

Adirondack Park Trends Analysis

By **RAYMOND P. CURRAN**

The Adirondack Park Agency has prepared a plan to gather resource data to be used in long-term Park management. As a priority step in the development of the Adirondack Park Agency's Strategic Action Plan — an effort to develop policies to help guide the Agency into the future — a staff team was assembled in 1999 to examine the issue of monitoring trends in Park resources as a tool for assessing progress in Park management. As conceived by the Agency, the monitoring of trends was to cover both natural and cultural resources as resources of special significance. The staff was also asked to identify suitable baseline data, timelines, partners who might aid in design or implementation of data analysis and, most importantly, appropriate sources of funding for the effort. The staff group was asked to develop a written plan for such an analysis of trends.

The Agency is not without a statutory basis for this interest. Section 801 of the enabling legislation creating the Adirondack Park Agency in 1971 states that the Agency is to be a "forum for developing long range park policy" and provide for "a continuing planning process." In addition the Agency is the administrator within the Adirondack Park of both the New York State Freshwater Wetlands Act and the New York State Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act. Agency statutory respon-

sibilities extend to the private lands along State designated rivers. The wetlands law places a heavy emphasis on providing data to landowners, particularly the location of the outer boundary of wetlands and wetlands maps. Under Section 816 of the Adirondack Park Agency Act, the Agency is also charged with an ongoing role in planning the use of Forest Preserve lands and must periodically review the master plan and prepare amendments for presentation to the Governor. The on-going planning responsibilities, wetlands mapping, and wetland delineation responsibilities have led the Agency to assume a very strong role in developing and maintaining geographic data about Park resources. As a result the Agency continues to be a repository for geographic data that is well-suited for the monitoring of trends in resources and a reason for taking a leadership role in Park trends analysis.

Beginning its work, the Agency staff team identified strategic benefits flowing from the effort, the most important being:

- Agency decisions will be based more on trends observed from comprehensive and scientific monitoring of natural, cultural and economic resources.
- As a result of identifying resource trends the Agency can articulate and take action to offset adverse future scenarios.
- Agency decisions will provide a foundation to sustain the Park over the long-term.

Working over several months, the team began first with a comprehensive list of more than 100 resources of interest identified by various groups since the first reports of the 1971 Temporary Study Commission on the Future of the Adirondacks. The team also looked at the statutory purposes of all legislation bearing upon the mission of the Agency. Since these resources were to be measured regularly to determine trends and to provide information to Park policy makers and managers, the team felt that the list should be relatively short so that the effort was manageable. Subsequently, the team, which was composed of persons with a wide variety of experience in many disciplines, set priorities and identified 18 natural and cultural resource areas in four resource categories as priorities for trends monitoring. Under these 18 resource areas, the team identified 59 data elements as indicators of the health of the Adirondack Park.

The four resource categories and associated resource areas include:

- 1) Economic, fiscal and cultural resources (Economics, Fiscal and Public Services, Housing, Community Cultural Character and Visitation);
- 2) Park character (Open Space, Scenic Vistas, State Land, Travel Corridors, Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers and Shorelines, Community Character);
- 3) Physical resources (Air Resources, Surface Water, Ground Water); and,

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4) Biological resources (Forested Lands, Uncommon and Vulnerable Lands, Shoreline and Riparian Areas, Wetlands, Wildlife).

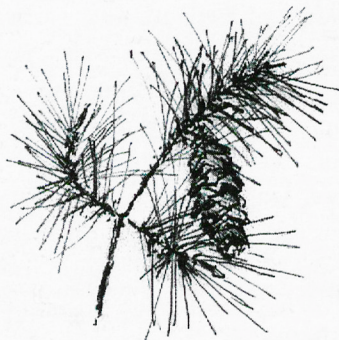
A comprehensive view of Park trends is insured by articulating such a broad range of data collection in many resource categorizes.

The team identified measurable indicators for each resource area which we felt were appropriate measures and which were realistically attainable. Examples of the 59 indicators include employment and payroll by industry (economics); roadside visual character (travel corridors); population levels of focal species (wildlife); and water quality of oligotrophic lakes (uncommon and vulnerable lands).

For each resource area or indicator we identified related supporting information which we felt would make the task of assembling a trends analysis more achievable. We identified worthwhile data sources, likely partners for collaboration, and potential funding sources. For example, for the resource area of "Housing," the source of data was identified to be the NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal and the U.S Census Bureau. We also felt that regional and local planning and economic development organizations would share an interest in assembling and analyzing data related to "Housing" and would thus be likely collaborators in seeking funding opportunities.

Because the Agency has an interest in periodically reviewing the State Land Master Plan, the gathering of data to determine trends in this resource will be particularly valuable. For example, "monitoring use patterns of individual State land units" and "perceptions of users" — two in-

dicators called for in the Plan — will provide insight into the changing impacts to the State Land resource. These same data are of interest to the DEC land managers responsible for management of the individual units. The Agency's trends analysis plan is well-correlated to the Department's priority planning effort to update unit management plans.



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In June of 2001 the Agency Board accepted the staff report and asked for a specific focus on continuing efforts on trends analysis. The Agency asked the staff to promote the concept of trends analysis at conferences and technical meetings and to distribute the document. It also asked the staff to go to work on determining wetlands trends as a priority activity.

Among the meetings the staff attended to promote the plan was the September 2001 meeting of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks in Lake Placid. This meeting focused on biological surveys and trends analysis. The staff also promoted the plan at Local Government Day in March 2002 and the Annual Meeting of the Adirondack Research Consortium (ARC) in May of 2002, both in Saranac Lake. Both of these meetings generated much interest in the concept and identified potential partners. The ARC meeting included a session devoted to the issue of trends analysis

and included a range of papers relating different geographic levels of resource information.

With respect to the monitoring of trends in the wetlands resource, Agency staff secured funding and initiated work in September of 2001 on a study to look at wetlands change over the period of the mid 1980s to mid 1990s. This study, which is still under way, is measuring wetland change in 26 separate geographic areas of the Park by comparing 1985 and 1995 high altitude color infrared aerial photography. Net gain or loss of wetlands will be detected as well as will the shifts in cover type within wetlands. Furthermore, the aim of the study is to attribute changes to specific causal factors such as flooding by beaver and to report changes by major watershed. It is expected the wetland change work will be complete in December of 2002.

The Plan serves to identify those areas where the Agency believes more research and data development will be most efficiently used and, if completed, would enable a comprehensive and balanced view of the multiple, interrelated economic, social and environmental factors which are integral to the dynamics of this Park. Although work has begun in several subject areas, researchers, Park residents, agencies, volunteers and other potential partners who would like to be involved with trends monitoring in the Park are encouraged to use the Trends Monitoring Plan as a tool to explore ways that their interests may fit in with the collective approach set forth in the Plan. The document is available at Agency Headquarters or on the internet at www.state.ny.us by following the links to government agencies, the Adirondack Park Agency home page and then to the "Documents" section.