

**Testimony of the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK)
Joint Legislative Public Hearing, Environmental Conservation Portion
2016-17 Executive Budget Proposal
28 January 2016**

Good afternoon Chairwoman Young, Chairman Farrell and honored legislators. My name is Neil Woodworth. I am the Executive Director of the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Governor's Executive Budget proposal.

The Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) is dedicated to the conservation, preservation, and responsible recreational use of the New York State Forest Preserve and other parks, wild lands, and waters vital to our members and chapters. ADK represents over 28,000 members who enjoy hiking, canoeing, kayaking, cross-country skiing, camping, backpacking, biking, mountaineering, snowshoeing, and other "muscle-powered" outdoor activities in New York. We sponsor programs that range from teaching people to hike and paddle safely to repairing our state's peerless hiking trail network. We are advocates for responsible recreation; and protection of the Forest Preserve, state parks and other wild lands. Our priorities today are state budget funding for open space protection and for stewardship of our Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve and our incomparable state parks system.

The Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) strongly supports Governor Andrew Cuomo's historic budget proposal to appropriate the highest level of funding - \$300 million for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). This increase in funding from \$177 million in the 2015-2016 budget will not only better protect our environment, but ensure cleaner air and water and create jobs throughout the state. **ADK applauds Governor Cuomo's leadership and we look forward to working with the Governor, the state Senate and Assembly to enact this historic increase in the EPF.**

A \$300 million EPF will allow the state to better meet current demand and implement critical programs to conserve open space and farmland, protect and improve water quality, build community resilience, sustainably revitalize waterfronts, create local parks, promote recycling, reduce waste, prevent pollution, provide community health programs, and support our zoos and botanical gardens. Capital investments made through the EPF support thousands of jobs in our state across a broad spectrum of industries, from tourism, recreation,

agriculture and forest products to drinking water protection for millions of New Yorkers, and generate approximately \$40 billion in revenue every year.

Since its creation in 1993, the Senate and Assembly have provided strong, bipartisan support for the EPF. In recent budgets, as New York's economy has recovered, 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 rebuild the EPF and your recognition of the benefits it brings to our state – such as job creation, tourism opportunities, clean water and other environmental and public health protections, climate resilience, recreational access, and quality of life.

ADK is very pleased to see that this historic increase to the EPF was done without the use of Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) proceeds which is a critical program in meeting our climate goals and reducing green house gas emissions. This year, the Governor's proposed budget uses financial settlements to help fund the EPF, which is a strategy that may work for this year, but will not sustain the EPF at \$300 million or above. **Moving forward, the governor should use a recurring revenue stream like the real estate transfer tax (RETT) to support the EPF.** Last year, the RETT generated more than \$1 billion and is expected to produce more in 2016. The New York State Division of Budget's Economic Review Outlook, from 2011-2015 reports that RETT funds earmarked for the EPF have been a consistent \$119 million a year.¹ The EPF serves New York communities well and deserves to be fully funded from a reliable and sustainable source such as the RETT.

ADK is particularly excited about a nearly **\$13.5 million increase in land acquisition and open space conservation funding.** This substantial increase in funding will enable Forest Preserve and conservation easement purchases of key tracts of land in the Adirondacks and Catskills, such as the Boreas Ponds Tract and the Follensby Pond Tract. Equally important is the \$9.5 million boost in state land stewardship funding. This increase in funding will mean improved facilities for public use of the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves, including more hiking trail construction and maintenance as well as additional Summit Stewards to protect the Adirondack High Peaks.

ADK is excited to see a new \$32.5 million appropriation for **Greenhouse Gas Reduction and climate change mitigation and resiliency** will keep the State of New York in the forefront of the critical battle to reduce greenhouse gases and to prepare the state and its communities for climate change.

We are very pleased to see a significant increase in funding for invasive species protection and control with a boost from \$5.8 million to \$10 million at a critical time in the battle against aquatic and terrestrial invasive species. ADK hopes to see the increase in funding be used for effective AIS prevention and management strategies such as **boat washing and inspection stations.** Invasive species are spreading at rapid rate, reducing water quality, property values, and recreational opportunities along the way. New York State has

enacted numerous regulations and laws that will prove vital to stopping the spread of aquatic and terrestrial invasive species, but there is still a missing link. Robust investments in public education, spread prevention, and mitigation are needed before the impacts become insurmountable. Lake associations, non-profits, and municipalities are desperate to act in the best interests of the water they protect, but lack the necessary funding to do the job. Rapid state-wide investments in boat washing stations, staffing, and training would protect native aquatic fish and plants, saving the state countless millions in lost economic sporting and recreation activity.

The state should **continue to invest in AIS spread prevention, and the successful program of watercraft decontamination, management and control activities across the Adirondack Park.** This region is the last area in New York where major water bodies remain un-infested and free of invasive species.

The Adirondack Park's economy is particularly vulnerable to invasive species. A study commissioned by the Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program conservatively estimated the potential impact from just 8 invasive species to be between \$468 to \$893 million loss to the Adirondack's economy. Prevention efforts are of paramount importance and are critical to the economy, ecology and quality of life in the Adirondack Park.

Since 2000, AIS spread prevention, watercraft inspection, and education efforts have been successfully implemented by Paul Smith's College, the Lake Champlain Basin Program, and active lake associations at many, but not all, critical boat launches across the Adirondack Park. While these programs are effective at detecting and removing the majority of visible plant fragments, they cannot provide adequate decontamination of small-bodied organisms such as zebra mussels, Asian clam or spiny waterflea. Compared with spread prevention, the costs of directly managing infestations are high and often exceed the capacities of state action, local governments, and non-profits. Across the Adirondacks we need to **continue to build an effective AIS spread prevention and decontamination network** comprised of coordinated inspection locations and strategically located decontamination facilities.

