Adirondack
ADK
Mountain Club

Testimony of the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK)
Joint Legislative Public Hearing, Environmental Conservation Portion
2017-2018 Executive Budget Proposal
13 February 2017

Good afternoon Chairwoman Young, Chairman Farrell and honored legislators. My name is Neil Woodworth. I am the Executive Director of the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Governor's Executive Budget proposal.

The Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) is dedicated to the conservation, preservation, and responsible recreational use of the New York State Forest Preserve and other parks, wild lands, and waters vital to our members and chapters. ADK represents over 30,000 member in 27 chapters and 36 year-round staff offering programs that help people discover, play in, and protect natural places. Since its founding in 1922, The Adirondack Mountain Club has protected wild lands and waters through the work of its dedicated member volunteers and staff. ADK members enjoy hiking, canoeing, kayaking, cross-country skiing, camping, backpacking, biking, mountaineering, snowshoeing, and other "muscle-powered" outdoor activities in New York. We sponsor programs that range from teaching people to hike and paddle safely to repairing our state's peerless hiking trail network. We are advocates for responsible recreation; and protection of the Forest Preserve, state parks and other wild lands. Our priorities today are state budget funding for open space protection and for stewardship of our Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve and our incomparable state parks system.

Environmental Protection Fund

The Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) supports Governor Andrew Cuomo's proposed $300 million appropriation for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). We greatly appreciate the Legislature's strong, ongoing support of the EPF which allows us to better protect our environment, ensuring the conservation of critical resources for future generations while creating jobs and making our communities more resilient. Maintaining the $300 million appropriation enhances the state's ability to leverage federal, local, and private dollars, and enables communities to seize opportunities to implement programs that will make New York an attractive and healthy place for businesses to locate and for families to live.

Adirondack Mountain Club, 301 Hamilton Street, Albany, NY 12210, 518-449-3870 advocacy@adk.org

A $300 million EPF will allow the state to better meet current demand and implement critical programs to conserve open space and farmland, protect and improve water quality, build community resilience, sustainably revitalize waterfronts, create local parks, promote recycling, reduce waste, prevent pollution, provide community health programs, and support our zoos and botanical gardens. Capital investments made through the EPF support thousands of jobs in our state across a broad spectrum of industries, from tourism, recreation, agriculture and forest products to drinking water protection for millions of New Yorkers, and generate approximately $40 billion in revenue every year.

Since its creation in 1993, the Senate and Assembly have provided strong, bipartisan support for the EPF. In recent budgets, as New York's economy has recovered, the Legislature has worked to provide important funding restorations to the EPF which has benefitted every county in New York State. We appreciate your work to rebuild the EPF and your recognition of the benefits it brings to our state – such as job creation, tourism opportunities, clean water and other environmental and public health protections, climate resilience, recreational access, and quality of life.

Do Not Cut Land Acquisition and Open Space Funding

ADK is **concerned that the Governor's proposed budget cuts land acquisition and open space conservation funding by $7 million at a time when important new land purchases that will help our ecosystem be climate resilient are poised for state purchase.** This funding is essential for Forest Preserve and conservation easement purchases of key tracts of land across the state. **We need to increase EPF land acquisition funding to $40 million or above, which was the funding level in 2016-2017.** Many of the lands important to you, have been added to the NYS 2016 Open Space Conservation Plan, and are listed subsequently as potential acquisitions in the Governor's proposed 2018 budget. Several examples of these exciting properties that would further conservation goals across New York State, and which illustrate the importance of ensuring an EPF Open Space/Land Conservation budget category of at least $40 million include the following. Follesnby Park, in the Adirondacks, would add 14,600 acres to the Adirondack Forest Preserve as well as the ecologically important Follesnby Pond. Also in the Adirondacks is Whitney Park, a 36,000-acre property in Hamilton County that contains enormous outdoor recreational potential, and northern flow river corridors such as the Deer, St. Regis, Grasse, Oswegatchie, Raquette and Little. In western New York there are parcels around the Hemlock-Canadice Lakes which serve as the water supply for the City of Rochester. In the south, there is the Schunnemunk Mountain area which includes Moodna Creek, Woodcock Mountain and the Hudson Highlands Connectivity project lands. This would protect significant habitats along Moodna Creek and help protect key areas of the Long Path. The Hudson Valley Highlands Connectivity project lands would protect a vital wildlife corridor in southern New York. In western New York lands have been identified around Cattaraugus Creek and its tributaries. The Zoar Valley Unique Area is located here and land acquisition will further help to protect it. In the Catskills important acquisitions would include additions to the Indian Head Wilderness, acquisitions of parcels on Catskill peaks with summits of 3500 feet or above, such as Balsam, Graham, and Doubletop

