

**Environmental Protection Fund (Adirondack and Catskill Groups)**

Yellow = support

Green = increase

Blue=new

**Add/New in EPF:**

- \$200,000 Adirondack Watershed Institute (AWI Zoe Smith for more information)
- \$200,000 Atmospheric Science Research Center (ASRC) Whiteface Mountain Field Station (ADK or Scott McKim ARSC for more information)
- \$1 million Carrying Capacity Study or VUM for Saranac Lake Complex (Protect the Adirondacks for more information)
- \$1 million for Wildlife Research on State Lands (Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve)
- \$2 million for the Adirondack Experience (ADKX) exhibit on the African American Experience in the Adirondacks (Adirondack Council for more information)

Open Space Account	FY23-24 Enacted	FY24-25 Executive Proposed	Request	More info
<b>Open Space / Land Conservation</b>	38,900	34,500	50 million	
LTA Conservation Partnership Grant Program	3,000	3,000	3.07 million	Adirondack Council
Urban Forestry (incl. funding for cities & re-treing public lands)	3,200	3,200		
Projects in DEC Regions 1-3	4,000	4,000		
LTA Conservation Easement Program	1,500	1,500	1.5 million	Adirondack Council
Village of Lake Placid Rail Trail	300	0		
OPRHP/Saratoga PLAN Snake Hill	1,000	0		
Farmland Protection	21,000	18,250		
Tug Hill Tomorrow for Ft. Drum ACUB	1,000	500		
Cornell University Land Class/Master Soils List	97	106		
Agricultural Waste Management	1,500	1,500		
Cornell Dairy Acceleration Program	700	700		
Municipal Non-point Source Pollution Control	6,200	6,000		
Cornell Community Integrated Pest Management	1,000	1,000		
Agricultural Non-point Source Pollution Control	19,500	19,000		
Cornell Integrated Pest Management Program	2,000	2,000		
Suffolk County Cornell Cooperative Nutrient Management	500	500		
Cornell Pesticide Management Education Program	250	250		
Hudson River Estuary Program	7,500	7,250		
Mohawk River Action Plan	1,000	1,000		
Biodiversity / Landowner Habitat Conservation Program	1,850	1,850		
Pollinator diversity research (incl. Cornell funding)	500	500		
Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies Catskill Research	100	100	\$200	Cary/Catskill Center/ADK
Albany Pine Bush Commission	3,000	3,000		
Long Island Pine Barrens Commission	2,500	2,500		
Long Island South Shore Estuary Reserve	2,000	2,000		
Finger Lakes/Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance	2,750	2,750		
Lake Erie Watershed Protection / Erie Co. SWCD	250	250		
Lake George Park Commission	900	900		
<b>Invasive Species</b>	18,550	17,000	20 million	
Eradication Grants	5,750	5,750		
Cornell Hemlock Woolly Adelgid project	500	500	\$500	Cornell/Catskill Center/ADK
Cornell Plant Certification Program	120	120		
Southern Pine Beetle incl. Rx Fire in Pine Barrens	500	500		
Ocean and Great Lakes Initiative	22,500	21,000		
Peconic Estuary Program	550	550		
Billion Oyster Project Head of Bay Oyster Reef	500	0		
Water Quality Improvement Program	22,000	21,000		
Suffolk County / DEC Nitrogen Reduction	3,000	3,000		
Suffolk County Sewer Improvement Projects	1,500	1,500		
Nassau County Bay Park STP, well testing & LINAP	5,000	5,000		
Source Water Assessment Plans	5,000	5,000		
Chautauqua Lake Partnership	95	95		
Chatauqua Lake Association	150	150		
Stony Brook wastewater and phosphorus pilots	1,000	1,000		
Eastern Finger Lakes Watershed Basin Program	0	1,200		
Allegheny River Watershed Program, incl. Chatauqua Lake projects	0	1,000		
Lake Erie -Niagara River watershed basin program	0	1,000		
Long Beach Salt Storage Done	500	0		
Lake Ossi restoration	25	0		
Save the Great South Bay	500	0		
Town of Southeast Peach Lake Brook restoration	100	0		
Soil and Water Conservation Districts	16,000	18,000		
Water Resources Commissions	1,085	0		
Susquehanna River Basin Commission	259	0		
Delaware River Basin Commission	359	0		
Ohio River Basin Commission	14	0		
Interstate Environmental Commission	42	0		
New England Interstate Commission	38	0		
Urban Farm & Community Garden Grant Program	0	2,325		
Cornell University	0	325		
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>187,085</b>	<b>179,075</b>		

