

# The Adirondacks: A Road Back

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## FORUM

In order to consider the future of the Adirondack region and its people in a sensible, "non-crisis driven" way we must eliminate the extreme crisis mentality from the debate. The cries of, "last chance ... if we don't act now it will be lost forever ... development threatens biosystem ..." etc. must at least, if just temporarily, be suspended.

Because this is impossible for many who consider themselves environmental policy shapers, one can only offer a premise that these habitual crisis creators can view through their kaleidoscopes as hypothetical, abstract fiction or whatever suits. Assuming then that the Adirondack/Champlain region is not in crisis we can proceed logically within a framework to a sensible conclusion.

We have to also assume that the issue is purely for the environment, in an absolute way and not subjectively driven into the areas of aesthetics, lifestyle, philosophy, etc. And in an even greater leap for this exercise we must assume that the forces of wealth, power and plunder of private resources are not a factor. Given all these parameters, we can consider the environment, the future of this region and its people.

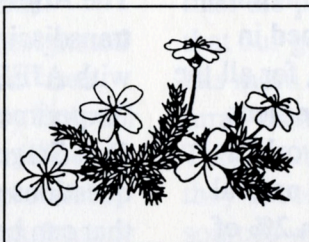
If there is anything close to an actual crisis in our communities it is the economic environment that currently exists. Existing programs — Northern Forest Lands Study and Lake Champlain Management Conference — do not address the regional economy meaningfully, instead treating this as more of a nuisance than an aspect of the region requiring attention. The Management Conference does have an Economic subcommittee to the Technical Advisory Com-

mittee ... chaired, however, by a representative of the Adirondack Park Agency. There is always some emphasis towards tourism, upon which our communities would perish if they were totally dependent.

Consider our resources, our infrastructure, and our markets. It must be mentioned again that I am approaching this from the stand-

point that sustainable development (and the economy needed for such), environmental integrity, and a true model of humankind working successfully and compatibly with available resources is the goal. We have abundant resources (pure water, timber, minerals) in the Adirondack/Champlain region. We have, particularly in the eastern Adirondacks, a railway, road systems, and an international waterway linking us to major markets only hours away. We certainly have the ability to take raw materials to finished products, market them in the large population centers economically and thus be competitive. What is missing? Of course there are factors such as the hostile business climate in New York State, but given the numerous positive aspects, New York's drawbacks could be overcome.

The issue then reverts to the question, "What is wrong?" Every program, every study, every initiative has begun by looking at the Adirondack region as if it is in a glass bowl, with researchers poking and prodding, looking through some lens that only offers images but lacks substance. These initiatives have not sensed let alone understood the unspoken nuances that carry in them a measure of the spirit, tenacity, and endurance that has enabled a people to cling to their homeland when many





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would have left this mountain region that is harsh not only in climate but in its lack of opportunity due in large part to suppressive regulation.

If ever there can be conciliation, the environmental organizations will have to stop bandying about the chicken yard shouting about threatening skies. State and Federal government agencies/politicians must stop listening to the chicken littles and reach into the communities, not to find those who agree with their programs and proposals but rather to search for those who can make sensible judgments on the needs of their communities: in short, policy decisions from the ground up, from the people, the way it is supposed to work.

Contrary to certain opinions there is intelligence in the Adirondacks. Yet Michael DiNunzio's article in *AJES*, vol. 1 no. 1 refers to the 21st Commission Report in these terms: "Unfortunately, most Adirondackers never took the time to sift through the details before they judged its merits." Had Mr. DiNunzio any confidence in the intelligence of the Adirondack people he may have phrased that as follows — "Unfortunately, a number of Adirondackers took the time to read the report cover to cover and realized that its implementation would signal the end of a culture, and thus our plans were at least temporarily derailed."

Within our region exist the ingredients necessary for it to become a model for humanity. But disregard for individual sovereignty and the territorial unit of government that has been imposed on the region like a curse prevents the success of such an endeavor. Further, there is a myriad of agendas that a thousand voices clamor to put into effect. Among these is the reintroduction of extirpated species, e.g., the wolf.

Wolves disappeared because they and humans are not compatible. The notion that we

can reach back into time and grasp certain pieces, bring them forward and call the result natural is perverted. Nature is not static. The wolf does not belong here any more. To cling to these pieces of time is unnatural. The future may be exciting but we will have to let go of the notions that at some previous time nature was perfect. Assigning human qualities (i.e., that the wolf is a noble creature) gives proponents of reintroduction a sense of being part of a worthy endeavor. Wolves are only noble because someone believes they are. The wolf doesn't feel noble (nor do they dance). They feel tired, they feel hungry, they kill — sometimes to eat and sometimes just to kill. Species reintroduction is but one of the many agendas that come before consideration of the region's communities and their wellbeing.

I do not mind this exercise in futility, because it is honest and it is true. If we acknowledge that all initiatives must start locally, even if the ideas come from afar, that is a start. I do, however, believe that all rhetoric, debate, and theory on our future in the pure sense is moot. The forces at play are not on the same field. The issues are not open space, bio-diversity, viewsheds, soundsheds, critical environmental areas, pristine wilderness, etc. These, like the spotted owl in the Northwest, are but means to an end.

Will the people take no notice, much like the frog dying as the water gradually increases in temperature, or will they become aware of the gradual erosion of freedom (property is synonymous with freedom) and embark on the road to bring America back?

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