

Big Shoes, Next Steps

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It was with appreciation and humility that I recently agreed to take on the role of executive editor of the *Adirondack Journal of Environmental Studies*. So many people from so many walks of life in the Adirondack region owe a debt of gratitude to Professor Gary Chilson for founding AJES, staying true to its search for common ground, and promoting dialogue around sustainable development through the window of the Adirondack experience. These are big shoes to fill, but ones I humbly accept because so much has been accomplished in the 15 short years since the creation of the Adirondack Research Consortium and its publication AJES, but also because so much more lies ahead.

The first issue of AJES in 1994 was published on the heels of turbulent political times in the Adirondacks. The journal and the research consortium helped to fill a void between entrenched positions along the preservation–development continuum by providing a neutral ground of sorts—shrouded in at least the spirit of academic objectivity—to share ideas and produce a body of research both emerging from and accountable to the region. The hope has been to publish both contemporary debates and peer-reviewed analysis across a broad range of issues and disciplines in a voice approachable by an audience larger than just typical academic circles. I have been fortunate to work with many people in the intervening years involved in planning and participating in annual conferences, writing and reviewing AJES articles, and building bridges between information producers and

consumers. We have connected some dots, but much of the borderlands between discipline and perspective remain unexplored.

The opportunity nearly 15 years later is to continue to promote an arena for ground-truthing and fact-checking, aided by open minds and informed dialogue. AJES seeks to explore the nexus of environmental, social, and economic issues, and as such demands a transdisciplinary and participatory approach to inquiry. The world has problems, but the academy has disciplines. More often than not they do not overlap. The study of the Adirondack region, the larger Northern Forest, and similar biomes across the world requires an approach that transcends disciplinary boundaries and pushes for unified descriptions of human-dominated ecosystems from which management recommendations can emerge. And broad participation must not come only from credentialed expertise, but from all layers of society . . . citizen, scientist, and manager alike. As communities worldwide search for examples of genuine development—where economic activity does not erode the very environmental foundation that makes life possible and worthwhile—the time is upon us to further open the lines of communication between the study of our means and the vocalization of our ends.

AJES can be that vehicle. We can hold on to the values and virtues of peer review, while providing a forum for debate, shared understanding, and resolution. We can continue to merge disciplines through the study of place. We can extend the circle

of those who speak with authority beyond academics speaking with other academics. And we can aide an ongoing, bottom-up process of visioning management objectives and clarifying decision alternatives.

But AJES cannot reach its full potential in print form, mailed to a fluctuating base of subscribers and publishing commentary and peer-reviewed analysis with a 6 to 12 month lag time. North Country communities are being pulled into the age of the internet (perhaps unwillingly for some), and so can AJES. The world of open-source learning is upon us, enabling faster review and publishing times, extending peer review to a broader group, extending avenues for commentary and feedback through web logged discussion, and creating active readers that can better shape research questions and target research results.

Gary Chilson (and too many colleagues to name) has built a foundation of disciplinary inclusion and broad perspective during the formative years of AJES and the Adirondack Research Consortium. The business of connecting information producers and consumers in real time should be the next big step for AJES. In another 15 years' time, let us look back on the second generation of AJES with pride in having expanded the common ground still further.

As we begin to plan for the next volume of AJES, I would love to hear your thoughts about a move to an internet platform. I can be reached at jon.erickson@uvm.edu, or the old-fashioned way at 802-656-3328.