

North Wind

October – November – December 2026

Fires

by Tom Van de Water, Vice Chair, Conservation

I confess, I'm a fire nut. I don't light forest fires, but I love to watch them burn. Fortunately, I work as a fire lookout in Idaho from June to October and see dozens of fires start from lightning each year. Those near timber or homes are put out immediately. Those in Wilderness Areas are sometimes allowed to burn as part of the forest ecology. And during a typical dry fire season in the Northern Rockies, these coniferous forests will burn. Some pine cones need fire to open and reseed. Some birds and insects need charred forests to thrive. And, in Idaho, dead wood doesn't rot. Burning is needed to release nutrients.



So, what about our Adirondack coniferous forests? Adirondack forests are wetter, and our wood does decompose into soil humus. But as recent smoke from Canadian boreal forests confirms, even supposedly wet forests will burn. Conifers are adapted to burn; our Adirondack boreal forests near peat bogs and on mountain peaks are no exception. Charred layers from hundreds of years ago reveal a long history of fires.



Temperatures are, of course, rising as we continue to burn fossil fuels and rainfall is becoming more unpredictable. Flooding and droughts result. A dry Adirondack summer is not impossible. When that happens, some hot August day, fires will start. Any spark will do. We will be shocked to see stretches of boreal forest burning with houses and camps embedded in them going up in flames. If we learn anything from our Western neighbors, it's that houses near conifers are vulnerable and that houses themselves are good fuel for fires. High temperatures will also threaten vulnerable people, not just in cities like Phoenix, but in places used to cooler temperatures like the Adirondacks. Caring for each other will be crucial.

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Fires, continued

Simply protecting ourselves, though, by reducing fire risk near our homes or camps is not enough. As Adirondack Mountain Club members, we need to be leaders in fighting climate change. We can promote efforts to avoid investing in fossil fuels, to drive and fly less, to promote positive change at local and national levels. We need to protect the places and people we love. We need to talk to each other about the elephant in the room.

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In the West, increasingly common pyrocumulus clouds rising above large forest fires are creating their own lightning. They are a reminder that fires are changing in size and intensity. Certainly, more frequent controlled burns can minimize risks. This does not mean we need to cut down forests indiscriminately or abandon designated Wilderness. In fact, Wilderness Areas offer a chance to see how ecological changes can play out in the midst of climate change. Can some lightning-caused fires in Adirondack wilderness be allowed to burn within certain parameters? Will we adopt forestry practices to prevent fires like those, brought about by mismanagement of logging slash, that burned thousands of Adirondack acres over 100 years ago?

Vermonter George Perkins Marsh wrote eloquently in *Man and Nature* (1864) about protecting Adirondack forests. Though he could not have anticipated today's global climate change, he knew the significance of human impact and that forests protect watersheds. His arguments helped justify establishment of the Adirondack Forest Preserve. Some 70 years later, Bob Marshall, one of the first three 46ers, fought for wilderness in the Adirondacks and the rest of the country. His voice still echoes through Western and Eastern forests. He saw wilderness as essential for human well-being. He would not have been surprised by all we have learned about fossil fuels, carbon dioxide, and climate change. Marshall was an advocate for protecting "the people's forest" through science and good government.



We will need to follow in the footsteps of conservation giants like Marsh and Marshall to tackle the intertwined problems of fires and climate change today.

Photos by the author, from his lookout tower in Idaho



Observations from the Chair

by Tom Wheeler, Chapter Chair

In mid-September I attended the Adirondack Mountain Club Fall Outing at the Young Life Camp on Upper Saranac Lake. The Outing was organized by the North Woods Chapter, which covers the Tri-Lakes area. Organizing the various individual outings was our long-time former member, John Omohundro. He managed to recruit trip leaders from eight different chapters. They included several members from our Chapter: Tom Ortmeyer, Dana Chudzinski, and myself. The Canton-Potsdam area was well represented among the participants. Hoping that I have not forgotten anyone, I saw Blair and Madge Madore, Jane Khondker, Jeff and Cheryl Miller, Mark Lowell, Tom Ortmeyer, and of course Eileen Wheeler. The accommodations were excellent and I enjoyed meeting ADKers from throughout the state. More than 200 participants came from as far away as Virginia and North Carolina.



