



New Board Member Backgrounder

This is not to provide a detailed history, which is well covered on the website, but rather provide an overview of the core reasons how and why The Wild Center came to be.

Beginnings

In the 1990's there were a series of significant environmental events that came in rapid-fire succession leading Betsy Lowe, then Region 5 director of the DEC, to wonder where you could go for answers to questions about the natural history of the Adirondacks. First, in 1990, the New York Environmental Quality Bond Act failed to pass, a first in the state's history, and a blow to the Adirondacks. Environmental groups, sportsmen and towns and villages all opposed each other, despite having strong common interests. Then, in 1995, a drought led to a series of small forest fires, followed that year by a cluster of microbursts that ravaged a million acres across the north central Adirondacks. In January 1997, a storm that coated the Adirondacks with over 3 inches of ice devastated millions of acres of trees.

The best candidate for science-based answers, The Adirondack Experience (then the Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake), really had none. Their core focus is really on the history and culture of the Adirondacks, rather than the "Natural" history and they were fully supportive of the concept of a complementary Natural History Museum of the Adirondacks. As The Wild Center's first Board Chair, Obie Clifford later said, "the Adirondack Experience is about man in the woods. The Wild Center is about the woods." The two museums are perfectly complementary.

The Foundation

Clearly, there was a need to provide education to make all parties in the Adirondacks aware of the value of the wildness of the Adirondacks. "The story of the Adirondacks is the most interesting natural history story in the world. It has been shown here that natural systems can restore themselves and recover in remarkable ways in coexistence with man" –Bill McKibben. The Adirondacks may be one of the only places on earth where there are more wild areas than there were 100 years ago.

Having not been selected for the site of a new NYS prison, that would have helped the local economy, local officials were looking for other opportunities. Situated in one of the wildest parts of the Adirondacks, Tupper Lake was a logical choice for The Wild Center. The Town and Village were fully supportive of hosting The Wild Center and donated the property where it sits today.

In 1999 Betsy met with Obie Clifford, a former partner at McKinsey, a Board member of the American Museum of Natural History in NYC and a fourth generation seasonal resident of nearby Big Wolf Lake. She convinced him to become the first Board Chair. His view was “Man has two basic issues: how does man get along with man, which we will likely never solve, and how does man get along with nature? That part is what the Wild Center is all about.”

The Three E’s

The conceptual foundation of The Wild Center was laid, revolving around “The Three E’s” **Environment, Education and Economy**. The Wild Center still lives that daily.

The Wild Center’s mission is all about the environment; [Ignite an enduring passion for nature that inspires action to ensure a thriving natural world](#). Why the Adirondacks? It is a completely unique model. “The Adirondack story is one of mankind discovering better ways to coexist with nature: it is a badly needed model for the whole world.” –Dr. Peter Raven. Beyond the Adirondacks, our Youth Climate Summits are achieving national recognition for our trailblazing work on climate change.

Education has always been a focus of The Wild Center. In 2019, **00000** school children attended The Wild Center. Tupper Lake schools visit for free, always. During the 2020 pandemic, The Wild Center quickly pivoted to fill a compelling need for stay at home families by streaming a “Lunchtime Live” environmental educational series.

Driving the Adirondack and Tupper Lake economy is a significant benefit The Wild Center brings. The publicity for the Tri-Lakes area from the I Love New York campaign featuring the Wild Center has been an enormous boost. The customer traffic for local businesses has been markedly higher since The Wild Center and the Wild Walk opened. Tupper Lake appears to be on a positive economic trend in part due to the Wild Center’s role as an important Adirondack destination.

Big steps forward

Driven by Betsy Lowe and Obie Clifford and with support from thousands of generous donors, the town of Tupper Lake and New York State (with George Pataki, Hillary Clinton and Ron Stafford deserving special thanks) The Wild Center broke ground in 2004, with the governor operating an earth mover. TWC opened its doors on July 4, 2006. Stephanie Ratcliffe became the Executive Director in 2007 and the infant has grown quickly into adolescence under the leadership of Stephanie and a series of superb board chairs, including Obie, Lynn Birdsong, Nancy Simpkins and now Karen Thomas.

In 2009 the first Youth Climate Summit was held, expanding our footprint beyond the Adirondacks.

In 2012 Planet Adirondack was added, bringing new technology to our exhibits.

In 2016 Wild Walk opened, opening up our entire campus as an asset.

In 2018, the Raquette River waterfront property was acquired, creating limitless new opportunities around science-based water and wetlands education.

In 2020 TWC's digital education capabilities expanded and new ways to leverage the campus were developed.

What's next? "Our story at The Wild Center has just begun"--Stephanie Ratcliffe. What's next, indeed.