Mountain and the Dry Brook Valley that play a critical role in the wilderness character of the area, and parcels that will protect the Peekamoose Gorge and the Upper Neversink Valley

<u>Increase State Land Stewardship Funding to $30 Million</u> **Equally important is the $2 million boost proposed by Governor Cuomo for State Land Stewardship. This funding must be increased, as proposed by the Governor, to at least $30 million** with an increase for the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) consistent with DEC's responsibility of managing and protecting 4 million acres of state land plus nearly 1 million additional acres in conservation easements. This funding supports stewardship opportunities such as trail building and maintenance, and public education and safety in the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve, especially the High Peaks, and in other public lands across the state. It also provides protection, through support of the Summit Steward Program, for rare habitats including the Adirondack High Peaks which are threatened by heavy visitation and climate change. **It is important that at least $4 million of this funding be committed to stewardship in the Catskills and the watersheds that protect the New York City water supply.**

<u>Combating Invasive Species</u>

We are pleased to see maintenance of last year's significant increase in funding for invasive species protection and control with a boost to $12 million at a critical time in the battle against aquatic and terrestrial invasive species. ADK hopes to see the increase in funding be used for effective AIS prevention and management strategies such as **boat washing and inspection stations.** Invasive species are spreading at rapid rate, reducing water quality, property values, and recreational opportunities along the way. New York State has enacted numerous regulations and laws that will prove vital to stopping the spread of aquatic and terrestrial invasive species, but there is still a missing link. Robust investments in public education, spread prevention, and mitigation are needed before the impacts become insurmountable. Lake associations, non-profits, and municipalities are desperate to act in the best interests of the water they protect, but lack the necessary funding to do the job. Rapid state-wide investments in boat washing stations, staffing, and training would protect native aquatic fish and plants, saving the state countless millions in lost economic sporting and recreation activity.

The state should **continue to invest in AIS spread prevention, and the successful program of watercraft decontamination, management and control activities across the Adirondack Park.** This region is the last area in New York where major water bodies remain un-infested and free of invasive species.

The Adirondack Park's economy is particularly vulnerable to invasive species. A study commission by Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program conservatively estimated the potential impact from just 8 invasive species to be between a $468 to $893 million loss to the Adirondack's economy. Prevention efforts are of paramount importance and are critical to the economy, ecology and quality of life in the Adirondack Park. Since 2000, AIS spread prevention, watercraft inspection, and education efforts have been successfully implemented by Paul Smith's College, the Lake Champlain Basin Program, and active lake associations at many, but not all, critical boat launches across the Adirondack Park. While these programs are effective at

detecting and removing the majority of visible plant fragments, they cannot provide adequate decontamination of small-bodied organisms such as zebra mussels, Asian clam or spiny waterflea. Compared with spread prevention, the costs of directly managing infestations are high and often exceed the capacities of state action, local governments, and non-profits. Across the Adirondacks we need to **continue to build an effective AIS spread prevention and decontamination network** comprised of coordinated inspection locations and strategically located decontamination facilities.

Hemlock Woolly Adelgid

Moving forward additional funding will be needed to continue to combat invasive species. Aquatic Invasive Species are not the only threat New York faces. New York faces **potential decimation of eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) from a forest pest, hemlock woolly adelgid (*Adelges tsugae*) (HWA),**[1] which has not yet entered the Adirondack Park, but has already caused significant decline in the Catskill Park, and has been identified in Letchworth State Park, and Zoar Valley, and Allegany State Park (where our members helped identify HWA under a *citizen science* project run by OPRHP).

Hemlocks are a foundation species.[2] Foundation species are critical species in the habitats they help create.[3] In the case of hemlocks they moderate stream water temperatures for trout and other animals, provide a buffer for nutrient inputs to maintain water quality, stabilize shallow soils especially in steep gorges, provide shelter for animals and plants which is especially important in winter, provide critical habitat for migrating neo-tropical birds, and provide acidic substrate for lichens.