Next year's Fall Outing is planned for the vicinity of Oneonta. It will be sponsored by the Susquehanna Chapter.

It was great to see the North Carolina visitors, John and Susan Omohundro, who recently moved to a retirement community in that state. As most of you know, they were key members of our Chapter. John served as Chair for terms in three different decades, in addition to holding other leadership roles.

The next club-wide outing is Winter Outing. This winter, the gathering is organized by the Black River Chapter. That chapter is based in Watertown and Jefferson County, but the outing will actually take place in our county, at the Massawepie Boy Scout camp near Childwold.

We have two Chapter events that I urge you to attend in the coming months. The first is a potluck dinner at the Presbyterian Church in Canton, on November 15. The program will include our Photo Contest awards. Then, New Year's Day sees another potluck, this one at Higley Flow State Park, from noon to 4:00 p.m. Again, we will be joined by the Friends of Higley Flow State Park, an organization that continues to contribute to the success of the park. Expect to have the opportunity for snowshoeing and skiing. A campfire and an afternoon potluck inside the park's cabin are also on the schedule.

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Observations from the Chair, continued

I would like to congratulate Robert Williams III of Waterville, New York, for completing the Loony Loop challenge and earning its coveted patch. To earn the patch, one must complete eight hikes from a list of 22 in the St. Lawrence River area, 11 in New York State and 11 in Ontario. The web link is https://adklaurentian.org/?page=loony_loop_challenge.html.

As you may know, ADK has sold the Cascade Ski Center to a private purchaser. The property was beyond the financial capabilities of the club. I have spoken with the purchaser, Brian Pollock, who says he intends to have the facility open for cross-country skiing this winter and has been hard at work preparing the trails and improving the building.

Have a great fall.

Photo Contest Deadline Approaches!

The Laurentian Chapter is pleased to sponsor its 2026 Photo Contest. **Submissions should be sent by email to contest organizer Tom Ortmeyer at tortmeyer@gmail.com.** Digital submissions are preferred. Photos must have been taken between October 1, 2025, and September 30, 2026, for this year's contest, and **they must be received by October 10, 2026.**

Photos should be on topics of interest to members of the Adirondack Mountain Club and its Laurentian Chapter. Preference will be given to photos taken in and near the Adirondack Mountains and the St. Lawrence and Ottawa River Valleys, as well as those taken at ADK events. Photos from Laurentian Chapter members are accepted, as are photos from non-members that are taken on Chapter outings. Photos submitted from those outings are also automatically entered. Good luck!





Editor's Ramblings: The Return of Acid Rain? by Neal Burdick, Editor

The August 2026 edition of the Adirondack Council's regular report "Five Things to Know in Adirondack Conservation" leads with this: "A few decades ago, the Adirondack Park was facing an existential threat. Pollution and acid rain were killing fish, denuding forests, and throwing off the natural balance of the Adirondacks. But strict regulations around air pollution reversed the negative trend. We (have seen) native trout return, and forests are thriving.



"However, loosening those air quality rules is a priority for the current Administration in Washington, and the (return) of acid rain and other pollutants to the Adirondacks is a distinct possibility."

"A distinct possibility" – think about that. After years -- decades -- of lobbying, writing letters, pushing legislation, and so much more by concerned citizens and influential organizations like ADK, all that effort may go down the drain, before the onslaught of an Administration that cares nothing about the environment or anything else except subservience and profit for itself and its cronies. That will knock us right back where we started, some 50 years ago.

Think about *that* whenever you go to the polls to vote.

