



With News & Classifieds From: **The Post-Standard**



NEW NEWSPAPER SEARCH [Enter Keyword(s)] GO [FIND A BUSINESS] [Enter Category] GO

- Home
- News+Biz
- Local
- Sports
- Forums+Chat
- Cams+Radio
- Living
- Entertainment

CLASSIFIEDS

Get The Best Local...

[Jobs](#) | [Autos](#) | [Real Estate](#)

[All Classifieds](#) | [Place An Ad](#)

» Win Syracuse Crunch Family Four Pack!

NEWS

The Post-Standard

Click here to subscribe!

» [More From The Post-Standard](#)

Top News

More roads, development greatest threat to Adirondacks

October 20, 2002

By **Hart Seely**
Staff writer

As a man tramps the woods to the lake," William Chapman White wrote about the Adirondack Mountains in 1954, "he knows he will find pines and lilies, blue herons and golden shiners, shadows on the rocks and the glint of light on the wavelets, just as they were in the summer of 1354, as they will be in 2054 and beyond."

White was wrong. The touch of civilization constantly changes the Adirondack wilderness in ways that scientists are only beginning to understand.

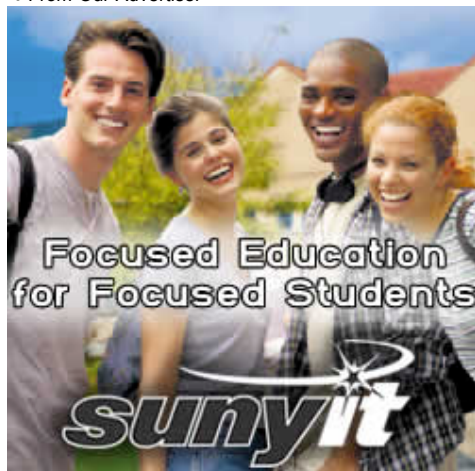
Acid rain threatens songbirds, highways divide pristine habitats, and the arrival of a new species sets off chain reactions across the landscape. Nature keeps churning, and each change brings another.

/INFHThe Adirondacks

This is the fifth article in a series on the region.

"There's a tendency for us, as a society, to focus on the picture of an ecosystem, in contrast to its process," said William Porter, an ecologist at the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry. "Thus, we want Yellowstone Park to look the way it was when we visited at age 10. ... When we go and see that it burned in 1988, we're distraught, because it's different. But the reality is that fires are part of a process that must occur if the system will continue."

▼ From Our Advertiser



- INSIDE News**
- » [Business](#)
 - » [Technology](#)
 - » [NewsFlash](#)
 - » [Weather](#)
 - » [Photo Galleries](#)
 - » [Obituaries](#)
 - » [Search](#)
 - » [Special Reports](#)
 - » [NY Lottery](#)
 - » [Online Polls](#)
 - » [News Releases](#)
 - » [The Hot List](#)
 - » [Corrections](#)

- » [SEND THIS PAGE](#)
- » [PRINT THIS PAGE](#)

- » [Talk about Top News events!](#)
- » [More Forums](#)
- » [Log On to ChatXtra!](#)

CNY Entertainment!

- » [Dining and Bar Guide](#)
- » [Tourism Guide](#)
- » [Local Music](#)
- » [Preview the latest movies](#)
- » [Calendar of Events](#)

Got Questions?

Get answers

SU Part Time

Call 443-9378



- >> [M & T Bank - All the Bank You'll Ever Need](#)
- >> [Treat yourself or someone else with a Holiday Gift Certificate](#)

» [Advertise With Us](#)

In some respects, the Adirondacks are a patchwork Noah's Ark, nearly destroyed 100 years ago by logging and fires, then rebuilt by the cycles of nature and the tinkering of humanity.

The beaver, believed driven from the state in 1893, was reintroduced 12 years later from Yellowstone. Today, the dams built by thousands of descendants, restructure the Adirondack wetlands. Native strains of brook trout and salmon, nearly lost, are hatched by the thousands in state-run fisheries. The peregrine falcon, nearly wiped out by the pesticide DDT, was returned to the High Peaks in the 1980s.

The wolf, gone since the turn of the 19th century, may have mated with the southwestern coyote to create a hybrid, which roams across the state. The moose, bobcat and wild turkey - all nearly lost - have made resounding comebacks. The Adirondacks, their stories say, show a remarkable ability to mend, if humans get out of the way.

"The system goes through vicissitudes," said Justina C. Ray, a Wildlife Conservation Society zoologist. "What we have to figure out is, which ones are we causing? How out of whack are we making it? Because if we are here to stay, we may just have to be satisfied with continually new states of affairs."

