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# Environmental Impact of Trains in the Adirondacks

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## **Trains in the Adirondacks- an Environmental Timeline.**

- **Early 1800s-** Clinton County's main mode of transportation and shipping was by steam boat, saw mills usually close to the water for easy transport of goods.
- **1833-** Earliest account of "The Great Ausable Railroad Company."
- **1852 to 1868** – Railroad line is built connecting Montreal to Plattsburgh.
- **Mid 1800s-** D&H railroad burrows 439 foot tunnel under fort Ticonderoga
- **1868 to 1875** – railroad built connecting Plattsburgh to Ausable River Station
- **1874-** 40 mile run from Whitehall to port henry opens
- 1875 to 1878 – railroad connecting "Plattsburgh Junction" to mainline D&H(Delaware & Hudson) to Port Henry
- **1875-1<sup>st</sup>** train in Plattsburgh
- **1878-** NYS
  - A few weeks after the first train entered Plattsburgh a train filled with first time riders hits and kills a cow (press republican)
  - Trains Run on coal
    - Coal is imported from Virginia coal mines.
- **1878** – Railroad connecting Plattsburgh and Dannemora is built. This railroad was used to transport prisoners, as well as fuel and supplies, to Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora
- **1878 to 1894** – railroad built connecting "Chateaugay Junction" to Chateaugay RR.
- **1880-** lumber companies have exhausted the supply of large pines and spruce trees located near bodies of water for easy transport.

- Lumber companies were able to utilize the trains to transport their goods and were not restricted to staying by large bodies of water.
  - The train tracks allowed loggers to penetrate deeper into the Adirondacks.
- **1886**- Railroad Depot of the D&H co. opens in Plattsburgh
- **1880s**- Major forest fires in the Adirondacks.
  - Some fires caused by the debris lumber companies left behind in clear cuts.
- **1887**- Total of 73 miles of tracks run through the Adirondacks.
- **1889**- Delaware and Hudson Rail Company purchases the railroad.
- **1889**- "Hurds line" very rough, poorly graded, and was primarily used to transport lumber.
- **1892**- 191 miles of tracks from Herkimer to Malone open.
- **1894**- Rail line connecting Plattsburgh to Port Henry is abandoned.
- **1899**- Tupper lake is destroyed by a forest fire. Sparks from an increase in locomotive use is a contributing factor.
- **Late 1800's**- Railroad is used to ship iron mined from Lyon mtn all over the United States.
- **1900**- 64 of New Yorks 100 paper mills are found in the Adirondacks.(white,1985)
  - The railroad was not only easier access but also a more useful form of transport when compared to rivers. Lumber companies could now harvest more hardwoods that cannot be transported by water.
- **1902-1903** – after D&H consolidated all of the railroads they began reconstructing the railroad to standard gauge.
- **1903** – A 13-car train carrying pig iron from Dannemora derailed. Engine 540 ended up in a soft sand bank where black sticky fuel oil from the tender oozed out.
- **August 1903** – train wreck in between Coopersville and Rouses Point.
  - Train crashed into a semi-open drawbridge, pushing the drawbridge into the water.

- Eight of the twelve cars that went into the Chazy River were loaded with livestock.
- **1912-1940**- Union depots busiest years, anywhere from 18 to 20 passenger trains per day.
- **1923**- Delaware and Hudson company releases a statement claiming to be installing new “marine boilers” in locomotives to improve fuel consumption.
- **1930s**- The paving of roads and popularity of cars draws people away from passenger trains.
- **November 1, 1946**- interstate commerce commission gives permission to D&H railroad to abandon all lines beyond Lyon Mountain.
- **1947**- 500 ton load, 42 freight/coal car derailment 9 miles south of Plattsburgh, railroad wrecking crews cleared coal off of tracks.
- **1952**- The New York Central first petitions to abandon the day train to Lake Placid. The petition was denied.
- **1957**- Petition to end passenger service to Malone is granted and the tracks from lake clear junction to Malone are removed.
- **1958**- The railroad company petitions to abandon all passenger services again, this is denied as well.
- **1961**- Trails from lake clear to Malone are abandoned. (PR sept12 1993)
- **1963**- New York Central is allowed to discontinue all passenger service and switch to 100% Freight.
- **July 1967**- The republic steel corp. mine at Lyon mountain closes
- **1971**- Iron ore mines in Moriah close.
- **1971**- D&H is only operating two trains
  - D&H discontinues all trains and the line doesn’t see any traffic for 3 years when Amtrak takes over use of the line.
- **1972**- Freight is discontinued and the entire Adirondack train route is abandoned.

