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## Wild Island in a Civilized Sea

by Michael G. DeNunzio

Created in 1892, the Adirondack Park was the first "countryside" park in the world. Its founders specifically incorporated a complex pattern of public and private lands, including thriving communities, within its boundary. It contains 6 million acres, covers one-fifth of New York State, and is equal in size to neighboring Vermont.

Some 58 percent of the Adirondack Park is private land, devoted principally to forestry, agriculture, and open-space recreation. The park is home to 130,000 permanent and 210,000 seasonal residents, and hosts an estimated 9 million visitors annually.

The remaining 42 percent of the Adirondack Park is publicly owned Forest Preserve, protected as "forever wild" by the State Constitution since 1894. One million acres of these public lands, representing one-sixth of the entire park, are designated as Wilderness, where a wide range of recreational activities may be enjoyed in an incomparable natural setting. Sixteen separate wilderness units, ranging in size from about 7,000 to over 220,000 acres, are scattered throughout the park. Motorized vehicles and equipment are banned from wilderness areas to preserve quiet and solitude, to protect sensitive wildlife, and to help prevent overuse. The

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majority of public land (more than 1.3 million acres) is classified as Wild Forest, in which motorized uses are permitted on designated waters, roads, and trails.

Plants and wildlife abound in the Adirondack Park, including many found nowhere else in New York State. Uncut ancient forests cover tens of thousands of acres. Ironically, much of the park is more wild and natural today than it was a century ago, when irresponsible logging practices and forest fires ravaged much of the region. Someday, all native wildlife, including those species totally eliminated from the Adirondacks during the last century, such as the wolf, lynx, and moose, may live and breed in the park once more.

The western and southern Adirondacks are a gentle landscape of hills, lakes, ponds, and streams. In the northeast are the High Peaks, 46 of them 4,000 feet or higher, 11 with alpine summits that rise above timberline.

The Adirondacks include the headwaters of five major drainage systems: the Hudson, Black, St. Lawrence, and Mohawk rivers, and the New York portion of the Lake Champlain basin. Within the park are 2,800 lakes and ponds and more than 1,500 miles of rivers fed by an estimated 30,000 miles of brooks and streams.