



A New New York, a New Adirondacks

Updated Blueprint for the Blue Line

Common Ground Alliance (2015)

“The Adirondacks have world-class outdoor recreation opportunities but not world-class infrastructure and amenities.”

New York is on track to be a progressive beacon of hope for the country once again thanks to governmental leadership restoring the state’s financial health. Adirondack groups are also optimistic about the way we work together to realize a better future. This positive change, which benefits all of New York, has been the centerpiece of the Common Ground Alliance.

For seven years, the Common Ground Alliance has brought stakeholders together to foster open communication, seek collaborative solutions, and set the stage for constructive action. We are working toward collective impact: the commitment of Adirondackers — including those in government, nonprofit, and the business sector — to coordinate their efforts and find a common agenda for solving complex problems. Together we develop a shared vision and strategies for the whole Adirondack Park in order to communicate with one voice. Using a scenario-based planning tool to stimulate new, creative thinking about the challenges and opportunities ahead, a new conversation started and the Common Ground Alliance proposed the following vision for the Adirondack Park over the next 25 years. The entire report can be found at ADKfutures.org

“Over the next 25 years, an understanding of the interdependence of our environment and our economy spreads throughout our communities. Our mixture of public and private lands is the defining feature of the Park; our diverse sustainable economy increases our self reliance. We use balanced, slightly more flexible regulation to preserve our unique landscape while enhancing the health of our communities.”

Progress toward this vision has been occurring across the region by multiple partners. Recent successes help drive our momentum forward:

- North Country Regional Economic Development Council, which includes the Adirondacks, wins multiple state competitions for support. Over \$274 million in projects awarded funding.
- New public access and opportunities for diverse multi-season recreation on new state lands, coupled with resource protection, and new public recreation on private lands with easements permitting public use.
- Expanding broadband and cell coverage, with \$14.5M in State funds for 9 broadband projects.
- New investment opportunity for Remsen-Placid rail corridor to generate community and Park benefits.
- The NYS Legislature approved three bills to combat invasive species.
- The NYS legislature approved legislation to advance efforts by the state to update rebuilding policies to enhance local community resiliency to climate change and storm impacts.
- State Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) restorations for two years total \$22 million.

Yet great challenges remain and the vision for the Adirondack Park is far from being realized. Demographic and economic trends challenge upstate New York. Thwarting invasive species, upgrading community infrastructure, and support for small businesses need sustained funding. Our aging population and struggling small schools continue to be obstacles in our region. The Common Ground Alliance polled its members and other interested individuals and presents the following 2014 proposed Adirondack Budget and Legislative Priorities.

2015 Adirondack Budget and Legislative Priorities

In 2014, the Common Ground Alliance produced a legislative poll for participants to rank priorities for attention from our elected leaders. With input at the Common Ground Forum, the priorities include (with examples for illustrative purposes):

- 1) **Infrastructure Capital Funding** (including NY Works, EPF, EFC, and any Infrastructure Bank)
Infrastructure for clean water, tourism, roads and bridges is in disrepair or lacking. Small rural Adirondack communities need assistance from the state to form public-private partnerships to close the gap.
 - a) Matching funds, loans, and grants for clean water, waste water, storm water, including waste water treatment systems for our small, rural communities, including many that only have septic systems.
 - b) Capital fund grants for preventing and combating invasive species, including a system of staffed boat wash disinfection stations like those found in Lake George for the entire Park rather than for individual lakes.
 - c) Buried, broadband communications lines and well-screened functioning cell service to help reach our goal of high-speed communications in every town.
 - d) State-land infrastructure, trails, bridges, signage, and ecological restoration to increase access to and protect our millions of acres of publicly owned lands. These funds would implement state DEC Unit Management Plans.
 - e) Farmland protection funding distribution, including family farms in the Champlain Valley.
 - f) Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) project grants, including tourism infrastructure, smart biomass, plus energy sustainability, smart grid, and other projects for economically struggling communities.

- 2) **Operational Funding**
Significant budget reductions during the great recession left state agencies (DEC and APA) lacking needed resources to leverage other private and local government resources to maintain and attract visitors to Park amenities.
 - a) Continue and expand 'I Love NY' upstate tourism promotion funding and support for expanded private visitor service employee training, branding, and inclusiveness. Continued Adirondack Challenge events.
 - b) Increase Forest Preserve stewardship resources and education focused on large, landscape and/or watershed systems, combining individual Units and management areas into larger integrated blocks for planning purposes.
 - c) Restore Adirondack Park Agency (APA) staffing for outreach and support for private entrepreneurs, compliance assistance, and local community priorities.
 - d) Restore Department of Environmental Conservation stewardship and forest ranger staffing to handle the increased number of visitors and provide new jobs in the area.
 - e) Provide access to state incentive investment for multi-community public/private collaboration already established. Place an emphasis on "buy local (Adirondack) farm products" and increased access to grants to scale up local food production and support young farmers.

- 3) **Policy Innovations**
Updated state policies, from invasive species to energy, are as important to the Adirondacks as funding.
 - a) Pass of community net metering legislation to support the State Green and Renewable Energy agenda.
 - b) Look closer at Adirondack Park Agency (APA) policies to include current, science-based reforms including transfer of development rights (TDRs), clustering and smart-growth incentives for landowners and communities.
 - c) Consider a State Land Master Plan (SLMP) update and adoption of comprehensive landscape scale planning.
 - d) Draft an amendment and enabling legislation that address environmental and community concerns regarding road and utility infrastructure in the Adirondacks.

State and Federal leadership is needed for development of consensus and resolution on the unique challenge of health care, transportation, and education present in sparsely populated rural areas such as the Adirondacks.

Thanks to State and Federal support, revitalization is underway in the Adirondacks — creating new business investments, new jobs, and new protection for clean water, the environment, and public health. New alliances are breaking down old conflicts; common ground is being found on multiple fronts, and the Adirondacks is poised to benefit. We encourage our leaders to join us and grow this momentum to ensure that our vision is achieved for a healthy, strong, accessible Adirondack Park. Thank you to all who care about the future of New York and the Adirondacks. You have a diverse team ready and willing to work with you and support your efforts.