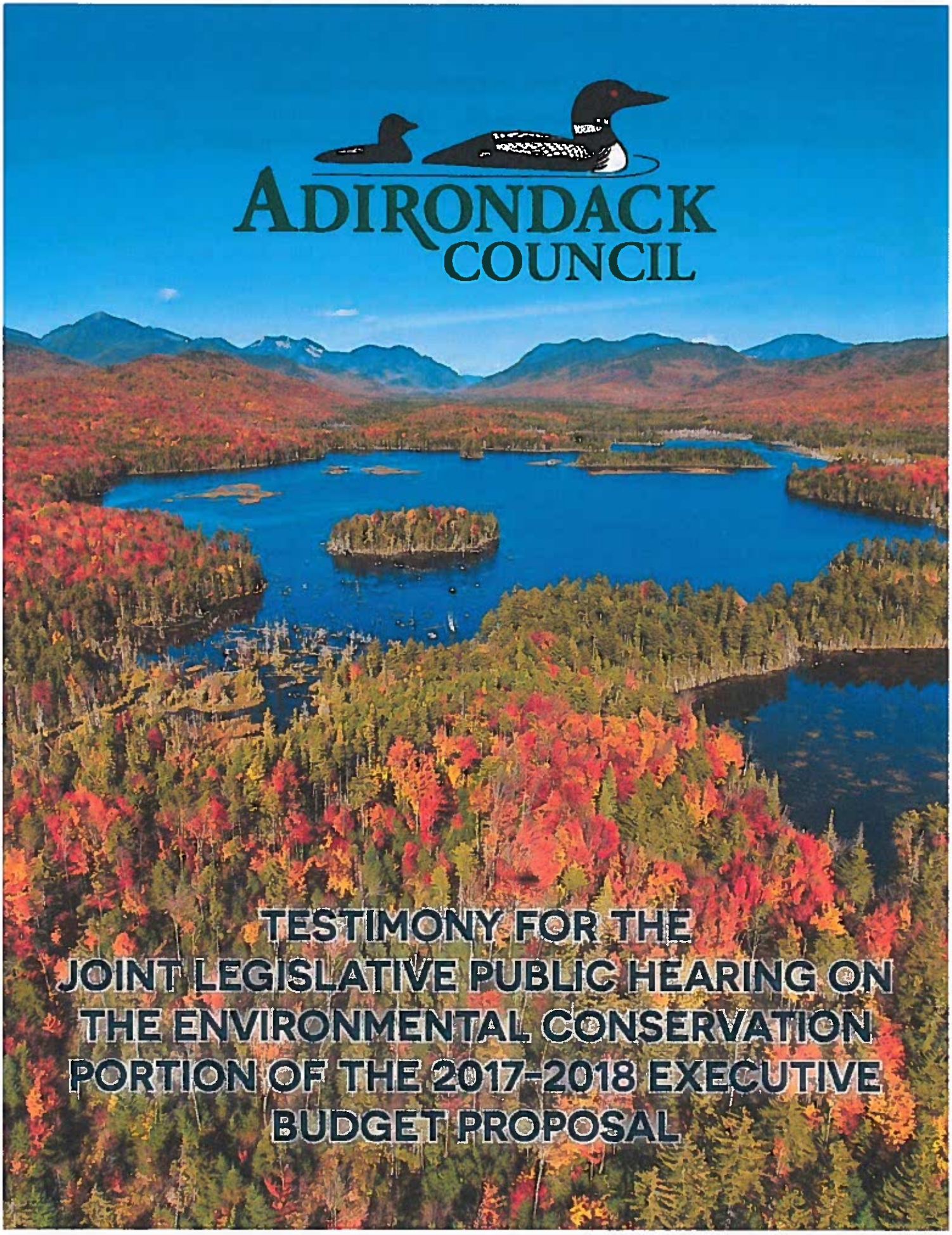
ADIRONDACK
COUNCIL
TESTIMONY FOR THE
JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING ON
THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
PORTION OF THE 2017-2018 EXECUTIVE
BUDGET PROPOSAL

Testimony of the Adirondack Council at the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the Environmental Conservation Portion of the 2017-2018 Executive Budget Proposal

February 13, 2017

Good afternoon Chairwoman Young, Chairman Farrell and honored legislators. My name is Kevin Chlad, and I am the Director of Government Relations for the Adirondack Council. The Adirondack Council is a 501 (c) 3 not-for-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the ecological integrity and wild character of the Adirondack Park. We envision an Adirondack Park with clean water and air, healthy and abundant wildlife and large wilderness areas, surrounded by working farms and forests and vibrant communities. We do not accept any public funding. We offer the following testimony in response to the Governor's proposed Executive Budget.

Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)

We urge the legislature to approve a $300 million Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) once again for the 2017-18 fiscal year. The EPF is the cornerstone of capital funding for New York's environment, supporting efforts to protect open space, provide clean water, and support vibrant communities and their working farms and forests. A study by the Trust for Public Land found that for every $1 invested by New York State in the EPF, $7 in economic benefits are returned to communities. [i] The EPF enables community-based efforts to implement programs that will make New York an attractive and healthy place for businesses to locate, and for families to live.

We applaud the state's continued increases in annual EPF disbursements, which demonstrate both the overwhelming demand for this funding, as well as the state's ongoing commitment to protecting our environment.

SPECIFIC EPF CATEGORIES

Open Space Protection

For the Adirondack Park, one of the most important funding sources is the Open Space Protection funding line in the EPF. The state recently completed the acquisition of 65,000 acres of land formerly owned by The Nature Conservancy and Finch, Pruyn & Co. constituting perhaps the greatest single land purchase the state has ever made, and demonstrating the magnificent power of the EPF. The centerpiece of this acquisition, the Boreas ponds tract, is nothing less than spectacular, hosting the state's highest elevation wetland, a healthy moose population, and a priceless view of our state's highest peaks. You have left a

legacy for future generations by funding this acquisition, and it is our hope that Governor Cuomo and his Adirondack Park Agency will soon provide this landscape with a motor-free Wilderness classification that provides a minimum one-mile buffer around the Boreas ponds. Anything short of this level of protection will threaten the very jewel that this state just acquired. New York State has an extraordinary opportunity to create an expanded 280,000-acre Adirondack Wilderness that will rival the most famous conservation landmarks in the world in scale and provide long-lasting benefits to clean water, wildlife and communities.[ii]

The Adirondack Council deeply appreciates the time and attention the state has given to this acquisition, especially considering the long list of open space priorities that still exist around the state. We applaud the state for the recent release of the final version of the updated open space conservation plan, making public the state's vision for land protection in the coming years. While the Adirondack Forest Preserve is not yet complete, conservation is a statewide effort, and resources from this category will be needed around the state in the coming year. **Please continue funding open space protection at robust levels, to protect water quality at its source and to increase our state's resiliency in the face of climate change.**

Protected and well-managed private lands are widespread and a critical component of the Park's ecosystem. Land Trusts around the state are keeping large landscapes whole by purchasing conservation easements, making land holding more affordable for the owner, while opening up lands to public recreation uses. **We support the proposed increase to the LTA/ Conservation Partnership subcategory in the Open Space Account, bringing its total to $2.5 million, for the expansion of this valued program.**

State Land Stewardship

The State Land Stewardship (SLS) budget line supports professional trail crews, summit stewards, Student Conservation Association work, and the construction and maintenance of the state facilities and recreational infrastructure that act as an economic driver in much of the state. The SLS projects permit the public to enjoy safe use of state parks and other public lands, and support sanctioned lean-to rehabilitation, parking lots, trail signs, bridges and many other access-related duties that enable the Forest Preserve to continue to be the quality resource and economic driver that it is. **We appreciate and support the Executive proposal to increase this line to $30 million this year, and urge the legislature to accept this appropriation.**

Invasive Species

We support the proposed $12 million budget target for the Invasive Species funding line, and ask that the legislature approve this total once again. Communities in the Adirondacks and private stakeholders are increasing their commitment to combat invasive species, but require financial support more than anything else. The Adirondack Park Invasive Species Prevention

Strategy has proven to be a success, aiding in the protection of water quality and native species in our Adirondack Park. This program will continue to evolve as data and public feedback are collected, and as the great minds behind this program continue to strengthen and expand its impact. We applaud the state for providing these much needed resources to those who are on the frontlines.

The economy of the Adirondacks and outlying regions rely on clean water hosting a vibrant array of fish, invertebrates and aquatic flora. This will support continued efforts to educate visitors who plan to recreate, conduct science-based prevention of the spread of invasive species and fund rapid response teams that control and eradicate infestations.

