to rise in levels of priority and urgency,” he said. “The Department of Environmental Conservation and the land conservation community need to dust off prior studies and immediately resume efforts to work with the landowner and a variety of Park stakeholders to conserve the tract. The Town of Long Lake must be involved, as must the DEC’s Region 5 Open Space Conservation Advisory Committee, which has not met in quite a while,” continued Gibson. “The Region 5 committee has discussed this area quite a bit in the past since Whitney Park was listed as a High Priority project in the state’s Open Space Conservation Plan starting in 1992.”

“Naturally, Adirondack Wild is interested in the wilderness character and potential to re-wild portions of the tract. Future expansion of the current 15,000-acre William C. Whitney Wilderness would be seamless and make a great deal of management and stewardship sense to us, particularly at places contiguous to the existing Wilderness, like Salmon Lake and Slim Pond.” Gibson said. “In other places which have greater cultural significance, conservation easements or other state land classifications might be more appropriate. The key is to pull people together at this stage, dust off the prior planning studies and re-start the conversation. The need for a coordinated conversation about conserving this property should re-commence immediately.”

In December, 1997 Governor George Pataki, The Nature Conservancy, the Adirondack Land Trust and the DEC coordinated with landowner Marylou Whitney and her husband John Hendrickson to announce the sale of 15,000 acres of Whitney Park’s Little Tupper Lake and nine other lakes and the former Whitney headquarters for \$17 million. The land and its lakes and connecting streams became part of the Adirondack Forest Preserve and, therefore, taxable for all purposes. William C. Whitney, for whom that eventual Wilderness was named, and the founding owner of the land in 1898, was a trustee of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks starting in 1902.

Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve is a not-for-profit, membership organization which acts on behalf of wilderness and wild land values and stewardship throughout the state. More on the web at www.adirondackwild.org.