In 1994 the Open Space Institute (OSI) began negotiations with NL Industries for the purchase of 10,000 acres known as the Tahawus Tract. OSI successfully acquired the property in August of 2003 through its land acquisition affiliate, the Open Space Conservancy, for a purchase price of $8.5 million. The Tahawus Tract, located in Essex County in the northern part of the Town of Newcomb, represents the largest land acquisition by OSI since the organization was founded in 1963. The acquisition, which has long been at the top of the conservation community’s “must save” list, will protect the headwaters of the Hudson River, the “deserted” village of Adirondac and the site of Theodore Roosevelt’s “Midnight Ride” to the presidency in 1901. The Houston based NL Industries, which operated a titanium mine on the property until 1989, will retain the 1,200-acre industrial portion of the Tahawus Tract.

The Adirondack Iron Works

In the heart of the Adirondacks, near the headwaters of the Hudson River, lying between Lake Sanford and Henderson Lake is the abandoned site of the “Adirondack Iron Works.” This untamed tract, protected by Santanoni Mountain to the west and the “Cloudsplitter,” Mt. Marcy, to the east, was twice a busy mining community. First “discovered” in 1826 by Archibald McIntyre and David Henderson, who were guided by an Indian from the St. Francis tribe, iron ore was extracted with moderate success between 1827 and 1857.

In 1843, iron ore extraction reached from twelve to fourteen tons a day. This may have represented the most productive period for the Adirondack Iron Works Company. During peak production, nearly 400 men labored at the Works and a small Village named McIntyre (also known as Adirondac) formed. Expert opinion at the time held that the Adirondack iron was the best steel producing ore so far discovered in the country. Records indicate that the best marks of American and Scotch pig-iron were selling for twenty dollars to twenty-two dollars per ton; the Adirondack output readily brought forty dollars to forty-five dollars per ton.

Historic Village of Adirondac

“The Tahawus property represents many aspects of what makes New York State great.”
- Governor George Pataki, October 6th, 2003
Throughout its existence, the Adirondack Iron Works operated two farms, the blast furnace and forge, a puddling furnace, charcoal and brick kilns, trip hammers and a grist and saw mill. The Village consisted of sixteen dwellings and a building with a cupola, used as school, church and the general assembly room.

The most surprising feature of this remote and secluded mountain hamlet was a bank – a duly organized State Bank, the first in the Adirondacks. It was called the McIntyre Bank.

The Blast Furnace

In 1854, the Sackett’s Harbor and Saratoga Railroad Company surveyed their line to within a few miles of the iron-works. They began construction with great promise of reaching the Village of Adirondac. The prospect of the railroad invigorated the iron-works owners who began repairing their old buildings and undergoing extensive and costly improvements. They built a new blast-furnace of the largest type, estimated to have cost $43,000. The Blast Furnace would have improved efficiency and profitability.

However, the heightened anticipation resulting from the proposed railroad project came crashing down once it became clear the tracks would never reach the iron-works.
Despite bold initiative and enterprise, the original undertaking succumbed to the inherent difficulties of operating in the wilderness. Inadequate roadways resulted in severe transportation and distribution problems. Essential supplies were shipped north from Albany on sleds during the winter. The long haul to Lake Champlain over the most primitive mountain roads made it impossible to compete with companies nearer the markets.

Further complicating matters was the presence of titanium dioxide in the iron ore. Finally in 1857, after a valiant struggle, the Adirondack Iron Works surrendered to the remoteness of the wilderness and the place became known as the "deserted village."

A view from inside the Blast Furnace.

This structure has withstood the rigors of a century and a half of Adirondacks weather.

It stands after nearly 150 years, a testament to the ingenuity of the pioneering men and women who toiled in the heart of the Adirondacks.

