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**Contact:** Emily DeSantis  
518-402-8000

## **STATE TO PURCHASE 1200 ACRES OF LAND IN THE CATSKILL PARK**

### **Big Indian Acquisition Protects Important State Forestland**

New York state's purchase of 1,200 acres of land on the eastern side of Belleayre Mountain, known as Big Indian, is expected to be completed later this week, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Joe Martens announced today. The acquisition will expand the Catskill Park Preserve and further protect the New York City watershed.

"The Big Indian acquisition preserves a major undeveloped geographic feature of the scenic Route 28 corridor in the heart of the Catskill Park," Commissioner Martens said. "The property is an important natural resource for future public recreation and in protecting the New York City watershed. The completion of this acquisition protects the Catskill Park while allowing economic growth in the area."

The \$5.6 million used to purchase the land came from the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). The property will be added to the constitutionally protected State Forest Preserve and will remain on local property tax rolls. This purchase fulfills a priority project area in the state's Open Space Conservation Plan.

The purchase also completes a key element in a non-binding Agreement in Principle reached between the state, the City of New York, several environmental groups and Crossroads Ventures LLC in September 2007. That agreement outlined a potential path forward to protect important lands in the New York City watershed and to allow for the potential future construction of a downsized private development project known as the Belleayre Resort at Catskill Park, as well as an expansion of the state's Belleayre Mountain Ski Center.

Congressman Maurice Hinchey said: "The conservation of 1,200 acres of Big Indian Ridge on Belleayre Mountain is something I have long championed, and I deeply appreciate the DEC's commitment to preserving this important natural area. This acquisition recognizes the vital need in the Catskills to balance smart and sustainable economic development with the conservation of critical forest lands and protection of water quality. This will ensure that the region can be enjoyed by current and future generations."

EPA Regional Administrator Judith Enck said: "I applaud the State of New York for this impressive land preservation commitment. It helps ensure clean drinking water for millions of New Yorkers, preserves the scenic beauty of the Catskills and helps launch a sustainable economic development project in a region that needs it."

State Senator John Bonacic said: "The State's acquisition of Big Indian will compliment the overall recreational experience available in the Catskills. I am pleased this step is being taken, and hopeful it will help advance the much needed Crossroads resort project."

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Assemblymember Kevin Cahill said: “The addition of the Big Indian Plateau to the Catskill Preserve is long overdue and represents a significant step forward for the environment and our regional economy. This land acquisition will ensure the preservation and protection of the highly sensitive ecosystem that attracts so many visitors to the area. I look forward to building on this progress by continuing to work with our communities, Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Martens to see that the promised state investments in the Belleayre Ski Center and Route 28 Corridor come to fruition.”

New York City Environmental Protection Commissioner Carter Strickland said: “The purchase of the 1,200-acre parcel in Big Indian is a great complement to steps we are taking to preserve the quality of New York City’s water supply. Since 1997, the city has protected more than 120,000 acres of the most sensitive watershed land. This allows us to maintain our status as one of only five large cities to operate an unfiltered water supply and it means that New Yorkers continue to receive the best water possible every time they turn on the tap.”

Dean Gitter, Managing Member of Crossroads Ventures LLC, the seller of the Big Indian lands, said: “We are pleased to have facilitated New York State’s acquisition of these magnificent lands for Forest Preserve preservation and protection of NYC’s watershed. This acquisition is further evidence of the private sector and the public sector working together to promote the interests of the Catskill region.”

Eric A. Goldstein, an attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council, said: “This is the largest and most important state land acquisition in the Catskills in a decade; among other benefits, it will help protect downstate drinking water and help prevent upstate flooding. Governor Andrew Cuomo and DEC Commissioner Joe Martens deserve the thanks of all New Yorkers for safeguarding this 1,200-acre green jewel for future generations.”

Paul Gallay, President and Hudson Riverkeeper, said: “Riverkeeper applauds the state’s completion of the acquisition and protection of the Big Indian Belleayre Mountain property as an important addition to the Catskill Forest Preserve. Protecting forests, scenic viewsheds and clean water in the Catskills protects drinking water for 9 million New Yorkers while also supporting economically important tourism and sustainable development. As an organization, Riverkeeper has long supported the protection of lands and waters in the Catskills and in particular the acquisition by the state of this property. This is an important milestone for the Catskills and New York.”

Open Space Institute CEO Kim Elliman said: “Congratulations to Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Martens for this tremendous achievement in land conservation and natural resource protection in the heart of the Catskills. The future of this critical property has hung in the balance for many years and it is a relief to all who care about the Catskills to see it protected. The preservation of this ecologically significant and prominent parcel will safeguard the watershed, benefit surrounding communities and serve as a model of smart, sustained land use.”

Alan White, Executive Director of The Catskill Center for Conservation said: “The Catskill Center is very pleased to see this impressive addition to the Forest Preserve and we recognize the significance of this permanent protection for 1200 acres of watershed forest in the Ashokan basin.”

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