History of the Adirondack Council
1975 to 2005

By JOHN SHEEHAN

Abstract

"History of the Adirondack Council" is communications director John F. Sheehan's take on the evolution of one of the nation's most effective environmental organizations. The organization has grown larger and more sophisticated from its founding in 1975 through its 30th Anniversary in 2005. While the scope of its interests has remained the same — anything affecting the ecological integrity or wild character of the Park — its ability to carry out that mission has improved steadily. Topics such as acid rain, land-use planning, land acquisition and motorized use of public lands are explored in an Adirondack context. The Council has been a strong advocate for (and occasional critic of) the Adirondack Park Agency and for the "Forever Wild" clause of the NYS Constitution, which protect the Park's Forest Preserve from logging and development. The careful preservation and expansion of the Park's public lands — especially Wilderness Areas — is one of the group's highest priorities. The article contains a discussion, with accompanying maps, of the Council's proposals to create a 73,000-acre Boreal Wilderness in the northern Adirondacks and a 408,000-acre Bob Marshall Great Wilderness in the western Adirondacks. The article includes statements about the Council from members of Congress, numerous NYS officials and other environmental organizations, as well as references to website materials and additional information.

The year 2005 will be a time of celebration and rededication for the Adirondack Council. Thirty years ago next January, the Adirondack Council was founded by a group of concerned individuals and organizations who saw the need for an advocacy organization dedicated solely to protecting the Adirondack Park from the ravages of uncontrolled development and pollution. Today, the Council is one of the largest and most effective regional environmental advocacy organizations in America.

It started as a confederation of national and regional environmental organizations who united into a council to focus on the problems of the Adirondack Park in the mid-1970s. Back then the staff was very small, as was the membership, and the council of trustees (board of directors) was very involved in day-to-day operations. Over time, the organization and staff grew in response to the increasingly sophisticated threats to the Park's ecology and wild character. The Council grew more independent, drawing more on the expertise of Adirondack landowners and other New Yorkers whose sole focus was the Park.

Today, the Council still enjoys the moral support of its national and regional member organizations, but isn't dependent upon them for financial help, activists or staff. The Council prides itself on being well organized, even-tempered, intelligent and decisive. When threats to the Park's ecological health or wild character emerge, the Council uses its large staff (14 full-time employees) to quickly assess a problem and propose a workable solution. When quiet diplomacy doesn't work, it uses its vocal membership, media attention and legal action to bring pressure on state and federal officials to resolve the issue.

The Council is strictly non-partisan, working as well with Republicans as it does with Democrats, however the Council is very political. Staff members are experienced in motivating public officials with both criticism and praise. Four Governors and more than a dozen Legislative leaders have found the organization to be both a trustworthy advisor and a worthy opponent.

In his note of congratulations to the Council upon its 20th Anniversary in 1995, Congressman Sherwood Boehlert, R-Utica, wrote: "The Adirondack Council has done great work … from fighting acid rain to educating people on the beauty and wonders of our state's greatest natural wonder, the Adirondack Mountains," "I have been privileged to work with the Council on numerous issues, and I always value the Council's input."

In the past five years, the Council has held joint press conferences with every member of the Adirondack Congressional delegation, as well as with US Senators Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton.

On the Presidential level, the Council worked with the George H.W. Bush Administration and Congress in the successful effort to pass the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990. The amendments required a 50 percent cut in sulfur dioxide — a good start on acid rain.

The Council helped persuade the administration to revive and fund the Land & Water Conservation Fund and the Forest Legacy Program under the Clinton Administration.

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The current Bush Administration sent US Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Christie Whitman to Albany at the Council’s request in 2002 to explain the President’s clean air legislation. President George W. Bush visited the Adirondacks later that month to ask Congress to pass legislation to address acid rain.

Last December, after Congress failed to act on acid rain, EPA proposed the Clean Air Interstate Rule. At the Council’s request, EPA Administrator Michael Leavitt visited Paul Smith’s College to discuss the plan at the annual Adirondack Water Quality Conference in August 2004. He vowed to finalize the new rule this year, requiring cuts of 70 percent in sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides from electric power plants that cause acid rain in the Adirondacks.

Why would the nation’s top environmental regulator travel from Washington, DC to a small college’s water conference in the Adirondacks? Because the Adirondack Council has made acid rain an issue that federal officials can no longer ignore. The Council has taken every opportunity to alert the public and the media to new developments as soon as they occur — reacting quickly to new scientific studies and federal reports; attending all public hearings, prompting Congressional investigations, calling joint press conferences, producing short films and public service announcements and underwriting public television and radio programs.

