



Photo by Carl Heilman II

Crab Island in Lake Champlain would become part of the Forest Preserve if the Adirondack Park were expanded.

Crossing the Blue Line

■ *Two state commissions recommended expanding the Adirondack Park to the north and northeast, but local politicians oppose the idea.*

By Phil Brown

A FEW YEARS AGO, I paddled down Hatch Brook and the Salmon River to Chasm Falls. As on many of my canoe trips on Adirondack streams, I meandered through alder thickets, grassy wetlands, and pristine forest and forgot about civilization for a few hours.

The difference was that most of this trip took place outside the Adirondack Park. I put in Hatch Brook in Porcaville, a tiny settlement in the northern Adirondacks, and headed downstream. In less than three miles, I crossed the Park boundary. I continued another five miles, eventually reaching the Salmon River and following it to the falls, where the river drops 120 feet in a series of cascades.

If not for the map, I would not have guessed that I had left the Park at all. The trip served as a reminder that beauty does not stop at the Blue Line.

As it happens, though, two state commissions, in 1970 and 1990, proposed that the Park boundary be extended north to include the rest of Hatch Brook and a long stretch of the Salmon, to Chasm Falls and ..▶

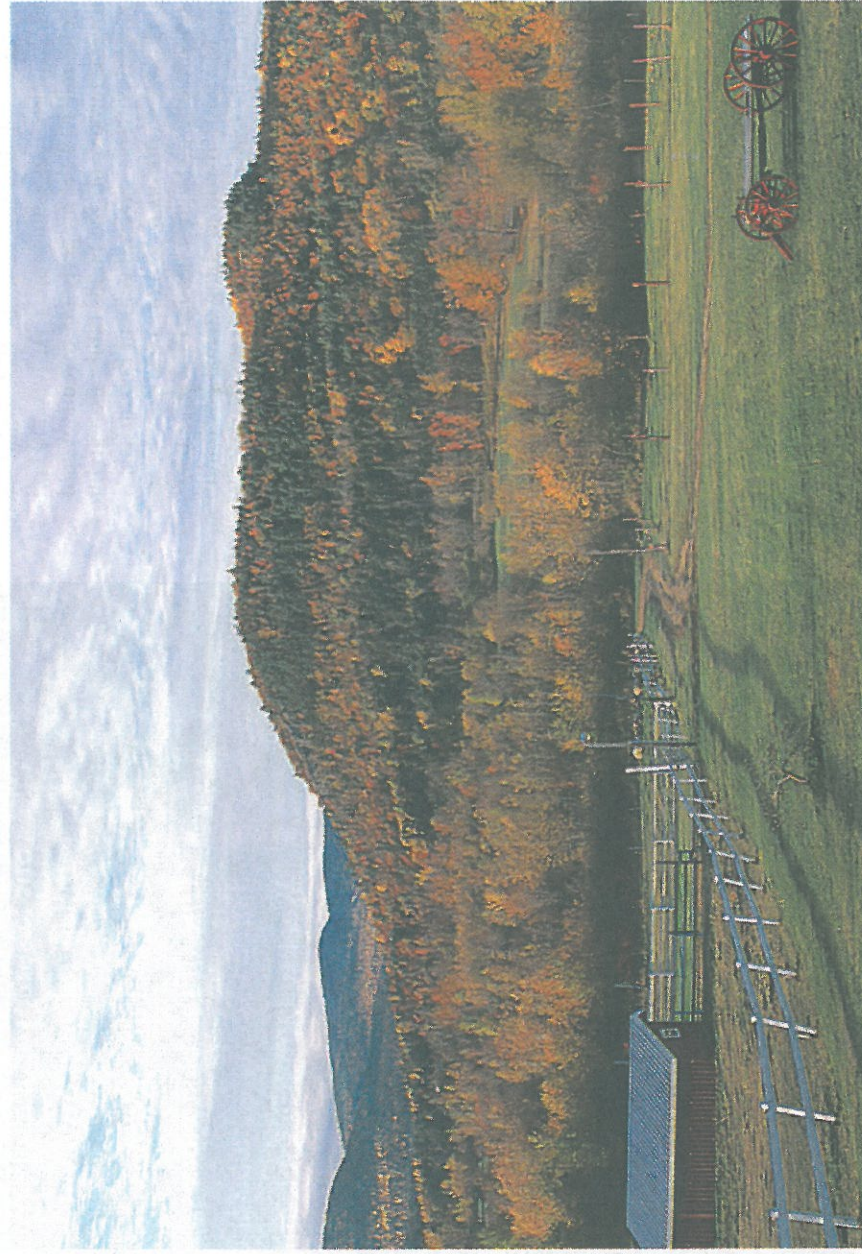


Photo by Nancie Battaglia

Peru Supervisor Pete Glushko says the town can protect its rural character on its own.

