

Adirondack Almanack  
November 16, 2009

BLOG ENTRY

## Exporting The Adirondack Park Model to England

There's been a lot of discussion in recent months about the exportation of the "Adirondack model" - the sense that the environmental conservation model used here in the Adirondack region can be exported to other places in the world. It's an argument that North Country Public Radio's Brian Mann called "one of the great orthodoxies of Adirondack theory."

Recent interviews by former Adirondack Park Agency chairman Ross Whaley to support the 600 page tome *The Great Experiment in Conservation* have left a sense that the Adirondack experiment - that combination of public and private lands, overseen by a combination of local and regional authorities - can not be repeated.

Whaley told Brian Mann that "the package in total cannot be replicated." He says his increasing disappointment with the political process at the state and national level combined with a history of the establishment of the Adirondack Park that required "visionaries" - rich and politically connected elites - means that it can never happen again. "You can't take this model and replicate it elsewhere," the former Adirondack Park Agency Chairman told those at this summer's Adirondack Research Consortium conference. That's an argument that the Almanack's own Anthony Hall echoed in his recent post *Origins of the Adirondack Park Agency: A Footnote*.

On Friday however, came news that the Adirondack Park model may have been replicated in the United Kingdom by the South Downs Campaign, a grassroots organization that has established a national park in southern England based on the Adirondack model.

The South Downs Campaign was founded in 1990, the same year one of the new park's chief advocates, Paul Millmore (a countryside management officer for the East Sussex County Council) arrived locally to speak at the Adirondack Council's 1990 conference "Managing Growth and Development in Unique Natural Settings."

Millmore spent much of his time at the conference talking about the Adirondack model and how he intended to export that model to his own back yard. "He said it was an especially useful model in Europe, where no large areas of intact wild lands remained," the Adirondack Council's John Sheehan recalled. "But it is still possible to connect public lands with well-managed private lands and create a park that can both support the economy and protect the environment." Millmore then returned to home and set out on a more than 20 year project to make it so.

Millmore helped organize a movement to establish a park of private and public lands that grew in that time to some 160 organizations including most of the national and regional conservation and environmental organizations plus over 90 local groups, societies and businesses and 29 parish and town councils.

The new British national park stretches from Beachy Head to the edge of Winchester. It will be the most populous of the United Kingdom's 14 national parks with an estimated 120,000 people living inside its boundaries (about 1 million visit each year). "The South Downs is a priceless environmental asset in one of the most densely populated areas in the world," Natural England's Poul Christensen said of the plan. "It fully deserves its new national-park status which stands out as a statement of ambition for the way landscapes need to be protected and valued in 21st century England."

The new park will be overseen by a National Park Authority, a regional governing body not unlike the Adirondack Park Agency, essentially adding a layer of government control over development and environmental and cultural resource protection.

Here is a description of the new park natural landscape from John Sheehan:

The South Downs National Park is not a forested mountainscape like the Adirondacks and Catskills. It is mostly sheep-grazing country of farm fields and small seaside communities. But that is where the differences end. The new park combines both public lands and lived-in landscapes into a single park, with hiking trails connecting the entire landscape, crossing both public and private lands. The park includes the seashore, approximately from Brighton to Dover, including the Seven Sisters -- a white, chalk cliff formation of seven hills that are slowly eroding into the Atlantic. The uplands consist of sparsely wooded hillsides and vast sheep farms, connected to one another and to the shore by hiking trails. But the Green Ridge and Alice Holt Forest are wilder and have more native trees.

A description of the political boundaries from wikipedia:

The extent of the proposed National Park stretches for 90 miles, from St Catherine's Hill near Winchester in Hampshire in the west to Beachy Head, near Eastbourne in East Sussex in the east. The southern boundary of the proposed park lies a few miles inland along most of its length, excluding the coastal towns and cities of Southampton, Portsmouth, Chichester, Bognor Regis, Littlehampton, Worthing and Brighton, but it will include the towns of Petersfield, Liss, Midhurst and Petworth in the Western Weald, and Arundel and Lewes. It will include two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB): East Hampshire and the Sussex Downs. Unlike any other National Park, it will include an area of chalk downland.

Photo: Approximate boundary of the South Downs National Park with respect to London and the South East of England.

Posted by John Warren