It is located along the Tahawus trailhead access road.
Tahawus Club

Over the next half-century, private hunting and fishing clubs and lumbering activity were the primary land uses on the Tahawus Tract. A large private fish and game club, the first of its kind in the Adirondacks (in New York???) organized in 1876. The club was called the Preston Ponds Club, after three small sheets of water lying just north of Lake Henderson. This club leased the land from the Adirondack Iron and Steel Company – a later incorporation of the Adirondack Iron Works.

This endeavor was so popular and successful that its members desired a permanent organization. In January of 1877, the club was reorganized and incorporated as the "Adirondack Club." The entire Tahawus Tract was leased from the heirs of the original Adirondack Iron Works.

In 1898, the Adirondack Club once again changed its name and became the Tahawus Club. Its headquarters were north of Lake Sanford, near the site of the upper works. The first president was Mr. James MacNaughton of Albany, whose father had married the daughter of Archibald McIntyre.

NL Industries 1940 - 1989

Ironically, the titanium dioxide that hampered mining efforts in the 1800s later served as the catalyst for reopening the mine in 1941. The wartime demand for domestic titanium dioxide provided sufficient impetus for the Federal government to build a railroad into the mine site. The railroad provided the distribution capabilities that allowed National Lead Industries to successfully reopen the mine. Under NL Industries ownership, 40 million tons of titanium were extracted before operations ceased in 1989.

Existing Mine Site
With the termination of mining activities by NL Industries in 1989, the mine site once again lies deserted. The mine pits filled with water and local lore states the depths reach 1,000 feet or more.

The water filled mine pits are clearly visible in this aerial photo. A 300-foot high massive tailings pile sits between the mine pits.

The mining operation and abandoned equipment remain the property of NL Industries under the terms of the agreement negotiated with OSI.

**Tahawus Tract acquired by the Open Space Institute**

“The Tahawus Tract is absolutely breathtaking,” says Joe Martens, President of
the Open Space Institute (OSI). “Its defining natural features include rugged mountains, crystal clear, glacially carved lakes, and the headwaters of the Hudson River. OSI has historically focused on the Hudson River and its watershed so it is no mystery why we were steadfast in our pursuit of this project. This property is a key missing piece of the High Peaks Wilderness Area.”

OSI and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) cooperatively manage 6,000 acres on the northern end of the property, immediately adjacent to the High Peaks Wilderness Area. Some 3,500 of the remaining 4,000 acres will continue to be managed as a working forest. And, several hundred acres comprising the historic Village of Adirondac will be managed as an historic area.

The historic district will be protected by conservation easements, which will be purchased by the State. These easements will provide opportunities for local government and not-for-profit historic preservation organizations to develop a plan for stabilization, rehabilitation and public interpretation of the site. The working forest easement will provide for public recreation and prohibit development on this portion of the property. Allowable public activities will include paddling, hiking, skiing, hunting and camping at designated sites. The natural and historic resources on the property are expected to draw more visitors and benefit the local economy of the town of Newcomb.

“This significant acquisition would not have happened without the support and enthusiasm of Governor Pataki. The acquisition of the Tahawus Tract is a great example of a highly successful public-private partnership,” said Joe Martens.
Located on the Tahawus Tract is the 450-acre Henderson Lake, one of many pristine lakes on the property. The Hudson River begins at the outlet of Henderson Lake where the river is a narrow and inconspicuous mountain stream.

David Henderson, for whom the lake is named, was charged with management of the Adirondack Iron Works in 1838. Mr. Henderson was a man of unusual business ability. He had great energy and enterprise, backed by sound principles, financial acumen and considerable scientific knowledge. He was of a genial and cordial disposition and very popular with the men at the works, in whose lives and welfare he took a personal interest.

In a desolate wilderness spot on September 3rd, 1845, Henderson was killed as a result of an accidental gunshot wound. He had thrown his knapsack and gun belt on a rock and the open hammer was struck discharging the weapon. The "Duck Hole" where he was shot has since been called "Calamity Pond," and the brook that flows from it, and a nearby mountain, now bear the same name.

