The right to own private property is a fundamental American freedom that guarantees personal liberty and promotes economic prosperity.

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The Honorable Brian M. Kolb, Assembly Minority Leader
New York State Assembly
Legislative Office Building 933
Albany NY 12248

Buried in the State Budget:
Over $50 Million To Buy 70,000 Acres for
“Forever Wild” Adirondack Forest Preserve

Dear Assemblyman Kolb:

Thirty-seven years ago, when my husband and I moved from New York City to the southeastern Adirondacks, we had no idea of the radical vision of environmental groups for the region. We soon learned that the groups use the Legislature against the people here.

We have no family heritage in the region, but we see the local heritage being wiped out. We have spent much of our life working to strengthen the future of the communities spread over the twelve-county, six million acre expanse. We are still shocked and disheartened by the grandiose plans of radical environmentalists, which, if not checked, will virtually depopulate the region except for tiny service centers.

The ambitions of the radical environmental groups reach into this year’s proposed executive budget. Within the $70 million allocated for “Open Space Protection” is over $50 million to acquire 75,000 acres of private land now held by The Nature Conservancy.

This budget item includes about $41 million to buy 60,000 acres of productive timber land formerly owned by the Finch Pruyn paper manufacturing company. This record-breaking acquisition would lead to the land being converted to “forever wild” Forest Preserve. This misuse of scarce taxpayer dollars would mean that 100 square miles of prime timber land would never be logged again and that the beloved hunting camps where many families have enjoyed their time together would be erased.

Logging roads would be closed and access by almost all of the public would be impossible. Instead of being nationally acclaimed for its biodiversity and sustained logging (to supply the Finch Pruyn mill in Glens Falls from twenty years before the Forest Preserve was established in 1885), the forest would ultimately revert to mainly a dark, lonely expanse with little biodiversity and where deer would no longer flourish.

There is no environmentally defensible purpose to acquire the land, because relegating the sustainably logged land to unmanaged deep forest will result in a loss of biodiversity and a permanent hazard of intense fires. In sum, the drive to carry out this acquisition is both ecological idiocy and a direct assault on the delicate economies of communities in the Adirondack region and the intergenerational hunting culture.

State and local taxpayers would take a big hit. Over $41 million would be blown away at a time when state workers are being laid off because of the extreme budget shortfall. Not only would the taxpayers of the State of New York be saddled with the burden of paying for the initial purchase, but they would keep paying indefinitely to maintain the real estate tax payment obligation to local communities that was justly established by the Legislature at the time the Forest Preserve was created in 1885.
This gargantuan tax expenditure is like a reverse “gift that keeps on giving,” with no other beneficiary than the egos of radical environmentalists. We must draw the line here.

The state owns about three million acres within the “Blue Line” of the Adirondack region in full title. With the addition of the 89,000 acres of the Finch Pruyn lands already sold by The Nature Conservancy by splitting the title between the state and a timber company, the state also owns nearly 800,000 acres of conservation easements within Blue Line. Not one home or business can ever be constructed on the conservation easement-encumbered lands.

In May 2009, the Adirondack Park Regional Assessment Report presented a disciplined analysis of the dire results that we have been bemoaning for years of the state’s extreme land acquisition and land use controls: the scarcity of employment and business opportunities (irrespective of tourism), the lack of affordable homes, the exodus of young men and women, the precipitous decline in school enrollment, the declining real estate tax base, and so on.

The local town officials, who were given or promised small favors, cajolled, tricked, and intimidated into initially signing on the dotted line (when little information was available) to initially support the acquisition of the Finch Pruyn tracts, are now rising up in opposition. The Legislature should not act as a rubber stamp for this anti-people, $41 million plan hatched between radical interests and environmental officials.

In addition, the Legislature should reject the Follensby Pond tract acquisition, another Nature Conservancy boondoggle, which is being pushed for a simultaneous rubber stamp—a $10.3 million rubber stamp, however, bringing the total immediate cost to the strapped taxpayers of the Finch Pruyn and Follensby Pond tracts to over $51 million.

The land sought for acquisition of the “Philosophers’ Pond,” as Follensby Pond is known, is actually 15,000 acres—many times the area used in 1858 for rustic camping by ten nineteenth century Cambridge scholars, including Ralph Waldo Emerson. The Follensby Pond area should be protected as a State Historic Park, along the lines of Henry David Thoreau’s Walden outside Boston. The general public easily accesses Walden Pond to pay homage to Thoreau’s transcendental appreciation for nature.

Stopping the acquisition of the huge Finch Pruyn and Follensby Pond tracts will be good for the state budget; good for future state taxpayers; good for the sustained logging of a very valuable timber resource; good for the environment and wildlife; good for the families who cherish their hunting camps; good for hunters and other sportsmen; good for local youth, families and communities; good for the future of the local economy; and good for public appreciation of eighteenth century natural philosophers.

Of the many important matters being debated during the budget process, entirely rejecting the outlandish plan to acquire the former Finch Pruyn land and the Follensby Pond tract should be a singular goal. The Legislature should direct this huge sum to important unfunded needs!

Respectfully,

Carol W. LaGrasse
President