

Testimony of the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK), Joint Legislative Public Hearing,  
Environmental Conservation Portion of the 2026-2027 Executive Budget Proposal, January 28, 2026

**Thank you for your continued leadership** and strong support for clean water, clean air and the environment in New York State. As federal funding is cut, protecting our environment and public lands is more important than ever. Thank you for securing historic funding for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) at \$425 million in the last state budget, as well as funding for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act (CWIA), and capital support for OPRHP and DEC. Continuing to protect our environment is essential for the health, safety, and prosperity of our communities and families across New York State.

**The Adirondacks and Catskills**, which represent a quarter of New York State's land mass, welcome 44 million visitors annually, bringing in \$5 billion in tourism expenditures. These regions serve as vital natural assets—providing clean water, climate resilience, and recreational opportunities, including over 2,000 miles of trails that promote health and well-being—while also offering economic support for regional communities. Environmental programs safeguard the Catskill and Adirondack Parks and the Forest Preserve, providing what we all need: clean water to drink, clean air to breathe, safe places to enjoy the great outdoors, and vibrant communities to raise our families. EPF programs support hundreds of thousands of jobs in communities across New York State with EPF-supported industries generating approximately \$40 billion in economic activity that supports communities and families every year.

**Thank you for your support** in providing \$10 million in dedicated funds for the Catskill and Adirondack Parks in last year's final budget in the State Land Stewardship category of the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). Thank you also for your support last year for Adirondack and Catskill visitor centers, science facilities, research, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, including accessibility.

In November, ADK, Catskill Center, and **over 50 Adirondack and Catskill groups and municipalities** signed a letter to Governor Hochul highlighting the need to continue support for the Adirondack and Catskill Parks.

On behalf of the stakeholders and communities who cherish and depend on the Catskill and Adirondack Parks and their Forest Preserve lands, we respectfully request that the funding priorities outlined below be maintained or restored in the FY 2026-27 One-House Budget Proposals.

- Maintain at least \$425 million for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and begin working to increase the appropriation to \$500 million annually.
- Maintain at least \$10 million for the Adirondacks and Catskills under EPF State Land Stewardship
- **Maintain and restore** \$1 million in the EPF for Adirondack and Catskill Visitor Centers
  - Restore \$250,000 Adirondack Mountain Club's (ADK) Visitor Center funding (at \$0 in Executive Budget Proposal, was at \$250,000 in last year's final budget)
  - Maintain funding for Catskills Visitor Center (at \$250,000 in Executive Budget Proposal)
  - Maintain funding for Paul Smith's Visitor Interpretive Center (at \$250,000 in Exec Budget)
  - Maintain funding for SUNY ESF Adirondack Interpretive Center (at \$250,000 in Exec Budget)
- **Maintain and restore** \$600,000 in the EPF for Research and Monitoring

- Restore \$200,000 for the Adirondack Watershed Institute (AWI) (at \$0 in Executive Budget Proposal, was at \$200,000 in last year's final budget)
- Restore \$200,000 for the Atmospheric Sciences Research Center (ASRC) Whiteface Mountain Field Station (at \$0 in Executive Budget Proposal, was at \$200,000 in last year's final budget)
- Maintain \$200,000 for Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies (currently in the Executive Budget)
- Maintain at least \$90 million for DEC Capital Projects
- Support \$340 million for "New York Works" OPRHP Capital Projects
- Maintain \$500 million for the Clean Water Infrastructure Funding
- Continue funding for SCALE, Timbuctoo Institute, Invasive Species, Smart Growth programs, historic sites, and other trail town infrastructure, and Diversity, Inclusivity and Accessibility initiatives to ensure all are welcome and have safe adventures.

The table below summarizes sections of the EPF in terms of funding requested by Adirondack and Catskill groups and what is proposed in the Executive Budget Proposal.

**Unshaded table lines show requested increases or needed restoration.**

<b>Environmental Protection Fund</b>	<b>FY25-26 Enacted</b>	<b>FY25-26 Exec Prop</b>	<b><u>Request</u></b>	<b><u>Restore</u></b>
**000s omitted. Some numbers rounded.				
<b>TOTAL EPF</b>	\$425 million	\$425 million	At least \$425 million	
<b>Parks and Recreation Account</b>				
<b>State Land Stewardship</b>	\$50,075	\$50,075	At least \$50,075	
<i>Parks &amp; Trails NY Grants Program</i>	\$2,000	\$2,650	Support	
<i>Adirondack and Catskill visitor safety &amp; wilderness protection</i>	\$10,000	\$8,000	\$10 mil	
<i>Ausable River Association for Adirondack Lake ecosystem study</i>	\$2,000	\$1,000	\$2 million	
<i>Adirondack Mountain Club visitor center</i>	\$250	\$0	\$250	Restore
<i>Adirondack Architectural Heritage Camp Santanoni Mngt</i>	\$750	\$750	Support	
<b>Municipal Parks</b>				
<i>SUNY ESF Adirondack Interpretive Center</i>	250	250	Support	
<i>Paul Smiths Visitor Interpretive Center</i>	250	250	Support	
<i>Catskills Visitor Center</i>	250	250	Support	
<b>Open Space Account</b>	\$42,000	\$42,000	\$50 million	
<i>Biodiversity</i>				
<i>Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies Catskill Research</i>	\$200	\$200	Support	
<i>Paul Smith's College Adirondack Watershed Institute</i>	\$100	\$0	\$200	Restore
<i>SUNY Albany Atmospheric Sciences Research Center</i>	\$100	\$0	\$200	Restore
<b>Invasive Species</b>	\$18,550	\$18,550	\$20 million	
<i>Cornell Hemlock Woolly Adelgid project</i>	\$500	\$500	Support	
<b>Environmental Justice</b>				
<i>Connect Kids Outdoor Recreation Program</i>	\$3,000	\$3,500	Support	

