

AGREEMENT TO CONSERVE FORMER FINCH, PRUYN LANDS

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and The Nature Conservancy Fact Sheet, February 2008

Overview

On June 18, 2007, The Nature Conservancy purchased 161,000 acres from Finch Paper Holdings LLC, the company that purchased all of Finch, Pruyn & Company's assets, including the paper mill in Glens Falls. Since then, the Conservancy has completed an ecological assessment of the property and has been working with NYSDEC, community leaders, and other stakeholders to develop a plan for the property's future.

Today's announcement reflects the conceptual agreement for the *northern parcels* that make up 83% of the property: 134,140 acres lying in five towns within the central lake and tourist region of the Adirondack Park.

Objectives for the property

In recognition of the property's extraordinary ecological and economic importance, the carefully configured plan:

- preserves the ecological integrity of the forests and waters and the diverse array of life they sustain
- allocates portions of the land to community enhancement projects like snowmobile connector trails and affordable housing
- keeps much of the land working for the timber industry by protecting tens of thousands of acres through conservation easement
- transitions to a long-term ownership that would ensure real property tax payments continue
- preserves traditional recreational uses on the bulk of the property
- creates new public recreational opportunities

Conservation values of the property

This project provides a historical opportunity to protect a globally important landscape. The Adirondacks hold ecological prizes significant to New York State and offer a prime, intact portion of the world's threatened temperate deciduous forests. With a local and state commitment to conservation in these northern holdings, the ecological integrity and beauty of the Adirondacks and the Hudson River watershed will be protected for the long term.

From an ecological perspective the Finch lands stand out because of their position within the Adirondacks’ vast and central landscape, proximity to protected lands, varied topography, and exceptional array of features, including calcium-rich cliffs, alluvial forests and boreal bogs. The unique ecological features of parts of the Finch lands will be targeted for forest preserve. These forest preserve sections have exceptional conservation qualities not compatible with forestry and must be given the strictest levels of protection.

A special opportunity exists in the Adirondack Park that does not exist in many places around the globe. Nearly half the planet’s original forest cover is gone today, and each year 40 million acres is replaced by development or agriculture. Yet, in this pocket of the northeastern United States, in a state with a population of 18 million residents, large swaths of forests can be protected in ways that will enable natural processes to function and persist over time. Large and intact landscapes can respond and adapt to disturbances like wind throw and ice storms and provide better flood control.

The Finch lands specifically round out the protected areas of the High Peaks Wilderness with lower elevations to make for an increased protected gradient. They provide safe havens for species to move upslope and northward in response to a changing climate—putting them in a better position to withstand invasions of damaging non-native plants, pests, and pathogens.

Disposition breakdown for the northern holdings

The northern holdings fall into five towns—Newcomb, Indian Lake, North Hudson, Minerva, Long Lake—and collectively add up to 134,140 acres. Ecological, recreation, economic, community and cultural resources all factored into the plan, which calls for the following:

- 73,627 acres (54% of northern holdings) to be protected by a state-held conservation easement,
- 57,699 acres (43% of northern holdings) to be purchased by New York State for addition to the Adirondack Forest Preserve,
- up to 1,098 acres will be made available for communities to acquire,
- 1,715 acres in Indian Lake will be protected by a conservation easement and sold per the original purchase and sale agreement to Finch Paper/Atlas Holdings.

This table shows the disposition breakdown by town and the attached map illustrates where the various parcels are:

Town	Total Finch lands (acres)	Proposed working forest/conservation easement (acres)	Proposed additions to Forest Preserve (acres)
Newcomb	49,584	19,646	28,967
Indian Lake	35,392	28,909	4,692
North Hudson	21,890	4,909	16,981
Long Lake	15,625	15,573	—
Minerva	11,649	4,591	7,058

Economic mainstay: snowmobile connector trails and winter tourism

Many Adirondack towns see the bulk of their tourism business in summer and fall when visitors come to hike, hunt, paddle, find solitude, and enjoy the scenery. Snowmobiling is widely considered an essential draw for attracting dollar-spending visitors in the winter. By augmenting existing trails with new linkages, this project presents a unique opportunity to stitch together a snowmobile network for the communities of North Hudson, Newcomb, Long Lake, Minerva and Indian Lake. The proposed trail linkages will be carefully sited and will receive protection under conservation easements, including a seasonal winter use limitation.

Community enhancement opportunities

The steps TNC is taking as a private landowner to accommodate a variety of competing interests concerning the future of the Finch lands are unprecedented. In the past seven months TNC has had many meetings with town officials, hunt clubs, snowmobile associations and several other recreation groups to share perspectives. Developed in tandem with DEC, the conceptual agreement reflects input from those community leaders and stakeholders. For example, in consultation with the town supervisor and school superintendent, parcels in the Town of Newcomb have been identified for their suitability to expand the public golf course from nine holes to 18, as well as establish new housing for foreign exchange students. There are also opportunities in Newcomb to remedy at least two situations affecting hundreds of homeowners: securing property access and fixing a dam in disrepair. In Indian Lake, a small Finch parcel may make it possible for the community to establish a new ball field, and in Long Lake affordable housing may be an option, and a problematic residential road may be rerouted. Now that these options have been identified, TNC and DEC will work with community leaders to determine priorities and prepare for ownership transitions.

