



PRESS RELEASE

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Restoring the Big East with Big Beasts: Ecosystem Recovery and Economic Sustainability in Adirondack Park

Is the Adirondack Park viable habitat for a sustainable population of cougars?

Protect the Adirondacks hosts Christopher Spatz, President of the Cougar Rewilding Foundation, at the Paul Smith's Visitor's Interpretive Center on Sunday July 5th at 11 AM.

For more information:

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Lake George, NY – Protect the Adirondacks will host Christopher Spatz, President of the Cougar Rewilding Foundation, at the Paul Smith's College Visitor's Interpretive Center on Sunday July 5th at 11 AM as part of its 2015 annual meeting. Spatz's presentation is entitled "Restoring the Big East with Big Beasts: Ecosystem Recovery and Economic Sustainability in Adirondack Park." In 2015, the Cougar Rewilding Foundation published "Yellowstone East: The Economic Benefits of Restoring the Adirondack Ecosystem with Native Wildlife," which makes the economic case for reintroducing and supporting a robust carnivore population in Adirondacks, such as the cougar.

Reports of cougars in the Adirondacks have persisted for years in the Adirondack Park without verifiable evidence, with the one exception of a cougar that traveled through the Adirondack Park in 2007. Protect the Adirondacks manages a Cougar Watch project, which has collected more than two dozen credible sightings over the past two years.

On the issue of the return of cougars to the Adirondacks, Spatz wrote: "The Adirondacks are missing four native megafauna, four species whose millennial presence created the Adirondack ecosystem: elk, bison, wolves and cougars. As evidenced by the rewilding of other U.S. regions, restoring the full ecologic functioning of the Adirondacks with these marquee wildlife would enhance both the NYS DEC's Watchable Wildlife Adirondack sites and New York State's nation leading, multi-billion dollar wildlife watching tourism. By creating opportunities for wildlife tracking classes and vacations, darting, howling and photography safaris, and big game hunting for the Northeast's 84 million people, rewilding the Park would establish the Adirondacks as an international wildlife recreation destination."

“A great park is shaped by its wildlife. The return of large carnivores to the Adirondack ecosystem is a long-term goal of many Adirondack Park advocates. This presentation by the Cougar Rewilding Foundation is a great opportunity to hear from one of the east’s top scientific advocates for the restoration of a top carnivore,” said Peter Bauer, executive director of Protect the Adirondacks.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has declared cougars officially extinct in the eastern U.S. There are no plans for any cougar restorations in the Adirondacks or anywhere else in the eastern U.S. at this time, though restoration remains an objective of organizations such as the Cougar Rewilding Foundation.

Cougars number in the tens of thousands west of the Mississippi River and occupy almost all large mountainous areas in western states. There are an estimated 15,000 cougars in California alone. In recent years, cougars have naturally recolonized several parts of the west including the Black Hills of South Dakota, the Badlands of North Dakota, and the Pine Ridge area of western Nebraska. South Dakota has embarked upon a new hunting season for cougars this year.

A cougar population of around 150 has survived in Florida. It was successfully augmented recently with the introduction of several males to help widen the gene pool. This population is a remnant population from a time when cougars thrived coast to coast. The Florida population is considered far beyond the reach of even the most freewheeling and well traveled young male cougars to reach on their own. In 2007, one cougar was documented as having traveled from South Dakota to Connecticut, where it was hit by a car. This cougar passed through the Adirondacks.

The 2012 study “to detect the presence of *Puma concolor* (Cougar) in eastern Canada” found “19 positive identifications of cougars in Québec and New Brunswick.” DNA investigations found that “some specimens were from South America, whereas others had a North American origin.” DNA of South American origin is generally dismissed as escaped or released pets.

As a member of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation’s State Wildlife Action Plan Advisory Committee, Christopher Spatz coordinated the teams that revised the DEC’s 2015 wolf and cougar species assessments, as well as the 2015 Vermont State Wildlife Action Plans for wolves and cougars. A member of the Mohonk Preserve’s Land Stewardship Committee and a former director of the Gunks Climbers’ Coalition, he lives in Rosendale, New York.

Protect the Adirondacks

Protect the Adirondacks is a privately funded, IRS-approved not-for-profit organization dedicated to the protection of the 6-million-acre Adirondack Park in northern New York. PROTECT was formed through the merger of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks and the Residents’ Committee to Protect the Adirondacks in 2009.

PROTECT pursues its mission to protect the Adirondack Park and defend the public “forever wild” Forest Preserve through citizen advocacy, grassroots organizing, education, research, and legal action. PROTECT is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. PROTECT maintains an office in Lake George. For more information see www.protectadks.org.

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