Former Chairman David Skovron, of Long Lake and Connecticut, liked to refer to the Council as “the light cavalry of the environmental movement. We are ready at a moment’s notice, usually we are the first ones prepared to respond, we cover a lot of ground and bring a substantial force to bear, usually while the rest of the troops are still assembling.”

In reaction to Skovron’s statement, former state Department Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner John Cahill (now Secretary to the Governor) said that if the Council is the light cavalry, “I’d hate to see the heavy artillery.”

The night he made that comment Cahill was receiving the Council’s highest honor: The Conservationist of the Year Award for 1999. He was smiling when he delivered the punch line, but while most DEC and Adirondack Park Agency Commissioners eventually come to rely on the Council as an ally, they also come into conflict with the Council when State politics and environmental protection are at odds.

US Senator Charles Schumer discusses easements and the new Forest Preserve lands in and around the proposed Bob Marshall Great Wilderness with Willie Janeway of the Nature Conservancy and John Sheehan.

“I hate to think what kind of shape the magnificent Adirondack Park would be in without the work of the Adirondack Council,” said Woody Cole, Chairman of the Adirondack Park Agency from 1984 to 1992. “Even though the Park Agency Act is quite weak in providing genuine protection for the Park’s varied ecosystems, the political presence of the Council [has] held state government to its commitments to the ‘forever wild’ clause of the NYS Constitution and the Agency’s mandates.”

“Would the DEC and other state agencies have listened to the Park Agency? Would the wetlands and wild rivers acts have passed without with pressure of thousands of Council supporters on the Governor and Legislature? It is hard to say. I believe, however, that the Council forced the action. They certainly pushed me toward seeing the seriousness of exploitive threats to the Park’s rich biological treasures.”

Handling threats is only half of the picture. Every successful “cavalry charge” requires planning and preparation. The Council encourages the state to set in motion conservation strategies that result in effective long-term management of the Park and avoid crises before they arise. But New York is a large, metropolitan state that directs most of its money and attention toward the problems of big cities. Park residents might occupy 20 percent of the state's land, but they account for less than one percent of its population and voters. That would be enough to make the Legislature unresponsive in any state. But New York isn’t just any state.

In New York, over the past 30 years, the combined effects of retirement, death and criminal prosecution have removed far more Legislators from office than the voters have. Of 212 seats, the number of hotly contested November races can be counted on one hand each election year. Terms for each house are only two years
long but, as a general rule, members who reach their second terms can remain in office for as long as they are alive, alert and unindicted.

Still, short terms lend themselves to short-term political thinking. Governors usually come and go more frequently than Legislators, and state agency directors come and go more frequently still. That's why it is imperative for advocacy organizations such as the Council to think in terms of what the next century will bring, not just the next two to three years.

"During the seven years I served as Commissioner of New York's Department of Environmental Conservation, I came to rely on the Adirondack Council as a source of accurate and fair advocacy, especially advocacy in the interests of future generations of New Yorkers," said Thomas Jorling shortly after his retirement in 1995. "The Council, more than any other organization, served as a reminder of the great conservation history of New York State regarding the Adirondacks, and provided a link between that history and the present, always pointing the way to the future."

Being careful never to ally itself directly with any political party or candidate for office is not always enough to assure independence. In an effort to safeguard its effectiveness and preserve its integrity, the Council accepts no public money of any kind. All of its funding comes from the private donations of its supporters. Thus, it is never beholden to any public official or agency and is free to express its views.

The Council's model of a strong, independent, vocal advocacy organization has not only achieved success in the Adirondacks, but has been recreated in other areas of the nation. The Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance and the Northern Forest Alliance (which watches over 26 million acres of forest from Maine to New York) were based on the Adirondack Council's example. Each has amassed an experienced professional staff and each makes good use of the individual talents of its trustees.

Each also watches over a partly public, partly private landscape similar to the mix of public and private lands in the Adirondack Park. For all three groups, public and private lands are interwoven and dependent upon one another. They are two sides of a single coin. To ignore either would be a mistake. So the Council, like its newer counterparts, has developed and maintained the expertise to ensure the ecological health and wild character of each.

"The Adirondack Council has pioneered regional conservation strategies," said Kim Elliman, former Chairman of The Wilderness Society Board of Governors and currently President of the Open Space Institute in a note of congratulations upon the Council's 20th Anniversary in 1995. "The Council, one of the first regional advocacy groups, developed models of biological inventory for the Park: models for regional zoning, and permanent funding for the conservation of land."

If it wanted to be effective, the Council had no other choice. The Adirondack Park is unique and requires a unique approach when protecting it.

