



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Gov. Cuomo Signs Ritchie Bill to Support Wilderness Rescue Groups

PATTY RITCHIE July 18, 2012

| ISSUE: **ENVIRONMENT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, RECREATION AND TOURISM, HOMELAND SECURITY, EMERGENCY SERVICES OR FEMA**

Governor's Signature Sets Standards 30 Years in the Making

Governor Cuomo today signed into law a measure sponsored by Senator Patty Ritchie that gives official state recognition to volunteer "search and rescue" groups like those that help save countless lives of lost hikers, hunters and others in the Adirondacks and other vast wilderness areas of Upstate.

The bill, S.3552, caps a 30-year effort by state Forest Rangers, volunteer groups and local communities to establish standards for training and safety of volunteers, which supporters believe will help lead to more successful rescue operations.

"There are more than 26 search and rescue groups statewide that are made up of individuals who put their lives on the line to help people who go missing in the woods and wilderness areas of our state," said Senator Ritchie.

"These people are willing to face everything from rough terrain to bad weather in areas that are dangerous, desolate and often time do not have cell phone service. I applaud Governor Cuomo for signing this important piece of legislation, which ensures that rescue teams can get the training and recognition they need in order to continue to rescue people and save lives."

Senator Ritchie's bill:

- officially recognizes volunteer wilderness/inland Search and Rescue groups, and allows (but doesn't require) local governments to use the groups in rescue operations;
- directs the state Department of Environmental Conservation to design specific training that would lead to official credentialing of search and rescue volunteers. The training would be designed to reduce risk and injury to volunteers, as much as helping to ensure more successful search outcomes (not unlike training that's required for firefighters and other;
- protects local communities who use search and rescue groups from certain lawsuits and damages that could arise from rescue operations.

More than 300 visitors to the Adirondack Park are lost or injured while wandering in its thick forests each year, requiring Forest Ranger and volunteer efforts to locate and rescue them. There are currently nine outstanding missing persons cases dating back to 1971.

The bill was sponsored in the Assembly by Assemblyman Bill Magee.

