



## **Restoring ZBGA to \$16 million means Innovative and Inspiring Environmental Education, Quality Jobs, and Economic Development to every corner of New York State**

January 27, 2020

2020 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing, Environmental Conservation

Honorable Liz Krueger, Helene Weinstein, Todd Kaminsky, and Steven Englebright:

From the Buffalo and Erie Botanical Garden to the New York Aquarium in Brooklyn and everywhere in between, the Zoos, Botanical Gardens, and Aquaria (ZBGA) line of the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) directly supports and protects the fragile living collections of 95 zoos, botanical gardens, nature centers and aquaria in every corner of New York State.

The EPF, the dedicated source of funding for programs like ZBGA and other critical programs that protect our clean water and natural resources was maintained at \$300M in the SFY 20 / 21 Executive Budget proposal, a level the Coalition supports yet hopes to grow in the coming years.

**For reasons that are not clear, the ZBGA appropriation was cut in the SFY 20 / 21 Executive Budget by 12.5%, bringing it from its current level of \$16M down to \$14M. A \$2M cut to the appropriation may result in a proportionate cut to each grant recipient – a reduction too severe for any non-profit organization that could result in the loss of jobs, operating hours, and the impactful work we do to educate New Yorkers about their connection to the natural world.**

We are extremely grateful to the Assembly and Senate for protecting and growing this program over the last 10 years, and are again asking to make restoration a priority with your leadership and in your one-house budgets.

### **Restoring ZBGA to \$16M maintains quality environmental literacy programs statewide:**

While living museums work hard at their mission by helping to breed and protect endangered species, addressing the impacts of global climate change, and fighting the spread of invasive species, we are most proud of is educating and inspiring thousands of public school teachers and millions of school children, literally growing the next generation of conservation stewards. It is not a stretch to say that living museums are the state's heartbeat of ecological literacy. Critical to the goals of the EPF, living museums educate the next generation of conservation stewards and create an informed electorate that values and understands the severe threat to our planet posed by climate change.

Perhaps Assemblyman Steven Englebright said it best in The New York Times, "It is through these institutions - the excitement of a trip to the zoo, or the ability to touch an exotic plant at the botanical gardens - that stirs the imagination and leads to a lifetime commitment to caring about the natural world."

## **Restoring ZBGA to \$16M maintains employment and fuels local economic development:**

Now celebrating over 40 years of investment, ZBGA has also proven its economic benefits to the entire state. Living museums generate millions of dollars each year for the state in tourism and economic development. 12 million visitors sought refuge in our environmental sanctuaries, and these numbers are growing as people stay closer to home. Institutions like the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences, the Utica Zoo, and the Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary and Audubon Center on Long Island are core to stabilizing local economies by providing good paying jobs and supporting local businesses.

**The Wild Center (TWC), and other upstate living museums, are major catalysts and economic engines for the North Country.** Visitors to TWC generated more than \$14 million in total regional revenue and led to the creation of 277 jobs in a single year. Salaries earned by TWC employees had a \$2.4 million impact in the North Country, meaning that money stayed local and was spent on groceries, clothing, mortgages, taxes, rent, and fuel among other things. In addition to the 38 full time jobs at The Wild Center, 19 new jobs were supported through these expenditures. 6 out of 7 visitors made Tupper Lake their destination of choice because of The Wild Center. On average, they stayed in the region for more than four days and spent \$893.

### **Mohonk Preserve**

A survey of Mohonk Preserve, New York State's largest non-profit nature preserve and ZBGA recipient, indicated that its 150,000 annual visitors generate a conservative \$3 million in direct food, lodging, and other retail expenditures (bike rentals, rock climbing equipment, gas, etc.) per year, while generating 13,500 lodging nights per year. The Mohonk Preserve generates over \$200,000 in sales tax revenues for Ulster County. Furthermore, this activity sustains 75 tourism-related jobs. Using a multiplier of **x2** for how the dollar cycles through the regional economy, the total economic impact of this publicly accessible, non-governmental natural area is well over **\$6 million** per year to the Hudson Valley

**Wildlife Conservation Society** and **The New York Botanical Garden** both have a major economic impact upon the Bronx and New York City – generating significant amounts of employment, purchasing goods and services, and drawing visitors and visitor spending to the city. This impact benefits not just the private sector, but also generates substantial tax revenues through sales and income tax receipts from employees. A recent survey of The New York Botanical Garden's economic activity found that the Garden's direct and indirect contribution to New York State was nearly \$154 million. Overall, the total economic activity generated by Wildlife Conservation Society during fiscal year 2010 was \$315.6 million, with an associated \$113.3 million in total earnings and over 2,500 total full-time jobs.

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