The Park

The Adirondack Park is a 6-million-acre reserve of public and private lands. It is the same size as Vermont, but has only a fourth of Vermont's population. There are no cities. Most residents live in villages and hamlets that sprouted up around lakeside resorts and faded industries such as papermaking and mining. During the past 30 years, the Park's residents have come to rely less on the boom-and-bust cycles of international competition and industrial resource extractions that scar the landscape.

According to the recently published Adirondack Atlas (2004, Wildlife Conservation Society and Syracuse University Press), central Adirondack residents may be isolated, but they are better paid than their counterparts in the rest of rural New York or even residents on the outskirts of the Park. Employment by local governments is high in relation to the rest of the state, often in response to seasonal influxes of Park visitors and seasonal residents.

State lands comprise approximately 2.7 million acres, which are protected as "forever wild" by the NYS Constitution.

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, nor taken by any corporation, public or private, nor shall the timber thereon be sold, removed or destroyed.

Article 14, Section 1, NYS Constitution, Adopted at the New York State Constitutional Convention, 1894

Those 53 words, enshrined in the Constitution, comprise the strongest forest protection law in the world. They are all that stands between the largest collection of wilderness and ancient, never-cut forests in the eastern United States and the devastated wasteland the Adirondacks became shortly after the Civil War.

However, even among "forever wild" lands, there are some distinctions. In rough terms, the Forest Preserve is divided into Wild Forest (about 1.5 million acres, where motorized access is allowed on designated roads and snowmobile trails), Wilderness (about 1.1 million acres where the use of motorized vehicles is banned to protect wildlife habitat from traffic, noise and pollution), and other state classifications including Primitive, Canoe, and Intensive Use Areas. A tiny percentage of other state lands is used for administrative purposes, including state agency offices, three state prisons and numerous state police barracks.

The other 3.3 million acres is composed of private lands dedicated principally to forestry, outdoor recreation, large private estates and more than 100 small communities ranging in size from a few homes to as many as 3,500 year-round residents. The Park's year-round population
is approximately 130,000, or an average of about 13 people per square mile. The population swells in the summer to more than 200,000 as seasonal residents spend time at their second homes. Tourism officials estimate that the Park receives more than nine million visitors each year. The combined impact of an ever-increasing permanent population and millions of visitors can place great strain on the Park’s natural resources and its wild character.

Protecting The Park’s Public Heritage

Defending “Forever Wild”

In preserving the Adirondack Park’s public heritage, the Council has been a staunch defender of the “forever wild” clause of the NYS Constitution (Article 14, Section 1). The clause protects the Park’s public lands (Forest Preserve) from lease, sale, development and logging. The Council lobbied effectively for eight years (1976 to 1983) against legislation that would have allowed logging to “improve deer habitat.”

Council staff members concurrently defeated several proposals to allow firewood removal from the preserve. In 1992, the Council persuaded the sponsor to change a Constitutional Amendment that would have allowed the lease and development of Adirondack Forest Preserve lakes that were set aside to provide water to the Erie Canal. In 1994, the Council worked with Grammy Award winning singer/songwriter Bonnie Raitt to publicize the 100th Anniversary of the “forever wild” clause.

Unshackling Rivers

Protecting Adirondack watersheds was the driving force behind the Park and the “forever wild” clause. In 1976, the Council fought to include several major rivers to the state’s new Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers System (WSR), providing them with special protection from development and degradation. The Legislature added more than 1,000 miles to the system later that year. Starting in 1980 the Council fought to include the Moose River in the WSR system, which the Legislature finally did in 1989.

Starting in 1990, the Council and New York Rivers United (NYRU) worked together to press lawsuits and negotiate the terms of new, 40-year, federal hydropower dam licenses. By 1994, the two groups had assisted American Rivers in its lawsuit winning the right to require dam operators to protect water quality, fisheries, recreational use, and wildlife habitat. Previously, operators were only required to respond to the need for additional water flows in the summer to dilute pollution coming from factories downstream. Federal law did not require environmental sensitivity and could not be overruled by state law.

On the Beaver River alone, the Council and NYRU obtained an agreement from the dam operators to increase the water flow through the dams and restore several miles of dried up trout habitat. The deal opened a new canoe route, added land to the Pepperbox Wilderness Area, and also increased whitewater rafting and rock climbing opportunities. The agreement acted as a model for future negotiations along the Raquette, AuSable and Sacandaga Rivers, where dozens of dam licenses were up for 40-year renewals.

Late in 2003, negotiations over the dam license at Newton Falls, in St. Lawrence County, resulted in a no-cost easement to the state over a biologically unique wetland complex known as Chaumont Swamp.

