



Board of Directors

March 30, 2022

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Chair

Hon. Steven Englebright, Chair
State Assembly Committee on Environmental Conservation
Room 621, LOB
Albany, NY 12248

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Hon. Todd Kaminsky, Chair
State Assembly Committee on Environmental Conservation
Room 307, LOB
Albany, NY 12247

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RE: State Needs to Find a Way to Complete Cathead Mountain Constitutional Amendment to Upgrade and Enable Enhanced Public Emergency Communications in Southern Hamilton County

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Dear Chairman Englebright and Chairman Kaminsky:

Hamilton County has been trying to expand its emergency communications network for years. The county has dead spots not only for cell service, but for its emergency communications system too. The only viable option for the county, given the widely equipment used in New York State, is to expand its network of line-of-sight towers that are powered by utility lines, with emergency backups, and are accessible by motor vehicle for servicing. The south end of Hamilton County has limited police and EMT communications service.

I write this letter to you as I am also a member of the Blue Mountain Lake Volunteer Fire Company and Ambulance. While we're located in northern Hamilton County, I know first-hand from mutual aid calls with other companies in Hamilton County about the limitations of the current emergency communications system.

Peter Bauer
Executive Director

On the summit of Cathead Mountain, which is private land, there is a firetower long abandoned by the State, but which has since been used by the State Police as a communications tower powered by a solar array affixed to the firetower and windmill. This installation is serviced by personnel who access Cathead Mountain via a helicopter, and there is a landing pad built on the summit, or on foot, hiking the roughly 1.5 miles. The private landowner, the Hatch Brook Club/Thomas Gang, has allowed these facilities. As a result, there has been no public access to Cathead Mountain for two decades, arguably having the best view in the southern Adirondacks.

Protect the Adirondacks

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Hamilton County states that creation of a new emergency communications facility on the north summit on club lands (see map) will solve its communications problems. Hamilton County has worked with the private landowner interested in transferring significant acreage to the state a roughly 6-to-1 land swap. This would be a complicated deal, but it's solvable. In this way, Hamilton County will be able, through easement with the private landowner, to build its emergency system, by building a road on private lands to the north summit. The private landowner would enhance access to its property. The state would expand the Silver Lake Wilderness Area and re-establish permanent public access to the summit of Cathead Mountain where the firetower could be restored as a public amenity.

There are two main problems that could be remedied by a potential Article 14 amendment at Cathead Mountain. First, Hamilton County needs to expand its emergency communications system to improve and expand its coverage in the southern reaches of the county. The county claims to have determined that the most viable site is the summit of Cathead Mountain. The site has functioned as a State communications site with only solar and wind power, but this has limited the overall electrical capacity on the summit. Also, access by service personnel is limited to reaching the summit on foot or by use of a helicopter.

Second, the public has no access to the summit of Cathead Mountain, which provides the grandest view in the southern Adirondacks. Public access to Cathead Mountain could help to bring visitors to an under-utilized part of the Adirondacks and provide a high-quality destination to lure hikers away from the over-used High Peaks Wilderness Area. The landowner has made clear that restoration of public access to Cathead Mountain will only be considered part of a land swap.

Protect the Adirondacks sees no other viable, practical alternatives. We see three benefits to the public:

- The expansion of emergency communications in southern Hamilton County, which will also assist emergency communications in northern Fulton County.
- Permanent public recreational access to Cathead Mountain.
- Expansion of the Forest Preserve and Silver Lake Wilderness area.

Hamilton County claims that not only does it need access to the summit of Cathead Mountain, which is on private land, but it also needs to traverse the Forest Preserve with a motor vehicle road and power line. The only viable way that we see to accomplish this would be to involve the Hatch Brook Club in a land swap amendment to Article 14.

As stated above, a possible amendment to Article 14 for Cathead Mountain would be complicated to craft. Here are seven components:

1. We understand that the Club has offered to convey 480+/- acres of its 820-acre inholding to the state, by grant, in exchange for 80 acres of Wilderness and Primitive lands that includes the 0.536-mile Hatch Brook Road. The 480 acres of swapped lands would presumably be classified as Wilderness and be added to the Silver Lake Wilderness Area. We understand that Hamilton County has also pledged to augment the Club's lands with another 80-100 acres that would be added to the Forest Preserve at another location.
2. On lands in the vicinity of North Road, owned by the Hatch Brook Club, the Club would grant a permanent easement to the DEC for a hiking trail to connect to Forest Preserve lands to access Cathead Mountain. This would include an area for a public parking lot and trailhead installa-

tions. Another consideration is that the entire public hiking trail, from parking area/trailhead to summit, should be on the Forest Preserve.

