

UNIVERSITY POLICE | ENCON POLICE



PARK POLICE | FOREST RANGERS

2018 Joint Legislative Public Protection Hearing Testimony

Submitted on behalf of the Police Benevolent Association of New York State

By: Drew Cavanagh, Director of the Forest Ranger Superior Officer's Association of the PBA of New York State

February 7, 2018

Suite 1200 11 North Pearl Street, Albany New York 12207
(518) 433-5472

www.pbanys.org / pio@pbanys.org

Testimony by: Drew Cavanagh
Director of the Forest Ranger Superior Officer's
Association of the PBA of New York State ("PBA of
NYS")
PBA of NYS Board Member

Testimony before: 2018 Joint Legislative Hearing Committee on
Environmental Conservation

Date: February 7, 2018

Good afternoon respected members of the joint committee. My name is Drew Cavanagh, and I am the Director of the Forest Ranger Superior Officer's Association of the PBA of New York State ("PBA of NYS") and a current PBA board member. The PBA of NYS was established in 2011, and is the law enforcement labor union representing the interests of approximately 1,200 members of the New York State Agency Police Services Unit ("APSU"). I have been a New York State Forest Ranger for 25 years. Currently I am a Forest Ranger Captain assigned to DEC Region Six ("6") which covers the western Adirondacks.

My testimony today will focus on the budget priorities of the New York State Forest Rangers. Today there are 137 Forest Rangers in New York State. The 137 Forest Rangers are responsible for 4,934,951 total acres of DEC administered lands. By comparison, in 1970, there were 140 Forest Rangers and only 3.5 million total acres of DEC administered land. This is evidence that over the past half century the number of Forest Rangers has remained stagnant while DEC has acquired roughly 30 percent more landmass. The Legislature and Governor's efforts to drive tourism have been successful in increasing usage of DEC administered land. The good news is more people are using the wilderness and great outdoors. The bad news is that more people are using the wilderness and great outdoors. It is truly a double edged sword.

The PBA of NYS respectfully submits that a more appropriate number of New York State Forest Rangers is 175 and not the current 137 force size. Increasing the number of Forest Rangers to 175 is justified by weighing public safety, outsourcing Forest Rangers to emergency response needs outside of New York State, and examining the historical amount of acreage that a Forest Ranger has been accustomed to patrolling.

Today, DEC administered landmass is equal to approximately 5 million acres, and assuming the state had 175 Forest Rangers, each Forest Ranger would be responsible for approximately 28,500 acres. The reduced size of the territory for each Forest Ranger will lead to faster response times to search and rescue missions and help curtail overtime costs for New York State. In addition, a force of 175 will give the Forest Rangers more flexibility and a work force to respond to out of state needs which generates revenue for New York State since the costs are reimbursed by the other state and/or federal government.

A comparison of the National Park Service data on Rangers and acreage statistics highlights the inadequacy of the current staffing levels in New York State. For instance, Yellowstone National Park is approximately 2.2 million acres of land and has 330 rangers assigned to it.¹ Thus, Yellowstone Park, which is less than one-half of the size of DEC Administered Land, has 60% more rangers than all of New York State. The national ratio of rangers to all National Park Service administered land is no different. Collectively, National Parks across the country equate to approximately 84.9 million acres. In total, there are 3,800 permanent rangers assigned to the National Parks. This amounts to approximately one ranger for every 22,000 acres of National Park land. By contrast, New York State Forest Rangers must currently cover approximately 40,000 acres.

Given the lack of Forest Rangers, the New York State legislature should include funding for a robust academy of new Forest Rangers. More academies will allow New York State to explore other cost saving initiatives such as reducing overtime costs and seeking reimbursement from federal emergency response initiatives. Of course, this will also provide enhanced public safety for tourists and New Yorkers who enjoy the great outdoors within New York State.

We are thankful for the actions of Assemblyman Steve Englebright, chair of the environmental conservation committee, and Senator Rich Funke, Chair of the Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks and Recreation committee, who have publically stated that more Forest Rangers are needed in New York State and wrote to Governor Cuomo asking for increases in Forest Ranger staffing.² We urge the entire legislature to take action and increase Forest Ranger staffing.

¹ See <https://www.nps.gov/yell/faqs.htm>

² See *attached* Letter to Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo by Assemblyman Steve Englebright, Chairman of the NYS Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee dated January 2, 2018;

Letter to Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo by Senator Rich Funke, Chairman of the NYS Senate Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks and Recreation committee dated January 26, 2018.

In addition, the PBA of NYS will advocate for A.1459 (Jenne) / S.3987 (Funke) entitled "An act to amend the environmental conservation law, in relation to protecting newly acquired state land". The proposed legislation is attempting to reduce the amount of acreage that each Forest Ranger is responsible for patrolling. The bill would add one new full time equivalent forest ranger position for every thirty thousand acres of land that is acquired. The justification for the legislation is that it would ensure Forest Rangers are granted the appropriate resources necessary to meet their expanded responsibilities, and protect environmentally preserved land within the state's jurisdiction.

It should be remembered that Forest Rangers wrote over 2,500 tickets for violations of the Environmental Conservation Law and other related offenses. In addition, Forest Rangers are responsible for managing, investigating and directing resources assigned to wildfire emergencies. This is a statewide function no other police officer or state fire official is mandated to perform. The diverse skillset of a Forest Ranger is also demonstrated by their statewide service as incident managers and first responders. Arthur Perryman's testimony will focus more on those topics.

