

Adirondack High Peaks Wilderness Campaign

November 9, 2015

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Re: Expanding the Adirondack High Peaks Wilderness

Dear Governor Cuomo,

You have an extraordinary opportunity to create a true national legacy, an Adirondack wilderness area here in New York whose scale and positive impacts will rival some of the most famous conservation landmarks in the world. You have been to the Boreas Ponds. You know how special they and the Adirondacks are. We write to urge you to create an expanded Adirondack High Peaks Wilderness, a more than 280,000-acre national jewel connecting the existing High Peaks and Dix Wilderness Areas with new Wilderness protection for 35,000 acres including the Boreas Ponds and McIntyre tracts, and the headwaters of the Hudson River. Your administration's decision on this, and your leadership will determine your Adirondack legacy.

The Adirondack Park Can be Your National Legacy

The Adirondack Park is a six-million-acre global treasure of public and private land, a legacy created in 1892 that is the largest park in the continental United States. Thank you for appreciating and understanding the history and uniqueness of the Adirondack Park. Thank you for your commitment to protecting and enhancing the Park's wilderness and communities. Thank you for your pledge to complete the largest Adirondack land protection project in more than 100 years. Your leadership is greatly appreciated.

Designated Wilderness, Constitutionally Protected as Forever Wild, is the Ultimate Legacy

As you know, the state, in partnership with the Nature Conservancy, ensured that 92,000 acres of former Finch Pruyn timber company lands were transferred to new private owners with state conservation easements in place to prevent development and allow sustainable timber harvest. By purchasing the 20,494 acre Boreas Ponds tract you will be completing the acquisition of 65,000 acres for the Adirondack Forest Preserve. An expanded Wilderness will provide new economic opportunity for communities in the heart of New York's Adirondack Park while protecting for future generations this priceless gift of nature among the state's tallest mountains, one of the world's best known rivers, and the Park's most spectacular scenery.

The Boreas Ponds, the Headwaters of the Hudson River, and the High Peaks

At the center of those breathtaking landscapes is the Boreas Ponds tract. Remote and carefully protected by its previous owners (Finch, Pruyn & Co. and The Nature Conservancy), Boreas Ponds tract is free from invasive species. It is ecologically healthy and biologically rich. It provides some of the state's most intact and diverse wildlife habitat, from low-elevation wetlands to high-elevation spruce-fir forests. It also offers some of the most spectacular views of the High Peaks, including Mts. Marcy, Haystack, Gothics, and Saddleback. More than 50 miles of rivers and streams, primarily within the Upper Hudson Watershed, run through the tract, including Boreas River, LeClaire, Casey, Slide, and White Lily brooks. Adirondack forests filter water and air while providing a unique variety of healthy and popular recreational opportunities for citizens of local communities and citizens of the world.

We call on you now to be a national leader. We urge you to support an over 280,000-acre contiguous wilderness that will rival some of the most popular and iconic parks and natural areas in the country. It would be larger than Rocky Mountain or Mount Rainer National Parks, and would be double the size of the popular Zion National Park. Your action will ensure that the Adirondacks contain the best wilderness in the eastern United States.

This new Wilderness would help to enhance New York's reputation for outstanding wild lands stewardship and careful environmental protection. It would show that "Forever Wild" is more than just an ideal. It is our heritage and our greatest gift to future generations.

Wilderness is Good for Communities and the Economy

Establishing a new wilderness would benefit human communities too, both inside the Adirondack Park and far beyond its borders. The Adirondacks attract over 10 million visitors a year, has 130,000 year-round residents, and has over 100 small communities. The Adirondacks are located less than half a day's drive from more than 70 million people. Your action here will attract national attention in the outdoor recreation community, bringing more spending to a Park that already generates \$1.29 billion in direct annual spending.

200,000 + 45,000 + 35,000 = 280,000 (acres)

Connecting for the first time the current 200,000-acre plus High Peaks and 45,000-acre Dix Mountain Wilderness Areas, and adding 35,000 acres of new High Peaks Wilderness including the Boreas Ponds and MacIntyre tracts and part of the existing state Vanderhacker Wild Forest, results in more than 280,000-acres of contiguous Wilderness. At the same time, a community connector snowmobile route between Newcomb and North Hudson could be developed near the Blue Ridge Road should environmental, Forest Preserve, and private landowner concerns be addressed, impacts avoided or minimized, and any tree cutting be consistent with the limitations of Article XIV of the State Constitution. Opportunities also exist to establish world-class hut-to-hut accommodation rental systems on private land, including land where the state holds easements.