When loggers and fires razed the forest in the early 20th century, for example, they created the ideal habitat for the snowshoe hare, which then lured the golden eagle. After the forests became protected lands, the logging ceased, the hare moved elsewhere and the golden eagle disappeared.

But in fact, the system was healing.

"When you designate land as 'Forever Wild,' and you don't log it, and you suppress forest fires on it, then you may be dooming a species like the golden eagle that needs to hunt over more open areas," said Charles Smith, of Cornell University's Department of Natural Resources. "You can't keep change from happening." Pitter-patter of little feet

To see how commercial and residential development affect wildlife, SUNY ESF doctoral student Michale Glennon three years ago began monitoring footprints left by small animals in tracking tubes placed across the Adirondack Park.

She put tubes in old-growth forests, on harvested timberlands and in backyards. Then she counted the species whose prints were left behind. Glennon found that no matter where the tubes were placed, the number of different species remained relatively constant. Each location had its own wildlife diversity.

"The difference is not in the number of species that were found," Glennon said. "Rather, it's the difference in what those species are."

Around a hamlet, the prints of mice and gray squirrels would be abundant. In the old-growth forest, she would find shrews and flying squirrels.

Some animals can deal with people, and some can't. As humans encroach in the Adirondacks, the animals that live well with people are gaining ground. The pigeon, the scourge of city parks and once an Adirondack rarity, increasingly shows up in bird surveys across the region.

In a separate study, Glennon used data from bird surveys taken in state-protected forests, private timberlands and hamlets to create an "index of biotic integrity," a system designed to measure the health of an ecosystem. Then, she rated each 5-kilometer-wide block in the park.

The resulting map shows regions of high integrity - the pristine wilderness - separated from each other not by whether the land is private or public, but by roads. In areas cut by highway, the natural integrity declines. The study sheds new light on a long-standing debate.

"The question in the Adirondacks, at least in contemporary times, is really not about the forest preserve versus what the forest industry is doing to the land," Porter said. "The big difference is where you start to see the increasing amount of road space."

"With roads, the implications are obvious," said Heidi Kretser, project director for the Wildlife Conservation Society's Adirondack office. "There's more land for sale, and more nearby roads. ... Roads are the agent for development."

They are also the economic lifeblood of a region heavily dependent on tourism.

Columbus Day weekend, with fall foliage near peak, an estimated 7,000 cars visited the area near Lake Placid. So heavy is autumn traffic that shuttle buses now transport hikers to the wild.

"Before, it was chaos," said town of Keene Supervisor Thomas Both.

Last year, an estimated 500,000 people took day trips into the Lake Placid area, according to the Lake Placid/Essex County Tourism Bureau. Officials estimate, based on sewage flow, they had about 1.8 million overnight visitors last year, up by about 200,000 since 1995.

Through the first six months of this year, the county's hotel/motel occupancy tax revenues have risen by 9 percent over 2001. The main attraction: the wilderness. Missing lynx

In the late 19th century, however, the millenniums-old wildlife system of the Adirondacks nearly perished.

The elk disappeared around 1830, the wolverine near 1840 and the moose about 20 years later. By 1900, the lynx, wolf and mountain lion were museum displays - "evicted tenants of the Adirondacks," as Harper's Weekly described them. Next to go would have been the fisher, marten, beaver and white-tailed deer.

Then came strict environmental laws, a backlash to the wrongs that had been done.

Today, the Adirondack marten and fisher populations thrive, and deer and beaver have become so abundant that control measures are considered to keep them in check. The system greatly resembles what it once was, but it's not the same.

"The system has gone through so many changes over the last 150 years, what we've got now are the survivors," Ray said.

Between 1989 and 1991, SUNY ESF scientists released 83 Canadian lynx into the High Peaks region, an area they believed to be an ideal habitat. Tracked by radio collars, the lynx wandered as far as Pennsylvania, Canada and Rochester.

But the radio batteries died, the state cut funding, and then there were the roads. Most of the 37 recorded deaths of lynx came on the highways, which typically follow the natural river valleys and lakes that might have provided their home.

In 1998, the Wildlife Conservation Society placed "scent pads" in remote locations, designed to lure the lynx and capture a tuft of fur, a method shown to work in the Rocky Mountains. At the end of the season, they

found no lynx fur.

One strand of lynx DNA could have proven the animal's survival. The lack of it leaves the matter unresolved. Now and then, hikers report a lynx, but conservationists suspect the sightings are bobcats.

"People hearken back to what was here 250 years ago, and they take bits and pieces of what there was," said Ray, of the Wildlife Conservation Society. "But the truth is, you can't bring everything back."