As new invasive species enter sensitive areas such as the Forest Preserve and the working forests under easement in the Adirondacks and Catskills, more funding will be required to manage these pests and plants that can cause serious harm to the state's economy, affecting the timber and tourism industries. **A recent economic study on the impacts of invasive species estimates that the potential direct economic impact from only eight invasive species that were evaluated could range from $468 to $893 million.**[iii]

Spending money now will save the state countless millions of dollars in the coming decades. Our abundant water and timber resources paired with high visitor rates put the Adirondacks at the epicenter of the invasive species epidemic.

Waterfront Revitalization- Adirondack Projects

The "Waterfront Revitalization – Adirondack Project" funding category will support Department of State (DOS) Office of Planning and Development for the towns of Minerva, Indian Lake and Newcomb. These funds can support smart growth planning and post-planning project implementation and are not limited to traditional "waterfronts." Typically this funding helps communities develop updated planning, zoning and economic development and infrastructure project priorities. The DOS staff are supposed to make sure projects protect sensitive environmental and historic resources. We support the proposed appropriation of $660,000 in funding that can help Adirondack communities become more vibrant while protecting our Adirondack legacy.

We also support the Governor's proposal to increase the cap for the reimbursement rate to 75 percent, up from its current cap of 50 percent. Local Waterfront Revitalization Projects are much more than local projects. On an annual, project by project basis, this state funding enables communities around the state to conduct environmentally friendly improvements, which cumulatively strengthen our climate resilience, lessen our impacts on water resources, support healthy modes of transportation, and improve community spaces.

Community Water Infrastructure Funding

We are pleased to see that Governor's budget proposal includes a $2 billion appropriation, amounting to an investment of $400 million annualy for five years. The proposed *Clean Water Infrastructure Act of 2017* would provide funding for wastewater and drinking water infrastructure, as well as source water protection to prevent road salt and agricultural runoff into waterbodies. More than 800,000 tons of road salt are spread on state roads every year, and when the snow melts or the rain falls, the salt is washed into roadside soils and waterbodies. With enough time, salt can leach into aquifers, potentially ruining a community water source.

We are also pleased to see that the Legislature has a $5 billion bond act bill in each house. We strongly urge the Governor and Legislature to work together in making this a historic year for clean water. The *Water Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2015* and its increase in 2016 have proven to be a tremendous success, leveraging more than $1 billion in clean water investments to date. With $175 million in funding remaining, a new appropriation in 2017 would prevent a gap year and continue the success of recent years.

In the fall of 2016, the Adirondack Council released a report demonstrating over $100 million in current wastewater funding needs in the Adirondacks.[iv] Adirondack communities are small, but can serve very large visitor populations, placing high demands on aging wastewater systems. In supporting wastewater funding, you support rural communities in the Adirondacks and ensure the Park has a future filled with clean water.

Adirondack Park Agency (APA)

Eight years ago, the APA had a staff of 72 employees. **This year, the Agency has 54 employees and the Executive Budget does not propose to increase that number.** Their operations budget will decrease by $330,000 due to the expiration of a federal grant. We have real concerns that the current staff will not be able to carry out the Agency's functions, such as permit site reviews, community and applicant outreach and proactive enforcement of regulations. Without being able to replace critical positions, the APA will continue to face difficulties keeping up with permit timelines and will lack the resources to incentivize compliance with their regulations.

The APA's Planning Division has lost 80 percent of its staff, and while it has a modern GIS system, there are too few people to use it. GIS and planning are also essential to help communities that are facing a variety of challenges. From stream protection, to avoiding future flooding like what we saw during Hurricane Irene, to planning for the creation and expansion of wastewater infrastructure systems, local governments are in need of more technical assistance from the state, especially in light of the property tax cap.

