PROTECT THE ADIRONDACKS!

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February 13, 2017

Hon. John Flanagan
New York State Senate
Room 330, State Capitol
Albany, NY 12247

Hon. Carl Heastie
New York State Assembly
Room 932, Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12248

RE: Environmental Conservation and Parks 2017-18 Budget Hearings

Dear Sirs:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide this testimony about environmental spending in the proposed New York State 2017-18 budget.

$200 Million for Clean Water

This is an important program that should be funded, but it meets a fraction of the needs that New York faces. The Environmental Facilities Corporation currently has an approved list of over $10 billion of approved projects and identifies and approves new projects each year. The proposed $200 does not come close to meeting the state's clean water challenges for clean drinking water, safe municipal and school infrastructure, lead contamination, sewage treatment plants and stormwater control. At this pace, New York will never catch up to the current need.

Environmental Protection Fund

We support a $300 million Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). While this marks the second year in a row at this high level of funding at this all-time-high level, the reality is that the EPF is chronically underfunded and in a state like New York the EPF should be funded at $1 billion annually.

We support $33 million is proposed for land acquisition and $30 million for state parks and land and easements (infrastructure, access and stewardship projects),

including projects on State lands and easements, access to the State Forest Preserve, recreational trail construction and maintenance, Catskill and Adirondack campground improvements, Forest Preserve and state forest unit management planning, among other projects.

We support $12 million proposed for implementation of the Invasive Species Task Force, including $450,000 for Lake George (including $5.550 million for invasive species eradication and $500,000 for control of hemlock wooly adelgid by Cornell University).

On the EPF we urge the Senate and Assembly to do two things. First, I do not believe there have been oversight hearings about what the EPF has accomplished, how it is funded, how the money is spent, and the effectiveness of the overall program compared with the identified needs across New York. This should be done.

Second, the High Peaks Wilderness area in the Adirondack Park is the most visited wild area in the Adirondacks, the most heavily used, and a vital part of the dynamic tourism economy of the greater Lake Placid area. Unfortunately, even though their historic high use, with some trails like Cascade Mountain now seeing over 33,000 hikers a year, more than 1,000 on a busy fall weekend, hikers to Mount Marcy and Algonquin Mountain up 50%, and the majority of these hikers staying overnight in the area, the state is 5-years behind in trail maintenance and the most heavily used and successful Forest Preserve units suffers from dire under investment. This needs to be changed to protect the natural resources and ensure that the public has an enjoyable and memorable experience.

DEC Capital Budget

Forest Legacy Program: We support the $10 million proposed for acquisition of lands under the forest legacy program. This program accesses significant federal land protection support and helps to protect working forest lands in the Adirondacks and other places.

Campgrounds Maintenance: We support the $22 million for Operations, including $500,000 for campground modernization and reconstruction.

Capital Budget

Empire State Trail Network: We question the funding for the Empire State Trail. $123 million is proposed for improvements, alterations, rehabilitations and completion of the Empire State Trail network. Other State entities authorized to be involved are the Department of Transportation and the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the Dormitory Authority and Power Authority of the State of New York.

"New York Works" Spending in the Adirondacks: We also question the spending of $70 million for "New York Works" undifferentiated through many activities, such as demolition of unsafe structures on state lands, state land stewardship public access and environmental and recreational projects. This will also fund "Adventure New York" which

is scheduled to be the lead funding source for the Exit 29/Frontier Town renovations for a new state campground, visitor center, commercial facilities and outdoor recreational center, totaling $32 million. We are concerned that the State of New York is building a new state campground in the same area as two private campgrounds that have operated for years and in an area where there are three other state campgrounds nearby. We're concerned that the Exit 29 plan does not include the most valuable and important property that is actually at Exit 29 and in serious disrepair.

We are also very concerned about state spending in the "Adventure New York" program that does not comply with Article 14, the forever wild provision, of the State Constitution. We call on the Assembly and the Senate to include language in the state budget that "Adventure New York" funding cannot be used for buildings on the Forest Preserve, whether through the hut to hut program, rental cabins, temporary yurt type structures, or some other means. This was decided a long time ago in a state constitutional amendment that was voted down. If the Cuomo Administration wants to build buildings on the forever wild Forest Preserve it should not be doing this through administrative fiat but through the formal process of amending the State Constitution.

Adirondack Park Agency Funding

The Governor proposes staff and funding levels at $4.6 million (a decrease of $300,000) and 54 FTE's (Full Time Equivalents) unchanged from FY 2016-17. The APA budget has been frozen for too long and needs enforcement, scientific, and project review staff.

Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

The budget proposes $635,000 from the Snowmobile Trail Development and Management Account proposed for this year. It's important that these trail are made to comply with the forever wild provision of the State Constitution. Budget language should stress this.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Protect the Adirondacks, please let me express our gratitude for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

Peter Bauer
Executive Director