- Briefly reopens in 1980 for the winter Olympics in Lake Placid.
- **April 1981**- Adirondack Rail Company declares bankruptcy.
- **1978**- Benson Iron Ore mines close.
- **1982** – Trains switched from shipping to lumber mills and feed stores to shipping freight, coal, chemicals, steel, and generators. (Press. Rep. Harold Mero)
- **1982**- Trains run on diesel fuel(Press Rep. Harold Mero)
- **1989**- D&H goes bankrupt
- **1989**- Iron Ore Mining ends in tahawus
- **1990**- Train hits debris on tracks and leaks oil in the city of Plattsburgh. (pulled from press republican 1991)
- **1990**- NYS DOT and DEC begin the process of forming a management plan for the Adirondack rail corridor from Remsen to Lake Placid.
  - This plan would cost an estimated 17 million dollars.
  - **1994**- planning team released a draft plan that kept the tracks in place for 5 years until a suitable operator could be found
- **1991**- Train turbine caught fire in Beekman town. (press republican)
- **1992**- Volunteer Historical Society works to repair 5 miles of abandoned track. The 5 miles of track reopened in 1992.
  - A reporter reported some of his experience on his trip on the short 5 mile trip “Only minutes into our trip, we found ourselves in forester wilderness, often following a placid tributary of the moose river to the east. The train whistle punctuated our conversation as we spotted a heron in a wetland.”
  - The same reporter also noted that it was very common to spot deer along the tracks.

- **1992-** A beaver dam is found plugging a Culvert allowing water to accumulate over the train tracks. Volunteers regularly remove the debris only for the beavers to return again.
- **1894 to 1903** – railroad built connecting South Junction to Ausable Forks and Port Henry
- **2002-** Plattsburgh Rail Yard relocated from D&H yard in front of the station to the Air Force Base.
  - “An additional \$500,000 in funding was provided to enhance the area and to create new development opportunities on the city’s waterfront. State funds were used to relocate the rail yard and clear it. The New York Department of State also provided a \$350,000 grant to complete site remediation and to clear and grade the site. The relocation opened about 14 acres for redevelopment.
  - **Post 2004-** A \$75,000 grant was awarded to study how to mitigate adverse conditions at the Water Treatment Plant, adjacent to the site of a proposed hotel. The city’s overall community development efforts, including the waterfront area directly adjacent to the station, are supported by resources and funding from a variety of New York State offices: Department of State, Office of Community Renewal, Department of Environmental Conservation and the Division of Housing and Community Renewal.
- **2002-** An outdated salt shed located on the abandoned rail yard is demolished. The building was erected in roughly 1869.
- **2006-** Train hits and kills a moose in Northern Washington County.
- **2012-** the Saratoga and North Creek Railway, a subsidiary of the Iowa Pacific Holdings, announced that it plans to reopen the railway line from Tahawus to carry crushed limestone left at the mine to markets for use in highway construction.
- **June 11, 2015-** DEC proposes restoration of 35 miles of abandoned tracks from Utica to Tupper Lake and the addition of a snowmobile trail.

- New York state regulators are proposing to extend a tourist train route and create a multi-use trail through the heart of the Adirondacks, moves which could boost visitors to remote areas currently accessible only on foot, kayak or canoe...”
- **October 8<sup>th</sup> 2015**- -A Chicago-based railroad Proposes to store obsolete rail oil tankers on an Essex county stretch of the rail line near the Adirondack high peaks.
- **2015**- LCRI zooplankton study on micro plastics
  - Plastic Factories use small plastic pellets (nurdles) often transported by rail.
  - Spilled by the thousands (A problem seeing as the majority Clinton county railways run alongside the water directly introducing the plastic into the waterway)
  - Spilled nurdles end up in gutters and drains and end up in the ocean
  - Major contributor to marine garbage patches

### Summary

Through researching the major events in Adirondack railroad history we have highlighted some key environmental concerns. The most prevalent of which are habitat fragmentation, collisions with wildlife, noise pollution, introduction of micro plastics into the waterways, and now the potential expansion of a scenic route in Tupper Lake.

From the very beginning trains in the Adirondacks had a massive environmental impact. The completion of rail lines this far north had never been accomplished before and allowed the logging industry to thrive. Previously, loggers relied on waterways to transport lumber, but with the introduction of the train they could clearcut as far as the eye could see with almost no limitations. The

debris left behind after clearcutting were potential fire hazards and is directly linked to the historic fire in Tupper Lake that destroyed the town.

Train tracks can have an impact on the mortality of wildlife. Tracks can be used as corridors or can create barriers. Often times increased collisions occur when a track intersects a breeding ground or has an abundance of a desirable food source. If a beaver's dam was causing a train track to flood, it would be removed by workers. Moose often ended up on the tracks and were then hit and killed by trains. The noise pollution caused by trains affects many animals, from birds to fish.

Nurdles (pre-production plastics) are transported by trains and often fall off by the thousands. Because many of the trains run right next to the water, nurdles have the potential end up in our water sources. This is a huge problem and once they are there, they do not go away. These microplastics will bioaccumulate and cause damage to organisms within the water. This will indirectly effect the human population as well. Lastly, an additional train route from Utica to Tupper Lake is being proposed, with the addition of snowmobile trails. This would disturb the environment there, creating more habitat fragmentation and corridors.

Trains have created quite an impact on the environment everywhere they were or are utilized. The methods and practices used to erect the first train tracks did not factor in the impact it would have on the environment. Because of this, even train tracks that are no longer in use have left a significant scar on the environment. In the past, trains enabled industries that were harmful to the environment as well. Railways and trains had many economic and commercial benefits, but with this came many harmful environmental impacts.



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