

PROTECT THE ADIRONDACKS!

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January 23, 2026

Senator Liz Krueger
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
New York State Senate
172 State Street, The Capitol
Room 416
Albany, NY 12247

Assemblymember J. Gary Pretlow
Chair, Assembly Committee on Ways and Means
Legislative Office Building Room 923
Albany, NY12248

RE: Adirondack Park FY27 Funding Priorities

Dear Senator Krueger and Assemblymember Pretlow:

Protect the Adirondacks! Inc. (“PROTECT”) is pleased to submit this written testimony concerning the FY2027 Executive Budget. PROTECT is a non-profit grassroots membership organization dedicated to the protection, stewardship, and sustainability of the natural environment and human communities of the Adirondack Park. PROTECT uses advocacy, independent public oversight, grassroots organizing, education, scientific research, and legal action to advance its mission. PROTECT has over 2,000 members and supporters who share a common desire to protect the environmental health and legacy of the Adirondack Park. Many of PROTECT’s members reside or own property within the Park. PROTECT’s members also regularly recreate in and enjoy the natural resources and scenic treasures of the Adirondack Park.

PROTECT urges the Legislature to maintain funding for crucial Adirondack Park programs and initiatives that support the stewardship and long-term vitality of both public and private lands throughout the Park. In addition to the budget allocations outlined below, we urge the Legislature to introduce and

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pass an important Article VII climate change bill that would provide economic stability to local municipalities and strengthen environmental protection for privately owned forest lands. This legislation would incentivize landowners to keep forests intact to store and sequester carbon rather than converting them to non-forestry uses.

Additionally, we support Governor Kathy Hochul's proposed constitutional amendment that would remove from the Forest Preserve, and allow the redevelopment and repurposing of, three closed correctional facilities on lands owned by the State. The proposed constitutional amendment should include at least 2,500 acres of compensation lands to be added to the Forest Preserve in the Adirondacks.

Budget Requests Supported by Protect the Adirondacks

We are pleased that Governor Hochul's proposed budget includes \$425 million for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). PROTECT supports the following EPF allocations for the coming fiscal year (2026-27) to help protect and sustain healthy, resilient human and natural communities throughout the Adirondack Park:

- **PROTECT urges the Legislature to allocate at least \$425 million to the EPF for FY2027 including the following:**
 - **\$50 million for open space protection and land conservation (an increase from the Governor's proposal of \$42 million),** including:
 - at least \$3 million for the Land Trust Alliance Conservation Partnership Program
 - at least \$1.5 million for the Land Trust Alliance Conservation Easement Program
 - **\$50.6 million for state land stewardship,** including:
 - **\$10 million for Adirondack Visitor Safety and Wilderness Protection (an increase from the Governor's proposal of \$8 million)**
 - \$2.5 million for Parks and Trails Grants Program
 - **\$2 million for the Survey of Climate and Adirondack Lakes Ecosystems (SCALE) (an increase from the Governor's proposal of \$1 million)**
 - **\$250,000 each** for the SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) Adirondack Interpretative Center (AIC), Paul Smith's Visitor Interpretative Center (VIC), and the Adirondack Mountain Club's High Peaks Information Center (**the Governor's proposal did not include the Adirondack Mountain Club's visitor information center**)
 - **\$200,000 each** for the Adirondack Watershed Institute (AWI) at Paul Smith's College and the Atmospheric Science and Research Center (ASRC) Whiteface

Mountain Field Station (the Governor's proposal did not include either of these critical research programs)

- **At least \$18.55 million for Invasives Species prevention, control and eradication, including \$500,000 to Cornell University for the control of hemlock wooly adelgid**
- **At least \$3.8 million for the Smart Growth program**
- **PROTECT urges the Legislature to reallocate \$1 million to the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to conduct the carrying capacity study of the Saranac Chain of Lakes (this reallocation is included in the Governor's proposal)**
- **PROTECT urges the Legislature to allocate funding to improve Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Climate Justice in the Adirondacks, including:**
 - **\$2.1 million for the Timbuctoo Institute (an increase from the Governor's proposal of \$1.25 million)**
 - **\$420,000 for the Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI) (an increase from the Governor's proposal of \$300,000 in Aid to Localities)**
- **PROTECT urges the Legislature to allocate at least \$90 million in capital funds for DEC**
- **PROTECT urges the Legislature to allocate at least \$500 million to the Clean Water Infrastructure Fund, with funding to continue expanding road salt reduction and control efforts throughout the Adirondacks and across the State**
- **PROTECT urges the Legislature to allocate funding to increase staffing for DEC Forest Rangers and the Adirondack Park Agency (APA). The State Budget must increase DEC Forest Ranger staffing because these brave, highly trained professionals are essential to protecting our public lands, responding to emergencies, and keeping millions of Adirondack and Catskill visitors safe. APA needs additional staff to fulfill its statutory mandate to provide for the planning and protection of the 6 million acres of public and private lands within the Adirondack Park. Today, the Adirondack Park faces unprecedeted environmental, social, and economic pressures from climate change, overuse of trails and waterways, fragmented forests, an acute shortage of affordable housing, and outdated development standards that threaten the long-term health of both the Park's natural resources and its communities. APA staff should be increased so the agency can address the increased workload, respond to the surge in development pressures, engage in long-term planning to protect Adirondack Park resources, and respond to the mounting demands on the Adirondack landscape from natural and human-induced changes.**

