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## **EDITORIAL: State's land deal, almost done, makes Adirondack Park even better**

[http://poststar.com/print-specific/editorial/editorial-state-s-land-deal-almost-done-makes-adirondack-park/article\\_0e0dca31-37bf-51eb-8373-59443998d78b.html](http://poststar.com/print-specific/editorial/editorial-state-s-land-deal-almost-done-makes-adirondack-park/article_0e0dca31-37bf-51eb-8373-59443998d78b.html)

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In the future, if Andrew Cuomo is praised for nothing else — and he might not be — he will be praised for the 2012 deal that led to the state's acquisition of huge tracts of Adirondack forestland that used to belong to Finch Paper.

The deal was facilitated by the Nature Conservancy, which bought 161,000 acres of woodlands from Finch Paper. The Nature Conservancy sold 89,000 acres to a Danish company for timber operations, while at the same time selling conservation easements on that land to the state. The land could still supply timber to local mills, and jobs for local lumberjacks, but could not be developed for housing or any other environmentally degrading purpose.

Next, the state agreed to buy over a period of about five years, for about \$50 million, 69,000 acres of beautiful woods and waters, including 175 lakes and ponds, 180 miles of rivers and streams, bogs, fens, hills and mountains.

It was a stupendous deal for New York, one that will remain an undimmed highlight in Gov. Cuomo's very mixed legacy.

With the state's purchase this spring of the 20,758-acre Boreas Ponds tract, the deal is mostly complete. One part that isn't done is classification of the lands within the Adirondack Park Agency's zoning scheme. We have advocated for most of the Boreas Ponds tract to be classified as wilderness, which, with other nearby forests — including the High Peaks Wilderness Area — would create an unbroken region of about 280,000 acres, one of the largest wilderness areas in the country outside Alaska.

The arguments now focus on minor elements and should be easily settled through compromise. For example, Gulf Brook Road runs from Blue Ridge Road about 7 miles in to a spot where paddlers can put in their boats.

Some strict environmentalists want the whole road closed to cars, while those advocating for public access want the whole road opened. The Adirondack Council suggests leaving about 6 of the 7 miles open to cars, but closing the last mile as a wilderness buffer. That seems a sensible compromise. Hiking a mile, even with a canoe or kayak, is not too much to ask of people seeking a special wilderness experience.

Other compromises have been struck, too, with the creation of a snowmobile connector trail between North Hudson and Newcomb, and the opening to bicyclists of about 20 miles of roads in the Essex Chain of Lakes area — another part of the Finch land deal.

The current arrangement in the Boreas Ponds tract allows for biking only up and down the 7-mile stretch of the Gulf Pond Road, not on any of the other old roads around the ponds. We sympathize with the argument for keeping bikes out of the wilderness, but are puzzled by the state's simultaneous allowance of horses and horse-drawn wagons on about 25 miles of roads through the tract.

It's hard to argue that bikes are disruptive to the wilderness experience and even, possibly, dangerous to hikers sharing the trails, but horses aren't. It's hard to argue that two or three people on mountain bikes will do more damage to an old dirt road than a wagon being drawn by a couple of horses.

Perhaps horses are being appreciated as more "natural" than bikes, regardless of the actual amount of disruption or damage either one of them does to the wilderness.

But aside from haggles over small issues of classification, the Finch land deal is essentially done, and the Adirondack Park, already a wonder of beauty and wildness, is now even more glorious.