

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

In 1995, Warren County purchased the forty-mile right-of-way for the former Adirondack Branch of the Delaware and Hudson Railroad, extending from the town of Corinth in Saratoga County to the hamlet of North Creek in the Warren County town of Johnsbury. Since the 1860s, that rail line has played a central role in various aspects of Adirondack life. Its original passenger service fostered the proliferation of great camps at the turn of the last century. Its freight operations supported the growth of the wood and paper industries, and served as a vital link for mining operations in Tahawus. In the aftermath of the 1932 Lake Placid Olympics, it transported the first generation of downhill skiers from points south to Gore Mountain.

Following its acquisition by the County, the former Adirondack Branch is taking on a new role in the region. The line remains available to provide freight service to local industry. It has also become the focus of tourism development activities along the Northern Hudson River. Beginning last spring, a tourism railroad began operating on an eight-mile segment featuring twice daily roundtrips from North Creek to Riparius. Warren County is seeking ways to use the tourism potential of the right-of-way as a springboard to enhance tourism development along the entire Northern Hudson Corridor from Corinth to North Creek.

Warren County's initial investment, combined with key sources of federal support, have revived the potential for passenger and freight service extending as far south as Saratoga Springs. Retiring U.S. Rep. Jerry Solomon was instrumental in accessing federal funds through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Enhancement Act (ISTEA). Five million dollars is to be allocated to improvements of the rail line between Saratoga and North Creek. An additional \$5 million has been earmarked for the Saratoga Springs rail station renovation reconstruction project, and another \$6 million is currently set aside for the planning and implementation of a commuter train Demonstration Project between Saratoga Springs and Albany.

This report outlines an action plan by which local community, recreational, cultural, and historic resources can be coordinated to encourage the creation of a fully integrated tourist promotion effort along the Northern Hudson Corridor. Through an intermunicipal agreement the Warren County towns of Johnsbury, Thurman, Stony Creek, Warrensburg, and Lake Luzerne are joining with the towns of Hadley and Corinth in Saratoga County to create a corridor long revitalization plan under the aegis of the New York State Department of State's Local Waterfront Revitalization Program.

### **The New York State Department of State's Local Waterfront Revitalization Program**

The Department of State's Local Waterfront Revitalization Program promotes the creation of Local Waterfront Revitalization Plans (LWRPs) by local municipalities. Each LWRP formulates waterfront development objectives by adapting statewide legislation and policies to the unique and individual requirements of each municipality. The LWRP also outlines strategies that are used to meet the municipality's objectives.

The LWRP process involves cooperation with State, County, local, and private agencies as well as an appointed LWRP Advisory Committee that included local businesses as well as village and town residents. The LWRP outlines specific projects and policies to encourage environmental protection, foster economic development, protect valuable water resources, and improve public waterfront access. Once enacted into law, the LWRP will ensure that State and local actions proposed within the waterfront area are conducted in a manner consistent with the policies of the LWRP.

One of the components of the LWRP is the identification of long-term uses and specific projects along the waterfront and related lands. These uses and projects, in conjunction with an established management program, can significantly increase a community's ability to attract and manage development activities that complement the unique cultural and natural characteristics of its waterfront.

Once completed and approved by the New York State Secretary of State, the LWRP provides a community with the local controls to guide waterfront development. More importantly, a distinct benefit of the LWRP is the legal ability to ensure that all actions proposed for its waterfront only occurs in a fashion prescribed by the LWRP. This "consistency" provision is a strong tool that assures that State and local governments work in unison, and not at cross purposes, to build a stronger economy and a healthier waterfront environment.

### **Project Approach: The First Wilderness - Enhancing Economic Opportunities by Creating a Corridor-wide Tourism Experience**

The development of a tourism railroad is the first step in revitalizing the Northern Hudson Corridor. The first season of operations of the Upper Hudson Railroad have met or exceeded expectations. However, tourism railroads become sustainable only if they are developed as one component of a larger tourism experience. Consequently, the challenge and the opportunity presented by the tourism railroad is to use it as a catalyst for integrating the smaller scale attractions found throughout the corridor into a single experience for visitors.

This report identifies and defines such an experience: The First Wilderness. As described in the inventory, the Adirondacks were the first place where Americans realized that wilderness was going to be a distinguishing and *permanent* feature of their civilization. By the 1880s, more had been written about the Adirondacks than any other wilderness area in America. By the 1890s, the Adirondack Park was created as the largest protected wilderness area east of the Mississippi. Since then, the Adirondack Park has challenged each generation to define the role of wilderness in our increasingly urbanized civilization. As illustrated in the Inventory and Analysis section, the Saratoga-to-North Creek corridor was instrumental in establishing the Adirondacks as the First Wilderness.

The thrust of this study will be to define the First Wilderness as the consistent tourist experience for the corridor that can serve as the basis for attracting and retaining tourism activity throughout the corridor. This will involve a comprehensive inventory and assessment of community resources; a definition of the tourism market opportunities accessible from the corridor; and development of a tourist experience which integrates existing and potential tourist attractions into a "critical mass", which strengthens the corridor's

name recognition and attractiveness in the tourist market place. The report concludes with a plan of action to implement the experience and thereby realize the as yet untapped market opportunities available to communities in the study corridor.