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## **Cuomo describes massive expansion of Adirondack wild lands as “moral accomplishment”**

<http://www.northcountrypublicradio.org/news/story/31758/20160511/cuomo-describes-massive-expansion-of-adirondack-wild-lands-as-moral-accomplishment>

May 11, 2016 — Governor Andrew Cuomo visited remote Elk Lake in the Adirondacks yesterday. He was there to formally sign a deal adding more than 20,000 acres of wild lands around the Boreas Ponds to the Park. The price tag for the parcel was \$14.5 million.

The Nature Conservancy, which brokered the deal, will also help create a \$750,000 fund to help economic development in nearby communities. Yesterday’s visit capped a nearly decade long conservation project that has changed the Adirondack Park in fundamental ways.

### **Celebrating a "forever" deal**

The governor’s visit was largely ceremonial. We’ve known for a while that the Boreas Ponds deal was locked in. But Governor Cuomo argued yesterday that this was a moment that deserved some ceremony. "Once in a rare while, you get a chance to do something that makes a difference forever," he said.

On a brilliant spring day, Cuomo spoke at Elk Lake Lodge, with the High Peaks rising in the background. "We are leaving our children a better North Country, a better park than we inherited. And that, my friends, is the greatest accomplishment, an accomplishment that you feel in the places that really matter. It’s not just an intellectual accomplishment, it’s not just an economic accomplishment. It is a moral accomplishment."

### **An effort that reshaped the Adirondacks**

The Boreas Pond tract is part of a much bigger project covering roughly 160,000 acres that radically transformed the Adirondacks over the last nine years. The mastermind of that effort is Mike Carr, head of the Adirondack Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, who said it required more than \$35,000,000 in private fundraising to pull off.

"We bought this in 2007, before the downturn in 2008 and that's really when we started flying into turbulence. That was a frightening time," Carr said.

The Nature Conservancy managed to keep the deal from unraveling and New York State eventually agreed to buy 65,000 acres of land for the forest preserve, while protecting another 95,000 acres with conservation easements.

In addition to permanently protecting places like the Boreas Ponds, the Hudson River Gorge, and OK Slip Falls, Carr said the project stitched together one of the biggest contiguous areas of wild lands in the East. "It's astonishing, Carr said. "The former Finch ownership now connects 800,000 acres of previously protected land. So the leverage in that from a conservation perspective is very real."

For the first time, permanently protected Park land will link the High Peaks Wilderness to the north and the Dix Mountain Wilderness to the south.

So this deal really does alter the way wildlife and the Park's human visitors will experience the Adirondacks. But it also redefined the way environmental groups interact with local government.

### **Local government on board**

In the past, land preservation was a flashpoint here. But at yesterday's gathering, North Hudson Town Supervisor Ron Moore praised this project. "Governor Cuomo has been leading the charge alongside the Nature Conservancy," he said.

"His commitment to both protecting open lands and protecting the economy has had a positive impact on the region," Moore added.

Bill Farber, chair of Hamilton County's board of supervisors and a leading voice for local government in the Park, said yesterday that the massive Finch Pruyn project is a model and a sign that the Park's debate has evolved. "The Nature Conservancy has made a commitment to the communities like none that had ever been seen before on a whole host of levels,"

That amicable tone will be tested in the months ahead as various factions in the Park debate how the Boreas Ponds tract should be zoned. Green groups are already pushing hard for the area to be given the most restrictive classification. "It is our top priority," said Neil Woodworth, head of the Adirondack Mountain Club, who described the wilderness designation as a "critical priority for us."

We'll have more on the debate over the classification of the Boreas Ponds parcel tomorrow.