Forestry or Forever Wild:  
The Debate over Logging in the Forest Preserve, 1885–1894

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Abstract
During the period between the establishment of the Adirondack Forest Preserve in 1885 and the adoption of the Forever Wild clause in 1894, much of the debate concerning the Adirondacks centered around the future of logging on Forest Preserve land. Early multiple-use conservationists such as Gifford Pinchot and Bernhard Fernow saw sustainable logging as a justifiable use of Forest Preserve land, and attempted to demonstrate the possibilities of scientific forestry on several private preserves. Strict preservation advocates, fearful of commercial interests controlling state resources, lobbied for total protection of all Forest Preserve land, finally granted during the Constitutional Convention of 1894.

Between the creation of the New York State Forest Preserve in 1885 and the establishment of the Adirondack Park in 1892, an unusual, and in many ways untenable, situation developed regarding land holdings in the Adirondack region. For one thing, no one inside or outside the New York State legislature was really sure whether the Forest Preserve was to be permanently off-limits to loggers. For another, it was unclear whether the state intended to own all of the land within what became the Park’s boundaries, and if so, how the state would acquire that land. Certainly, many people recognized the problems of unregulated logging and the impact that large-scale cutting of trees had had on watershed protection and, to a lesser degree, on the area’s aesthetic and recreational value. Following the creation of the Forest Preserve, however, the primary question facing state legislators centered around the future status of logging on Forest Preserve land. The subsequent debate over the role and purpose of the Forest Preserve with respect to logging was a watershed moment in defining what the Adirondack Park was to become, and how its natural resources would be utilized.

Initially, it seems, the intention among many in New York’s political machinery was that logging would eventually be resumed at some undetermined point in the future once the forest had recovered and regained its capacity for regulating water flow. In 1884, a New York legislature-appointed committee led by noted Harvard arboriculture professor Charles Sprague Sargent had suggested as much, proposing that a Forest Commission be established to oversee management of state land in the Adirondacks. One of America’s earliest advocates of scientific forestry, Sargent was skeptical of proposals to log the Forest Preserve, having seen the devastating results of unrestrained logging in the area over most of the nineteenth century. Yet, the expectation of the Sargent Committee seems to have been that, after the lands of the Forest Preserve had recovered sufficiently, the state would contract with private lumbermen to practice scientific forestry on the Forest Preserve, under the Commission’s watchful eye.

This was not a foregone conclusion, however. The wording of the Forest Preserve Law of 1885, largely adopted on the strength of the Commission’s recommendations, is noteworthy in its ambiguity with respect to logging. Although it was the first document to declare that the “lands now or hereafter constituting the forest preserve shall be forever kept as wild forest lands,” the law neither permitted nor absolutely prohibited logging on Forest Preserve land. This ambiguity created a great deal of confusion, not only among lumbermen and timber companies from around the region who resented the prospect of so much potential timberland becoming permanently “locked-up,” but also among those prohibitionists who wanted to ensure that the integrity of Adirondack forests would be safeguarded. Scientific foresters like Sargent were stationed in an ideological middle-ground: though deeply concerned about forest health, Sargent was also opposed to any absolute prohibition of logging, simply on the utilitarian grounds that preservation was not the “highest and best use” of productive timberland, an argument seconded by other proponents of scientific forest management. Earlier in 1885, while debate over the status of public lands raged both in the press and in the legislature, Dr. Franklin B. Hough, who had earlier become the first Chief of Forestry in the United States Department of Agriculture, introduced a bill into the New York Legislature proposing that state lands in the Adirondacks be designated a Forest Reserve rather than a Forest Preserve. Such a designation would have allowed scientific forestry on public land in the Adirondacks, theoretically providing an income in perpetuity to the state, a prospect that no doubt appealed to many in the Legislature.

