



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michelle Hinchey

## Senator Michelle Hinchey Announces First-Time Funding Lines for Catskill Park in State Budget, Senate Passage of Bill to Create New Catskill Park Coordinator

MICHELLE HINCHEY June 14, 2021

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**HAINES FALLS, NY** – Today, at the Mountain Top Historical Society, Senator Michelle Hinchey (SD-46) announced new State Budget funding that she secured to protect the Catskill Park and Forest Preserve, and, for the first time ever, put the Catskill Park on par with the Adirondack Park through the stewardship line of the \$300 million Environmental Protection Fund. The Senator was joined for the announcement by Department of

Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Basil Seggos, Catskill Center Executive Director Jeff Senterman, Catskill Mountainkeeper Deputy Director Katherine Nadeau, Catskill Stewards, and members of the Police Benevolent Association of New York State.

The Catskill Park and its public lands bring more than 2.7 million people, thousands of jobs, and more than \$170 million annually to the Catskills region and its communities. Spanning four counties and 26 towns, the Catskills are important environmentally, culturally, and as an economic driver, especially for the small and rural communities located in Senator Hinchey's district, which includes all of Greene County and portions of Ulster County.

A priority issue for Senator Hinchey during the 2021 State Budget process was to establish funding parity between the Catskills and the Adirondacks, the latter of which has seen significantly more resources in years past. Due to Senator Hinchey's advocacy, the 2021 State Budget includes the Catskill Park on the same funding line as the Adirondack Park. This investment earmarks \$1,550,000 for spending on visitor safety, wilderness protection, and activities to address issues related to overuse.

Another first-time investment that Senator Hinchey secured is \$100,000 for Catskill Park Stewardship in the Aid to Localities budget bill. This funding is to be directed to the Catskill Center and Catskill Mountainkeeper to expand the number of seasonal Catskill Stewards that will be placed in high-use areas across the Catskills. Over the last decade, visitor use has increased dramatically in the Park, creating high-use hot spots and issues, including trash-littered trails and cars creating traffic hazards on roads unfit to accommodate parking. Multiple studies have been completed to improve the protection of the Park's natural resources and visitor management solutions, but they have not been implemented due to a lack of resources and coordination. The funding secured by Senator Hinchey will allow

solutions to be implemented for these issues and more.

“Protecting the Catskill Park is critical to the sustainability of our natural resources and equally crucial to the economic revitalization of Upstate New York. It is our duty to ensure that these irreplaceable lands will be preserved and accessible for generations to come, and as a Catskills Senator, that took top priority for me this budget season,” said **Senator Michelle Hinchey**. “This year, we carved out a real space for the Catskills in the State Budget, finally delivering a level of investment these lands deserve. Because of our advocacy, the Catskill Park now features on the same funding line typically reserved for the Adirondack Park alongside a new stream of funding designated for the Catskill Center and Catskill Mountainkeeper. This historic funding attention not only means more money to enhance stewardship efforts but empowers us to elevate the profile of the Catskills as a whole. This will allow visitors to enjoy the beauty and recreational assets of the Catskills while ensuring that adequate safeguards are in place to protect our fragile ecosystems. I’m proud of what we were able to achieve for the Catskills this year, and I will continue to raise awareness in Albany about the vital need to sustain these investments to ensure that the Catskill Park gets the attention it deserves.”

In related legislation, the State Senate voted unanimously last week to pass a bill, S6421, sponsored by Senator Hinchey, to create the position of Catskill Park Coordinator within the Department of Environmental Conservation. The 705,500 acre Catskill Park and 287,500 acre Catskill Forest Preserve cover an area that is home to much of the New York City Watershed, overseen by DEP, as well as represented by two DEC Regions, three Department of Transportation Regions, three Regional Economic Development Councils, four counties, 26 towns, and dozens of nonprofit entities. The Catskill Park Coordinator will serve as the central connector between all of the Park’s stakeholders to ensure continued interaction to

address natural resource and public access concerns throughout the Catskill ecosystem and develop community-based tourism strategies to promote the regional economy.

**DEC Commissioner Basisl Seggos** said, “The Catskills are attracting visitors from across New York and the nation because of the Park’s opportunities for outdoor adventure and the peerless beauty of its natural resources, as well as the charm of its communities. DEC is making significant investments in the Catskill Park to protect these resources and improve public safety. I look forward to continuing to work with Senator Hinchey, our public and private partners, and everyone who loves the Catskills to protect this special place and help the region thrive.”

“Senator Hinchey’s strong support of the Catskill Steward program will make it possible for us to help mitigate high-use impacts in the Catskills by greeting and educating tens of thousands of visitors,” said **Jeff Senterman, Executive Director of the Catskill Center**. “In addition, a Catskill Park coordinator would revolutionize the implementation of efforts to improve and protect the Park, while propelling the region’s economy. We applaud the Senate passage of her bill to create this position.”

"Thanks to Senator Hinchey's leadership, New York State stepped up to provide much-needed boots on the ground to protect the Catskill Park and Region this year," said **Katherine Nadeau, Catskill Mountainkeeper's Deputy Director**. "As a result of her efforts, Mountainkeeper was able to hire, train, and deploy two full-time Catskill Stewards on the trails this summer, providing in-person education and support to hikers and visitors while reducing litter and maintaining trails. We look forward to continuing the work to protect the Park by creating a Catskill Coordinator position in the 2022-2023 state budget."

Senator Hinchey is committed to preserving the Catskill Park and Forest Preserve to ensure that New Yorkers and visitors have access to its natural, recreational, and economic assets. In this year's State Budget, the Senator successfully advocated for additional funding within the Environmental Protection Fund for the Catskills, which includes:

- \$100,000 for the Catskill Science Collaborative;
- \$150,000 for the Congressman Maurice D. Hinchey Catskills Visitor Center;
- \$500,000 for the Cornell Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Project;
- \$1,000,000 for the Belleayre Ski Center;
- \$2,000,000 for Community Smart Growth Grants in the Adirondack and Catskill Parks.

The final budget also includes \$500 million in clean water infrastructure funding, continued support for the \$300 million Environmental Protect Fund, and the approval of the \$3 billion Restore Mother Nature Bond Act, which will allow the state to leverage funding to reduce the impacts of climate change as well as preserve and restore New York's natural resources. The Bond Act will feature on the ballot this November 2022 and must be approved by voters in order to be enacted.

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