

A person is kayaking on a calm lake at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a golden glow and long reflections on the water. The kayaker is in the center, silhouetted against the bright light. The background shows a forested shoreline and distant hills.

# **ADIRONDACK PARK RECREATION STRATEGY:**

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Capitalizing on the Economic Potential  
of our Natural Environment





*New York’s Adirondack Park holds an incomparable combination of mountains, lakes and recreation venues providing a remarkable variety of recreational opportunities, all within a day’s drive of 120 million visitors. While the Park has long been recognized for its outstanding natural features and recreational amenities, there is significantly more that can be done to capture a greater share of the outdoor recreation market and to increase this sector’s economic benefits to the Park and its residents.*

Governor Cuomo’s comments on the State’s pending addition of former Finch Paper Company lands to the Forest Preserve captured the vision well when he said, *“Opening these lands to public use and enjoyment for the first time in 150 years will provide extraordinary new outdoor recreational opportunities, increase the number of visitors to the North Country and generate additional tourism revenue.”*

The Adirondack Partnership Recreation Strategy Group’s mission is to establish a comprehensive recreation strategy for the Adirondack Park and to identify, diversify and grow recreational opportunities which will help sustain the economy of communities throughout the Park.

Recent planning initiatives in the Park have identified outdoor recreation as an area of major economic opportunity that has the potential to create new investment and employment within the Park. According to the study, *Economic Impact of Tourism in NY 2010* by Tourism Economics, tourism in the Adirondack region was a \$1.1 billion industry supporting nearly 20,000 jobs (17% of total Adirondack employment) and generated \$144 million in State and local taxes in 2010.

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Recommendations in this report address four areas of opportunity where suggested strategies could increase recreation-based economic growth inside the Adirondack Park:

*Ensuring access to public recreation*

*Positioning community support of tourism*

*Expanding the outdoor recreation industry*

*Marketing the identity of the entire Park.*

We include examples of community successes and the story of five communities where the addition of new public lands offers a potential model to test the recommendations included in this report.



