

EARTHTALK

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CHAPTER SIX

Forever Wild or Forever in Battle:
Metaphors of Empowerment in the Continuing
Controversy over the Adirondacks

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IT MUST BE understood from the outset that the history informing the current controversy surrounding the Adirondack Park in upstate New York is extremely complex and rich, spanning more than two hundred years. It is a tightly woven and interlocking, some might say hopelessly knotted, web created by the beliefs and actions of the backwoods guides, farmers, loggers, lumber barons, entrepreneurs, adventurers, Gilded Age elites, wealthy politicians, preservationists, and other individuals and families who determined the area's history and continue to impact it today. Their collective and historical experiences and memories, now framed as metaphors, continue as powerful drivers of the contemporary debate. As they are used, both consciously and unconsciously, these metaphors serve to empower some groups, to obstruct others, and to rhetorically encourage the deadlock.

The diversity of public/private ownership of the Adirondack Park, its complex history, and the politically charged balance it requires between development and preservation suggest that the controversy is more complex than issues around, for example, protecting a national park. As Bill McKibben (1992) aptly observes, "Anyone with enough fence can make a Yellowstone [National Park], and then walk away and leave it alone" (p. 42). The Adirondacks are different. Certainly, if some of these conflicting issues can be resolved in the Adirondack Park, then it might serve as a global model for similar situations (Davis, 1993) in which economic communities must survive and even thrive intermingled with protected wilderness.¹ Ultimately, the Adirondack Park challenge is about reconciling public values on private land and about reconciling yesterday with the future.