



**Department of
Environmental
Conservation**

Testimony of

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Commissioner

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

New York State Legislature

Senate Standing Committee on Finance

Assembly Standing Committee on Ways and Means

Hearing:

The 2022-2023 Executive Budget Recommendations for the

Department of Environmental Conservation

February 1, 2022

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Krueger, Chairwoman Weinstein, and members of the fiscal, environmental conservation, and other legislative committees. I am Basil Seggos, Commissioner of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Thank you for the opportunity to discuss Governor Hochul's environmental priorities for State Fiscal Year 2022-2023.

Governor Hochul's Executive Budget proposes a historic investment in environmental protection, including increasing the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) to \$400 million, its highest-ever level. The Executive Budget proposes an additional \$500 million for critical water infrastructure, bringing the State's total water infrastructure commitment to \$4.5 billion. It contributes \$500 million to further growing New York's nation-leading offshore wind industry. And it increases the Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act, which will go before New York voters later this year, to \$4 billion. Simply put, Governor Hochul's proposals amount to the largest commitment to the environment, climate action, and environmental justice in New York State history. These proposed investments are critical to not only enhance conservation efforts, but to create jobs and bolster our continued economic recovery.

The Executive Budget also proposes to extend the Brownfield Cleanup Program for another 10 years and expand it to incentivize renewable energy projects and cleanups in disadvantaged communities. The Brownfield Cleanup Program is a critical tool in revitalizing formerly contaminated sites, protecting public health, reinvigorating neighborhoods, and strengthening local economies. In 2021 alone, DEC issued a total of 42 Certificates of Completion and accepted 90 new sites into the program. Since its inception in 2003, the Brownfield Cleanup Program has successfully led to the remediation of 543 former industrial sites statewide.

In addition, the Executive Budget proposes essential improvements to the State's wetlands protection program, protecting an estimated additional million acres of wetlands and helping New York adapt to increased flooding and severe storms fueled by climate change. And as part of our comprehensive efforts to respond to the global recycling crisis and reduce waste and plastic pollution, New York will introduce transformative legislation to fundamentally shift the way recyclable materials are produced and managed. The Governor's proposal to advance Extended Producer Responsibility to manage packaging and printed paper, as well as other difficult or costly to manage materials, will set the standards for programs across the country.

To support these ambitious initiatives, DEC's budget for the coming year recommends State Operations funding of \$481.4 million, an increase of \$18.1 million from the 2021-22 Enacted State Operations Budget. DEC's Capital Budget would grow to \$9.7 billion, its largest ever. The budget increases DEC staffing to 3,108 employees, up 168 from last year, and provides \$90 million in NY Works funding to support infrastructure projects across the state. In addition, the Executive Budget recommends appropriations of \$20 million for hazardous waste remediation and \$7 million for flood and coastal protection projects. These commitments will allow DEC to continue to fulfill our mission of ensuring the health, safety, and accessibility of our environment while sustaining and advancing efforts to reduce emissions and invest in Environmental Justice communities across the state.

Now in the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, our state has been repeatedly tested and challenged in unimaginable ways. The pandemic has revealed the importance of government and shined a bright light on the disproportionate burdens faced by disadvantaged communities. On the front lines in communities across New York, DEC constructed and operated COVID testing and vaccine sites, delivered food and medical supplies, and operated call centers. All told, more than 1,000 of DEC's 3,000 staff provided essential assistance to the state's COVID response and I want to recognize their contributions. Yet through this period, DEC continued to meet our core mission and address new and emerging challenges. DEC's efforts to preserve the environment have never been more critical, and I am proud that our professionals never relent in upholding our commitment to the people of New York State.

New York continues to be a national leader on the response to climate change, the defining issue of our time. As Co-Chair of the State's Climate Action Council alongside NYSERDA President and CEO Doreen Harris, I am working to ensure New York reaches the targets in the state's nation-leading climate law while ensuring every community has an opportunity to make their voice heard in the process.

Late last year, the Climate Action Council released its Draft Scoping Plan. This roadmap to achieve New York's ambitious climate goals as part of the nation-leading Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act is a historic step forward. I commend the Council, agency staff, and dozens of outside experts for their hard work over the last two years to reach this critical milestone. While preliminary, the Draft Scoping Plan conservatively presents an encouraging \$80 to \$120 billion benefit to cost ratio over a "no action" approach, as well as the creation of hundreds of thousands of new jobs. This transition is already underway, as New York is now advancing more than 100 large-scale renewable energy projects and new transmission projects. Once these projects are operational, 63 percent of the state's electricity will come from renewable sources, putting New York well on its way to our goal to generate 70 percent of state's electricity from renewable sources by 2030, and on the path to 100 percent zero-emission electricity by 2040.

We look forward to exploring the economics of the Scoping Plan's draft recommendations in greater detail over the course of this year. The Draft Scoping Plan is now out for a 120-day public comment period through the end of April. I encourage all New Yorkers to review the Scoping Plan and provide their input via mail or email, or during one of the upcoming public hearings we are holding across the state.