<b>Parks and Recreation Account</b>				
State Land Stewardship	47,525	47,025	50 million	
ORDA/Belleayre Mountain	1,000	1,000	1 million	Catskill Center
Parks & Trails NY Grants Program	2,000	2,000	2 million	PTNY
NY Natural Heritage Program Protected Areas Database	18	18		
Adirondack and Catskill visitor safety & wilderness protection	8,000	8,000	10 million	ADK/Catskill Center
Town of North Elba for Adirondack Loj Road	0	1,250	1.250 mil (from 10 mil above)	ADK
Adirondack Mountain Club High Peaks Info Center	100	0	\$250 Restore	ADK
Adirondack Architectural Heritage Camp Santanoni Mngt	500	0	\$500 Restore	AARCH
Ausable River Association for Adirondack Lake ecosystem survey	2,000	0	3 million Restore	ASRA/ Adirondack Council
Waterfront Revitalization Program	14,275	13,000		
Inner City/Underserved	10,500	10,500		
LWRP Updates to mitigate climate risks	2,000	2,000		
Niagara River Greenway Commission	300	300		
Municipal Parks	26,000	22,750		
Inner City/Underserved	13,000	13,000		
Tivoli Park	250	250		
Hudson River Valley Trail Grants	500	500		
SUNY ESF for Adirondack VICs	250	250	\$250	ESF
Paul Smiths for Adirondack VICs	250	250	\$250	Paul Smiths
Catskill Center for Conservation and Development VIC	200	200	\$250	Catskill Center
Western NY Land Conservancy Riverline	225	0		
Amherst Town Splashpad	250	0		
Hudson River Park	4,200	4,400		
ZBGA	20,000	17,000		
Navigation Law	2,300	2,300		
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>114,300</b>	<b>106,475</b>		
<b>Solid Waste Account</b>				
Municipal Recycling	19,000	16,000		
Organics/Food Waste Programs	2,500	2,500		
Secondary Materials Markets	650	650		
Pollution Prevention Institute	4,600	4,600		
Interstate Chemical Clearinghouse	250	250		
Pesticide Program	1,500	1,500		
Long Island Pesticide Prevention	200	200		
Natural Resource Damage Assessment	1,775	1,775		
Landfill Closure / Gas Management	300	300		
Environmental Justice	13,000	12,000		
Community Impact Grants Program	4,000	4,000		
SUNY ESF Center for Native Peoples and the Environment	746	1,142		SUNY ESF
Connect Kids Outdoor Recreation Program	3,000	3,000		DEC
Environmental Health	12,750	9,250		
Childrens Environmental Health Centers	4,000	2,000		
Fresh Connect and programs to expand access to fresh food	3,850	3,850		
Clean Sweep	500	500		
Stony Brook wastewater and 1,4 dioxane pilot projects	1,000	1,000		
USGS LI Groundwater Study	1,500	0		
Brownfield Opportunity Area Grants	2,000	2,000		
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>55,575</b>	<b>48,075</b>		
<b>Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Account</b>				
Greenhouse Gas Reduction Outside Power Sector	2,900	2,400		
Regenerate NY grant program	500	500		
Refrigeration Council pilot program	500	500		
Community Forests Program	1,000	500		
Climate Adaptation	7,925	6,525		
Wood Products Development Council	200	200		
Climate Coordinators	2,000	2,000		
Timbuctoo Pipeline Summer Climate and Careers Institute	2,100	0	2.1 million Restore	Adirondack Council/ESF
Resilience Planting Program	500	500		
Public TV Climate Teaching Tools	500	0		
Climate and Applied Forestry Research Institute	1,000	1,000		
The Nature Conservancy Staying Connected Initiative	25	25		
<b>Smart Growth Grants</b>	<b>3,650</b>	<b>4,000</b>	<b>Support</b>	
Climate Resilient Farms	15,250	15,250		
Cornell Soil Health Program	500	500		
Forest Preservation on Ag land for carbon sequestration	500	0		
Climate Smart Communities Projects	13,500	12,500		
Municipal EV fast chargers *	1,000	0		
Farmers' Market Resiliency Grant Program	0	700		
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>43,225</b>	<b>41,375</b>		
Offload of state agency staffing costs	0	-25,000		
<b>TOTAL EPF</b>	<b>400,000</b>	<b>375,000</b>	<b>400 million no agency staff raid</b>	

000s omitted. Programs in italics are sub-allocations within programs.

\*program included in appropriation but not allocated a specific amount

Chart showing FY23-24 and exec proposal originally compiled by The Nature Conservancy. January 16, 2024. Adapted by ADK to reflect requests by Adirondack and Catskill groups in specific categories

### ***Additional budget requests by Adirondack Groups***

--\$600 million for Clean Water Infrastructure Act  
(Adirondack Council for more information)

--\$420 thousand Adirondack Diversity Initiative  
(Adirondack Wilderness Advocates for more  
information)



6 November 2023

Governor Kathy Hochul  
 Executive Chamber  
 Capitol Building  
 Albany, NY, 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,  
**The Catskill and Adirondack Forest Preserve Parks** collectively represent over 6.5 million acres of land or nearly **a quarter of New York State**. This incredible resource serves all New Yorkers by protecting public wildlands, water, and providing recreational access for health and well-being, supporting local and state tourism and economies, and preserving intact mature forests and habitat. The Adirondack and Catskill regions are home to 200,000 residents and serve over 25 million visitors annually. In our current climate crisis, **the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve Parks serve as the lungs of New York, a great force to combat climate change** as its forests provide oxygen and sequester carbon. They protect critical habitat, and provide **fresh drinking water to millions**, including those in New York City.

