



**Board of Directors**

February 28, 2024

Charles Clusen  
**Chair**

Mr. Randall Young, Regional Director  
NYSDEC Region 6  
317 Washington St.  
Watertown, NY 13601-3787

James McMartin Long  
Michael Wilson  
**Vice-Chairs**

Barbara Rottier  
**Secretary**

**RE: Public comments to Region 6 Open Space Advisory Committee on Development of New Draft 2024 NYS Open Space Conservation Plan**

David Quinn  
**Treasurer**

Dear Regional Director Young and the Region 6 Open Space Advisory Committee:

Nancy Bernstein  
John Caffry  
Andy Coney  
Dean Cook  
James C. Dawson  
Lorraine Duvall  
Robert Glennon  
Roger Gray  
Evelyn Greene  
Sidney Haring  
Sheila Hutt  
Dale Jeffers  
Patricia Morrison  
John Nemjo  
Peter O'Shea  
Philip Terrie  
Chris Walsh

We appreciate the work that is underway by the Region 6 Open Space Advisory Committee (Committee) on the new draft 2024 NYS Open Space Conservation Plan (Plan). The new Plan provides a great opportunity to identify and protect high quality ecosystems across New York that provide outstanding recreational opportunities, protect water quality and wildlife habitat, and mitigate the impacts of climate change. 2024 is shaping up as a big year for land protection in the Adirondack Park and across New York State.

**Staff**

Peter Bauer  
**Executive Director**

The "30 by 30" Act passed by the Legislature and signed into law by Governor Kathy Hochul in 2022 sets an ambitious goal of protecting 30% of New York State's lands and inland waters by 2030. The 30 by 30 Act saw overwhelming and bipartisan support, passing the State Senate by a vote of 58 to 3, and the State Assembly by a vote of 137 to 8. The 30 by 30 goal is a daunting task because currently just 20% of New York's lands are protected and more than 3.1 million acres will need to be protected in the next seven years to meet the statutory goal. Consequently, we ask that the Committee incorporate the goals of the 30 by 30 Act as the central organizing framework for developing the new Plan.

Claudia K. Braymer, Esq.  
**Deputy Director**

Christopher Amato, Esq.  
**Conservation Director and Counsel**

**General Comments**

**Environmental Protection Fund is Underfunded:** The NYS Environmental Protection Fund is underfunded. The EPF should be

**Protect the Adirondacks**

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funded at a level of at least \$500 million and land protection should be funded at \$100 million annually.

**Annual Aggregate Additional Assessments:** Protect the Adirondacks has always supported full payment of local property taxes by the State of New York on Forest Preserve and Conservation Easement lands. The Annual Aggregate Additional Assessments section of the Real Property Tax Law was enacted at the same time as the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) Act to provide enhanced tax payments to some Adirondack communities. This payment is based on a formula of state Forest Preserve ownership and valuation in a given town in 1960. Implementation of RPTL Section 542 through the years has created winners and losers among local governments. This program, which provides additional state payments to select Adirondack towns, is outdated and needs to be updated. Additional towns with high percentages of either Forest Preserve or state-owned conservation easements need to be included and the formula by which state tax payments are enhanced needs to be updated.

**State Tax Payments on Intensive Use Areas:** The way in which the State of New York pays or does not pay local property taxes on Forest Preserve lands classified as Intensive Use, which includes State ski areas and campgrounds, among other lands, under the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan is ad hoc and needs to be changed. The State of New York should pay local property taxes on areas of the Forest Preserve classified as Intensive Use just as it does on all other Forest Preserve lands, except for State Administrative areas.

**All Counties Should Publish Project Lists:** All counties in each DEC region of the state should develop priority acquisition lists that are published in the Open Space Plan. Each county should solicit projects from towns and from the public. Past Open Space Conservation Plans have not included these lists for all counties. It is our experience that when a local government solicits recommendations from residents for lands to protect in their communities, that many parcels are identified that protect the local quality of life, improve public access, protect water quality and wildlife habitat, or protect local community character. In Region 6, there were no county lists. We urge the Committee to ensure that the counties are soliciting input from residents and local governments and providing priority acquisition lists to you.

#### Statewide/Multi-Region Land Protection Recommendations

**Forest Preserve Access and Enhancement:** All parcels that adjoin existing Forest Preserve should be eligible for protection.

**Forest Preserve Inholdings:** All parcels that are completely surrounded by or border Forest Preserve on two side should be eligible for protection.

**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.

**Working Forest Conservation Easement Access and Enhancement:** Parcels that border or are within close proximity to existing easements should be eligible for protection.

**Long-Distance Trail Corridors, Network and Linkages:** This is an important category to maintain.

**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 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 by maintaining biological connectivity to other wild areas and for protecting wildlife corridors.

**Statewide Small Projects:** This category should be retained, but the existing nine categories should be expanded for acreage and land costs. Small project acreage should be increased to allow for acquisitions up to 1,000 acres and \$1 million in costs. Existing categories are Public Fishing Right Easements, Waterway Access, Enhancement of Public Lands, Significant Rare Habitats, Significant Historic Archeological Resources, Trail and Greenway Connections, Stream Buffer Easements, Important Birding Areas, and Aquatic Connectivity. Additional “small projects” categories should be expanded for climate, working forests, long distance trails, rail trails, and public access.

**Article 14 Amendment Compensation Lands:** Lands that are purchased by the State of New York as compensation lands for amendments to Article 14 of the New York Constitution should be a general category. The completion of Article 14 amendments should not be delayed by the need to identify and purchase compensation lands. Article 14 amendments are a regular feature of overall Adirondack Park management.

