

CITIZENS CAMPAIGN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



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Empowering Communities, Advocating Solutions.

TESTIMONY TO JOINT LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON 2013 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION BUDGET

February 4, 2013

Albany, NY

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is William Cooke, Director of Government Relations, Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE). CCE is an 80,000 member non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization that works to empower communities and advocate solutions that protect public health and the natural environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FUND

CCE supports Governor Cuomo's proposed increase to the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). While CCE supports the EPF's proposed revenue increase we are concerned that those increases will be inappropriately tied to Bottle Bill revenue. The EPF needs to be increased regardless of Bottle Bill revenue. The EPF is critical to every New Yorker, transcending all race, age, class, and gender differences. From Montauk to Buffalo, the EPF positively affects every single person living in the Empire State. The EPF has provided a reliable and dedicated source of funding for essential programs since 1993, supporting projects and programs to protect and improve water quality, protect air quality, conserve critical open space and farmland, and sustain important environmental education for our next generation of leaders.

In addition to creating significant environmental benefits, the EPF contributes positively to New York's economy. EPF projects and programs employ real people to do real work in NY. Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers are employed in industries supported by the EPF, such as outdoor recreation, recycling, and farming. EPF funds provide critical financial resources for maximizing federal tax dollars and private investment as matching funds to make environmental investment dollars go even further.

CCE encourages the Legislature to look at additional opportunities to increase the EPF. Specifically, CCE believes the following increases are important of New Yorkers:

- **Oceans and Great Lakes to \$9 million** – Healthy ocean and Great Lakes resources help drive and defend New York's economy, providing numerous jobs and recreational opportunities and protecting our coastal communities. Ocean and Great Lakes funding should be used to strengthen our coastal communities' natural defenses; further the responsible siting of offshore renewable energy and protection of sensitive offshore habitats; and support investments in good science to aid in decision-making regarding of the management of New York's valuable coastal and ocean resources. To better protect

our coastal communities from flooding, storm surges, and expected sea level rise, one key cost-effective and environmentally beneficial strategy is to invest in our natural defenses, such as coastal wetlands and shellfish reefs that can help dissipate wave energy and maintain the shoreline while simultaneously providing essential habitat for struggling fish and shellfish populations. Increased funding is needed to update our natural resource-related maps – many of which are decades old – to show post-storm locations of naturally protective features like tidal wetlands and seagrass meadows, so that this information can be used in decision-making. We must also defend the Great Lakes' natural shoreline. As the International Joint Commission develops its plan to return Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River towards more natural flows to benefit the environment, New York must support this new water level regulation, and work with local governments, universities, non-governmental organizations, and coastal stakeholders to produce a shoreline restoration program for Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River that restores wetlands, adapts coastal infrastructure, monitors effectiveness of the new regulation, and reduces coastal hazards.

- **Farmland Protection** – The Farmland Protection program provides direct capital for farmers to reinvest in order to improve farm profitability. The Farmland Protection program supports the purchase of conservation easements on working farms. Through the Department of Agriculture and Markets, counties and towns receive financial support from the Farmland Protection program to develop farmland protection plans and purchase development rights on farmland. This is particularly important as development pressures increase in many rural areas throughout the state. The Farmland Protection program helps promote the economic viability of farms, modernize farms and diversify production. The Farmland Protection program helps buffer farmers from market volatility by encouraging them to participate in programs such as direct marketing through farmers' markets and regional markets. New York's agriculture is critical to our state's economy and operates across the state. Farming is a multi-billion dollar industry for New York, yet it is made up of small family farmers.

In addition to the contribution to the statewide economy, farmers are the backbones of their regional economies as well. Farm loss is a negative multiplier to regional economies, because farmers invest in their local economies. According the Long Island Farm Bureau, family farmers on LI are barely making it and the situation has never been more critical than it is now. In addition to the critical addition to local and regional economies, farmland provides important environmental benefits. From stormwater retention to groundwater replenishment, we know there is a connection between a healthy environment and a healthy farm. Turning farmland into other uses not only negatively impacts the local economy; it also places an economic burden to replace these natural systems with man-made ones.