Halting Abuses

Time and again, the Council has responded to illegal uses — or proposed uses — of the Forest Preserve with calls for state enforcement. If that failed, the Council has always been willing to go to court to protect the Park. The “forever wild” clause is the only state law that allows citizens to sue to compel the state to enforce it.

Most recently, the Council was contemplating a suit to prevent the Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA) from building and leasing Forest Preserve cabins to Whiteface Mountain Ski Center patrons. The Council
and the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks (a member organization) complained to state officials and the Council threatened to file a lawsuit to prevent construction. Due to the efforts of the Council and the Association, DEC Commissioner Erin Crotty told ORDA to remove the cabins from the ski area management plan.

In 2000, the Council helped to reshape state policy on motorized traffic on the Forest Preserve, preventing the recurrence of abuses by permit-holders who used trucks, ATVs, chainsaws, bulldozers and explosives to widen and flatten trails on public lands. The Council worked with state environmental regulators, a coalition of other environmental organizations and representatives from organizations for the disabled to reach a settlement in a federal lawsuit brought by a disgruntled ATV rider. The settlement resulted in strict limits on state and non-disabled vehicle use on the Forest Preserve, while opening new, permanent trails for all disabled persons to use. From 2000 to 2004, the Council documented the damage done to trails and forests by ATV riders who were destroying four Wild Forest Areas in the western Adirondacks. Using digital photography, the Council provided images of the devastation to the media and to state officials. It also published examples of rutted and ruined trails on its website (www.adirondackcouncil.org), in its newsletters and its annual "State of the Park" reports. In the summer of 2004, state regulators closed the roads to ATVs in all four western Adirondack Wild Forests cited in the Council's research.

Unfortunately, you don't need a motorized vehicle to damage the Forest Preserve. For 22 years, (1975 through 1996), the Council argued vehemently for restrictions on the hordes of campers who were destroying the natural character and health of the eastern High Peaks Wilderness Area. Since it contains many of the state's tallest mountains, the High Peaks Wilderness lures more than 120,000 visitors per year. Campers often overflowed the designated sites, creating new ones in inappropriate locations and causing widespread erosion, damage to water quality and the destruction of fragile alpine vegetation. In response, DEC created a new plan to manage camping facilities in the High Peaks Wilderness.

The new plan restricts camping and hiking group sizes, prohibits camping at high elevations, bans open fires, requires dogs to remain leashed and sets modest goals for limiting the total number of campers in the area. The Council was often at odds with recreational organizations, which chafed at the idea of restricting access to the High Peaks.

Completing the Preserve

Don't let the beauty and grandeur fool you. The Adirondack Park is a work in progress. It was created in 1892, but the area set aside was merely half the size of the current Park. The original plan was to buy up all of the lands within the boundary and run it like a National Park. That plan was dashed by a lack of money and a lack of political resolve in Albany. However, the Park's boundary was expanded several times to encompass entire ecosystems and river drainage basins. Consequently, the Park border rarely coincides with political subdivisions such as town and county lines.

The expansion of the Park virtually assured that the state would never purchase it all. Rather than give up, the state turned this checkerboard of public and private tracts into something brand new. It would be a lived-in Park, where small, compact communities could provide the services and compatible industries that would sustain a Park larger than Yellowstone, Yosemite, Glacier and Olympic National Parks combined.

The plan in the Adirondacks was the same. As they had — or would — throughout the Northeast, widespread clearcutting and wildfires consumed most of the Park's ancient, never-cut forests by 1920. It seemed that the only way to protect the most important places would be to buy them. The logical question was: what should be bought first, and why?

This new style of park soon became popular in other parts of the world. For decades, England, Ireland, Scotland and
Wales have been creating “countryside parks” in landscapes that had been farmed, grazed and inhabited for thousands of years. In those nations, the idea was not just to preserve what precious little wildness was left, but to increase the number of wild areas and restore long-degraded habitat.

Big Money, No Plan

Until the Council published a plan for completing the Wild Forest and Wilderness areas, state officials simply bought any affordable parcel that came on to the market.

By 1990, it was clear that this would no longer be acceptable to the State Legislature. The Council had assisted Governor Mario M. Cuomo in promoting the passage of the successful Environmental Quality Bond Act of 1986. The Bond Act provided $250 million dollars for land acquisition and historic preservation. The Council honored Governor Cuomo’s achievement that year with its highest honor — the Conservationist of the Year award. The Governor’s staff had informally relied on the Council’s advice in targeting additions to the Forest Preserve.

However, the Bond Act was quickly exhausted on parcels statewide. The narrow defeat of the 1990 Bond Act can be attributed to the non-environmental add-ons (pork barrel spending) meant to assuage potentially disagreeable Legislators. Its final form contained more than $2.1 billion in spending. The public balked.

