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Tourism Threatening Adirondack Solitude

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, “To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society.” In his epic work “Nature,” he describes solitude as a critical factor in the delicate relationship between man and the wilderness. He and Henry David Thoreau capitalized on this idea along with spiritual renewal during the transcendentalist movement while in the Adirondack region. As time has passed, many have worked to preserve the healing powers of nature within the Adirondacks; however, the importance of jobs and economic development has surpassed this. Logging was once one of the dominant industries in the Adirondacks but with the revival of the “forever wild” pact it is no longer welcomed with open arms. Therefore, tourism is primarily the most lucrative industry of the Adirondack communities. The increased expansion of this thriving industry is exploiting the freedom of the Adirondack wilderness.

In the early 20th century, the Adirondacks became known as an escape to one’s daily life. The creation of vacations began to flourish and families naturally found solace in nature. Therefore, with a bounteous mountain range and a surplus of beautiful lakes, the Adirondack region became a vacation hotspot. Through its genuine beauty and tranquility, thousands of people became spiritually and emotionally invested in the Adirondacks. Those who were passionate about its powers tried to carry forth the preservation of the region. Today, we see the results of this thought, the battle of environmental conservation against economic development.

Tourism is integral to the Adirondack economy and the small surrounding towns would certainly go up in a flurry without its strong financial support. According to Oxford’s economic impact of tourism research in 2009, of the 11 New York State regions, the Adirondacks has the greatest reliance on tourism with 17 percent of total employment. According to The Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages in the 2007 – 2010 Occupation and Industry Reports of the New York State Department of Labor, three of the top five counties with the highest percentage share of tourism jobs are in the Adirondacks: Hamilton, Essex, and Warren. While some of these communities are the least populated, over 95 percent of their areas are comprised of public recreational lands and waterways, which maintain aggressive advertising to promote tourism. Having been home to two winter Olympics, supporting attractions such as mountain climbing and white water rafting, and maintaining extensive and infamous luxury hotels and ski resorts, the Adirondacks has had great success in attracting tourists.

As time goes on, the Adirondacks will continue to grow as a tourist destination. For example, the town of Tupper Lake is in the process of trying to build The Adirondack Club and Resort which will hold 700 residential units, a ski lodge, a waterfront marina, and a sportsman’s club. This development has bitterly divided the town into environmentalists who want to protect the “forever wild” pact and the businesspeople who are desperate to resurrect the dying community. The Adirondacks tends to exploit the tourist economy since it is the primary economy.

Tourists are slowly encroaching on the backcountry. Soon this will no longer be a land free of human visitation and beautiful silence. The towns will be congested and the land will be unappreciated. No one will be immune to the exploitation and the concept of Adirondack solitude may be lost forever.