The undersigned groups are **appreciative of the historic commitment** to the \$400 million Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), and passage and roll-out of the \$4.2 billion Clean Water, Clean Air, Green Jobs Bond Act—Thank you! These are exciting accomplishments that benefit the whole state. We are also grateful for the boost in agency staff last year for the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to help implement the Bond Act and the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act.

**Thank you for your leadership specifically** in supporting the Catskill and Adirondack Forest Preserve Parks by providing **\$8 million in dedicated funds** the past two years within the nearly \$50 million of State Land Stewardship funding in the EPF. Projects are now being implemented with this funding including the expansion of trail work, more educational stewards, improvements to recreation infrastructure (e.g., trailheads, parking, and water access), projects to improve inclusivity and accessibility, and Visitor Use Management (VUM) planning and implementation.

The dedicated funding line in the EPF for the Catskills and Adirondacks is an impressive step toward meeting the vision outlined by the Catskill Strategic Planning Advisory Group (CAG) and the Adirondack High Peaks Strategic Planning Advisory Group (HPAG), to **protect wilderness, provide safe and welcoming visitor experiences, and to invest in Catskill and Adirondack communities**. We must continue our progress toward this shared vision and **urge you in FY 24-25 to support the following:**

- **Stewardship**

- **Retain dedicated stewardship funding** in the EPF for the Catskill and Adirondack Forest Preserve Parks as an annual appropriation of \$10 million under State Land Stewardship.
- **Continued support for Forest Preserve Visitor Centers** in the EPF.
- **Support research and monitoring** of climate change, pollution, and other causes of environmental stress in the Adirondacks and Catskills.
- **Develop an accessibility policy** for DEC-managed lands.
- **Clear the backlog of land conservancy acreage** under agreement for public land acquisition to meet New York State climate goals.

- **Sustainability**

- **Invest in Adirondack and Catskill communities** through support of Bond Act projects, Smart Growth initiatives, and DEI initiatives; and through promoting affordable housing, cellular and broadband connectivity, and special Adirondack ambulance districts.
- **Continue to add and support agency staff** and promote streamlining and reforms to make hiring and retaining agency staff more efficient.

## **Stewardship**

### **Retain Dedicated Stewardship Funding in the EPF and Include Trails as Bondable Investments**

**Stewardship funding for recreational infrastructure supports Adirondack and Catskill communities.** Studies show that the Forest Preserve and its wilderness experiences, such as hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing, help sustain regional economies and property values in the Adirondacks and Catskills. **Unfortunately, Bond Act funding will not cover stewardship needs** funded by the dedicated Forest Preserve line, such as education and the eligibility of trails as bondable in New York State is currently uncertain. Given the durability of trails, however, and the need for higher trail standards to enhance access, protect natural resources, and improve stewardship, we urge the state to include trail building and trail maintenance as appropriate and essential uses of Bond Act funds. Other states like California can provide examples of bonding for trails. This is especially time sensitive as the Long Path, another premier long-distance trail, approaches the milestone of being the first trail to directly connect New York City and both Forest Preserves along a single route. The upcoming 100th anniversary of the 120-mile Northville-Placid trail this year is a testament to trail durability. **The maintenance of existing trails, the greatest need, is even more unlikely to receive Bond Act funding.**

The projects supported by the Catskill and Adirondack dedicated funding line in the EPF are not one and done projects, but ongoing needs. Trails must be maintained and improved annually. Educational stewards are needed every year to help visitors have safe experiences. Building capacity in **Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity, and Justice (DEIJ)** initiatives in the Adirondack and Catskill Parks will require annual investments such as by implementing the recommendations of the **Open Spaces for All report** led by the New York Outdoor Recreation Coalition (NYORC) and the Open Space Institute (OSI).

**Continued support for VUM planning and implementation** is also an ongoing need, such as the projects currently funded for the Adirondack High Peaks and Kaaterskill Clove in the Catskills. Other popular areas desperately need VUM planning such as the Lake George Wild Forest, which is one of the most complex and heavily used land units in the Forest Preserve, and in the Catskills, the currently trailless high peaks are seeing natural resource degradation due to increased visitation.

Dedicated stewardship funding is also needed to **continue support for accessibility** in the Adirondacks and Catskills. Accessible and sustainable trail infrastructure provides opportunities for all visitors whether they be families, new recreators, or individuals with mobility challenges. Efforts to create new trail experiences for a wider range of people should be considered through the lens of accessibility. **To promote access for all we urge DEC to develop a comprehensive accessibility policy** to guide land managers in promoting accessibility for its managed lands statewide, including the Forest Preserve. Implementing an accessibility policy as part of DEC's overall Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiative will create synergy with the State effort to promote inclusivity in access to state lands for all people.