The law establishing the Forest Preserve that Governor David B. Hill eventually signed in 1885 did little to end the
debate over the use and purpose of the Adirondacks. Adirondack Forest Preserve land at that point totaled just over 680,000 acres (plus an additional 34,000 acres in the Catskills of southeastern New York) and was overseen by a three-man Forest Commission. For the next several years, most of the Commission's energies were aimed in two directions: first, in determining appropriate provisions for taxation of state lands; and second, in documenting threats to the Forest Preserve. These came in the form of insects and disease, brush fires from locomotives, natural occurrences such as landslides or windfalls, and theft from loggers. This problem of uncontrolled logging was of particular concern to the Commission, since it had been the primary reason for the very establishment of the Forest Preserve.6 Difficulties enforcing restrictions on logging of Forest Preserve land were compounded by dreadfully vague property lines:

because so much of the Forest Preserve had fallen back into the state's lap through tax default, in many cases the Commission simply did not know where its land began and private lands ended. Such confusion would create a nightmare for state surveyors, and a potential bonanza for land speculators and timber thieves, the latter of which often logged Forest Preserve lands with impunity, then either claimed ignorance of state boundaries or purchased the silence of local officials.7

In 1887, a law was introduced into the legislature (and passed without the governor's signature) allowing the state to exchange small isolated parcels of Forest Preserve land for other land adjoining larger Forest Preserve tracts.8 Then, in 1890, the legislature declared its intention to enlarge the state's Adirondack holdings through an appropriation of $25,000.9 This resolution was, as Philip Terrie has argued, the "true legislative origin of the Adirondack Park" for it was the "first meaningful move toward the state's assuming responsibility to consolidate its holdings."10 But it also compounded the confusion over how large the state's holdings were going to be and what form they were going to assume. What was the Forest Preserve going to consist of? What were to be the boundaries of the proposed Park? And what would happen to private land within that boundary once it was incorporated into the Park?

For its part, the Forest Commission seemed indifferent to these questions. In its 1890 Report, the Commission pled indifference to the first two, declaring it "immaterial whether the popular demand calls for a park or a preserve, provided the consequent legislation enables the state to acquire and hold the territory in one grand, unbroken domain."11 As for the fate of private lands in the region, the Commission was equally noncommittal: though it acknowledged that large private land holdings would likely continue to exist in any designated park for the foreseeable future, the Commission argued that private ownership of large estates would need to be reconciled with public interest. As Terrie suggests, the Commission seemed to feel that "private land in the Adirondacks enjoyed a status different from private land elsewhere," and that its location within a park would accord it privilege as well as responsibility; it is also possible that the Commission anticipated the use of legal instruments like scenic easements to preserve public access.12 But the Commission provided little guidance as to how private land was to be treated, a question that would remain largely unaddressed for another eight decades.

One immediate result of the state's lack of commitment regarding the status of various land within the Park was a frenzy of land-buying, either by those hoping to grab a piece of the Adirondack pie before the remainder was gobbled up by the state, or by land speculators, who foresaw skyrocketing land prices if Forest Preserve holdings were indeed to be permanently off-limits to logging or if the state decided to buy all lands within the Blue Line. Some of these people were Adirondack locals, people like Paul Smith, who eventually owned somewhere between thirty and forty thousand acres of upstate land.13 But many of those involved in this "rich man's land rush" were not from the immediate area. Rather, they were from wealthy New York City families, with names like Vanderbilt, Huntington, Whitney, and Morgan.14 These Gilded Age barons of the Industrial Revolution began buying up enormous chunks of Adirondack land in order to carve out private reserves for themselves, their families, and friends. Here they could escape from the pollution and congestion of rapidly growing urban centers, problems that, ironically, their own industrial empires had helped to create. Of course, various groups and individuals, as well as corporations, had been buying up large tracts of Adirondack real estate since before the state declared itself an active buyer in the region, though at a much less frenzied pace than that which occurred in the 1890s. With transportation made easier by the introduction of railroads in the 1880s and 90s, however, the door was thrown open to a new kind of landowner in the Adirondacks: the landed gentry.

