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Governor Pataki wants \$1.75M for Santanoni, railroad line

Lee Manchester
Staff Writer

LAKE PLACID – Governor Pataki has proposed spending a total of \$1.75 million in the upcoming budget on two preservation projects in Newcomb: Great Camp Santanoni, and the Tahawus railroad line.

In his final budget proposal, delivered last week, Pataki targeted \$1 million for a new round of repair work on the 32.2-acre Santanoni historic preserve, which contains the architectural core of the century-old, 12,900-acre great camp.

Camp Santanoni was acquired by the state in 1972. It is now administered by a partnership of the state Department of Environmental Conservation, the town of Newcomb and Adirondack Architectural Heritage, a nonprofit preservation organization that's also known as AARCH.

A long-range conservation plan prepared 3 years ago by AARCH Executive Director Steven Engelhar said, "It's terrific news. This is, far and away, the largest monetary commitment to Santanoni's conservation the state has ever made. It will put a big dent in the pile of work that needs to be done there."

Engelhart said that the most pressing conservation needs at the preserve were to shore up the main lodge, restore the stone masonry on two small bridges, fix up a farm residence that has not seen any work in 50 years, and refurbish two buildings at the entrance to the estate as visitors' centers.

THE GOVERNOR also asked for \$750,000 to help buy the 30-mile railroad line (and its right-of-way) between North Creek and the former National Lead mill site at Tahawus.

The railroad ROW had been part of the Open Space Institute's 10,000-acre Tahawus Tract purchase, which will eventually add about 6,000 acres to the High Peaks Wilderness Area of the state Forest Preserve. After opposition last year from groups both the left and the right, OSI withdrew the railroad line from the project.

According to Dan Luciano, OSI's general counsel, the \$750,000 proposed by Governor Pataki will help cover the cost of buying both the rails and the right-of-way from National Lead, keeping the line intact so that state and local officials can explore prospects for other uses of the ROW. Such uses might include industrial transport from the former mill site, a snowmobile corridor or a High Peaks tourist train.

According to Luciano, the actual purchase would be made by the Essex County Industrial Development Agency.

“The IDA would acquire the whole line,” he said, “to help avoid potential Article 14 problems.”

If the state of New York were to acquire the railroad ROW, the “Forever Wild” clause of the state’s constitution (Article 14) would probably make it necessary to rip out the tracks.

“The \$750,000 would not, however, be sufficient to cover the entire cost,” Luciano said. “The deal would be contingent on Warren County and Barton Mines contributing the remainder.”

Both Warren County and Barton have been involved in discussions for some time concerning the acquisition of a portion of the 30-mile railroad line for their own purposes.

“NL’s asking price for the whole line was \$1 million,” said George Canon, Newcomb town supervisor. “Barton Mines had an interest in retaining the line up as far as their plant, north of North Creek, and Warren County had interests as well. They made a deal to retain that portion of \$250,000.

THE BUDGET will be the subject of much wrangling over the next several months between the governor, the Democratic-controlled state Assembly and the Republican-dominated Senate. Many of the governor’s spending proposals will not survive the process.

The final state budget, due by April 1, has been completed on time only once since 1984.