



Q3 2010

Dear AdkAction.org Members and Friends:

Our young, spirited organization has yet another quarter of successes to report. If you don't have time to read this entire newsletter for the full details, the major accomplishments of this past quarter are summarized in the bullets below:

- AdkAction.org stepped in when a proposed rail or trail study for the rail corridor from Lake Placid to Tupper Lake stalled in August, raised private funds to underwrite the important, unbiased study by a top consulting firm, quickly signed a contract for the work and expect a fact-based report by January.
- AdkAction.org laid the groundwork for creation of a rejuvenated Adirondack Counties Assessors' Association. We will continue to facilitate this important work to help make property tax assessment in the Adirondacks more uniform and equitable by helping organize the group's first working session next June at the Wild Center.
- AdkAction.org's trip to Washington, D.C. last December to lobby for federal funds to help control invasive milfoil in Adirondack lakes is on track to secure \$500,000 to begin when the federal budget is adopted after the Congressional recess.
- AdkAction.org continued to press for formation of a state commission to recommend ways to reduce pollution from road salt in the Adirondacks.
- Adk.Action.org concluded a successful season of work with our first summer intern, Peter Erwin of Hamilton College. [Read Peter's own summary of his internship on our website.](#)

RAILS OR TRAILS

As members will recall, in March AdkAction.org, working with the Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA), developed a Request for Proposals (RFP) that would answer the simple question: what would be better for the towns and people between Lake Placid and Tupper Lake, renewed railroad service or conversion of that corridor to a recreational trail? The RFP was answered by four top consulting firms and a winner (Camoin Associates) was selected by the North Elba Town Board, who expected to pay for the study out of contributed funds left over from an aborted Lake Placid to Saranac Lake rails-with-trails grant. ANCA, despite its involvement in developing the RFP, raised objections to the use of those idle funds in a series of questions about possible restrictions on the donations. When the exchanges between North Elba and ANCA became public, North Elba's board backed away from their commitment to fund the study.

In September, after months of delay, AdkAction.org stepped back in and took over the project. We created a tax-deductible fund so ADkAction.org members could underwrite the study (if you would like

to be an 'angel' and support this, please email us at info@AdkAction.org). We created a Project Steering Committee from member-volunteers, committed to letting the facts speak for themselves no matter what their individual preferences. Finally on September 20th we executed the contract with Camoin Associates and the study is underway with a final report due back in early 2011. Camoin will also make public presentations of the results in Lake Placid, Saranac Lake, and Tupper Lake.

We do not have a dog in this fight: *our position is that whatever improves the economy most is what we will support*. What we need are the facts that Camoin will deliver: what is the cost of rail restoration, what is the cost of converting the corridor to a recreational trail (bike, hike, winter sports), what would the increased tourism and other benefits be from each, and what would be the ongoing costs. Unfortunately, the community has been paralyzed by competing positions of the two camps, rail buffs vs. bikers and snowmobilers, neither with the facts to either support their position or go to our elected officials with solid grant or appropriation-worthy requests. We observe simply that the corridor is an extremely valuable local resource that has lain unused for more than two decades. It is time to fix that.

NEW ASSESSORS' GROUP AIMS TO MAKE ASSESSMENTS MORE UNIFORM

For more than two years AdkAction.org has been working to further one of our priority member goals of fair and equitable property assessments by building a strong working relationship with local assessors. In June 2008 we sponsored an all-day conference on assessment practices and invited more than 125 North Country assessors, supervisors and other officials. This past June, we followed up with another all-day conference of assessors (Members with a strong interest in assessment issues may wish to review some of the [presentations from the June conference on our web site](#)). That meeting concluded with the consensus that the unique problems of assessing property in the Adirondack Park would benefit from rejuvenation of a long-dormant association for Adirondack assessors.

A kick-off meeting of the group was held during the recent NYS Assessors' Association conference in Lake Placid last month. Key assessors from Franklin, Hamilton, Warren, and Herkimer Counties agreed to form the Adirondack Counties Assessors' Association. During October, they will get agreement from the County Assessor Presidents in St. Lawrence, Clinton, and Essex to also sponsor the new association. All assessors for the towns wholly or partially in the Park and all assessors for towns outside the Park in St. Lawrence, Franklin, and Clinton Counties will be invited to join the new association.

The first meeting of the new association will be a one-day seminar to be held in late June, 2011, at the Wild Center (good acoustics and central location). Since all property assessments are based on property inventory data, it was agreed that the first seminar should focus on the standardization of data collection in the North Country. Dave Briggs will moderate the seminar; and he is confident that he will be able to get education credit for the seminar. Dave Wolff committed AdkAction.org to assist with the creation and distribution of the meeting invitations, the scheduling of the meeting itself, and the production and distribution of meeting minutes.