The arrival of wealthy landowners in the Adirondacks proved to be one of the most important trends leading up to the establishment of the Adirondack Park. Interestingly, their arrival can be seen as an event representing both a problem and solution that existed prior to the creation of the Park. On the one hand, the establishment of enormous estates by a handful of land barons — men like William Seward Webb, William C. Whitney, and Edward Hubbard Litchfield, each of whom owned tens of thousands of acres of Adirondack land — created a great deal of resentment among recreation advocates, who saw large sections of the Adirondacks being fenced off for private parks, and put off-limits to the general public.
At the same time, these large landowners stood to gain from expansion of the Forest Preserve, and perhaps even from the creation of an Adirondack Park, provided that it merely surrounded — but did not include — their own private holdings. As owners of huge parcels of land, estate-holders had both the incentive and the influence required to establish more and stronger protective measures for the Forest Preserve. For one thing, Forest Preserve strictures created a de facto buffer zone around any private holdings that were surrounded by public land. Owners could sell portions of their land to the state without worry that it would later be sold, logged, or developed. Large landowners also recognized that stronger protection and state acquisition of Forest Preserve lands decreased the supply of private land, thereby increasing the value of private lands that could either be sold, logged, or leased to other logging interests.

At the same time, however, the existence of the Forest Preserve meant that, for the time being at least, any logging that was to be done in the Adirondacks would have to be done on private holdings. Such a shift in resource utilization patterns created an implicit incentive for large estate holders to manage their timber holdings prudently, given the reduction in supply created by the existence of the Forest Preserve. For them, “cut and run” logging was becoming a less viable use of Adirondack timber.

The introduction of large estates into the Adirondack landscape, then, created a new dynamic along with it, as “enlightened” urban industrialists tried to accomplish on their own private preserves what had not been done earlier: namely, responsible logging in the Adirondacks. To accomplish this, several large landowners looked to the budding field of scientific forestry. In the eyes of many Americans today, Gifford Pinchot is rightly considered the father of forest conservation in America. Though not the first American to advocate scientific forest management, he is certainly the best known, and much of American forest policy can be traced directly or indirectly back to Pinchot. His fame today rests largely on his public career as Chief Forester in the United States Forest Service and, to a lesser degree, as Governor of Pennsylvania; what is less well-known is that Pinchot was also a private forester, who gained much of his knowledge of scientific forestry managing the private preserves of wealthy nineteenth century industrialists.16

Born to a prominent eastern family, Pinchot received his formal education in New York and Paris before entering Yale University with hopes of becoming a professional forester. Yale had no official program in forestry at the time (nor did any other American university) but Pinchot was determined, and so created his
own program of study, taking classes in botany, geology, and meteorology and reading such authors as George Perkins Marsh, Charles Sargent, and renowned French forester Jules Clave.

In the summer following his graduation from Yale in 1889, Pinchot traveled to the World Exposition in Paris, where he not only saw several exhibits on European forest management, but also met with several prominent German foresters, who had been practicing scientific forestry since the 1850s. Convinced that European methods of forest management were needed on his own side of the Atlantic, Pinchot returned to America determined to emulate European forest practices; to his initial dismay, however, he found little support for scientific forestry within the American public domain, and so set himself up as a private forester. Using family connections, Pinchot eventually contracted to manage George W. Vanderbilt’s Biltmore estate in western North Carolina, one of the earliest large experiments in scientific forest management in America.17 Pinchot managed the Biltmore estate and the adjacent Pisgah Forest — an area of about one hundred thousand acres — from 1892 until 1895. The experiment was fairly successful, and despite Vanderbilt’s lack of enthusiasm for the project, Pinchot was able to show a modest profit for his efforts.18

More importantly, however, the young forester was able to attract some attention to the principles of scientific forestry through an elaborate exhibit on the Biltmore project that Vanderbilt funded and Pinchot presented at the World’s Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893. The exhibit gained considerable attention and drew considerable praise. Garden and Forest, one of the most influential conservation magazines of the period, hailed the Biltmore experiment as “the first attempt... on a large scale in America to manage a piece of forest property on the scientific principles which prevail in France, Germany, and other European countries.”19 Consequently, Pinchot’s theories and techniques of responsible logging caught the attention of several wealthy estate-holders in upstate New York, who owned huge tracts of Adirondack forest land and wanted to figure out some way of making those lands pay for themselves without attracting the scrutiny of the New York Legislature.20