But it pointed out a huge problem. Developers such as Henry Lassiter of Atlanta were buying up vast Adirondack tracts from timber companies and were seeking to subdivide them into thousands of 50-acre lots. Follensby Pond — hardly a pond at five miles long — was on the market for less than the cost of a New York City luxury apartment (about $5 million). The Heurich Estate — the last two miles of undeveloped shoreline on Lake Champlain — was about to be auctioned for less than $3 million.

Big Plans, No Money

In terms of land acquisition money, the state was broke. That’s when the Council began to press the Legislature for a capital fund for buying important parcels around the state. The Legislature was willing to go along with the idea, but wanted something first: a plan. That was a problem. The state didn’t have one.


From 1988 through 1990, the Council parlayed this expertise into a practical, on-the-ground plan for conserving the Park’s most vital resources. Its three-volume

Big Ideas:
The Bob

In 1992, the Council published a 24-page booklet focusing on the opportunity to create the Bob Marshall Great Wilderness from a group of existing western Adirondack Wilderness Areas. The proposal was called “A Gift of Wildness: The Bob Marshall Great Wilderness.” Bob’s father, Louis, had led the fight at the 1894 Constitutional Convention to create the “forever wild” clause to safeguard the Park’s public lands.

Bob Marshall and his guide and companion, Herb Clark.

Bob spent his first 22 summers exploring the forests around the family camp on Lower Saranac Lake. He and his brothers were co-founders of The Wilderness Society. In the 1930s, Bob conducted an extensive survey for the federal government — at his own expense — to identify every area in America containing 300,000 acres or more of roadless landscape. He found fewer than 50. One was in the western Adirondacks. Remarkably, by 1992, the area Bob first identified and explored still contained no public highways and no communities.

When the Council first published “A Gift of Wildness,” only 50 percent of the proposed 408,000-acre preserve was protected as Forest Preserve, or under no-development agreements with private landowners, known as conservation easements.

Today, fully 85 percent of the proposed “Bob” has been permanently protected from development, through easements and acquisitions through the assistance of the Environmental Protection Fund, the 1996 Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act, conservation groups such as the Adirondack Nature Conservancy and The Conservation Fund, and landowners such as the International Paper Company, Champion International and the Whitney Family.
set of publications named 2020 VISION were a far-reaching, scientifically sound blueprint for the completion of the Wilderness and Wild Forest systems, and for preserving the Park’s biological diversity.

Thus began the Council’s long string of publications explaining in detail what the Council wanted to protect and why. By placing its cards on the table, leaving no doubt as to its intentions, the organization has overcome many of the misunderstandings that prevent many environmental groups from making progress with state and local policy makers. The Council repeated this theme with publications on acid rain (1990 and 1998), managing growth and development (1991), new wilderness areas (1992), Lake Champlain (1995), the tax benefits to town residents when the state purchases Forest Preserve (1997), shortcomings in Adirondack Park Agency enforcement (1999 and 2001) and the need to reimburse local governments for revenues lost when the state grants property tax abatements to timber companies (2003 and 2004). An extensive collection of the Council’s publications, newsletters, press releases, tax studies and annual “State of the Park” reports is available online at www.adirondackcouncil.org.

2020 VISION was the prototype. It included maps and exhaustive descriptions of lands that ought to be preserved to protect rare plants and wildlife, and to expand existing Wilderness Areas and Wild Forests to their natural boundaries. It also included a plan to create two new Wilderness Areas—the 408,000-acre Bob Marshall Great Wilderness in the western Adirondacks and the 73,000-acre Boreal Wilderness in the northern Adirondacks.

Real Plan = Real Money

By 1993, the state was publishing the first version of its new Open Space Conservation Plan. Since then, most of the Council’s recommendations were included in the state’s official plan, although some of the projects were given different names.

That same year, the Legislature approved a permanent, new, pay-as-you-go Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), dedicating a steady $100 million per year to the state’s highest open space priorities, recycling grants and landfill closure. The Council has lobbied hard for increases in the fund. In 2004-2005, the EPF remained a record high of $125 million, with $32 million dedicated solely to open space. Since it was created, the fund has provided more than $1 billion to major state conservation projects.

Creating a Bond

Governor Pataki proposed the Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act in 1996. Members of his own party seemed surprised. “If you told me that this Governor would propose such an ambitious bond act for land and other major environmental projects, I would have told you the chances were somewhere between slim and none — and Slim just left town,” said state Senator Carl Marcellino, R-Syosset in a speech on the steps of the State Capitol. But Council staff members had already been working with the Pataki Administration for more than a year, developing a relationship that lasts to this day. The Council offered its full support in guiding the legislation through final passage and on to the November ballot.

