

# EDITORIAL: Let's expand the Adirondack wilderness

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## OUR VIEW

Adirondack environmental groups are right: latest land acquisition should be added to wilderness area.

We like the racy new slogan — “Be Wild NY” — the Adirondack Council is using in its campaign to persuade the state to classify as wilderness the last big acquisition of former Finch timberlands.

The wild character of the Adirondack Park — its huge forests, strings of lakes, rugged peaks and expansive wetlands — is a valuable asset, and except for the neighborhoods of New York City, it's the state's most distinguishing feature.

The acquisition of 22,000 acres of land called the Boreas Ponds Tract is not a new purchase but is part of a multiyear deal conceived of and brokered by the Nature Conservancy. The conservancy bought huge tracts of Adirondack forest land from Finch Paper and has been gradually reselling much of it to the state to add to the Forest Preserve.

The only question with the land is how it will be classified after the sale is complete. The Adirondack Council and several other Adirondack environmental groups make a convincing case that Boreas Ponds and a couple of other remote tracts of former Finch land should receive the state's most restrictive classification, which is wilderness.

No matter what, the public land will end up off limits to development of any sort. What the wilderness classification would do is also make it off-limits to motorized vehicles — snowmobiles, motorboats and ATV's. Because the land is remote, beautiful and undeveloped, wilderness is the right classification.

Also, the Boreas Ponds Tract and a few other, smaller tracts acquired from the Nature Conservancy lie next to the High Peaks Wilderness Area, the most majestic part of the Adirondack Park and the most popular for hiking. Adding these new lands would create an enormous, contiguous wilderness area — 280,000 acres — that could be marketed as one of the largest and most spectacular wild places in the country.

Besides its excellence as a way to market the Adirondack Park to tourists, a sprawling, forested wilderness has intrinsic value in this era, when the Earth is rapidly warming and wild places are vanishing. The undisturbed woods, where wind stirs the trees as animals rustle on the forest floor, soothe our distracted minds and settle our spirits.

We believe the Adirondack Park is big enough to accommodate all sorts of visitors. Other parts of the forest are suitable for motorized access and use. As part of this proposal, a snowmobile trail would be created just south of the new wilderness area, connecting North Hudson and Newcomb.

An existing road, Gulf Brook Road, could be left open so that people for whom it would be difficult to carry a canoe or kayak miles into the wilderness would be able to drive up close to the Boreas Ponds to unload.

Compromise is necessary in the Adirondacks, so conservation of the wilderness can be pursued at the same time as economic development in the region's towns and villages. We do not subscribe to a rigid conception of the wilderness that considers any man-made structure an intrusion.

Protect the Adirondacks, for example, has suggested that a dam that impounds water for the Boreas Ponds should be dismantled to increase the region's wilderness integrity. We cannot see the sense in disturbing the existing ecosystem, risking the vitality of a brook trout fishery or endangering the ponds' attractiveness as a paddling destination.

One effect of designating this area as wilderness will be to reduce the possibility that invasive species, which more often lurk in motorboats than canoes and kayaks, will be introduced to its water bodies. Once established in remote backcountry lakes, invasive species would be difficult to eradicate.

New York is wild — much wilder than many people know — but the campaign to designate this land as wilderness should help to raise awareness of the special nature of the Adirondacks.