Conservation Tips

Thousands of people are lucky enough to call the Adirondack Park home. Homeowners in the Park enjoy a "neighborhood" unparalleled by most in the nation, if not the world. Our Adirondack communities are surrounded by majestic mountains, glistening waterways, and protected wilderness areas, all which provide unique recreational and scenic experiences.

Many neighborhoods throughout the nation organize into neighborhood associations, which work locally to better the quality of life in their area. Residents of the Adirondack Park, while they may belong to local neighborhood organizations, can work locally to better the environmental quality throughout the entire 6 million acre Park.

By utilizing practices at home, residents of the Adirondack Park can improve water quality throughout the Park, protect vital habitats, prevent the spread of invasive species, encourage sustainable populations of native plant and animal species to continue to thrive, and reduce emissions which can cause acid rain and mercury contamination.

If each homeowner in the Adirondack Park made simple, but effective changes to daily routines, the positive impact on the Park's ecosystem would be substantial. This provides year round and seasonal homeowners with information about things they can do to improve the environment in the Adirondack Park such as: conserving water, maintaining septic systems, landscaping, and conserving energy. Also included is a list of resources for landowners.

Water Conservation

Water conservation is one of the most important things residents can do to protect their water supply. Many of us take our water supply for granted. We turn on a faucet and we have access to water in our homes. In America, we generally have abundant water supplies which the public can access at relatively low cost. Water is involved in the majority of our daily activities - drinking, cooking, cleaning, bathing, and recreating.

Water supplies are not limitless, our aquifers and waterways used to supply drinking water are valuable resources that must be protected. Although the Adirondack Park is less developed than other regions of the state, as the population in the Park increases, so does demand for water. Water quality and quantity are issues that need increasing attention from the public.

It is important for residents of the Adirondack Park to understand their local water supply systems. Is your home connected to a municipal water supply system, or do you have a private well on your property? What is the source of your water? Understanding where your water comes from will help you understand what can be done to protect the watershed of your source water. Residents can play an important part in efforts to preserve watersheds and protect water supplies.

Watershed protection measures are especially important inside the Adirondack Park because the Park is home to the state's most magnificent rivers, many of which feed water supplies or watersheds for communities outside the Park. These rivers include the Beaver, Black, Grass, Hudson, Moose, Oswegatchie, Raquette, St. Regis, and Saranac.

Conserving water is one of the most simple and effective ways to protect not only the quantity of water, but also the quality. The following is a list of ways that you can conserve water in and around your home, and protect the water supplies of the Adirondack Park and New York State.

Water Conservation Inside the Home	**Water Conservation Outside the Home**
◆ Fix leaky faucets and toilets! A dripping faucet can waste 20 gallons of water a day, a leaky toilet can waste even more. Many times the fix is as simple as replacing old washers or other small parts. ◆ Don't let the water run while you do something else. Turn the water off while you brush your teeth, lather soap on your hands, and wash dishes. ◆ Assess the efficiency of your appliances. Many appliances including washing machines, dishwashers, and toilets made more than 15 or 20 years ago are not as efficient as newer models. Older toilets can be made more efficient by placing a brick in the tank which displaces unneeded water. Older washing machines and dishwashers are most efficient when loads are full. If you are washing less than a full load, use the "small" setting if available. ◆ When purchasing new appliances, look for front loading washing machines and low-flow toilets, which use less water to do the same jobs. You can also outfit your home with low-flow shower heads and faucets, which do not effect water pressure but reduce the amount of water used.	◆ Outfit your hose with an automatic shut of nozzle, so water only flows when you want it to during yard work or car washing. ◆ Water your lawn early in the morning or after sunset. This will prevent loss of water through evaporation. When watering your lawn, use a soaker hose or a trickle system, which are more efficient. If you use a sprinkler, don't use one that produces a fine spray, which tends to evaporate too quickly. ◆ Create a shallow ditch around trees in a yard that will collect and hold water. ◆ Channel roof and other runoff to pervious surfaces including lawns and gardens to help irrigate and reduce the need for additional watering. A cistern may also be used for this purpose. ◆ Set your lawn mower to a higher setting, which will keep the grass slightly longer. This will allow the lawn to shade its roots and require less watering. ◆ If you have a paved driveway, don't wash it down with a hose. Sweep it instead. ◆ Don't use your local lake or waterway to wash things (including your dishes or your dog). Detergents that are used for these purposes can cause degradation of water quality.

Septic Systems

Many homes in the Adirondack Park are not served by municipal wastewater treatment systems (or sewage systems). These homes have their own waste treatment systems - septic systems. Adirondack homeowners want to spend time in the outdoors and in their yards. The last thing anyone wants is a malfunctioning or poorly maintained septic system to ruin the experience. Septic systems can cause not only embarrassing odor problems, but also serious water quality problems.