William Seward Webb was George W. Vanderbilt’s brother-in-law and, through Vanderbilt, became interested in Pinchot’s forest conservation experiments. Webb was the owner of more than 112,000 acres of Adirondack land, which he developed into a game preserve and wanted to manage for its timber resources. Webb considered himself an enlightened conservationist, despite the fact that in 1892 he had constructed the Adirondack and St. Lawrence Railroad, for the dual purposes of creating access to the region for himself and providing transportation through the area for tourists and goods.21 That same year, Webb commissioned Pinchot to conduct a preliminary survey of his forestlands. Pinchot, along with other conservationists such as Charles Sargent and Bernhard Fernow, was concerned about unregulated logging practices in the Adirondacks, and was anxious for the New York Legislature to pursue a policy of scientific forestry. Pinchot was particularly concerned about the condition of the Forest Preserve which, despite protection, continued to be cut due to unclear titles and depredation. Such destructive practices, the young forester feared, made it less likely that any logging would be permitted on the Forest Preserve, since unrestrained logging had been the primary reason for establishing the Forest Preserve originally. Pinchot’s fear would prove justified when, in 1894, Article VII, Section 7 — the “forever wild” clause — was added to the State Constitution, effectively banning all logging on Forest Preserve lands.22

Stymied in his efforts to practice sustainable logging on the Forest Preserve and unsure whether logging would ever resume on state land in the region, Pinchot turned his attention to the large private land holdings within the Blue Line, lands whose ultimate fate in the 1890s was still to be determined. A logical ally was William Seward Webb. In early spring of 1896, Webb commissioned Pinchot to begin a detailed survey of Ne-Ha-Sa-Ne Park, a 40,000-acre tract of virgin forest that lay within Webb’s larger estate;23 the following year, the young forester completed a working plan for Ne-Ha-Sa-Ne which, according to Pinchot biographer Harold T. Pinkett, was to become a model for other American foresters. Especially noteworthy in the plan was a statement of rules for the cutting of timber which emphasized the forester’s authority in the marking and cutting of trees, stipulated fire prevention measures, stressed protection of young growth and provided penalties to lumbermen for noncompliance with the rules.24

So important to Pinchot were the lessons he learned at Ne-Ha-Sa-Ne, in fact, that they formed the basis of a book he would publish in 1898 on forest management techniques entitled The Adirondack Spruce. In his study, Pinchot meticulously documented much of the survey data which he collected on Ne-Ha-Sa-Ne, such as the various habitats, types of each tree, and even relative sizes and densities of each species within a given habitat. Pinchot also went into great detail discussing what he called the “basis for forest management,” or need for responsible harvesting, especially in areas where only one species (in this case spruce) was desired. The fact that Ne-Ha-Sa-Ne was largely virgin forest was extremely important to Pinchot, for it allowed him to attack problems that all lumbermen faced when presented with what he termed “valueless species.” Although he argued that “from a technical point of view, the condition of the virgin forest is not good, because much of the land, which might be producing marketable timber, is occupied by worthless and scrubby trees,” Pinchot realized that it was "not possible
to produce a pure forest of Spruce over a large area." He was not even sure that a monoculture spruce forest should be the goal, arguing that "without doubt in time [hardwoods'] value will have increased to such an extent that their presence will be extremely desirable."  

Though Pinchot's ideas about sustainable use and systemic health were largely driven by purely economic considerations, they nonetheless laid the foundation for land-ethical attitudes that would later become apparent with respect to Adirondack forests. Although Pinchot's fairly mercenary attitude toward forest use put him at odds with true preservationists, it was an equally far cry from that of earlier loggers in the Adirondacks, and The Adirondack Spruce was widely read and discussed among the large landowners of upstate New York, many of whom sought to emulate Pinchot's success. William C. Whitney, a wealthy lawyer-politician-sportsman whose own estate lay adjacent to Webb's, and Adirondack lumber baron Pat Moynihan were but two other large landholders who attempted to put into practice Pinchot's conservation gospel, albeit with varying degrees of success.  

Along with individual preserves, several large hunting and recreation clubs were established in the Adirondacks between 1885 and 1900. One of the largest and most important of these was the Adirondack League Club, founded in 1890. Like that of many early clubs, the membership of the League Club consisted mostly of downstate urbanites, many of whom had been coming to the Adirondacks for several years to hunt, fish, or simply to relax. Unlike some of the other recreational clubs in the area, though, the League Club was fairly specific in its intention to promote responsible logging, marking it as one of the more progressive such organizations in the region.  