INVASIVE PLANT APPROPRIATION

You will recall that last December a joint delegation from AdkAction.org and the Adirondack Council traveled to Washington to call on our senators and congressmen. Dan Kelting, head of the Paul Smith's

Adirondack Watershed Institute (PSAWI) came with us to present the case that the 54 lakes with known invasive species could and should be mapped and a plan for eradication developed, but that only federal funds could make this happen given New York's near-bankrupt status. We received a generally warm welcome from all, but Congressman Bill Owens took the project and ran with it. First introducing a \$1million appropriation, he then shepherded it through the Agriculture Committee where \$500,000 was approved and awaits House action. We are hopeful that this will happen soon and PSAWI will get the funds to develop Stage 1 of a much larger plan to bring Eurasian Water Milfoil under control in the untreated lakes using non-chemical techniques proven effective in Upper Saranac, Mountain View, Lake Colby and others. We are grateful to Congressman Owens for his leadership on this issue.

Dan Kelting reports that PSAWI said about half the funds would be used to conduct milfoil assessments in about 80 Adirondack lakes. The other half would be used for rapid response removal where deemed effective and for public education on the need to prevent the spread of this destructive invasive. Training of about 20 new employees would begin in June, with assessment diving to begin in July when milfoil is has grown enough to spot easily, Dan said.

SALT STUDY STATUS

Follow-up to the [ground-breaking study](#) we underwrote and published in February included a very successful conference with the key stakeholders on May 17th. The results of that conference included the unanimous recommendation that the Governor appoint a special commission to make recommendations on improving the maintenance of our roads in winter conditions. In August, our Water Quality Chair and the Executive Director of the Adirondack Council, who had jointly sponsored the May conference with us, went to see the Governor's representatives on the environment and on road policy. We found an administration in bag-packing, résumé-writing mode, with little interest in anything but moving on.

Our current focus is on the incoming administration, and we have already started making contact with the presumed next-governor's staff. We are asking every member and supporter who has not yet done so to [sign our on-line petition](#) asking that the special commission be appointed. Please take a few minutes to generate more support by sending the link to the petition to your own contacts with your personal appeal for them to sign.

We do not expect much progress until the new administration is in place, but we think your support can get us early access. If Andrew Cuomo is the next governor his strong position on consolidation of government services should help us greatly, as there is no more visible overlap or waste than in the multi-jurisdiction, incompatible procedure, and conflicting views of chemical and sand use than in winter road maintenance. We believe our proof that you can both improve the environment and reduce costs should resonate with his campaign.

GOOGLE THE ADIRONDACKS

A number of AdkAction.org members attended Clarkson's Forever Wired Conference in early September. See <http://clarkson.edu/adk/ForeverWired/index.html>. Dave Wolf, chair of our steering committee, provided the following summary of the conference.

The keynote speaker, Chuck Wilsker, outlined the value of working from home in his talk "Broadband and Bringing Jobs":

- Good for the environment (less pollution from commuting)
- Helps the US with energy independence (less gas usage commuting)
- Helps increase business profits (businesses save on average \$20,000 per year for each tele-commuter)
- Helps increase personal savings (people save on average \$8,000 per year because of not paying for gas, parking, business clothes and cleaning)
- Helps disabled workers as they find commuting difficult
- Improves productivity (American Express found that it's tele-commuters were 20%-40% more productive)
- Offers built-in business continuity in case of some type of disaster

A key session was called “Managing the Last Mile: Broadband Infrastructure Options”:

- Dave Mason from Keene explained how Keene implemented its fiber network. By focusing on connecting all the school children and adults associated with the school, they were able to rally community support and to raise the required capital. After installing the fiber with the money they raised, the network is self sustainable. Today, Keene has a 93% adoption rate. The national average is just over 60% and the Adirondacks average is around 30%.
- Mark Dzwonczyk explained his WiFi (with a little fiber) solution for Upper St. Regis. He now gets speeds at his camp (9.2MB download and 6.7MB upload) that are faster than what he experiences back home in Silicon Valley. The other good news is that Mark used commodity components and the WiFi receivers were easy to hide from view.
- Conference “take away”: In an effort to improve the broadband availability in the Tri-Lakes, the Google the Adirondacks team agreed to focus on the schools in the Tri-Lakes and to identify the children who do not have access to broadband. Gerry Goldman, the Superintendent of the Saranac Lake schools, has agreed to conduct a census of the school children to determine who doesn't have broadband access and who has access but is not connected. By identifying areas where high-speed Internet access is lacking, we can then determine how to address the coverage gaps.
- In addition, New York State just developed a statewide map showing the availability of high-speed Internet service by street address. The map is available at www.broadbandmap.ny.gov. This new capability will help complement the school census and enable us to quickly develop the maps showing the broadband coverage gaps in the Tri-Lakes

AdkAction.org Board Members:

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