



November 21, 2024

Governor Kathy Hochul
Executive Chamber
New York State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

RE: FY2025-26 New York State Budget

Dear Governor Hochul,

On behalf of the undersigned members of New Yorkers for Clean Water and Jobs, a broad coalition of conservation, environmental justice, labor, business, local government, outdoor recreation, and public health groups, thank you for your work to continue New York's environmental leadership. State funding is essential for communities to deliver clean water, clean air, access to nature, and local jobs to New Yorkers, as well as leveraging local and federal funding for projects.

Environmental programs provide significant benefits to New Yorkers. These programs contribute billions to the state economy, creating jobs in construction, tourism, retail and many other sectors. Environmental funding protects public health by removing pollution from air and water, and now with many programs mandating significant funding for disadvantaged communities, these benefits will reach more New Yorkers including those that have historically suffered the impacts of pollution the most. As our climate changes and deadly threats including flooding and heat face neighborhoods across the State, environmental funding helps conserve the natural resources New Yorkers depend on to reduce these climate impacts.

In order to build on the important progress happening in communities throughout the State, we write to respectfully ask the following environmental funding programs to be prioritized in your 2025-26 Executive Budget Proposal:

Appropriate at Least \$500 Million for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)

We urge you to increase the EPF appropriation to \$500 million in the next State budget. We appreciate that your administration has provided significant funding to the EPF and, after discussion with the Legislature, has abandoned problematic proposals such as offloading agency operating costs into the fund, which would reduce project funding. We urge you to continue to support agencies as they find efficiencies for program administration to speed up annual disbursements from the EPF.

The EPF has consistently enjoyed bi-partisan support in the Legislature and has funded beneficial projects in every county of the state, including every borough of New York City. EPF programs are essential to the resiliency, sustainability and quality of life in New York. These programs protect clean water; support our zoos, aquaria, and botanical gardens; advance environmental justice; conserve land and water including local farms and forests; create new parks and trails that promote equitable access to nature; support climate adaptation and mitigation projects; fund community recycling programs; and

prevent pollution. EPF programs also support hundreds of thousands of jobs across the state, and EPF-supported industries generate approximately \$40 billion in economic activity every year.

Many EPF programs have years-long waiting lists for funding or need that far outpaces current appropriations. Continuing to effectively move these programs forward and scale up their impact will complement the Bond Act and other environmental programs that protect clean water and create jobs.

\$600 Million for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act

We urge you to appropriate \$600 million for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act (CWIA) in your FY 2025-26 budget proposal. This will further work in New York communities to address pressing infrastructure needs and leverage significant federal dollars for water projects.

Your administration's continued work to award grants to projects has been effective, and we appreciate the hundreds of millions of dollars in funding that have been announced for water quality improvement projects throughout the state since you took office. Furthermore, we understand that a significant portion of this funding is reaching disadvantaged communities. We ask you to continue this important work and discuss with stakeholders opportunities to create further efficiencies and program flexibility to expand further access to these funding programs.

We urgently need to continue to modernize New York's aging drinking water and wastewater infrastructure that can't keep up with the state's current needs. New York communities – rural and urban, in all regions of the state – continue to suffer the consequences of failing infrastructure such as boil water orders in municipalities like the Village of Fonda and cities like Syracuse, where over 10% of homes sampled had more than 4 times the EPA limit for lead. Infrastructure failures like these put public health and safety at risk, and we must continue the critically important work of upgrading across the state.

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency 2022 Clean Watersheds Needs Survey, New York clean water infrastructure systems – including wastewater treatment, stormwater management, nonpoint source pollution prevention or mitigation and decentralized wastewater management – require approximately \$54 billion in upgrades. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency 2023 Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment, the State's needs are approximately \$35 billion for upgrades to drinking water systems to continue providing clean drinking water to New Yorkers.

The State has made important investments in water infrastructure programs, including the Clean Water Infrastructure Act (CWIA), to protect clean drinking water, and prevent pollution from reaching our lakes, rivers, and streams. These investments must continue, and grow, to further progress against these significant needs. Annual WIIA funding compliments other sources of funding for water infrastructure including the EPF, the Bond Act, the federal Infrastructure and Jobs Act, the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds, and regional and municipal funds.

Capital Funding for New York State Parks and Department of Environmental Conservation

2024 marked the centennial of our world-class state parks system, an incredible asset to all New Yorkers. Throughout the COVID crisis, state residents relied on these parks to recreate, exercise, and find solace during extremely difficult times. While the crisis phase of the pandemic has ended, the renewed engagement in outdoor recreation across New York has continued. Visitation at State Parks remains high, and this demand requires additional investment that will generate important returns for our state's economy.

An economic impact report conducted by Parks & Trails New York, The Political Economy Research Institute, and The Natural Heritage Trust released last month found that the GDP of New York State Parks and Historic Sites amounted to \$3.7 billion in 2021, an economic impact similar to that of the state's agricultural sector. Based on the significant benefit our State Parks provide to New Yorkers and the economic returns generated by investments in these resources, we urge you to appropriate at least \$200 million in capital funding for New York State Parks for FY 2025-26.

Like our state parks, state owned lands and waters under the care of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) enable New Yorkers to spend time outdoors for recreational activities including but not limited to hiking, fishing, boating and hunting. Outdoor recreation in New York generates \$21.1 billion in economic activity and supports over 241,000 jobs with \$13.1 billion in compensation. Investments in our natural resources pay major dividends for New York.

We ask that you to appropriate at least \$100 Million in capital funds for the DEC in your budget proposal. Annual capital appropriations to DEC enable critical infrastructure projects and programs, including “Adventure New York” that support the record visitation our state lands are now experiencing. These projects protect natural resources, enhance visitor safety and enjoyment, and create new access to the outdoors in all regions of the state. In addition to Adventure New York, capital funding for DEC supports critical health and safety projects that protect the environment and the people of New York State.

Continuing to Implement the \$4.2 billion Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act

According to data on the New York State Environmental Bond Act website, funds equivalent to more than 1/8 of the entire \$4.2 billion Bond Act have been awarded to projects throughout New York, based on the program appropriations included in the enabling legislation passed in 2022. We applaud your Administration for issuing many draft guidelines for implementation and seeking public input on program design.

We are aware of concerns about New York City’s ability to access and leverage Bond Act funding based on their size and issues including program caps. Bond Act funding is needed throughout the State and must be distributed in a way that benefits all New Yorkers. Furthermore, it is critical that the State meet or exceed the mandate to spend 35-40% of Bond Act dollars in disadvantaged communities. With New York City being home to more than 8 million New Yorkers, and significant number of disadvantaged communities as identified by the Climate Justice Working Group, we urge your Administration to work with the City of New York to evaluate policies that may enable Bond Act programs to take into account the unique needs and circumstances of the City and determine how adjustments can be made to address procedural barriers to funding.

We urge you to continue your Administration’s work to implement the Bond Act, including issuing new requests for proposals for Bond Act programs, authorizing state agencies to add staff to administer funding, make programmatic adjustments to enable Bond Act spending and make programs more efficient and effective. Many of our organizations stand ready to provide technical expertise and support to state agencies as these programs are shaped. Tapping external stakeholders with issue expertise and deep experience in a diversity of communities throughout New York will enable the creation of programs that are effective and accessible.

Make Strategic Staff Enhancements at Environmental Agencies

The professionals working at the State’s environmental agencies are the front line of program implementation and natural resources conservation. From protecting clean water and air to implementing federal and state laws including the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act to conducting community engagement and grant programs, DEC staff enable the realization of the state’s environmental vision and leadership. Our understanding is that DEC has reached its current staff “fill level.” Strategic staff additions of approximately 225 new FTEs are needed throughout different divisions and offices within DEC to enable efficient program implementation including permitting, planning, grants, public safety and more.

Likewise, additional capacity is needed at the Department of Health (DOH) for effectively implementing new clean water programming and public health requirements. Federal mandates, including the implementation of new federal regulations from US Environmental Protection Agency that require the replacement of nearly 500,000 lead service lines by 2037 and more stringent drinking water standards for

PFOA and PFOS, will necessitate additional DOH resources to ensure the public is protected and these critical health standards are safely implemented. The new drinking water standards for PFOA and PFOS are estimated to cause an additional 296 utilities to exceed drinking water standards and require advanced treatment and will require additional resources so that New York State can meet them in a timely manner.

As you prepare your Executive Budget Proposal we urge you to prioritize environmental funding – including the EPF, CWIA, capital funding for OPRHP and DEC, strategic state agency staff additions and implementation of the Bond Act. Environmental funding is a small percentage of the overall state budget, and provides huge benefits to New Yorkers including clean water, clean air, jobs and economic growth, and access to natural resources. This funding enables the State to leverage local, federal and private funding for programs that improve quality of life and safeguard resources that future generations of New Yorkers will depend on.

Sincerely,
New Yorkers for Clean Water and Jobs
(List of organizations signed on to this letter attached)

Adirondack Architectural Heritage, Erin Tobin, Executive Director
Adirondack Council, Raul J. Aguirre, Executive Director
Adirondack Lakes Alliance, Scott Ireland, Executive Director
Adirondack Land Trust, Mike Carr, Executive Director
Adirondack Mountain Club, Julia Goren, Interim Executive Director
Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, David Gibson, Managing Partner
Agricultural Stewardship Association, Renee Bouplon, Executive Director
Alley Pond Environmental Center, Inc., Irene V. Scheid, Executive Director
American Farmland Trust, Linda Garrett, NY & NJ Regional Director
Appalachian Mountain Club, Kaitlyn Sorensen, Mid-Atlantic Conservation Policy Manager
Bronx River Sound Shore Audubon, Doug Bloom, Vice President
Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies, Joshua R Ginsberg, PhD, President
Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, Jeff Senterman, Executive Director
Central Westchester Audubon Society, Lisa Curtis, President
Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director
Clean+Healthy, Bobbi Wilding, Executive Director
Coalition of Living Museums, Aaron T. Bouska, Chair
Columbia Land Conservancy, Troy Weldy, President
Delaware Highlands Conservancy, Diane Rosencrance, Executive Director
Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society, Susan O'Handley, Board Director, Advocacy Committee
Ducks Unlimited, Nikki Ghorpade, Director of Public Policy
Dutchess Land Conservancy, Inc., Rebecca E.C. Thornton, President
Empire State Forest Products Association, John Bartow, Executive Director
Engineers Labor-Employer Cooperative (ELEC 825), Daniel Ortega, Community Affairs
Environmental Advocates NY, Vanessa Fajans-Turner, Executive Director
Environmental Defense Fund, Kate Boicourt, Director, Climate Resilient Coasts and Watersheds, NY-NJ
Environmental Real Estate Solutions, Jim Daus, President
Finger Lakes - Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance, Kristy LaManche, Program Coordinator
Finger Lakes Land Trust, Andrew Zepp, President
Four Harbors Audubon Society, Joyann Cirigliano, Conservation Chair
Friends of Clark Reservation, Angela Weiler, Past Chair
Friends of Georgica Pond Foundation, Inc., Sara Davison, Program Advisor

Friends of the Upper Delaware River, Jeff Skelding, Executive Director
Gas Free Seneca, Joseph Campbell, President
Genesee Land Trust, Lorna Wright, Executive Director
Genesee Valley Audubon Society, June Summers, President
Grassland Bird Trust, Inc., Keith Swensen, Board Chair
Grassroots Gardens WNY, Timothy Chen, Executive Director
Group for the East End, Robert S. DeLuca, President
Healthy Schools Network, Claire L. Barnett, Executive Director
Hempstead Harbor Protection Committee, Eric Swenson, Executive Director
Hudson Highlands Land Trust, Inc., Katrina Shindledecker, Executive Director
Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester, Michael Bochnik, President
Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, Jen Benson, Director of Environmental Action
Hudson Taconic Lands, Jim Bonesteel, Executive Director
IMPACT: Friends Improving Allegany County Trails, Inc., Glenn Gebhard, President
Land Trust Alliance, NY Program Jamie Brown, Senior Program Manager, NY
Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy, Mark King, Executive Director
Mohonk Preserve, Kevin Case, President & CEO
Nassau Hiking & Outdoor Club, Guy Jacob, Conservation Chair
National Audubon Society, Erin McGrath, Policy Director
Natural Areas Conservancy, Emily Walker, Senior Manager of External Affairs
Natural Resources Defense Council, Richard Schrader, Senior Director Government Affairs Northeast
New York League of Conservation Voters, Julie Tighe, President
New York Outdoor Recreation Coalition (NYORC), Melissa Abramson, Chair
North Shore Land Alliance, Lisa W. Ott, President and CEO
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY), Katie Baidon, Policy Manager
Northern Catskills Audubon Society, Larry Federman, President
Northern New York Audubon, Kenneth Adams, Chairperson, Conservation Committee
NYC Bird Alliance, Jessica Wilson, Executive Director
Onondaga Audubon, Maryanne Adams, Conservation Chair
Open Plans, Sara Lind, Co-Executive Director
Orange County Audubon Society, Jody Susler, Board Member
Orange County Land Trust, Jim Delaune, Executive Director
Outdoor Promise, Ronald Zorrilla, Executive Director
Parks & Trails New York, Paul Steely White, Executive Director
Paul Smith's College, Dr. Daniel Kelting, President
Peconic Baykeeper, Peter Topping, Baykeeper & Executive Director
Peconic Land Trust, John v.H. Halsey, President
Possible Planet, Victoria Zelin-Cloud, Cofounder
Preservation League of NYS, Jay DiLorenzo, President
Protect the Adirondacks! Inc., Claudia Braymer, Deputy Director
Recreational Equipment Inc (REI), Melissa Abramson, