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## Land Conservation Keeps Habitat From Fragmenting, Stranding Moose

By James H. Miller

Large populations of moose are roaming into the Adirondacks, says Leslie Karasin of the Wild Life Conservation Society.

And according to Karasin, the moose is likely to return to New York in numbers the state hasn't seen for over a century.

Karasin is the Program Manager and Community Planning Project Coordinator of the Wildlife Conservation Society's Adirondack program, and she spoke at the Lake George Land Conservancy's Macionis Conservation Center on June 25 about wildlife connectivity.

New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) currently puts the number of moose in New York State at roughly 500 to 800. But those numbers are primarily based on reported sightings of the animal—the real figure could be much larger. And if, as the DEC assumes, the population increases at about the same rate as it does in Vermont and New Hampshire—10-15% every year—then there will be a substantial population of moose in the Adirondacks over the next



Leslie Karasin

decade.

Karasin and the Wild Life Conservation Society (WLCS) have responded to the influx with the Adirondack Return of the Moose Assessment (AROMA), which has been working to track the activity of moose in the Adirondacks.

Using trained dogs, Karasin and her colleagues performed 20 transects in the northern Adirondacks, searching for moose scat, tracking the locations with GPS technology, and collecting samples for genetic analysis. The samples are still being analyzed, but Karasin hopes to find out where the moose are coming from, the number of males and females, and the size of the population.

But there are concerns the growing population may disrupt the area and cause ecological damage, and if that occurs, certain measures will

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that occurs, certain measures will have to be taken, most likely in the form of a moose hunting season.

"That would be possible in the next ten years," Karasin said, but added that such a step should be based on hard data.

Centuries ago, before Europeans settled in America, there was a sizeable moose population in New York. But changes in the habitat and unregulated hunting eventually shrunk that population, so that by the end of the Civil War, the moose had relocated or died out from the state completely, until 1980, when the first moose in over a hundred years was spotted in Whitehall.

The AROMA project is part of a larger campaign put forth by the WLCS, called the Staying Connected Initiative. The initiative, which focuses on the Northern Appalachian Ecological Region (New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, and the border provinces of Canada), sets out to preserve intact forest lands for smooth animal connectivity, like that of the moose from Vermont to the Adirondacks, and to keep animals from becoming, as Karasin said, "ecologically stranded".

According to Karasin, as environmental or ecological conditions change, animals like the moose need to move from habitat to habitat, and need "paths of least resistance" to do so. These paths need to be free of congestion, busy roadways, housing developments, and other human obstacles.

On the local level, Karasin brought up a few things that can be done to help ensure that smooth animal connectivity, like simply understanding the relationship of the land to connectivity, the threat of road and housing projects, and learning about wildlife in the community.