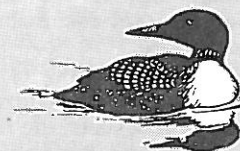




# The Adirondack Council NEWSLETTER



to keep supporters informed of our activities

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## FOREVER WILD??

Preservation of the Adirondack Wilderness Has Always Been an Uphill Battle. What is in Store for the Future?

**wil.der.ness** (wil'der-nis) n. Any unsettled, uncultivated region left in its natural condition, especially: a large, wild tract of land covered with dense vegetation or forests, or an extensive area that is barren or empty, as a desert or ocean.

### WILDERNESS FOR THE ADIRONDACKS

In 1972 when the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan was approved by Governor Rockefeller, several large, roadless, wild areas of the 2.3 million acre forest preserve within the Adirondack Park were formally classified wilderness. Guidelines for their management and use were predicated on an expanded definition of wilderness, a blueprint more explicit than that of the dictionary definition above.

"A wilderness area in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man—where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. A wilderness area is further defined to mean an area of state land or water having a primeval character, without significant improvements or permanent human habitation; which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined, type of recreation."

This definition closely parallels the language of the Wilderness Act of 1964, federal legislation that created a National Wilderness Preservation System, which today contains nearly 20 million acres of wilderness in our national forests, national parks and monuments, and national wildlife refuges.

Beginning in 1972 and continuing to the present, much heated discussion has focused on the wilderness of the Adirondack Park. Primarily because motorized use is prohibited in this approximately one million acres of the total 6,000,000 acre Park, some have decried the wilderness, arguing that these lands have been locked up and declared useless. But the majority of those interested in the Adirondack Park have accepted and even welcomed official designation and protection of a portion of the Adirondack forest preserve as wilderness, and proudly support this legacy of wildlands, that in quantity and quality, exceed that of any other such lands in our eastern states.

For many people the protection afforded the Adirondack Park's wilderness in the State Land Master Plan of 1972 came none too soon. Since the "forever wild" protection was constitutionally provided to the forest preserve in 1894, the preserve had been subjected to many inroads of civilization.

Developed campgrounds, fire towers, telephone lines, interior caretaker facilities, truck trails, and tent platforms had "domesticated the woods", well beyond what many considered to be "forever wild."

### IN THE BEGINNING

The passage of the federal Wilderness Act of 1964 climaxed a century-old movement to protect wild country in the United States. The act states:

"In order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition, it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness."

The world's first instance of large-scale wilderness preservation in the public interest occurred on March 1, 1872, when President Grant signed an act designating over two million acres of northeastern Wyoming as Yellowstone National Park. Thirteen years later a 715,000 acre "forest preserve" in the Adirondacks was established.

Ironically, the rationale for action in these instances did not take account of the aesthetic, spiritual, or cultural values of wilderness. Yellowstone's advocates acted to prevent private acquisition and exploitation of geysers, hot springs, waterfalls, and other curiosities. In the Adirondacks the decisive argument concerned the necessity of protecting the vast forested watershed that feeds five of the major drainage basins of New York State—Lake Champlain, and the Hudson, St. Lawrence, Black and Mohawk River basins. In Yellowstone and the Adirondacks, wilderness was preserved unintentionally.

In those early days there were few people who recognized the need to preserve wilderness for its own sake. There were still many wilderness frontiers beyond, and when one was spoiled it was possible to move on to another. Fortunately there were a few voices to publicize the benefits of wild country and the need to provide that some would always exist in upstate New York. A single statement that did much to publicize the region was William H.H. Murray's *Adventures in the Wilderness: or Camp-life in the Adirondacks of 1869*. Murray extolled the hunting and fishing in the area and also expressed

personal reasons for seeking wilderness. Said he, "The wilderness provides that perfect relaxation which all jaded minds require."

With the popularity of the Adirondacks came more people and the impact of civilization. An anonymous writer warned that "in a few years, the railroad with its iron web will bind the free forest, the lakes will lose their solitude, the deer and moose will flee to a safer resort...and men with axe and spade will work out a revolution."

In 1864 a New York Times editorial urged the state to acquire this land before it was "despoiled." Lumber mills and iron foundries could operate in places not reserved, ensuring the balance "which should always exist between utility and enjoyment."

In the 1870's Verplanck Colvin, superintendant of a topographical survey of the Adirondack region, was keenly aware of the speed at which the wilderness was disappearing,

"While to the political economist these matters are of the first and most vital importance, to the lover of nature and of the wilderness, the progress of settlement, and the extension of civilization into the primeval forests, is recognized only with regret...viewed from the standpoint of my own explorations, the rapidity with which certain changes take place in the opening up to travel of the wild corners of the wilderness has about it something almost startling...It is still almost as wild and quite as beautiful; but close behind our exploring footsteps came the 'blazed-line,' marked with axe upon the trees; the trail, soon trodden into mire; the bark shanty, picturesque enough, but soon surrounded by a grove of stumps..."

