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January 24, 2025

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Dear Senator Krueger and Assemblymember Pretlow:

Protect the Adirondacks, Inc.! ("PROTECT") is pleased to submit this written testimony concerning the FY2026 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 are also regular users of and visitors to the Forest Preserve who recreate in and enjoy the natural resources and scenic treasures of the Adirondack Park.

**Staff**

**I. Environmental Protection Fund**

Claudia K. Braymer  
**Executive Director**

The Environmental Protection Fund ("EPF") is the main source of funding for stewardship of public lands within the Adirondack Park and for the environmentally sound economic development of communities in the Park. While we are pleased that Governor Kathy Hochul's proposed budget includes \$400 million for the EPF, this figure has remained stagnant since FY2023, despite the increasingly serious environmental challenges facing the State and the increased costs of responding to those challenges.

Christopher Amato, Esq.  
**Conservation Director  
and Counsel**

Peter Bauer  
**Fundraising  
Coordinator**

Accordingly, **PROTECT urges the Legislature to increase EPF funding to \$500 million for FY2026.**

## EPF Open Space and Land Acquisition

As you know, in 2022 the Legislature passed and Governor Hochul signed the landmark “30 by 30” law, which commits the State to protecting 30% of the State’s lands and inland waters by 2030. PROTECT issued a report that documented all currently protected lands in the State and concluded that in order to reach the 30 by 30 goal the State will need to protect an additional 3.2 million acres over the next six years.<sup>1</sup> Additional funding for open space protection is necessary to acquire and preserve the millions of acres of lands and waters of the State needed reach the 30 by 30 goal. The Executive Budget’s EPF funding for Open Space and Land Conservation proposes a decrease from last year’s adopted budget (from \$39,500,000 to \$37,500,000).

**PROTECT urges the Legislature to increase EPF funding for Open Space and Land Acquisition to \$50 million if the EPF remains at \$400 million and to \$100 million if the EPF is increased to \$500 million.**

## EPF State Land Stewardship

The State Land Stewardship line in the EPF provides funds for the management and protection of millions of acres of State-owned lands, including the nearly 3 million acres of Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park. The Executive Budget proposes \$49 million for this account, which is a welcome increase over last year’s adopted budget amount of \$47 million. However, the funding for Adirondack and Catskill visitor safety and wilderness protection in this account has been reduced from \$10 million in FY 2025 to \$8 million in the proposed budget. This \$2 million shortfall should be restored.

In addition, PROTECT urges that \$1 million of the State Land Stewardship line (e.g., Adirondack and Catskill visitor safety and wilderness protection to address overuse) should be earmarked to fund a carrying capacity study of sensitive water bodies in the Adirondack Park. “Carrying capacity” means the ability of natural resources to withstand and sustain human activity and the environmental impacts resulting from those activities. In the case of waterbodies it means the impacts on water quality, fish and wildlife, scenic and aesthetic resources, and the user experience resulting from increasing boat traffic and conflicting visitor use. A carrying capacity study would examine these factors, evaluate whether and to what extent the carrying capacity has been exceeded, and recommend measures to avoid exceeding the carrying capacity and/or to return resources to an acceptable level that does not exceed the carrying capacity. Although the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan requires the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to conduct a carrying capacity study<sup>2</sup> for each unit of Forest Preserve lands and waters in the Park, DEC has thus far failed to complete even one such study, citing budgetary constraints.

**If the EPF remains at \$400 million, PROTECT urges the Legislature to increase EPF funding for State Land Stewardship to \$50 million, including \$1 million for a carrying capacity study**

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<sup>1</sup> PROTECT’s report, “20% in 2023: An Assessment of the New York State 30 by 30 Act,” is available at [Protect-the-Adirondacks-30-by-30-Report-web.pdf \(protectadks.org\)](https://protectadks.org/20%in2023-report-web.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Information concerning the critical need for DEC to complete a carrying capacity study of the Saranac Lakes Complex can be found at [Carrying Capacity study needed for the Saranac Chain of Lakes - Protect the Adirondacks! \(protectadks.org\)](https://protectadks.org/carrying-capacity-study-needed-for-the-saranac-chain-of-lakes/).

