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The Adirondacks: Wild at heart

[The Nature Conservancy \(@nature_org\)](#)



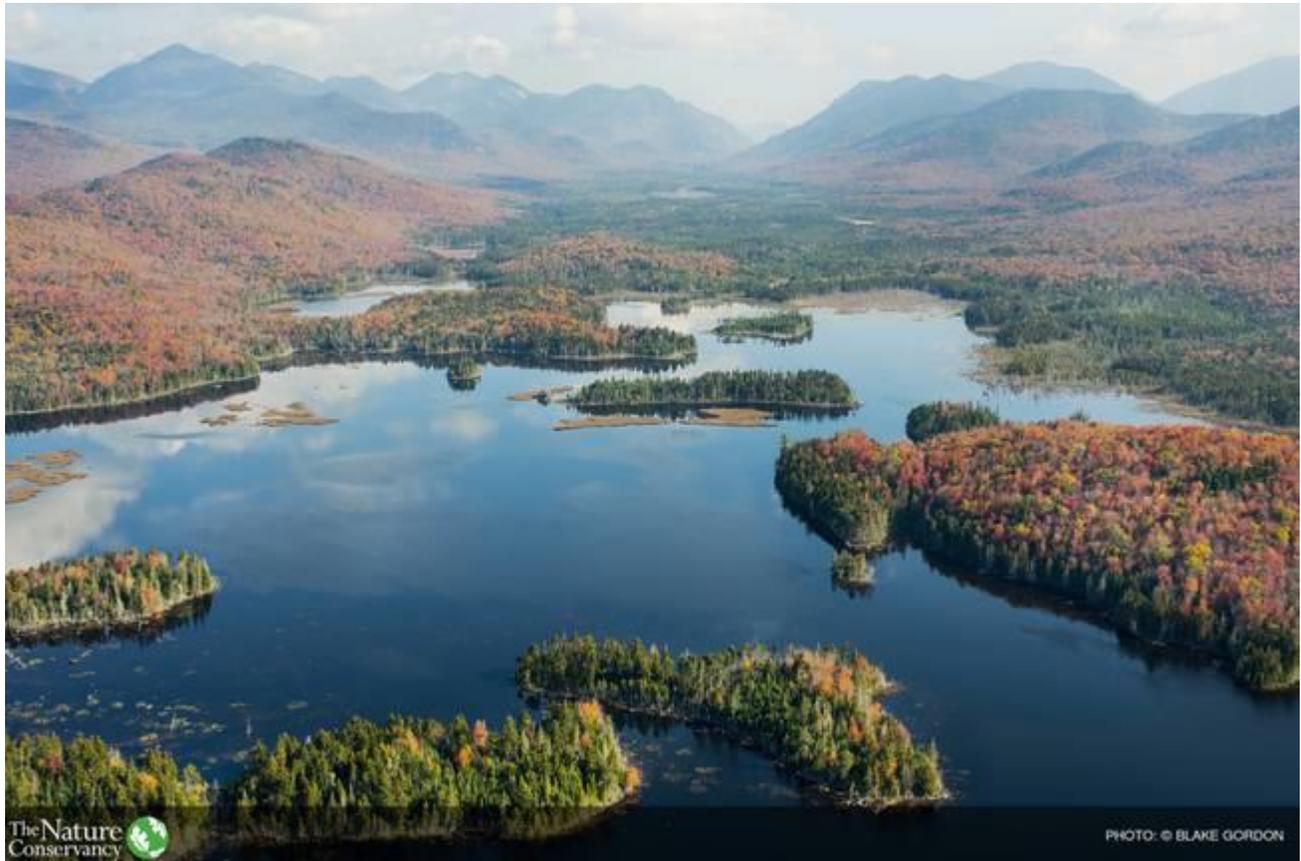
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For the first time in more than a century, Boreas Ponds will open to the public.