## THE WATERSHED ARGUMENT

The people who favored wilderness preservation avoided placing themselves in opposition to progress and industry. They were aware that their arguments to preserve the northern forests would need to be supportive of civilization. In 1872, the New York State Park Commission, created to investigate the possibilities of establishing a public park in the Adirondacks, recommended "the simple preservation of the timber as a measure of political economy...Without a steady, constant sup-



ply of water from the streams of the wilderness, our canals would be dry, and a great portion of the grain and other produce of the western part of the state would be unable to find cheap transportation to the markets of the Hudson River Valley."

## THE STATE TAKES ACTION

With business interests applying the necessary pressure, on May 15, 1885, Governor David Hill approved a bill establishing a "Forest Preserve" of 715,000 acres that was to remain permanently as "wild forest lands."

The need to protect wild country for its own sake gained more supporters, and in 1891 the New York Forest Commission gave birth to the idea that the forest preserve be made a park as "a place where rest, recuperation and vigor may be gained by our highly nervous and overworked people." The Legislature acted to create a park one year later. Legal recognition of wilderness for the sake of recreational values had gained equal footing with more practical arguments.

The desire of many New Yorkers to have the principle of wilderness preservation written into the state constitution was realized at the constitutional convention of 1894, when Article 7, Section 7, guaranteeing permanent preservation for the Adirondack wilderness, was unanimously approved. Now known as Article XIV, it decreed:

"The lands of the state now owned or hereafter acquired, constituting the forest preserve as now fixed by law, shall be forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be leased, sold or exchanged, or be taken by any corporation, public or private, nor shall the timber thereon be sold, removed or destroyed."

The watershed argument was reiterated in the debate that led to the approval, but consideration was also voiced for "the higher uses of the great wilderness." David McClure, a New York attorney who headed the committee responsible for the "forever wild" proviso, declared,

"The hills, rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun-The venerable woods-Rivers that move in majesty-and the complaining brooks that make the meadows green, these for years had been neglected by the people of the State and the great men of our State, the men of public spirit generally, had forgotten that it was necessary for the life, the health, the safety, and the comfort, not to speak of the luxury of the people of this State, that our forests should be preserved."

## OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

Someone has said, "wilderness holds answers to questions we have not yet learned to ask." To some people the educational value of wilderness by itself justifies the need to preserve as much wild country as we can. Others of little intellectual humility argue that wilderness is a useless waste that renders no service to society. Thirty years ago Aldo Leopold wrote in *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford University press, 1949) of "the shallow-minded modern who has lost his rootage in the land (and) assumes that he has already discovered what is important...It is only the scholar who appreciates that all history consists of successive excursions from a single starting point, to which man returns again and again to organize yet another search for a durable scale of values."

Diversity is a value of wilderness that grows in importance in an otherwise increasingly monotonous world. A basic maxim of ecology is that "diversity promotes environmental health." Less than 1% of America's landscape is formally designated wilderness. That small percentage can hardly be considered a luxury but an absolute necessity as the rich diversity of the world's cultures is diminished by modern transport and industrialization.

Wilderness recreation perpetuates the primitive skills in pioneering subsistence and

the primitive arts of wilderness travel, particularly canoeing and packing. There are those who decry wilderness activities as undemocratic because they discriminate against the old and infirmed. That specious argument is eloquently deflated by Gary Smith in his book *Windsinger* (Sierra Club Books, 1976),

"After I had finished the manuscript for this book, I suddenly became ill and lost my ability to read and walk normally. The doctors say I have multiple sclerosis, and although my reading and walking ability might improve, I know now my life will be changed. It's difficult to say how many more trails will feel my boots upon them. As I prepare to face this new adventure I am deeply indebted to those in our country who had the courage and wisdom to preserve the areas of wildness in our midst that helped me grow. Just the knowledge that those areas, and hopefully many more will always exist gives me strength and hope, especially when I think of the young ones yet to come who might have the opportunity to experience what I did, and to be shaped by the American earth. Our wildland legacy will undoubtedly go down in history as the finest hallmark of the North American civilization."

Aldo Leopold was alarmed by the trophy hunting sportsman who never grew up, in whom the capacity for isolation, perception, and husbandry was lost or undeveloped. He was, in Leopold's words, the "motorized ant" who swarms the continent consuming but never creating outdoor satisfactions. In the debate over the Perkins Clearing land exchange in the Adirondack Park, some sportsmen argued that one should not support the exchange because the subsequent classification of the newly acquired forest preserve as wilderness would preclude access to the area. Their argument was misleading because they neglected to mention that they meant motorized access. Non-motorized access to the area will be available to all who are willing and able to partake of it. It has not yet been decided how the Perkins Clearing land will be classified. This author hopes readers will familiarize themselves with this issue and express their thoughts to the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Adirondack Park Agency.