#### Continue Support for Visitor Centers

Visitor centers currently address stewardship and promote communities in the Forest Preserve Parks. These include the Catskills Visitor Center in Mt. Tremper, the Paul Smith's Visitor Interpretive Center, the ESF Adirondack Interpretive Center in Newcomb, the High Peaks Information Center at the Heart Lake Program Center in North Elba. These facilities are strategically located and attract visitors traveling to popular areas. **Continued funding of these strategic centers**, which rely heavily on private fundraising, **is critical as they serve to protect the Forest Preserve, keep recreators safe**, educate youth and the public, **and highlight community assets**.

#### Support Research and Monitoring of Environmental Stress and Ecological Vital Signs

Sustained monitoring of the ecological vital signs of the Forest Preserve is imperative to protect the health and integrity of New York State's treasured Adirondack and Catskill parks. Tracking these ecological indicators - biodiversity, air and water quality, and climate resilience - is essential for the well-being of the people and lands of the state of New York. Several facilities in the Adirondacks and Catskills specialize in monitoring ecological vital signs including, **The Adirondack Watershed Institute (AWI), The Atmospheric Sciences Research Center (ASRC) Whiteface Mountain Field Station, and Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies**. These facilities track pollutants in air and water, monitor weather, disseminate data to other researchers and the public, and provide inclusive opportunities for interns and research fellows.

Research that informs management actions is called for in both the HPAG and CAG reports, as well as in the Adirondack Vision 2050 Report. For example, carrying capacity studies like the one proposed for **the Saranac Lake Complex in the Adirondacks** are necessary to protect aquatic habitats. Increased support of Cary Institutes' **Catskill Science Collaborative** is also essential as is **continued support to combat invasive species** by supporting the Forest Preserve PRISMs, including **The Nature Conservancy's** Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program (APIPP), and the **Catskill Center's** Catskill Regional Invasive Species Partnership (CRISP), and projects that partner with them such as Cornell's **NYS Hemlock Initiative** to combat Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. And to understand the extent of climate change impacts on Adirondack lakes—habitat quality, climate sensitive species distributions, carbon accounting, and harmful algae blooms—and guide science-based management for decades to come, supporting the consortium-based Survey of Climate Change and Adirondack Lake Ecosystems or **SCALE**, **and project partners such as the Ausable River Association, is essential to the future of water quality** throughout New York State.

#### Fix Land Conservancy Acreage Backlog to Meet Climate Goals

At a time when the future of the planet depends on protecting open space, land protection should be one of NYS' highest priorities. NYS land acquisition has slowed down to a trickle. In the 2000s - 2010s DEC and OPRHP were purchasing an average of 70,000 acres (fee and easement) annually. **In 2020 this dropped to 6,005 acres and DEC only purchased 4,416 acres in 2022. Currently NYS Land Trusts have purchased and are holding over 96,000 acres of land** that NY State asked them to buy with a fair market value of over \$150 million. The majority of this acreage is in the Forest Preserves. NY Land Trusts' "holds" are longer than 5 years; in the past this hold period averaged two years. The backlog, and the burden on land trusts whose ability to protect open space has been severely impacted, has become so acute that legislation was proposed last year to bring New York's acquisition process in line with the streamlined efficient practices used by the federal government and other states. Clearly, fixing this issue is the only way that New York will meet its climate and 30x30 goals.

#### Sustainability

### Invest in Adirondack and Catskill Park Communities

*Healthy Parks require Healthy Communities.* Unlike other state parks, Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve Parks contain communities where people live, work, and raise families. These communities and their businesses are part of the fabric of the Parks, and they provide lodging, food, entertainment, and emergency services to park visitors. The **Park Towns and Villages** are integral parts of the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve Parks. As such they **need infrastructure support for quality of residential life, and for safe and enjoyable visitor experiences that help support regional economies.** In the Adirondacks, the Common Ground Alliance (CGA) and the Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages (AATV), and in the Catskills, the Catskill Park Coalition (CPC), meet annually to collaborate and develop priorities on whole park issues that include the needs of communities within the park as well as recreation and ecological concerns. Smart Growth Grant and other EPF funding should be increased and coupled with other investments such as Bond Act funding to update infrastructure in Forest Preserve Park communities. Funding should support clean water, affordable housing, and infrastructure projects such as trails, community development, and scenic byways. Funding should also be retained for **Historic sites** that draw thousands of visitors to communities each year **such as Camp Santanoni**, and the network of historic fire towers and Park sites with friends' groups who are funded by **Parks and Trails NY EPF stewardship grants.** It is also essential to support programs and opportunities in Park communities that will build capacity in **DELJ**, such as the work of the **Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI)**, the **Timbuctoo Pipeline Summer Climate and Careers Institute**, the **SUNY ESF Center for Native Peoples and the Environment**, and the recommendations of the **Open Spaces for All report.** Supporting the establishment of special ambulance districts in the Adirondacks will improve emergency services for rural communities.