3. The Hatch Brook Club would grant a permanent easement to the DEC for access to the summit of Cathead Mountain for public recreation and restoration of the firetower. All communications equipment would be removed from Cathead Mountain.
4. The Club would grant an easement to Hamilton County for access by County personnel in motor vehicles and access for a power line to construct and maintain an emergency communications facility on the north summit. In this way, the Cathead Mountain summit would function like the summit of Blue Mountain where a public firetower is located near a public communications tower.
5. The Hatch Brook Club would grant a conservation easement over its remaining lands that it retains that prohibits all future development and allows Hamilton County to build a road to the summit of Cathead Mountain through these lands and utilize the summit for an emergency communications tower. This easement would also preclude any future development of the property.
6. This conservation easement would include a right-of-first refusal for the State of New York or its assignee.
7. The easement would include a provision that the summit of Cathead Mountain will be cleaned up and restored and that the fire tower and Rangers cabin will be rehabilitated and opened up for public education and interpretation.

Going forward, Protect the Adirondacks stands ready to work with legislative leaders to put together a new constitutional amendment for Cathead Mountain to enhance the emergency communication system in southern Hamilton County, expand the Forest Preserve and Silver Lake Wilderness, and gain permanent public recreational access to Cathead Mountain, which has the best view in the southern Adirondack Park.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Protect the Adirondacks, please accept my gratitude for the opportunity to provide these views on this matter.

