

# Railroad leader wants it all

As submitted to the Adirondack Daily Enterprise, January 27, 2016

To the editor:

I am writing in response to Adirondack Railway Preservation Society President and Skaneateles resident Bill Branson's recent Guest Commentary (Jan. 25), "Economic impact of rail trails." I have never met Bill Branson personally, but at a time when many - myself included - are calling for both sides in the rail trail debate to finally come together, accept the state's proposed unit management plan compromise - roughly two-thirds train, one-third trail - and move on, Mr. Branson and his minions want it all!

In a nutshell, Mr. Branson insinuates that numerous rail trail "success stories" referenced by the state are not what they are cracked up to be and, at the very least, are inappropriate comparisons for the envisioned economic benefits of the state's proposed 34-mile-long Lake Placid-Tupper Lake rail trail. I'll give Mr. Branson this much: He's as good as any when it comes to cherry-picking information and statistics in support of his efforts to undermine support for the state's proposed rail trail. Well, I could do some cherry-picking of my own to show just the opposite. But there has been enough of that already.

Let me instead cut to what I see as the heart of the matter. To quote Mr. Branson, "Ripping up the tracks as proposed will result in roughly 40,000 fewer visitors on the sidewalks of Saranac Lake and Lake Placid in 2017, just with current operations, and I predict this many and more with an improved rail line. You decide. Whose interests are really being promoted anyway? If you are a local resident or shopkeeper, those interests certainly aren't yours."

Good question, Mr. Branson. I think a great many of us know whose interests really are being promoted by your commentary. Truth be told, your critique has LITTLE to do with the interests of the residents and shopkeepers of the Tri-Lakes community, who, I predict, will experience a considerably greater influx of "feet on the street" from a rail trail than a tourist train. Rather, your commentary has EVERYTHING to do with the vested interests of the Adirondack Scenic Railroad and your efforts to keep a failing enterprise afloat for yet another 20 or more years at taxpayer expense. Do you really expect folks throughout the Tri-Lakes to accept your claim that a Utica-to-Lake Placid tourist train - chugging along for five to six hours on an "improved" Class 2 rail line at an average speed of 25 mph - is going to help put upwards of 40,000 tourists on the sidewalks of Saranac Lake and Lake Placid? You have got to be kidding!

Joe Mercurio, president

Adirondack Recreational Trail Associates

Saranac Lake