Capitalizing on  
Opportunities  
to Leverage the  
Economic Potential of

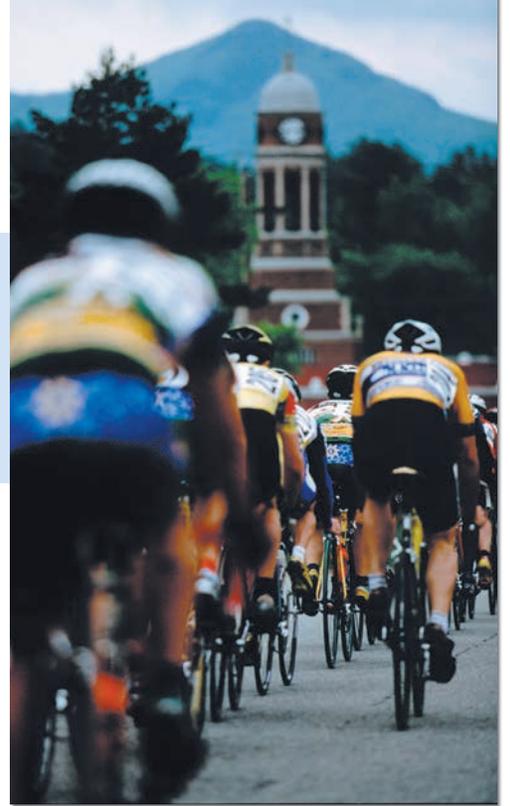
**OUR NATURAL  
ENVIRONMENT**

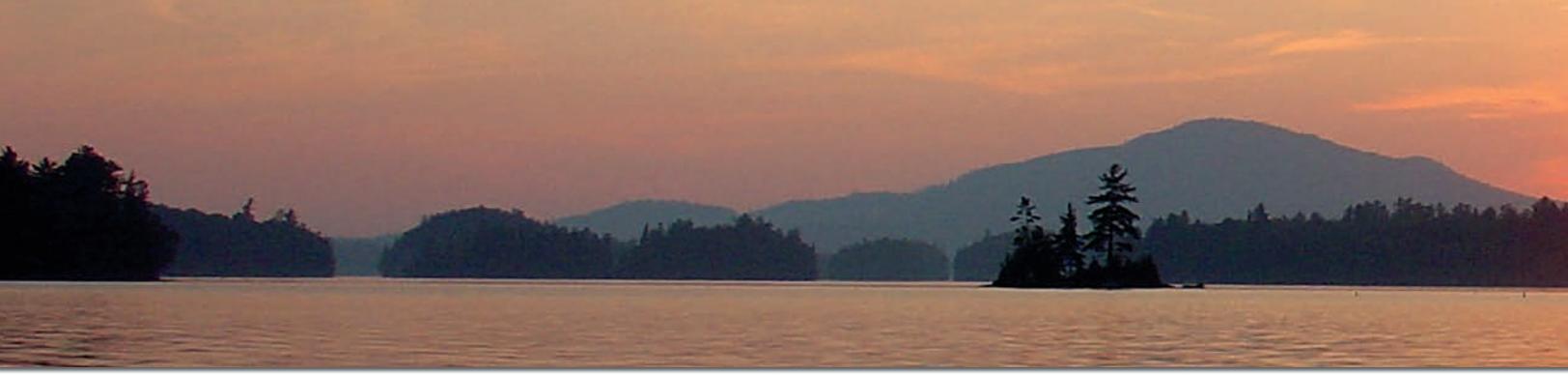
## Opportunity 1:

Ensure access to public lands for a full range of recreation activities for people of all ages and abilities.

### *Recommendations:*

- Expedite a collaborative approach to recreation planning for Forest Preserve, conservation easement and other publicly accessible lands within the Park which seeks to:
  - Establish recreational linkages between communities in the Park.
  - Create a system of destination trails that weave between the regions of the Park.
  - Develop a spectrum of recreational opportunities ranging from more intensive use in the front country and more remote interior experiences.
  - Consider the needs of various user groups during planning and implementation of infrastructure projects (e.g. bike lanes during road reconstruction/repaving).
- Create an online asset management system to coordinate public land stewardship carried out by paid and volunteer groups which would also serve as a project locator for potential volunteers.
- Implement a cohesive design standard and establish informative themes for recreation opportunity signage among the State, local governments and businesses in the Park.
- Establish a dedicated fund devoted to maintaining recreation infrastructure.
- Increase the stewardship category of the Environmental Protection Fund.
- Identify and develop recreational opportunities within communities (e.g. pedestrian and bicycle pathways, athletic fields and water access).





## Opportunity 2:

Position communities to attract revenue from recreating visitors.



### *Recommendations:*

- Conduct tourism amenity mapping across the Park to identify gaps in service as well as market opportunities.
- Utilize targeted investments to ensure each regional recreation hub (cluster of communities and related infrastructure and amenities) has the complete set of amenities to facilitate visitor-driven economic activity, recognizing that each community can and should benefit from the success of others within its regional hub.
- Provide technical and financial assistance for Park communities to:
  - Identify water and sewer improvement needs related to business growth and development planning.
  - Apply for low-interest financing from the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation.
  - Tap into grant opportunities and planning assistance programs to make improvements to municipal services related to business development and recreation amenities.
  - Improve Main Streets.
- Implement the Community Transformation Tourism Fund and the Tourism Business Revitalization Fund (recommended by the North Country Regional Economic Development Council) as a way to jumpstart construction and improvements to existing visitor amenities.
- Continue to support NYSERDA energy audits, grants and loans for businesses needing to upgrade their energy efficiency to maintain their business profitability.
- Establish an Adirondack Microenterprise Fund to support small business retention, development and expansion within the Park. This fund should include opportunities for both grants and low-interest loans and take into account the seasonality of businesses, both in understanding streams of income and encouraging shoulder season development.

*Each community within can and should benefit from the success of others within its regional hub.*



### Opportunity 3:

Expand and diversify the outdoor recreation industry as a Park-wide priority for economic sustainability.



