Whenever I think of the summers I spent as a kid, scrambling around the Adirondack’s High Peaks, I always remember my grandfather’s constant refrain: “Don’t step on the lichen!” A boisterous group of four kids from Long Island, we were, ascending those rugged mountains in tow behind our parents and grandparents throughout our childhood in the 70s and 80s. There were times, especially on the cold rainy days, we kids would probably have preferred to watch television, but our daily routine during those summer visits was all nature, all the time – including bushwhacking excursions in search of historic landmarks and the legend of Verplanck Colvin, the 19th century surveyor whose work helped lead to the creation of Adirondack State Park. Oh those days, and what they taught us – to respect and love the fragile Adirondack eco-system, to cherish New York’s wildest region. These lessons have stayed with me throughout my life.

When I found out about Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s plan to allow 200 acres of pristine Adirondack wilderness be subjected to open pit mining, I cried. How can this be possible? The governor’s own father, Mario Cuomo, called for the Adirondacks to remain forever wild, decades ago. And didn’t New York State conservation law protect the wild, wonderful and fragile environment of the Adirondack region?
What’s at stake? Not only is a fragile eco-system threatened, but America risks losing part of its natural heritage. Some residents of the area depend on the existing mine for their livelihoods. These are good paying jobs. Others have to live with the mine and its impacts on their homes, roads and safety, and the negative consequences of the mine on other businesses, such as tourism. However, none of the residents of the area are dependent on mining the adjacent Wilderness.

The opening of the land to mining is itself the result of a confusingly worded voter referendum. Voters were asked if they wanted to amend the state Constitution to allow the state to “swap” upstate lands with mining companies in exchange for land of equal value elsewhere. Fifty-three percent of voters OK’d the amendment, but were never told that the land being swapped was part of a Wilderness area. Nor were they told that the mining company has several decades worth of mineral reserves on its own private land, or that the public’s Wilderness to be mined harbors old forests and sensitive plants and animals.

And of course millions of Adirondack fans from around the world had no say in the decision at all. Life has taken me 3,000 miles away from my New York roots, to London, England, but my heart is still hiking through those forests and marvelling at the lichen, trees, butterflies, beavers and flowers of the Adirondacks. When my family and I venture back to the region we spend money on recreation. We come for the wilderness, we buy the ice cream, we get no say.

I am supporting Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve and its allies as they defend the 200 acres under threat of open pit mining by the governor’s administration. Please join me in this cause, wherever you are. Tell the governor that you too oppose open pit mining in the Adirondack Wilderness. Please share your views on social media with the hashtag #KeepAdirondacksForeverWild.

By the way, my grandfather Fran Rosevear, from Ohio, took dozens of young people into the Adirondacks over the years, and taught them about nature and the region, during his many decades serving as a Boy Scout troop leader. It is these many generations of youth, now scattered around the world, who have grown up with the region, are faraway, but still care.

Does this mark the beginning of the end for one of America’s precious unspoiled wilderness areas? If laws created by past generations to protect and save our greatest wilderness and national heritage sites can be overturned, is anything open to upheaval, when profit presents itself?

Some varieties of lichen, my grandfather told me, are as old as pre-historic dinosaurs. Do we really want to rip up the lichen and mine away our legacy?
Lisa Devaney is the granddaughter of Francis B. Rosevear, author of Colvin in the Adirondacks: A Chronology and Index. She is also an author herself of a cli-fi novel (climate change fiction) called In Ark: A Promise of Survival. To defend her view against open pit mining in the Adirondack forest preserve, she has created a hashtag #KeepAdirondacksForeverWild and launched a social media campaign. Visit her website at: www.lisadevaney.com