

# COON MOUNTAIN NATURE PRESERVE GROWS

*by Chris Maron, BRASS Board Member*

Coon Mountain Nature Preserve, a popular Champlain Valley hiking destination, is now 72 acres larger. The Adirondack Nature Conservancy and Adirondack Land Trust recently acquired property from Ward Lumber Company to add to its 246-acre preserve.

Coon Mountain is a local landmark with unique ecological features. It features high quality forests, excellent habitat, critical wetlands and it is part of a wildlife corridor that connects Split Rock Wild Forest to the Adirondacks.

As many of you know, Coon Mountain is a prominent landscape feature between Westport and Essex. A steep one-mile hike to the summit is one of the few public hiking areas in the Champlain Valley and offers great views of Lake Champlain, nearby farmlands, the Adirondack High Peaks, and the Green Mountains of Vermont. The newly acquired property includes a small knoll and a secluded tributary stream that flows northwest into the Boquet River.

Coon Mountain Nature Preserve is important for other reasons. It features a great variety in habitats for many plants and animals, so it is a place for local residents and visitors to hike and observe nature. And it aids the local economy with the number of visitors. These people shop in our stores, eat at our restaurants, and stay at local hotels and B & Bs. I like to think of it as "prosperity through preservation," since there have been 264 out-of-state visitors plus another 58 people from outside the U.S. (from as far away as Japan, Germany, and New Zealand) who have signed the hiking register this year.

The Land Trust plans to put another trail on the newly acquired extension to the property, which will be an easier hike than the summit trail. But, investing in Champlain Valley conservation is not cheap. The Land Trust has formed a local volunteer committee to help raise money. We are making some progress toward the \$80,000 goal. People who want to support this project can mail donations to ALT - Coon Mt., Box 65, Keene Valley, NY 12943.

The Adirondack Land Trust (established in 1984) protects open space and working landscapes such as farmlands and managed forests, and other lands that contribute to the quality of life for Adirondack residents. The Land Trust is a partner of the Adirondack Nature Conservancy. Working together since 1988, these partners in land protection have helped protect more than 282,200 acres, 14,764 of which are in the Champlain Valley.