

## State Should Be Prepared to Buy Boy Scouts' Land

Generations of Long Island Boy Scouts have hiked the trails at Camp Wauwepex in Wading River, and no doubt generations more will tread there. But the trails may get shorter: The scouts' Nassau council, which owns the camp, plans to sell more than a quarter of the property to help cover operating deficits. According to the council, a developer who wants to build a golf course is willing to pay more than \$2 million for 147 acres.

But environmentalists oppose the sale because the camp is in the core preservation area of the Suffolk pine barrens, designated

to protect the underground water supply. Fertilizer on a golf course could be a major pollutant. And it doesn't help that the prospective buyer is affiliated with a sand-and-gravel company; environmentalists are already justifiably furious over a sand-mining project elsewhere in the pine barrens.

The Camp Wauwepex sale can't go through without a green light from a five-member commission made up of three town supervisors and one representative each from the county and the state. The scouts can ask for a hardship exemption, but fortunately

there's also a way it could keep the land and still get paid — though not \$2 million. It could transfer development rights to some builder who could then put up more houses or offices elsewhere than the zoning code would otherwise allow.

That would be the best solution for the pine barrens water and the Wauwepex campers. But if the camp's owners won't go for it, the county or the state should make a fair offer to buy the property for public use. The last thing the pine barrens commission should do is approve another sand grab.