►► beyond. Although they went unheeded, the recommendations raise intriguing questions. Is the current Blue Line the best boundary for the Park? Does it make economic or ecological sense to extend the boundary?

The state legislature created the Adirondack Park in 1892, declaring that it be reserved "for the free use of all people for their health and pleasure, and as forest lands necessary to the preservation of the headwaters of the chief rivers of the state, and a future timber supply."

The original Blue Line encompassed 2.8 million acres, but by definition the Park was restricted to the 551,000 acres of state-owned land. Since then, the legislature has extended the Park's boundaries six times. It now comprises 5.9 million acres, including about 2.8 million acres of state Forest Preserve. Also, private land inside the Blue Line is now considered part of the Park and is subject to state regulations on development.

The Park has not been enlarged since 1973, almost forty years ago. That year,

acting on the advice of the Temporary Study Commission on the Future of the Adirondacks, the legislature added 250,000 acres to the Park, including Valcour Island in Lake Champlain and the Champlain Valley towns of Willsboro and Westport.

For reasons that remain unclear, the lawmakers did not heed the recommendation to add large swaths of rural and forested lands just outside the Park in Franklin and Clinton counties. In 1990, the Commission on the Adirondacks in the Twenty-First Century tried to rectify this when it urged the state to add roughly 130,000 acres to the Park. Most of the land (about 100,000 acres) lies just north of the Park in the towns of Dickinson, Brandon, Malone, and Bellmont, all located in Franklin County. Most of Bellmont is already in the Park, but the other three towns lie entirely outside it. The panel

also recommended adding lands in the towns of Peru and Saranac, both in Clinton County, and the uninhabited Crab Island in Lake

Champlain to the Park.

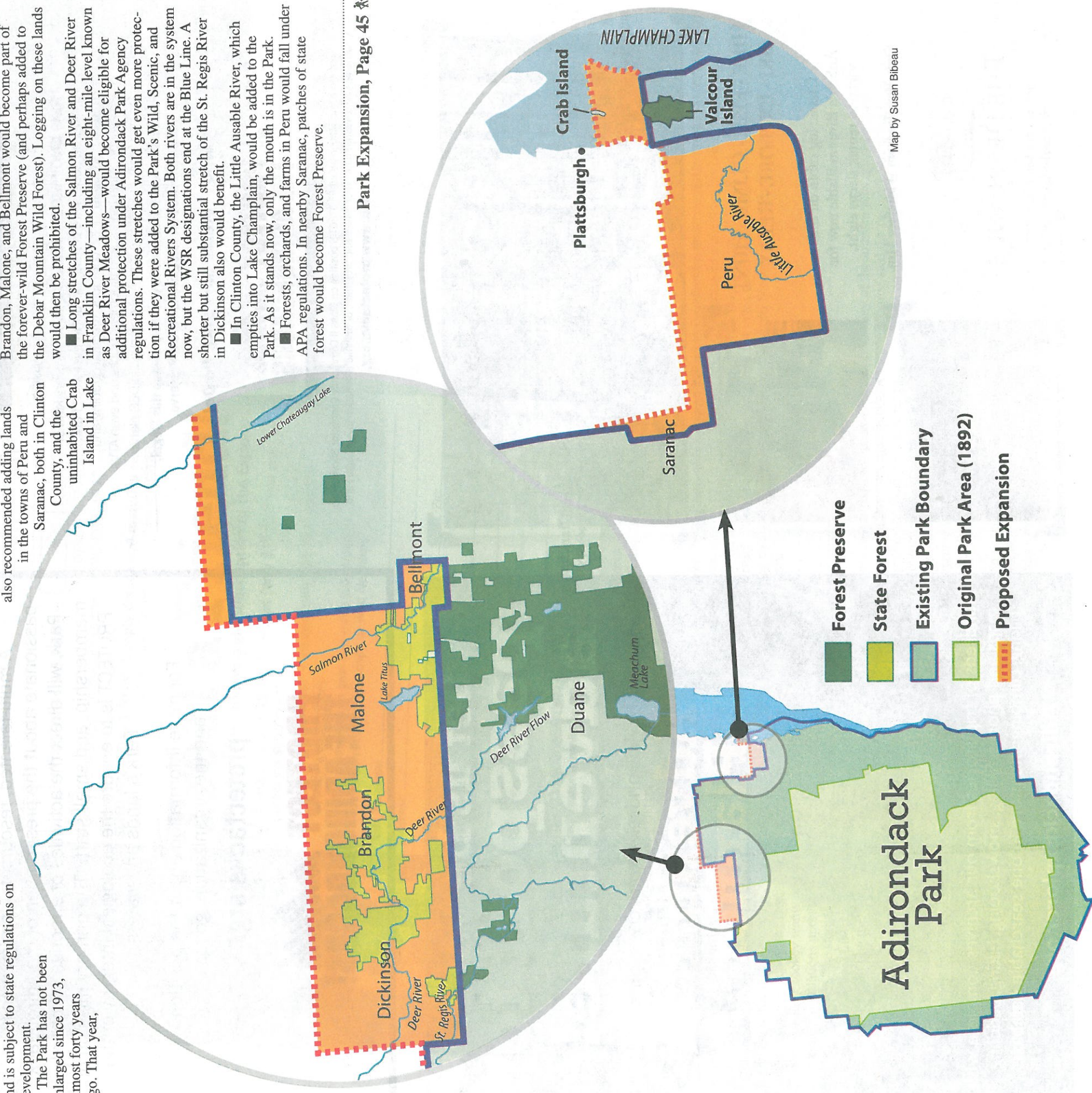
"Largely, we were looking at natural forests and major rivers that were mostly in the Park," George Davis, the commission's executive director, recalled in a recent interview about expanding the Park.

