



Carl Heilman II

*More than a*

# Working Forest



## Conservation easement protects Upper Hudson Woodlands

By Connie Prickett

Last December, news of New York State’s purchase of an 89,000-acre working forest conservation easement made quite a splash. Why wouldn’t it? The properties, which fall into 27 rural upstate towns mostly within the upper Hudson River drainage, are equivalent in size to six Manhattan Islands. The acreage represents more than half of the land once owned by paper manufacturer Finch, Pruyn & Co. (now called Finch Paper), largely concentrated within the central lake and tourist region of the Adirondack Park and prized for its immense conservation values.

Broadly speaking, the easement is a legally binding agreement that stays

with the property in perpetuity, ensures that the forests will never be developed, requires that they be managed sustainably, and will one day provide new and exciting public access opportunities. It achieves significant ecological protections of forest and freshwater resources while also supporting the timber industry, as well as boosting recreation and the tourism economy.

### *Managing the Forests*

Wayne Tripp, New York’s regional manager for the forest management consulting firm, F&W Forestry, has worked in the forest products industry for more than three decades. Since 2009, he’s managed the conservation

easement lands, which are known as the Upper Hudson Woodlands.

During Tripp’s time in the business, patterns of forestland ownership have undergone a fairly dramatic change—not just in New York, but across the United States—largely due to global market forces. All of the well-known timber giants, for instance, exited the Adirondack Park between 1997 and 2007, and sold off more than 700,000 acres of industrial forests. The Upper Hudson Woodlands that Tripp now manages were part of this wave.

If not for the conservation easement, Tripp believes “there would be no guarantee down the line” that the property would be available for

timber harvest, nor would it stay in large intact blocks. He speculates that at some point, it would have gone to a private interest and subsequently been divided into smaller tracts.

Managing the Upper Hudson Woodlands revolves mainly around servicing a fiber supply agreement with the Finch Paper mill in Glens Falls. The easement conditions and two “green” certifications provide the handrails for sustainable harvest operations. Tripp’s client, property owner ATP Timberland Invest, is committed to sustainable forestry and views Upper Hudson Woodlands as a long-term investment.

## Green Certification

Third-party green certification is a way to assure consumers that forest products have come from landowners who manage their forests sustainably. Three of the most prevalent and nationally recognized forest certifications are the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), and the American Tree Farm System (ATFS). Through a third-party verification entity, a forest landowner is required to provide independent auditors access to their lands, staff, and forest management policies and procedures in order to ensure the landowner’s forest practices meet the applicable FSC, SFI or ATFS standards. As a result, forest products coming from green-certified lands may be marketed with that certification system’s logo, hopefully creating a greater demand for these green-certified products. For more information, visit the following websites:

[www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org)  
[www.sfiprogram.org](http://www.sfiprogram.org)  
[www.treefarmssystem.org](http://www.treefarmssystem.org)

**Note:** Readers will be happy to know that *Conservationist* is printed on paper from an FSC-certified paper source, which supports responsible forest management.

Tripp and his small team of foresters, who work out of F&W Forestry’s Glens Falls office, mark the timber stands and oversee a handful of loggers at different sites on the property. They are working now to remove the “low-grade fiber” to let the higher value timber continue to grow. Their work is not all about trees, however; they also oversee a private recreational leasing program involving hundreds of hunters and anglers who pay for exclusive use of sections of the property. Given the high costs of owning and managing land, a forester working for a large landowner can expect lease management duties to be part of the job.

## Where There’s a Will

For some people, snowmobiles are synonymous with adventure. They offer opportunities to explore the unique beauty of winter landscapes. To some rural Adirondack towns with struggling winter economies, snowmobiles look a lot like money. When 161,000 acres once owned by Finch, Pruyn & Co. changed hands in 2007, some local leaders and interest groups recognized the potential for new economic and recreational opportunities.

Newcomb Town Supervisor George Canon, Indian Lake Supervisor Barry Hutchins, and the New York State Snowmobile Association’s Jim Jennings and Dave Perkins had at least one wish-list item in common for the former Finch lands: to make existing snowmobile trails permanent and create new community connector trails.

For as long as anyone can remember, access to snowmobile trails on these timberlands had been available through one-year leases. Maintenance was shared by local towns and snowmobile clubs, but the tentative nature of the agreements made the parties hesitant to invest in and rely on the trail network. That all changed following the state’s conservation easement purchase.