**of water bodies in the Adirondack Park and \$12 million overall for Adirondack and Catskill visitor safety and wilderness protection. If the EPF is increased to \$500 million, PROTECT requests that State Land Stewardship be funded at \$65 million with the carrying capacity study and visitor safety and wilderness protection lines included.**

#### EPF Visitor Center Funding

We support funding Visitor Centers at \$1 million, with \$250,000 each for Paul Smith's Visitor Interpretative Center (VIC); the SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) Adirondack Interpretative Center (AIC); the ADK High Peaks Information Center; and the Cascade Welcome Center. The Executive Budget proposes to eliminate the prior funding of \$250,000 for the ADK High Peaks Information Center and the Cascade Welcome Center. It appears that the \$250,000 was moved to increase the funding for the Adirondack Architectural Heritage's proposal for Camp Santanoni to have a fire suppression system, which we do not support.

**PROTECT urges the Legislature to restore the EPF funding (\$250,000) for the ADK High Peaks Information Center and the Cascade Welcome Center.**

#### EPF Diversity Funding

The Executive Budget includes \$1.25 million for the Timbuctoo Summer Climate and Careers Institute. The Timbuctoo Summer Climate and Careers Institute<sup>3</sup> is a program developed by the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) to introduce high school sophomores and juniors from New York City to climate science, provide career counseling, and address issues of access from an equity and justice perspective. In 2023, the Institute partnered with CUNY Medgar Evers College to bring 48 high school students to the Adirondacks for three two-week sessions. In 2024, 46 students from all five New York City Boroughs attended the program. We support funding this program and urge that it be increased to \$2.1 million.

The Executive Budget fails to include any funding for a planned new exhibit on the African-American Experience in the Adirondacks at the Adirondack Experience (formerly the Adirondack Museum) in Blue Mountain Lake. The African-American Experience in the Adirondacks would be a major permanent exhibition dedicated to the untold story of African Americans and their experiences, past and present, in the Adirondacks. We urge funding of \$1 million towards this \$2 million project as it works towards a 2027 launch.

**PROTECT urges the Legislature to increase funding for the Timbuctoo Summer Climate and Careers Institute to \$2.1 million and to add \$1 million for the African-American Experience in the Adirondacks exhibit at the Adirondack Experience.**

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<sup>3</sup> A description of the Timbuctoo Summer Climate and Careers Institute, a collaboration between SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) and CUNY Medgar Evers College (MEC) in cooperation with other partners, is available at [https://www.esf.edu/news/2023/esf\\_timbuctoo\\_institute.php](https://www.esf.edu/news/2023/esf_timbuctoo_institute.php).

## EPF Water and Wildlife Research

The Adirondack Watershed Institute (AWI) at Paul Smith's College in the Adirondack Park conducts a long-term (over twenty years) water quality monitoring program and conducts invasive species management throughout the Park. The Institute's mission is to protect clean water, conserve habitat and support the health and well-being of people in the Adirondacks through scientific inquiry, stewardship and real-world experiences for students.

The Survey of Climate and Adirondack Lakes Ecosystems (SCALE) is a multi-year study of how climate change impacts waterbodies in the Adirondacks. SCALE researchers from Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, the Ausable Freshwater Center and other academic partners are examining how climate change impacts baseline conditions of waterbodies, and exploring 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. The Executive Budget proposes \$1.5 million for SCALE. This should be increased to \$2.5 million to reflect the pressing problems facing the Adirondacks due to climate change.

The Executive Budget also proposes \$1 million in EPF funding to Cornell University for research on septic and wastewater treatment systems. We support this funding.

Wildlife research in New York is heavily focused on game species because it is funded by hunting license revenues. As a result, Forest Preserve planners have little information about non-game wildlife populations on State lands. DEC is in the process of updating its Statewide Wildlife Action Plan, which is updated every 10 years, and DEC has inadequate data to support its efforts and to make science-based decisions. PROTECT supports the addition of \$1 million to the EPF for non-game wildlife research by DEC.

**PROTECT urges the Legislature to add \$1 million to the EPF for wildlife research on State lands, including \$500,000 to conduct a gray wolf status assessment, and \$200,000 for research and monitoring at the AWI and the Atmospheric Sciences Research Center Whiteface Mountain Field Station, which both received no funding in the Executive Budget. Last year's adopted budget included \$100,000 for AWI. Funding for SCALE should be increased to \$2.5 million.**

## EPF Implementation of Salt Reduction Task Force Recommendations

In 2023, the Adirondack Road Salt Reduction Task Force released its report documenting the significant adverse groundwater and surface water pollution effects of the use of road salt in the Adirondack Park. EPF funding is needed to implement the road salt reduction strategies identified in the Task Force's report.