Climate change affects the entire planet, but its impacts are being experienced disproportionately by disadvantaged communities, the same communities that have borne the brunt of pollution and neglect for decades. That is why climate justice is at the heart of New York State's Climate Act, and why we will direct 40 percent of climate investments to disadvantaged communities. The Climate Act also requires us to advance a just transition for New York's workforce to ensure all New Yorkers are represented in a cleaner energy future.

In addition to the critical work of the Climate Action Council and the release of the Draft Scoping Plan, New York is meeting key requirements of the Climate Act, including:

- Release of the Disadvantaged Communities Barriers and Opportunities Report to help address persistent disparities in the effects of climate change and spell out actions to design mitigation, adaptation, and clean energy programs with a focus on climate justice.
- Release of the Just Transition Working Group’s Jobs Study, which estimates the number of jobs created to combat climate change and examines the skills and training required to tackle the climate crisis. The study shows that New York is projected to add 10 jobs for every job lost, amounting to hundreds of thousands of new jobs by 2030 and beyond.
- Release of New York's first-ever Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report, which describes statewide greenhouse gas emissions for 1990 through 2019. The report shows large emissions reductions from the power sector, largely offset by increases in emissions from transportation and housing.

In addition to our Climate Action Council work in 2021, DEC advanced critical projects, programs, and policies to safeguard the health of our environment and our communities, including:

- Adopting New York's Advanced Clean Truck Rule, which will phase in sales and use of zero-emission trucks to reduce pollutants in our communities. Combined with legislation setting the goal that 100 percent of medium- and heavy-duty vehicles offered for sale be zero-emission by 2045, and ongoing investments in electric vehicles and infrastructure, the State is taking bold steps to reduce the transportation sector’s reliance on fossil fuels and meet CLCPA requirements.
- Supporting community-based organizations in Environmental Justice communities to advance community-driven and community-led solutions through millions of dollars in Community Impact Grants supported by the EPF.
- Enacting regulations and supporting the Food Donation and Food Scraps Recycling Law helping to cut greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the disposal of excess food in landfills while promoting food donation to help New Yorkers in need.
- Preparing affected entities and reducing waste through the New York’s polystyrene ban, one of the strongest in the nation, and providing EPF grants to help local governments support municipal recycling coordinators, recycling education and planning.
- Leading the nation in protecting drinking water and our natural resources from emerging contaminants like PFOA, PFOS, and 1,4-Dioxane in impacted communities and at legacy contaminated sites, landfills, and waterbodies that serve as drinking water sources.
- Directing \$272 million in DEC Water Quality Improvement Project grants in addition to millions in additional grants and loans to water infrastructure projects across New York in coordination with our colleagues at the Environmental Facilities Corporation and the State Department of Health.
- Finalizing regulations prohibiting the use of the pesticide chlorpyrifos and recently taking steps to protect pollinators by restricting the use of neonicotinoids.
- Advancing critical coastal resilience and water quality improvement projects, including the Lake Ontario Regional Economic Development Initiative, the Suffolk County Coastal Resiliency Initiative, and the Bay Park Conveyance Project.

- Implementing measures to reduce emissions from oil and natural gas infrastructure, which would lower methane emissions by more than 14,000 tons per year. In addition, DEC continues to locate and plug abandoned, decades-old oil and gas wells leaking methane.
- Addressing sustainable use of public lands by increasing public awareness and managing the impacts of increased visitation, including the launch of a pilot reservation system at the Adirondack Mountain Reserve, new shuttle bus in Essex County, increased protections at the Peekamoose Blue Hole, and the creation of the first Adirondack and Catskill Park Coordinators to guide DEC's ongoing and collaborative efforts with our partners.
- Protecting open space by acquiring nearly 5,800 acres of land and 7,100 acres of conservation easements through the EPF and other sources and continuing to support efforts to create stronger and healthier ecosystems through urban and community forestry and combating invasive species.
- Improving DEC's campgrounds, which broke records for overnight stays in 2021 and saw 1.58 million visitors, and additional recreational investments, including new fishing access in the town of Denmark and village of Maine, new waterway access at Hashamomuck in Southold, an upgraded boat launch in Cocksackie, and new archery range at Saratoga Sand Plains, not to mention the first segments of the New York State Birding Trail in New York City.
- Opening a state-of-the-art Marine Resources headquarters at Nissequogue River State Park.
- Effectively managing New York's fish and wildlife resources with tools that include our nationally recognized, award-winning Deer Management Plan, Trout Stream Management Plan, and efforts to protect freshwater mussels on the Grasse River and restore New York's threatened lake sturgeon, among other successes.
- Enforcing environmental crimes through the everyday actions of our Environmental Conservation Police and requiring polluters to clean up contamination at sites like Tonawanda Coke, Hoosick Falls, and the Northrup-Grumman plume.
- Helping sister states in need by sending DEC-led teams of Forest Rangers and other wildland firefighters to Western states and more recently participating in the multi-agency recovery from devastating tornadoes in Kentucky.

New York State has long held the title of the birthplace of the modern environmental movement. Yet it is not enough to give birth to a movement when the scale of the challenge five decades later demands sustained and forceful leadership. Governor Hochul's proposed generational investments in conservation, clean energy, and green jobs positions New York at the vanguard of environmental protection in the United States.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony today. As always, I look forward to working with you to capitalize on these important investments and policies.