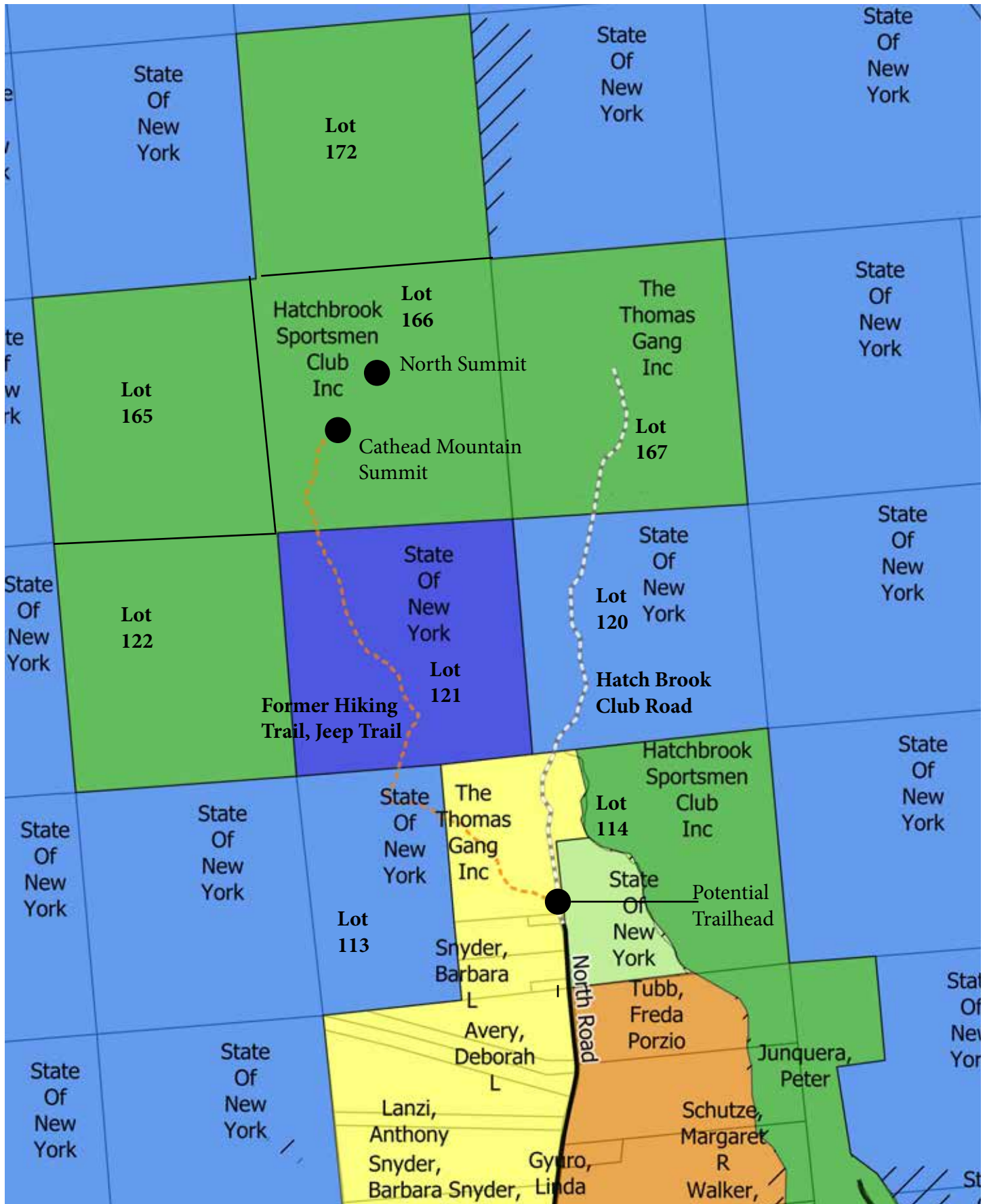
Sincerely,



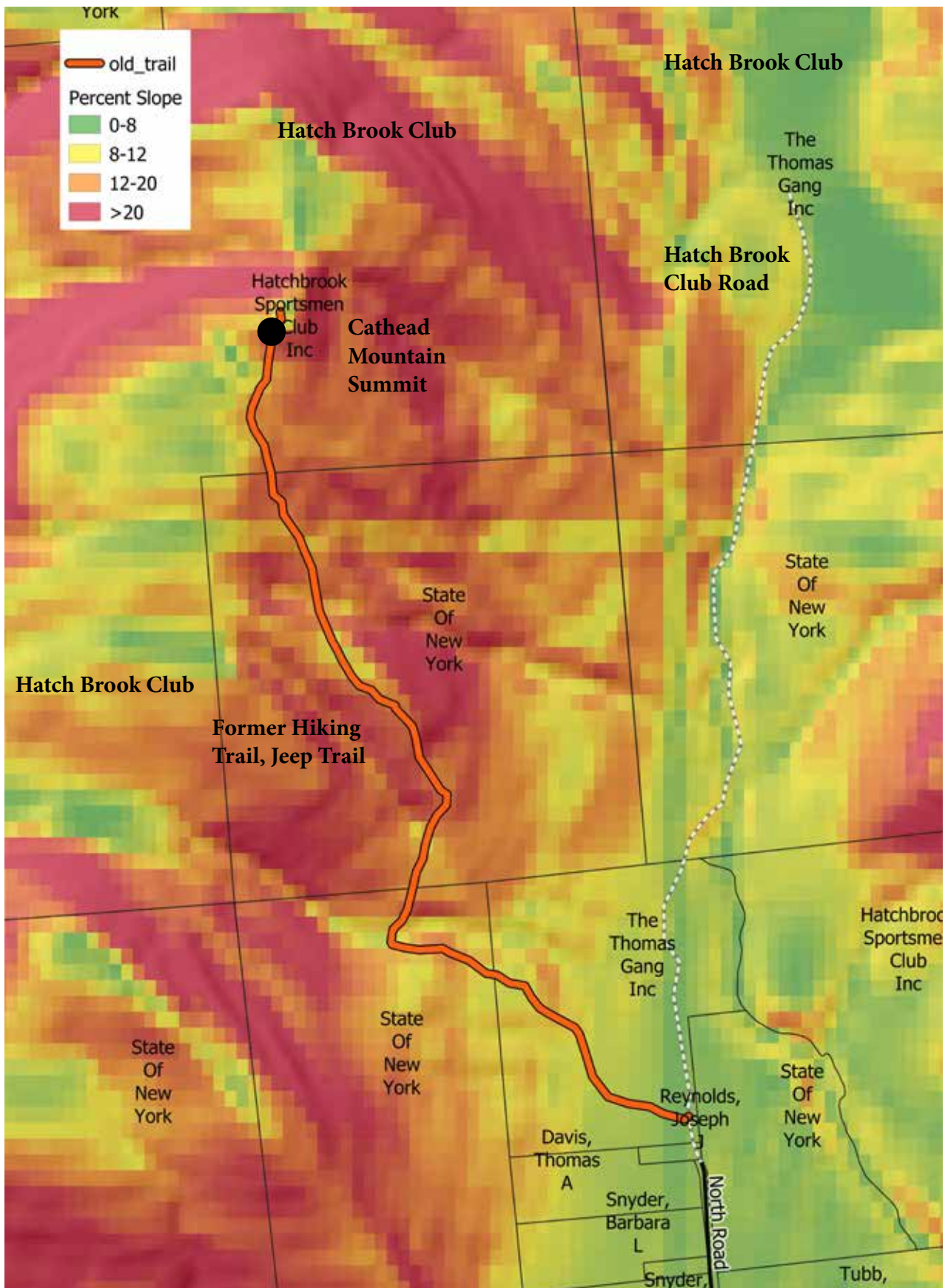
Peter Bauer
Executive Director

CC: State Assembly Leaders/Members
State Senate Leaders/Members
Executive

Hatch Brook Club/Cathead Mountain Inholding in the Silver Lake Wilderness/Land Ownerships (Great Lots)



Slope Map for Cathead Mountain Primitive Area and Cathead Mountain



Cathead Mountain Solar and Wind Installations, and Helipad on Firetower and Mountain Summit

