

As Adirondack Park Agency Chairman I ask the same question everyday, “How do we change the tone of local and regional discussions regarding the environment and communities of the Adirondack Park and its relationship to the Adirondack Park Agency?”

By tone, I refer to discussions that take place along Main Streets, at soccer games, town meetings, and the diverse places Adirondackers and visitors discuss the Park, its past, present and future. In my work as Chairman, I respect the long history of public involvement regarding property ownership, business interests and personal interactions with the agency. The Community Spotlight series, visiting communities and attending public hearings broaden my understanding of how the public views the agency and the management of public and private lands.

The agency is charged with administration of the Adirondack Park Agency Act, the Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers Act, and the Freshwater Wetlands Act. Clearly, these statutes, particularly in terms of public and private land protection—influence how people live and work in the Park. They also contribute to the exceptional environmental quality, open space character and rural heritage of the region recognized not only nationally but throughout the world.

Changing the tone will require acknowledgment of the APA’s longstanding and legitimate role established by the New York State Legislature for Park planning, policy and regulations, a role many stakeholders see as a partnership for success. As we embark on the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a decade that includes the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Adirondack Park Agency Act, it is high time to move beyond differences and embrace opportunities where environmental planning and stewardship gain their rightful place as a fulcrum to build and sustain economies and communities across this amazing place. Ignoring this perspective prolongs divisions that weaken the competitiveness of the Adirondack Park.

From the creation of the Forest Preserve and Adirondack Park, New York State has demonstrated a profound interest and engagement in the sustainability of the Adirondacks for the benefit of all New Yorkers. For those of us who live and work here, that underscores the challenge of how to maintain the value of place and quality of life with the need to attract growth to ensure Adirondack communities remain viable. These tensions exist and in economically challenging times seem even more formidable.

Democracy empowers debate, contradiction, disagreement, and the acknowledgement and acceptance of different beliefs. Our biggest challenge is not allowing differences to undermine the combined interests we share and distract from the very real urgencies facing the Park. It would be naïve to ignore the need for improved infrastructure, economic diversification, and job creation, affordable housing, retaining schools and youth, increasing private revenue investment, and invasive species control. Addressing these issues requires commitment from citizens, municipal government, not-for-profits, and state agencies—all working together towards a shared goal.

To truly change the tone we must work together in partnership to promote what makes this region unique and worthy of investment. Collectively we must better inform investors that the Adirondacks are not closed to business but in fact eight agency approved business parks await their arrival. It may mean accepting the fact the Forest Preserve attracts millions of visitors and billions of tourism dollars. Changing the tone means realizing we are not alone confronting current economic trends and globalization.

While the past is an important footnote to the present, it should not be the narrative which defines the public discussion or the agency response to the present and future. Together, in our interactions, communication and understanding of the important balance between economy and environment, we have the ability to shape the future. At the agency, we are committed to changing the discussion to one of how to improve efficiency, outreach and regulatory reform for the betterment of the Adirondack Park. To change the tone is to recognize the need for an honest dialog between opposing views with a commitment to reconcile differences and achieve solutions.