The APA is our smallest state agency, but carries a mission the Legislature established as vital for the entire state – *the protection and preservation of the natural resources and wildness of the Adirondack Park.* It is an exciting time in the Adirondacks, with ongoing discussions about recent land acquisitions, Unit Management Plan updates, and silvicultural clearcut reviews, all taking place while day-to-day permit reviews continue. **We request that two additional staff be added to the Adirondack Park Agency (APA), to enhance the rate of permit review, improve permit compliance assistance and to ensure that ongoing state land classifications and Unit Management Plan reviews are conducted with adequate resources.**

Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)

The Executive Budget proposal shows a $12.5 million decrease in appropriations for the DECs state operations budget. Even though we see a decrease in funding, staffing levels have been kept even by supporting some staff using capitol funding. The DEC must confront great challenges in their ability to effectively follow their mandates with permitting, enforcement, land management, and air and water quality monitoring, given the growing constraints on their funding. With important new laws and regulations such as the Sewage Pollution Right to Know Act, the Invasive Species Prevention Act and water withdrawal reporting, the DEC's job necessarily grows in its efforts to conserve, improve and protect New York's natural resources, health and environment. Their funding should reflect their growing role. **We propose an increase in state operations funding for the DEC Division of Lands and Forests to support eight additional staff, upgrade and replace equipment and reduce the tight fiscal pressure they face in implementing state land projects.**

Continue to Promote Adirondack Tourism through the "I Love NY" Campaign

The Governor has proposed $55 million for NYS Tourism promotion, an increase of $5 million over last year's budget. This fund supports the very successful I LOVE NY and TASTE NY programs and will continue to support the summer and winter Adirondack Challenges, fishing tournaments and wine cups. We applaud this increase and encourage the Governor and Legislature to work together to ensure this program continues to thrive.

With the continuation of the Adirondack Challenges, promotion of the Adirondack Region on television, and the New York City-based "Get Outta Town" campaign, the state has helped to renew interest in and raise awareness about visiting the Adirondack Park. The Adirondack Park has tremendous potential to capture an even greater share of the national tourism economy than it already does. We hope that the legislature will work with the Governor to continue to drive this effort and capitalize on the momentum you have all created.

With that increased visitation comes an increase in impact to our state lands. It will be critical to ensure the protection of the resources that are now hosting a large influx of visitors. On Labor Day weekend of 2016, more than 1,200 hikers summated Cascade mountain in the High Peaks Wilderness in Lake Placid, NY.

Miscellaneous Capitol Projects

We are pleased to see that the Governor has proposed funding for a "Gateway to the Adirondacks" welcome center at Exit 29 on the Northway. This private local and state partnership will enable the purchase of a conservation easement by the DEC for a new public campground and equestrian facility, and will incentivize a $2.8 million investment by Paradox Brewery in a new facility. This project will attract new visitors to the region and compliment a Wilderness classification for the Boreas ponds, only a few miles down the road.

The Governor's Adventure NY program would expand the successful NY Works state land access program, to support campground renovations in the Adirondacks and around the state. **The program will also fund "infrastructure at Boreas ponds" and trail building as part of a proposed "hut-to-hut" system. We have questions regarding the details of the Governors commitment to fund "infrastructure at Boreas ponds," and hope that said proposed infrastructure is Wilderness compliant, such as a trail for persons for disabilities for the last mile to the view at the edge of the ponds.**

The Governor has also proposed the Empire State Trail, which would complete the Erie Canalway and Hudson River Valley Greenway, creating the largest multi-use trail system in the country. The third phase of this of this project would follow Route 9 in the Adirondacks, and would offer another tourism attraction that fits well with the Park's character if advanced in a manner consistent with Article XIV and the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan.

Biomass and 480-a Reform

We applaud Governor Cuomo for his support of the Adirondack Park and a forest products industry that is climate smart and sustainable. Biomass, with wood coming from sustainably managed private forests, managed to be carbon neutral or better, is good for the Adirondack Park, its wild forest character and vibrant communities. **We support efforts to reform forest taxation laws that will expand enrollment, improve habitat conservation, and reimburse**

local governments for losses to their tax base. We urge the Governor and Legislature to enact reforms this year.

Our organization urges the legislature to propose a budget that protects and enhances our environment, thereby improving the quality of life for all New Yorkers. Remember, it's not THE Adirondack Park, it's YOUR Adirondack Park.

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[i] The Trust for Public Land. "The Economic Benefits of New York's Environmental Protection Fund." https://www.tpl.org/economic-benefits-new-yorks-environmental-protection-fund. 2012.

[ii] Please visit www.BeWildNY.org for more information.

[iii] Prepared by Yellow Wood Associates, Inc., Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program. "The Actual and Potential Economic Impact of Invasive Species on the Adirondack Park: A Preliminary Assessment." http://adkinvasives.com/brochures-and-more/. 2014.

[iv] To see the full Adirondack Council report, visit: http://www.adirondackcouncil.org/page/special-reports--57.html