

Adirondack Daily Enterprise
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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Sen. Little has it wrong

To the editor:

I read with great dismay Senator Little's Nov. 25 letter, once again calling for a moratorium on additional state Forest Preserve purchases. This is the third time in as many years that Senator Little has cried that "the sky is falling." This panic-stricken response was incorrect the first two times, and it is incorrect now.

It remains politically popular to bash environmentalists and regulators in the Adirondacks; however, the senator should take note that being against something isn't the same as having a plan to make things better.

Two years ago, the senator used a court case in Western New York (challenging how New York pays taxes on parcels of forest land it owns) to incite fear over future land purchases. Rather than waste time wringing our hands, environmental organizations got involved in the court case and submitted a "friend of the court" brief describing the benefits of tax payments to Forest Preserve communities. The judge agreed and ordered them reinstated.

Last December, when Governor Paterson proposed to cap the state's property tax payments on Adirondack Forest Preserve lands, the senator again called for a moratorium. The Common Ground Alliance (a collection of community leaders and environmental groups) ignored her advice and instead persuaded the Legislature to defeat this plan. The Adirondack Council led a Common Ground group that generated hundreds of news articles around the state, calling attention to the benefits of state land purchases, of public land ownership and of state tax payments to local communities. The governor dropped his tax cap proposal.

Now, the senator again sees disastrous portents in the state's pending purchase of 69,000 acres of former Finch, Pruyn & Co. lands from The Nature Conservancy. This time, her complaint is that, when it comes to the Forest Preserve, no one seems to know how much land is "enough." This is nonsense.

She failed to note that all state Forest Preserve and easement purchases in the Adirondack Park are based on a plan that was first created in 1992-93, called the NYS Open Space Conservation plan. Contrary to her claims that local residents have no voice in planning, local residents have been members of the plan's regional advisory committees for all 17 years.

She also didn't mention that the state was already seeking to purchase a conservation easement on the former Finch lands. State officials want to ensure that the 90,600 acres of productive Finch timberland remains available to active, sustainable harvesting by buying the development rights but leaving the timber rights with the private landowners.

The 69,000 acres poised for addition to the Forest Preserve consist of steep slopes, gorges, cliffs, rock ledges, waterfalls, wetlands, pristine lakes, isolated ponds, wild rivers, mountain peaks and special wildlife habitats that would be protected by the "Forever Wild" clause of the state Constitution. As such, they would be opened to the public for hiking, paddling, camping, hunting and fishing for the first time since the Civil War. This would cause a huge boost to tourism and help some towns that have lost their mining and logging jobs to the Third World.

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The Adirondack Council

Albany