The Upper Hudson Woodlands easement may be the single-most important advancement toward establishing a snowmobile network linking the communities of North Hudson, Newcomb, Long Lake, Minerva and Indian Lake. Under the easement, nearly 30 miles of privately leased trails were converted to public trails. A new trail following old logging roads now connects Indian Lake and Newcomb. Even more trails are in the works.

Carl Heilman II



The Upper Hudson Woodlands encompasses some spectacular vistas and includes three of the 100 highest peaks in the Adirondacks.

# Preserving a Legacy

Since purchasing 161,000 acres once owned by paper manufacturer Finch, Pruyn & Co., The Nature Conservancy worked with DEC to develop a plan for the future of the property. The final agreement reflects extensive consultation with local government officials and other stakeholders, and balances economic development, recreational needs, and ecological protection. Key elements of the plan call for more than 89,000 acres of working forest, approximately 68,000 acres of public lands, and 1,100 acres to be set aside for community purposes in Newcomb, Long Lake and Indian Lake. The conservation easement acquired by New York in December of 2010 marks a major milestone in moving the plan forward.

The Upper Hudson Woodlands property contains some of the wildest land remaining in the Adirondacks, and accordingly, is home to some of the state's most impressive plant and animal diversity. A biological survey conducted in 2001 found 95 significant species, 37 of which are rare in New York, about 20 uncommon in the state, and 30 rare or uncommon in the Adirondacks. Featuring 16,000 acres of wetlands, 300 lakes and ponds, 90 mountain peaks, and 48 miles of Hudson River banks, the Upper Hudson Woodlands provide habitat for moose, otter, bobcat, and countless migratory birds that forage and live in the Adirondack Forest.

For more information on the Upper Hudson Woodlands conservation easement, visit: [www.dec.ny.gov/lands/71954.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/71954.html).



“This easement is a step toward making Newcomb a central hub for snowmobiling and winter recreation. It’s pretty great to get some real economic benefit from it,” said Canon.

“Indian Lake has been paying to lease snowmobile trails on an annual basis,” said Hutchins. “We see these trails as permanent and valuable assets that can help our struggling winter economy and our town budget appropriations.”

“If you look at a statewide map of the trail system, there’s a hole in Essex County...The trails we can now use because of this conservation easement are helping to fill that gap in a big way,” said Dave Perkins, former executive director of the New York State Snowmobilers’ Association.

Those benefits were evident during a 64-mile round-trip ride this winter. The group I was with rented sleds from a dealer at one end of the new trail in Indian Lake and stopped for lunch at a new diner and gas station at the other end in Newcomb. The trail, the diner and the dealer were abuzz with activity, and the town supervisors we met for lunch were pleased that the conservation easement is doing much more than keeping forests in timber production.

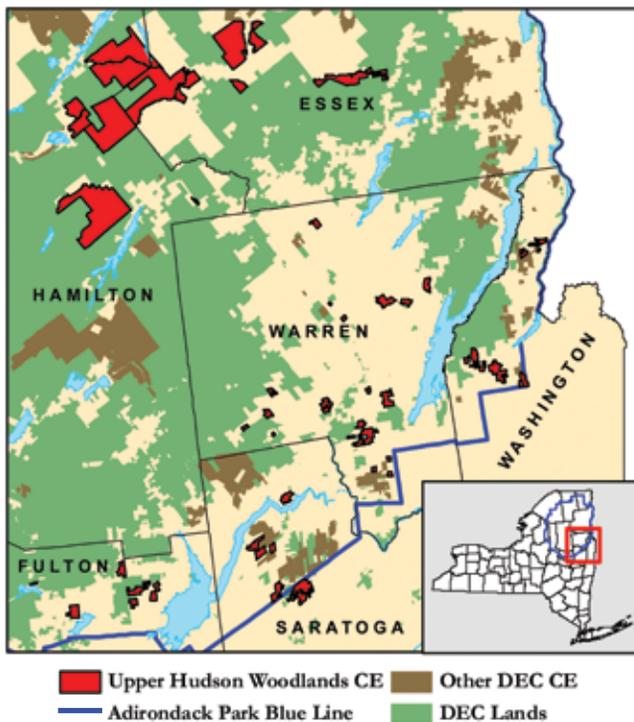
### *Lofty Goals, Adventurous Souls*

Pioneers of their day, Herbert Clark, George Marshall and Robert Marshall were the Adirondack’s first “peak-baggers.” On August 1, 1918, they ascended Whiteface Mountain and climbed each of the Adirondack’s 46 highest peaks between then and June 10, 1925, the day they reached Mt. Emmons. No matter that in subsequent years corrected survey information showed that some of the peaks fell a little short of 4,000 feet, they inspired thousands of hikers to follow suit. The Adirondack 46er website lists more than 7,000 on its 93-year roster and it’s anyone’s guess as to how many more have climbed the same peaks but neglected to submit an official record of their ascents.

