

Conservation Easement in the Works for Natureview Park

The long battle to preserve Natureview Park in Amherst saw a major victory this July, when the Town Board approved a proposal to restrict use of the land and involve the WNY Land Conservancy in a partnership to protect the whole 1300-acre site. Hundreds of Amherst residents crowded the



Windemere School, where the meeting was held, to support the proposal and speak out against another proposal to construct an 18-hole golf course on the land. The dramatic 6 - 1 approval confirmed that our voices had been heard, with only Councilman Mike McGuire refusing to support Natureview.

The real victory, however, took place deep in the underground halls of the Amherst Planning Department, where the rusty machinery of the planning bureaucracy finally chugged up to speed. At the helm is a new planning director, Rick Gillert, who is agreeable to the Natureview project.

With his cooperation, we are now making progress in bringing the WNY Land Conservancy into the fold to set up permanent protection for the park. The goal is to create a conservation easement, which is a legal agreement between the Town and the Land Conservancy that a set of mutually agreed upon land use restrictions be followed. These restrictions are permanent and not subject to the whims of future Town Boards. We hope to have the draft easement ready by December, after which a public hearing will be held to discuss it.

Stay tuned for further updates, and stay involved! The coyotes and mayapples and great horned owls of Natureview will thank you.

--Robbyn Drake

Bring Popcorn! Sierra Club Double Feature: "Battle for the Everglades" and "This Land is Your Land, Saving the National Forests."

The Niagara Group will be hosting a slide and show and video presentation on Wednesday, November 17, starting at 7:00 PM. The presentation will be held at the Harlem Road Community Center, 4255 Harlem Road near Main Street in Snyder, NY. Some brief comments will proceed the presentation with opportunity for discussion and socializing before, in between and after the two presentations.

Prior to the 1940's, the Everglades were a vast wetlands of well over 3 million acres, covering the entire southern tip of Florida. The Everglades then drew their sustenance from a gradually swelling flow of waters originating more than 100 miles to the

north, and eventually drained into the Florida Bay.



And what abundant life it was! A century ago, even during the dry seasons, the Everglades supported an estimated two million wading birds, most memorably of all, the varied and

beautiful egrets.

Then, in the 1940s and after, the character of the Everglades itself began to change. As the human population of South Florida, and its demand for water, grew, the Everglades contracted. In 1948, at Congressional behest, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers embarked upon construction of a massive and elaborate system of pumps, canals and levees which diverted the region's natural flow of water for human purposes and drastically perturbed the ecological systems dependent upon its steady and unimpeded course to the ocean. Human intervention

disrupted the ancient seasonal rhythms that formerly controlled the region's waters, devastating many of the indigenous creatures specifically adapted to the region.

By the mid-1970s, wading-bird numbers had dropped back to a few hundred thousand, a clear sign that the Everglades were, and still are, severely threatened.

By the late 1980's, however, the threat to the Everglades began to gain recognition. Subsequently, in an effort to repair the damages wrought by the overreaching policies of the past, Congress and the state of Florida have drawn up a \$7.8 billion plan to restore the ecological health of the Everglades. This will be one of the most ambitious attempts at ecological restoration ever attempted. Its first phases are scheduled to begin in the next year or so.

Battle for the Everglades, a production of the Florida Chapter of the Sierra Club, examines this \$7.8 billion restoration plan to save America's subtropical frontier. It will look not only at the plan's beneficial aspects, but also at its bad and its downright ugly aspects as well.

So, come and join us on November 17th. Wade through swampgrass, see eye to eye with an alligator and discover why the battle to save one of America's most beloved places is a test of our commitment to the preservation of natural ecological systems nationwide.

The slide show is half an hour long and features 114 slides with recorded commentary.

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The other half of our upcoming "twin bill" is *This Land is Your Land*, a 17minute video that documents a century of management (or mismanagement) policies in our National Forests. *This Land is Your Land* was produced by the Ecology Center for the Sierra Club, as part of the Club's campaign to end all commercial logging in our National Forests. (Incidentally, that campaign received something of a boost early in October, when President Clinton announced a new plan protecting roadless areas in the National Forests. See the next *TrailBlazer* article for more on his announcement.)

On November 17th, join us at the Harlem Road Community Center and find out why it is time to end logging on our National Forests!

--Michael Kukla

"...There are no other Everglades in the world. They are, they have always been, one of the unique regions of the earth, remote, never wholly known. Nothing anywhere else is like them; their vast glittering openness, wider than the enormous visible round of the horizon, the racing free saltiness and sweetness of their massive winds, under the dazzling blue heights of the clear sky. They are unique also in the simplicity, the diversity, the related harmony of the forms of life they enclose. The miracle of the light pours over the green and brown expanse of sawgrass and of water, shining and slow-moving below, the grass and water that is the meaning and the central fact of the Everglades of Florida, the world's great river of grass...."

