

**Outside Scoop** By Fred LeBrun

# Greens applaud DEC hires

■ *Kathy Moser and Bob Stegemann will have much to say about management of the Forest Preserve in coming years.*

**G**IVEN THE PERVASIVE influence the state Department of Environmental Conservation has on life in the Adirondacks, any leadership change in the agency is of more than casual interest, and in recent months, the department has made two such changes.

In January, Bob Stegemann, associated for years with International Paper, replaced Betsy Lowe as director of Region 5 in Ray Brook. In his new post, Stegemann oversees DEC policy in the eastern two-thirds of the Adirondack Park.

A month earlier, down at DEC headquarters in Albany, Kathy Moser was appointed assistant commissioner for natural resources. Formerly with the World Wildlife Fund and the Nature Conservancy, Moser will be responsible for overseeing management of the Forest Preserve. She replaced Chris Amato, who resigned. After four and a half tumultuous years of drastically declining resources to work with, which began under Governor Eliot Spitzer, Amato was ready to return to private environmental law.

These sorts of comings and goings are routine with changes of administration, and not too much should be read into them. Nearly every new governor and environmental conservation commissioner likes to put a new team together.

These were both generally congenial changings of the guard.

Still, change always brings uncertainty. What does all this mean for the Adirondacks, especially management of the Forest Preserve? One clue is that the environmental community is happy with both appointments.

John Sheehan, spokesman for the Adirondack Council, said Stegemann helped forge the deal that preserved all of IP's 260,000 acres in the Adirondack Park in 2004. "We didn't always agree on day-to-day public-policy matters, but when it came to long-term conservation of International Paper's land, Bob was a forward thinker," Sheehan said.

And Neil Woodworth, executive director of the Adirondack Mountain Club, described Moser as "an important ally" in securing money for the state's Environmental Protection Fund when she worked for the Nature Conservancy.

Both Moser and Stegemann were Commissioner Joe Martens's personal choices for their posts. Their backgrounds are not unlike his own, a blend of public and private environmental experience. Both Moser and Stegemann have advanced degrees in forestry. Both are used to dealing with diverse and sometimes adversarial stakeholders and working things out.

It's likely that Stegemann will be an assertive, hands-on, and very public presence in dealing with all those thorny Adirondack issues he's bound to encounter. He'll probably be a tad friendlier to the business community, reflecting his years of service with IP. Yet the IP deal



Photo by Lisa Densmore

**Thanks to conservation easements, the public is allowed to hike on lands once owned by International Paper.**

was applauded by all the major conservationists in the Park. In that transaction, the state bought two thousand acres outright and purchased conservation easements on the company's remaining 257,000 acres (now owned by Lyme Timber).

Moser, too, had a role in a major conservation deal in the Adirondacks: the Nature Conservancy's \$110 million acquisition of 161,000 acres from Finch, Pruyne & Company in 2007. At the time, she was head of the conservancy's eastern New York chapter and Martens was head of the Open Space Institute, which assisted in the financing. A wonderful rapport was created during that acquisition between the large not-for-profits and local governments all over the Adirondack Park, so everybody walked away a winner. That, I believe, is the model that Martens hopes his new hires will follow.

"I chose Bob because of his background in the private and public sectors. He was on the Tug Hill Commission. He's a capable administrator. He certainly knows the challenges, including fewer resources, which in turn means more partnerships with local government and the not-for-profits," Martens told the *Explorer*.

Martens prefaced his remarks about Moser with a tip of the hat to her predecessor. "I have nothing but great things to say about Chris Amato and the work he did here and wish him the best," he said. "Kathy I've known for years as well; we shared an office when I was at the Open Space

Institute and she was at the WWF, and I was delighted to hear she was eager to get involved in the DEC. She has a strong science background and terrific experience."

As assistant commissioner, she has a barrelful of challenges awaiting her, among them closing the deal on the purchase of sixty-five thousand acres of the former Finch, Pruyne property for inclusion in the Forest Preserve. The purchase is opposed by some local-government officials. When money becomes available to buy the property (perhaps this year), the debate is bound to become heated and will test Moser's and Stegemann's diplomatic skills.

Since her appointment, Moser has spent much of her time working on an interagency plan to respond to the next big flood. As Governor Cuomo himself noted, a hundred-year flood seems to be happening about every five years these days. Actually, last year the Adirondacks experienced two, in spring and summer, and the Catskills were rocked a couple of times as well. The state's response, while prompt, got mixed grades.

In hindsight it is clear that DEC field staff should have been advising state engineers and local heavy-equipment operators during the emergency cleanup of streams and rivers. That didn't happen, and consequently DEC has been forced to spend millions of dollars to restore badly mauled waterways. Now DEC is leading the task force charged with rewriting the playbook. That's how it should be.



Kathy Moser