Spencer Morrissey is number 5,320 on the official list, with a “w” after his number to indicate that he earned his 46er stripes by climbing the peaks in winter. That’s not all he has climbed. A graduate of the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Morrissey has a thing for forests and mountains. In the Adirondacks alone, he has climbed the 46 highest plus the next 54 highest to make it an even 100, and bagged about 500 others for good measure.

In 2007 Morrissey, who grew up in Long Lake and now lives in Lake Placid, New York, published *The Other 54: A Hiker’s Guide to the Lower 54 Peaks of the Adirondack 100 Highest*. It turns out that three of the 100 highest (Panther, Buell and Dun Brook Mountains) are in the Upper Hudson Woodlands in the Town of Indian Lake. The state acquired

Upper Hudson Woodlands Conservation Easement (CE)



the public access rights to them as part of its conservation easement purchase in December 2010. That means the state is removing the landowner-permission hurdle any goal-oriented hiker would have to clear to be able to attain the “other-54” or “full-100” badge. (The easement will also improve access to some of the highest 46.)

Using the 100-highest as a goal can be a helpful motivator; however, it’s important to mention that these peaks are fun for non peak-baggers too. After all, hiking is one of a multitude of outdoor activities that makes the Adirondacks a magnet



courtesy of TNC/Connie Prickett

Nearly 30 miles of privately leased snowmobile trails were converted to public trails under the easement agreement.

for solitude and adventure seekers. “I like the challenge and to know what’s up there,” Morrissey says. “When bush-whacking, you can never do the same route twice,” adding that it’s imperative to have a map and compass with you, even if using a GPS.

Morrissey plans to update his guidebook and will be working with the regional forester to identify new access points and potential parking areas to help the public gain access to those of the hundred highest that can be found on the Upper Hudson Woodlands.

### *Working Forests & More*

New York State’s investment in the Upper Hudson Woodlands conservation easement is an investment in people as much as it is in forests. It supports timber jobs, bolsters the tourism economy, and provides recreational opportunities. Importantly, it protects critical wildlife habitat and freshwater resources at the same time. As a newly protected swath of private land, it adds real value to the blend of private and



The Upper Hudson Woodlands easement ensures that more than 89,000 acres of former Finch Pruyn lands will remain a working forest for timber production and harvest.

public lands that defines the Adirondack Park as a world-treasure and hopeful story of forest recovery and restoration.

**Connie Prickett** is director of communications for The Nature Conservancy’s Adirondack Chapter in Keene Valley.



## SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

*Public access will extend from the Upper Hudson Woodlands to many other parts of the Adirondacks—for hiking, snowmobiling and other outdoor pursuits. Here are some highlights that will become available over time (check with DEC for details):*

**Essex County:** new fishing access along the scenic Branch River in North Hudson; new campsites and cross-country ski trails north of Goodnow Flow in Newcomb and Minerva; additional access to Allen Mtn., Hanging Spear Falls and other sites in the High Peaks Wilderness, which attracts more than 100,000 visitors annually.

**Hamilton County:** new fishing access to idyllic Fishing Brook and fishing/paddling on County Line Flow in Long Lake; new hiking access in Indian Lake to Panther, Buell and Dun Brook Mountains (three of the 100 highest peaks in the Adirondacks), making it more attractive for hikers to climb the “other 54” beyond the 46 highest peaks.

**Warren County:** new access to High Nopit Mtn. in Bolton and to English Brook in Warrensburg; opportunities for new campsites in Stony Creek.

**Saratoga County:** new access to Clute Mtn., overlooking the Great Sacandaga Reservoir in the Town of Day; full public access rights to include hunting, camping, fishing, and paddling on the 2,000-acre Lake Desolation Road tract, which features the lake called Archer Vly, in Greenfield.

**Fulton County:** new trails for cross-country skiing in Mayfield; future access across easement land to (pending) forest preserve land in Bleecker.