TNC and Adirondack Community Housing Trust working together

The Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy and the Adirondack Community Housing Land Trust have agreed to work together to identify properties on the Finch lands that may be suitable for perpetually affordable housing. With seed money originally secured by State Senator Betty Little, the non-profit community housing trust was launched in 2006. In a nutshell, the trust acquires land on which houses can be built and sold to income-eligible qualified buyers. If a homeowner decides to sell in the future, the house must be sold to similarly qualified buyers. To ensure a continual cycle of affordability for future homeowners, the trust retains an option to purchase the house back and a formula written into the purchase agreement limits the appreciated value the homeowner can receive at the time of sale.

Recreational leases

About three-quarters of the northern parcels are currently leased, primarily to recreational clubs. The leases typically give paying members exclusive use on a yearly basis to specific parts of the property. Lease acreages vary from 10 to 16,000. Some of the leases include modest cabins (less than 500 sq. feet with no running water, no septic system, and no electricity); others simply provide access to forests behind locked gates.

When property is added to the publicly-owned Forest Preserve, leasing for private use is no longer an option, though it would be available for many of the same uses—hunting,

fishing, paddling—by the public, including former leaseholders. The plan for the future of Finch lands includes a generous 10-year transition period for those clubs whose leases are wholly within lands slated for transfer to New York State.

At least two-thirds of the hunting clubs on these parcels, which occupy the land under year-to-year leases, will likely see no changes or can be readily accommodated because some or all of their lands fall under conservation easement. Here is an overview of all of the recreational club leases on the northern holdings: *(Leases not included in this tally include municipalities, snowmobiles, utilities, summer camp, corporate lease, et al.)*

Where the current leases fall	Acres under lease	Number of clubs	Number of members	What the future holds
Proposed working forest/conservation easement	39,098	11	929	Conservation easement would allow for continued leasing. In some instances, there may be changes to current leases relating to public recreation corridors and conservation objectives.
Proposed Forest Preserve	23,241	20	439	A 10-year transition period would allow clubs to remain exclusively on the property for three years, followed by two years of exclusive use during the hunting and fishing seasons and then five years of camp use with shared public recreation. Opportunities for relocation may be available.
Partially within proposed easement and Forest Preserve	34,819	5	524	Likely to be accommodated through relocation and/or reduced acreages.
Community enhancement	702	5	34	Possible opportunities for reduced lease envelopes and/or relocation.
Partially within property being purchased by Finch Paper Holdings LLC	4,796	1	129	Easement terms will permit leasing.

Recreation opportunities

From paddling to hunting, hiking to snowmobiling, this plan captures an astonishing variety of new public recreation opportunities. Spectacularly beautiful places that have been privately owned and off-limits for more than 100 years will eventually be opened up for public use. Please note that today’s announcement outlines a plan for the future of the Finch lands. Until that plan is implemented, there is no public access to this privately-owned property.

How the plan for the northern holdings stacks up against the objectives

Objective	Outcome
Environmental conservation	134,000 acres preserved: ensuring that the forests, rivers and lakes continue to protect 12% of the Upper Hudson watershed, fuel the economy, enrich the human spirit, provide wildlife habitat, and help stabilize the climate.
Sustainable forestry	More than half of the property will continue to be managed for timber to the highest sustainable forestry standards. A fiber supply agreement (for up to 20 years) maintains the century-old link between the property and the mill in Glens Falls.
Real property taxes	During its interim ownership, The Nature Conservancy is paying real property taxes. The state will pay real property taxes on new Forest Preserve acquisitions, as well as its share of the value on easement lands.
Balancing traditional recreational uses with exciting new public recreation opportunities	Hunt clubs: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– More than 50% of total hunting clubs will stay in place or will have the option to stay on the property within tighter lease envelopes.– Opportunities for others to relocate may be possible. Public recreation: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Exciting new public recreation opportunities for a variety of enthusiasts—from snowmobiling to paddling; fishing to x-country skiing.– Bolstering the Adirondacks’ draw as a world-class tourist destination
Community Enhancement	More than 1,000 acres dedicated to a variety of community uses, including snowmobile connector trails, affordable housing, and recreational facilities.

Public access

No immediate changes regarding public access to the Finch property come with today's announcement. Because of the complexity of this massive land protection project, it will take several years for the various parcels to change hands. TNC and DEC will keep the public informed as the status and ownership of the lands change as it is not likely to happen all at once. Until then, use of the property remains restricted to leaseholders, Nature Conservancy staff, and woodland managers/contractors. The public is of course always welcomed to enjoy the forests where public easement rights-of-way currently exist, such as the trail to Blue Mountain.

The southern holdings

The parcels that make up the southern holdings of the Finch lands add up to 27,000 acres and are spread across more than 20 towns. The Nature Conservancy has completed a rapid ecological assessment for all of those parcels. Over the next several months, TNC and NYSDEC will work with local community leaders and stakeholders to fine tune a plan for the future of the southern holdings. An announcement about that plan is forthcoming.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a leading international, non-profit organization working to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. The Adirondack Chapter, based in Keene Valley, New York, currently employs a staff of 25 and has protected 556,572 Adirondack acres since 1971. The Chapter is also a founding partner of High Peaks Summit Stewardship Program, dedicated to the protection of alpine habitat, as well as the award-winning Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program, which works regionally to prevent the introduction and spread of non-native invasive plants. On the Web at nature.org/adirondacks.