Department of Environmental Conservation

Testimony of
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The 2017-18 Executive Budget Recommendations for the Department of Environmental Conservation

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Good morning, Chairwoman Young, Chairman Farrell, and members of the legislative, fiscal and environmental conservation committees. I am Basil Seggos, Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Here with me today are Julie Tighe, Assistant Commissioner for Intergovernmental Affairs, and Jeff Stefanko, Deputy Commissioner for Administration. On behalf of DEC's nearly 3,000 dedicated professionals, thank you for the opportunity to discuss Governor Cuomo's 2017-2018 budget recommendations for New York's environment.

Governor Cuomo has established one of the most aggressive environmental agendas in our nation. The agenda recognizes that a clean environment goes hand in hand with a strong economy. Over the last six years, we have worked tirelessly with you to cement New York's leadership on environmental and clean energy issues. This foundation will serve the State well as we confront serious questions about the direction of environmental protection in Washington in the years ahead. New York must and will continue to lead.

The Governor's 2017-2018 budget is his most ambitious environmental budget yet. It reflects the State's strong commitment to our core conservation and public health responsibilities, and demonstrates our intent to tackle two of the most pressing threats of our time – climate change and drinking water protection.

The time for debate about climate change is over. Climate change is real, and human activity is the principal cause. Last year, I spoke to you about how 2015 was the hottest year ever. 2016 surpassed it. In fact, the past 16 years are among the 17 warmest on record. The time for action on climate is now, especially in the absence of federal leadership.

New York has already set the most aggressive climate goals in the country—a 40 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and an 80 percent reduction by 2050. And we intend to have 50 percent of our energy from renewables by 2030. Later today, NYSERDA will discuss how we'll reach these goals by investing billions of dollars in clean energy investments, through programs like NY Sun, Reforming the Energy Vision, and the Clean Energy Standard.

This year, we're doubling down on these goals.

First, through the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), we propose to lower the cap on carbon emissions from the power sector by 30 percent between 2020 and 2030. Second, DEC and other agencies will implement a comprehensive plan to control methane emissions. Finally, DEC and NYSERDA are undertaking a landmark study to determine how the State can secure 100 percent of our energy from renewable sources.

This year, we'll begin the critical work of the newly created Ocean Acidification Task Force. We'll also continue grants to municipalities to reduce carbon emissions and develop resiliency in the face of climate change. And we'll propose changes to the forest tax program to protect more private forest land, sequestering more carbon and protecting our precious water resources.

Clean water is vital for America's health and prosperity. Yet for too long we have taken it for granted. New York's historic legacy of contamination, coupled with some of the nation's oldest infrastructure, demands that we take bold action now.

That's why the Governor has proposed the $2 billion *Clean Water Infrastructure Act*. This monumental investment over the next five years is in addition to the $175 million remaining in *Water Infrastructure Improvement Act* funding, which provides grants to municipalities and leverages low-cost financing through EFC's billion-dollar loan program. With the additional $2 billion, we'll prioritize grants for the following: protecting water at its source through local land acquisition projects and green infrastructure; mitigating the impacts of road salt and dairy waste; and incentivizing consolidation of services between municipalities. These watershed-based initiatives will also create and sustain jobs.

Emerging contaminants are a serious threat to water quality. In 2016, DEC tackled major water pollution challenges in Hoosick Falls, Petersburgh, Newburgh, Owasco and on Long Island. Our unprecedented responses to PFC contamination across the State have secured clean water supplies, protected private wells, and held polluters accountable. Through the Governor's *Water Quality Rapid Response Team*, DEC and DOH are proactively identifying drinking water supplies potentially impacted by PFCs and other emerging contaminants like 1,4-dioxane. This weekend the Governor called on EPA to set a national drinking-water standard for 1,4 dioxane. If they do not, we will.

And to ensure that DEC has the resources it needs to effectively respond to water contamination, the Governor is proposing additional funding for state Superfund program.

These broad goals on climate change and water protection will be bolstered by another historic commitment of $300 million to the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). This includes funding for all traditional programs, such as land acquisition and invasive species control, and new programs, such as funding for disposal of PFC-containing firefighting foam and hardship grants for DOH's new water testing programs.

Environmental Justice continues to be one of my top priorities. As I work to update DEC's EJ policy, we plan to invest $2 million for targeted air monitoring programs and mitigation solutions in low-income communities of color, as we are doing now in Albany's South End. We'll also dedicate $1 million to support green job training in EJ areas and $1 million to develop urban environmental education centers.

Outdoor recreation and natural resource protection are the pillars of DEC's mission. This year, the Governor is proposing to increase our land stewardship capacity by increasing our *NY Works* funding to $70 million. Combined with EPF stewardship funding, this will allow us to invest $50 million in the first year of *Adventure NY*, a new program to upgrade DEC's recreational assets across the state. It will also encourage recreation in new areas, in part to curtail overuse in places like the Adirondack High Peaks.

In the first three years of *Adventure NY*, DEC will:

- Design and construct projects across the State, including boat launches, duck blinds and wildlife viewing areas;
- Improve trails, signage and campgrounds in our Adirondack and Catskills lands;
- Establish a Gateway to the Adirondacks on the site of the former Frontier Town amusement park;
- Coordinate marketing and tourism initiatives with I Love NY; and
- Expand recruiting and retention efforts for hunters and anglers, and continue our work with National Archery in Schools program.

To support all these initiatives, DEC's budget for the coming year recommends State Operations appropriations of $450.1 million and a Capital Budget totaling $2.9 billion. The budget maintains DEC's staffing level at 2,946 employees. And for the first time in many years, we're holding back-to-back academies for our Environmental Conservation Officers and Forest Rangers, which kicked off this past weekend with 45 new recruits. Day in and day out, our Rangers and ECOs perform heroic work on behalf of the State, and I am personally committed to ensuring they have all the resources they need to carry out their duties.

I am confident the Executive Budget will enable DEC to continue to fulfill its mission to protect public health and the environment. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.