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A vote for wilderness at the Boreas Ponds

When it comes to deciding how we're going to use the Adirondack Forest Preserve, how do we know who is being selfish and who is looking out for the best interest of others?

The Adirondack Park was created in 1892 to protect a large amount of natural resources in northern New York. On face value, it sounds altruistic. It sounds like the New York State Legislature - and the environmental advocates in favor of the Park - had made up their minds that to lasso the public and private lands with an imaginary Blue Line would be in the best interest of nature, plain and simple.

But it's not that simple. They didn't take into consideration that there were people already living inside the Adirondack Park. Visions of buying all the private land within the Blue Line and adding it to the Forest Preserve quickly vanished when reality set in. It was not affordable or practical.

Article Photos



Boreas Ponds, surrounded by mountains in the town of North Hudson, is seen from an airplane in September 2008. (News photo — Mike Lynch)

Conflicts among the entrepreneurs trying to get rich by exploiting the natural resources, Adirondack families trying to make an honest living and environmentalists trying to save the land were inevitable. As constitutional protections for the Forest Preserve were added over the years, those conflicts grew in number and intensity.

Today we're moving from one Forest Preserve conflict to the next, with the state Adirondack Park Agency caught in the middle: the Adirondack railroad corridor from Remsen to Lake Placid, Essex Chain Lakes, Boreas Ponds.

When it comes to the Adirondack Park's natural resources, where is the altruism? People seem to be taking sides based on their own interests.

The Adirondack railroad corridor is a classic example. On one hand, there's the Adirondack Railway Preservation Society, a collection of rail fans that created a tourist attraction so they can play with real-life trains. On the other hand, there's the Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates who want to use the corridor so they can play on skis, bikes and snowmobiles. In the end, it's just one hobby versus another.

You may ask, "What about the historic preservation advocates in favor of keeping all the rails?" It could be argued that they are being altruistic because they want to save a historical resource, much like the friends groups lobbied to save the fire towers on the summits of St. Regis and Hurricane mountains. But is this pure altruism?

We're not sure. After all, people like to help others because it makes them feel good, whether they give away millions of dollars to charity programs, volunteer at a fire department or help save the world from destruction. People can rest easier knowing they've made the world a better place.