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Adirondack Council unveils new map & wild lands complex

By Chrissy Prichard, Express News Staff

Local and state officials gathered in the Town of Webb meeting room on Wednesday, June 29, for an announcement made by the Adirondack Council. The environmental advocacy group announced its new concept of an area of interconnected lands and waters in the Western Adirondacks referred to as the Bob Marshall Wild Lands Complex.

The area includes over half a million acres of public and private lands offering endless opportunities for eco-tourism in any season. The complex includes nearly 450 lakes and ponds, close to 70 miles of NY State classified Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers, and large boreal wetlands. The complex also contains some of the largest old-growth woodlands and one of the largest tracts of roadless wilderness in the eastern United States.

Tourist maps of the region were also released by the Adirondack Council on Wednesday. The first 10,000 copies of the free waterproof map are now available and can be found at the Town of Webb Visitor Center.

Maps of the region will be distributed to all gateway communities that surround the area. Maps feature information about these communities, plus campground and contact information. 15 paddling routes are noted, as well as 90 trails for hiking, biking, skiing, snowmobiling and more. Longer routes, such as the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, the Northville-Placid Trail, the Cranberry Lake 50, Adirondack Scenic Byways and the TOBIE Trail are also included. Information on natural history, wildlife, and native species found in the region can also be found on the maps.

The Bob Marshall Wild Lands Complex has well known places such as Old Forge, Cranberry Lake, Tupper Lake and Blue Mountain Lake at its edges, as well as the lesser-known Big Moose, Conifer, Stillwater and Beaver River on its interior.

“This is as large as many of the premier national parks in the country,” says John Sheehan, Director of Communications for the Adirondack Council, “but in many ways it has better access, it’s easier to get to, and has these great communities around the outside of it than can help people enjoy the experience more fully. That’s what makes it unique.”

The two dozen gateway communities that surround the region, including Old Forge, can only benefit by having this vast recreational opportunity in their back yards. Not only will these communities see the economic benefits of visitors as they access these lands, but also enhance people’s enjoyment of the area by providing amenities and creature comforts, according to the Council.

Many of these villages started as logging camps or mill towns at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. They have evolved into much more over time. They are all historic places with interesting stories to tell. They all have unique local businesses that showcase local lore and locally made products. They add the crucial human dimension to a vast and wild landscape, making it more approachable and accessible.

“These 24 communities are the natural gateways to the largest wild lands area in the eastern United States,” says Adirondack Council Director Brian Houseal. “People don’t think of this area that way, because there is no fence around it, no toll gate and no fee for going there. But these villages are the front door to a paddler’s, hiker’s and snowmobiler’s paradise.”

“Each of these communities offers a different set of routes to gain access to the interior lands and waters,” Houseal said. “Each community contains people who know these woods like the back of their hands and can offer valuable advice, and often, guide services.”

Town of Webb Supervisor Robert Moore feels these maps will help educate the public that this complex exists. “It’s important to acknowledge what we have available in our gateway communities, the vastness of the untamed wild that exists, and the accessibility to that wild,” says Moore. “We have a lifetime of adventure in our own back yards. If people don’t know about it, how can they experience it?”

During the current economy, people are looking for natural recreation, according to Town of Webb Publicity Director Mike Farmer. He described the complex as a “tremendous asset for us, the state of New York, and all the people across the globe that come to visit us here.”

Farmer realizes the economic benefit this will bring to the region. “This is who we are. It’s more than what we do, it’s our whole economy,” he says. “This is our only industry here, and that’s the same for the communities throughout the area that borders this wild lands complex.”

Houseal explained that the Adirondack Council wants to work with local governments and state agencies to promote this region-less-traveled in the west-central Adirondack Park. The Adirondack Council supports the creation of a single unified Bob Marshall Wild Lands Complex. To accomplish this goal, the Adirondack Council proposes that New York State consolidate existing Forest Preserve units, purchase lands of willing sellers, promote long-term private land stewardship, acquire new public right-of-ways for connector trails, and work to prevent development by purchasing conservation easements from willing sellers.

“It’s time we all focus on turning the forest preserve and these protected areas into a real economic asset for our communities,” said Adirondack Council Director Brian Houseal. “We’re committed to doing that in any way possible and we join towns, counties, and agencies to make this a reality,” said Houseal.

Bob Marshall (1901-1939) was an influential figure in creating national land-use policy, permanently protecting some of the nation’s largest wild lands. Marshall was one of the first “Adirondack 46ers” and highlighted the Cranberry Lake-Beaver River area for preservation in the 1930’s. He worked for the U.S. Forest Service as chief of the Division of Recreational and

Public Lands. He later founded the Wilderness Society which in turn helped to found the Adirondack Council. For more information on the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, visit www.AdirondackCouncil.org.