In the Adirondack Park hemlock is very dense especially in the south and in areas like Lake George, Keene Valley, and in much of the Lake Champlain Basin (including its far edge in the Saranac Lakes Wild Forest and the St Regis Canoe Area).[4] Imagine the impact to the Adirondack landscape from a severe decline of hemlock-a highly likely scenario without a significant increase in early detection efforts (like those our members are engaged in as citizen scientists), treatment and development of bio-controls, such as the predatory beetle (*Laricobius nigrinus*).[5] We only need look to places such as the Great Smoky Mountains for an example of the devastation in store for the Adirondacks.[6] Closer to home, decline of hemlocks is already well underway in the Catskills.[7] HWA has been advancing quickly through New York State,[8] and now is at the doorstep of the Adirondack Park (and likely is already present). Anyone who has hiked, paddled, or driven through the Adirondack Park should realize what we will lose. If we do not act quickly, we may lose the species.[9]

We applaud the Governor's foresight in addressing the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) threat with $500,000 line item in the EPF for staffing at Cornell University and support for combating this pest through the work of the eight regional New York State PRISMs (Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management),[10] **as well as an additional $575,000 for establishing a lab at Cornell University to grow the predator beetle** (*Laricobius nigrinus*) as a bio-control for HWA.

Do Not Off-Load Navigation Law to EPF

ADK does not support the off-loading of the $2 million "Navigation Law" program to the Parks and Recreation Program Account of the EPF. The state typically reimburses localities for a portion of their cost in enforcing state navigation laws (boat registrations and safety). It typically runs through the Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) budget as local government assistance. The proposed budget now attempts to transfer this expense into the EPF rather than paying for it with the General Fund.

Other Budget Funding

Catskill Package

We are also asking legislators to fund **'The Catskill Package'** which includes funding to combat Hemlock Woolly Adelgid in the EPF State Land Stewardship account as noted above, as well as **funding for a Comprehensive Catskills Economic Study: $450,000; Aid to Localities: $550,000 (includes $50,000 for Catskill Interpretive Center); and annual ranger academies for needed DEC Forest Rangers to increase public safety: $1,000,000.**

New York Works

ADK supports the Governor's proposal to fund DEC New York Works at $70 million, an increase of $30 million, in support of the **Adventure New York program** which improves and renovates state facilities including campgrounds. However, we are **concerned that some of this funding may be used to build or install 'hut to hut' lodging and dining facilities on the lands of the Adirondack Forest Preserve. We are very concerned that these facilities would violate the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan and the 'Forever Wild' clause of the state Constitution.**

Clean Water Infrastructure Act of 2017

ADK supports the executive budget proposal for the inclusion of $2 billion for drinking water, waste water, and source protection projects over five years at the rate of $400 million per year. The essential projects covered by these funds include infrastructure for drinking water, waste water, and regional water infrastructure, land acquisition, green infrastructure, water quality improvement, replacement of lead pipes, and a study for consolidation of water systems. ADK also supports the executive proposal to require public water systems to test for emerging contaminants and for private water systems to be tested when property is sold. This funding compliments the $175 million in the 2017-18 budget from the 2015 Water Infrastructure Improvement Act.

Empire State Trail

ADK supports the Governor's proposal for a $53 million appropriation in the 2017-18 budget as well as the total, multi-year appropriation of $200 million for the Empire State Trail which proposes 350 new miles of trail to be constructed over a three-year period.

Buffalo Billion Phase II (AKA BB^2) Proposals 16 and 17: Development and Lodge on Goat Island Nature Preserve in Niagara Falls State Park

The Governor's Buffalo Billion Phase II Campaign provides needed investment in Western New York State. However, ADK does not support the BB^2 Proposals 16 and 17 in their current configuration which call for the building of lodge facilities and other development on Goat Island in the Niagara River. These proposals would destroy the wildness of Goat Island which is an Olmstead designed natural area in the middle of the Niagara River in Niagara Falls State Park.[11] The Buffalo Billion Phase II calls for $500 million for projects over five years with $400 million in settlement funds in the 2017-2018 Budget,[12] and an additional $100 million in unidentified resources.[13]

In 2012 OPRHP completed a Comprehensive Plan for Niagara Falls State Park.[14] In this plan numerous well designed projects were outlined to be funded with New York Works funding. There is no mention of a lodge for Goat Island in this study and such a proposal contradicts the stated intent of the plan, and the management of the park since 1982 when efforts began to return the design of the park to the original vision of its designer, Frederick Law Olmsted. Niagara Falls State Park is the oldest state park in the United States, and must be considered a national treasure. According to the 2012 OPRHP Plan,

