

I. Endangered Hemlock Forests & How Citizen Scientists Can Save Them—for 3500 Club Website:

- **New York has more hemlock trees than any other state.** These magnificent trees have little or no resistance to an invasive species that is moving into the Catskills. Damage from this pernicious pest, called the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, occurs in just a few years. If HWA becomes established in the hemlock forests of the Catskills, it will be unstoppable.
- **Citizen scientists must join the fight to identify and stop this invasive species!** Dan Snider of the Catskill Region Invasive Species Partnership (CRISP) led several of us into the backcountry in search of HWA eggs and unhealthy trees. Dan trains us to identify its eggs, and you can adopt an area to survey. The work goes on in all seasons. Contact Dan, dsnider@catskillcenter.org
- **Hemlock forests are not just beautiful, but their root systems are essential** for stopping erosion of the steep banks of our pristine Catskill streams. Without hemlocks, these erosion-prone slopes will be washed into New York City reservoirs, making these waters no longer pure enough to provide unfiltered water for New York City. To build and maintain a modern filtration plant exceeds billions of dollars. Hemlocks also provide the shade that cools our waters, essential for sustaining trout.
- **‘Little Lari’ against the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.** Little Lari, *Laricobius nigrinu*, is a biological control beetle that obviates the need for chemical eradication. The bad news is that little Lari breeds more slowly than the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid does. The good news is that human ingenuity is limitless. An institution will be built to grow *Laricobius nigrinu* in vast quantities—the long-term sustainable solution to a big problem. Cornell University and the Adirondack Mountain Club have worked tirelessly to inform potential funders about the magnitude of this problem; they are securing funding from New York State and New York City. But because of the breeding disparities, little lari cannot be deployed only where an occasional egg cluster is located; there must be sufficient infestation in an area to let little Lari out to get the job done. The need is now for many citizen scientists to enjoy days in our hemlock forests identifying where significant quantities of HWA eggs are and assessing the health of trees. Visit <http://catskillcenter.org/crisp/> and www.adk.org for more information.

II. Belleayre Resort Condos do not violate zoning law: Shandaken Zoning Board of Appeals, 2/15/2017:

BACKGROUND

The Catskill Heritage Alliance brought suit against Crossroads Ventures and the Shandaken Planning Board, arguing that lodging units on Belleayre Resort residential land were not permitted by the Town of Shandaken zoning law. The zoning code provides for single-family homes and duplexes in residential zones and disallows dwellings with more than two families (multi-family dwellings) in those zones. Crossroads Ventures proposes more than one dozen multi-family dwellings in its residential section, clearly not allowed. The CHA further sued the Shandaken Planning Board, which acted beyond its authority by granting permits. Ulster County Supreme Court Judge Richard Mott in Oct. 2016 referred the issue to the Town Zoning Board of Appeals for a decision on whether these units, which developers will sell as timeshares, are allowed in residential zones. The Shandaken Planning Board, meanwhile, suggested to the ZBA that the lodges could be defined “for transient occupancy” and be permitted under the zoning code. At a public hearing, citizens urged the zoning board not to show favor to the resort when interpreting the law.

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The zoning board with their attorney ruled on Feb. 15th that the lodge units were in conformity with existing zoning regulations and their unanimous decision allows the Planning Board to issue permits, unless legally challenged. The CHA is examining options in regard to this case and also against

Crossroads and the DEC. They contend that this decision could lead to massive over-development not only at the proposed resort but throughout Shandaken.

Governor Cuomo announced on Feb. 16th that the state will invest \$8 million for upgrades at Belleayre Ski Center for a new, high-speed gondola, multiple lodge expansions, and the addition of modern amenities for two primary lodges. A high-speed eight-person Gondola will span from Discovery Lodge to the mountain summit. The gondola will include 65 cabins to transport guests to the summit in under six minutes.

The Gondola will provide additional revenue opportunities:

- * Nordic and Cross Country skiing at the expansive summit of the mountain;
- * Year-round scenic gondola rides as sold at Whiteface & Gore Mountains;
- * Mountain biking from the mountain summit;
- * Wedding and private party rentals at mountain summit.

The mountain has two main lodges, Discovery at the lower area that services beginner terrain and rental facilities; and Overlook, which accesses upper mountain offerings and handles the majority of food and beverage offerings. The state will provide \$1.5 million for upgrades:

- * Discovery Lodge Improvements—Increase seating capacity, retail space, increased food/beverage locations, and additional office space. This will provide for a fully functioning learning area for all ages with necessary amenities to service guests including bar and restaurant offerings.
- * Overlook Lodge Improvements—Increase seating capacity, storage and locker areas, daycare facilities, and expansion of food and beverage offerings.

The press release issued by the Central Catskills Chamber of Commerce declares that these improvements will expand economic growth and investment opportunities for surrounding communities, a major boost to tourism in the Catskills and its economy; that the installation of this lift and other proposed changes will elevate Belleayre to a higher level of resort experience. A Crossroads Ventures spokesman said, “We have a unique piece of land if it’s next to a first-class ski facility. Next to a second-class ski facility, we don’t have that unique a piece of land [sic].” They had said that they would not build the resort if New York State did not finance these improvements.

The economic impact of tourism in the region reached \$1.83 billion in 2015, a 13% increase in 5 years. Visitation is up 14% since 2010 with 11 million visitors in 2015. Tourism provides 17,000 jobs, 15% of the region’s employment.