

WORKING FOR THE WATER & THE PEOPLE

HEADWATERS CAMPAIGN

The Headwaters Campaign is a collaboration of the Adirondack Council and Northern Forest Canoe Trail along with three lake associations (Blue Mountain Lake, Long Lake, and Raquette Lake) in the headwaters of the Raquette River Watershed.

The purpose of the Headwaters Campaign is to expand the communications and outreach capacity of the three lake associations in order to share stewardship-focused messaging (responsible recreation, invasive species prevention, Leave No Trace, etc.) with other local partners and to engage a broad base of stakeholders in watershed management planning.



Supporting the Lake Associations

Lake associations across the Adirondack Park play a vital role in safeguarding our precious lakes and waters from potential threats. This work is made possible in part through support provided by local and/or county government, as well as a variety of grant sources; however, the vast majority of this work is funded in large part by lake association members and carried out by contractors or volunteers.

Through its partnership with the Raquette Lake Preservation Foundation, the Adirondack Council recognized the growing need for additional support to these groups. The Council approached the Northern Forest Canoe Trail to partner up on writing a grant to fund a “Headwaters Campaign” that would provide staffing and advisory oversight to lake associations in the Raquette River Headwaters. That grant was awarded and funding will run through October 2024.



A Watershed Approach

Over the next 18 months, the Headwaters Campaign will support the region in moving towards a watershed-focused planning approach. One of the primary goals by the end of the project is to collectively develop a watershed management plan for the Raquette River Headwaters reflective of the interests of all the stakeholders involved in this campaign.



Some of the longer-term outcomes of the Headwaters Campaign include:

- Continued staffing similar to the Headwaters Coordinator to directly support lake associations;
- Improved watershed-scale partnerships between lake associations and other local stakeholders;
- Increased financial and organizational stability of lake associations in the region;
- Increased membership rates, public engagement and volunteer capacity for lake associations;

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- Improved public understanding of good stewardship practices, including responsible recreation and tourism, invasive species spread prevention (Clean, Drain, Dry), and Leave No Trace;
- Regular forums for information sharing and to improve collective understanding of threats to watershed health, as well as collective solutions.

If successful, the Headwaters Campaign could provide a blueprint for other Adirondack headwater communities to follow in moving towards a more collective, watershed-focused approach to planning.

Protecting Adirondack Headwaters is Essential

The Adirondack Park is home to an abundance of freshwater resources and vital headwater systems:

- Five major river systems find their headwaters in the Park;
- There are more than 2,800 lakes and ponds in the Park; and,
- Over 1,500 miles of rivers, fed by nearly 30,000 miles of streams are found in the Park.



These headwaters are home to some tremendously diverse and sensitive communities of plants, animals, and microorganisms. Apart from these natural communities, humans also rely on these waters. **Adirondack headwaters are the lifeblood of many Adirondack communities**, supporting towns and hamlets by providing drinking water; driving local economies; and offering residents and visitors enjoyment of the aesthetic and natural qualities of these places.

The consequences of any potential harms to these headwaters would be incalculable not only for the human and natural communities that they support, but for a wide range of downstream communities. Impacts in the headwaters could have the potential to “snowball,” sending compounding and cascading effects downstream. It is essential to safeguard these critically important headwaters at their source.

Adirondack Waters are Under Threat

Our Adirondack Headwaters face a variety of potential harms:

- Invasive species threaten the recreational viability and aesthetic quality of many waterbodies;
- Obsolete dams and undersized culverts prevent the natural movement of species due to habitat fragmentation and also pose risks from a stormwater management perspective;
- Aging septic systems facilitate increased nutrient loading, sometimes yielding harmful algal blooms that threaten drinking water resources and recreational viability; and,
- Road salt mismanagement poses a risk to drinking water and corrodes vital infrastructure.



Our partners working to combat these challenges throughout the region do an outstanding job of covering a lot of ground, but the Park is a large place and there is no way to manage these challenges all at once, everywhere. In many cases, we must look to volunteer-based non-profits to fill those remaining gaps - in the case of protecting Adirondack lakes, the collective role that lake associations play is enormous and essential on this front.



Marion River and Raquette Lake | Photo © Carl Heilman II/Wild Visions Inc.