

Go for it, Tupper Lake

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The stars seem properly aligned for Tupper Lake, the village with one of the most attractive locations - and greatest potential - in the Adirondack Park.

The Adirondack Park Agency has signaled its inclination to support an amendment to the management plan for the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor that would 1) extend rail service between Big Moose and Tupper Lake, and 2) replace the rails between Tupper Lake and Lake Placid with a multi-use trail. Final approval for this compromise use of the corridor is expected soon.

It's time now to end the interminable argument over the merits of this proposal and maximize the economic benefits it will bring. That's right, Tupper Lake. I'm talking to you.

I do not mean to exclude other worthy communities on the route, all of whom stand to benefit. But I have a special affection for you, Tupper Lake. I've been hosted and wonderfully treated by some of your civic leaders, who wanted my wife and me to see the value and importance of your community. I've been invited to participate in town meetings and planning sessions. I have good friends in Tupper. I love the Wild Center. I love the Lumberjack. I'd love to see you thrive and prosper, Tupper Lake - and here comes your best chance to so in more than a century.

Let the naysayers doubt what a world-class recreational trail can do for you. The key to success is to leverage your unique position as a hub for both the rail and the recreational trail - and to recognize that in this hub you possess an asset with national appeal.

Why am I so confident? Because I know, from my experience with other popular rail trails, that this could be one of the best. My confidence is also based on my experience a few years ago when the Adirondack Rail Trail concept was being developed. I had two meetings with executives of Trek bikes, a company with billion-dollar revenues and sales in 90 countries. Trek offered its support if the Adirondack trail came to pass because it knew it was a project of great potential. As the trail moves forward, Trek's dealers in and around the Park will have an opportunity to engage one of the world's largest bicycle companies in taking advantage of the business this trail will bring.

Tupper Lake, you can help to develop a national marketing initiative for a trail that will appeal to people from coast to coast. Doubters have charged that estimates for economic gain are inflated, that there is no comparable trail from which to make projections. They're right about that: There is no comparable trail in the United States. If done right, this one will add a new recreational dimension to the Adirondack Park. It will pass through one of America's truly wild jewels, connecting resort communities, campgrounds, museums, historic areas and Olympic facilities while intersecting with myriad other recreation opportunities (hiking, fishing, swimming, etc.).

Thanks to Next Stop! Tupper Lake, you have a beautiful depot with which to anchor the expanded train service on one end and the bike trail on the other. So first, consult with the Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism to develop an aggressive marketing plan to reach a national audience. Take advantage of the various networks of bicycling enthusiasts that can be found on the Web. Bill yourself as the bicycling capital of the Adirondacks. There's a huge audience out there; go after it.

You can be on the leading edge of ecotourism, too. Educate green-conscious tourists (another huge growth sector, along with bicycling) about the opportunity to leave their cars downstate, load their bikes on a train, come to Tupper and have the low-impact recreational experience of a lifetime. Or they can park their cars in Lake Placid or Saranac Lake and bike over to Tupper - then spend a few days visiting the Wild Center, hiking nearby mountains like Coney, Goodman and Arab, and paddling Tupper Lake and the Raquette River, some of the loveliest waterways anywhere. You can also attract thousands of bike-riding campers at Fish Creek and Rollins Pond, huge state campgrounds that connect with the trail only 6 miles from Tupper Lake. These campers will stream into Tupper for a visit to the Wild Center and a tour around town before returning to their campsites.

The nattering nabobs of negativity will say all this is a fantasy. Don't listen to them, Tupper Lake. I've seen recreational trails transform whole communities. Just ask Sparta, Wisconsin. The Elroy-Sparta Trail was the first rail-to-trail conversion in the country, and it has been a boon to the local economies along the way. What began in 1965 with 32 miles in that Midwest state has grown to more than 22,000 miles of rail trails in all 50 states, used by tens of millions of Americans annually.

As noted, the Adirondack Rail Trail will be one of the finest anywhere. It presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Tupper Lake. Market it properly, and the visitors will come - a lot of them.

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