**PROTECT urges the Legislature to include \$500,000 in the EPF for the purpose of implementing road salt reduction strategies in the Adirondack Park.**

## EPF Invasive Species

As the effects of climate change become more pronounced, New York State has experienced an unprecedented influx of terrestrial and aquatic invasive species. The Executive Budget proposes to keep level the amount of funding for invasive species control and eradication.

**PROTECT urges the Legislature to increase invasive species funding by \$1.5 million, from \$18,550,000 to \$20 million.**

## **II. Clean Water Infrastructure Act**

Funding provided under the Clean Water Infrastructure Act (CWIA) is essential to protecting Adirondack Park waters and to promoting new business and affordable housing in Adirondack Park communities. There is a great need for funding for clean water infrastructure projects to allow communities in the Adirondack Park to provide clean water to residents and visitors. The current backlog of wastewater treatment plant and sewer system projects in Adirondack communities exceeds \$200 million. In addition, failing private septic systems throughout the Park are compromising surface and groundwater quality. The CWIA's Septic Replacement Fund provides funding to counties for financial assistance to homeowners who need to replace or upgrade failing septic systems.

**This fund has historically received \$500 million each year. PROTECT urges the Legislature to provide \$600 million for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act to assist both State-wide and Adirondack Park communities in addressing urgent and widespread clean water infrastructure needs.**

## **III. Adirondack Park Agency**

The Executive Budget proposes to increase the staff of the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) by five additional employees, to increase the agency's budget by \$1.6 million, and to provide another \$10 million in funding for APA's headquarters. This funding will assist APA with some of its logistical problems but it will not fix the programmatic problems plaguing the agency whose principal mission is to protect the natural resources of the Adirondack Park. APA needs its Board Members and staff to refocus on its core mission and purpose, and the Adirondack Park Agency Act needs to be updated so that the agency can return to being a preeminent leader in environmental protection.

In the more than 50 years that have passed since it was signed into law, the Adirondack Park Agency Act (APA Act) has never been substantially modified or updated. At its inception, the APA Act was widely recognized as a ground-breaking and innovative regional land use plan intended to ensure that development of privately owned lands in the 6 million-acre Adirondack Park would proceed in an environmentally responsible manner consistent with protection of the publicly owned Forest Preserve lands in the Park. Today, 50 years later, some of the APA Act's provisions are outdated, others need clarification and improvement, and the Act must be updated to address current significant issues such as climate change, habitat fragmentation, protection of water quality, affordable housing and local government planning. Now is the right time to make

needed changes to the APA Act so that it can continue to serve its purpose of protecting and conserving for future generations the unique, valuable and beautiful natural resources of the Adirondack Park.

**PROTECT urges the Legislature to take this opportunity to update and improve the Adirondack Park Agency Act.**

#### **IV. Article VII Bills**

PROTECT urges the Legislature to include the following bills in their one-house budget bills:

**TEDE Part TT:** This bill would amend subdivision one of Section 3-0305 of the Environmental Conservation Law to remove the requirement that conservation easement acquisitions be approved by the Attorney General and authorize the State agency acquiring the conservation easement to ensure compliance with statutory requirements for easement purchases. The bill also amends the Tax Law to exempt from certain taxes conveyances of real property for open space, parks, or historic preservation purposes to any not-for-profit tax exempt corporation.

**Title Insurance for Land Acquisition:** The Legislature should include a bill authorizing the New York State Attorney General's Office to approve certain state land acquisitions made for the purposes of land conservation, and to accept a title insurance policy from a title company to insure the State against possible defects in the chain of title for the property acquired. Currently, there are substantial backlogs and delays in researching the chain of title to property under consideration for acquisition. This bill would authorize the Attorney General's Office to accept title insurance from a title insurance company that has already researched the chain of title for the property being acquired. Having this authority will accelerate the state's process for conserving land. The acceleration of this process is particularly critical to meet the State's goals as set forth in the State's 30 by 30 law, as well as to meet the State's goals in the Climate Action Plan and to expend the funds in the Environmental Bond Act and the EPF for land acquisition.

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.

Sincerely,



Claudia Braymer  
Executive Director