

**Testimony of the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK)
Joint Legislative Public Hearing, Environmental Conservation Portion
2020-2021**

Executive Budget Proposal

27 January 2020

Good afternoon Chairwoman Krueger, Chairwoman Weinstein and honored legislators. My name is Michael Barrett and I am very pleased to be with you and have the opportunity to testify today on the Governor's Executive Budget proposal.

I am now in my second month as the Executive Director of the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK). For nearly a hundred years, ADK has been dedicated to protecting and advocating for New York State's wild lands and waters while encouraging people to enjoy the outdoors responsibly. ADK's 30,000 members, many of whom participate in one of our 27 chapters statewide, not only enjoy hiking and paddling and other human powered pursuits, they spend thousands of hours each year working to protect the land they use. They maintain trails, remove trash, and generally serve as watchdogs for public lands and watersheds throughout the state.

I think it's safe to say that the Governor has proposed a bold, broad, but appropriate budget as it relates to addressing the harmful effects of climate driven disasters, building our resistance to future weather events, protecting our wild lands and waters, and continuing to establish a solid foundation for a green economy.

"Restore Mother Nature Bond Act"

We commend Governor Cuomo's proposal for the "Restore Mother Nature Bond Act" - which is part of a \$33 billion 5-year plan to combat climate change. The Act would aim to raise \$3 billion to fund natural restoration and resiliency programs across New York State. This initiative would support flood reduction projects and habitat restoration, including up to 10,000 acres of freshwater wetlands and 10,000 miles of stream habitat, as well as vastly expanding renewable energy resources and allowing former floodplains to be reclaimed by nature. The Governor is leading from the front in order to protect New Yorkers from the harmful effects of global warming, restore critical infrastructure and open spaces, all while building a sustainable economy of green jobs across the state.

Environmental Protection Fund

The Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) supports Governor Andrew Cuomo's proposed \$300 million appropriation for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). This continues the original commitment of a 5-year \$300 million EPF, and is great news as it will deliver \$1.5 billion for conservation across the state over that time period. Since its creation in 1993, the Senate and Assembly have provided strong, bipartisan support for the EPF. In recent budgets, the Legislature has worked to provide important funding restorations to the EPF which has benefitted every county in New York State. We appreciate your work to strengthen the EPF and your recognition of the benefits it brings to our state – such as job creation, tourism, clean water and other environmental and public health protections. Among the other statewide benefits of the EPF is that it enhances the state's ability to leverage federal, local, and private dollars, and enables communities to seize opportunities to implement programs that will make New York an attractive and healthy place for businesses to locate and for families to live.

Regrettably, the proposed appropriations language includes authority to use the EPF to pay for agency staff. While ADK strongly supports adding the needed DEC and other relevant state staff to carry out the EPF, it should not come from EPF funding.

State Land Stewardship Funding

ADK is excited to see a modest \$3 million proposed boost for State Land Stewardship. While it remains unclear what will be funded with these dollars, ADK wants to make sure that dedicated funds are available to address the following significant issue:

Dedicated Funding for Stewardship in the Forest Preserve

With 7-10 million visitors a year, numbers that we should be excited about, it has become universally accepted that we are experiencing high use in the high peaks. So much so that we now have a High Peaks Strategic Planning Advisory Group to advise the DEC on a best path forward. And that is tremendous. However, the most obvious way to address the reality that a lot of people are enjoying our first-class outdoor spaces is to dedicate the necessary funding to take care of those spaces. And that requires dedicated funding to address the high-use issues in the Adirondack High Peaks and areas of the Catskill Park, including the Blue Hole and Kaaterskill Falls, which require dedicated funding for stewards, rebuilding and maintaining trails, researching reservation systems, carrying capacity studies, hiker education and safety, and infrastructure. This

funding also provides protection, through support of the Summit Steward Program, for rare habitats including the Adirondack High Peaks which are threatened by heavy visitation and climate change.

Combating Hemlock Woolly Adelgid

Also, continued funding is needed to combat invasive species. New York faces potential decimation of eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) from a forest pest called hemlock woolly adelgid (*Adelges tsugae*) (HWA), which was discovered in the Adirondack Park in 2017. HWA has already caused a significant decline in the Catskill Park, and has been identified in Letchworth State Park, and Zoar Valley, and Allegany State Park.

Toward this end, we applaud the Governor's foresight in addressing the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) threat with a \$500,000 line item to combat this pest through some great work by Cornell University. However, we would like to see an increase in this line to \$750,000 to support research into additional predator species, and for environmental DNA (eDNA) studies to monitor up to three bio-control predator species of HWA in remote forest locations.

DEC Staffing - New York State Needs More Forest Rangers

ADK is pleased to see an additional 47 FTEs in the budget for DEC staff, including 16 FTEs for Law Enforcement. We are hoping that this includes a meaningful staff increase for the Forest Ranger Force.

As you well know, forest rangers provide for the care, custody, and control of 5 million acres of DEC-administered public lands and easements. In 1970, each ranger covered about 28,516 acres. Today, rangers are expected to cover nearly double that acreage, and that is despite the fact that the number of search and rescue incidents has more than doubled during that same period. Yellowstone National Park is 2.2 million acres and has 330 full-time rangers to protect and serve the public. The Adirondack Park is nearly three times that size at six million acres, but has only 50 rangers. With record numbers of often unprepared visitors to the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve and other public lands across the state, we must address this public safety concern.

Combating Tick-Borne Diseases

Tick-borne diseases are a major health threat in New York State, and the problem continues to intensify. The blacklegged ticks that spread Lyme disease can also infect

people with anaplasmosis, babesiosis, and the deadly Powassan virus. Blacklegged ticks are expanding their ranges into new geographic regions, putting greater numbers of people at risk. They are also feeding longer in the fall and earlier in the spring, due to climate change. Just this year, New York State added a new disease-carrying tick -- the longhorn tick. And Lyme disease, what was once prevalent only in the lower Hudson valley, is now a statewide issue and has become the fastest growing vector-borne disease. Because of this, ADK is advocating for \$1.5 million for public awareness, research, and prevention of Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases (TBD) statewide. This funding was not in the Executive Budget proposal.

Fracking Ban

ADK applauds Governor Cuomo for his proposal to make the Fracking Ban permanent. The Governor has introduced Article VII language to permanently ban fracking, protecting the health of New Yorkers and ensuring that the environment and our communities are not harmed by this practice.

Support the Catskill Park

ADK also supports Catskill Park Coalition Priorities including funding for Public Safety and Catskill Park Management, Environmental Protection Fund Programs to Enhance and Protect the Catskills, and Support for Catskill Communities.

Styrofoam Ban

Finally, ADK greatly supports Governor Cuomo's proposal of a statewide ban on polystyrene Styrofoam food containers and loose fill packaging materials. The Styrofoam ban would also empower the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to review and take action to limit or ban other packaging material.

Contacts

Michael Barrett
Executive Director
518-449-3870 (work)
573-355-6030 (cell)
michael@adk.org

Cathy Pedler
Director of Advocacy
518-449-3870 (work)
518-935-0492 (cell)
cathypedler@adk.org

Benjamin Brosseau
Director of Communications
518-523-3441, ext. 126 (work)
518-217-8072 (cell)
ben@adk.org

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