

Post Star  
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## DEC commissioner: 'We've made great strides' with environment

By DAYELIN ROMAN

LAKE GEORGE -- Lower acid rain levels, the return of wildlife and closed landfills were some of the accomplishments touted by the head of the state Department of Environmental Conservation, as he stood at the top of Prospect Mountain Monday afternoon to celebrate 40 years of Earth Day.

"As Earth Day turns 40, we've made great strides," DEC Commissioner Pete Grannis said.

In the 40 years since the first Earth Day and the founding of DEC, Grannis said 82 unlined landfills were closed in a region that spans eight counties, including Warren, Washington and Saratoga.

Grannis also pointed to some 700,000 acres protected by conservation easements, the return of native brook trout and whitefish populations to area waterways and programs connecting youths to the environment.

Progress in the area of acid rain was also made, he said, as the agency has found pH levels in 28 of 48 Adirondack lakes have improved. All of the lakes show reductions in sulfate or nitrate levels, he added.

A separate survey shows the average number of fish species in 42 of those lakes has increased from three to four.

Grannis's appearance at the top of Prospect Mountain on Monday was a stop on a statewide tour to highlight environmental progress.

But Grannis warned the work isn't done yet.

"It's time to rededicate ourselves to taking the next step," he said.

And that next step is tackling climate change.

Grannis called climate change the most pressing environmental priority the state faces and said he is on the governor's Climate Action Council, a group working on a plan to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in the state by 80 percent by 2050.

The group's plan will be finalized by the end of the year, Grannis said, and it will set out a road map for how to accomplish the task and how to adapt to the effects of climate change, such as rising ocean levels.

"It's a very ambitious plan," Grannis said.

Grannis wasn't alone as he celebrated the environmental accomplishments of the last 40 years.

Open Space Institute President Joe Martens, Fund for Lake George Executive Director Peter Bauer, Lake George Association Director Walter Lender and Adirondack Council President Brian Houseal joined Grannis at the top of the mountain, and each remarked on the progress made and the projects still to be tackled.

Houseal remarked about how, 40 years ago, there was no clean air or water act.

Bauer pointed to the work needed in the area of invasive species. Last summer, the Fund for Lake George paid for a project to remove tons of Eurasian watermilfoil from Lake George.

"It's great to be here to celebrate Earth Day," Martens said. "We do have a long way to go."