#### *Recommendations:*

- Target the outdoor recreation industry as a coordinated element of the North Country, Capital Region and Mohawk Valley Regional Economic Development Council Plans.
- Encourage programmatic collaboration among the various IDAs and related organizations in the Park to foster a favorable investment climate for the retention and expansion of the Park's outdoor industry.
- Plan and implement a diverse and dispersed set of managed recreation activities within the Park including races, challenges, athletic events and tournaments and other activities which support the Park's hospitality industry.



### Opportunity 4:

Market the identity of the entire Park to realize the State and local economic benefits of this unique asset.

#### *Recommendations:*

- Develop a comprehensive recreational asset inventory and web portal which promotes all recreation assets and events across the Park. Allow regional tourism, local communities and economic development websites to access the inventory and provide a real-time and accurate accounting of the recreational amenities within their districts.
- Develop an Adirondack Park design vernacular and logo to be used by State agencies on all public information outlets (e.g. signs, the web and published material) and available for use by private providers of visitor amenities.

## Current Successes

*The Adirondack Partnership's Recreation Strategy Group did not start with a blank slate. We learned from existing examples of success stories where communities have capitalized on the Park's outdoor recreation assets.*

### Cranberry Lake 50

The newly created Cranberry Lake 50, a fifty-mile hiking route around Cranberry Lake, was featured as one of the best multi-day hikes in the Northeast in the January 2011 issue of Backpacker Magazine. Since its inception in 2008, more than 440 people have officially registered as having completed the trail. In addition to attracting visitors, the trail serves as a branding tool for the local communities.

### Adirondack Canoe Classic 90 Miler Canoe Race and the Northern Forest Canoe Trail

The three-day, 90-mile canoe and kayak race begins in Old Forge, stops overnight in Long Lake, and finishes in Saranac Lake. Over 500 participants, as well as numerous support teams partake in the race and demand is so strong that applicants are regularly denied. The race follows a portion of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, whose users have spent an estimated \$6 million in the local economy and support over 134 jobs.

### Wilmington/Whiteface Bike Fest

Driven by a grassroots effort, new mountain bike trail networks have been developed throughout the Town of Wilmington, helping to stimulate hospitality industry revenue growth by 60% between 2000 and 2011. The Wilmington Whiteface Bike Fest's 100K race is a qualifier for the nation's most notorious mountain bike race, the Leadville 100, and has grown to over 350 racers in just two years.

### Champlain Area Trails

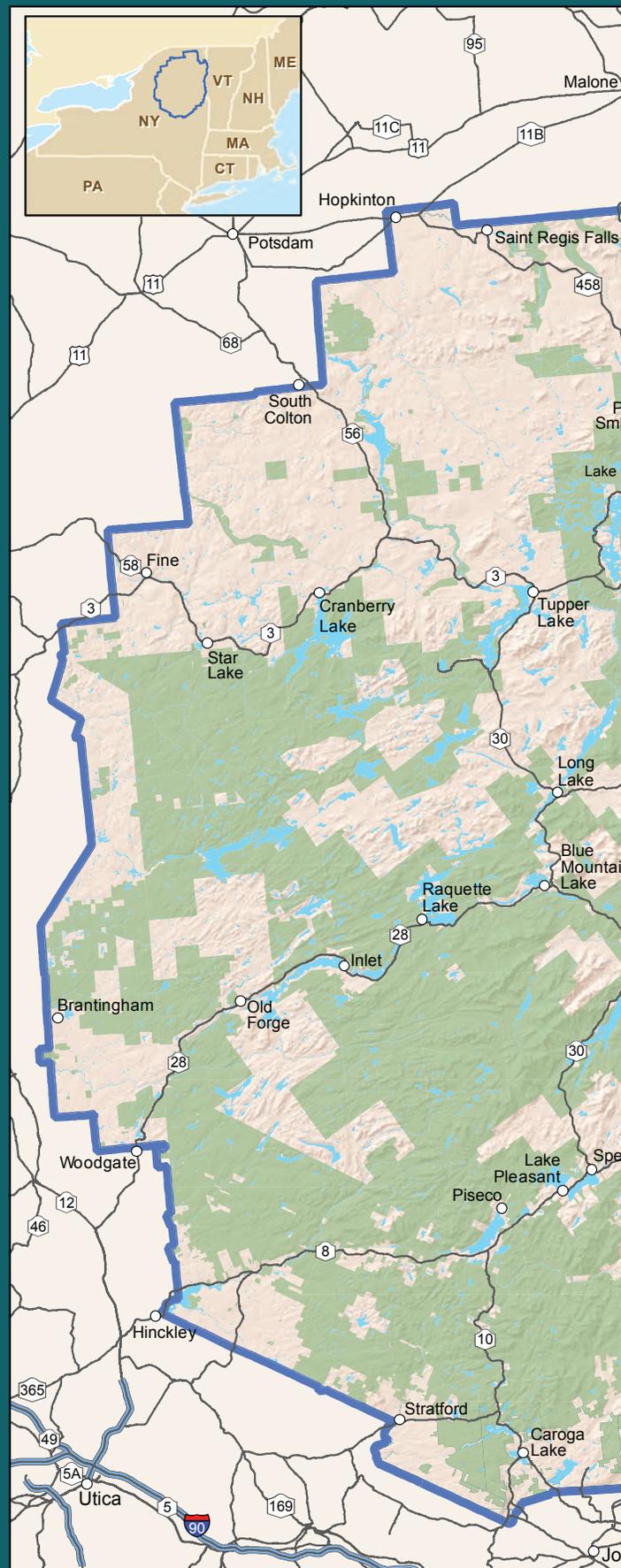
Numerous hiking trails have been developed throughout the Park's Champlain Valley, linking local communities. The trails are built and maintained through the work of Champlain Area Trails, a group that also works to preserve open space, promote farming and restore communities through its Champlain Valley Conservation Partnership Project.

