



**Department of
Environmental
Conservation**

**Testimony of
Basil Seggos
Commissioner
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation**

**New York State Legislature
Senate Standing Committee on Finance
Assembly Standing Committee on Ways and Means
Hearing:**

**The 2018-2019 Executive Budget Recommendations for the
Department of Environmental Conservation**

February 27, 2018

Good morning, Chairwoman Young, Chairwoman Weinstein, and members of the legislative, fiscal and environmental conservation committees. I am Basil Seggos, Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). On behalf of DEC's nearly 3,000 dedicated professionals, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Governor's environmental priorities for State Fiscal Year 2018-2019.

With me this year are Chief of Staff Julie Tighe and Deputy Commissioner for Administration Jeff Stefanko.

The past year has seen a dramatic retreat from environmental protection at the federal level. Washington is leading an attack on the environment and science and it is jeopardizing the great gains we have made as a nation over the last forty years.

New York, by contrast, has set a high bar in environmental leadership. Protecting our air, water, and natural resources is critical not just for safeguarding human health, but for securing New York's economic future. Thanks to the Legislature, our many partners in advocacy, local government and business, and Governor Cuomo's uncompromising commitment to the environment, New York is providing national leadership on some of the most pressing issues of our time.

While Washington works to decimate federal funding for the environment, New York is investing billions to develop and expand renewable energy, strengthen clean water infrastructure, and complete strategic resiliency projects across the state.

While Washington denies the existence of climate change and works to scrap the Clean Power Plan, New York co-founded the bipartisan U.S. Climate Alliance and is committed to meeting our share of the emissions targets through record investments in renewables.

While Washington rolls back water and air protections, New York is regulating emerging contaminants, suing the federal government for upwind ozone emissions, and holding polluters accountable all across the state.

Two-thousand seventeen was another extraordinary year at DEC.

We continued our aggressive response to water contamination, most notably in Hoosick Falls, Petersburg, Newburgh, and across Long Island. In Newburgh alone, we spent nearly \$50 million in response to the Department of Defense's PFOS contamination that they failed to address and have recently completed construction of a drinking water filtration plant. Having stepped in when the federal government failed to do so, it is now their responsibility to reimburse the state for our efforts to protect public health. And our jointly-created Drinking Water Quality Council is developing drinking water standards for emerging contaminants such as PFC's and 1,4-dioxane.

Our first responders worked to protect life and property across the state and beyond. Forest Rangers conducted 346 rescue missions. Environmental Conservation Officers responded to more than 26,000 calls, issued over 22,000 tickets and conducted dozens of investigations into

environmental crimes. We responded to record flooding on Lake Ontario, and helped those outside our borders impacted by fires and hurricanes, including in Puerto Rico, Florida, Texas, Montana, and California.

Working with you, we secured generationally significant funding to protect water through the \$2.5 billion Clean Water Infrastructure Act. In year one, we provided \$255 million in new grants and \$527 million in low-cost financing from the Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC) to help local governments fund 169 projects. We dedicated another \$87 million for water quality protection, including land acquisition and salt storage. And we just announced \$15 million for the first year of the septic system replacement program to support the new program in 31 counties.

We launched a community air monitoring program in the South End of Albany to identify opportunities to reduce air pollution at the Ezra Prentice Homes. We will soon be expanding this model to other communities across the state.

We are fighting for a complete cleanup of GE's PCBs in the Hudson River. EPA must ensure that the dredging project is protective of human health and the environment. Our own data has shown that more work is needed, and the Governor and Attorney General have pledged to sue the EPA if they deem the dredging project complete.

The Governor's 2018-2019 budget continues his strong environmental legacy.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), a major milestone for this transformational program. The budget again proposes a \$300 million EPF, the third year in a row at this record level.

Investments from the EPF protect water sources, help forests and farms remain resilient, monitor air pollution in urban neighborhoods, provide access to public lands for hunting and fishing, help businesses become more sustainable, and battle invasive species—all while supporting thousands of jobs and billions in economic activity.

The budget continues the \$100 million a year Superfund program, which will allow us to continue addressing contamination at the Grumman plume in Long Island and dozens of other priority sites across the state.

The budget also continues the \$2.5 billion Clean Water Infrastructure Act to help our communities upgrade aging infrastructure, and prioritizes a specific \$20 million investment for the Niagara Falls wastewater treatment plant.

The budget advances the Governor's \$65 million program to combat harmful algal blooms, or HABs. HABs are becoming more frequent and intense, so we are launching an initiative to aggressively combat HABs that threaten drinking water and recreation on upstate waterways.

New York set the most aggressive climate change goals in the country—a 40 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and an 80 percent reduction by 2050. The Clean Energy

Standard requires us to obtain 50 percent of our energy from renewables by 2030. And we are conducting an in-depth study with NYSERDA on how to reach 100 percent renewables. To achieve these ambitious goals, our partners in state government are making record investments in clean energy programs.

At DEC, we will be expanding the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) to include “peaker” power plant units. Shortly we will be proposing regulations to end the use of coal for power in New York.

DEC is also working with NYSERDA and the Department of Transportation on a transformational plan to reduce emissions from the transportation sector—the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. Armed with the best ideas from business, local government, and advocates, DEC will also be investing the \$127 million in Volkswagen settlement proceeds in ways that will accelerate that transformation.

The budget proposes an organic waste recycling program to keep food scraps out of landfills and divert food to those in need. And we want to modernize the forest tax law to protect privately owned forestland and open space and promote the wood products industry.

Lastly, this budget continues Adventure NY, a multi-year campaign to connect more New Yorkers and visitors to the great outdoors. In its first year, Adventure NY had notable ribbon cuttings and groundbreakings across the state, such as the Five Rivers center, the Salmon River fish hatchery, Frontier Town, and many other locations in the Catskills, Adirondacks, and statewide.

To support all these initiatives, DEC’s budget for the coming year recommends State Operations appropriations of \$447.8 million and a Capital Budget totaling \$796.4 million. The budget maintains DEC’s staffing at 2,945 employees. This commitment will enable DEC to continue building a stronger, more resilient state.

Everyday, DEC is on the frontlines of protecting public health and the environment, while we ensure the safety of all those enjoying the great outdoors in New York. While Washington is polarized on so many issues, here in New York, our strong partnerships and our commitment to results are cause for optimism. I know we will succeed because, with you, we have been doing just that for seven years.

Once more, I’d like to thank the members of the committee for your time today and would be happy to answer your questions.