

Why I'm voting NO on Proposition 5 on November 5th

By John Davis, Wildlands Network, wildlandsnetwork.org

In fear of a dangerous precedent, with certainty that the existing piece of Forest Preserve richly deserves continued protection, and with doubts that the gains in trade lands would outweigh the losses, I have decided to vote NO on Proposition 5 on the New York State ballot—the proposed land swap that would give NYCO a 200-acre piece of the Jay Mountain Wilderness in exchange for undetermined lands totaling at least the same acreage. I recently walked the 200-acre parcel, Lot 8, and found it classically beautiful rocky Northern Hardwood forest. I have also seen some of the suggested trade lands. They, too, are beautiful and deserve protection. With no guarantee of what we – the people and wildlife of New York-- will get in the trade, and with the possibility of this swap starting a bad trend of corporations going after Forest Preserve lands, I must resist the temptation to parley a known valuable block of wildlife habitat for putative richer lands elsewhere.

I believe we must be sensitive to the needs of the local people, and aware that the company is threatening job losses if the land swap does not go through. I believe also, though, that if economic threats become bargaining chips in public discussions over what lands to conserve, we could lose the inviolability of the Forest Preserve. I believe as well that the long-term economic, as well as ecological, health of northern New York depends heavily on fully and permanently protected lands, which provide numerous jobs in recreation fields and ecological services of inestimable value, including carbon sequestration, which helps stabilize climate, and provision of clean air and water.

As a conservation trekker who has traveled the lengths of the Appalachian, Adirondack, and Rocky Mountains in recent years, often in the company of fellow conservationists and naturalists, I know that we are the envy of the country, here in New York, for having lands guaranteed Forever Wild protection by the state constitution. Let's do our best to add to that great heritage of forest preservation, never putting at risk our hard-won gains, while also fostering local economies based on restoration and conservation, rather than on unsustainable exploitation. Where mining and logging are needed, let those activities be done as benignly as possible on private lands, and let the Forest Preserve forever serve the ecological, hydrological, aesthetic, ethical, spiritual, and recreational needs of all residents and visitors, two-legged, four-legged, winged, scaled, furred, finned, and photosynthesizing.

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