After Labor Day of 1996, Change New York, a conservative group opposed to the Bond Act, ran a series of television ads throughout the state in an attempt to persuade voters that the Bond Act would be used for Legislators’ pet projects that had nothing to do with the environment. Many of the ads, which featured a dancing pig, misled the public about the nature of the spending plan. On the Friday before Election Day, members of the Adirondack Council’s Albany staff filed a formal complaint about the ads with the State Board of Elections. The Council brought members of the media to the Board’s offices and explained the complaint. The resulting news stories and editorials helped to carry the vote the following Tuesday, providing nearly $2 billion for environmental and historic preservation projects.

The Whitney Purchase

One of the very first Bond Act projects was the 1997 purchase of 15,000 acres of commercial farmlands, lakes and streams, in the heart of “the Bob,” owned by the Whitney family. The grand prize was Little Tupper Lake, which is home to a rare strain of brook trout that was being threatened by the 43-lot subdivision proposed by Whitney Industries. The Council urged the state to purchase as much of the estate as it could afford, as it had in 1995 when the Whitney’s sold two parcels of the then-50,000-acre estate to the Adirondack Nature Conservancy. The parcels, called Canoe Carry East and Canoe Carry West, were located on the southern shore of Forked Lake. Both are now part of the Forest Preserve, as is Little Tupper and five interconnected ponds to its west.

The Council also wanted to ensure that the state’s management of the property enhanced and protected the rare fishery that the Whitenys had watched over since the 19th Century. Motorboats and jetski traffic, as well as snowmobiles on its frozen surface in the winter, could cause serious damage. Almost immediately, the state declared this new Forest Preserve to be the William C. Whitney Wilderness Area, connecting it with nearby Lake Lila Primitive Area, and banning all motorized traffic on both. The state also took the additional precaution of requiring that all public fishing at the Whitney Wilderness be catch-and-release only. It also banned live bait to reduce the risk of an introduction of aggressive non-native fish species.

Champion a Winner

In 1999, the state was ready when Champion International decided to divest itself of all 140,000 acres it owned in the Adirondacks. The lands included four major rivers and associated wetlands that had been off limits to the public for more than a century. The state bought 29,000 acres for the Forest Preserve along the St. Regis, Oswegatchie, Deer and Grass Rivers. It also purchased the development rights and recreational rights to 110,000
acres, opening a large new area of commercial timberland for snowmobiles and other public recreation. Cutting restrictions on the new owners included a ban on clearcuts and a sustainable limit on the total annual harvest.

Tahawus

The Council's Conservationist of the Year award for 2004 was presented to the Open Space Institute for a conservation easement and Forest Preserve purchase in the southern High Peaks Wilderness Area, near Tahawus, in Essex County. The lands are at the headwaters to the Hudson River, comprising a relatively unspoiled section of a former mining camp, as well as some abandoned buildings and a fire tower. The deal would add a southern approach to the High Peaks Wilderness, taking pressure off the eastern gateway trails between Keene and Lake Placid.

At the same time, the deal will protect the Tahawus Talus, a jagged, mossy, cliff-bottom rock formation identified in 2020 VISION Volume One: Biological Diversity, Saving All the Pieces. It is home to the rare long-tailed shrew, the rarer rock vole and a handful of unusual reptiles and insects.

The Park's Private Landscapes

Landing a Lunker

Conservation easements take a lot of pressure off the Adirondack Park Agency. New development, if allowed at all, is part of a master plan negotiated by state officials before the deal is completed. Recreational use and harvesting plans are worked out in advance. In short, there are no surprises. Governor Pataki has taken a keen interest in easements since taking office. The Champion deal doubled the number of easement-protected acres in the Park, but the biggest fish in the pond was still nibbling.

International Paper (IP) is the Park's largest private landowner, with 260,000 acres spread over 34 towns. IP had made no secret of the fact that it had
excess land it wanted to sell. More to the point, it had expensive waterfront that was costing a fortune in taxes and couldn't be harvested without causing water pollution. Leasing recreational access to hunting clubs had helped, but not enough.

As far back as 1993, IP had asked the Council to participate in talks about what should happen to the hundreds of lakes and ponds that bezel its holdings. For several years, the company struck medium-sized, yet exciting, deals to sell lands and lakes to the Adirondack Nature Conservancy (which would resell many of them to the state). Several, including Bog Lake and Clear Pond, were inside the proposed Bob Marshall Great Wilderness.

This spring, former IP CEO John Dillon and Governor Pataki announced that IP would donate a conservation easement on more than 18,600 acres of land and lakes north of the Village of Long Lake, which will become a new park-within-the-Park, with special access for the handicapped. Paul Smith's College said it would assist in the design and construction of recreational trails and a fishing pier for the disabled.