These recommendations got lost in the greater controversy over the commission's proposals for land acquisition and land-use restrictions. "I don't think anybody took a second look at this," Davis remarked.

Nonetheless, some environmentalists think expanding the Park was a good idea then and remains a good idea now, even if it's not on their active agenda. If the Park were enlarged as the commission intended, some of the consequences would be:

- Large tracts of state-owned forest in Dickinson, Brandon, Malone, and Bellmont would become part of the forever-wild Forest Preserve (and perhaps added to the Debar Mountain Wild Forest). Logging on these lands would then be prohibited.
- Long stretches of the Salmon River and Deer River in Franklin County—including an eight-mile level known as Deer River Meadows—would become eligible for additional protection under Adirondack Park Agency regulations. These stretches would get even more protection if they were added to the Park's Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers System. Both rivers are in the system now, but the WSR designations end at the Blue Line. A shorter but still substantial stretch of the St. Regis River in Dickinson also would benefit.
- In Clinton County, the Little Ausable River, which empties into Lake Champlain, would be added to the Park. As it stands now, only the mouth is in the Park.
- Forests, orchards, and farms in Peru would fall under APA regulations. In nearby Saranac, patches of state forest would become Forest Preserve.

Park Expansion, Page 45



Map by Susan Bibeau

PARK EXPANSION, From Page 43

■ The forty-acre Crab Island in the town of Plattsburgh would fall under the control of the state Department of Environmental Conservation instead of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The island was used as a field hospital during the War of 1812. Some 150 British and American soldiers are buried there.

John Sheehan, spokesman for the Adirondack Council, agrees with the commission that these places belong in the Park. "We think these lands have an Adirondack character to them," he said. "The question is whether the residents want to be in the Park. I think they'd have little trouble getting the legislature to expand the boundary if they wanted that."

Sheehan argues that the Park's cachet would attract more tourists to the local towns, but that's not how the town supervisors see it. Not one of the seven supervisors favors expanding the Park in their towns. Nor do they think their constituents would like the idea.

The supervisors argue that the Adirondack Park Agency's development regulations are onerous and unnecessary—a complaint voiced by local politicians ever since the agency was created in 1971. "We have enough layers of government," remarked Malone Supervisor Howard Maneely.

Consider the town of Saranac. All of it is in the Park except for a thin slice along the town's east border. Most of the slice is forestland, and much of it is owned by the state. Nevertheless, Supervisor Ron Kent does not want to see it added to the Park. "I don't think the Park is doing us any favors," he said. "Tourism is a good thing, but not when it interferes with people trying to make a living."

In neighboring Peru, about a third of the town is now in the Park, and Supervisor Pete Glushko doesn't want that to change. He contends that Peru is doing a good job preserving its rural character. "I'm not sure why we would need the Adirondack Park to help us out," he said. "We can do it ourselves."