Perhaps because it was formed during the period of debate over the question of logging on Forest Preserve lands, the League Club professed an acute awareness of the need to promote responsible land stewardship. In its original 1890 charter, the Club declared as the primary objects of its 125,000-acre reserve  

1) The preservation and conservation of the Adirondack forests and the proper protection of game and fish in the Adirondack region; 2) The establishment and promotion of an improved system of forestry; 3) The maintenance of an ample preserve for the benefits of its members for the purposes of hunting, fishing, rest and recreation.

Certainly, these statements reflect self-serving desires of the Club for unblemished recreational experiences for its members as much as they do enlightened goals for maintaining Adirondack forest integrity. With respect to the Forest Preserve, moreover, Club members realized that strict protection of the Forest Preserve could only benefit them: for one thing, state-owned lands could act as a natural buffer to their own holdings, effectively increasing the size of recreation lands available to them; for another, an absolute prohibition of Forest Preserve logging would translate into a smaller supply of marketable timber in the region, thereby driving up the value of the Club's own holdings. As for logging their own land, it could be argued that the Club's stance toward forest management reflected a fear of state acquisition of the Club's holdings, of which "93,000 acres were covered with virgin forest, the largest contiguous tract of its kind then remaining in the Adirondacks."  

But even under such a scenario, the Club stood to realize a handsome profit, and the land in any case would remain available for recreational use as part of the public domain.  

Still, it seems fairly clear that the Adirondack League Club was interested in providing some sort of model of responsible forest management. Actually, the Club was in a unique position with respect to the use of its forestlands. On the one hand, it needed the income generated by logging to repay its own members' investments: although composed primarily of wealthy businessmen, the League Club was formed partly under the premise that it would be a profitable concern, and it lacked the seemingly endless pool of resources that many estate-holding individuals had. Unlike purely commercial enterprises, though, the Club had an equally powerful interest in maintaining the integrity of its forests, both as wildlife habitat and as recreational playground. In effect, then, this put the League Club in the unique position of needing — rather than simply wanting — to manage its timber resources responsibly. From a purely practical standpoint, an uncut forest was unaffordable and an overcut one unusable.

To develop a plan for its own forests, the League Club turned to Bernhard Fernow, Chief Forester of the United States Department of Agriculture, and one of the Club's own charter members. Fernow, who had helped to write the Forest Preserve Act of 1885, had an interest in demonstrating the possibilities of scientific management just as Pinchot did, and his management plan for the League Club in 1890 actually predated Pinchot's forestry experiment at Biltmore by about a year.

The establishment of scientific forestry management practices in the Adirondacks was a crucial step in the ongoing evolution of land ethical attitudes in the Adirondacks. Its appearance marks a clear acknowledgment that unregulated logging could not continue indefinitely if the forests were to survive, and that economic uses of the land had to be reconciled with the forests' ability to satisfy those uses. The rise of professional foresters like Pinchot and Fernow, moreover, signaled the rise of conservation management throughout the country, the practice of which Pinchot continued in his later role as head of the United States Forest Service.

Yet, although scientific forestry was beginning to take hold in the Adirondacks
by the end of the nineteenth century, the major logging issue in the Park continued to be the future logging status of the Forest Preserve. Though foresters like Pinchot would continue to encourage sustainable logging practices on private land, they also felt strongly that Forest Preserve lands ought to be similarly managed, once they had recovered from earlier cuttings. To the utilitarian forester, there was simply no excuse for forests not to be logged, provided that such could be done properly and under professional supervision. Unfortunately for Pinchot, not everyone shared his view that all loggers would act responsibly if given proper guidance and instruction; nor was there a consensus that all forestlands should necessarily be "managed" at all. The tug of war between newly defined preservationists and progressive conservationists over logging on the Forest Preserve would continue almost unabated for another twenty years.

