



**Rensselaer Plateau Alliance**  
*Rensselaer Plateau Regional Conservation Plan*

**Landowner Meeting**  
**May 16, 2012**  
**Old Daley Inn on Crooked Lake – 7:00 PM**

## Meeting Summary

### **I. Public Presentation**

This was the first in a series of stakeholder meetings to be conducted in May and June as part of the development of the Regional Conservation Plan. Approximately 150 of the plateau's largest landowners received postcard invitations to this Landowner Meeting. About 35-40 people attended the meeting which was facilitated by Behan Planning and Design. Michael Welti from Behan Planning and Design gave a PowerPoint Presentation that started with an introduction to the Plateau, the RPA, and the purpose and process for preparing the Regional Conservation Plan.

Following this introductory discussion, the focus of the presentation turned to specific areas of research for the plan – study of the Plateau's natural areas and an analysis of the economic importance of the Plateau. The natural area's discussion focused on the extensive inventory work being done on the Plateau's flora and fauna and how that work will be presented in the plan. The economic discussion highlighted the preliminary results of two studies that are being prepared as part of this project – the economic impacts for select industries operating on or near the Plateau, and the economic value of ecosystem services on the Plateau. The first study looked at the number of jobs and the fiscal impacts of several industries such as food services, forestry and tourism. The second study estimated the economic value of natural systems on the Plateau by analyzing how they offset the need for engineered solutions to environmental issues – for example how much would a water treatment system cost to treat X gallons of water in lieu of the natural water treatment provided by Y acres of wetlands on the Plateau.

The remainder of the presentation focused on some of the preliminary ideas that are being considered for inclusion in the conservation plan document. In addition to the background and the natural and economic information, the plan will have a section about the history of the plateau, a section describing the future of the plateau in the context of sustainability, and a section that will serve as a "Guide for Decision Makers". This section will provide a "toolbox" for landowners, municipalities and other organization and agencies to use to advance the goals of the plan. Finally the plan will contain an implementation or "next steps" section highlighting what the RPA and other involved groups can do to help move the goals of the plan forward.

### **II. Open Discussion**

Following the presentation the audience was invited to provide feedback and ask questions about the preliminary ideas for the plan. To organize the discussion, Mr. Welti offered two questions:

- In terms of the ideas presented this evening - what questions, concerns, suggestions do you have?
- As a landowner, how can the RPA and this plan be helpful to you?

The following is a summary of the questions/comments that were offered from those who attended the meeting; and the responses that were provided.

- **Question/Comment:** Noted that the Plateau outline extended only to the edge of Crooked Lake and Glass Lake. Shouldn't these be included because they are unique ecosystems?

**Response:** ecologically the lower elevation lakes are different from the plateau upland. These ecosystems are intertwined with the Plateau, but represent different systems.

- **Question/Comment:** Question about the 480-A program - you mentioned concerns about the program, what were they?

**Response:** It is felt by some that it is cumbersome to work with; that it is not an easy process or user-friendly; and that very few people seem to be taking advantage of it.

#### **Follow-up Comments:**

- (From Dick Gibbs, New York Forest Owners Association (NYFOA)) - people in NYFOA are landowners and foresters and advocates for foresters. These folks know a lot about the 480-A program and would be more than happy to talk to you about it.
  - There are too many regulations. It's insane.
- **Question/Comment:** What is the 480-A program?

**Response:** It's a tax incentive program. To qualify you need 50+ acres, need a forest management plan, need to harvest at some point, and need to stay in it for 10 years. If you enroll and meet these obligations, you receive substantial tax savings.

**Response:** There may be folks working in ways to make it more functional. For example, Vermont has a similar program and it seems to be much more popular and more effective. One thing that could be done is steps taken to help work towards making this program more functional. This could be a legislative initiative that comes out of the Regional Conservation Plan. [There might be a committee (of NYFOA?) that has been working for a while to try to do this. They've had little success so far getting any official changes made, but have put together an alternative design based on the Vermont program...]

- **Question/Comment:** What makes the Plateau unique?

**Response:** It's the 5th largest forested area. It's unique ecologically for the local area. It's not a place that people necessarily currently recognize.

**Response:** Its unique geology, poor soils and elevation mean that it has ecosystems that are more like the Adirondacks than the area immediately surrounding it. And it is only 20 minutes from downtown Albany.

- **Question/Comment:** Does the Plateau protect any water sources for any towns?

**Response:** The Tomhannock reservoir, which serves Troy and several other municipalities. And it's the recharge for the aquifers for residential wells in the area.

- **Question/Comment:** When you showed the forest map, it included the Taconics, but stopped at the NY state border. Are there any ideas of extending it, e.g. to other states? That's where the large animals come from as they need large areas to roam...

**Response:** that is a very good idea that we should take note of

**Response:** David Hunt has also noted this, and is consciously identifying areas that are important both for interior connectivity among relatively intact forested areas on the Plateau, and those that are important for connectivity to forested areas off the Plateau. One such important corridor is in the northeast, connecting toward VT, and I believe he's identified another one connecting to the south and perhaps one to the west as well. [This information will be available in the final report and on the web site].

- **Question/Comment:** I'm part of a not-for-profit that owns property on the Plateau. So far we've just let it be, but we'd love to find a way to have the land assist the not-for-profit in paying for itself. Doing something that makes a little money but also fits in ecologically with the system. E.g. growing blueberries. Who could give us some advice on this?

**Response:** That is an excellent suggestion for the plan

**Response:** One idea we've had is that we'd like to, after the plan and David's biodiversity work is completed, is to find a way to fund and make David available to landowners to come and talk to you about what's on your land, what's important, where are the best places to do this or that, etc.

**Response:** master forest owners can also be available to come on your land and provide advice as well...

- **Question/Comment:** Does the historical part of the plan include the history of the native American cultures that preceded us? I have heard that it was used as a gathering place for them and that there may still be signs of this up on the Plateau. Though I'm not sure that this is true, this kind of thing would be interesting to know about the history of the Plateau...

**Response:** It will; but the historical piece that is included will be just an overview. Not encyclopedic, but instead provide enough flavor to spark some interest in the history of the Plateau. References (for further study) will be provided too.

**Response:** One idea that has come up is to create a library of historical resources about the Plateau, which might make it easier to folks to find such information... [One additional comment provided later - during the post-meeting discussion - was that nice large hard copies of the maps should be available in the library as well.]

- **Question/Comment:** Marcia Hopple -We have put a conservation easement on our land. The property is a nice spot on the western face of the Plateau and thus it protects an

area that many folks can see as they approach the Plateau from the west. It's just 150 acres, but it's at least something, and maybe it'll start a trend. I would be willing to talk to anyone about our experience with conservations easements. We have given up our development rights. It was a donation, and is entrusted to the Rensselaer Land Trust. It's a way that we can keep the land and still own it. We still pay taxes. There are some tax benefits from donating the easement. One thing to note is that an easement adds value to all the adjacent properties. Thus, when they had the appraisal of the property done to determine the value of the donation, the appraiser actually had to appraise the value of the adjacent properties as well to identify the full value of the donation.

**Response:** Thank you for sharing your experience. RPA is currently working toward applying for funding to help folks get easements on their property if they wish. See Jim Bonesteel if you are interested.

### **III. Adjournment**