

NEWS RELEASE



For more information:

John F. Sheehan
518-432-1770 (ofc)
518-441-1340 (cell)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, Monday, February 4, 2013

STATE MUST RETURN \$2.5 MILLION IN FEDERAL AID FOR ACQUISITION OF ICONIC FOLLENSBY POND TRACT DUE TO LACK OF MATCHING FUNDS
State Loses Forest Legacy Grant Aimed at Adding Lake, Mountain Parcel to Forest Preserve; Birthplace of Wilderness Preservation Movement to Remain in Private Hands for Now

[Click](#) to Read the Council's Budget Testimony

ALBANY, N.Y. – The Adirondack Park's largest environmental organization today urged state lawmakers to increase funding for environmental priorities in the FY2013-14 NYS Budget. The Adirondack Council cited the recent loss of millions of dollars in federal aid as a sign that New York's Environmental Protection Fund needs an immediate boost.

"We are grateful that Governor Andrew Cuomo's budget proposal calls for the first increase in the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) in five years," said Adirondack Council Legislative Director Scott Lorey. "But environmental programs are still underfunded across the board, and the signs become more obvious every day. In 2008, the EPF contained \$66.5 million for open space protection. This year's proposal is only \$20 million or about 15 percent more than last year.

"In addition, there are too few employees at the Adirondack Park Agency and Department of Environmental Conservation to protect the state's natural resources and tourism investments in the Adirondack Park," Lorey said. "Enforcement of existing laws is suffering, which means wildlife, water quality and forest health are suffering. The state no longer operates a single visitor-education center in the park. And now, just when it seemed like the acquisition of Follensby Pond was finally within reach with the help of federal monies, it slips away from New York again."

Lorey called for another \$11 million in the EPF and urge the governor to rebuild the staffing at key regulatory agencies whose budgets have been cut in recent years.

Follensby Pond Slips Away, Again

The state has been trying to acquire the Follensby Pond tract since 1988. The 14,600-acre parcel is situated on the western edge of the High Peaks Wilderness and east of Tupper Lake.

In 1858, it was the site of “the Philosophers’ Camp,” a meeting of writers, artists and wilderness preservation advocates whose work transformed America’s relationship with nature by encouraging people to see nature and wilderness as something rare and precious, rather than as an obstacle to progress. According to the Adirondack Museum, the gathering included poets Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Russell Lowell, and painter William James Stillman, as well as scientists, lawyers and doctors.

The property was purchased in 1952 by the McCormick family of Manchester, Vermont. The McCormick’s negotiated a purchase agreement with the state from 1990 through 1992, but the lack of environmental funding in those years made the purchase impossible. The Environmental Protection Fund was created in 1993, partly in response to the loss of the Follensby Pond opportunity.

In 2008, the parcel was acquired from the McCormicks by The Nature Conservancy, which hopes to resell it to the state. The parcel has been a top priority in the NYS Open Space Conservation Plan since the plan was first drafted in 1992. The Conservancy is also awaiting state reimbursement for the purchase of nearly 50,000 acres of new Forest Preserve out of the 161,000 acres formerly owned by Finch, Pruyn & Co. That transaction won’t be complete for another four years. Because of curtailed funding, the Follensby purchase must wait until the Finch sale is completed.

“If the EPF had remained at 2008 funding levels, both the Finch and Follensby parcels could have been acquired and added to the Forest Preserve by now,” Lorey said. “All of these new lands and waters could have been opened to the public already, providing an economic boost to Adirondack hamlets and villages that need the stimulus. It’s a shame New York must return the grant money to the federal government. This is a lost opportunity.

“We are grateful to the Department of Environmental Conservation officials who worked hard for several years -- first to be awarded the federal grant of \$2.5 million and then in the attempt to keep and use the money -- in hopes that the Legislature and Governor would provide the matching funds,” Lorey said. “Sadly, the final extension ran out at the end of January.”

Lorey called on the Legislature to examine long-term efforts to increase the size of the EPF in future years and provide an additional \$11 million this year above the Governor’s proposal. That would bring the Fund up to \$164 million. He suggested that \$10 million be added to the open space protection line and \$1 million added to fight invasive species.

The Adirondack Council also recognized Governor Cuomo’s effort to get federal aid for storm damage from Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. Adirondack communities in Essex, Clinton and Franklin Counties suffered tremendous damage and need assistance rebuilding in a way that would help limit damage from future severe weather events.

The Adirondack Council is a privately funded, not-for-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the ecological integrity and wild character of the 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.

-end-