The decade of the 1890s was a period of great change in the Adirondacks, change resulting from both political and economic activities. For the logging industry, the nineties marked the beginning of the paper pulp boom, in which softwood trees — mostly pine and spruce in the Adirondacks — were used for paper pulp on a large scale. Softwoods had always constituted the majority of trees taken from Adirondack forests, largely because they float (unlike hardwoods) and so could be transported more easily down the region's myriad waterways. Beyond that, most lumbermen saw pine and spruce as the forests' most valuable species, and generally left the hardwoods behind. What this situation created, of course, was an imbalance in the natural environment, as hardwoods spared the ax came to dominate the northern forest. The rise of the paper pulp industry, moreover, meant that even the smallest softwoods could be cut, which only exacerbated the problems of hardwood succession, since almost no softwoods remained to re-establish themselves. Shortsighted logging companies operating under a "cut-out-and-get-out" policy often overlooked such problems, but recreation clubs like the Adirondack League Club that (at least in theory) planned to manage their lands indefinitely could not ignore them.

Concurrent with the problems of maintaining diversity, though, was a desire to "create" an environment that encouraged specific plant and animal species to reproduce. The purpose of forest management was not to maintain the most natural system, but to create the most economically viable one. Unlike preservationists (such as Sierra Club founder John Muir) who felt that untouched forests were the pinnacle of God's creation and so ought to remain unaltered, conservation foresters like Fernow and Pinchot wanted to change the forests they managed, either to stimulate the growth of marketable trees, or to encourage the reproduction of certain wild animals. The changes invoked by forest management techniques, then, were not only changes of degree but of kind as well, driven by the desire to increase the numbers of certain species while discouraging — or in the case of predators, entirely eliminating — others. White-tailed deer were (and still are) considered the most desirable game animal in the Adirondacks, and scientific foresters often tried to manage their employers' lands so that deer populations were enhanced and enlarged. Such enhancements were necessary to maintain deer populations simply because, while deer have always existed in the Adirondacks, they did not survive in large numbers prior to the arrival of white settlers and loggers. As a mature, mixed hardwood-softwood forest with few open clearings and little undergrowth, the Adirondack region prior to Euro-American settlement was more suited to moose than to deer, the latter of which prefer to eat pioneer tree species like cedar and birch. It is likely, in fact, that white-tails in the Adirondacks thrived only in areas that had been recently cleared of climax species like pine and spruce, either by natural events such as fires, blowdowns and beaver dams, or by unnatural ones like logging. One result of the massive logging operations that took place at the
turn of the century, then, was the opening up of large areas to deer, which increased their population well beyond its historic capacity in the region. The result of conservation forestry, while not necessarily natural, was no less desirable to hunters and hunting organizations.36

The establishment of the paper pulp industry in the Adirondacks created a shift in the land-use dynamic of the Adirondack region. The ability to use logs of almost any size or quality meant that lands which had already been cleared of their large softwoods could be logged further (and more often) for their smaller pine, spruce, and hemlock. This development had a number of ramifications. One was that logging concerns suddenly had a reason to hang onto lands that were earlier forfeited to the state as worthless, once stripped of pine and spruce.38 An attendant result was that Adirondack land began to increase in value, making it more difficult for the state to purchase land and so less likely that it would ever acquire all lands inside the Blue Line.

In 1893, possibly as a result of the increased value of timberlands, the Forest Commission recommended and the State Legislature passed a law allowing the sale of timber on any part of the Forest Preserve. Though presented as a measure ensuring protection of the Forest Preserve under the aegis of progressive conservation, the bill was seen by many New Yorkers as a concession to logging interests, and many citizens began to doubt the integrity of the Forest Commission. In response, Governor Roswell P. Flower disbanded the Commission, replacing it with a five-man commission the following year. Along with confirming that “it did not intend to acquire all lands inside the Adirondack Park boundary,” this new body proceeded to do just the opposite: it began the sale of timber on the Forest Preserve, contracting to sell the timber on 17,468 acres for $53,400.38 In signing the bill, Governor Flower argued that if from so small a portion of the Forest Preserve, so considerable a revenue is received without injury to the forest, we can reasonably look forward to the time when the Forest Preserve will not only be a great conservator of our water courses and the restorer of health, but will contribute a large part of the money required for the support of State Government.39

The 1893 “cutting law” and impending sale of Forest Preserve timber sparked a great deal of opposition throughout the state, not only among those who opposed logging outright, but...
even among those who advocated scientific forestry. Bernard Fernow was very critical of the “cutting law,” charging that the Forest Commission had neither a plan nor a policy to properly manage its holdings, a charge which prompted Garden and Forest to lament that “it would seem that the time has already come when the Park ought to be preserved from its preservers.”