Climate Protection-Based Private Land Forest Management Program

We urge the Legislature to include in the State Budget an amendment to the Real Property Tax Law that would create a tax incentive for private landowners to keep mature forests intact. Protecting standing forests reduces carbon in the atmosphere and benefits community safety, carbon storage and sequestration, climate resiliency, and New Yorkers' wallets. A climate protection-based program for private forest lands would be especially beneficial in the Adirondack Park, where millions of acres of privately owned forests are at risk of conversion to non-forestry uses. A straightforward state program, available to willing private landowners across New York, would provide annual property tax benefits in exchange for maintaining intact forests. In addition, localities meeting specified criteria would be eligible to seek state reimbursement of lost property taxes revenues from the real estate transfer tax funds. This approach will help New York achieve the goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act and the 30 by 30 Act, while also improving habitat connectivity for wildlife and reducing forest fragmentation.

Legislation to establish this program already exists (S5603/A7550), and we urge the Legislature to advance this proposal through the budget process.

Constitutional Amendment for Closed Correctional Facilities

A constitutional amendment is required to lawfully allow the redevelopment and repurposing of closed correctional facilities located on Forest Preserve lands owned by the State. PROTECT supports Governor Hochul's proposal for a constitutional amendment to repurpose three closed correctional facilities: Camp Gabriels in Franklin County, Mount McGregor in Saratoga County, and Moriah Shock in Essex County. These facilities include hundreds of buildings and an assortment of existing, but mostly neglected, infrastructure such as roads, electricity and water/wastewater systems.

Significant groundwork and dialogue have already taken place that position these three facilities to move quickly through the amendment process. A constitutional amendment removing these facilities from the Forest Preserve is needed to allow them to be redeveloped and revitalized to benefit the local communities where they are sited. Mount McGregor is located in Saratoga County, one of the fastest growing counties in the state, and Moriah Shock functioned like an educational campus that can be readapted. The location of Camp Gabriels in the Tri-Lakes area of the Adirondacks, arguably the most dynamic neighborhood in the Adirondack Park, also holds promise. These facilities could be put towards a number of different public uses from housing to small business space to non-profit space.

A constitutional amendment must include a provision, as Governor Hochul's proposal does, to compensate for the removal of developed Forest Preserve lands by adding new undeveloped, wild forest lands to the Forest Preserve. Governor Hochul proposes adding 1,500 acres as compensation lands, but we urge the Legislature to increase that acreage to at least 2,500 acres. We saw in November 2025 that the voters only narrowly approved a constitutional amendment for the Mount Van Hoevenberg Winter Olympic Sports Complex to bring its facilities into alignment with the constitution. That amendment authorized the use of up to 323 acres of land for winter sports activities and infrastructure that would remain in State ownership. In exchange for allowing those lands to be used as part of the winter sports complex, the amendment provides that 2,500 acres of new wild lands will be added to the Adirondack Forest Preserve.

Here, the proposed amendment would allow 243 acres of land to be completely removed from the Forest Preserve. There is not an exact formula for calculating the acreage of the compensation lands, but what the Forest Preserve gains needs to be sufficiently large enough to persuasively demonstrate to the voters that the amendment provides an overall net benefit to the Forest Preserve and to the people of the State. Accordingly, for this amendment to have a greater chance of success getting statewide voter approval there needs to be a higher amount of compensation lands. We believe that amount should be at least 2,500 acres.

Conclusion

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Protect the Adirondacks, please let me express our gratitude for the opportunity to submit this budget testimony. We are happy to answer any questions that you or your staff may have regarding this testimony.

Sincerely,



Claudia Braymer
Executive Director

cc: Senator Pete Harckham, Chair, Senate Committee on Environmental Conservation
Assemblymember Deborah J. Glick, Chair, Assembly Committee on Environmental
Conservation