

Editorials

No candidates back North Woods park? That's a shame

January 30, 2010

At the recent first gubernatorial debate, this newspaper reported in a front page story (Jan. 21) that "all 13 candidates said they would not support a national park in the northern woods of Maine."

Yet a number of these same candidates did declare their support for casinos in Maine.

What is wrong with this picture and with these candidates? Casinos are the furthest thing from what Maine is and what it should be. It is a Maine Woods National Park that builds on our true strength and character.

Election after election, politicians and candidates talk endlessly about creating jobs and keeping our young people from fleeing the state to find jobs elsewhere.

Acadia National Park, a relatively tiny park, generates \$145 million per year and is responsible for about 3,000 Maine jobs.

A much larger and grander Maine Woods National Park would generate many more thousands of permanent, desperately needed jobs for Mainers, especially in those towns adjacent to the new park.

Many young Mainers and older ones too would find it very appealing to move nearby to the park to start new businesses and for new jobs that the park would bring forth.

Where is the politician or candidate with true leadership, courage and vision who will finally stand up for the Maine Woods National Park?

Robert Goldman

South Portland

I was disappointed to learn none of the 13 gubernatorial candidates who participated in last week's debate support the creation of a national park in Maine's North Woods. There are many reasons they should. Here are a couple.

First, the majority of Mainers support the national park model for the North Woods.

Just last fall Critical Insights, a Portland-based research firm, conducted a statewide survey that indicated 78 percent of Maine residents support the acquisition of more public lands in the North Woods.

Several statewide surveys in prior years also have found majority support, specifically, for a new national park in northern Maine.

Nearly 100,000 people have signed a petition, which calls upon the U.S. Congress to authorize a feasibility study to be conducted by the National Park Service to determine if the North Woods qualifies for national park status. Hundreds of Mainers continue to sign this petition each month.

Second, unemployment rates in some Northern Maine counties are near 12 percent. A new national park will revitalize and diversify local economies that are overly dependent on a withering forest products industry.

A detailed economic impact study of one North Woods national park proposal determined that 10,000 or more new jobs would be created. The study also concluded that towns like Millinocket and Greenville would especially benefit from a new national park, as it will spur job growth and development.

One only has to look to Acadia – which consistently ranks in the top 10 most-visited national parks – to understand the enormous revenue-generating engines national parks are.

Maine's politicians have demonstrated zero leadership in exploring a new national park for Maine. Hopefully, some gubernatorial candidates will emerge to represent the majority of Mainers who, at minimum, want a feasibility study done to explore the national park option for the North Woods.

Lou Demers

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