- **Invasive Species** - Invasive species pose a real threat to New York's ecological and economic health. Invasive species negatively impact native species through direct predation, competition for nutrients, disruption of food webs, and altered physical habitats. Economic losses associated with invasive species have been calculated at nearly \$120 billion per year in the United States. Maintenance at water intakes to address zebra

mussel infestations costs an estimated \$267 million in North America. Commercial and recreational fishing are severely impacted by invasive species. Of the estimated \$5.7 billion in economic and environmental damage invasive species cause annually in the Great Lakes Basin, \$4.5 billion occurs in the fishing sector. In the New York State Canal and Hudson River system, an estimated \$500 million in economic losses occur each year from at least 154 non-indigenous species; 80% of that loss is in commercial and sport fishing. Complete loss of the scallop fishery due to brown tide, a type of harmful invasive algal bloom, resulted in economic losses estimated at \$3.8 million annually. In addition, on Long Island, according to DEC, over 50% of lakes and rivers have aquatic invasive plant species including Variable Leaf Milfoil and Cabomba. These aquatic species take over the lake, choke out native vegetation and cover the surface water like a blanket. This threatens property values and diminishes recreational activities and ecological health of the local ecosystem. When it comes to invasive species, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. New York State can prevent significant environmental harm, and save money by investing in preventative measures through this important line item. Also, this line item should be used for some remediation efforts including the Yaphank Lakes in the Town of Brookhaven.

- **Finger Lakes-Lake Ontario Watershed to \$2.3 million** – The Finger Lakes- Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance (FL-LOWPA) facilitates processes that encourage watershed partnerships. FL-LOWPA works to protect and enhance water resources by promoting the sharing of information, data, ideas, and resources pertaining to the management of watersheds in New York's Lake Ontario Basin; fostering dynamic and collaborative watershed management programs and partnerships; and emphasizing a holistic, ecosystem-based approach to water quality improvement and protection. FL-LOWPA is successful through grassroots programming. Water quality problems are defined and solutions are developed and implemented at the local level. Through participation in the Alliance, member counties develop a more regional perspective that informs local programming and encourages cooperation. FL-LOWPA membership includes the following New York State counties wholly or partially in the Lake Ontario drainage basin

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION STAFF

In order to adequately support existing programs and responsibilities, DEC staff must be increased. CCE supports more staff for DEC to support their existing functions, including enforcement. Unfortunately, DEC staff has been continuously cut for the past 7 years. It is critical for the health of New York's environment for the DEC to be built back up.

REBUILDING NEW YORK POST-SANDY, IRENE, AND LEE

CCE supports and applauds Governor Cuomo's commitment to see New York become stronger and more resilient post-Sandy, Irene, and Lee. Governor Cuomo was correct in asserting that these types of storms will, unfortunately, become a part of life that we must regularly plan to recover from. CCE encourages the Legislature to recognize that climate change is here and we must continue to make strides to reduce our dependence upon fossil fuels, as well as, protect our environment and our natural environment to defend itself through its natural buffers and

resilience measures. While we await the details of Governor Cuomo's storm recovery, CCE supports the following broad initiatives from Governor Cuomo's 2100 Commission report:

- Protecting and strengthening natural infrastructure and coastal ecosystem restoration
- Using green and natural infrastructure
- Improving wastewater treatment facilities and raising them about sea level
- Updating flood maps
- Keeping the Fire Island breach or 'New Inlet' open and considering the benefits of breaches in specific areas
- Lowering the greenhouse gas cap
- Long term extension of the New York Sun Initiative, as well as the long term extension of New York's other clean energy programs

FRACK FREE BUDGET

The Executive Budget was presented 'frack-free.' New York State has not effectively shown that it can conduct a permit program safely and it does not have the staff to ensure that a program can move forward without unnecessary harm to the environment and public health. CCE encourages the Legislature to ensure that the final budget remains frack-free.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment today.