Moving forward additional funding will be needed to continue to combat invasive species. Aquatic Invasive Species are not the only threat New York faces. New York faces **potential decimation of eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) from a forest pest, hemlock woolly adelgid (*Adelges tsugae*) (HWA),²** which has not yet entered the Adirondack Park, but has already caused significant decline in the Catskill Park, and has been identified in Letchworth State Park, and Zoar Valley, and Allegany State Park (where our members helped identify HWA under a *citizen science* project run by OPRHP).

Hemlocks are a foundation species.³ Foundation species are critical species in the habitats they help create.⁴ In the case of hemlocks they moderate stream water temperatures for trout and other animals, provide a buffer for nutrient inputs to maintain water quality, stabilize shallow soils especially in steep gorges, provide shelter for animals and plants which is especially important in winter, provide critical habitat for migrating neo-tropical birds, and provide acidic substrate for lichens.

In the Adirondack Park hemlock is very dense especially in the south and in areas like Lake George, Keene Valley, and in much of the Lake Champlain Basin (including its far edge in the Saranac Lakes Wild Forest and the St Regis Canoe Area).⁵ Imagine the impact to the Adirondack landscape from a severe decline of hemlock—a highly likely scenario without a significant increase in early detection efforts (like those our members are engaged in as citizen scientists), treatment and development of bio-controls, such as the predatory beetle (*Laricobius nigrinus*), and predatory silver flies (*Leucopis piniperda* and *Leucopis argenticollis*).⁶ We only need look to places such as the Great Smoky Mountains for an example of the devastation in store for the Adirondacks.⁷ Closer to home, decline of hemlocks is already well underway in the Catskills.⁸ HWA has been advancing quickly through New York State,⁹ and now is at the doorstep of the Adirondack Park (and likely is already present). Anyone who has hiked, paddled, or driven through the Adirondack Park should realize what we will lose. If we do not act quickly, we may lose the species.¹⁰

Although there are some truly wonderful pieces of this budget—the great increase to the EPF, a total spending increase of \$76 million for DEC, and a \$3 million increase for OPRHP, these are largely capital spending increases. **ADK remains very concerned about the impact that the implementation of a flat budget (increase of only 2% each year) has been having on the staffing of Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), OPRHP, and APA.**

The budget holds funding at current levels for agricultural, environmental and parks operating programs. Although Lands and Forests has received authority to fill FTE vacancies this year, which is a great help, **there is still a large gap between the existing staff and the additional staff needed to protect the 5.1 million acres of DEC administered lands across the state**, including 2.6 million acres in the Adirondack Park and nearly 300,000 acres in the Catskill Forest Preserve. **Additionally, OPRHP operates our State Park system with 180 State parks and 35 historic sites, and 62 million annual visitors.**

One example of how the combination of our excellent increase in EPF categories such as the Open Space/Land Conservation Program is ultimately undermined by the flat budget strategy and ends up costing taxpayers more in the long-run involves the fact that without DEC support, staff such as surveyors, real property attorneys, scientists, and planners are unable to accomplish the tasks necessary to use Open Space/Land Conservation funding to purchase land, classify land units, or create management plans for public use.


We applaud the Governor's commitment to open space protection and improved access to wildlife-related recreation in the acquisition of the former Finch Pruyn Lands, the largest addition to the Adirondack Forest Preserve in a century. However, **to complete the job we must have more support for the agencies** tasked with the acquisition process and the protection and management of our state public lands.

In summary, **ADK commends the Governor in proposing a budget which makes an historic increase to the EPF, and other important increases to capital funding for the environment.** ADK appreciates your

understanding of the important economic and public health benefits that environmental investments have across the state and we look forward to working with you to ensure a \$300 million EPF is included in the final budget adopted by March 31st. **We hope to also work with the Senate and Assembly to address critical staffing needs** in DEC, OPRHP, and in the Adirondack Park Agency.

Thank you for your dedication to the communities, environment, and the natural heritage of New York State.

Sincerely,



Neil F. Woodworth
Executive Director and Counsel
Adirondack Mountain Club, Inc.

¹ <https://www.budget.ny.gov/pubs/executive/eBudget1617/economicRevenueOutlook/economicRevenueOutlook.pdf>

² <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7250.html>

³ <http://www.lternet.edu/research/keyfindings/foundation-species-matter>

⁴ <http://adkinvasives.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/WHITMORE-Lk-Placid-28-Mar-15-1.pdf>

⁵ <http://adkinvasives.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Hemlock-Woolly-Adelgid-Adirondack-Distribution-Map.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/2015/06/cornell-introduces-silver-flies-save-hemlock-forests>

⁷ <http://www.lakeplacidnews.com/page/content.detail/id/523715/Flies-could-avert-hemlock-threat-in-New-York.html?nav=5005>

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https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=12&ved=0CFoQFjALahUKEwiqprXP5rLHAhVIXB4KHsSmDG0&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.na.fs.fed.us%2Fnews%2Fnewsstories%2FHWA-Study-FINAL-012915.pdf&ei=tzvTVepuyLh5pM2y6AY&usg=AFQjCNFRO6h3W_R1J2EKupOn32xQBBQLpQ&

⁹ <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/95656.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.lakeplacidnews.com/page/content.detail/id/523185/A-threat-to-hemlocks.html?nav=5005>