### Promote Affordable Housing

The lack of affordable homes is a national crisis. However, in tourism destinations such as the Adirondacks and Catskills housing availability becomes more complex due to the popularity of second homes, short-term rentals, availability of developable lands, and greater regulation. In times of crisis, many move to the Adirondacks and Catskills to escape urban areas, putting even more pressure on available housing and increasing housing expense. Full-time residents, service workers, seasonal workers, recreational stewards, and civil servants are finding affordable living extremely difficult. The Adirondack CGA and AATV, Catskill Park Coalition, and the Adirondack Vision 2050 **call for initiatives promoting affordable and achievable housing**, including technical support for towns to revise their land use codes; careful expansion of hamlets tied to creating quality, affordable, and attainable housing; ensuring that planning and land-use regulation create incentives for construction of affordable and attainable housing; development of a land bank program to meet community housing needs; increasing opportunities for Smart Growth, the creation of a feasible Transfer of Development Rights program; and inclusion of individuals from the Adirondacks and Catskills in any task force, study group, and stakeholder organization developed by the state to address affordable housing needs.

### Cellular and Broadband Connectivity

We applaud the Governor's broadband initiative. It is essential that connectivity efforts plan for both broadband and cellular together, using tools like open-access middle-mile fiber to fill the gaps for both. Our rural Parks, who cater to millions of visitors annually, must have these critical services, as people's lives depend on it. Significant gaps in cellular and broadband coverage in the Adirondacks and Catskills create not only health and safety risks, but also magnify limited economic and educational opportunities. We urge **the adoption and funding of recommendations of the New York Upstate Cellular Coverage Task Force** to encourage private sector investment in cellular infrastructure through regulatory reforms and, where appropriate, economic incentives.

### Add and Support Agency Staff

Projects cannot be implemented without staff. While we understand the current hiring challenges, we urge focusing on critical positions and exploring ways to streamline and support the hiring and retention of staff, and to create more efficiency and flexibility within the system. **We are especially concerned about insufficient staffing levels in the Division of Lands and Forests.** In 1996, there were 186 staff responsible for managing a total of 3,818,983 acres of public land. Today there are 170 staff who are responsible for 4,950,000 acres of public land and conservation easements. Also, during this time, three critical new programs were added: 1) climate change; 2) invasive species; and 3) conservation easements.



Simultaneously, recreational use has doubled. **Acres and workload are up, and staff is down;** staff numbers in the Division of Lands and Forests should be increased. Also adding staff in the Division of Operations would **support the 55 state public campgrounds** in the Catskill and Adirondack Forest Preserve Parks, and **increase DEC's dedicated trail crews. DEC should also add seasonal recreational facilities coordinators** to ensure timely completion of workplans and other project elements, and to better coordinate with volunteers.

**Staff support for the DEC Accessibility Program is also needed** to develop and implement a comprehensive accessibility policy with robust trainings, technical consultations and field assessments with land managers, public outreach, maintenance of accessibility information for the public, and ADA-transition planning which helps with the removal of physical barriers that prevent program accessibility for people with disabilities.

Thank you for hearing the call to **support the New York State Forest Ranger force** with their own Ranger Academy and 40 slots for new recruits in 2022. The Forest Ranger force is a critical piece of Forest Preserve recreation infrastructure. When people get lost or injured on the Forest Preserve, the Forest Rangers are there to get them safely back home. We urge support for another **Forest Ranger academy in 2024** to stay ahead of attrition due to promotions and retirements. In maintaining the recruitment and retention of Rangers we also ask that you recognize these crucial members of the New York State Police Forces by signing their pension parity legislation that provides a uniform 20-year pension for all New York State Police forces. In our current unpredictable climate where excessive heat and drought fuel wildfires, Forest Rangers are also New York State's **first line of defense against large destructive wildfires** that could decimate the Adirondack and Catskill Parks. Supporting the Forest Rangers in **this effort should be a part of a well-planned climate initiative.**

The **Adirondack Park Agency is tasked with long-range planning for 20% of the state of New York.** It is a model for planning agencies across the country and the world. We request that you continue to assist the agency in filling open positions to **bring them back up to a fully staffed level.**

Thank you for your work and leadership in caring for the great State of New York and the Catskill and Adirondack Forest Preserve Parks. We appreciate your attention to these important requests.

