GOVERNOR CUOMO ANNOUNCES
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ADIRONDACK SITE WHERE FEDERAL
WILDERNESS ACT WAS PENNED

Family of Howard Zahniser donates historic cabin and lands

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Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced the family of Howard Zahniser has granted New York State a conservation easement on the cabin where much of the Federal Wilderness Act of 1964 was drafted, allowing for the site to be protected as part of the Adirondack Forest Preserve. Additionally, the family donated more than five acres of land to the state as a tribute to their late father’s wilderness advocacy. The lands border the Siamese Pond Wilderness near the hamlet of Baker Mills in the Town of Johnsburg in Warren County. The gift commemorates the 50th anniversary of the signing of the historic Wilderness Act.

"New York is not only the proud home to two of the most sterling examples of natural beauty anywhere in the world, the Adirondack and Catskill Parks, it is also the birthplace of the wilderness movement that inspired the work of Howard Zahniser and other advocates," Governor Cuomo said. "We are honored to accept this generous gift from the Zahniser family and ensure that this important piece of history is preserved for generations to come."

Howard Zahniser befriended Adirondack wilderness conservationist Paul Schaefer in 1946, who introduced him to the Adirondacks and to Article XIV of the New York State Constitution. Zahniser purchased property near Mr. Schaefer’s property and built a cabin. He spent many days at his cabin in the Adirondacks drafting more than 60 versions of the historic federal law that established the National Wilderness Preservation System. Zahniser referred to the Adirondacks as the place “where wilderness preservation began.”

In 1894, New York established its “Forever Wild” constitutional amendment, known as article XIV, protecting what is today the approximately 3 million-acre Forest Preserve in the Adirondacks and Catskills. New York State was the first in the nation to preserve its wild forest lands by its own constitution.

Since the signing of the National Wilderness Act 50 years ago, the amount of federally designated wilderness areas on federal public land has grown to 109
million acres in 44 states and is viewed by many as one of the most important environmental laws ever enacted.

Zahniser had passed away before President Lyndon Johnson signed the National Wilderness Preservation System into law on September 3, 1964.

Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Joe Martens said, “This donation is an extraordinary gift that will highlight and preserve the important role the property played in the development of the national wilderness movement and protecting millions of acres of land over the past 50 years. New York is a leader in preserving valuable forest lands, waters and natural resources, and providing access for people to enjoy their scenic beauty and recreational opportunities. The Zahniser property and cabin continue to symbolize the value of lands like the Adirondack Forest Preserve, and we are proud to protect this property and the legacy of Howard Zahniser.”

Mathias Zahniser said, “My father, Howard, and my mother, Alice, fell in love with the Adirondacks in the summer of 1946. This led to the purchase of a cabin and 31 acres of farmable land in 1947. It is here that Howard Zahniser penned the initial drafts of the Wilderness Act introduced to the national legislature in the mid-fifties and enacted into law and signed by President Johnson in 1964. We are in the eighth decade of use of this cabin, including my parents’ great, great grandchildren. There is a sense in which the Wilderness Act began in the Adirondacks.”

Senator Betty Little said, “The Zahniser family cabin, and surrounding lands will remain as a modest and fitting monument to the legacy of Howard Zahniser, whose vision and inspired work has and will continue to benefit future generations of Americans.”

Assemblyman Dan Stec said, “The preservation of this historic cabin is a fitting tribute to an extraordinary man with a vision for the wilderness.”

Dave Gibson of Adirondack Wild, said, “Howard Zahniser often said that once the Wilderness Act was passed, the greatest challenge would be to keep wilderness wild. This remains one of our biggest challenges in the Adirondacks, in the Catskills and across the country. We invite people of all ages to explore how we can become better stewards of our Forest Preserve during this anniversary.”