**Recreational Trail Linkages & Networks (Joint Regions 5 & 6 & 7 Priority Project):** The new Plan should include this category. Previous plans have stated “Long distance trail linkages and networks, (including water routes) for a variety of motorized and non-motorized recreational uses (such as hiking, skiing, biking, snowmobiling, canoeing, equestrian and other appropriate uses) are important as a way for local communities to benefit from neighboring State lands. Trails of interest in Northern New York portions of Regions 5, 6 and 7 include the North Country National Scenic Trail, the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, the Mohawk Valley Heritage Trail and 3 Blueway Trails and 15 Scenic Byways. The intent of this project is not to achieve broader acquisition but to work to integrate these corridors and trails into community and State land connections that contribute further into the region’s recreation and tourism economy.”

**Lake Ontario and Lake Erie Shorelines, Islands and Niagara River (Joint Regions 6, 7, 8 & 9 Priority Project):** Lands that are part of this long identified significant bat and avian migratory flyway should be preserved. Prior plans have stated that these lands include “islands, sand dunes, bluffs, embayments wetlands, major tributaries, lake plains, shoreline and island access and other significant natural and cultural resources.”

**Tug Hill Core Forests and Headwater Streams (Joint Regions 6 & 7 Priority Project):** The greater Tug Hill area should remain a priority area for land protection to protect working forests, public drinking water supplies, wildlife habitat, ecological community connectivity, and public recreation.

### Region 6 Priority Projects

The 2016 Region 6 Open Space Advisory Committee recommended land protection for Twitchell Lake Anne LaBastille Estate, Town of Western "Wilderness Camp," riparian buffers, Herkimer Home Viewshed, North Pond Tract, Fort Drum Army Compatible Use Buffer Project, Black Creek Watershed, Black River Valley and Corridor, Blueway Trail and Scenic Byway, Northern Flow River Corridors, Bog River/Beaver River Headwater Complex, and Recreational Trail Linkages & Networks, Massawepie Mire, Rome Sand Plains, Working Forest Lands, State Park Battlefields, Inman Gulf, Moose River Corridor, and St. Lawrence River Islands, Shorelines and Wetlands. We urge that all of the prior projects that have not been completed be included in the new plan.

Below are specific comments on different lands in Region 6 that are high priorities for protection:

**Working Forest Conservation Easements:** Prior versions of the Open Space Plan were important for highlighting “Working Forest Conservation Easements.” This allowed the State to buy the development rights and some or all of the recreation rights, while the lands remained in commercial timber production. Easements are an investment in the environment and economy. While there are problems with long-term forest management and limited public recreation on some easements, the State has now protected nearly 800,000 acres across the Adirondacks by conservation easement. There are hundreds of thousands of acres in the Adirondacks that could still be protected through conservation easements.

**Western Rivers (General Category):** The great western rivers in the Adirondack Park in Region 6 merit protection either through a new general category or through individual listings. The Beaver, Moose, and Oswegatchie Rivers that all flow west out of the Adirondacks should be listed for their entire lengths, similar to how the Black River Valley has been listed in earlier plans.

**Adirondack to Algonquin (General Category):** There has been extensive planning and promotion for the Adirondack to Algonquin corridor, also known as A2A. This corridor should be listed for protection.

**Greenwood Lake:** This 4,200-acre tract in the Town of Fine includes a landlocked parcel of Forest Preserve.

**Chaumont Swamp:** The 8001-acre Chaumont Swamp in Clifton is a complex ecological system that has long been identified as meriting protection.

**Heath Pond:** Located just north of Route 3 in Clifton, Heath Pond is a small but highly accessible wild pond.

**Twin Lakes:** These two small lakes are in a highly accessible location just north of the Star Lake Hamlet area. They are purported to include a heritage strain of brook trout.

**Syracuse Facility at Cranberry Lake:** The tract is several thousand acres in size and merits permanent protection through a conservation easement that would allow for continued scientific research and educational facilities. This tract would also protect a vast stretch of the Cranberry Lake shoreline and is surrounded by Forest Preserve.

**Moose River Corridor Parcels:** Though long identified for its importance, the protection of extensive river corridor lands owned by National Grid should continue to be a top priority. Other parcels along the river also merit protection creating the need for a Moose River Corridor project.

**Grass River Corridor:** The Grass River faces a similar situation as the Moose River with extensive ownership by National Grid. Other parcels along the river also merit protection creating the need for a Grass River Corridor project.

**Jordan River Club:** The Club owns more than 1 mile of remote lands along the Jordan River bordered by easement and Forest Preserve lands. This tract should be listed for protection.

**Little Oswegatchie River:** This complex river system in St. Lawrence County has long been identified for its ecological importance and for the varied landscape through which it flows. The Little Oswegatchie River Corridor should be listed in the new plan.

**Hill 19:** This tract is in the Town of Colton, near Route 56, and would provide new outdoor recreational opportunities while protecting important open space lands.

**Lake Marion:** The Lake Marion Tract north of Low's Lake has long been identified as one of the most important tracts that merits protection through either Forest Preserve acquisition or through a conservation easement.

**Boy Scouts/Lows Lake:** This tract has long been identified as an important tract on Low's Lake, one of the most popular canoeing, camping and fishing destinations in the Adirondacks.

**Gull Pond/Partlow Lake:** Gull Pond is scheduled to become Forest Preserve within the next decade. This new Open Space Plan should make note of this date. Partlow Lake should be listed as a high priority project. These are remote lands northwest of Lake Lila.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Protect the Adirondacks, please accept my gratitude for the opportunity to share our thoughts on land protection in DEC Region 6.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Bauer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Peter" being more prominent than the last name "Bauer".

Peter Bauer  
Executive Director

CC: K. Petronis, NYSDEC  
F. Watt, NYSDEC  
J. Clague, NYSDEC