When maintained properly, septic systems are an effective way to dispose of sewage, however many homes, especially older ones, have not had regular inspections and preventative maintenance performed on the septic system, or have no record of such activity. This can lead to conditions that put the health of the ecosystem and local residents at risk. A malfunctioning septic system not only causes problems in the home, including messy sewage backups, but also puts local waterways at risk of

contamination. With the Park's waterways being used for recreation and drinking water, leaking septic systems have the potential to create serious and unhealthy conditions. Homes with septic systems adjacent to waterways are more likely cause water contamination.

When leaking septic systems introduce coliform bacteria (the bacteria associated with waste which causes illness) into drinking water supplies, expensive treatment is needed to ensure potable water remains available for residents and visitors. When such bacteria are introduced into recreational water supplies, health risks for swimmers, boaters, and other users exists. Many Adirondack waterways are currently being polluted by aging and ineffective septic systems.

There are tell-tale signs that a septic system is not working properly. If you notice a sewage odor in your home or yard, toilets and sinks draining slowly, gurgling sounds in the plumbing system, or soggy soil or sewage surrounding the septic tank or absorption field, you should immediately consult a professional to inspect your septic system and assess what needs to be done to ensure it is operating effectively.

Taking responsibility and properly maintaining your septic system will not only protect your health and personal property, but also protect your community's water supply and the local tourism based economy. After all, who wants to come visit the Adirondacks if they can't drink or swim in our wonderful waterways?

The following are tips you can use to make sure your septic system is functioning properly:

- Be sure you know your septic system. You should know where the tank and absorption field are, and the age and size of the system. You should also keep a log of when maintenance is done on the system, and a sketch of where it is in relation to your home and property.

- Have your septic system inspected and pumped every few years (2-6 depending on whether you are in a year round or seasonal residence). A good indicator that pumping is needed is when sludge fills half the septic tank. Have this work done by a professional service. Be sure to keep records of when these types of activities occur.

- Take care in choosing household cleaning products, which may alter the effectiveness of your septic system. Look for low-phosphorus detergents, use anti-bacterial soaps only when needed, and limit the use of bleach, ammonia, and other harsh cleaners and cleansers. These types of products kill the bacteria in the septic tank needed to break down the waste.

- Avoid using toilets and drains as garbage disposals. Try to throw things in the trash instead of using a garbage disposal, which will increase the amount of times you need to have your system pumped. Do not put the following items down toilets or drains: cat litter, dental floss, hair, coffee grounds, chemicals, pesticides, fat, grease, oil, or paints.

- Do not plant trees or other vegetation in the septic system's absorption field. The roots will plug the lines and damage the system.

- If your home or property displays one of the signs of a failing septic system (listed above), address the problem immediately. Have a licensed professional assess your system and work on the repairs.

- If you are constructing a new home, or installing a new septic system, be sure that your design meets local, state, and federal regulations. You most likely will need to obtain a permit for construction. You or your contractor should look into alternative technologies to protect local waterways, proper soils to ensure good absorption, and design the system to obey setback regulations.

- Talk to your neighbors about good septic system maintenance. Organize a neighborhood septic pumping. Companies that provide pumping service may give everyone a discount if multiple homeowners have their tanks pumped together.

Landscaping

Part of making a house a home is personalizing the landscape. Never before has landscaping and gardening been more popular. These activities can serve not only as an exciting hobby and add individuality and value to a property, but can have measurable impacts on the environment.

Many homeowners are now practicing environmentally friendly landscaping by using plantings and products that do not disrupt the natural function of the ecosystem in which they live. These products, along with sustainable design and proper planning will allow a property to become an oasis for both the homeowner and the many species that thrive in the Adirondacks.

Using native plants and natural landscaping can also help slow global warming by providing shade which allows a homeowner to conserve energy and by storing carbon - a greenhouse gas.

Below are some tips you can use to make your yard more natural. In addition, there is a variety of information about native planting and natural landscaping at your local library, bookstore, or on the internet.

- Limit the amount of permeable surfaces you add to your property. This includes using a gravel driveway instead of a paved one, and limiting the size of areas like patios.
Try to keep existing vegetation on the property intact to protect habitats and prevent runoff.

- Plan your landscaping design to preserve the natural drainage of your property, which will reduce erosion.

- Use native plants only! Talk to your landscaper or landscaping store and ask them which native plants can be used on your property. Using native species in landscaping will not only beautify your home, but also provide important habitat for the creatures you share the ecosystem with.

- When doing yard work, don't put yard waste (ie. leaves) into nearby waterways. As these materials break down in waterways they can cause low oxygen conditions and kill fishTry not to alter the shoreline of waterways near your home. If you must build a dock, breakwater, pier, beach, or dredge an area, contact authorities to assist you with permitting and proper design.

- If you use chemicals in your yard work, store them in good quality containers and be sure to dispose of them at a proper facility. Do not dump chemicals on the ground or into waterways.

- Limit or eliminate pesticide use. Go natural! This reduces phosphorus levels that run off into local waterways and cause water quality problems.

- Limit cutting, especially along shorelines of ponds, lakes, streams, and rivers. Don't disturb wetlands if it can be avoided. These areas are important habitat and also protect your property by providing natural flood control. If you must make changes to a wetland, be sure to obey local and state regulations and obtain any permit you may need from the proper agency.