One reason that the opposition to logging on the Forest Preserve was so adamant and widespread was that, despite the several private preserves and individual estates that were attempting to manage their timber holdings responsibly, much of the land within the new Adirondack Park was still owned by purely for-profit corporations. Like many other industries of the late nineteenth century, large logging concerns such as International Paper, St. Regis Paper, and Finch, Pruyn and Company began to consolidate their holdings (and concomitant influence) in the Adirondacks and elsewhere. Many Park advocates doubted that these entities would act any more responsibly than they had in the previous decades. The rise of the paper pulp industry, in fact, convinced many New Yorkers that upstate forests would eventually be decimated by loggers, a fear justified by the spectacular growth of that industry in the 1890s. By 1900, fully one-third of all paper pulp mills in the United States were in New York, and the majority of the wood for these mills was logged locally. Railroads accelerated the process, as lines such as William Seward Webb’s Adirondack and St. Lawrence were able to reach deep into the heart of the central Adirondacks and drag endless carloads of timber out. Despite the creation of the Forest Preserve, in fact, 1890 witnessed the beginning of the most intensive logging ever done in the Adirondacks, largely to satisfy the paper pulp industry. Small-scale, experimental successes in scientific forestry notwithstanding, the combination of more railroads and paper pulp mills created the potential for another assault on the lands of the Forest Preserve.

Railroads also created another problem, one that, ironically, would actually help to guarantee protection for the Forest Preserve: the threat of fire. The greatest argument for strict preservation of the Forest Preserve probably came from mother nature herself, in the form of drought which gripped much of the eastern United States in 1894. Fires, many caused by sparks from locomotives and intensified by the slash left by loggers, raged through much of the Adirondack region. The looming threat of severe water shortages downstream recalled earlier problems from logging, and reconfirmed the worst fears of many urban New Yorkers regarding future water supplies.

Collective distrust of the Forest Commission, legislature, and logging industry, combined with real and imagined threats of fire and drought, were enough to move New Yorkers to finally demand comprehensive and lasting protection for the Forest Preserve. Conveniently for those seeking to take the decision-making out of the hands of the state legislature, a constitutional convention was scheduled for the summer of 1894, and some saw the possibility of incorporating protective measures into the constitution itself, thereby granting the ultimate authority over the fate of the Forest Preserve to the people of New York State.

Interestingly, the drive for stronger legislative protection of the Forest Preserve was spearheaded partly by the New York Board of Trade and Transportation. Representing the interests of New York City businessmen who feared that destruction of upstate watersheds would result in a railroad monopoly on transportation into New York City, the Board of Trade was anxious to prevent railroad and logging interests from manipulating future lawmakers, and saw in the upcoming 1894 Constitutional Convention a means of granting ironclad protection to the Forest Preserve. Along with downstate businessmen, many other interest groups spoke up in favor of strict protection, from preservationists to sportsmen to fire insurance companies. This unusually broad alliance was sufficient to convince convention delegates that constitutional protection of the Forest Preserve was not only desirable, but also necessary. The result was the addition to the New York State Constitution of Article VII, Section 7:

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.

To the great relief of preservationists, the lands of the Adirondack Forest Preserve were at last beyond the manipulative reach of unscrupulous logging interests.

Still, questions remained. One was the question of how long “forever” was. From the scientific forester’s point of view, support for “forever wild” seemed to conflict with the idea of utilitarian management. Yet, as Frank Graham explains,

Those [in favor of constitutional protection] who were also foresters were in favor of prohibition until another state Constitutional Convention might be called in twenty years or so, at which time it was hoped that both spreading enlightenment and refined forestry techniques might once again make the preserves available for commercial exploitation.

