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## Adirondack Council Joins “BeWildNY” Coalition

<http://wnbz.com/adirondack-council-joins-bewildny-coalition/>



Acclaimed actress and environmentalist Sigourney Weaver is the narrator of a new video advertising campaign urging New York’s Governor Andrew Cuomo to protect roughly 30,000 acres of new public land as motor-free wilderness.

“New York has an extraordinary opportunity to expand Adirondack Wilderness to rival the most famous conservation landmarks in the world,” Weaver notes in the opening seconds of the video.

The piece closes with the call to action: “Ask Governor Cuomo to protect our Adirondack legacy now. Protect our tallest mountains and purest waters, while opening new public access. It’s time to be wild New York!”

Link to the video: <http://bewildnewyork.org/>

The campaign comes as Governor Cuomo’s Adirondack Park Agency is preparing to announce a series of public hearings on wilderness (motor-free) and non-wilderness (with motorized- and mechanized-use options) classification alternatives for lands and waters recently acquired by the state in the Adirondack Park. The coalition is seeking wilderness protection for the most sensitive waters, wildlife habitat and forests, totaling over 30,000 acres. The video and the accompanying ad campaign are sponsored by the Adirondack Council, on behalf of the BeWildNY Coalition. The coalition consists of nine regional, statewide and national conservation organizations that together represent millions of people.

The centerpiece is the Boreas Ponds tract, a 20,500-acre parcel containing ponds, rivers, wetlands, threatened fisheries, moose, bobcats, and high-quality nesting sites for loons and the endangered Bicknell’s thrush.

A “wilderness” classification would open up public access while providing the ultimate permanent protection for the most special places from noise, pollution and invasive species by restricting cars, snowmobiles, motorized and mechanized recreation and vehicles to the periphery. Visitors would gain access on foot or by non-motorized boat. Additional accommodations could be made for persons with disabilities.

The wilderness expansion plan would also connect a larger High Peaks Wilderness to the neighboring Dix Mountain Wilderness, creating a single wilderness tract of roughly 280,000 acres. That would be larger than Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado and would be twice the size of Zion National Park in Utah.

The Adirondack Park is a six-million-acre (9,300-square-mile) park located in the vast, lake-bejeweled mountain range between New York City and Montreal. Founded in 1892, it is the largest park in the contiguous United States and is home to 90 percent of all wilderness lands in the Northeast – about 1.1 million acres. Public lands are protected as “forever wild” by the state’s Constitution. If the Boreas Ponds are protected as wilderness, still less than 50 percent of the Adirondack Park’s public land will be managed as motor-free.

“We want to thank Sigourney Weaver for volunteering her time and efforts to this cause,” said Adirondack Council Executive Director William C. Janeway. “She has been a good friend to the Adirondacks for many years and knows the value of Adirondack wilderness.

“We also want to thank composer Michael Bacon, whose music accompanies Sigourney’s voice on the soundtrack,” Janeway said. “Michael also allowed us to invade his Manhattan studio for our recording session with Ms. Weaver.”

Aerial video images were shot by renowned Adirondack photographer Carl Heilman II, of Wild Visions. Smartmeme Studios of Lincoln, WA produced the video, with additional input from SKD Knickerbocker.

## **Why Wilderness?**

The proposed expanded High Peaks Wilderness in the Adirondack Park will contain the state’s steepest terrain, wildest whitewater rivers, highest-elevation lakes, and most fragile wildlife habitat. It protects the sources of the Hudson River and shelters cold-water fisheries that are threatened by climate change. It contains habitat for a wide variety of rare, threatened and endangered species, Janeway explained.

**“Creating new wilderness would be a powerful attraction to a national tourism audience,” Janeway explained. “Wilderness is very rare, especially in the Northeast. Outdoor enthusiasts travel thousands of miles to find the natural beauty, peace and solitude that only wilderness can provide.**

“There are only two places with significant wilderness acreage in all of the Eastern United States,” he noted. “They are the Florida Everglades and the 21 wilderness areas of the

Adirondack Park. The Adirondack Wilderness System remains incomplete. This would bring it a big step closer to completion.”

### **National Appeal**

A new wilderness would reinvigorate interest from the 70 million people who live within an easy, half-day’s drive of the Adirondack Park, Janeway said, explaining that people could enjoy breakfast at home and lunch on the trail to Boreas Ponds, preparing to slip a canoe into the water for the last leg of the journey.

An expanded wilderness would provide a stunningly beautiful experience in hiking, skiing, paddling, camping, birdwatching, hunting, fishing, snowshoeing and horseback riding. Visitors would gain new access to a network of rivers and streams including the confluence of the Opalescent River and the Upper Hudson River, and access to remote flat-water paddling on Boreas Pond.



### **Good for Local Communities**

Nothing sells like a unique experience. People can find public lands where they can ride jeeps, snowmobiles or all-terrain vehicles almost anywhere in the Northeast, Janeway said. What they can’t find – and may not know exists so close to home — is a place where solitude and quiet are the dominant forces and where nature is all that one can see, smell and hear.

Surrounding communities will benefit as gateways and hosts to an exciting new venture, creating opportunities for new businesses and new jobs, he said. Visitors will need food, lodging, fuel, gear, supplies, entertainment and guiding services.

It is no coincidence that two of the Adirondack Park's most prosperous communities, Keene Valley and Lake Placid, are the two most popular entryways to the High Peaks Wilderness Area. A December 2015 study by Clarkson University School of Business showed that Adirondack communities and properties that are close to wilderness areas reap a significant 25-percent economic benefit premium compared to those who are not.

### **Good for the Environment**

Opening new trails into the state's tallest mountains from the south can relieve pressure in overused areas of the existing Forest Preserve, especially the eastern High Peaks Wilderness Area.

“Too many hikers and campers in those places threaten water quality, forest health, wildlife and the area's beauty,” he said. “Spreading the public's love to new places will reduce the pressure on the trails in the eastern High Peaks and help those areas to recover their wild character and vitality.”

The **BeWildNY Coalition** consists of the Adirondack Council, Adirondack Mountain Club, Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, Audubon New York, Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Environmental Advocates of New York, Natural Resources Defense Council, New York League of Conservation Voters, and The Wilderness Society.

The **Adirondack Council** is an independent, privately funded, not-for-profit organization. The Council's mission is to ensure the ecological integrity and wild character of the Adirondack Park. The Council envisions an Adirondack Park comprised of large, core Wilderness areas, surrounded by working forests and farms and vibrant local communities.

The Adirondack Council carries out its mission through research, education, advocacy and legal action. Adirondack Council members live in all 50 United States.