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Adirondack Council picks EPA as Conservationist of the Year

Green group credits federal agency for helping to curb acid rain, mercury

AuSABLE FORKS - The Adirondack Council will present its highest honor, the Conservationist of the Year Award, to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency during an awards ceremony here on July 14.

The council will honor the federal agency for its work in curbing air pollution from electric power plants.

The award will be presented at the historic Asgaard Farm and Dairy. Asgaard was the home of renowned artist Rockwell Kent from the 1920s until his death in 1971.

"The EPA has made great strides on behalf of the nation's air quality in the past year," Adirondack Council Executive Director Brian L. Houseal said in a press release. "The Cross-State Air Pollution Rule and the new mercury standard for power plant emissions will curb acid rain and mercury contamination in the Adirondack Park and across the Northeast. By 2014, both will require power plants to slash their emissions of acid-rain-causing sulfur and nitrogen pollution, while also requiring deep cuts in toxic mercury.

"The Adirondack Council was founded in 1975. For the first time in four decades, we can envision a day in the near future when the daily destruction of acid rain will end for the Adirondack Park, and real healing can begin," he added. "Finally, we can look forward to the day when our soils and waters will be pollution-free - when all Adirondack fish are safe to eat again, free of chemical contamination. Without EPA's work and diligence, this day could never come."

Each July, the Adirondack Council awards a museum-quality, hand-carved, life-size common loon to the Conservationist of the Year Award winner. The Adirondack Council's annual membership meeting, which starts at 1:45 p.m., is free of charge and open to the public, but reservations are required for the awards lunch. Call 1-877-873-2240 for details.

Also at the lunch, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Adirondack forest rangers will be celebrated for protecting public forest preserve lands, natural resources and people who use these resources. David Brunner, co-owner of Asgaard Farm and Dairy, will be the guest speaker. Brunner and Rhonda Butler acquired the farm in 1988 and put it back in production in 2003. Today Asgaard is a diversified, family-operated farm with a goat dairy and creamery at its core.

Accepting the award on behalf of the EPA will be Region 2 Director of Clean Water Joan Leary Matthews. Matthews is a former State Assistant Attorney General in the Environmental Protection Bureau. EPA Region 2 covers New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. EPA is the 28th annual recipient of the award.

Matthews has worked alongside the Adirondack Council on clean air issues for years, both while in state government and as a private-practice attorney. She was lead counsel for the state's successful defense of its automobile emissions standards when it was sued by auto makers. She was also in charge of New York's successful suit forcing the EPA to adopt more stringent ambient air quality standards. She is a past chair of the state Bar Association's Environmental Law Section.