Adirondack Wilderness Provides Environmental and Recreational Benefits

You are opening in perpetuity lands and waters that have been closed to the public for more than 150 years. This region will provide a very special experience in hiking, camping, paddling, birdwatching, hunting, fishing, cross country skiing, snowshoeing and horseback riding. Activities will be possible for people of all abilities, while preserving water quality, and wildlife habitat. The exceptional value of Boreas Ponds lies in the opportunity it offers to experience nature's grandeur without the influence of motors. There simply is no other publicly accessible waterbody in the Park that offers the combination of views and solitude these ponds offer. Motorized access would not only diminish the experience but would deter visitation and weaken the property's economic draw.

Providing for state maintenance of the Boreas Ponds Dam protects a special brook trout fishery, and a remarkable paddling destination. The Gulf Brook Road could accommodate access needs for visitors, recreationists and the state, with a public access trailhead just over one mile south of the Boreas Ponds. Removal of the Boreas Lodge would eliminate a white elephant for the state and helps restore the historic wilderness character, view, and wild forest nature of the site.

The Boreas Ponds must be protected inside a motor-free Wilderness Area to preserve water quality, wildlife, a fishery free of invasive species and the rare opportunity of solitude and quiet one can experience among the majestic High Peaks. State and private easement lands adjoining and near the new Wilderness will be excellent candidates for mountain biking, and new public motorized access for hunting and snowmobiling. Surrounding communities will stand as "gateways" to the Forest Preserve, gaining an economic boost through the demand for food, lodging, supplies and services by those looking

to experience these attractions. A small Boreas-High Peaks interpretive center can be envisioned in the Town of North Hudson off the Blue Ridge Road in order to attract visitors and provide critical information about the new acquisition and its opportunities. Several small businesses might spring up as a result of this facility.

The Adirondack Wilderness Proposal is Balanced

By expanding the High Peaks Wilderness to include the Boreas Ponds tract you can protect the most sensitive lands and waters as Wilderness. You can be bold, provide for recreational access, and restore wilderness. The Adirondack Forest Preserve is not done. Less than half of state owned land in the Park has the ultimate protection – both designated as wilderness and constitutionally protected as forever wild. 92,000 acres of former Nature Conservancy Finch lands remain in private ownership with much of it open for a wide variety of public motorized, snowmobile and other recreational uses.

The Importance of Process and Transparency

The process of reaching classification decisions should follow the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan and applicable regulations, comply with the law, and be respectful of divergent opinions. Classifications must be science-based, protect functional natural ecosystem integrity and habitat connectivity, integrate sound science and above all, as required by the master plan, keep ecological protection paramount. The process should include opportunity for analysis and consideration of feasible alternatives, ample transparency, input from the public, and hearings across the state.

Your Legacy

In 1970, Governor Rockefeller's Study Commission on the Future of the Adirondack Park placed an image of the Boreas Ponds on the front cover of its final report. In 1978, Governor Carey's Environmental Conservation Commissioner added 9,000 acres to the High Peaks Wilderness, bringing into state ownership every peak higher than 4,000 feet and protecting the Ausable Lakes with a conservation easement. In 1999, Governor Pataki's Department of Environmental Conservation approved the first Unit Management Plan for the High Peaks Wilderness. In 2016, you have the chance to finally acquire and classify tracts your predecessors could only dream of, and finally complete the natural boundaries of the landmark, globally significant High Peaks Wilderness.

You also helped your father, Governor Mario Cuomo, establish his legacy as a champion for the preservation of New York's Adirondack Park. **Now you have an extraordinary opportunity to create your own national legacy, protect Wilderness and support vibrant communities.**

Our organizations appreciate your leadership acquiring these lands and understanding the important impacts your decision will have on current and future generations. Thank you for your commitment to wilderness, communities and the nation's largest state park, the Adirondack Park.

Thank you,

Adirondack Council
Adirondack Mountain Club
Adirondack Wild, Friends of the Forest Preserve
Audubon New York
Citizens Campaign for the Environment
Environmental Advocates of New York
Natural Resources Defense Counsel
New York League of Conservation Voters