It is for the mechanically propelled sportsmen that the recreational engineer dilutes the wilderness and artificializes its trophies in the belief that he is rendering a public service. Leopold argued that, "it is the expansion of transport without a corresponding growth of perception that threatens us with qualitative bankruptcy of the recreational process. Recreational development is a job not of building roads into lovely country, but of building receptivity into the still unlovely human mind."

The scientific values of wilderness can only expand with time. Only by understanding natural laws that govern soils, plants and animals, and their interrelations can man devise the best methods of land management, agriculture, forestry, and animal husbandry.

The physical, biological and spiritual values of wilderness will expand in the future as the remaining landscape is increasingly exploited and as the gap between the needs of expanding human populations and available natural resources widens. Whole tree harvesters and growing markets for the full range of forest products may lead to excessive harvests and a diminution of the watershed capacity of privately owned forests and their ability to sustain yields. Single specie forest plantations will undoubtedly be increased in number to meet growing demands for wood fiber. These monocultures are vulnerable to disease and their recreational values are limited.

Wilderness furnishes long range economic and social benefits. It affords watershed protection; helps control floods; and harbors plant life that generates oxygen and ameliorates the effects of air, water, and noise pollution. Additionally, wilderness deepens man's appreciation of his natural origins and provides for the edification of those who may one day wish to see, feel, or study the origins of their cultural inheritance.

It remains to be seen if society will resist the temptation to look to the wilderness for a "quick fix". Currently in the

Adirondacks, utilities talk of the need to relax the "forever wild" protection of the constitution and the Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers protective provision, to enable construction of large, new hydroelectric dams. The hydro potential in the Adirondack Park, even if protection measures are relaxed, is approximately 500 megawatts. Statewide, 3,000 megawatts can be realized by simply rehabilitating existing small hydro sites. It seems premature to talk of the need for a blanket relaxation of natural river protective devices. If in the future, hydroelectric dams are felt to be desirable by the people of the state, provisions already exist, such as through constitutional amendment, to make the necessary exceptions.

Some people are advocating that the forest preserve be used to provide some of the much needed wood energy, yet it has been estimated that if all the forests in the state, including the preserve, were to be harvested on a sustained yield basis, they would only provide 5 percent of the state's energy needs. The contribution of the preserve would be miniscule and roads built to gain access to the forests would make a mockery of "forever wild." Others argue for the need to selectively cut part of the forest preserve to improve habitat for white-tailed deer. Many biologists, however, tell us that improving food supplies is not that critical because hard winters and the lack of winter cover, poaching, and dog kills play a greater role in determining deer numbers. The present balance of undisturbed state lands and the substantially managed and harvested private lands provide a diversity beneficial to the widest range of both game and non-game wildlife species.

The most ironic threat to wilderness emanates from wilderness advocates loving the place to death. Colin Fletcher, eminent hiker and naturalist, has said, "The woods are overrun and sons of bitches like me are half the problem." Put the tag of "wilderness" on an area and thousands go there to pollute waters and trample fragile soils and vegetation. The majority of users are responsible, but sheer numbers cause unfortunate impacts.

Fortunately, in the Adirondacks, only a few wilderness areas have suffered from overuse. If hikers avoid the High Peaks, Pharaoh Lake, and West Canada Lake Wildernesses, they easily find the solitude they crave. In the overused areas the picture brightens. The Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) have fielded roving "rangers" to help the public better understand and more gently use the land. In some areas camping sites are gradually phased out and users are directed to alternative locations where they will find equally rewarding, or more likely, improved, wilderness experiences. Quotas on use in a few areas will no doubt be a necessity in the future. The experience of The National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service indicates that people accept regulated use because of their respect for the quality of the wilderness experience. Some individuals suffer inconvenience and disappointment, but the alternatives of resource degradation or excessive encounters with too many people are less desirable. Roderick Nash, in his excellent book, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (Yale University Press, 1978), comments, "considering both the gains in appreciation for the wilderness and the losses in the amount of wild country left to appreciate, it is increasingly evident that the future of the American wilderness depends on American civilization's deliberately keeping it wild."

The future of wilderness is uncertain. Pressures on it are increasing in intensity. Those of us who have fought and are fighting for wilderness have bigger battles ahead of us because of present and anticipated economic and energy crises. When one battle is won, we may well expect another, or two or three more, to surface. Yet, we should not despair for more people every day are stepping forward to advance the cause of wilderness. In these times, Bob Marshall's words echo more relevant than ever, "There is just one hope of repulsing the tyrannical ambition of civilization to conquer every niche on the whole earth. That hope is the organization of spirited people who will fight for the freedom of the wilderness."



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## The Adirondack Council

Box D-2, Elizabethtown, NY 12932

*A coalition of the National Audubon Society; The Sierra Club, Atlantic Chapter; The Wilderness Society; The Natural Resources Defense Council; The Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks; and other concerned organizations and individuals.*

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