

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

For Immediate Release
June 2, 2021

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Whitney Subdivision Plans threaten Adirondack Park

Groups Urge Passage of Conservation Design Legislation

Six environmental organizations have written to NYS Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and NYS Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins not to adjourn this year's legislative session before passing a measure to preserve the ecological integrity, wildlife, water quality and open space in the Adirondack Park.

In the remaining few days of the legislative session, the six groups are making passage of this measure a top priority. Assembly bill 4074 (Assembly member Englebright et.al.) and Senate bill 1145 (Senator Kaminsky et. al.) would strengthen the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) by incorporating modern conservation development practices to curtail widely scattered exurban development, or "rural sprawl" in the Adirondack Park.

Last week's announcement by the owner of Whitney Park, 36,000 mostly undeveloped acres in the heart of the Adirondacks, that he will apply to the APA to fragment the large tract into eleven, sprawling estate lots makes the need for the legislation especially urgent.

Whitney Park in Long Lake has been a top priority of the State's Open Space Conservation Plan since 1992. Whitney lands have 22 lakes and hundreds of streams and wetlands which connect the lakes. The owner, the late Marylou

Whitney's husband John Hendrickson, told the *Times Union* last week that he wants to convert 11 of those lakes into individual estates, introducing new roads, vehicles, utilities, lights, and pets throughout what is now the park's most protected private land use classification, Resource Management, colored green on the APA land use map.

The pending legislation would require that the APA carefully design such a subdivision to concentrate the new homes near existing roads and infrastructure while maintaining intact the lakeshores, wetlands, and blocks of forest for wildlife and open space recreation.

"While large, the Adirondack Park is highly vulnerable to adverse changes due to land use and development," said Protect the Adirondacks Executive Director Peter Bauer. "That is why fifty years ago, the State Legislature created the Adirondack Park Agency and its zoning plan. This legislation is the first significant, science-based conservation advancement in the APA's legislation in 50 years."

"Subdivision, development and fragmentation of a landscape like Whitney Park is precisely the kind of substantial threat to the Park that this legislation is intended to prevent or at least substantially mitigate," said John Sheehan, Communications Director with the Adirondack Council.

"The bill would for the first time apply new scientific research showing that the location, spatial design and layout of large subdivisions is more important ecologically than the sheer number or density of new houses," said Adirondack Wild's managing partner David Gibson.

"The bill is directed squarely at the largest, commercial, speculative developments in the Adirondack Park, such as the proposed subdivision of Whitney 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 ensures early, rigorous analysis of environmental conditions before the Park's largest applicants to the Adirondack Park Agency expend significant dollars on site engineering," added Roger Downs, Conservation Director with the Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter.

"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,” said Michael Barrett, Executive Director of the Adirondack Mountain Club.

The groups add that the 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 rare in the Adirondack Park.

In March, APA approved a sprawling, conventional subdivision that will ring private Woodward Lake and forest with 34 new second homes, with no public sewer or water. Now one of the state’s most iconic wild landscapes, Whitney’s, is also threatened with subdivision.

The legislation also has significant climate mitigation benefits, say the groups. It requires that APA actively work with the largest developers to permanently set aside large, contiguous blocks of private working forest. Those private Adirondack forests sequester over a million tons of carbon each year.