



**Department of
Environmental
Conservation**

**Testimony of
Basil Seggos
Acting 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 2016-17 Executive Budget Recommendations for the
Department of Environmental Conservation**

January 28, 2016

Chairwoman Young, Chairman Farrell, and members of the legislative fiscal and environmental conservation committees, I am Basil Seggos, Acting Commissioner for the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Thank you for this opportunity to discuss Governor Cuomo's budget recommendations for DEC for State Fiscal Year 2016-17.

Since taking office, Governor Cuomo has established one of the strongest environmental records in the nation. This record is built on the belief that the state's prosperity, both now and in the future, depends upon the health and resilience of its land, water, and air. We're protecting our environment to ensure our economy remains competitive long into the future.

Nowhere is the Governor's record on the environment stronger than on climate change. Indeed, climate change mitigation and adaptation are the centerpieces of the Governor's environmental agenda—and New York State is now a global leader in this effort. The State has made great strides in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the power sector through the multi-state Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. We're not stopping there. The 2015 State Energy Plan has set ambitious targets to further this effort: reduce carbon emissions by 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030, and mandate that 50 percent of the energy used by New Yorkers come from renewable sources by 2030. New York will be a leader in the clean energy economy.

Working together with the legislature over the last five years, we began to restore the Environmental Protection Fund; put sorely needed resources into parks and open spaces; prioritized hunting, fishing, and outdoor tourism; enacted one of the nation's strictest bans on illegal ivory sales; and directed hundreds of millions of dollars into water infrastructure upgrades. Last year alone, we reformed and extended the brownfield cleanup program, provided \$1 billion for the State Superfund, and increased funding to address oil spills.

The vital signs of New York's environment are trending upward thanks to our collective work. Our air pollution levels have been slashed dramatically since 2005, and New York is in attainment for all federal air quality standards, except ozone which is largely an upwind states issue. In 2014, 70 percent of all waters fully support the uses for which they are designated, up from 66 percent in 2005. Our lands, too, are gaining protection. Since 2011, DEC has acquired nearly 100,000 acres of fee and easements, protecting lands in every region of the state. We're nearly done acquiring the Finch Pruyn property in the Adirondacks—one of the largest land conservation and public access projects in the State's history. Outdoor recreation is booming across the state, hunting, fishing, biking, camping. For example, thanks to the state's focused efforts in the Adirondacks, tourism-related employment is up nearly eight percent, tourism spending is up ten percent, and visitation is up 15 percent in the Adirondack Park. We're going to bring the same attention to the Catskills this year.

All of this is good news. But make no mistake, the challenge ahead of us remains enormous, whether its climate change or invasive species or disproportionate pollution in disadvantaged communities. That's why this year, the Governor has laid out one of the most ambitious environmental visions of any governor in generations.

First, the Governor has proposed a record \$300 million for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) – more than double the funding provided in 2010. Much of the increase will support

traditional EPF programs – municipal recycling, parks, oceans and great lakes, invasive species, and land acquisition.

But we are also proposing two new EPF commitments. The first is the new Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Account. This \$32.5 million account will provide funding to communities for planning and capital investments to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, reduce non-energy sector emissions, and assess vulnerabilities of state operations.

The Governor is also proposing the largest investment of direct Environmental Justice (EJ) funding ever made in New York – \$7 million. This funding will continue to provide community impact grants for underserved and overburdened communities. But now it will also increase funding for air quality monitoring in urban areas, education and outreach efforts, and provide access to our wonderful state lands. Environmental justice will be one of my top priorities at DEC as the Governor launches a statewide environmental justice agenda.

Second, the Governor has made it clear that we must address the State's water infrastructure. Our communities need it, our economy needs it, and so does our environment. Last year, working with you, we enacted the \$200 million Water Infrastructure Improvement Act. The first year's funding was coupled with federal grant funding and Environmental Facilities Corporation financing, turning \$75 million in grants into over \$440 million in projects. This year, we propose to add another \$100 million in funding. Combined with the original investment, these funds will result in more than \$1 billion in projects, creating construction jobs, providing clean drinking water and healthier waterways.

Third, the Governor continues to improve the state's visible infrastructure through NY Works. Since its inception in 2012, NY Works has provided more than \$220 million in funding to DEC for environmental capital projects such as repairing and improving recreational facilities, hardening dams and flood control structures, upgrading fish hatcheries, plugging abandoned oil and gas wells, and implementing our eBusiness plan to streamline internal process. This year, the Governor proposes another \$40 million in NY Works funding.

Lastly, DEC's budget for the coming year recommends State Operations appropriations of \$462.5 million and a Capital budget totaling \$858.6 million. This includes the EPF investment, water infrastructure funding, NY Works, and State Superfund to continue these critical capital programs. The budget maintains DEC's budgeted fill level at 2,946 employees.

One of the best things about coming to DEC is the chance to work with such talented and dedicated staff. From monitoring air quality to issuing permits; from managing our state lands to rescuing stranded hikers; DEC's employees are there to protect and improve our environment and ensure that New York is Open for Business. And I want to especially recognize our Forest Rangers and Environmental Conservation Officers for their work responding to last weekend's storm. I had the honor of working with them as they helped dig Long Island out from near record levels of snow. We're always proud of their work, and are looking forward to replenishing their ranks with a new training academy starting this February.

I am confident the Executive Budget will enable DEC to continue to fulfill its mission to protect public health and the environment. I appreciate the opportunity to testify, and would be happy to answer any questions.

