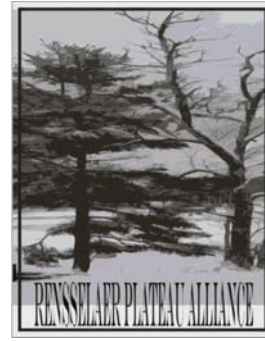


The Rensselaer Plateau Alliance
A Vision of Recreation, Tourism and Conservation
1463 Plank Road
Petersburg, NY 12138
www.rensselaerplateau.org



April 15, 2010

Bill Schongar
NYSDEC Region 4
1130 North Westcott Rd.
Schenectady, NY 12306

Dear Mr. Schongar,

I am writing on behalf of the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, Inc, (RPA), to express our support of your proposal to create a Rensselaer Plateau Forest Legacy Area.

The mission of the RPA is to, “promote and facilitate the protection of the Rensselaer Plateau’s undeveloped and unfragmented forests.” The Rensselaer Plateau is New York State’s 5th largest forested area. It supports habitat for large mammals such as moose, black bear, bob cat, river otter and fisher that are not normally found in neighboring lowland areas. It is the breeding ground for many forest interior bird species and has been designated an Important Bird Area by Audubon New York. The streams of the Plateau run with crystal clear water and still support populations of native brook trout. The forests of the Plateau also support an active forest industry; supporting numerous local saw mills, firewood and maple syrup producers. The majority of the Plateau is still owned by small private landowners.

The western edge of the Plateau is just 20 minutes from the significant metropolitan areas of downtown Albany and Troy. The Rensselaer Technology Park in North Greenbush is even closer. In recent years the area just west of the Plateau has seen significant areas of farmland and forest converted to large residential developments. On the Plateau there has already been a large impact in area around Dyken Pond where several large residential developments have cut into core forest areas. This development is on our doorstep.

Our Alliance member organizations represent a broad range of support from environmental groups to lake associations to snowmobile clubs and sportsmen’s groups. For a full list of Alliance Members or for more information about our organization you can visit our web site at www.rensselaerplateau.org.

Over the past four years we have conducted on our own and in partnership with other organizations a number of educational workshops and woods walks, lectures, and other events to raise awareness of the Plateau and the need for conservation of its forests. In the summer of 2008 we proposed the development of a regional conservation plan for the Plateau and invited all 10 towns of the Plateau and the 1 independent village to participate in its creation. From this we received resolutions of support from the towns of Grafton, Hoosick, Nassau, Poestenkill, Sand Lake and the Village of East Nassau as well as numerous letters of support including one from the County Executive Kathy Jimino. This by no means suggests specific support for the Forest Legacy Area by any of these entities but is rather to illustrate that there is a level of support for conservation in general and specifically regional planning on the Plateau.

The Forest Legacy Program is an excellent tool, as a funding source, for keeping our forests from being converted to non-forest use. It is 100% voluntary, imposes no restrictions or regulations on towns or non-participating landowners and has an emphasis on working forest and public access. There are already Forest Legacy Areas in the surrounding areas of the Taconics to the east and Washington County to the north. The

Plateau is no less ecologically important than those areas. Given its proximity to the large cities it can be argued that conservation in this area is more important.

As part of RPA's activities we have been listening to the concerns of the public and of local officials and would like to pass along some of these concerns to you. These concerns have been expressed throughout the entire region by more than a few people and should not be taken lightly:

1. There is a concern that the tax base will be impacted if the State acquires land in fee. In this case the State will no longer pay the county portion of the property taxes. As the Forest Legacy Program does, we would also like to encourage you to place an emphasis on protecting land on the Plateau through the purchase of development rights.
2. Another concern is that the State will place restrictions on towns and landowners. We understand that the Forest Legacy Area places no such restrictions on towns or non-participating landowners. We wholeheartedly support the proposed Forest Legacy Area but suggest that no action be taken by the State that would infringe on individuals private property rights or lessen in any degree the home rule of the local municipalities.
3. Lastly, people have stated a mistrust of the State, and DEC in particular, with respect to things such as handling of mining permits in several of the towns and perhaps most notably, the cleanup of the Dewey Loeffel Landfill toxic waste site. We understand that DEC is a large organization and that the personnel at DEC that will be administering the Forest Legacy Program have not been involved in these areas and have in fact done an outstanding job in protecting the Taconic Ridge to the east of the Plateau. Be aware however that the public sees DEC as one entity and what happens in other parts of the agency can affect the public support for your good work.

We bring these concerns to you because we feel that these voices need to be heard if we are to succeed in building more broad support for conservation efforts in the region. Where these concerns are based on misunderstandings, we will continue to work with towns, residents and local organizations to clarify intentions and procedures and increase understanding. I would like to thank you and the entire staff of DEC Region 4 for all of the good work you are doing, for recognizing the importance of the forests of the Plateau and for taking this step toward opening opportunities for conservation in the area.

We support the proposal to create a Rensselaer Plateau Forest Legacy Area, and urge your approval of this proposal. Now is the time to act. The unfragmented forests have survived thus far through multigenerational ownership and stewardship by some and a program of benign neglect by others but the threats they face now are real and imminent.

Sincerely,



Jim Bonesteel

President