> "The scenic reservation was established by New York State in 1885, and in 1887 Frederick Law Olmsted, along with his colleague Calvert Vaux, prepared a master plan for the preservation and enhancement of the natural landscape and scenery surrounding Niagara Falls, along with the islands and river rapids above the falls. The original vision of preserving and restoring the natural scenery surrounding the falls must be considered within the context of the current demands of eight million visitors per year. Through the years the park has accommodated steadily increasing numbers of visitors, and in order to provide facilities for this increased usage and demand for visitor services, substantial modifications have been made to the park. Modifications have included new roadways, parking areas, structures, large expanses of lawn, and paving. Such action has resulted in the removal of natural plantings and landscapes. This trend was initially addressed subsequent to the adoption of the 1982 Master Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for Niagara Falls State Park. This plan called for making major improvements to the visual quality of the "Reservation" and signaled the beginning of a process to return to a more naturalized environment consistent with the original vision and intent of the park."[15]

Staffing for State Agencies

Although there are some truly great pieces of this budget, ADK remains very concerned about the impact that the implementation of a flat budget (increase of less than 2% each year) has been having on the staffing of Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Office of Park Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), and the Adirondack Park Agency (APA).

Although there is a significant increase in funding for DEC, these fund reflect the Executive proposal to provide $2 billion for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act of 2017. **There is still a large gap between the existing staff and the additional staff needed to protect the 5.1 million acres of DEC administered lands across the**

state, including 2.6 million acres in the Adirondack Park and nearly 300,000 acres in the Catskill Forest Preserve. **Additionally, OPRHP operates our State Park system with 180 State parks and 35 historic sites, and 62 million annual visitors.**

Without DEC support, staff such as surveyors, real property attorneys, scientists, and planners are unable to accomplish the tasks necessary to use Open Space/Land Conservation funding to purchase land, classify land units, or create management plans for public use.

We applaud the Governor's commitment to open space protection and improved access to wildlife-related recreation in the acquisition of the former Finch Pruyn Lands, the largest addition to the Adirondack Forest Preserve in a century. However, **to complete the job we must have more support for the agencies** tasked with the acquisition process and the protection and management of our state public lands.

In summary, **ADK commends the Governor in proposing a budget which maintains last year's historic increase to the EPF, and other important increases to capital funding for the environment.** ADK appreciates your understanding of the important economic and public health benefits that environmental investments have across the state and we look forward to working with you to ensure a $300 million EPF is included in the final budget adopted by March 31st. **We hope to also work with the Senate and Assembly to address critical staffing needs** in DEC, OPRHP, and in the Adirondack Park Agency.

Thank you for your dedication to the communities, environment, and the natural heritage of New York State.

Sincerely,

Neil F. Woodworth
Executive Director and Counsel
Adirondack Mountain Club, Inc.

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[1] http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7250.html
[2] http://www.Iternet.edu/research/keyfindings/foundation-species-matter
[3] http://adkinvasives.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/WHITMORE-Lk-Placid-28-Mar-15-1.pdf

[4] http://adkinvasives.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Hemlock-Woolly-Adelgid-Adirondack-Distribution-Map.pdf
[5] https://www.nps.gov/grsm/learn/news/new-hwa-beetle.htm
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[6] http://www.lakeplacidnews.com/page/content.detail/id/523715/Flies-could-avert-hemlock-threat-in-New-York.html?nav=5005
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[8] http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/95656.html

[9] http://www.lakeplacidnews.com/page/content.detail/id/523185/A-threat-to-hemlocks.html?nav=5005

[10] http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/47433.html

[11] See 46:35 in video at link http://on.ny.gov/2lst6XV

[12] New York State Assembly, Yellow Book, 2017, P.5; Budget Briefing Book, p.8

[13] New York State Assembly, Yellow Book, 2017, P.102

[14] https://parks.ny.gov/parks/attachments/NiagaraFallsHowNYWorksProjectsAreAffectingNiagaraFallsStatePark.pdf

[15] https://parks.ny.gov/parks/attachments/NiagaraFallsHowNYWorksProjectsAreAffectingNiagaraFallsStatePark.pdf