As for Crab Island, Plattsburgh Supervisor Bernard Bassett sees it as a tourist attraction that would draw more people if it had such amenities as docks and a rain shelter. Since the undeveloped island is owned by the state, if it were added to the Park it would become part of the Forest Preserve, and Bassett believes this would make it harder to win approval for amenities. "The island needs to be preserved for the public, but it needs to have public access and public use," he said.

Bellmont Supervisor H. Bruce Russell fears that APA regulations and red tape would discourage developers from building cell towers and wind turbines in the few areas that lie outside the Park. Given the lack of cell towers, phone reception is spotty to non-existent in much of the town. Several towns along the Park's north border have benefited from wind-power development, and Russell hopes Bellmont will be next. The turbines would bring in much-needed revenue to the remote town, he said.

Dickinson and Brandon seem the most natural fit for inclusion in the Park: few roads, substantial tracts of state forest, a long stretch of the Deer River. Yet Dickinson Supervisor Joe Clookey wants no part of it. "I don't want to see more regulations upon our residents and how they can use their land," he said.

Brandon's Michael Lawrence was slightly more open to the idea of expanding the Park. "Right now, without further study, I would be opposed," he said. "I'm not sure I would continue to be opposed. I would need more education."

The state legislature does not need the towns' approval to expand the Park, but it would be reluctant to do so without it. Neil Woodworth, executive director of the Adirondack Mountain Club, said the measure would stand little chance of success without the support of State Senator Betty Little, whose wide-ranging district includes all seven towns.

Spokesman Dan MacEntee said the senator opposes expanding the Park. He later sent an e-mail with the



Photo by Phil Brown

This stretch of the Salmon River lies just outside the Blue Line.

Unbounded beauty

THE EIGHT-MILE CANOE TRIP down Hatch Brook and the Salmon River to Chasm Falls is a delightful way to spend a sunny afternoon. Although it begins and ends in civilization (loosely speaking), most of the route is in wild country.

Put in Hatch Brook at the bridge on County Route 27 in Porcaville, a tiny settlement located a few miles inside the Blue Line. At the start, you'll have to fend off alders on the narrow, winding stream. Eventually, the alders become less of a nuisance. Expect to see a few beaver dams and perhaps a rising trout, and look for animal tracks on the muddy shores.

After passing several camps, Hatch Brook enters state-

owned land. In about four miles, it reaches the Salmon River, where grassy meadows afford views of Owls Head Pinnacle, a hill masquerading as a mountain. A sandy beach beckons the traveler to loll in the sun and while away time in this idyllic spot. The cool water is plenty deep for a swim.

Continue downstream on the Salmon through wild forest, with occasional views of Titusville Mountain. The river is wider and not as twisty as the brook, but it has its share of surprising turns. One is called the Oxbow; another, the Eye of the Needle. A third, known simply as The Bend, is reached as the river leaves the woods and pulls alongside a rural road. From here, it's less than a mile to a state fishing-access site on the left. This is the best takeout, but you could continue another three-quarters of a mile to the dam at the falls. —**Phil Brown**

DIRECTIONS: From the junction of NY 30 and NY 86 in Paul Smiths, drive north on NY 30 for 17.5 miles to County 26. Turn right and drive to County 27. Bear left and continue to a small bridge over Hatch Brook. This is the put-in. Just before the bridge, on the north side of the road, is the start of Run Road, a dirt lane through an evergreen forest. To reach the takeout, follow Run Road 0.4 miles to a T-intersection. Turn right onto California Road and go 2.2 miles to another T-intersection. Turn right onto Studley Hill Road and go 2.3 miles to a fishing-access site on the right.

following statement from Little: "Expanding the Park's boundaries is not an issue I would expect the legislature to consider this year, especially if local governments in that area of the North Country are against the idea. It would require a comprehensive review by the various state agencies, local governments, businesses, and environmental groups, and I don't believe there's interest in doing that."

Fred Monroe of the Adirondack Park Local Government Review Board, a frequent critic of the APA, concedes that the Park draws tourists, but he said the Adirondacks cannot survive on tourism alone. "Tourism is great, but we need a broader-based economy," he said.

"Many of the tourism jobs are seasonal and low-paying."

Monroe said the review board would support the towns' position on expanding the Park. "It doesn't surprise me that they're opposed," he said. "Most people on the edge of the Blue Line believe it's tougher to do business or build a home inside the Park than outside it."

Despite all the opposition, David Gibson of Adirondack Wild believes minds could be changed if a study of expanding the Park showed that the towns would benefit economically. In general, he said, Adirondack towns fare better than rural towns in other parts of the state. "There are real economic advantages to being part of the Adirondack Park," he said. ■