### Hamilton County Birding Festival

Each June, the Hamilton County Birding Festival attracts nearly 100 attendees bringing an estimated \$56,000 to \$80,000 into the local economy during an off-season time. Capitalizing on a wide array of natural habitats found primarily on public land, the festival features outings with New York State licensed guides, canoe trips, hiking excursions and lectures throughout the county.

# The Six Million-Acre Adirondack Park

The Park covers approximately 20% of New York State. It is The Park contains more than 105 towns and villages and is



the largest Park in the contiguous United States.  
within a day's drive of 120 million people.



## North Creek Business Alliance

The hamlet of North Creek and the Town of Johnsburg have experienced a renaissance in part due to the North Creek Business Alliance, a group that is expanding linkages between its hamlet and outdoor recreation opportunities. The Alliance has developed shuttles and signage to link visitors from the Saratoga & North Creek Railway to new trails, the business district, Gore Mountain, and the North Creek Ski Bowl.

## Keene Valley

The citizens and businesses of the Town of Keene have leveraged their link to the High Peaks and Giant Mountain Wilderness areas through sponsoring mountaineering and hiking events with international participation, promoting local foods with a fall festival and making broadband available to tourists as well as local school children. Since 2000, occupancy revenues from the town have increased 140% and the population has grown 4% over the past decade as new businesses continue to open and existing businesses expand.

## Great Sacandaga Walleye Ice Fishing Challenge

Every year, over 2,200 anglers go out on the ice for ice fishing competitions on Great Sacandaga Lake. Over 1,500 hundred fishermen and an additional 1,500 support team members attend the Walleye Ice Fishing Derby alone. Similar events occur in other Adirondack communities.

## John Dillon Park

John Dillon Park offers a fully accessible wilderness facility for those people who would not ordinarily be able to experience the rugged terrain of the Adirondack Park. Managed jointly by International Paper Company and Paul Smith's College, its carefully designed and well-maintained handicap accessible trails, boat launches, lean-tos and other facilities attract an additional and unique user segment, thereby helping to broaden the outdoor recreation base of the Adirondacks. In 2012, 1,631 people visited the park. Their testimonies attest to the fact that the benefits far exceed the raw numbers.

