

Camps to stay on former Champion lands

The state acquired the lands outlined in yellow, 2,797 acres in all. After years of negotiation and some controversy, the state has finalized an agreement that will allow more than two hundred hunting camps to remain on timberlands formerly owned by Champion International.

In 1998, the state entered an agreement with Champion to purchase 29,000 acres in the Adirondacks and preserve another 110,000 with conservation easements that allow public access.

Under the original agreement, the hunting camps on the easement lands were to be removed by 2014, but following an outcry, the state Department of Environmental Conservation renegotiated the agreement to permit them to stay. In return, the new landowner, Heartwood Forestland Fund, will give the state nearly 2,800 acres in the Deer River valley. The new agreement was signed this week.

“This is great news for the North Country. The tradition of hunting and hunting camps is an important part of our heritage,” Clifton Supervisor Robert Snider said in a DEC news release issued this morning.

The Adirondack Council also praised the deal. John Sheehan, the group’s spokesman, noted that later easement deals allowed hunting camps to remain in place. “Timber companies get more money from leasing the camps than they do cutting timber,” he said. “It helps to keep the forest intact.”

Environmentalists had raised concerns about the change in the agreement when DEC revealed its intentions in 2006.

Neil Woodworth, executive director of the Adirondack Mountain Club, said his biggest worry was that the hunting-club members would ride all-terrain vehicles on the easement lands. But under the renegotiated agreement, he said, recreational ATV use is prohibited (the hunters can use them in the spring to reach their camps).

David Gibson of Adirondack Wild criticized DEC for conducting the negotiations behind closed doors and failing to hold a public hearing. He also questions whether the public got a fair deal. For more of Gibson’s thoughts on the matter, [click here](#).

The deal allows Heartwood to lease up to 220 hunting camps on the easement lands. There are 208 camps now, so Heartwood could construct another twelve. The camps have exclusive

recreational rights to one-acre footprints around their buildings. The rest of the easement lands are open to the public for hunting, fishing, hiking, and other forms of recreation.

More than 2,100 of the 2,797 acres deeded to the state lie within the Adirondack Park and thus will become part of the Forest Preserve. The rest lies just outside the Blue Line and will be designated State Forest. DEC spokeswoman Lori Severino said these lands are now open to the public.