



FOLLOWPA

FINGER LAKES - LAKE ONTARIO WATERSHED PROTECTION ALLIANCE

**New York State Senate and New York State Assembly
Environmental Conservation Committee
SFY 2016-17 Budget Hearing**

Testimony by the Finger Lakes – Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance
Submitted on January 22, 2016
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of the Finger Lakes – Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance (FOLLOWPA). FOLLOWPA is an alliance of 25 New York State counties within the Lake Ontario drainage basin, **celebrating our 20th anniversary this year!** The Alliance promotes grassroots programs to protect water resources with participation from numerous agencies and organizations, local governments and individual landowners to control nonpoint sources of pollution, eradicate invasive species, conduct watershed monitoring, and educate and engage the public. FOLLOWPA programs address identified needs as defined in county water quality strategies, comprehensive watershed management plans, state and federal plans, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation’s Priority Waterbody Inventory. The Alliance facilitates the transfer of information, techniques, and resources among the 25 counties so water quality problems can be managed more effectively at the watershed level, despite crosscutting political boundaries and agency jurisdictions.

New York (and FOLLOWPA) needs funding to address critical issues that make our communities desirable for businesses, residents and tourists alike, including conserving clean water; supporting jobs in forestry, agriculture, construction, recycling and tourism; improving community parks and waterfronts; and positioning our municipalities to become more resilient and reduce risk from storm impacts.

Clean, available freshwater is essential to a high quality of life. Respondents to Money Magazine’s survey on the best places to live in the United States consistently rate clean water as a top consideration. The two and one-quarter million people that live and work in the Finger Lakes-Lake Ontario region of upstate New York benefit immeasurably from the 260 lakes and more than 16,200 stream miles that distinguish the landscape. These resources provide water supplies for drinking, industry, and agriculture. They support exceptional recreational opportunities and scenic vistas – enhancing the quality of life and making upstate New York more desirable to new businesses and tourists.

Each year more than 24 million tourists visit the Finger Lakes region. Anglers participating in Lake Ontario fishing derbies bring in well over \$2 million annually to shoreline communities. In several rural areas of the region, lakefront properties make up as much as 70 percent of the local tax base. Clean lakes are major revenue generators. While the economic value of our waters is evident, their intrinsic value is not easily quantified. The satisfaction that comes with sailing on a clear lake, catching a healthy, edible rainbow trout, or viewing a bald eagle in its shoreline nest cannot be measured, but is a steady reminder of our stewardship responsibility. Our water resources are arguably one of the region's greatest assets. It is prudent to protect them and vital to communities now and in the future.

The Trust for Public Lands (2012) reported that "For every dollar spent by the State's Environmental Protection Fund to acquire or protect land, \$7 in economic benefits are returned through natural goods and services, such as filtering air and water of pollutants, and flood control." The report also noted, like the Oxford Economics Study, that activities benefitting from the EPF – including outdoor recreation, forest-related manufacturing and logging, farming, and recycling – account for more than 300,000 jobs in New York State and billions of dollars in spending."

Most recently, a survey conducted by the Global Strategy Group (November 2013) determined that a "majority of New York voters support more funding for environmental programs in New York State." Voters are in favor of increasing the annual appropriation to the EPF so that the States' sources of clean water, for both drinking and recreation, can be adequately protected. FLOWPA plays a major role in overseeing the protection and promotion of New York's water resources; therefore, an increase to the EPF and FLOWPA's appropriation would be consistent with the demands of the voters.

FLOWPA would like to thank the New York State Legislature for your foresight in enacting the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) over two decades ago, and for your historical commitment to ensuring the critical programs within the EPF are funded year after year. 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. Specifically, EPF projects and programs employ real people to do real work in NY. 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.

Since 1997, FLOWPA has been included in the EPF under the Open Space Program Category. Over **95%** of our annual appropriation is distributed to our 25 member counties for program implementation. **FLOWPA partners leverage \$2 for every \$1 appropriated to them in the EPF. In 2015, the FLOWPA program leveraged over \$2.5 million dollars in additional water quality investments through stakeholder contributions, other state funding and federal contributions.** FLOWPA funds are the catalyst for getting projects started and bringing additional financial assistance to the area. Often times FLOWPA funds are used to move a project from the planning/design phase to actual implementation, at which time, the landowners are much more willing to contribute their time, materials, equipment and labor to see the project through to completion. All of the stakeholders that have participated in FLOWPA water quality improvement projects and have received reimbursement from the FLOWPA program are very appreciative of this financial assistance and have been motivated to continue being good stewards

of the land by teaming up with FLOWPA to do more work on their property or applying the principles and concepts learned to other activities on their land.

As you know, the Governor has proposed funding the EPF at a historic level - \$300 million - for SFY 2016-17. Despite an increase of \$123 million dollars, the Governor has proposed an increase of \$229,000 for FLOWPA, bringing our appropriation to \$1,979,000 which is still \$321,000 short of restoring our appropriation to SFY 2007-08 and SFY 2008-09 levels. FLOWPA continues to be a partner and asset to New York State, especially the Department of Environmental Conservation. We have proven our ability to efficiently and effectively manage not only our State appropriation, but have demonstrated the ability to successfully secure and administer over \$4 million dollars in Federal grants that not only benefit our 25 county region, but all of New York State by drawing attention to the collaborative process currently underway to protect New York's freshwater resources; while promoting agriculture, tourism, recreation and economic development.

On behalf of FLOWPA, I respectfully submit this testimony today and ask that you consider increasing FLOWPA's appropriation in the SFY 2016-17 budget so that our funding will be restored to \$2.3 million. It is imperative that our EPF appropriation be restored to \$2.3 million, so that we can not only assist efforts underway with federal and state funded projects, but also develop and implement comprehensive, basin-wide programs that promote public education and citizen involvement and the sharing of information and techniques among watershed partners - FLOWPA's greatest strength and attribute.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony and for your careful consideration of this request.

