



## BATTLEFIELD PARK RENEWED

# EDITORIAL.

## To Protect Lake George Battlefield Grounds' Historical Importance, Amend State Master Plan

Sometime this winter, the Adirondack Park Agency will adopt recommendations for amendments to the Park's State Land Master Plan and submit them to Governor Kathy Hochul for her approval. We hope those amendments include reclassifying the Lake George Battlefield Park complex as "Historic" state-owned properties. Since 1972, the year Governor Nelson Rockefeller approved the first State Land Master Plan for publicly owned properties within the Blue Line, the adjoining, multi-purpose sites have been classified as "Intensive," which is to say, as recreational areas, to be utilized by as many people as possible, regardless of the cumulative impacts on their historically fragile surroundings. Over time, that land use classification appears to have tacitly or explicitly encouraged the manager of Battlefield Park, the Department of Environmental Conservation, to promote the Park's recreational resources at the expense of its importance to American history.

New York State purchased 25 acres of these lands in 1900 for the express purpose of "carefully preserving the fortifications and other historic features." In 1910, the state legislature appropriated funds to build the iron fence around the 1903 "Battle of Lake George" monument to protect it from vandalism. Two years later, in 1912, the state's Attorney General affirmed that the state purchased the lands for the sole purpose of commemorating the Battle of Lake George.

(Although the Lake George Battleground Campground was the first public campsite in New York State, that use of the property appears to have been an afterthought, developed years after the land was purchased as a historical site. But even the campground and picnic areas have historical value. According to the New York State Museum, several acres of some of the Park's most intensely used recreational areas were used by pre-historic and pre-contact peoples as far back as 8,000 BC.)

The NYS Museum has also confirmed that archaeological digs from 1999 to 2001 and from 2014 to 2016 show that Lake George Battlefield Park is among the last of only a few relatively untouched sites along the historic 18th-century military corridor that runs from present-day New York City to the Canadian border.

As the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance noted in its letter to the APA supporting the reclassification of these lands, “a Historic classification will help protect the properties by minimizing topographical alterations and preserving their scenic, natural and open space resources. This will serve to limit the construction of new structures and proposals to develop additional uses that could be considered a threat to the critical historic resource.”

According to the Alliance, roughly ninety people submitted comments to the APA supporting its request to reclassify Lake George Battlefield Park and Lake George Battleground Campground as “Historic.” Without minimizing the importance of maintaining public access to the Adirondack Park’s recreational resources, the Alliance posits that the public’s need for access to American history is equally vital – especially now, as we prepare to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the nation’s founding.

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As the local initiative to restore the monuments of Battlefield Park demonstrates, and which we report on in this issue, residents of the Lake George area value the

park’s history as much as they do its open space. Reclassifying the public lands as “Historic” would affirm a rarely articulated notion that public lands belong to the local residents who live in close proximity to them as much as they do to the tourists who visit them.