

## **2026 Joint Legislative Hearing On Environmental Conservation**

January 28th, 2026

Good morning/Afternoon/Evening Madame  
Chairwomen and respected members of the panel.

My name is Matt Krug, and I am the Director of the Environmental Conservation Officers and serve on the Board of Directors of the PBANYS.

First and foremost, I would like to publicly say thank you to Commissioner Amanda Lefton for approving the purchase of a new records management system and body cameras for our officers which is expected to be delivered in late 2027. The commissioner has also approved hiring thirty more officers who will begin their twenty-nine week academy next month.

With the Legislature's support and encouragement, Commissioner Lefton has done more for my officers in the last nine months, than has happened in the last five years.

The primary responsibilities of a conservation officer is enforcing the laws that are passed by the legislature to protect the environment. We support new environmental laws but enforcement of almost every new law passed in the last two decades has been unfunded.

Unfortunately, despite the new future headcount, our staffing numbers are down 20%. At full staffing we can have 342 conservation officers, a limit that was set decades ago. We currently have approximately 270 officers statewide.

A depleted force of Conservation Officers cannot adequately enforce air quality laws throughout the state, including in areas that have longer suffered from environmental injustice, without hiring additional officers and continued funding of all the equipment necessary to deploy an environmental protection. Also, when aquatic invasive species laws were passed, we didn't hire more conservation officers for enforcement.

When restrictive emission requirements for large trucks were passed, which again, we support, there were no additional officers hired. When the state protected an additional one million acres of wetlands, which we agree are critical for flood control and ecosystems, no officers were added. These unfunded and unstaffed mandates need to stop.

Conservation officers responded to 9/11, Hurricane Irene, and Hurricane Sandy, however, if a major event like that happened tomorrow, we are woefully unprepared due to past budget cuts at the DEC that deprioritized first responders. Maintaining emergency response equipment needs reliable funding sources.

All of our emergency response boats, ATVs, snowmobiles and portable radios need to be purchased and maintained on 8-10 year cycles.

In Governor Hochul's budget address she stated that she intended to make an investment into an "urban search and rescue partnership to deploy quickly and sustain large scale rescue operations during a major disaster." Under Andrew Cuomo the framework for this had already been set up with the creation of a multi-agency swiftwater response team, which employed teams from state fire, state troopers, Park police, Forest rangers and Conservation Officers. Unfortunately, this did not provide funding to adequately equip these different agencies with the safety equipment and small crafts necessary to accomplish the mission.

Outside of the necessary funding, another Cuomo-era policy called DPAT which stands for Disaster Preparedness Asset Tracking adds layer upon layer of red tape to the purchase of motorized emergency response equipment. This DPAT system requires the approval of chamber employees who have never responded to flooding or snow emergencies. This adds another 6-9 months to the approval process. For example if we need to purchase a new trailer to carry snowmobiles or boats, we have to use the DPAT process for purchasing. Often times putting emergency equipment out of service an additional 6-9 months because of an overburden and unnecessary bureaucratic process.

Since 2021 I have asked the legislature to allocate all funding to Conservation police in separate dedicated line items within the state budget. This will ensure that funding for the enforcement of environmental laws, and emergency response like natural disasters is protected and not diverted to other agency priorities.

This can also easily fund additional laws and mandates placed on conservation officers by the legislature.

Secondly, I ask you to pass the Environmental Enforcement Bill championed by Senator Harckam and Assemblywoman Anna Kelles and which passed the Senate in 2025. This bill essentially holds polluters and poachers accountable for paying for further enforcement. The bill increases fines for pollution and directs that money into supplementing further enforcement of the existing environmental laws.

Currently, the majority of Environmental cases are significantly under prosecuted by many local District Attorneys. This bill will also allow the hiring of special prosecutors for our cases.

Third, pass an enhanced bottle bill, and instead of diverting the unclaimed deposits into the general fund, use it to hire more conservation officers to be placed in environmental justice areas. This will improve the quality of life by cutting down on asthma and other pollution-related illnesses in our most vulnerable communities.

Lastly, please add our members to the existing state police twenty year pension plan to make us competitive in the hiring process with other law enforcement agencies. Last year a pension bill created a new pension system for our members but the language of the bill has prevented it from being implemented as it was intended. Adding us to a current tried and true pension system will cleanly fix this issue. Thank you.