Energy Conservation

Energy conservation is a simple way homeowners can protect the environment, and save money on their bills. Most of the power plants which produce our energy in New York Stateand throughout the nation, burn fossil fuels (ie. coal, oil, gas) to generate power. These fuel sources cause a number of environmental and public health problems including global warming, acid rain, and mercury contamination.

Acid rain has already caused over 500 of the lakes in the Adirondacks to become biologically dead - meaning they are unable to sustain their native fish populations because they are so acidic. Acid rain has also damaged our high elevation forests. Additionally, the New York State Health Department recently issued a warning to children and women of child-bearing age not to eat fish caught in Adirondack waters because mercury levels are unsafe. Global warming will forever change our beloved Park, driving out many of the native plant and animal species and creating water quality problems.

It will take action in Congress and the State Legislature to fix these problems completely, and the Adirondack Council is continuing its 30 year fight to ensure that our elected officials act to address these issues and protect the Park. But, rules, regulations and laws are not the only way to stop problems like global warming and acid rain.

Energy conservation shows our elected officials that the public is serious about stopping these problems. It also reduces the amount of fossil fuels burned, thereby reducing pollution that causes the damage. By conserving in the home, citizens can protect ecosystems, the economy and public health.

In addition to conserving energy, homeowners should be aware of where their energy comes from. In New York State, electricity providers are required to disclose the "mix" of fuel sources that customers pay for. This information can be found in the "Environmental Disclosure Label" which a homeowner can obtain by contacting their energy company. Some energy companies also offer plans where customers can opt-in and purchase renewable energy. This is another way to reduce the amount of fossil fuels being used to generate electricity.

Below are ways homeowners can use less electricity inside the home and throughout the property.

- Turn off lights when you leave a room or when you are not home. If you feel the need to leave a light on for security purposes, put it on a timer so it is only on when it is dark out.

- Replace your regular light bulbs with energy efficient or compact fluorescent bulbs. You can even phase them in as old bulbs die out. These more efficient bulbs usually last longer and produce the same amount of light.

- When replacing appliances including washers, dryers, stoves, microwaves, air conditioners, televisions, and computers, look for energy efficient models. In New York State, you can look for the Energy Star label. Sometimes the State offers rebates to individuals who buy Energy Star appliances. Ask your retailer about these models and any special offers.

- If you are building a home, ask your designer about using LEED standards. LEED stands for "Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design." These standards will ensure your home is the most energy efficient it can be, which will not only save energy, but save you money on your utility bills.

- If you are remodeling, pay attention to the energy efficiency ratings on new windows and doors. Buying top of the line models will save you money in the long run as they save energy.

- If you have an automatic thermostat, set it so that once your home is warmed or cooled the system shuts off. Be mindful of open windows and doors if the heat or air conditioner is on.
- If you are replacing the heating or cooling system in your home, look into adding solar panels or geothermal technology. These systems can often be added to existing homes to allow them to produce some of their own energy without the use of fossil fuels.
- Make sure your home is well insulated so that you are not heating or cooling the neighborhood.
- Plant trees strategically on your property so that they shade your home and reduce the amount of energy you need to cool your house in the summer.
- When installing outside light fixtures, use a motion sensor so that they are not on all the time. Also, look for full cutoff fixtures, or fixtures that can be directed so that you do not create light pollution, which not only wastes electricity, but also disturbs many native species and your neighbors.

Resources for Adirondack Homeowners

Adirondack Park Agency Post Office Box 99 Route 86 Ray Brook, New York 12977 (518) 891-4050 www.apa.state.ny.us	Contact the APA for obtaining permits for projects on your property. Activities that need an APA permit include but are not limited to subdivisions, new construction, clear cutting of 25 acres or more, installing new wastewater treatment systems, and shoreline clearing. If you do not know if your project requires a permit, you can ask the agency to determine that for you. The APA has produced a helpful guide to regulations for citizens of the Adirondack Park. To access the APA's Citizen's Guide, call the APA or view it on the web at: http://www.apa.state.ny.us/Documents/Guidelines/CitizensGuide.pdf.
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation 625 Broadway Albany, New York 12233 (518) 402-8540 www.dec.state.ny.us	DEC also has jurisdiction over lands in the Adirondack Park and can serve as a useful resource for citizens. In addition to the Albany office, the DEC has 2 offices with jurisdiction in the Adirondack Park. **DEC Region 5 Office** 1115 NYS Route 86 PO Box 296 Ray Brook, New York 12977 (518) 897-1200 Serves Clinton, Franklin, Essex, Hamilton, Warren, and Washington counties. **DEC Region 6 Office** State Office Building 317 Washington Street Watertown, New York 13601 (315) 785-2239Serves Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Oneida and St. Lawrence counties.
New York State Energy Research and Development Authority 17 Columbia Circle	NYSERDA has a wealth of information on energy efficiency products and design techniques, New York's electrical system, and incentives being offered for homeowners who upgrade to more efficient appliances and heating and cooling systems.

Albany, New York 12203 1-866-NYSERDA or (518) 862-1091 www.nyserda.org	