



Protecting Zoar Valley from Logging

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Several of my friends who hike and enjoy birding have asked me this question over the past 9 months: *What is going on in Zoar Valley?* I tell them that commercially valuable trees are being marked for logging in the areas that are labeled for "Multiple Use." Their reaction is shock and surprise. We all thought that Zoar Valley was protected from logging, but we were mistaken.

There is a plan between the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and the Audubon Society of New York-Connecticut that would use clear-cutting as a forest management tool for the purpose of creating early successional habitats for bird species which thrive in such habitats. When Sierra Club Niagara learned about this plan we investigated and notified our Chapter Chair about what the DEC was planning to do. She wrote a letter on behalf of our state-wide membership to the NY DEC Commissioner. Below are 3 paragraphs taken from the letter dated October 4th.

We (Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter) support the goal of increasing early successional forest land in NYS for breeding and migratory habitat for declining bird species, as long as those goals are carried out in appropriate existing land use areas such as former farmland, plantations, meadows, and fallow fields. We support the NYS DEC in assisting the Audubon Society in locating alternate and more suitable locations in which to carry out its bird habitat projects so long as those projects do not include deforestation or logging of largely native forest cover.

Aside from our instincts to protect the ecosystems surrounding Zoar valley from unnecessary intrusion, we are deeply concerned about the climate crisis and urgent need to retain mature native forest cover to sequester carbon. This imperative is emphasized by Governor Hochul's goal of planting 25 million trees statewide by 2033 — a \$47 million effort supported by the Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act and the FY25 Enacted Budget.

In conclusion, The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter urges the NYS DEC to halt any tree clearing plans in the Zoar Valley Unique Area/Multiple Use Area, and reopen the May 2021 Draft Niagara Frontier Unit Management Plan and its forest management proposals to allow for true public engagement so there can be an open discourse about the ecological health of this beloved park and what necessary steps need to be taken to preserve its legacy, especially in the context of the climate crisis.

At the time of this writing, there has been no logging in the Zoar Valley Unique Areas or the Multiple Use Areas, however, we will need to stay vigilant and continue to advocate to protect Zoar Valley, so future generations can enjoy this jewel of nature. Sierra Club Niagara is part of the Zoar Valley Coalition. For more information about this issue or to get involved, go to the Zoar Valley Coalition website (zoarvalley.org).