

# NEWS RELEASE



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, Thursday, September 22, 2011**

**ENVIRONMENTALISTS URGE GOVERNOR TO CLARIFY STATEMENTS ABOUT PERMIT  
WAIVERS FOR ADIRONDACK STORM CLEANUP; HALT BULLDOZING OF RIVERS**

*Highway Crews Have Flattened, Straightened World-Famous Trout Streams, Degraded Fish  
Habitat for Thousands of Feet away from Road Washouts, Turned Wild Rivers into Drainage Ditches*

ELIZABETHTOWN, N.Y. – The Adirondack Park’s largest environmental organization today urged Gov. Andrew Cuomo to alert state and local highways crews that his emergency waiver for permits to reconstruct roads following Tropical Storm Irene was more limited than they appear to realize and didn’t mean they could bulldoze and excavate trout streams and wetlands that are thousands of feet away from the affected road.

“A lot of environmental damage is taking place in the name of public safety,” said Adirondack Council Executive Director Brian L. Houseal. “The Governor should make it clear that there are some things road crews can do to rebuild without permits, but bulldozing trout streams is not one of them.”

The Adirondack Council also called on the Governor to assign his regulatory agencies the job of determining how to avoid severe storm damage in the future as roads, private buildings and public facilities are reconstructed or relocated. The group provided photographs of major alterations of famous Adirondack rivers and brooks by heavy equipment, including Johns Brook, Gulf Brook, Roaring Brook, the East Branch of the Ausable River, and others.

“We understand there was a need for emergency road repairs and for the clearing of debris from rivers in the communities that were hardest-hit by tropical storm Irene,” said Houseal. “The Ausable and other rivers jumped their banks and may have changed course. But the bulldozing we are seeing now goes far beyond emergency response in communities. Road crews are flattening and straightening rivers in some cases for thousands of feet upstream and downstream of the road crossings. They are turning wild rivers into wide, flat drainage ditches.

“This is bad for all aquatic life in the river,” Houseal said. “Without big rocks, a few fallen logs, undercut banks and deep pools here and there, there will be no place for fish and other wildlife to find shelter, food or breeding areas suitable for them. Fish populations can recover from a storm without much help from us. But our current reaction to the storm is causing serious, long-term damage from which fish and wildlife will have a much harder time recovering.”

Ironically, the decision by local highway crews to widen and straighten sections of the river will only lead to more flooding problems in the future. During low flow periods, the unnatural, flat bottomed river channels will actually cause an increase in siltation deposits that can change the flow of water.

“In other cases, what the crews are doing will cause water to move more swiftly and with greater force in the next major storm,” Houseal said. “That’s going to be bad news for people and wildlife living downstream. We cannot afford to assume that something like this won’t ever happen again. There was serious flooding throughout the Lake Champlain basin this spring.”

Various regions of the Adirondack Park have experienced flooding and major storm damage nearly every year for the past decade. The Northway has washed out twice in that time. Looking back a little further, an unexpected major storm blew down more than a million acres of forest in July of 1995.

“Wild, unpredictable weather is one of the facts of life in the Adirondacks,” Houseal said. “That is expected to get worse as global climate change alters precipitation patterns.”

Houseal called on Governor Cuomo to provide assistance through the Adirondack Park Agency and Department of Environmental Conservation to local communities in determining which roads, public facilities and private developments are in the greatest danger of future storm damage and to develop plans to rebuild them differently or to relocate them to upland areas where flooding is less likely.

“You can try to fight the forces of nature, but ultimately, we will lose,” Houseal said. “We should learn something from all of the pain, aggravation and suffering this most recent storm has caused and act accordingly. We should apply those lessons as soon as possible. These rivers will be gushing again in a few months when this winter’s snow begins to melt.”

The Adirondack Council is a privately funded, not-for-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the ecological integrity and wild character of the 9,300-square-mile Adirondack Park. Founded in 1975, the Council carries out its mission through research, education, advocacy and legal action. The Council’s members live in all 50 United States.

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