

Trees Recover Quickly from 1998 Ice Storm

By Graham Cox

IN JANUARY 1998, a major ice storm affected some 17 million acres of forestland in northern New York and New England states, with 4.6 million acres damaged in New York alone. Since then the state forestry agencies, under the general supervision of the US Forest Service and with many partners in the public and private sector and in educational and research institutions, have funded and conducted a broad variety of studies to assess the damage and make suggestions as to how to handle the next big storm—whether it is wind, ice, snow or fire.

In March at a two-day conference held in Syracuse and organized by the State Environmental Conservation Department and the SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) School, the results of damage assessments and responses by more than two dozen researchers were presented.

Audubon New York contributed to this ice storm damage research through its study on the effects of salvage logging on forest biodiversity. Both salvage and conventional logging impact wildlife communities because of the way they change the structure of the forest habitat.

Mitschka Hartley, Audubon's forest ecologist, presented results of our research to date, comparing wildlife impacts on Adirondack forest plots that had been damaged by the ice (and on which salvage logging had taken place)

with forest plots that had been harvested by conventional means.

The broad conclusion, according to Hartley, is that the wildlife impacts of salvaging and conventional logging are similar and are the result of the level of cutting that occurred.

No matter whether stands had been salvaged or conventionally logged, the effects on wildlife are determined by the degree of cutting and extraction. As a result, management recommendations that seek to make conventional logging more friendly to wildlife species of concern can also apply to salvage logging. This research, in conjunction with that conducted by Audubon elsewhere in New York as described in previous editions of *Audubon Advocate*, will result in a 'decision tree' manual to be used by forest landowners, professional foresters and loggers in the near future. It will show what kind of wildlife results to expect under different tree harvesting intensities and make suggestions to landowners about sustainable forest practices from the perspective of wildlife conservation.

Industry representatives at the Syracuse conference responded to the research results, which showed that the impact on businesses and on the psychology of landowners was enormous, but the impact on the forest health was much less than expected.



One industry representative said: "In retrospect, perhaps we panicked and did much heavier salvage logging than was needed." Owners of maple sugar farms were very hard hit for the winter of the ice storm, and the visual damage to the forest and the street trees of the northern towns and cities was distressing. The researchers showed in many of their papers that the trees have recovered very quickly from what appeared to be major damage to their branches, limbs and crowns and maple sugar production has come back, if not yet to the earlier levels.

ESF forestry professor Ralph Nyland, concluded that in future storms—and there will be more storms, he cautioned—landowners, forester and loggers should not act in haste. They should practice good silviculture, and "must balance the immediate impulse to act with the long term likelihood of recovery.... Debranched trees recover at an amazing rate," said Prof. Nyland.

State buys Schunnemunk Mountain

in the Hudson Highlands, makes this 163rd state park

By Graham Cox

SCHUNNEMUNK MOUNTAIN, an eight-mile long ridge towering 1,700 feet above the state Thruway on the western boundary of the Hudson Highlands, has been acquired by the state for \$2.5 million. The 2,458-acre ridge property had initially been acquired by the State Open Space Institute and will now be managed as the 163rd state park by the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

This majestic highland landscape in Orange County is the backdrop for an extensive trail network, including the Long Path and the Highlands Trail. The mountain provides habitat for two rare natural communities. It boasts one of the most extensive stands of mountain laurel in the area. It provides the natural backdrop to the Storm King Art Center, a sculpture park and museum with a collection of some 230 pieces of art. The mountain is on the state open space conservation priority list. The Open Space Institute has worked with the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference since 1996 to acquire and maintain the property's extensive trail network. The area will be managed as a passive-use, natural resource protection park.



Public input needed by DEC for Unit Management Plans, High Peaks regulations

22 groups urge reimbursement for local governments hit by forestland property tax exemption

CONSERVATION GROUPS, forestry organizations and local government groups have joined together to give broad support for \$3.3 million in the executive budget proposal which would be available to reimburse local governments impacted by the forest use property tax exemption.

In a letter to Governor George E. Pataki and the State Assembly and Senate leadership 22 groups, including Audubon New York, urged the state to enact this local reimbursement provision as part of the overall state budget package. "We have united around the need to improve New York's forest tax law program by providing state reimbursement to significantly impacted local governments," according to a letter to the state officials.

"We have expressed this support ... (since 1998) when the governor first proposed an appropriation to reimburse local governments and school districts for the property tax shift resulting from enrollment of private lands in New York's forestland exemption program (Sections 480 and 480-a of the Real Property Tax Law)," according to their letter. The governor is proposing to take this reimbursement from the General Fund, but the budget bill needs to set out a formula for distributing these revenues to impacted towns, villages and school districts. In the past it was estimated that some 50 local entities were hard hit by the forestland property tax exemption, many in the Catskills and Sullivan County, some in the Adirondacks.

DEC is asking for your comments on unit management plans for the Wilmington Wild Forest and Split Rock Wild Forest, units now split from the bigger Taylor Pond Wild Forest unit. Wilmington is a 14,000-acre area on the east-facing slopes of Whiteface Mountain between the ski center and the Veteran's Memorial Highway. Split Rock covers about 3,700 acres near Westport overlooking Lake Champlain.

Earlier in the winter, DEC asked for public comments as they started the plans for units on Dix Wilderness Area and Giant Mountain Wilderness Area. Dix includes more than 45,000 acres of the most rugged High Peaks of the Adirondacks and Giant includes nearly 23,000 acres of similar high wilderness terrain. DEC is also asking for public comments on new regulations for the High Peaks Wilderness Area which will help curb trail erosion and damage to alpine and high elevation vegetation. It will set limits on camping at higher elevations and on the size of hiking and camping groups.

For a complete list of unit management plans underway and for the DEC's new High Peaks regulations, visit the DEC website at

www.dec.state.ny.us.

or comment to the foresters in the regional office in Ray Brook.