



PRESS RELEASE

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Charles “Chuck” M. Clusen Receives Howard Zahniser Adirondack Award for a Lifetime of Wilderness Conservation

North River, N.Y. — July 13, 2026 — Protect the Adirondacks presented the Howard Zahniser Adirondack Award to Charles “Chuck” M. Clusen during the organization’s Annual Meeting on July 11 at Garnet Hill Lodge in North River, NY, recognizing his extraordinary lifetime of leadership in protecting wilderness across the United States and defending New York’s Adirondack Forest Preserve.

For more than five decades, Clusen has been one of the nation’s most influential conservation leaders. Throughout his career in conservation work and his years of nonprofit advocacy, he has spent 55 years organizing and leading efforts to protect public lands, preserve existing wilderness areas, and secure permanent protection for millions of acres of America’s most treasured landscapes.

“I’m extremely honored to have received the Howard Zahniser Adirondack Award from Protect the Adirondacks. As Howard Zahniser was drafting the federal Wilderness Act in the late 1950’s, he regularly visited Paul Schaefer in the Adirondacks mountains to discuss wilderness protection. Federal wilderness areas and the Adirondack Forest Preserve’s Wilderness areas are born out of a collective desire to preserve natural landscapes, untrammelled by man and set aside in a way that leaves them unimpaired for future generations. I’m grateful that I was able to dedicate so much of my career and personal time to protecting wilderness areas in the Adirondacks and across the country and carrying forward Zannie’s legacy,” says Chuck Clusen, Chair, Protect the Adirondacks.

Clusen’s impact on Adirondack conservation has been equally significant. He was influential in founding Protect the Adirondacks in 2009 and has served as the organization’s Chair of the Board of Directors since then. Under his leadership, Protect the Adirondacks established itself as a strong voice for the Adirondack Park, dedicated to defending the “Forever Wild” protections of Article XIV of the New York State Constitution and safeguarding the Park’s forests, waters, wildlife, and public lands.

“Chuck was instrumental to the formation of Protect the Adirondacks! from two distinct organizations – the venerable Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks and the relatively new Residents’ Committee to Protect the Adirondacks. Chuck’s leadership was vital to making the merger successful and bringing the two organizations’ agendas, histories, and board members together. The many accomplishments of the last 15 years would not have been possible without Chuck. We would not have a decision from the NYS Court of Appeals stopping the construction of new snowmobile highways in the Forest Preserve and granting clear and stronger

protection to the Adirondack Forest Preserve” says Phil Terrie, Ph.D., author, historian, and member of Protect’s Board of Directors.

“Chuck’s leadership, mentorship, and his tireless efforts have been invaluable to Protect the Adirondacks. His work has had a lasting impact on our organization and future generations of conservation advocates. We are grateful for his many years of service to Protect and other conservation organizations across the country” says Barbara Rottier, Esq., Vice-Chair of Protect’s Board of Directors.

About the Howard Zahniser Adirondack Award

The Howard Zahniser Adirondack Award, given by Protect the Adirondacks, honors individuals whose commitment, vision, and leadership have made lasting contributions to protecting the Adirondack Park and advancing wilderness conservation. Named for Howard Zahniser, principal author of the federal Wilderness Act of 1964 and a frequent visitor to the Adirondack wilderness, the award recognizes those whose work reflects his enduring conservation ethic and commitment to wilderness protection.

“Chuck’s lifelong dedication to wilderness protection, and his ongoing commitment to the Adirondack Forest Preserve is an inspiration to the Board, members and staff of Protect the Adirondacks. We are thrilled to recognize Chuck with this award and to have this opportunity to reflect on his achievements and our organization’s successes, and to renew our dedication to defending and growing the Forest Preserve’s Wilderness areas” says Claudia Braymer, Executive Director, Protect the Adirondacks.

About Clusen’s Career in Wilderness Protection

As Chair of the Alaska Coalition, Clusen helped lead the successful campaign for passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980. The landmark legislation established more than 100 million acres of national parks and wildlife refuges while permanently protecting 56 million acres of designated Wilderness. His work on wilderness legislation throughout the lower 48 states also contributed to Congressional designation of more than 14 million acres of Wilderness.

Throughout his distinguished career, Clusen held leadership positions with many of the nation’s premier conservation organizations. He served as Vice President of The Wilderness Society; Director for the National Parks and Alaska Projects at the Natural Resources Defense Council; Executive Director of the American Conservation Association; Executive Director of the Adirondack Council; and Associate Conservation Director for the Sierra Club. He also helped found American Rivers, later serving as its Board Chair, and served on the Board of Directors of the League of Conservation Voters.

“Chuck is a founder of American Rivers. He was at the meeting in Denver in 1973 where they formed the American Rivers Conservation Council. Chuck was vital to the early days of the organization. As ARCC was focused on stopping massive pork barrel dam projects that were destroying our last wild rivers and at the same time working to proactively protect more rivers under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, his determination and grit helped shape the fledgling organization and set us up for decades of success for rivers” says Amy Souers Kober, American Rivers.

“Protecting the Adirondacks has been strengthened by Chuck Clusen’s prior leadership in saving wild Alaska. A champion for the North Country” says Laurance Rockefeller Jr., Honorary Trustee, Natural Resources Defense Council.

About 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 22-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 and @ProtectAdkPark.