

Thank you, Gov. Cuomo

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By Hope Frenette , Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates

Open letter to Gov. Andrew Cuomo:

I applaud New York state, under your leadership, for taking the initiative to revisit the management plan for the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor and for moving ahead with the recreation trail from Tupper Lake to Lake Placid. Our town and village boards have voted to support that initiative, and I thank you for listening. (I am also confident that, once established, the 34-mile rail trail will prove such an economic blessing that it will make sense to continue the trail to Old Forge.)

Over the last couple of weeks, my community of Tupper Lake has been overtaken by athletes here for our Tinman Triathlon and thousands of visitors to see the Wild Walk at The Wild Center. Most people had to stay in neighboring towns because we only have a few small motels for lodging. While there has been some interest in building more lodging here, the few potential investors have expressed reservations because we have so little going on here in the winter months and it's tough to make the numbers work on just a summer-fall basis.

Tupper Lake has been trying to shift from a community with mostly a government and manufacturing economy to a tourist economy. It's been a struggle, to say the least. This change is difficult but necessary if our village is to survive. To do this, we must capitalize on what we have.

Our main assets are the magnificent natural surroundings and the hard-working, friendly people of the community. Our lakes, rivers, mountains and forests are what we have to offer and to work with. This is a good thing, considering the explosive growth in outdoor recreation across the country.

Our most successful small businesses include outdoor outfitters, a few restaurants and a local brewery. These all do well during the summer and fall, but many close or curtail their business hours through the winter and spring. It is getting harder for these types of businesses to survive without a winter recreation venue.

With the transformation of the rail corridor between Lake Placid and Tupper Lake into a year-round, multi-use recreation trail, we can look forward to increased tourist traffic from the bicycling campers at Fish Creek and Rollins Pond, as well as to an influx of other bicycle riders from Lake Clear, Saranac Lake and Lake Placid. But what we also need is the economic boost in the winter that snowmobilers will bring to our community. We have already felt the economic influence of snowmobilers on the few days that there has been enough snow to cover the tracks. Tupper Lake needs now to capitalize on the full potential of snowmobiling.

On the map, Tupper is already a major hub for snowmobile trails, for which the travel corridor serves as the main thoroughfare. With the tracks removed, the connections from here to other long-distance trails are mind boggling, including links to Canada, Tug Hill, Malone, Plattsburgh, Newcomb, Stillwater, Raquette Lake, etc. These are benefits that a tourist train, operating sporadically during the summer and fall, cannot begin to provide.

I also have concerns about any state investment in the rails between Tupper Lake and Big Moose unless a serious independent study is first conducted that carefully analyzes the economic benefits of snowmobile vs. tourist train use. Serious consideration should be given to the need to stimulate our winter economy, something that was missing in the latest study by Camoin Associates. I fear that giving a 20-year lease to a railroad operator without specific requirements relating to usage and public expenditures will result, yet again, in 20 more years of underutilization of a significant public asset.

Even now, the Adirondack Scenic Railroad runs only one weekly train from the south up to Big Moose, during a limited season. To judge by its publicly available financial statements and tax returns, the ASR is essentially bankrupt. The only other tourist train in the Adirondacks, the Saratoga & North Creek Railroad, reports losing more than \$1 million a year. In my view, this says a great deal about the best possible use of the corridor.

Thank you once again for your vision and dedication in helping us build a sustainable, year-round economy in the Adirondacks!

Hope Frenette lives in Tupper Lake and is a board member of Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates.