



**Board of Directors**

December 17, 2014

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**Chair**

Open Space Conservation Program  
NYS DEC

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625 Broadway  
Albany, NY 12233-4250

**RE: Public comments on draft 2014 NYS Open Space Conservation Plan**

James Long  
**Secretary**

Dear NYSDEC,

David Quinn  
**Treasurer**

Protect the Adirondacks applauds the release of the new draft 2014 Open Space Conservation Plan by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). This plan marks 25 years that the State of New York has undertaken serious long-term planning to protect critical natural resources, wildlife habitat and provide an array of outdoor recreational opportunities. Throughout New York's history the state has acted boldly to protect lands in good and bad economic times with bipartisan support that has spanned generations. This plan is the latest installment in this proud tradition.

Joshua Axelrod  
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General Comments

**Environmental Protection Fund is Underfunded:** The NYS Environmental Protection Fund is underfunded. The EPF has been raided and is no longer a dedicated fund. The EPF is half of what it was 10 years ago, when the total fund was more than \$300 million annually. The EPF needs dedicated funding and should be funded at a level of at least \$500 million.

Peter Bauer  
**Executive Director**

**Climate Change:** The draft Open Space Conservation Plan (OSCP) focuses on the use of land protection and the protection of natural systems across the New York to mitigate the impacts of climate change, especially events of severe weather. This is an important organizing focus for the state.

**Need for Greater Financial Resources to Protect Land to Mitigate Climate Change and Extreme Weather Impacts:** The importance of protecting wildlands and intact natural systems, especially coastal areas, wetlands and floodplains, to mitigate impacts of extreme weather cannot be understated. New York has seen hundreds of thousands of acres of wetlands filled along our coastal areas as well as

along major rivers. The loss of these areas will limit the state's ability to absorb impacts of hurricanes and tropical storms in the decades ahead. The State of New York needs to commit new funding beyond the scant funding in the Environmental Protection Fund, to land protection for climate change mitigation.

**Riparian Buffer Regulations are Needed:** While modest efforts like the proposed "Trees for Tribs" program to organize volunteers to plant trees along riparian buffers are well and good, the State of New York should look at bolder solutions to climate change mitigation, such as stream corridor buffer regulations. Vegetated buffers are used across the U.S. They are easy to monitor and enforce. This should be a statewide regulatory program.

**Conservation Easement Management Reform:** Major reforms are needed in New York's conservation easement program. While this program has successfully protected over 840,000 acres across New York, it has limited public recreational opportunities, supported extensive clearcutting, and changed the terms by which easements were purchased by the state, which weakened public recreational opportunities. Then DEC should develop rules and regulations for the administration of conservation easements and all conservation easements in the Adirondack Park should be regulated and managed under the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan.

**Invasive Species Protection:** The State of New York needs to enact an aquatic invasive species surcharge for all boat registrations in New York to help support programs across the state to build and operate boat decontamination stations. The state also needs to prepare for terrestrial invasive species control efforts across the Adirondack Park and Tug Hill.

**NYSDEC Division of Lands and Forests and Forest Preserve Bureau Needs Wilderness Management Professionals:** The Forest Preserve is the finest state-managed public wildlands system in the U.S., yet it lacks professional wilderness management. The NYSDEC has failed to invest in and build Wilderness management expertise among its staff. Trained foresters dominate the ranks of DEC management for public lands, rather than people educated and trained in management of wildland and wilderness systems.

#### Specific Comments for DEC Regions 5 & 6

In general, we support all of the DEC Region 5 and 6 priority lands listed in the draft 2014 Open Space Conservation Plan.

Below are specific comments on different lands:

**Adirondack Mountain Club Lands:** PROTECT does not see how clearing lands necessary for 300 cars is Constitutionally permissible. PROTECT believes that a decision on this facility should be made in the context of an amendment to the High Peaks Wilderness Unit Management Plan.

**Support for Projects Exempt from Local Veto:** We support the inclusion of projects exempt from the local veto, including Follensby Pond and the Whitney tract.

**LaBastille Estate:** We support purchase of this tract on Twichell Lake for the Forest Preserve. This protects an important site for Adirondack history as well as enhances public access to Twichell Lake.

#### Statewide Projects

**Working Forest Conservation Easements:** This is an important category to maintain. This has been a highly successful program and the state should focus on new conservation easement purchases in the Adirondack Park.

**Small Projects:** This is an important category to maintain. The acreage and cost limits should be raised to 500 acres and \$500,000.

**Long-Distance Trail Corridors, Network and Linkages:** This is an important category to maintain. The "Linkages" section should be flushed out with scientific analysis about internal wildlife corridors. These corridors should be referenced in the plan and highlighted for importance.

**Adirondack Park Buffer, Wildlife Corridor, Biological Connectivity:** This should be a new statewide category as it involves DEC regions 4, 5 and 6. This category should authorize state acquisition and protection of Forest Preserve lands outside the Adirondack Park Blue Line, conservation easements, state park lands, wildlife refuge lands, long-distance trail corridors, and farmland protection to protect the ecological integrity of the Adirondack Park.

**Transfer of Mount McGregor Lands:** We support the expeditious transfer of the excess State land on Mt. McGregor, other than the 70 odd buildings for the prison (now empty and being moth-balled) from the Department of Corrections to OPRHP. Grant's Cottage is already in OPRHP hands but is an isolated enclave. Adding the open space to existing Moreau State Park will consolidate with adjoining existing State Park land, bring in Grants cottage, and make trail connections to Saratoga Springs and surrounding communities.

This land now under the Department of Corrections is Forest Preserve land, located in a Forest Preserve County.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Protect the Adirondacks, please accept my gratitude for the opportunity to submit these public comments.

Sincerely,



Peter Bauer  
Executive Director