For the first time in more than 175 years the public will have fishing and paddling access on Henderson Lake. The lake has been privately owned since 1826.

Included throughout this mountainous property are significant natural resources, including Mount Adams, which offers one of the most breath taking views of the High Peaks found in the entire Park. The property contains several peaks over 2,000 feet that are jumbled upon one another, providing spectacular scenic vistas. There are eight additional lakes and ponds scattered throughout the forested land, including Preston Ponds and numerous rivers and streams.
Wildlife abounds on the Tahawus Tract. A quiet, attentive hiker has opportunities to glimpse moose, bears, deer, loons, coyotes, foxes and other small mammals. The elusive Pine Marten is known to favor the deep recesses of the Tahawus Tract and rugged Indian Pass just north of the old Village of Adirondac.

Pristine water leaves Henderson Lake as the Hudson River flowing through the heart of the Adirondacks, onward to the Catskill watershed and finally emptying into the Atlantic Ocean at New York City.
Governor Pataki Officially Welcomes the Public to the Tahawus Preserve

On October 6th, 2003 Governor George Pataki, along with Senator Betty Little, Assemblywoman Teresa Sayward, Assemblyman Chris Ortloff, Newcomb Supervisor George Canon and DEC Commissioner Erin Crotty officially welcomed the public to the Tahawus Preserve.

The Governor said, “The Tahawus property represents many aspects of what makes New York State great. Today marks the beginning of a wonderful new opportunity for current and future generations to explore an area of the Adirondacks that is rich in precious natural resources, historical significance, economic potential and recreational opportunities. This is an extraordinarily important parcel and it’s been a top priority.”

Town of Newcomb Supervisor George Canon

Life long Newcomb resident, Town Supervisor George Canon, poses in front of the grand fireplace of the NL Industries private retreat house located on the Tahawus Tract. Mr. Canon’s father worked in the sawmill during the time period...
that NL Industries operated the mine. Mr. Canon was an NL Industries employee.

Supervisor Canon recalled life growing up in a Company town with great fondness. Mr. Canon said, "There was a great sense of community. Growing up we never felt isolated. The Village had everything a kid needed. We hunted, fished and attended socials at the Company YMCA. Everyone knew and trusted each other. We may have been right in the heart of a great wilderness but growing up we all felt part of a vibrant community. Families made a decent living in the Mine and at the Mill. It was hard work but we were proud to do it."

Supervisor Canon stated, "This acquisition provides a variety of opportunities for the Town of Newcomb to enhance its goals of becoming a historic destination site and, along with the Santanoni Preserve, will provide the base to meet those goals. I'm pleased to see that the purchase provides for the continuing benefits of the wood fiber production, long a staple of the Newcomb economy."

**APA Chairman Dr. Ross Whaley**
The New York State Senate approved the Governor’s nomination of Dr. Ross Whaley as Chairman of the Adirondack Park Agency on September 16, 2003. He brings to the position more than 30 years experience as a University Professor, Researcher and Administrator. Since 1984, Dr. Whaley has been associated with the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, 16 years as its President and subsequently as University Professor. As Professor his interest focused on the political economy of sustainable development. Throughout his career Dr. Whaley has emphasized the importance of balance with regard to environmental issues and the use of our natural resources.

While on a tour of the Tahawus Tract in October of 2003, Chairman Whaley praised the Open Space Institute and Governor Pataki for their innovative approach and hard work in obtaining such a valuable asset. Chairman Whaley said, “This acquisition holds tremendous potential for the State Forest Preserve, the local economy of Newcomb and the generations of people who will recreate in this most primitive Adirondack setting. The inclusion of the historic Village of Adirondac blends perfectly with the Santanoni Great Camp property and greatly enhances the Town of Newcomb’s potential for tourism. I am also encouraged by the working forest aspect because I see different sides coming together for common goals and benefits. The Tahawus acquisition is an outstanding example of balance.”