



**Testimony of
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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**

January 23, 2019

Good morning, Chairwoman Krueger, Chairwoman Weinstein, and members of the legislative, fiscal, and environmental conservation committees. I am Basil Seggos, Commissioner of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). On behalf of DEC's 3,100 dedicated employees, thank you for the opportunity to discuss Governor Cuomo's environmental priorities for State Fiscal Year 2019-2020.

President Trump is waging an unprecedented assault on our environment. This assault risks decades of conservation progress, endangers our economic sustainability, and could not come at a worse time, with all signs pointing to imminent dangers from a changing climate. America needs strong leadership from Washington, D.C., to address the most pressing threats to our water, land, air, and climate. Failing that, the states must lead.

New York State stands in complete defiance of the President's attack on our environment. We have established the most ambitious environmental and clean energy agenda in the nation, and we are not done yet. We are doing everything in our power to advance comprehensive policies that show the nation and the world it is possible to spark significant economic progress while taking bold actions on the environment and energy.

Through the Governor's steadfast leadership and the steadfast support of our partners in the legislature, we have made critical progress in combating climate change, rebuilding our water infrastructure, eliminating contamination in our air, water, and land, improving resiliency, and connecting more New Yorkers with outdoor adventures like hunting, fishing, and camping.

Within the last year alone, we have also made significant strides on several key initiatives, including;

- Implementing the \$65 million, four-point initiative to aggressively combat harmful algal blooms;
- Announcing our plan to invest the \$127.7 million Volkswagen settlement in electric vehicles and clean transportation;
- Launching the largest expansion of artificial reefs in state history;
- Approving the State Land classification for Boreas Ponds, the largest Forest Preserve addition in the history of the Adirondacks;
- Shutting down Tonawanda Coke, which dramatically improved air quality in the Buffalo area;
- Suing the federal government for the Trump Administration's egregious actions, including protecting New Yorkers from smog generated out of state; working to block seismic testing in the Atlantic Ocean, which harms highly sensitive marine mammals; fighting against the repeal of the Clean Power Plan; and most recently, filing suit to fight unfair federal allocations of fluke, which hurt New York's commercial fishery;
- Suing the manufacturers of firefighting foams for their contributions to PFOS and PFOA contamination in New York's environment and communities, including our water resources;
- Fast-tracking the drilling and completion of the first four groundwater extraction wells designed to contain the Navy/Grumman plume;

- Issuing a comprehensive study of the upper Hudson River, which confirmed GE's PCB cleanup is far from complete;
- Executing the largest takedown of illegal dumping in New York history through Operation TrashNet;
- Awarding \$4.7 million in Environmental Justice grants to communities statewide;
- Responding to 10,449 spills across the state to protect public health and the environment;
- Our ECOs responding to more than 21,668 calls, include major floods on Seneca Lake, issuing 20,665 tickets ranging from poaching to illegal dumping, and even training law enforcement partners in Africa to crack down on the illegal ivory trade; and
- Our Forest Rangers performing 346 search and rescue missions, and successfully leading efforts to battle the 547-acre Altona Flat Rock Wildfire.

The Governor's 2019-2020 Executive Budget Proposal is his most ambitious yet. It doubles down on our nation-leading environmental agenda.

While the federal government continues to deny climate change, the Governor has proposed the Green New Deal, a transformative plan that will build on the state's already robust climate action agenda and lead us to carbon neutrality while ensuring a just transition for the state's workforce, spurring economic growth and prioritizing the needs of low- and moderate-income New Yorkers. In particular, the Green New Deal, through the Climate Leadership Act, sets New York State on a path to a carbon-free power grid by 2040, and a carbon-free economy as soon as is practicable. We look forward to working quickly with the legislature to make this proposal a reality.

We also propose to boost the historic \$2.5 billion Clean Water Infrastructure Act of 2017 by another \$2.5 billion, bringing the total to \$5 billion. This is one of the largest grant programs of its kind in the United States. Demand for this funding remains high and it's transforming our communities by modernizing our hidden, but critical, infrastructure.

Once again, we propose to maintain the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) at \$300 million. The EPF provides essential resources for open space protection and access, climate change mitigation and adaptation, environmental justice programs, farms, and recycling.

New York is also pushing back and pursuing legal action on federal proposals to allow offshore oil and gas drilling. The Executive Budget includes legislation that will protect New York State's environment and coastal waters by prohibiting offshore oil and gas development.

To respond to the global recycling crisis and address issues related to contamination of recycled materials, we propose to expand the Bottle Bill to make most non-alcoholic beverage containers eligible for a five-cent redemption, including those for sports drinks, energy drinks, fruit and vegetable beverages, and ready-to-drink teas and coffees.

In addition, driven by the Plastic Bag Taskforce's recommendations, we are proposing a statewide ban on plastic bags while authorizing localities to establish their own fees on paper bag alternatives. These two proposals will help reduce the scourge of plastic litter and improve recycling in the state.

We also proposed the Consumer Chemical Awareness Act to keep New Yorkers informed about potentially hazardous chemicals in designated products. The Act authorizes DEC, in consultation with the Departments of Health and State, to develop regulations establishing an on-package labeling requirement for designated products.

To support all these initiatives, DEC's budget for the coming year recommends State Operations appropriations of \$459.7 million and a Capital Budget totaling \$1.3 billion. The budget increases DEC's staffing to 3,115 employees and provides \$55.25 million in NY Works funding for infrastructure projects across the state. This commitment will enable DEC to continue building a stronger, more resilient state for the next generation of New Yorkers.