Stone Valley Bridge Project Completed

Mark Simon oversaw completion of this new bridge over O'Malley Brook where it flows into the Raquette River on the east side of Stone Valley, replacing the bridge that was washed out in August 2024 during the heavy rains from Hurricane Debby. Primary labor was provided by the Clarkson University Bridge Team.

Photo by Mark Simon





Membership News from HQ

ADK is modernizing its membership program to reduce paper, streamline staff processes, and make membership information easier to access.

Here are the key changes:

Beginning October 1, 2026:

- Membership cards will no longer be automatically mailed. Members can access their membership information through the Member Portal or request a letter with their membership details.
- Membership can be verified without a physical card. All ADK staff can verify membership using a member's name, email address, or new six-digit membership ID.
- New six-digit membership IDs will appear on receipts and in the Member Portal.

Beginning January 1, 2027:

- ADK will launch a \$30 Under 30 membership campaign running January–March.
- Gifts of \$50+ will automatically include membership benefits. Gifts of \$70+ will qualify for Family Membership benefits, with the option to add another household adult and/or children upon request.

ADK Laurentian Chapter

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Outings and Events

Dana Chudzinski, Vice Chair, Outings

Aside from Weekly Walks, we offer just two outings this fall (A potluck dinner and program is wonderful, but it’s not really an “out”ing. And New Year’s Day – the Higley Flow event – belongs to winter). Step up, folks – we need more outings! Early ADK leader A.T. Shorey once said, “A mountain club that does not climb mountains has no excuse for being alive.” Let’s stay alive!

- Check for last-minute updates on our website: adklaurentian.org.
- Please contact the trip leader at least one day before the trip.

ADK hiking trips are rated according to the following scale:

Rating	Effort Level	Elevation Gain (ft.)	Miles	Time (hrs.)
A+	Very Strenuous	4,000	10	10
A	Strenuous	3,000	5 to 10	8 to 10
B+	Moderately Strenuous	2,000	5 to 10	6 to 8
B	Moderate	1,000	5 to 10	5 to 7
C+	Fairly Easy	1,000	5 to 8	4 to 6
C	Easy	Under 1,000	< 5	< 5

Outings and Events, October - December 2026

Thursdays, Oct. 1, 8, 15, 22, 29: Weekly Walk, Munter Trail, Potsdam We will walk the trails for approximately 2 miles, 1-hour round trip. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot behind the Clarkson Walker Arena and Hantz Field off Clarkson Ave. Contact Tom Ortmeyer, tortmeyer@gmail.com, 315-244-3707. Level C (Easy).

Fri., Oct 9: Fall Foliage Hike, Mount Arab Fire Tower, Piercefield Join us for a fall hike up Mount Arab through hardwood forest to the historic fire tower and observer's cabin. The hike is approximately 2.1 miles round trip with 741 ft. of elevation gain and includes a steady climb with a few steeper sections. Allow approximately 2 hours for hiking, breaks, and enjoying the remaining fall foliage. Climbing the tower is optional. Meet at 11:00 a.m. at the Mount Arab trailhead parking area on Mount Arab Road. Bring water, a snack, sturdy footwear, and layers appropriate for October weather. Contact Krystyna Kowalski, krystyna.kowalski@gmail.com, 613-804-8878. Level C.

Thurs., Nov. 5, 12, 19: Weekly Walk, Munter Trail, Potsdam We will walk the trails for approximately 2 miles, 1-hour round trip. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot behind the Clarkson Walker Arena and Hantz Field off Clarkson Avenue. Contact Tom Ortmeyer, tortmeyer@gmail.com, 315-244-3707. Level C.

Sat., Nov. 7: Stone Valley Loop For most this is a very well-known hike. We will do the full loop, downstream on the west side of the Raquette River from Colton and up the east. Total distance, about 7 miles. We will determine what time to meet as the date draws closer. Contact Dana Chudzinski, Chudski63@yahoo.com or 315-244-5315. Level B.

Sun., Nov. 16: Fall Potluck First Presbyterian Church, Canton. Arrive around 5 p.m., supper to start at 5:30. Bring a dish to share and your own tableware. Presentation of photo contest awards, perhaps a speaker. Contact Tom Wheeler, northflow@gmail.com.

Thurs., Dec. 3, 10, 17, 24, 31: Weekly Walk, Red Sandstone Trail We will walk the dirt access roads for approximately 2 miles, 1-hour round trip. If the roads are icy, traction devices such as micro spikes are recommended. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Red Sandstone trailhead, north entrance parking lot off Back Hannawa Road (CR59) between Potsdam and Hannawa Falls. From Potsdam, at the intersection of Rt. 11 and Clarkson Ave (CR59), drive south for 2.5 miles. The access road is on the left just past Sweeney Road. A brown "trail parking" sign marks the entrance. Contact Tom Ortmeyer, tortmeyer@gmail.com, 315-244-3707. Level C.

Sat., Dec. 12: Lampson Falls Great hike for everyone, beginners and beyond. This easy hike will begin at 10:00 a.m. and will be 2-3 miles long. Plan to have a great lunch at the falls. Contact Tom Van de Water, 315-261-1723. Level C.

Save the Date: New Year's Day at Higley Flow: January 1, 2027, 1-4 p.m. Joint with Friends of Higley Flow State Park. Ski, snowshoe or hike (1:00-3:00 p.m.) to kick off the new year in nature. At 3:00 we'll gather at the lodge for a potluck finger-food social. Bring a snack to share. Weather permitting, we will have a bonfire. More to come in the Winter 2027 North Wind.



Backtracks

Reports on some of the previous season's outings. "TL" indicates trip leader.

ADK Bike Week, June 14-19 Laurentian members Tom Ortmeyer and Greg Smith once again co-led ADK bike week. With the help of new trip leader Julie Leonelli we hosted 35 bikers for 5 days of biking near Saranac Lake. All bikers had the chance to bike the full 34 miles of the recently completed Adirondack Rail Trail. We also pedaled to new destinations: the West Branch of the St. Regis River, Split Rock Falls from Elizabethtown, and the "Junction Trail," which visits historic landmarks of Tupper Lake. Participants: Too many to list, from the North Country, New Jersey, "Upstate NY," the Finger Lakes, and Buffalo. Photos: Greg Smith



Indian River and Red Lake, August 6

We had great weather to explore a unique ecosystem of grassland and glacial erratic lakes. On Indian River, we saw a wide variety of birds: Great blue heron, kingfisher, sandpipers, chestnut warblers, a red-tailed hawk, and an osprey. On Red Lake, we paddled from grasslands to impressive metamorphic rock cliffs. After takeout, we visited Butterfield Lake and enjoyed ice cream in Redwood, N.Y. Participants: Kim Baxter, Holly Chorba, Cyndi Grover, Greg Smith (TL) Photos: Greg Smith





Backtracks, continued

Clear, Long, and Lilypad Ponds, September 5

The day started a bit misty but quickly turned into great late-summer hiking weather. We started at Long Pond and made our way to Lilypad Pond. We made lots of mushroom spotting stops along the way. A great lunch at Lilypad, the most picturesque of the ponds, was followed by backtracking back to Clear Pond. Great hike, great company. Pictured left to right, Jeff Miller, Greg Smith, Tom Ortmeyer. Dana Chudzinski (TL). Photo: Greg Smith



Buck Mountain Fire Tower, September 12

On a perfect fall day, we assembled at 10:30 a.m. At the parking lot we met someone whose son was participating in the 90-mile canoe race, and who had an adorable four-month-old golden retriever, Mabel. The first half of the hike was relatively flat and well-constructed, with many bog bridges. The incline began to increase until we came to the first of nine wooden ladders, one of them almost vertical with narrow treads. We reached the summit as the fire tower came into



view. It was restored in 2023 and is extremely sturdy, with each stair landing well fenced in. Jane went up six flights, high enough to see over trees. We had lunch at the top.

Participants: Jane Khondker (TL) and John Barron