By Mike Carr, Executive Director of The Nature Conservancy's Adirondack Chapter

The view of the Adirondack Park's Gothics Mountain pulls you in from the moment you launch a canoe on First Pond. Sure, you can see other summits that reach toward the sky, from deep within the largest wilderness area in the Northeast, but this mountain keeps your eyes fixed on its steep, narrow architecture, and its gray granite streaked with tendrils of fir forest. With each paddle closer, it invites you to be completely present—to shed any worry that might have followed you to this beautiful remote spot in northern New York.

When you reach the center of Second Pond, the largest of three connected water bodies that make up Boreas Ponds, a choir of mountains comes into view: Allen, Cheney Cobble, Marcy, Skylight, Saddleback, Basin, Haystack, Sawteeth, Giant, Boreas. All soar upward, and it feels as if you are in one of the world's great cathedrals.



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These mountains and the pure waters that flow from them are central characters in one of the world's most promising forest restoration and recovery stories. And for the first time in more than a century, [Boreas Ponds will soon open to the public for outdoor recreation](#). In April 2016, [The Nature Conservancy conveyed the 20-758-acre parcel to the people of New York State](#) to be protected as Forever Wild under the state constitution. This means that the conservation of this property and its forests, rivers, streams, and ponds will not just benefit nature—its natural beauty will bring joy and opportunity to people.

The Adirondack Park was established in 1892 to protect water quality and forest health, both of which were in rapid decline from unsustainable logging. In size, the Adirondacks can swallow Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Glacier national parks combined, but that is not an altogether fair comparison. The lands inside the boundary of this 6-million-acre park are a mixture of public and private, protected and unprotected, large forests and small towns. As forests have recovered, moose, American marten, and other wildlife have returned.



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The Boreas Pond tract is larger than Manhattan and the waters of the ponds flow into the Hudson River, providing a natural tether between the Adirondacks and New York City. It also borders the 203,500-acre High Peaks Wilderness Area, which offers more than 250 miles of (mostly steep) hiking trails to the state's tallest summits.

Boreas Ponds is the crown jewel of 25 parcels—totaling 69,000 acres—that the Conservancy has transferred to state ownership in the past four years as part of a [larger project that is also conserving 95,000 acres of woodlands](#) for continued sustainable timber harvest. The project began in 2007, when the Conservancy purchased the largest remaining unprotected timber tract in the Adirondacks: 161,000 acres once owned by paper manufacturer Finch, Pruyn & Co. (The Conservancy first came to know these lands, seeing firsthand how well managed they were, in 2000 when the company hired our scientists to oversee a biological inventory to help prepare for sustainable forestry certification.)

In any landscape, the opportunity to protect 300 lakes and ponds, 90 mountains, and 415 miles of rivers and streams would be compelling. In the Adirondacks, the ecological and social significance of these places is amplified by our unique history. Thanks to more than 100 years of conservation action, this is among the top three most intact contiguous areas of mixed temperate

forest left on Earth. The range of this type of forest overlaps with most of the world's population, so it has been largely cleared for development and agriculture. This project is another step in keeping connected a sweeping landscape ranging from alpine summits to lowland forests, creating pathways for plants and animals to adapt and move in response to a changing climate, and allowing forests to store carbon, which mitigates greenhouse gas emissions.



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In 1864, The New York Times referred to the Adirondacks as “fitted to make a Central Park for the world.” In 2007, the Times hailed the Conservancy’s land purchase as “A Deal Worth Cheering.” As conservation successes span centuries, the world is paying attention; a park that integrates human communities is serving as a model for protected areas in other places. Longevity will depend on environmental stewardship and human values.

Conservation is never an end state, but a constant cultivation of values and experiences, of the sublime and the practical. That’s why, as places like Boreas Ponds become available for recreation, the Conservancy has provided seed money for recreation-based economic development projects. This kind of investment is just as important as buying land for preservation. It [strengthens the link between conserved lands and the communities that host them](#) and those who seek solace and adventure in wild nature.