Sincerely,

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December 4, 2023

The Honorable Kathy Hochul  
 Governor of New York State  
 NYS State Capitol Building  
 Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

The Adirondack Park today faces many challenges that were unforeseen or unimagined as recently as a decade ago. These challenges include the impacts of global climate change, road salt pollution, rapidly changing technological advances, invasive species impacts, and the pressures on Adirondack communities from the vacation-home and short-term-rental marketplace. Current legal protections and the regulatory and management programs put in place 50 years ago are outdated and will not sustain the long-term protection of the iconic wild lands of the Park and put at risk the viability and prosperity of Adirondack communities in the future. New York stands at a crossroads in its management of the Adirondack Park. The

common denominator in all of the challenges is greater investment in the Forest Preserve and rural communities of the Adirondack Park.

Your new Executive Budget will set out your priorities for the Adirondack Park and will shape how the North Country will fare in the coming year. We have always believed that a healthy environment and vigorous economy are not mutually exclusive, but go hand-in-hand. Bold, strategic investments in the preservation of the Adirondack Park are essential to the regional economy and vitality of its small rural communities. As you develop your Executive Budget proposal for the 2024-25 fiscal year, please consider the following list of critical investments as core parts of your Adirondack Park agenda:

- \$400 million for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). The EPF supports many vital programs for the Adirondacks, including:
  - \$50 million for open space protection and land conservation, including \$3.07 million for the Land Trust Alliance Conservation Partnership and at least \$1.5 million for their Conservation Easement Programs.
  - \$50 million for State Land Stewardship split between the DEC and OPRHP, including \$10 million for Adirondack Visitor Safety and Wilderness Protection, \$2 million for Parks and Trails Grants Program, \$1 million for a long-required and long-overdue Carrying Capacity Study on the Saranac Chain of Lakes, and \$1 million for Wildlife Research on State Lands, and \$3 million this year for the Survey of Climate Change and Adirondack Lakes Ecosystems (SCALE).
  - \$2.1 million for the Timbuctoo Summer Climate and Careers Institute.
  - \$1 million for Visitor Centers with \$250,000 each for Paul Smith's Visitor Interpretive Center (VIC), the SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) Adirondack Interpretive Center (AIC), the ADK High Peaks Information Center, and the Catskills Visitor Center.
  - \$20 million for invasive species prevention and eradication programs, including \$500,000 for Cornell's New York State Hemlock Initiative.
  - \$600,000 for research and monitoring in the Forest Preserve: the Adirondack Watershed Institute at Paul Smith's College, the Atmospheric Science and Research Center (ASRC) Whiteface Mountain Field Station, and Cary Institute for Ecosystem Studies
  - Continued and increased funding for Smart Growth Grants.
- Allocating \$600 million for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act (CWIA), to assist rural communities with gap-closing grants that will support clean water, affordable housing, and business development.
- \$420,000 for the Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI).
- \$2 million for the Adirondack Experience (ADKX) exhibit on the African American Experience in the Adirondacks.
- Invest in the implementation of the Adirondack Park Road Salt Reduction Task Force final report recommendations.

Further information about these requests:

### **\$400 million Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)**

With your leadership, the EPF grew to \$400 million two years ago. With that increase came notable investments in Adirondack Park open space protection, state land stewardship, climate change mitigation and adaptation and more. This year, we can't go backwards and urge funding the EPF at a minimum of \$400 million as we work towards a goal of \$500 million over the long term. The following EPF categories are of particular importance to the Adirondack Park and its communities:

1. **\$50 million for Open Space Protection:** We applaud the public's overwhelming support and passage of the Clean Air, Clean Water, and Green Jobs Bond Act. Bond Act funding was always intended to be additive to foundational programs such as the open space protection line of the EPF. The 30 by 30 Act prioritizes funding for open space protection across New York to meet the state's ambitious goal of protecting 30% of our lands and waters by 2030. Future years will require much greater funding for land protection from the EPF and other sources. Open space protection for ecologically significant Adirondack properties threatened with subdivision and development, such as the 36,000-acre Whitney Park in Long Lake, depends on the monies allocated to the Open Space account in the EPF. We urge you to fund the Open Space account at \$50 million this year.
2. **\$50 million for State Lands Stewardship:** The Forest Preserve has suffered from chronic underinvestment. More investment will support good paying jobs and promote tourism and quality of life benefits for the communities that serve as gateways to these wildland resources.
  - Forest Preserve Stewardship: Thank you for working with the Legislature to approve \$8 million for an Adirondack and Catskill Visitor Safety and Wilderness Protection subcategory last year, for the preservation and care of the "forever wild" Forest Preserve. Our great Wilderness areas, such as the High Peaks Wilderness, are key attractions in the Adirondack Park, providing an immeasurable benefit to the residents of this state. We urge you to increase funding dedicated to Adirondack and Catskill visitor safety & wilderness protection to \$10 million this year.
  - \$1 million to fund a Carrying Capacity Study on the Saranac Chain of Lakes: This study has been required under state law for decades, but never completed. This study is needed now more than ever due to increased development pressures around the Saranac Chain of Lakes.