Some ecologists say the wilderness might be ready for lynx in another 20 years. Others say too much has changed. Species have died and been reborn. Where the wolf once prowled, there is now the coyote.

Historically a southwestern animal, the coyote is believed to have reached the Adirondacks around the 1950s. Statewide, its population is estimated between 15,000 and 30,000, though the animals don't last long living near people. In studies done outside Albany and Plattsburgh, nearly all coyotes fitted with radio collars died from human-related poisoning or collisions with cars, Ray said.

Some biologists believe this coyote is a hybrid, interbred with an eastern strain of wolf. Its larger size, up to 60 pounds, lets it take deer, as the wolf once did.

By lowering the deer population, which devours maple saplings and wildflowers, the coyote gives the forest a chance to regenerate. It creates food for scavengers such as foxes, fishers, martens and the raven - which has enjoyed a comeback.

"Coyotes do well in the wolf role, when moose aren't a big part of the system," Ray said. "When moose become a big part, which is now happening, coyotes will no longer be able to fill that role."

Since 1877, sportsmen had sought unsuccessfully to restore moose to the Adirondacks. Then, in 1980, one from Vermont wandered into New York. Ever since, the state has had a moose population.

It's not known if the Adirondack coyote can take down a moose. The two haven't lived together very long. But with no natural enemy, the moose population could grow from current estimates of between 100 to 200. It faces only one threat:

"The biggest moose predator that we know of is General Motors," said Al Hicks, a wildlife biologist for DEC's Endangered Species Unit.
Adirondack islands

When Jerry Jenkins took up his life's work 30 years ago, environmentalism often meant rallying around an endangered species.

"Everyone wanted to know where the rare species were, so we could protect them," said Jenkins, a biologist for the Wildlife Conservation Society. "After doing that for a while, I realized that the rare species very rarely stayed where you found them, and you could protect them until the cows came home, but you were protecting only tiny scraps, compared to the overall environment.

"Then, in the '80s, a new model came along," he said. "What we were basically trying to do was find the land that was most wild, which we meant to be the least-changed. ... So instead of doing rare species preservation, sometimes it was as if we were trying to do historic preservation in the woods."

Today, ecologists still grope for a perfect way to determine the health of an ecosystem.

"What we've learned is that is when you try to have little islands of woods in a sea of suburbia, those woods will always be biologically impoverished," Jenkins said. "If you have little islands of people - a farm or two, a supermarket maybe, and some cottages - I don't know if that has effects that extend far beyond its radius. The woods don't look like Swiss cheese, and I think that's the key."

In today's Adirondacks, the woods don't look like Swiss cheese. But more islands of development are popping up.

In 1900, the U.S. Census counted 65,597 people in Essex, Hamilton and Warren counties, which are entirely or almost entirely inside the Adirondack Park. A century later, it found 108,053, an increase of 65 percent. Nearly one-third of those 42,000 new residents came since 1980.

During the 1990s, the park's population grew by 7 percent, outpacing the rest of Upstate. About 9,000 new buildings were built in the park during that period, according to research by the Residents' Committee to Protect the Adirondacks.

"There is a danger, and it's not anything we have a good handle on," said Ray Curran, an ecologist for the Adirondack Park Agency. "We need to be concerned that we're not splitting up the Adirondacks into smaller islands."

Still, Porter said, the Adirondack wilderness shows an amazing ability to sustain itself.

"What we see there until the European settlers came was a system that showed resistance to change," said Porter, director of SUNY ESF's Adirondack Ecological Center. "Now, what we see is a system that shows an incredible resilience to bounce back from those changes.

"... The question, though, is when does it lose that resilience? And one of the keys seems to be that a permanent loss comes when we see commercial and residential development in an area. They are difficult to overcome.

"... In the Adirondacks, there has always been a spiritual connection to nature and the wilderness," Porter said. "We don't live in the Adirondacks for agriculture. We don't live in the Adirondacks for mining. We live in the Adirondacks because of the ambiance. And we just have to make sure we don't love that to death."

© 2002 The Post-Standard. Used with permission.

» [Send This Page](#) | » [Print This Page](#)

MORE NEWS

- » [Snow puts car theft on ice](#)
- » [Walsh doesn't worry about power shuffle](#)
- » [Liverpool schools choose Matousek](#)

[More Stories](#) | [14-Day Archive](#) | [Complete Index](#)

MORE FROM THE POST-STANDARD

[Post-Standard Links & Archives](#)

[About Us](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Help/Feedback](#) | [Advertise With Us](#)

© 2002 Syracuse.com. All Rights Reserved.