<i>Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Account</i>				
<i>Timbuctoo Institute</i>	<i>\$1,250</i>	<i>\$1,250</i>	<i>\$2.1 mil</i>	
<i>Smart Growth Grants</i>	<i>\$3,800</i>	<i>\$3,900</i>	<i>\$4 mil</i>	

#### **Additional budget requests by Adirondack and Catskill Groups:**

- \$420,000 for Adirondack Diversity Initiative. (at \$300,000 in ATL Exec Proposal)
- \$100,000 for educational stewards in ATL split between Catskill Center and Catskill Mountainkeeper

Increase the dedicated funding line for the Catskills and Adirondacks to at least \$10 mil  
**This line is critical** for protecting wilderness, providing safe and welcoming visitor experiences, and supporting communities. Studies show that the Forest Preserve and its wilderness experiences, such as hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing, help sustain regional economies and private property values in the Adirondacks and Catskills. **Continued funding is essential** to implement the vision outlined by the Catskill Strategic Planning Advisory Group (CAG) and the Adirondack High Peaks Strategic Planning Advisory Group (HPAG) to address high use of popular areas in the Forest Preserve and the communities that surround them. Projects 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, critical materials (e.g., materials for bridges, docks, camp sites, parking and day use areas), ecological monitoring, and Visitor Use Management (VUM) planning and implementation. **The dedicated funding for the Forest Preserve has been a huge boost** for stewardship projects **but with thousands of miles of trails in need of maintenance and repair** and many state land units not yet developed for public access, **it is simply scratching the surface of this need.**

#### Maintain and Restore support for Forest Preserve Visitor Centers

Continued and restored 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. Adirondack Mountain Club's (ADK) High Peaks Information Center (HPIC) is essential infrastructure for the Adirondacks and the High Peaks Wilderness. It is **a year-round resource** for hikers, backpackers, snowshoers, and cross-country skiers, providing trip planning, weather reports, trail conditions, maps, guidebooks, and essential gear to ensure recreators have safe, enjoyable adventures. It also provides **year-round access to skilled education staff, 24-hour flush toilet bathroom facilities, and preventative search and rescue (PSAR) education** to help avoid preventable rescues by an already overstressed Forest Ranger force. The HPIC also serves as **a base for NYS Forest Rangers** who coordinate Search and Rescue events. These are critical services at this entryway to the Adirondack High Peaks, which is the busiest backcountry trailhead in New York State.

#### Maintain and Restore Support for Research and Monitoring

Research and monitoring, which are called for in both the HPAG and CAG reports, are essential to inform management actions, evaluate the health of the Forest Preserves. Several facilities and projects in the Adirondacks and Catskills specialize in monitoring of biodiversity, air and water quality, and climate resilience including, The Adirondack Watershed Institute (**AWI**), The Atmospheric Sciences Research Center (**ASRC**) Whiteface Mountain Field Station need to be restored to \$200,000 each, and **Cary** Institute of Ecosystem Studies should be maintained at \$200,00. The *Survey of Climate Change and Adirondack Lake Ecosystems (SCALE)*, and its project partners should also be supported. These facilities and programs track pollutants in air and water, monitor weather, disseminate data, and run essential programs like the **Catskill Science Collaborative**.

#### Increase DEC Capital Funding and Staff

**The need for capital projects in the Forest Preserve is huge**, but DEC has only \$90 million for 4.5 million acres of managed public lands and conservation easements across the state. **DEC's**

**capital funding should be increased significantly** to have parity with the funding available to the Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). Staffing increases are needed in the Division of Lands and Forests and in the Division of Operations.

#### Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity, and Accessibility (DEIA)

It is essential to support programs and opportunities in Park communities that will build capacity in inclusivity and accessibility, such as the work of the **Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI)**, the **Timbuctoo Institute**, and the recommendations of the Open Spaces for All report led by the New York Outdoor Recreation Coalition (NYORC) and the Open Space Institute (OSI). We also appreciate your continued investment in rail trails (and their connector trails) in the Adirondacks and Catskills as recreational opportunities that serve multiple recreation groups.

Dedicated stewardship funding is also needed to continue support for accessibility in the Adirondacks and Catskills. Appropriately located accessible and sustainable trail infrastructure that protects natural resources and provides opportunities for all visitors whether they be families, new recreators, or individuals with mobility challenges. We applaud the creation of the Accessible Recreation Destinations map to provide comprehensive and accurate information for the public, and DEC's recent release of a draft Other Power Driven Mobility Device Policy (OPDMD) to guide and promote accessibility and inclusivity on its managed lands statewide, including the Forest Preserve.

#### Invest in Adirondack and Catskill Park Communities

Park Towns and Villages are integral parts of the Adirondack and Catskill Parks that 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 Grants and other EPF funding should be coupled with other investments such as Bond Act funding to update infrastructure in Park communities. Funding should support clean water, road salt reduction, flood resilience, affordable and achievable housing, improving connectivity, community development, scenic byways, and infrastructure and transportation projects such as shuttles and "hamlets as hubs" that support Adirondack and Catskill Trail Towns. 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**.

We urge you to support \$500 million for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act (CWIA) and to use this appropriation to "jumpstart" a multi-year commitment. This will further work in New York communities to address pressing infrastructure needs, protect public health, and keep water and sewer rates affordable. By reducing the cost of critical infrastructure projects for local communities, every dollar invested in the CWIA saves New York families money.

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

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