

Gooley Club seeks to preserve historic buildings

Sept. 30 deadline fast approaching to remove club's structures

By Dan Ladd

Contributing Writer

Newcomb, N.Y. — Donald MacElroy knows the end of an era is fast approaching. Following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, he and his brother John MacElroy have spent a great part of their lives hunting and fishing at the Gooley Club on the Essex Chain Lakes near Newcomb in the central Adirondacks.

But that's all about to change.

The Gooley Club is just one of a number of camps that have been displaced by the state of New York's acquisition of lands once leased to the clubs by Finch, Pruyn, LLC, the Glens Falls-based timber company that sold 161,000 acres to The Nature Conservancy in 2007. TNC has since sold some 69,000 acres, including the Essex Chain, to the state.

As part of an arrangement with the state, the clubs have until Sept. 30 to remove their buildings. But the MacElroys and other Gooley Club members are trying to save a few of the structures, which they feel have historic significance and could also be used should a future hut-to-hut trail system develop in the Adirondacks.

"Third Lake Camp is a critical park of the history of the Central Adirondacks, and based on its inclusion on both the New York State and National Historic Registers deserves protection," said MacElroy. "There are contributing and non-contributing structures. Some were built in the '70's and '80s, like the bathhouse and a cabin or two. But primarily the main lodge and several of the cabins were all contributing structures to that National Historic determination."

The Gooley Club worked closely with New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Adirondack Architectural Heritage and a number of other stakeholders to achieve the

historic designation. But that's not enough to save the buildings and they are asking Gov. Andrew Cuomo for a Stay of Execution to buy some time and get more stakeholders together to discuss their future.

"We're looking for stakeholders to be brought together," says MacElroy. "The environmental community, the sporting community, the historic community and business groups."

Like the recent debate surrounding the classification of the nearby Boreas Ponds tract, which was also part of this acquisition, the Essex Chain, too, was hotly contested among environmental and sportsmen's groups, and especially the snowmobiling community.

The result was varying levels of classification and what is now known as the Essex Chain Complex, which opened to the public in 2013. Structures have been part of the conversation all along and it was eventually determined that the old Gooley farmhouse, which sits on the what is known as the "outer" camp and is accessed from Indian Lake, would remain, at least for the time being.

The farmhouse overlooks the Hudson River, just above its confluence with the Indian River. Its addition to the National Historic Register inspired the Gooley Club to seek the same status for at least some of the buildings on Third Lake in the Essex Chain, known as the "inner" camp.

"The lodge itself, to the best of our knowledge, probably goes back to about the late 1920s," said MacElroy. "Cabin 3, which was a logging cabin, is probably from about that same time. It was used for logging purposes in the 1920s and 1930s. Then in the season it was used for sporting."

Sporting uses on the Essex Chain date back to heyday of the Adirondacks, and the Gooley Club feels the location is the sight of the oldest operating Adirondack sporting camp.

In 1866, Civil War veteran Harve Bonnie of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, purchased the grounds, built a camp on Third Lake and eventually hired Mike



The Gooley Club is one of a number of camps that will have to be torn down following New York state's acquisition of 161,000 acres of land in the Essex Chain. The club is looking to save the structures through historical designations.

Photo by Dan Ladd

and Olive Gooley as caretakers who welcomed loggers and sportsmen alike. It stayed that way for nearly 80 years until the Gooley Club was formed in the post-World War II era and began using the lodge and cabins to cater to its members.

Along with the historic contribution, MacElroy says the Gooley Club, which will continue to lease lands north of the Essex Chain, sees any remaining structures fitting perfectly with the state's Hut-to-Hut (or Hamlet-to-Huts) initiative, for which the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) released a conceptual plan in 2015.

The Hut-to-Hut plan is centered around establishing a four-season, destination trail system linking the communities known as the "Five Towns" — Long Lake, North Hudson, Newcomb, Indian Lake and Minerva.

MacElroy says the buildings on Third Lake are set up perfectly for this and stresses that it's something the community needs, simply because the Essex Chain Lakes are not attracting the number of visitors that were anticipated. And towns like Newcomb are suffering economically.

"Half of the reason for asking to have this done is historical aspect. The other half is practical. We have the benefit of hind-

sight," said MacElroy. "When this idea for the Essex Chain was originally proposed all you heard about was how this had been off limits for 150 years and it was going to open up a whole new vista; it's going to result in increased tourism; its going to be great for the locals."

"After three years of this place being open to the public, nobody is going," he added. "I checked both of the sign-ins on July 4 and fewer than 100 people had signed in this year, and most of them were state employees. And the people who are coming in are from Newcomb, Long Lake and Minerva, so it's not attracting tourists."

Gone, too, is a great deal of support the hunting clubs that were once on the new state lands contributed to the local economy. MacElroy said the Gooley Club alone had an annual impact of \$750,000, and other clubs did likewise throughout the Five Towns.

"Right now, between Minerva and Long Lake, you can't even find a convenience store. There were three stores in Newcomb," he said.

Should the campaign to preserve the main lodge on Third Lake be successful, something both the Gooley Club and Adirondack Architectural Heritage would like to see happen is a celebration of the historic Adirondack hunt-

ing camp. The Gooley Club's history has always been well documented and there are plenty of artifacts to display for educational purposes. The main lodge could double as an interpretive center.

Should the governor deny a Stay of Execution request, or do nothing, the club will have no choice but to begin dismantling their buildings, which MacElroy says would be a shame. Meanwhile, they are pressing forward.

"We anticipate a good number of backers on this, but what it boils down to is who the governor is going to listen to," he said. "Now that we know this plan was not as successful as they said it was going to be, let's give this a shot."

"Some people have asked what's so special about these buildings," MacElroy. "It's special because it's the oldest, and because it's still in operation. The nucleus could be made use of. There are options out there; we just need the right people to get together. Let's see if we can get together and compromise on something that will bring people in and will help these localities. The preservation of the Third Lake Camp and its re-use as an interpretive center or as a link in the Hut-to-Hamlet program would offer real promise as an attractor for hikers, paddlers, bikers, hunters and fishermen."

Outdoor Market

Gooley Club

(From Page 8)

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