

New York State Pledges Support For The Great Swamp Grant Application For Federal Conservation Funds

By Graham Cox

THE UNITED STATES Fish and Wildlife Service is considering a grant application from the Friends of the Great Swamp (FROGS) to match a state commitment to purchase key parcels to protect the unusual habitat. The Great Swamp is a 6,000-acre plus freshwater wetland along the Route 22 corridor in Dutchess and Putnam counties.

The Great Swamp is included as a priority area in the latest revision to the state open space conservation plan. Audubon New York, with other land conservation groups, presented supporting comments to the State Environmental Conservation Department in November and earlier had written supporting letters to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Bird Habitat Conservation.

The Friends group, FROGS, has

proposed a more than \$2 million conservation program for the area, the largest freshwater wetland in southeastern New York. Much of the wetland is within the Croton River drainage basin and flows into the East Branch Reservoir, part of the New York City watershed. Leading the designation and funding effort is Dr. James Utter, chair of FROGS and biology professor at State University of New York SUNY-Purchase. They are seeking federal funds from the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund (NAWCF).

In a supporting letter from the state, Governor George E. Pataki said, "I had the opportunity to canoe portions of the Great Swamp and witness first hand what a marvelous resource the Great Swamp presents for the people and communities of this region. The

state is committed to working with the FROGS, local governments and willing sellers of properties within the Great Swamp, to acquire key parcels. It is an important part of a larger effort to create a swath of protected lands around the entire New York metropolitan area." The governor pledged at least \$1.2 million from the state Environmental Protection Fund to match the NAWCF grant.

Though the wetland is large, much of it is subdivided into hundreds of small tax parcels. Though much of the wetland is mapped as a Department of Environmental Conservation class 1 regulated wetland, much of the threat to the water and wildlife comes from incremental development, pollution and infilling along the edges of the wetland which is in an area seeing considerable suburban development pressure.

In a supporting letter, Dr. Michael Burger, director of bird conservation for Audubon New York explains, "With the help of organizations such as FROGS and The Nature Conservancy, awareness of the swamp's ecological significance has grown over the years, but very little of the swamp is in public ownership and is in continual threat from development." The Great Swamp was identified as an Important Bird Area (IBA) in the Audubon New York IBA publication in 1997. It supports an exceptional bird community, including Great Blue Herons, Green Herons, Least Bitterns, American Bitterns, Virginia Rails, Sora, Wood Ducks, Red-shouldered Hawks, Broad-winged Hawks, Black-billed Cuckoos, Yellow-billed Cuckoos, seven species of flycatchers and as many as 13 wood warbler species.

Northern Forest Community Economy Publication Soon To Be Available

By Graham Cox

A PUBLICATION designed for people "struggling to find sustainable alternatives for the Northern Forest economy" will soon be available from the Northern Forest Alliance. Audubon New York is active in this 40-member coalition covering four states (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and New York) and has contributed to the preparation of the 40-page text.

Award winning author Bill McKibben has prepared the preface to the book. The text details some of the economic and social changes taking place in the heavily forested region and proposes that "building strong, diverse, locally based economies that support thriving communities is essential to the future" of the region.

This will be the third and final publication describing the "three legs" of the Alliance work agenda for the 26-

million acre region. The first described the Alliance vision of a "wildlands" core for habitat conservation, the second publication described its concepts for sustainable forest management for the overwhelmingly privately-owned forests of the region, and this last publication builds on these earlier ones to discuss sustainable community development.

A companion publication will also soon be available from the

Alliance, a compilation of case studies providing practical, working examples of sustainable community development, the natural amenities of an area, cultural heritage and nature-based tourism, and value-added forest products businesses. For information about the two publications, contact gcx@audubon.org.

Birds *win big* in new Open Space Plan

By Michael Burger

HIGH QUALITY bird habitats are featured prominently in New York state's new conservation wish list. The draft 2001 Open Space Conservation Plan, which was released this past fall, lists more than one hundred areas, or projects, that have been identified as priorities for open space and natural resource conservation in New York state. Included among these projects are 73 of Audubon's Important Bird Areas (IBAs).

Projects listed in the Open Space Plan are eligible for state money for protection through acquisition, conservation easements, or other means, such as smart growth and farmland preservation initiatives. Most of the priority projects listed in New York's Open Space Plan were identi-

fied by nine regional committees, whose members include representatives of towns, counties, and conservation organizations and other citizens. Projects range from specific single properties to larger regions. Some of the larger projects, such as the South Shore Estuary Preserve on Long Island, include multiple IBAs.

The State's Open Space Plan is updated every three years. Release of the 1998 Open Space Plan coincided with Audubon New York's publication of *Important Bird Areas in New York State*, which profiles 127 sites across the state that were identified because of their importance to birds. Forty-six IBAs were listed among the priority projects in the 1998 plan.

Since 1998, Audubon New York staff have been advocating for the inclusion of IBAs in the Open Space

Plan. Those efforts were rewarded with the release of the draft 2001 plan. In addition to the 73 IBAs listed among the priority projects, several other IBAs are identified in the Plan because of the importance of their habitat, and the plan contains many references to Audubon's IBA program and the State's Bird Conservation Area program that is based on it.

Listing in the Open Space Plan is only the first step toward protection of these valuable habitats. Importantly, over the past couple of years, 24 Open Space Plan projects in which New York state is protecting IBA habitats have been acted on or are in various states of completion. These successes are highlighted in the draft 2001 OSP.



Please visit the website at <http://ny.audubon.org/conservation/ibas.htm> for more details about IBAs in the Open Space Plan or to view the 2001 draft plan.