## Town of Inlet

Inlet's Parks and Buildings Department Head, Mitch Lee, speaking at an Adirondack Park-wide local government conference in 2012 said, "Almost 100% of the people who visit Inlet come into contact with the Forest Preserve." The town promotes at least seven major outdoor recreation events that rely on surrounding public land, and views the Forest Preserve as an economic asset.



### Emerging Opportunities:

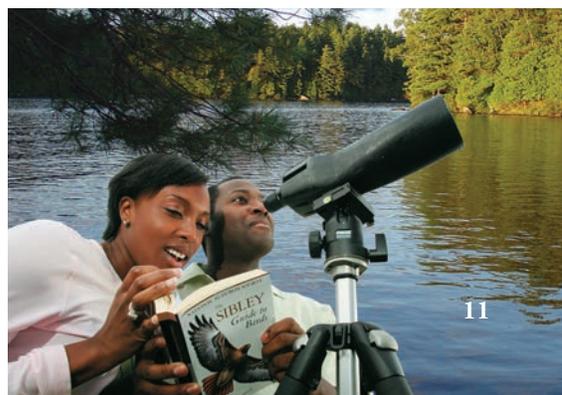
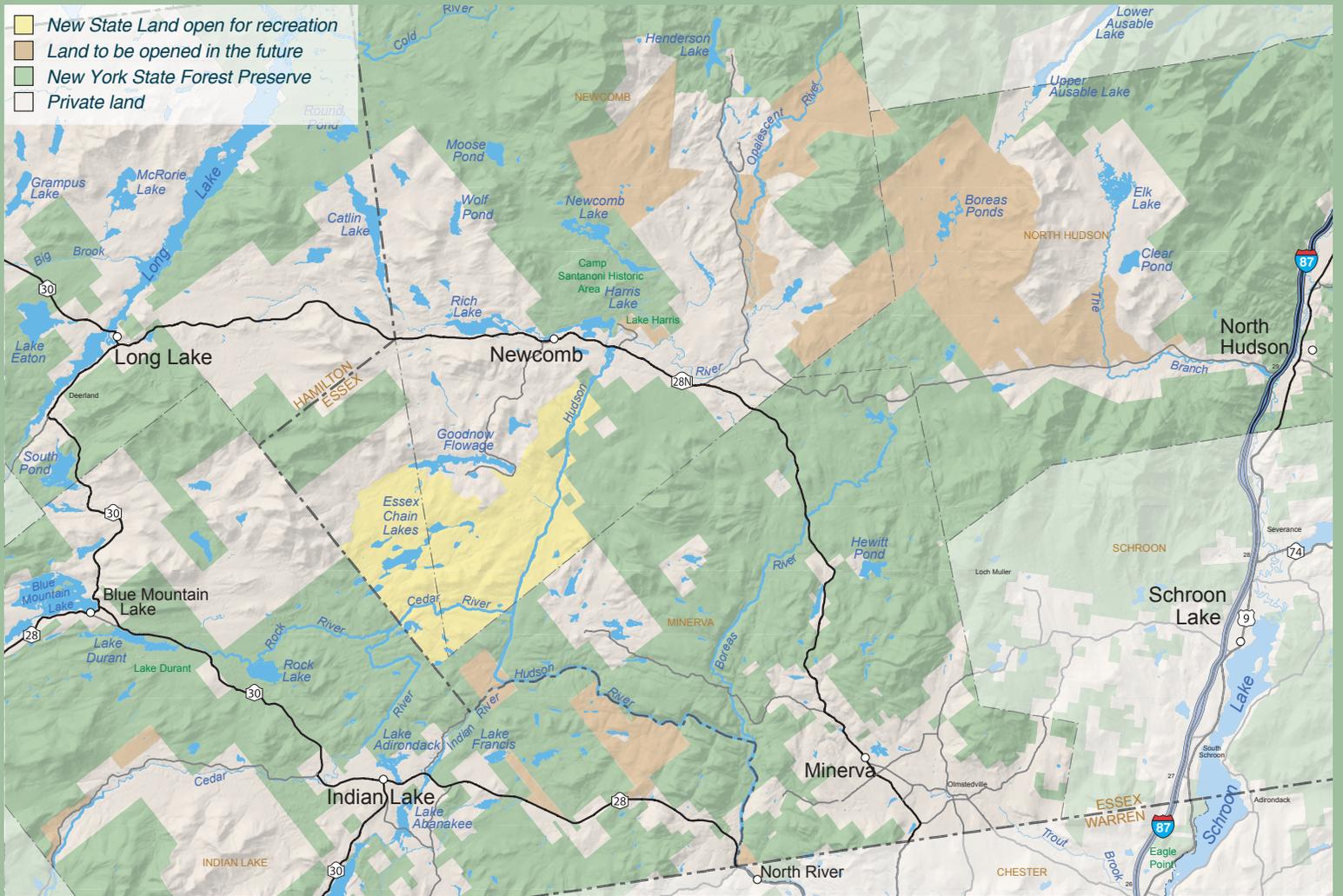
Five towns, two counties work together to build sustainable recreation economy on the Upper Hudson Recreation Hub.