In the meantime, apparently, it would be up to professional foresters like Gifford Pinchot and Bernard Fernow to spread that enlightenment and refine the techniques that might allay the fears that spurred the creation of the Forest Preserve in the first place.
The other great, unresolved issue surrounding “forever wild” concerned the ultimate fate of private lands within the Park. How would they be affected by the strictures placed on the Forest Preserve? Would they be subject to similar restrictions? And how would local residents survive and live in a Park dominated by “forever wild” Forest Preserve and large private holdings? The issue of logging on the Forest Preserve would indeed be settled at the 1915 Convention, when the “forever wild” clause was retained and the Forest Preserve permanently protected; many of the questions regarding the use of private land, however, would be tabled for almost eighty years.45

Footnotes

2Graham, Adirondack Park, 100.
4Despite Colvin’s passion for protecting the Adirondacks, he can not really be considered a true preservationist in the present-day sense of the word. As Philip Terrie has argued, “[w]hen it came to policy, Colvin was a conservationist, but he was never a preservationist, even though his own narratives of exploration were implicit arguments for preserving the wilderness.” See Terrie, Forever Wild, 77-78.
6Van Valkenburgh, Adirondack Forest Preserve, 40-43.
8Van Valkenburgh, Adirondack Forest Preserve, 45.
10Terrie, Contested Terrain, 99.
12Terrie, Contested Terrain, 99. The commission's report was perhaps intentionally vague, claiming that the “exclusion of the public from the private preserve lands can be, by negotiation and mutual concession, removed.” How this exclusion was to be accomplished was not discussed in the report.
15William West Durant himself provides the best example of this strategy. The last three Great Camp sites he sold — Uncas, Sagamore, and Kill Kare — each consisted of only 1000-1500 acres, just enough acreage to enclose a small private lake for each site just south of Raquette Lake. He then sold the land surrounding the preserves to the state, effectively isolating each of the individual camps. Kamp Kill Kare, perhaps not coincidentally, was acquired by L.t. Governor Timothy Woodruff, who had negotiated the purchase of the surrounding lands by the State, thereby gaining the equivalent of an enormous private preserve through the purchase of just 1,030 acres, including the whole of Lake Kora. See Craig Gilborn, Durant: The Fortunes and Woodland Camps of a Family in the Adirondacks (Blue Mountain Lake, N.Y.: Adirondack Museum, 1981), 109-109.
16One of the best and most recent works on Pinchot’s professional career is Harold T. Pinkett, Gifford Pinchot: Private and Public Forester (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970).
17Pinkett, Pinchot, 17-19.
18Pinkett, Pinchot, 22-30.
19Pinkett, Pinchot, 26.
20William Seward Webb was one of the first large landowners to run into legal difficulties with the state over the use of his land. In 1895, the state appropriated $600,000 to acquire 66,000 acres of Webb’s land, rendered inaccessible to logging after the construction of the Stillwater Reservoir. See Barbara McMartin, The Great Forest of the Adirondacks (Utica, N.Y.: North Country Books, 1994), 100-101.
22Pinkett, Pinchot, 32-33.
23McMartin, Great Forest, 40-41.
24Pinkett, Pinchot, 37.
26Pinkett, Adirondack Spruce, 110.
27Pinkett, Pinchot, 37.
28Graham, Adirondack Park, 137.
30Terrie, Contested Terrain, 122.
31Grady, The Adirondacks, Fulton Chain—Big Moose Region, 255.
32Terrie, "Grandest Private Park," 76.
34McMartin, Great Forest, 117.
35McMartin, Great Forest, 27, 38. McMartin notes that, as early as the 1830s, "when the lumberman spoke of "merchantable timber" [italics hers], he meant only spruce; nothing else had its market value." Pine for its part, diminished in importance as a timber species beginning at roughly the same time, though it would continue to be harvested.
38Van Valkenburgh, Adirondack Forest Preserve, 57.
39Graham, Adirondack Park, 124-125
40Quoted in Graham, Adirondack Park, 126-127.
41The frenetic pace, of course, could not continue indefinitely. According to Barbara McMartin, "by 1910, more than half the pulpwood consumed in New York pulp and paper mills came from [Canada]."
42McMartin, Great Forest, 121.
43Graham, Adirondack Park, 126.
45Graham, Adirondack Park, 128.