- \$1 million to fund Wildlife Research on State Lands. Wildlife research in New York is driven heavily for game species by hunting license revenues. Forest Preserve planners have little information about wildlife populations on State lands.
- \$20 million for Invasive Species. We support expansion of the Invasive Species Account to \$20 million this year, split evenly between prevention and interdiction and eradication. These funds assist local governments and many entities across New York in their work to educate the public about invasive species and stop their spread. The Adirondack Park is the only place in New York with a large number of waterbodies that remain free of invasive species infestations and we need to keep these waters free and pure. The New York State Hemlock Initiative works in the Forest Preserve and across the state to protect Hemlock Forests from Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.
- \$1 million for Adirondack Park and Catskill Park Visitor Centers: We support funding Visitor Centers in the Forest Preserve at \$1 million, with \$250,000 each for Paul Smith’s VIC, the SUNY ESF AIC, the ADK High Peaks Information Center, and the Catskills Visitor Center. These facilities are strategically located and attract visitors traveling to popular areas. Continued funding of these centers, which rely heavily on private fundraising, is critical as they serve to protect the Forest Preserve, keep recreators safe, educate youth and the public, and highlight community assets.
- Vital Research Institutions: We support \$200,000 each for the following institutions for research and monitoring: the Adirondack Watershed Institute at Paul Smith’s College to help fund the only state-certified biological laboratory in the Adirondacks and long-term water quality research, the ASRC Whiteface Mountain Field Station for Trace Gas Monitoring and Cloud Collection and Analysis to continue at the facility, and Cary Institute for Ecosystem Studies for Forest Preserve research and collaboration that supports land management and community engagement.

### **Survey of Climate Change and Adirondack Lakes Ecosystems (SCALE)**

The water quality of Adirondack lakes and ponds reflect the Park’s ecological, economic and climate destiny. A consortium of non-profit partners and academic institutions have designed a three-year water quality Survey of Climate Change and Adirondack Lake Ecosystems which has great potential to guide our state’s climate policy. Researchers will examine how climate change impacts baseline conditions of waterbodies, explore the relationships between climate



change and harmful algae blooms, food webs, and mercury bioaccumulation. This data will inform future climate policymaking and guide strategic investment in greenhouse gas reduction and climate resiliency.

You worked with the legislature to provide an initial \$500,000 in the FY 22-23 budget, and an additional \$2 million in the FY 23-24 budget. The initial \$500,000 has funded a pilot survey that was carried out this summer. The results of the pilot will shape the full survey when it is conducted. The \$2 million approved last year will assist with the early phases of the full survey, but additional funding is needed.

We request a \$3 million allocation for a Survey of Climate change and Adirondack Lakes Ecosystems this year, with funding dedicated to the core team of SCALE consortium partners – Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs), Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), the Ausable River Association and other academic partners.

### **Preserving Clean Water and Promoting Community Vibrancy**

The Adirondack Park has aging clean water and wastewater infrastructure. The impacts are far-reaching – from closed beaches to impaired trout streams to harmful algae blooms. Small Adirondack communities host large seasonal influxes of visitors, including vacation rentals that stress these aging systems further, especially impacting the shores of our Adirondack lakes. Investments in water infrastructure constitute one of the most pivotal investments the state can make in protecting Adirondack waters while promoting new business and affordable housing in Adirondack Park hamlets. Since 2016, New York State (NYS) has invested close to \$100 million in grants for clean water infrastructure projects for communities in the Adirondack Park region, but the need is far greater, currently exceeding \$200 million in a backlog of wastewater treatment plants and sewer system projects alone in over a dozen communities.

Clean water infrastructure grants are essential for these communities in the Adirondacks with lower median household incomes and low user bases to cover the local cost share. We request \$600 million for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act (CWIA) this year to help not only our state-wide needs but also address these critical needs in the Adirondack region. We also encourage federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law clean water grants and newly established NYS Bond Act funding to supplement these needs so all projects in the Adirondacks can be affordable for these rural and hardship local communities.

Furthermore, greater investment and eligibility is needed for the NYS State Septic Replacement Fund to assist residents who have septic systems on Adirondack Lakes. The vast majority of wastewater controls surrounding these water bodies are decentralized and managed through homeowner's septic systems. Many of these systems are outdated and failing, costing tens of thousands of dollars to replace. Setting aside additional funds through the Clean Water

Infrastructure Act for the Septic Replacement Fund, which can provide up to 50% of remediation costs, will go a long way to help Adirondack Lakes remain healthy and for those with harmful algae blooms combat that problem.

### **Fostering Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Climate Justice for the Adirondacks**

We all must do more to ensure that all New Yorkers have the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from the precious resources of the Adirondack Park. The Adirondacks can be a place of respite, a critical resource in fighting climate change, and a place of opportunity for those pursuing green jobs.

