

NEWS RELEASE



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**ADIRONDACK COUNCIL CALLS ON GOV. CUOMO AND SAGE COMMISSION TO
REALIGN STATE AGENCIES TO BETTER MANAGE ADIRONDACK PARK**

*Plan Calls for Administrative Changes at the Adirondack Park Agency and Department of
Environmental Conservation, Funding for Local Government Planning Assistance*

ALBANY, N.Y. – The Adirondack Park’s largest environmental organization today called on Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the Spending and Government Efficiency (SAGE) Commission to change the way state agencies serve the Park and its people in an effort to save money and better protect the Park’s natural resources.

“Given current state and local budget constraints, taking incremental steps to right-size government services are urgently needed. These game-changing governance and policy reforms can provide a unified management structure that customizes the delivery of NYS agencies’ services to the Adirondack Park in a more efficient manner. Our recommendation will also promote private sector investment and employment opportunities,” said Brian Houseal, Executive Director of the Adirondack Council.

“The two main state agencies that protect the Adirondack Park’s forests and waters are the Adirondack Park Agency and Department of Environmental Conservation,” said Houseal. “Both were established in the early 1970s and have been operating the same way since that time. Over the past 40 years, it has become clear that some things aren’t working very well. We have presented the Governor with a plan for fixing those problems.”

“In general, we would like to see state agencies treat the Adirondack Park as a single entity by using the same set of rules and policies across the entire Park,” Houseal explained. “For example, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) breaks the Park into two regions, with the regional office in Ray Brook overseeing the eastern two-thirds, while the Watertown office governs the western one-third of the Park, from a distance of 30 miles outside the Park’s border. The departments of Health, Transportation, Economic Development, also break the Park into multiple regions and regional directors.

“In most cases, we are proposing changes that the Governor has the authority to make on his own,” Houseal said. “Some others will require the assistance of the Legislature, either through new laws or with money.”

The Governor is due to deliver his budget to the NYS Legislature on Tuesday, January 17. Among the Adirondack Council’s recommendations are:

Adirondack Park Agency –

- Make the APA a one-stop-shop for comprehensive Park-wide planning, local planning assistance and permitting for development projects;

- Propose legislative reforms of the APA Act (land-use code) to improve water quality and revitalize local communities by supporting smart growth and investing in infrastructure within existing population centers;
- Create a dedicated Adirondack planning fund for local communities to address needs for smart growth, broadband telecommunications, affordable housing, the replacement of aging water and sewer infrastructure, main street revitalization, renewable energy and small business development. Administer the fund through the APA with DOS and DED input.

Department of Environmental Conservation –

- Rearrange DEC regions into a single region for the Park;
- Combine the 90-plus unit management plans for various blocs of Adirondack Forest Preserve into a smaller number of landscape-wide management plans that include various types of Forest Preserve (Wilderness, Wild Forest, Canoe Area, etc.);
- Encourage partnerships with non-profits and local communities to ensure essential functions are covered.

Other agencies –

- Use an Executive Order to mandate DOT, towns and counties to reduce damaging salt use in the Adirondacks, institute best management practices and enforce water quality regulations;
- Invest NYS Energy Research & Development Authority grants and Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative auction proceeds to create incentives for Park-wide energy self-sufficiency by 2030 (including appropriate siting and state and federal incentives for development of small-scale renewable energy sources, and public building weatherization and retrofitting for energy efficiency);
- Encourage the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets to use “buy local” procurement guidelines for agricultural products in state institutions (e.g., prisons, schools, hospitals, etc.)
- Use an Executive Order as a first step to align state agencies to treat the Adirondack Park as a single region;

“Every state agency with an office in the Adirondack Park has seen its budget tighten and its staffing decrease over the past four years,” Houseal said. “Now that everyone is focusing on efficiency and costs, it is a perfect time to look at reorganization and see where we can employ the twin virtues of saving money and doing a better job protecting the environment.”

The six-million-acre Adirondack Park, composed of public and private lands, is the largest protected area in the contiguous United States. The Park is globally significant as one of the largest and least fragmented temperate forest landscapes remaining anywhere on the planet. Approximately 2.7 million acres are constitutionally protected as Forest Preserve, public lands open to a wide variety of recreational uses, a valuable economic asset for local communities and the state.

The “Blue Line” boundary of the Adirondack Park surrounds one-fifth the land area of New York State. The Park was transposed over 12 counties, 103 towns and villages, numerous state agency regional boundaries which don’t coincide, and dozens of separate school districts and other smaller governmental units. With so few people in its small and remote communities, it is increasingly apparent that there are too many units of governmental bureaucracy for too few people.

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