



PRESS RELEASE

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Protect the Adirondacks Appeals Court Decision Dismissing Carrying Capacity Case

Protect the Adirondacks Presses DEC to Conduct Long-Overdue Carrying Capacity Study of the Saranac Lakes Complex

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Protect the Adirondacks (PROTECT) has been urging the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) for years to conduct a carrying capacity study of the heavily used Saranac Lakes Complex. After DEC failed to act in response to our formal demand letter, PROTECT filed a lawsuit seeking a court order to compel DEC to complete the required study. The Saranac Lake Complex includes Upper, Middle and Lower Saranac Lakes as well as Weller Pond, Second Pond, Fish Creek Ponds, Square Pond, Little Square Pond, Copperas Pond, Floodwood Pond, Rollins Pond, Whey Pond, and Follensby Clear Pond.

A carrying capacity study evaluates the maximum level of cumulative development or recreational use that a water body can sustain without causing adverse impacts to water quality, fish and wildlife and their habitat, aesthetic values such as noise and light pollution, and the overall quality of the recreational experience.

PROTECT's legal claim is based on explicit mandates in both the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (Master Plan) and the Unit Management Plan for the Saranac Lakes Wild Forest, which require DEC to conduct such a study. However, the New York State Supreme Court in Albany County dismissed the case on statute of limitations grounds. At the end of 2025, PROTECT filed an appeal with the Appellate Division, Third Department, and is currently awaiting a court date for oral argument in 2026.

"We are optimistic that the appellate court will recognize the strength of our arguments based on the clear language of the Master Plan, and direct DEC to undertake this mandated and long-

overdue carrying capacity study,” said Christopher Amato, PROTECT’s Conservation Director and Counsel.

Despite the court setback, PROTECT and other Adirondack advocacy groups achieved a major legislative victory in 2025 by securing a \$1 million allocation in the State’s Environmental Protection Fund for a carrying capacity of the Saranac Lakes Complex as part of the 2025-2026 State budget.

To date, DEC has failed to act on this appropriation during the State’s fiscal year, which ends on March 31, 2026, showing little interest in utilizing the funds or initiating the required study.

“We remain committed to holding DEC accountable and will continue to use all available means to ensure the agency fulfills its legal obligation to conduct this study,” said Claudia Braymer, PROTECT’s Executive Director.

Protect the Adirondacks

Protect the Adirondacks is an IRS-approved non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation and stewardship of the 6-million-acre Adirondack Park. Our mission is to protect the Adirondack Park’s wild character for current and future generations. PROTECT pursues this mission through a combination of advocacy, grassroots organizing, independent public oversight, research, water quality monitoring, education, and legal action. Protect the Adirondacks was formed in 2009 as the result of a merger between two long-standing environmental conservation groups in the Adirondack Park, the Resident’s Committee to Protect the Adirondacks (est. 1991) and the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks (est. 1901). Protect the Adirondacks is managed by a 21-member Board of Directors of Adirondack leaders with expertise in environmental law, local government, Adirondack environmental and cultural history, state agency management, and small business. Protect the Adirondacks maintains an office in a 100% energy efficient, solar-and wind-powered office in Johnsburg in the central Adirondacks. For more information see www.protectadks.org.

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