Less than a month later, IP sprang the big news. It had agreed to sell an easement to the state over each of its 260,000 acres of holdings yet to be protected in the Park. Nearly 10 percent of the Park's private forests would be protected forever from development and fragmentation in a single deal. Seven of the Council's highest habitat protection priorities were included in the deal. In all, 78,000 acres of IP lands will be opened to full public access, while more limited access will be allowed on the remainder, subject to negotiations.

The APA's staff must have breathed a collective sigh of relief. Off the table were 90 pre-approved subdivisions and zoning requirements that would have allowed more than 6,000 new building lots to be cut from the company's holdings if they were sold on the open market. The plan also meant IP or another commercial harvester, could afford to own the lands and provide jobs to local communities. By extinguishing the development rights IP will substantially reduce the assessed value of its holdings.

Under a state law passed at the Council's urging in 1983, the state is also oblig-
Enforcement Problems

In 1999 and 2001, the Council published two well-received reports on the several-thousand case backlog in enforcement cases and the APA’s lack of authority to deal decisively with obvious violations. The reports (“After the Fact: The Truth About Environmental Enforcement in the Adirondacks,” 1999; and “Falling Further Behind ... A Progress Report,” 2001) resulted in additional funding from the state budget for enforcement officers, attorneys and assistance from the NYS Attorney General’s office.

Taxpayer Impact

A significant number of the Council’s 18,000 members are Adirondack landowners who are naturally concerned about property taxes. The Council takes their needs seriously and has published recent local tax-impact studies on pending and proposed state easement and Forest Preserve purchases.

The first was published in 1996, and showed that the Town of Long Lake would reap a windfall of new tax revenue exceeding $100,000 per year when the state purchased the 15,000-acre Little Tupper Lake tract from Whitney Industries. The company had been granted a tax-abatement prior to World War II, to which the state was not entitled.

A 2003 study showed that several towns would reap large tax revenue increases if the state purchased an easement on lands offered for sale by Hancock Timber Resources Group. An additional study that same year revealed similar benefits for the Town of Newcomb upon the state purchase of the Tahawus property.

This year, the Council published yet another study on the need for the state to reimburse local governments for revenues lost to timberland tax abatements. In August, the Legislature announced that it had included more than $1 million in the 2004-05 state budget to begin the reimbursement process.

Tourism

The Council is also actively involved in the oversight of the development of Forest Preserve management plans by the Department of Environmental Conservation. These Unit Management Plans (UMP’s) establish how the public will be able to use the Forest Preserve as well as how and where facilities will be developed on the Preserve. The Council’s role is to ensure that the DEC protects the Park’s natural resources while managing public access to the Preserve.

Tourism is a major concern for the Council, since it is both a boon to the economy and a potential bane to the Park’s health and beauty — the very things that bring the tourists back. Careful readers of Adirondack Life magazine will note that the Council is working cooperatively with Essex County Industrial Development Agency officials, whose “Essex County. In the Park” tourism and investment advertising campaign is aimed at promoting the Park’s beauty, solitude and natural wonders.

The Council has worked with a variety of Park-based tourism councils and is a charter member of the Center for the Advancement of Sustainable Tourism (CAST) on a plan to bring the maximum economic benefits to Park communities located at the edges and gateways to the Bob Marshall Great Wilderness.

Acid Rain

Of all the threats to the Adirondack Park’s health and vitality, acid rain is at the top of the list. It damages public and private lands and waters with equal ferocity. It has devastated native fish populations in hundreds of lakes, poisoning adult fish and halting reproduction. It has wiped out vast stands of high-elevation red spruce (a hideous site that EPA Administrator Leavitt confirmed he had seen while traveling over the High Peaks via airplane during his visit to Paul Smith’s). A total of 30 Adirondack lakes are known to contain fish so tainted with acid rain-intensified organic mercury they are unsafe to eat. Loon populations are showing signs of mercury contamination throughout the northeast.

After winning passage of the NYS Acid Deposition Control Act in 1984, the Council worked with the late US Senator Daniel P. Moynihan and national organizations in Washington, DC, to press for the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990. Once the amendments were passed, the Council spent two years fighting Vice President Dan Quayle’s Council on Competitiveness, which tried to gut the plans to carry out a 50 percent cut in sulfur dioxide from power plants. The Council joined forces with the Natural Resources Defense Council in 1993 to sue EPA over shortcomings in its “allowance trading” plan for reducing smokestack pollution. EPA settled the suit by agreeing to remove 4 million tons worth of sulfur dioxide allowances from the market (about six months’ worth at current rates).