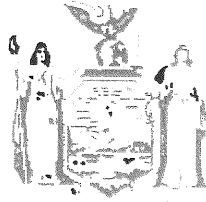
In closing, the New York State Forest Rangers ask that the Legislature increased staffing levels by dedicating funding in this State Budget process to provide 175 Rangers. Since DEC administered landmass is equal to approximately five million acres, and assuming the State had a Forest Ranger staff size of 175 would essentially mean that each Ranger would be responsible for approximately 28,500 acres. This small increase in staffing will provide a more robust Forest Ranger workforce that will allow us to better serve and protect all New Yorkers. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today.

CHAIRMAN
CULTURAL AFFAIRS

VICE-CHAIRMAN
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION
AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

COMMITTEE MEMBER
AGING
AGRICULTURE
CITIES
COMMERCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
& SMALL BUSINESS
CONSUMER PROTECTION
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
HIGHER EDUCATION

**THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK**



RICH FUNKE
Senator, 55TH District

ALBANY OFFICE:
ROOM 905
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247
(518) 495-2215
FAX: (518) 496-6245

DISTRICT OFFICE:
PACK BETTS LANDING
SUITE 230
FAIRPORT, NEW YORK 14450
(516) 223-1800
FAX: (516) 223-3157

E-MAIL ADDRESS:
FUNKE@NYSenate.GOV

WEBSITE:
FUNKE.NYSenate.GOV

January 26, 2018

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor
NYS Executive Chamber
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

As you put forward your 30 day amendments to the 2018-19 State budget proposal, I urge you to consider increasing the staffing levels at the State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and at the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). For several years DEC and OPRHP have been models for doing more with less – a theme you mentioned prominently. The current staffing levels are, however, insufficient.

Greater enforcement through additional staffing would provide significant benefits including: increased security for our citizens and visitors alike; a cleaner environment; less cost to State and local governments; and ensuring that polluters and litterers, and not taxpayers, are forced to pay for cleanups. As tourism has increased and the natural wonders of New York's open spaces have become more recognized, forest rangers have been called upon with increasing frequency, and Park Police officers are being spread very thin.

Currently, there are less than 140 forest rangers responsible for approximately 5 million acres of land, with responsibilities ranging from fugitive apprehension to search and rescue. To put this in perspective, the number of forest rangers is roughly the same as it was in the 1970's, but the amount of land they patrol has increased by approximately 1.4 million acres.

At present, there are 250 Park Police Officers responsible for more than 250 parks encompassing 350,000 acres, concert venues, historic sites, recreational trails, golf courses, boat launches and more. These sites are visited by 69 million people annually. Park Police are responsible for the safety of the millions of visitors while patrolling on foot, ATVs, vehicles, 4WD's, bicycles, snowmobiles, jet ski's and vessels. These officers provide anti-terrorism

protection, arrests for serious felonies and other crimes, conduct criminal investigations, wilderness/marine/high angle cliff and gorge rescues and other emergency services and responses.

While I understand the constraints faced in this year's budget, I believe it necessary to increase staffing levels both at DEC and OPRHP because of the important work they do and the fact that they continue to see an increase in responsibilities with reduced or steady staffing levels, in some cases due to attrition. Undoubtedly, there are many other areas of both of these departments that would also benefit from additional staff, and I ask that you please consider such an increase. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Rich Funke, Chairman
NYS Senate Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks and Recreation Committee

CC:

Senator Flanagan, Majority Leader, NYS Senate
Senator Young, Chair, Senate Finance Committee
David Previte, Majority Counsel/ Program
Shawn MacKinnon, Senate Finance
James Curran, Majority Counsel/ Program
Nicole Fosco, Senate Finance



THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

STEVEN ENGLEBRIGHT
4 Assembly District
Suffolk County

January 2, 2018

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor
NYS Executive Chamber
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

Thank you for your visionary State of the State message earlier today in which you rightly emphasized the importance of focusing on environmental challenges that threaten public health and safety as we go forward into what will be a challenging year. As you put the finishing touches on your 2017-18 State budget proposal, I urge you to consider increasing the staffing levels at the State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). For several years DEC has been a model for doing more with less – a theme that you mentioned prominently. The current staffing levels are, however, insufficient. Such an assessment would be true based solely on a review of DEC's State obligations; however, in light of the dramatic adverse environmental impacts taking place at the federal level, staff support at the State level has become increasingly important to fill the gaps left behind.

Greater enforcement provides one compelling example where additional staffing would provide significant benefits including: a cleaner environment; less cost to State and local governments; and, ensuring that polluters, and not taxpayers, are forced to pay for cleanups. Illegal dumping on Long Island remains a problem, contaminating public parks and the environment, and more environmental conservation officers could help decrease such activities. Also related to enforcement, as tourism has increased and the natural wonders of New York's open spaces have become more recognized, forest rangers have been called upon with increasing frequency. Currently there are less than 140 forest rangers responsible for approximately 5 million acres of land, with responsibilities ranging from fugitive apprehension to search and rescue. To put this in perspective, the number of forest rangers is roughly the same as it was in the 1970's, but the amount of land they patrol has increased by approximately 1.4 million acres.

Page 2

In addition, we are all too well aware of the challenges faced by potential water contamination. Additional DEC staff in the remedial and permitting divisions would help address not only legacy contamination, but also to identify potential future contamination prior to any human or environmental harm.

These are just a few examples of the important work DEC performs. Undoubtedly, there are many other areas of the Department that would also benefit from additional staff and I again ask that you please consider such an increase. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Very sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steve Englebright".

Steve Englebright, Chairman
NYS Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee