



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michelle Hinchey

Senator Michelle Hinchey's Bill to Codify First-Ever Catskill Park Coordinator Role in Environmental Law Passes State Legislature

MICHELLE HINCHEY May 24, 2022



ALBANY, NY – Senator Michelle Hinchey today announced the passage of her bill ([S6421A/A7753A](#)) to codify the first-ever role of Catskill Park Coordinator in Environmental Conservation Law, ensuring the permanence of this critical position within the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), which was created to provide focused attention on the Catskill ecosystem as it pertains to natural resource protection, visitor safety, and tourism promotion. After passing both houses of the State Legislature, due to Senator Hinchey's leadership in the Senate and Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther's leadership in the

Assembly, the bill now awaits the Governor's signature.

The position of Catskill Park Coordinator was first proposed in 1999 as part of the Catskill Forest Preserve Public Access Plan, which was prepared for the DEC in cooperation with the NYS Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and other regional stakeholders, spanning businesses and chambers of commerce and environmental groups. In 2021, Senator Hinchey succeeded in elevating the importance of this role through her legislation [S6421A](#), which was also supported by the DEC's High Peaks Strategic Advisory Group (HPAG) and aligned with Catskills Advisory Group (CAG) discussions. In November of 2021, the DEC announced the appointment of McCrea Burnham to Catskill Park Coordinator, a longtime staffer from the DEC's Division of Lands and Forests who now serves as the central connector between all of the Park's stakeholders, fostering partnerships among state agencies, local governments, businesses, environmental organizations, Forest Preserve communities, and other priority actors to help ensure the sustainable and equitable use of public lands and their preservation.

"The role of Catskill Park Coordinator is one that I've been proud to champion in the Senate and one that our Forest Preserve communities have sought to create for decades because we know how profoundly important it is to protect the natural resources of the Catskills, increase Park accessibility for a new generation of explorers, and keep nature-based tourism a cornerstone of our region's economic well-being," **Senator Michelle Hinchey said.** "With the State Legislature's passage of my bill, we are now one step closer to codifying the historic position of Catskill Park Coordinator in Environmental Conservation Law to ensure that our Catskill Park continues to benefit from this specialized role and its foremost focus on carrying out our collective vision for stewardship of the Catskills."

"The passage of this legislation is vital for the sustainability of the Catskill Park, as well as

the surrounding communities,” **Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther said.** “We have seen record-breaking numbers of people using and enjoying the Catskill Park and region over the past few years. The enshrinement of the position of Park Coordinator into law will help to make sure the concerns of municipalities and conservationists are considered and will ensure the Catskill Park remains an attraction for visitors and a resource for residents for years to come.”

Due to Senator Hinchey’s advocacy to protect two of New York’s most prominent natural landscapes, a landmark \$8 million for stewardship and maintenance in the Catskills and Adirondack Parks was secured through the FY’23 State Budget, marking an increase of over \$6.5 million compared to last year and significantly building on the historic funding attention Senator Hinchey carved out for the Catskills in 2021.

The 705,500 acre Catskill Park and 287,500 acre Catskill Forest Preserve are 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 and its public lands bring in over 2.7 million people, thousands of jobs, and more than \$170 million annually to the Catskills region and its communities — important environmentally, culturally, and as an economic driver for the communities in Senator Hinchey’s district.

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RELATED LEGISLATION

2021-S6421A

-
- Introduced

 - - In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate

 - - On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate

 - - Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate

 - Delivered to Governor

 - Signed By Governor

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Establishes the position of Catskill park coordinator within the department of environmental conservation

April 27, 2021

Senate Floor Calendar

Sponsored by **Michelle Hinchey**

Do you support this bill?