

SPLIT ROCK MOUNTAIN: A VALUABLE PUBLIC RESOURCE

Recently, the Open Space Institute (OSI) acquired Split Rock Mountain. This property, once owned by Gary Heurich, is 1826 acres straddling the Westport and Essex boundary and has the longest stretch (2 miles) of undeveloped shoreline on Lake Champlain. (An additional 429 acres to the north of the mountain will be placed under conservation easement to provide for continued agriculture, forestry, and building rights clustered near the present farmhouse.) Split Rock Mountain was purchased by OSI to keep it off the auction block until the state legislature could vote sufficient resources to acquire it as public land.

The NYS Assembly did vote for resources in the form of the Environmental Protection Fund, and acquisition of Split Rock Mountain by the State next year is now nearly assured. Yet, the OSI and the Adirondack Land Trust (ALT, which helped raise funds and negotiate OSI's purchase) are not sitting idle waiting for the State's purchase. They continue to work hard to examine the property's natural, recreational and productive resources. The Split Rock property, believe the OSI and ALT, is an unusual property in that it harbors a variety of land types and historic uses which dictate a carefully planned approach to state ownership and public use.

For instance, the property contains hay fields which will remain agriculturally productive under an arrangement with ALT. Forest resources could, if an upcoming timber analysis shows it makes sense, provide for responsible timber production in the future. Given the topography, endangered species (peregrine falcon and timber rattlesnake), woodland management, and recreational/educational public needs and desires, current trails and logging roads may need to be reconfigured.

ALT is exploring ways to involve the public in a planning process. BRASS hopes the public does get involved. The recreational potential is enormous. So, too, is the educational potential for the interpretation of wildlife, flora, wetlands, geology, and past ore mining. There is much to gain by careful planning and noting to lose (OSI and the State will keep the property on the tax roles) except the opportunity.