

Adirondack Express  
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OPINION

## Cooperation on ecotourism rapped by anonymous critic

By John F. Sheehan, For the Express

The Adirondack Council was thrilled to work with Webb Town Supervisor Robert Moore and Tourism Director Mike Farmer in Old Forge this summer to promote the network of “Gateway Communities” that surround the Bob Marshall Wild Lands Complex.

Together, we held a joint news conference in late June, hoping to encourage new eco-tourism in the region in advance of the big July 4 weekend.

As far as we can tell, this map represents something brand new in the history of the Adirondack Park. It is the first time that an environmental organization produced an outdoor recreation map that focused visitors’ attention on the villages and hamlets that surround the wild lands, rather than just the wild lands alone.

Why would an environmental organization do this? Because we don’t want tourists to only visit the park’s wild lands and waters. We want them to get to know and love all of the Adirondack Park and its people. Our small villages and hamlets are unique and historic places. They make the Adirondacks special by proving every day that people and wild areas are not incompatible, but really dependent upon one another.

Documentary film-maker Ken Burns says America’s best idea was the invention of national parks. In fact, it may have been our second-best idea. The Adirondack Park model is proving more useful to the rest of the world. Both were born in the late 19th Century.

The idea of national parks was based on the concern that America’s large, unspoiled landscapes were disappearing. Some portion of those virgin landscapes required strict preservation without private property or human habitation inside the park.

The idea behind the Adirondack model was that the entire region had already been tamed and altered in one way or another, but could recover some measure of its wildness with careful stewardship. Some areas would be set aside strictly for nature, but homes and businesses would remain an essential component of the park.

Most of the world doesn’t have large blocks of never-touched wilderness left intact that they can preserve inside a national park. But nearly every nation has lived-in landscapes where some measure of wildness can be restored. That is the value of the Adirondack model. And it is spreading.

Back in 1892, the Adirondack Park became the first in the world to incorporate communities inside the park boundary. The Catskill Park was the second. Since that time, several European and Latin American parks have been created on the Adirondack model, reclaiming nature alongside long-established villages and towns.

Last year, the South Downs National Park was created on the southern sea shore of England, about an hour south of London. It is an area of farms and small villages whose countryside has been grazed by sheep for thousands of years. Part of its appeal as a park is the way it preserves the unique qualities of these ancient, tiny communities and centuries-old farms—as well as the wilder spaces between them. Otherwise, all would have been overwhelmed by suburban sprawl from the modern cities of London and Brighton.

Today, there is talk of adopting an Adirondack-style park in rural Maine, where a new national park near Mt. Katahdin has been under consideration for a few years.

Regardless of the location, two things seem clear. We need wild areas to remain sane, healthy, happy people. And, wild areas need us to watch out for them. By nurturing and protecting them, we protect ourselves. By integrating people and wildness, rather than separating them, we have achieved what few other societies have even attempted.

Sometimes, though, we forget to tell anyone. Sometimes, we get hung up on arguing about the details and forget that we all want the same thing in the end. We should not let that stand in the way of the success of the Gateway Communities plan for The Bob. We believe we can have honest discussions and disagreements about the details, without trashing the entire idea.

Apparently, not everyone feels this way.

Last week, we received a copy of an anonymous flyer that has been posted and circulated in the Old Forge and Inlet areas. Because it is unsigned and unclaimed, it is impossible for us to know who is behind it. But one thing is clear. It is an attempt to undermine the wonderful cooperation between the Adirondack Council and the Gateway Communities that surround The Bob.

The Council is the park's largest environmental organization. We voluntarily designed and printed 10,000 waterproof copies of the new map. We are giving them to the 24 Gateway Communities for free.

We were saddened to see that the anonymous flyer claims our new map encourages people to trespass on private property. This is pure nonsense. The flyer reads: "Based on their map, the Council considers the mowed lawns, and the homes of residents in the area to be 'wild lands' ... [and] the Council considers these 'wild lands' to be 'open to all nature lovers.'"

The flyer's author must have missed the press conference and the news release, and clearly didn't read the map.

At the June 29 press conference in the Visitor Information Center, we urged people to stay away unless there is a conservation easement in place that specifically allows public access. We reiterated this warning in our written news release.

The map itself repeats this warning. Directly to the right of the Legend and below the Scale, there is a section of text marked “Private Land.” This section reads, in part:

“The Adirondack Park is a unique mix of public and private land. There are significant private land holdings in the Bob Marshall Wild Lands Complex. Do not trespass on private land. Some private lands have easements indicated by a green hatched line on the map. Some of these easements allow varying degrees of public access/egress. Not all easement land is publicly accessible! Do not trespass ...”

Even more obviously, the face of the map contains the words “RESPECT PRIVATE PROPERTY” written in red over the major blocks of private land within The Bob. The map also contains a section displaying contact information for the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, so visitors can discover which easement lands are open before embarking.

We want The Bob to be an attraction, not a burden on anyone, least of all the property owners whose lands are surrounded by it.

John F. Sheehan is Director of Communications for the Adirondack Council. For more information about The Bob or the Adirondack Council, go to [www.adirondackcouncil.org](http://www.adirondackcouncil.org).