

# PROTECT THE ADIRONDACKS!

January 28, 2016

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## **RE: Statement on Joint Legislative Committee Hearings for the NYS 2016-17 Executive Budget for Environmental Spending**

Protect the Adirondacks has worked to defend the Adirondack Park for more than 100 years. We have seen critical investments made in the "forever wild" Adirondack Forest Preserve in good economic and bad economic times and in times of war and times of peace. There has been a multi-generational, bipartisan commitment to protecting the Forest Preserve and Adirondack Park.

We support Governor Cuomo's proposal for a \$300 million Environmental Protection Fund. This marks the highest level of environmental funding since the Pataki years and marks a major policy shift for the Cuomo Administration, which has thus far failed to meet the immense environmental challenges faced by communities and important natural resource areas across New York.

In reality, even a \$300 million EPF is far too low. Do the math: \$300 million in a \$145 billion state budget is .002% of the budget. This fails to meet the state's needs. Each year the backlog increases of outdated sewage treatment systems, inadequate stormwater management, outdated municipal water systems, woefully energy inefficient buildings and infrastructure, outdated highway designs that destroy habitat or contribute to water quality decline, among many many other environmental needs and challenges.

The reality is that New York State should have a \$1 billion EPF at the bare minimum.

### EPF Funding

While we support this heightened level of funding we do not support the use of \$120 million of "settlement funds" for the EPF. This is basically a fiscal 1-shot and is not sustainable. We need to return to rational spending where the EPF was

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funded from the real estate transfer tax or explore other means of targeted taxes and fees, to help support the EPF, such as an excise tax on outdoor recreational equipment to help fund land protection and stewardship or an aquatic invasive species surcharge on boat registrations to fund control and prevention programs. These are just a few of many ideas to enhance funding.

#### Land Protection

Open Space Protection is proposed at \$40 million. While this represents a significant increase from recent years, this amount fails to meet the needs across the state. There will be enormous opportunities and needs in the Adirondacks as some amazing lands that have been identified as some of the state's highest conservation objectives come up for sale.

#### State Land Stewardship

Again, we're pleased with the increased spending of \$28 million, but point out that the backlog of approved projects for the Forest Preserve tops \$5 million and that does not include some of the biggest projects recently approved. \$1.25 million of the \$28 million is earmarked for special project. In the past this money has been split between the Forest Preserve and State Parks. It would be very helpful for the public if the Legislature did a 5-year review of the spending by the DEC on the Forest Preserve from this account. We have a terrible time getting financial data on Forest Preserve spending from the DEC.

#### Invasive Species

The \$10 million proposed for invasive species marks a major boost in funding. This is especially important in the Adirondack where we have the greatest number of miraculously uninfested lakes and ponds and rivers. The state needs to do much more. We need a comprehensive mandatory boat inspection and decontamination network across the state. Right now, we still have a fragmented and piecemeal approach that results in new lakes becoming infested each year. While this increased funding will help, the state needs to take the lead to coordinate with local partners bringing online hundreds of inspection and decontamination stations.

#### On Climate Change

We support the EPF spending on climate change. We're pleased that Governor Cuomo is not using the EPF to raid the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) funding. We're pleased that Governor Cuomo has demonstrated such strong policy growth on the issue of climate change. The Governor could not bring himself to even say the words "climate change" during his first term in office, yet now he plans significant spending on climate change resiliency planning and infrastructure. This is smart spending, but should be looked at as only the tiniest of downpayments and billions of dollars will be needed to convert and upgrade New York's municipal infrastructure in the decades ahead.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide these comments.

For more information contact Peter Bauer, Executive Director, Protect the Adirondacks