By 1995, the Council found a niche in the acid rain struggle by persuading unlikely members of the New York Congressional delegation to propose workable acid rain legislation. The Council started with the late US Rep. Gerald Solomon, R-Glens Falls, then Chairman of the House Rules Committee, and then won the sponsorship of US Sen. Alfonse D’Amato. Current Adirondack Congressmen John McHugh, R-Pierrepont Manor, and John Sweeney, R-Clifton Park, have been co-sponsoring excellent legislation for several years.
All of their efforts complemented the constant pressure from the Council in the form of media attention, activist letters, phone calls, ad campaigns, two expansive reports on acid rain's environmental impact, a short film on public television and assistance from historic preservation and sporting organizations. Together, they created enough pressure for EPA to finally propose the Clean Air Interstate Rule in late 2003. If approved as promised by Administrator Leavitt, it would stop acid rain's destruction in the Adirondacks and give the Park a chance to recover from decades of destruction.

As it moves into its fourth decade, the Council is hoping to complete the job of fixing the Park's acid rain problems and use that experience to play an appropriate, meaningful role in curbing global climate change.

**Pesticides**

A more localized, yet no less harmful, problem in the Park has been a reliance by some communities on chemical pesticides and herbicides to combat nuisances that can often be controlled another, less toxic, way. In 1991, the Council worked with Citizens for a Better Tomorrow of Lake Placid to bring a halt to the aerial spraying of neurotoxins to control black fly populations. The groups mailed the warning label from the pesticide can to every resident in towns that were still paying cropdusters to spray their forests. Within 18 months, everyone had stopped spraying.

From 1986 through 2003, the Council fought against a plan to use herbicides to kill invasive plants (Eurasian water milfoil) in Lake George — a lake with a Double A potable rating that is a source of drinking water for many shoreline residents. It is also home to a variety of rare, protected plants that would have been killed by the herbicide (Sonar). Two milfoil killers — a moth and a weevil — were known to be in the lake as well. Milfoil was declining and rare plants were increasing in numbers in each of the test areas. After a long public hearing, the APA rejected the herbicide plan.

**The Council: Then and Now**

Today's Adirondack Council would be unrecognizable to many of the people who sat around the table and created the organization 30 years ago. Alas, many of them, including founding chairman pro tem Bill Hoard of Philadelphia, have now passed away.

More than two decades ago, the Adirondack Council's founding fathers met ... to consider the idea of creating a consortium with the primary purpose of protecting the Adirondack Park against any and all threats. One of those persons was Harold K. Hochschild, chairman of Governor Rockefeller's commission on the future of the Adirondack Park. In his words: 'The idea is good. The Council is necessary. We need money.' Mr. Hochschild was a very wise man. The validity of his comment has been tested during the past 20 years. The Council is now recognized as an indispensable link in the chain of Park protection. We still need money.

William T. Hoyd (1911-2004)
Founding Chairman Pro Tem
On the Council's 20th Anniversary, 1995

In 1980, the Council's membership had reached about 3,000. By 1990, it has swelled to 15,000. Today, it stands at 18,000. Most are from New York, but the Council has members in all 50 states, as well as Europe and Asia. Most of the Council's membership surveys show that about 40 percent refer to themselves as Republican or conservative, while an equal percentage says they are Democrats or liberals. The rest referred to themselves as "independent." All of them, however, have one thing in common: a desire to protect the Park.

The Council's current member organizations include the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks, Audubon Society, Citizens Campaign for the Environment, National Parks & Conservation Association and The Wilderness Society.

It's no accident that the Adirondack Park is the largest intact collection of forest, lake, river and wetland ecosystems in the entire world. From Louis Marshall, who argued for the creation of the "forever wild" clause at the 1894 NYS Constitutional Convention, to the Adirondack Council activists who turn out for every public hearing on the Park's future, generations of conservationists have struggled to make the Park wilder and healthier. And for as long as it exists, the Adirondack Council will fight to protect the Park's ecological health and its wild character.

The organization's early years were fraught with peril. The group's first Executive Director, Gary Randorf, used to joke that he'd barely start to get the organization out of debt when former trustee and chairman Harold Jerry would burst into the office and tell him they had to sue the APA or DEC, or sue the people suing the APA and DEC, or both. Harold was Chairman of the NYS Public Service Commission, a State Senator and a driving force for Wilderness protection.

For more information on the Adirondack Council call toll-free at 1-877-873-2240, or go to our website at www.adirondackcouncil.org. The Adirondack Council offers competitive, full time college internship programs in both its Albany office (government relations and communications) and its Elizabethtown headquarters (conservation, government monitoring, administration, fund development, membership, photographic archives, public events).