The towns of Newcomb, Minerva, North Hudson, Long Lake and Indian Lake have initiated a collaborative regional approach to establish this region as a “recreation hub” leveraging the State’s recent purchase of Finch Paper lands from The Nature Conservancy. Facilitated by the Adirondack Recreation Strategy Group, these five towns plan on utilizing their recently expanded recreation assets to expand tourism and outdoor recreation-related business in the area.

The hamlets are investment-ready for the establishment of the critical mass of businesses necessary to realize the economic potential of recreation.

*Working meeting to establish future planning of the Upper Hudson Recreation Hub*





# Members of the Group

*The Adirondack Park Recreation Strategy Group was appointed by the Adirondack Partnership to explore ways to improve the economy of the Adirondack Park through leveraging the recreation opportunities offered by the Park's abundant natural resources. During its deliberations, many of the members moved from interested participants to crusaders for the mission given the group by the Partnership. Members include:*

Jessica Darney Buehler – Public Health Educator, Essex County  
Jeff Byrne – Vice President, Olympic Region Development Authority  
Susan Cameron – Events Manager, Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism  
Jim Connolly – Deputy Director, NYS Adirondack Park Agency  
Ray Curran – Advisor, Adirondack Sustainable Communities  
Bill Farber – Chair, Adirondack Partnership; Chair, Hamilton County Board of Supervisors  
Kimberly Finnigan – Attorney, Cooper Erving & Savage, LLP/Center for Economic Growth  
Ed Frantz – Adirondack Park Forest Preserve Manager, NYS Department of Transportation  
Jecinda Hughes – Community Outreach & Byways Coordinator, Adirondack North Country Association  
Dan Kelleher – Special Assistant for Economic Affairs, NYS Adirondack Park Agency  
Jason Kemper – Director of Planning, Saratoga County  
George Leveille – Lacrosse Tournament organizer; former planning board chair; Blue Line Strategy Group  
Angel Marvin – Planning Consultant  
Brian McDonnell – Manager Paul Smiths VIC; event organizer (incl Adirondack Canoe Classic)  
James McKenna – CEO, Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism  
Stacy McNulty – Associate Director, Adirondack Ecological Center, SUNY College of Environmental Science & Forestry, Newcomb  
Corrie Miller – Executive Director, Ausable River Association  
Fred Munk – Supervising Forester Region 6, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation  
Jason Pfothhauer – Deputy Director, St. Lawrence County Planning Office  
Connie Prickett – Communications Director, The Nature Conservancy  
Karyn Richards – Forest Preserve Coordinator, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation  
Nick Rose – Executive Director, Central Adirondack Partnership  
Steve Signell – Principal, Frontier Spatial  
Ross Whaley – Senior Advisor, Adirondack Land Owners Association; Northern Forest Canoe Trail  
Neil Woodworth – Executive Director, Adirondack Mountain Club

*The Adirondack Partnership is composed of local governments (towns, counties, and villages), educational institutions, and non-profit groups committed to unifying their economies and the environment for the benefit of the Adirondack Park communities.*



*This document was prepared for the New York State Department of State and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation under Title 11 of the Environmental Protection Fund and the Adirondack Smart Growth Program.*

