



THE WESTERN NEW YORK ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE

WWW.WNYEA.ORG

January 2025

STATEMENT REGARDING THE DEC/AUDUBON LOGGING PLAN AT ZOAR VALLEY

The Western New York Environmental Alliance is a coalition of independent organizations serving as an environmental voice for the WNY Region. We do this, in part, by helping to create community-based conversations about conservation and ecological strategies in Buffalo and Western New York. We advocate for science-based decision-making, environmental justice, and enforcement and enactment of laws, regulations, and policies designed to protect watersheds and regional and global biodiversity and to mitigate the harmful impacts of climate change.

Regarding the Zoar Valley logging plan being advocated by NYS DEC and the Audubon Society of New York.

We are in agreement with the Zoar Valley Coalition that any and all logging planned for any property owned or controlled by New York State regarding Zoar Valley including the Zoar Valley Unique Area/Multiple Use Area.

Furthermore, we have concluded that the conservation strategies articulated by the state DEC and the contractors and consultants, including New York Audubon, all employed to promote the logging, are not based in sound science. In fact these plans and the descriptions of the science behind them are both very thin and do not contribute to the kinds of bird conservation promoted and marketed by the consultants. We do understand the values and needs to promote more open habitat for certain species of birds. We also know that the existing habitat that is located on the planned logging sites is critical in the context of addressing climate change and species extinction. Disrupting this habitat with logging initiatives will cause great and unrepairable harm.

This site, adjacent to an old growth forest habitat, has established itself with a variety of native trees and other plants including richly contributing soil organisms and mechanisms. These include mycorrhizal networks, many insect, mammal, amphibian, reptile and bird species, and a rich biodiversity of plants and other organisms. Many of the native trees at this site are older than 150 years, The understory and the soils have evolved here for at least 10,000 years. Imagine if you can, the millennia of ecological investment that this forest habitat has contributed in terms of carbon sequestration and the support of so many species of flora and fauna including humans, that depend on this kind of vanishing place.

Destroying this living healthy habitat for this NYS DEC Audubon logging plan is a dangerous and thoughtless destruction of a long existing, established, and critical natural place. Zoar Valley and this site provides what must be characterized as substantial, if not unique, ecological value and services to the region. It is also a place providing past and future generations access to recreational activities, passive enjoyment, and the many benefits of natural places. Its contribution to human well-being is priceless.

We are concerned that this plan marketed by DEC and Audubon represents a logging initiative and not a conservation initiative as claimed.

Furthermore in light of the recent attempt by New York State to implement a 30 x 30 program, we believe that any and all logging initiatives in New York State that are on properties owned or controlled by New York State should undergo scrutiny such as a detailed SEQRA process that would include public meetings and public comment to guarantee public participation in decision making. This is a part of a democratic system that we have fought for and demand of New York State leadership.

The Western New York Environmental Alliance has hosted public meetings regarding the NYS 30 x 30 Plan, encouraged a public comment period which NYS granted in 2024. While there has been no response from the state to date to the public comments, we stand by our 30 x 30 comments including a demand that no net habitat loss occur on New York State owned or controlled lands.

Any and all logging plans in NYS represent a net loss to habitat. Those conducting those activities should be held accountable. The Zoar Valley logging plan, while being marketed to the public as a conservation plan, does not meet the smell test. This is a logging plan, not a conservation plan. No one is being fooled.

Furthermore we demand that NYS DEC reopen the May 2021 Draft Niagara Frontier Unit Management Plan and its forest management proposals. The world including the natural world is rapidly changing in 2025. Public engagement is critical if New York State is going to lead our state into a more climate resilient future. Secretive logging plans such as the Zoar plan betray the public trust.

New York State, under the current leadership, has entered into an era of anti-conservation activities. The tremendous loss of wildlands and biodiversity are primary causes of climate change and challenge positive quality of life opportunities for future generations.

We would be glad to get into more details and are reaching out to local individuals and organizations including the Zoar Valley Coalition about hosting or co-hosting more public information sessions.

John Whitney, President
WNYEA

Jay Burney

Lynda Schkneekloth

Margaret Wooster

Terrance Robinson

Anna Castanguay

Et al