



FOREST LEGACY DESIGNATION PROPOSAL FOR THE RENSSELAER PLATEAU

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is proposing to create a Rensselaer Plateau Forest Legacy Area under the USDA's Forest Legacy Program (FLP). The FLP is a federal grant program designed to protect forest lands from conversion to non-forest uses and is administered by DEC in New York State. The Rensselaer Plateau is a forested, 196,000-acre plateau in eastern Rensselaer and a small portion of Columbia counties encompassing all or part of the following towns: Berlin, Brunswick, Grafton, Hoosick, Nassau, New Lebanon, Petersburg, Pittstown, Poestenkill, Sand Lake, Schaghticoke and Stephentown. The Rensselaer Plateau meets the goals of the FLP, including maintaining and enhancing water quality, preventing lands from being converted to non-forest uses and protecting important wildlife habitat.

The federal Forest Legacy Program was authorized under the 1990 federal Farm Bill and recognizes that most forested lands in the United States are held in private ownership. Currently, the Taconic Ridge has been a Forest Legacy Area since 1994. Many forest landowners are facing growing financial pressure to convert their lands to uses that would remove them from the forested land base, such as residential and commercial development. The program is **entirely voluntary** and landowners who wish to participate may either sell to New York State their property outright (in fee) or sell only a portion of their property rights, such as development rights through conservation easements, and retain ownership of the land. Conservation easements are the preferred method of acquisition for this program. Conservation easements would allow the land to remain in private ownership and ensure that important public values such as wildlife habitat, watershed protection, forest resources and outdoor recreation opportunities would be protected.

While there currently is no state funding available for land protection, the FLP designation would position the state to work with **willing** landowners to protect plateau lands utilizing a combination of federal and state funds once state funding becomes available. For lands under a conservation easement, the landowner would still be responsible for property taxes. The State pays all property taxes for all lands acquired in fee in the towns of Berlin and Stephentown. Outside of these towns, the State would pay all local property taxes except for county taxes, excluding Wildlife Management Areas. The State would minimize acquisition of lands classified as Wildlife Management Areas, outside of the towns of Berlin and Stephentown, where no local taxes are paid.

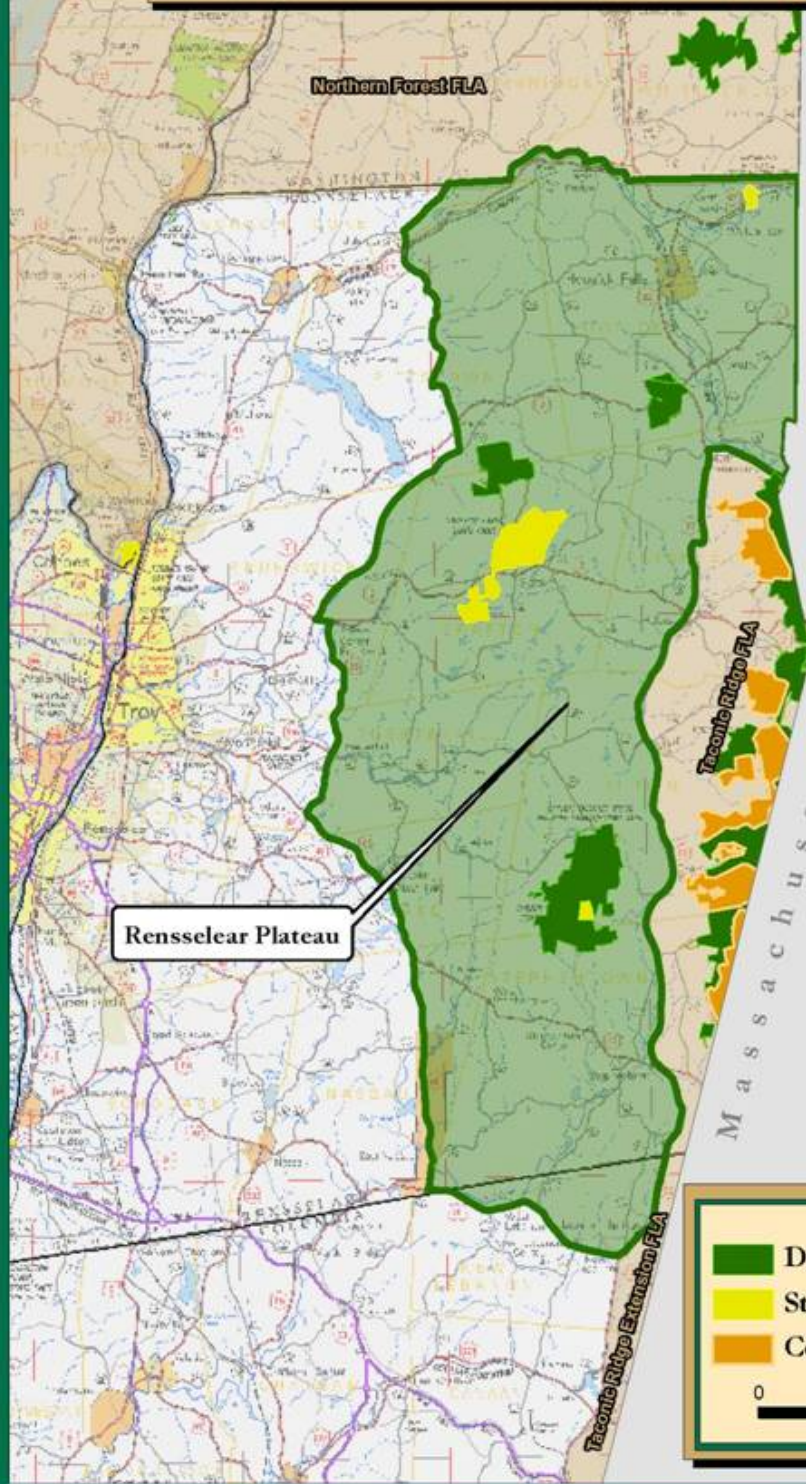
The Rensselaer Plateau was given priority project status in New York State's 1998 Open Space Plan and all updated versions, including the most recent in 2009. It includes the fifth largest unfragmented forest in New York State. The plateau also includes a portion of the Tomhannock Reservoir Watershed, which provides drinking water to more than 100,000 residents.

The forests of the plateau also generate jobs for the local forest products industry - in the woods and in the region's many mills and wood processing facilities. The plateau also includes several unique wetland communities and impressive mammal diversity not typical of the greater Capital District (including black bear, fisher, otter, bobcat, and moose).

Comments on the proposal to create a Rensselaer Plateau Forest Legacy Area will be accepted until April 16, 2010. Comments can be sent via email to r4ump@gw.dec.state.ny.us or via US mail to William Schongar, DEC Region 4, 1130 North Westcott Road, Schenectady, NY 12306.

For more information about the designation, including a map of the plateau area, visit DEC's website at: www.dec.ny.gov/lands/63125.html.

Proposed Forest Legacy Area (FLA)



V e r m o n t

M a s s a c h u s e t t s

Rensselaer Plateau

Northern Forest FLA

Taconic Ridge FLA

Taconic Ridge Extension FLA

- DEC Lands
- State Parks & Historic Sites
- Conservation Easements

0 2.5 5 10 Miles

