

NEWS RELEASE

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ADIRONDACK CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS CALL ON GOVERNOR TO PROTECT WHITNEY ESTATE

36,000-acre tract is in the heart of the wildest portion of the Adirondack Park

ALBANY, N.Y. – Eight conservation organizations that are concerned with the future of the Adirondack Park called on Governor Kathy Hochul today to act swiftly to protect 36,000 acres of forests, lakes and rivers in the central Adirondacks owned by heirs to the vast Whitney and Vanderbilt family fortunes.

The Whitney Estate, a vast tract of some of the most ecologically sensitive lands in the Adirondack Park, contains 22 lakes and ponds with more than 100 miles of undeveloped shorelines, connected by navigable rivers and streams in the Town of Long Lake, Hamilton County. It has been listed as a high-priority for state acquisition/protection since the NYS Open Space Protection Plan was first adopted in 1992, due to its high-quality wildlife habitat and great potential for public recreation and tourism.

“Following the untimely death of John Hendrickson this past summer, this historic tract in the heart of the Adirondack Park will be sold by a trust seeking to sell these lands in the months ahead,” the groups wrote to the Governor. “We ask that you and your Department of Environmental Conservation take a leading role in negotiating the conservation of Whitney Park through purchase as Forest Preserve, as conservation easement, or a combination of the two.”

The letter was signed by Raul “Rocci” Aguirre, Executive Director of the Adirondack Council; Peter Bauer, Executive Director of Protect the Adirondacks!; Roger Downs, Policy Director, Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter; Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment; David Gibson, Managing Partner with Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve; Julia Goren, Acting Executive Director of the Adirondack Mountain Club; Patrick McClellan, Policy Director, New York League of Conservation Voters; and, Pete Nelson, Chair, Adirondack Wilderness Advocates.

In 2021, John Hendrickson proposed to divide the property into 11 lots and sell each one to separate parties. Conservationists objected to this plan, noting that its pristine forests and

waters would remain healthier and free from invasive species if it was left intact. The subdivision was never submitted to the Adirondack Park Agency for approval. Because there are several private homes on the estate, the groups said they expected any conservation plan to contain a mix of public and private investments, meaning part of the tract would be likely to remain in private ownership.

In 1997, Governor George Pataki purchased 15,000 acres around Little Tupper Lake from Mary Lou Whitney and were added to the Forest Preserve. These lands were combined with the lands around Lake Lila to create the William C. Whitney Wilderness Area. This area has grown to be one of the most popular wild areas in the Forest Preserve. The 36,000 acres of Whitney Park border the William C. Whitney Wilderness and are connected by rivers and streams.

As the state advances on biodiversity and climate action through the Open Space Plan, State Wildlife Action Plan, 30x30 goals and sweeping review and updates to the state's Endangered Species list, it is important to demonstrate state leadership and commitment to land conservation. Protection of Whitney Park will help sequester carbon, protect water quality and support biodiversity for NYS while also supporting increased recreational access in Hamilton County.

“Since 1992, Whitney Park has been a high priority in the statewide Open Space Conservation Plan, described in that Plan as ‘a 36,000-acre property in Hamilton County that has been devoted to forest and wildlife management for over 100 years and contains enormous outdoor recreational potential,’” the organization leaders wrote. “Whitney Park’s interconnected waterways are not only part of a historic 19th century canoe route, but provide great ecological connectivity throughout the central Adirondack Park. Furthermore, its forests, recovering now after years of heavy cutting, would offer carbon sequestration and carbon storage benefits, thereby contributing substantially to your and the state’s (greenhouse gas) mitigation and removal goals.”

The groups offered the Governor their assistance in completing the transaction.

“The organizations listed above stand ready to help in every way possible so that you can conserve and protect the balance of Whitney Park for this and coming generations. Thank you for your commitment to the Adirondack Park and the Forever Wild Forest Preserve,” their letter concluded.

“In many ways as goes Whitney Park, so goes the Adirondack Park. This is a major moment that in many ways will define what kind of Adirondack Park we have in the future. We urge Governor Hochul to make the protection of Whitney Park a high priority. Missing this

historic opportunity and failing to protect these lands is not an option,” said Peter Bauer, Executive Director of Protect the Adirondacks!

“I think that of the many words one could apply to Whitney Park, ‘interconnectedness’ is the one that speaks for me,” said Pete Nelson, of Adirondack Wilderness Advocates. “To paddle in the William C. Whitney Wilderness or on Forked Lake is to be drawn to those lands, to want to traverse an intact, interconnected tapestry of water and forest that feels endless. The acquisition of Whitney Park would cement Forever Wild protections for a tract of land that is the ecological, aesthetic and historic glue for the central Adirondacks. When you’re at its border, you can feel that connectedness calling to you.”

“The Whitney Estate is a vital addition to the Forest Preserve and the future of the Adirondack Park,” said Julia Goren of ADK. “By protecting this parcel, Governor Hochul can preserve its fragile ecosystems and provide outstanding recreational opportunities that promote mental and physical well-being for all New Yorkers.”

Adirondack Wild’s Dave Gibson said “for decades Whitney has been a high priority on the Statewide Open Space Conservation Plan because its conservation has a much higher ecological and economic value to the central Adirondacks than its development. Multiple governors have hoped to conserve this landscape. Governor Pataki conserved one-third of it. Now Governor Hochul has the chance to complete this vitally important work.”

The Whitney Estate is the center of one of the wildest regions of the Adirondack Park and has been a conservation priority for the Adirondack Council since we published our 2020 VISION plan for completing the Wilderness System of the Forest Preserve in 1990,” said Raul J. Aguirre of the Adirondack Council. “It’s the last of the very large, vulnerable parcels remaining unprotected in the Adirondacks, finding a conservation solution for this land will be critical to enhancing the wilderness legacy of the Park.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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