

# PROTECT THE ADIRONDACKS!

**TO:** Assembly Ways and Means Committee, Senate Finance Committee, Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee, Senate Environmental Conservation Committee  
**FROM:** Peter Bauer, Executive Director  
**DATE:** February 5, 2018  
**RE:** Executive 2018-19 NYS Budget Testimony

Protect the Adirondacks has the following comments and recommendations on the Executive 2018-19 Budget

## Department of Environmental Conservation

**Environmental Protection Fund:** The Executive Budget proposed to continue the current \$300 million funding for EPF with \$39 million for solid waste, \$86 million for Parks and Recreation, \$154 million for open space, and \$21 million for climate change.

### Comments:

- Protect supports continued funding the EPF at the \$300 million level.
- Protect supports funding for State Land Stewardship and Invasive Species.
- Protect supports funding for Visitor Interpretive Center at Paul Smiths College and Newcomb.
- Protect supports new funding for the Lake George Park Commission
- Protect strongly recommends that criteria be developed for potential projects, to avoid funding projects that are not appropriate for the EPF. For example, funding for the Pesticide Data Base should be paid by companies economically benefiting from registering pesticide in NYS, not the EPF

**State Land Stewardship:** Increased funding is needed to meet increasing user impacts on the Forest Preserve. The State Lands Stewardship fund should be increased. There has been a significant increase in the public's interest in hiking, biking and visiting the Adirondacks, particularly in the High Peaks Wilderness. This increase has placed commensurate pressure on Forest Rangers to respond to accidents and rescues due to lack of knowledge and preparedness, weather-related accidents, health risks and other factors. Protect believes it is essential to increase the number of Forest Rangers and other personnel, such as Wilderness Rangers and educators, to respond to these pressures. In addition, DEC must fill any vacancies in the Forest Ranger program. PROTECT proposes that the Legislature investigate funding these positions from new income sources, such as hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, outdoor recreational equipment fees, etc, or permit fees from use.

Revisions to the Forest Tax Law (Section 480, 480a. and new 480b)/Empire Forests of the Future Initiative (EFFI)

The Executive Budget proposes significant changes to the Forest Tax Law. The new 480b section provides \$3 million in reimbursements to towns experiencing a greater than 1% tax shift. The program would provide 70% subsidy (currently 80%) and new management requirements. The new section also provides levels of subsidy based on forest certification. The law includes state notification of any forest harvest of 10 acres or greater, which is a common requirement in other states.

**Comments:** Protect supports EFFI. PROTECT supports the State notification of forest harvests of 10 or more acres. We recommend that the subsidy rate remain at 80%.

Forest Preserve Tax Cap

The Executive Budget proposed to cap Forest Preserve and other State land tax payments through a PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes). The current system is based on local land assessments. The State has not provided data on the cost savings to the State, the impact of a tax shift to private landowners, and overall State land tax payments. Apparently the State did not consult with NYSDEC on this proposal.

**Recommendation:** PROTECT recommends that this proposal be rejected. This proposal is likely to have a negative impact on local governments in the Adirondacks. Some communities within the Adirondack Park have considerable amounts of State Forest Preserve land within their borders and the economic impact could be significant.

NY Works

The Executive Budget proposes \$300 million through the NY Works for “environmental projects”.

**Comment:** PROTECT recommends that the Legislature request more specifics for environmental projects to be funded.

Empire State Trail funding

The Executive Budget proposes \$200 million for the Empire State Trail through multiple agencies.

**Comments:** While PROTECT supports the concept of completing the Empire State Trail, there should be more detailed information regarding the costs and expenditures for the Trail must be provided.

**Comments:** It is essential that the Legislature ensure that projects being funded for “access” not violate of the Forest Preserve and its Forever Wild protections.

Adventure NY Funding

The Executive Budget proposes \$40 million capital funds to DEC to provide access to the State’s natural resources. The projects including improved access to state lands,

rehabilitation of campgrounds, upgrading of recreational facilities, and “health and safety repairs” to State facilities.

One program that we think should be identified in Adventure NY is planning funding for Warren and Saratoga Counties to begin an evaluation of converting the rail line from Saratoga Springs (Saratoga County) to North Creek (Warren County) to Newcomb (Essex County) into a multi-use trail. PROTECT recommends that sufficient funding be provided to support the initial planning process for the conversion of the Saratoga North Creek Railway.

#### Agriculture and Markets

The Executive Budget recommends eliminating \$300,000 to the North Country Farm to School program in its Aid to Localities budget.

PROTECT recommends restoring this program funding. Local program encouraging use of locally grown and raised food products in schools not only benefits the children but the agricultural community.

#### Economical Development Grants

New York State has funded the Regional Economic Development Councils at \$5.4 billion, Buffalo billions at \$1.5 billion, Upstate Revitalization Initiative at \$4.7 billion, and Downtown Revitalization Initiative at \$200 million (20 grants \$10 million each) for a total investment of \$11.8 billion. This Executive Budget proposes to fund the Regional Economic Development Councils at \$750 million.

PROTECT would like to know if any of this proposed funding is to be directed to the Adirondack Park region this year. Further, PROTECT recommends Legislative oversight of this program, with a particular interest in where the Regional Economic Development Council grants have been invested in the Adirondack Park, the basis and rationale for these grants and the anticipated outcomes. An analysis of jobs gained/retained versus money spent would also be important. There are significant economic needs in the Adirondack Park and we support would like to see this funding go where it will have the greatest impact and value

Protect the Adirondacks appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed 2018-19 Executive Budget. We are happy to answer questions regarding our testimony and meet with appropriate staff.

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