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OUR VIEW, Protect the Adirondacks

Nearly all of us have spent time in the Adirondack Park, which holds arguably some of the most precious land in New York state. The Adirondacks are a beautiful, untamed area that appeals to something in all of us, from the survivalist hunter to the preservation activist to the newlyweds looking for a romantic retreat.

Because of how we feel about the Adirondack Park, and because of its extreme biological diversity, the land there needs to be protected from overdevelopment, and from sloppy, unregulated development too.

The Adirondacks are a special place, and they need better restrictions. Would you be surprised if you heard the Adirondack Park Agency, created in 1971, hasn't updated its rules since 1978?

Would you be surprised to hear that while here in Columbia County, homeowners are charged permit fees for things like subdivisions and additions to their homes, in the Adirondack Park, permit fees don't exist?

In fact, according to the state's Adirondack Park Agency, 98 percent of project applications that go before the agency board are approved.

Additionally, the staff of the APA has been cut like many other state agencies, so enforcement abilities have weakened.

This makes for a toothless situation. There are countless species of birds, for example, that thrive only in the Adirondack Park. According to the nonprofit Adirondack Council, nine out of every 10 homes in the park are built outside of an existing community. If this continues, it's going to be harder and harder to protect the wide wilderness we treasure.

The Legislature must work to reform the park's land-use code, getting local governments on board with the project, so that restrictions can match, at the very least, those of other wilderness parks in the state. Septic systems need to be inspected. Development must be clustered, not sprawled through land that is native to rare and dangerous animals — not only for the animals, but for the declining communities in the Adirondack Park too.

We must tighten regulations in the Adirondacks, so our children and their children can continue to enjoy the area as fiercely preserved wild land. Elsewhere — like the Hudson Valley, for example — our water is polluted, illegal dumping grounds exist in hidden places and empty factories dot the landscape. But it doesn't ever have to be this way in the Adirondacks if we work to preserve it.