--From "River of Grass" by Marjory Stoneman Douglas

Clinton Announces Ambitious and Historic Forest Preservation Plan

On Wednesday, October 13, at Little Rivers Roadless Area in Virginia, President Clinton announced he will order new Forest Service regulations permanently protecting roadless areas in over 40 million acres of National Forest lands.



Clinton's plan would make as much as two-thirds of America's remaining road-free federal forests permanently off-limits to logging, mining and other development. The forest protection plan would require no congressional action, relying instead upon regulations to be issued by the U.S. Forest Service after a detailed environmental review and public comments.

Currently only about 18 percent of the 192 million acres of federal forest is protected as wilderness. About 60 million acres are without roads, commercial or even recreational activity.

According to a spokesperson for the Heritage Forests Campaign, a coalition of conservation groups that he been fighting for such a permanent ban on new logging roads "It would be one of the most significant land conservation actions by the United States government in its history." Among the members of the Heritage Forests Campaign is the Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund, which was originally founded in 1971 as the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, and has worked closely with its parent Sierra Club ever since.

Although industry groups and western conservatives denounced Clinton's plan, and although there is still much to be done to realize the President's vision, the announcement nonetheless represents a major victory for the thousands of dedicated citizens and activists who have fought such a long and tireless battle on behalf of our remaining stands of natural forests. "...the last uncorrupted enclaves of biological diversity, watershed protection, scenic splendor, recreational opportunity and spiritual solace we have left..."

--Michael Kukla

Pataki Announces New Emissions Standards for NY Power Plants

When the federal Clean Air Act was passed in 1970 and then amended in 1977, many of the nation's older power plants were exempted from its regulations. Ever since then, these grandfathered plants have been allowed to generate 4 to 10 times as many pollutants as newer, more efficient power plants.

New York State is home to twenty-one plants that fit this description, including a handful of facilities in our own backyard. In 1997 alone, these twenty-one plants released 250,000 tons of sulfur dioxide, nearly 70,000 tons of nitrogen oxides, nearly 48 million tons of carbon dioxide and over 700 pounds of mercury. This is roughly equivalent to the emissions of over 3.5 million automobiles. The harmful effects of such airborne contaminants upon both human health and the health of a variety of ecosystems are pervasive and profound.

It is hardly surprising that environmentalists have for years worked to repeal the loophole that permits these plants to continue dirty operations. Late last year, for example, as part of a sustained statewide effort to eliminate the loophole, a coalition of activists from our own Niagara Group, NYPIRG and Environmental Advocates held a demonstration outside the Huntley plant, demanding that the state's

old, and dirty, coal-fired plants meet the tougher emissions standards that apply to newer facilities.

Their efforts and those of their myriad allies across the state won forceful vindication on October 14, as Governor Pataki ordered sharp cuts in emissions from all New York power plants. The new standards proposed by Pataki will be substantially more stringent than equivalent provisions in the federal Clean Air Act which are scheduled to take effect next year. Pataki's order would reduce emissions of the nitrogen oxides by 35% and emissions of sulfur dioxide by over 50%. The cuts will be phased in during the period 2003-2007.

Although the new emissions standards should make New York State a national leader in the fight for cleaner air, of themselves they will not effect much reduction in the acid rain blighting the Adirondacks and other upstate locales. Dirty Midwestern coal plants are the real culprits. They are thought to account for almost 75% of the emissions behind acid rain. Furthermore, many studies have concluded that the current provisions of the federal Clean Air Act will not be stringent enough to stem fully the acid rain damage afflicting the Adirondacks. Further action at the federal level will be necessary.

Nonetheless, the Governor's order is a genuine step forward. Coupled with Attorney General Spitzer's initiation of a lawsuit against a number of Midwestern power plants for violation of the Clean Air Act, it can only make matters in the Adirondacks better. Pataki's order will, for one thing, undercut the specious argument of Midwestern coal operators, and their allies in the state houses, and some of the Midwestern newspapers, that New York's acid rain problem is one of our own making. It should also increase pressure for other states and Congress to follow New York's example in setting tighter emissions standards.

One tawdry note mars what is otherwise a significant green victory. According to Jason Babbie of Environmental Advocates, a number of the very activists who led the fight to rein in emissions at the older plants, including Larry Shapiro of NYPIRG, Kyle Rabin of Environmental Advocates and John Stouffer of the Sierra Club, were denied admittance to the press conference where Pataki made his announcement. Perhaps the Governor and his staff felt that they would steal some of his thunder. Whatever the reason, such treatment cannot deprive these individuals of the great credit they deserve. It is largely because of their tireless advocacy, and that of other like-minded citizens, that the Governor finally took action against the dirty plants.

--Michael Kukla

**Next Trailblazer Deadline:
January 10, 2000**

Articles for our next newsletter are needed by January 10! Remember, if you send them via email, type the message into the body of the email, *don't send it as an attachment*. Send your contributions to George Dillman. His email address is **gdillmann@juno.com**. If you want to send things snail mail, his mailing address is 351 Parkside Ave., Buffalo, NY 14214-1960; 838-2923.

--George Dillman

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