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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## Op-ed opposing Adirondack land buys biased, and wrong

Donald MacElroy's Feb. 8 op-ed ["State should OK governor's moratorium on land purchases"] calling for a moratorium on state land purchases in the Adirondack Park was inaccurate and misleading.

The author is a member of a hunting club that would lose its exclusive use of property it was leasing from a timber company if the state completes a deal with the Nature Conservancy. This is land the timber company couldn't afford to keep. So it is understandable that he is upset, but he's upset at the wrong people.

Finch, Pruyn & Co., like every major timber company and paper maker in the Northeast, sold its Adirondack lands years ago. Luckily for us, The Nature Conservancy was able to buy the 161,000 acres Finch owned, preventing its loss to subdivision and commercial development.

Of the 140 exclusive "hunting" clubs on Finch land, about 90 will remain after the deal is completed. The others have 10 years to find a new home. Meanwhile, The Nature Conservancy gave all clubs three-year leases, not one-year deals like Finch gave them.

There is no material loss of timberland, as the author claimed. The vast majority of the Finch holdings will remain commercial timberland, protected by a conservation agreement. The agreement would limit development and ensure sustainable management — including new snowmobile trails. For these lands, The Nature Conservancy has retained all the same logging crews Finch was using.

The lands slated to be acquired by the public are lands from which Finch didn't cut much timber. They are remote and more suited to recreation. Finch leased these mountain slopes, cliff faces, wetlands, river gorges, waterfalls, pristine lakes and remote ponds to people who could afford to pay their way on to them. The public has been excluded from these lands for 125 years.

Finch too recognized the very limited timber value of the Hudson River Gorge, Blue Ledges, OK Slip Falls, the Essex Chain of Lakes, Boreas Ponds, and a half-dozen mountain peaks. Logging could barely generate \$20 an acre per year on the best of timber lands — a pittance when compared to the potential tourism value of opening these scenic and recreational riches to the public.

The writer also tried to leave the false impression that The Nature Conservancy had acted on its own in acquiring the Finch lands. The Adirondack Council has been calling for their acquisition since 1988.

The state Open Space Conservation Plan was created in 1992 and has been revised five times by the people of New York. All five editions list these Finch lands as a high priority for public acquisition. State officials were fully informed and remain supportive.

The author also didn't mention that the towns in which these lands are located will reap a large property tax benefit when the state takes ownership. Finch was enrolled in a property tax abatement program for commercial timberland to which the state is not entitled. The state must pay full property taxes on all Forest Preserve lands, as well as its share of taxes on easement lands. That will help taxpayers in 34 Adirondack towns.

I understand that leaseholders are upset with their loss of their elite, exclusive privileges. But their complaints should be directed at Finch, which sold both its land and its Glens Falls paper mill. Public land acquisition doesn't harm the economy. The Conservancy hasn't harmed forestry in the Adirondacks; it is ensuring that forestry has a future.

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