

**ADIRONDACK COUNCIL CALLS ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW BOARD TO
WITHDRAW INAPPROPRIATE, INACCURATE, MISLEADING RESOLUTION;
COUNCIL CALLS FOR STATE ETHICS INVESTIGATION**

***Review Board Misused its Position as Watchdog of Adirondack Park Agency to Attack Department
of Environmental Conservation, Land Purchase Agreement & The Nature Conservancy***

***Review Board Executive Director and Chairman Have Conflict of Interest as
Members of Exclusive Hunting Clubs that would Vacate Leased Lands When State
Purchases Hudson Gorge, Essex Lakes***

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ELIZABETHTOWN, N.Y. – The Adirondack Park’s largest environmental organization today called on the Adirondack Park Local Government Review Board to withdraw a resolution it sent to Gov. Andrew Cuomo, which attacks a pending state land conservation agreement with The Nature Conservancy that would add Hudson River Gorge, Blue Ledges and the Essex Chain of Lakes to the public Forest Preserve.

“This resolution is shameful,” said Adirondack Council Executive Director Brian L. Houseal. “We do our best to see eye-to-eye with local government, but the Review Board has stepped way over the line this time. Their accusations are baseless. Their claims of job losses are not only false, they are contradicted by a 2009 study that Adirondack local governments commissioned and the Review Board promoted.”

“Worst of all, both the executive director and the chairman of the Review Board have unmistakable, personal conflicts of interest in the matter at hand,” Houseal said. “Both are members of exclusive hunting clubs that will be forced to move elsewhere when the state purchases the Hudson River Gorge, Essex Chain of Lakes, OK Slip Falls and other former Finch, Pruyn & Co lands. Both officials should have recused themselves from even discussing this matter in public. That is not what happened here.”

The Review Board’s actions are inappropriate for two more reasons, Houseal explained.

“All 26 Adirondack town supervisors whose communities were affected by the Finch agreement approved the transaction in 2007,” said Houseal. “These parcels were identified by the public as high priorities in the state’s official Open Space Conservation Plan more than a decade ago. So the Review Board is now second-guessing everyone else’s careful decisions.”

Second, Houseal noted that the Adirondack Park Local Government Review Board has no business even commenting publicly on state land purchases. The Review Board has only one lawful function. It is supposed to monitor and report on how the Adirondack Park Agency administers and enforces the Adirondack Park Private Land Use and Development Plan. (Executive Law Section 803-a)

“The Adirondack Park Agency has no role in the acquisition of public lands,” Houseal said. “It is a private-land regulatory agency. But the Review Board is spending public money to attack the Department of Environmental Conservation, The Nature Conservancy and environmental protection in general. That is wrong. It is a misappropriation of tax dollars. When it is done by someone with a personal, financial interest in the outcome, it is worse than wrong.

“At a minimum, this merits an ethics investigation,” Houseal said. “It may be much more serious than that. We expect that the Attorney General, Comptroller and other state officials will want to know about this.”

Houseal said that Local Government Review Board Executive Director Fred Monroe of Chestertown has revealed to local media that he is a member of the Polaris Mountain Club. Review Board Chairman George Canon of Newcomb has told the media he is a member of the Gooley Club. Both clubs will be evicted from their leased lands when the state purchases the former Finch lands from the Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

Ironically, the clubs only had one-year leases with the timber company and could have been evicted by The Nature Conservancy when it purchased the lands in 2007. Instead, the Conservancy offered multi-year leases to all 42 hunting clubs that formerly leased Finch lands in 26 separate Adirondack towns, giving those that had to move years of warning and planning time.

Houseal said the Review Board's estimate of job losses was both inaccurate and contradicted by the 2009 Adirondack Park Regional Assessment Project (APRAP), commissioned by the Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages and Adirondack North Country Association.

"The Review Board's resolution claimed that 225 forestry jobs would be lost by subtracting these 75,000 acres from the park's commercial timberlands," Houseal said. "But the regional assessment project says there were only 420 forestry jobs in the entire Adirondack Park in 2007, spread across 1,763,470 acres of private forests. How does losing 4 percent of the timber base result in a 55 percent employment loss? It doesn't. The statement is blatantly false.

"The Nature Conservancy and state DEC have been an overwhelmingly positive influence on the timber industry in the Adirondack Park," Houseal explained. "Every major timber company has moved away or gone out of business in the past 20 years. But because of conservation agreements with new landowners, the state has protected from development some 800,000 acres of private lands in the Adirondack Park since 1990, where private timber harvesting continues under state supervision. The conservancy assisted the state in completing most of those agreements.

"If anything, the Nature Conservancy and DEC have saved timber industry jobs," Houseal said. "Part of their purchase of the Finch lands included a guarantee that the lands would remain in timber production, and that the lands would provide pulp to the former Finch papermill in Glens Falls for at least 20 years.

"In contrast, most of our local forestry job losses came with the closing of outdated paper mills and the invention of the feller-buncher, a piece of heavy equipment that allows one man to cut and load an entire forest of trees on to a truck without a crew," he explained. "But the Review Board's resolution isn't about saving jobs. It is about protecting exclusive personal privileges, and doing it with public money."

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