The fight for climate, environmental, and social justice demands that as we fight climate change, we better connect the Adirondack Park with communities living on the frontlines of climate change impacts across the state. We celebrate that New York's Adirondack Park was a cradle of the early fight for Black suffrage. In that same spirit of opportunity, the Timbuctoo Climate Science and Careers Institute introduces high school students to a broad spectrum of green job opportunities, fostering the next generation of environmental stewards and climate advocates. The first year of this program was a great success, with the SUNY school of Environmental Science and Forestry and CUNY Medgar Evers hosting 41 students from the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn. The program sees an opportunity to grow stronger in the coming year, while working within its existing budget framework. We encourage you to fund the Timbuctoo Summer Climate and Careers Institute at \$2.1 million once again this year.

The Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI) works to make the Adirondack region more welcoming and inclusive to all New Yorkers. ADI currently benefits from a \$420,000 appropriation in the Aid to Localities Budget. Along with many other ongoing efforts, ADI provides critical anti-bias training to Environmental Conservation Officers, and that work continues to expand and grow stronger. A new Micro-Credential focused on welcoming and belonging will launch in January 2024, and an ADI symposium will be hosted every other year. We support the Adirondack North Country Association's proposal to continue its allocation in this year's budget, in response to the program's growing impact and effectiveness.

The Adirondack Experience (ADKX) plans to create a major permanent exhibition dedicated to the untold story of African Americans and their experiences, past and present, in the Adirondacks. The 2,500-square-foot African American Experience in the Adirondacks exhibition will include hands-on, interactive features to engage 21<sup>st</sup>-century audiences. The exhibition will provide a focus for encouraging Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities to visit the region. We urge your support of this \$2 million project as it works towards a 2026 launch.

## **Implementation of Adirondack Road Salt Reduction Task Force Report**

With the release of the Adirondack Road Salt Reduction Task Force Report, New York State now has documented the solutions and strategies needed to reduce road salt pollution. This is an important first step. But to fulfill the recommendations put forward by the task force, New York now requires a plan of action and timeline, a mechanism for ensuring accountability to fulfilling that plan, and committed funding for implementation. To do this, we propose the following actions in the next year to reduce road salt pollution:

1. Establish an inter-agency and independent New York State Road Salt Reduction Advisory Council to guide the implementation of these recommendations.
2. With the input of a New York State Road Salt Reduction Advisory council, create a year-by-year plan of action that can include tangible frameworks to help design, frame, fund, and oversee the implementation of new and scaled recommended programs. As part of this plan of action, we urge you to establish a New York State water quality standard for chloride.
3. Dedicate funding towards implementation of the task force recommendations. Investments in road salt reduction have proven effective at dramatically reducing pressures on local winter road maintenance budgets. Eligibility for grant funds from the NYSDEC Road Salt Storage Facility program in the Water Infrastructure Improvement Act should be expanded to include equipment for salt reduction best management practices.

## **Establishing a New York State Civilian Climate Corps**

The Biden Administration recently took **executive action to launch the Civilian Climate Corps (CCC)**, which will train young people in clean energy, conservation, and climate resilience skills, create good-paying jobs and tackle the climate crisis. The CCC is a workforce training and service initiative that will ensure more young people have access to the skills-based training necessary for good-paying careers in the clean energy and climate resilience economy. As a core tenet of the program, the CCC will center on equity and environmental justice, leveraging the talents of all members of our society. New York has an opportunity in a challenging budget cycle to leverage this initiative to accelerate our green economy and bolster our capacity to steward the Adirondack Park. Please propose to establish and fund the New York State CCC this year.

## Conclusion

The organizations listed above have outlined a powerful agenda that we urge you to embrace. This agenda meets the critical needs facing the environment and small rural communities of the Adirondack Park. This is an ambitious agenda that will not only support action in the next fiscal year, but creates a foundation to continue to build on in future years. We stand ready to help in any way possible to help you advance these policies and programs. Thank you very much for your stalwart support for the Adirondack Park.

Sincerely,

Raul J. Aguirre, Executive Director, Adirondack Council  
Sawyer Bailey, Executive Director, AdkAction  
Michael Barrett, Executive Director, Adirondack Mountain Club  
Peter Bauer, Executive Director, Protect the Adirondacks!  
Elizabeth Cooper, Executive Director, Adirondack North Country Association  
Roger Downs, Director of Conservation, Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter  
David Gibson, Managing Partner, Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve  
Rob Hayes, Director of Clean Water, Environmental Advocates NY  
Paul B. Hai, Associate Director, SUNY ESF Adirondack Ecological Center  
David Kahn, Executive Director, Adirondack Experience  
Dan Kelting, Interim College President, Paul Smith's College  
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Brian Smith, Associate Executive Director, Citizens Campaign for the Environment  
Zoë Smith, Executive Director, Adirondack Watershed Institute  
Martha Swan, Founder and Executive Director, John Brown Lives!  
Kelley Tucker, Executive Director, Ausable River Association

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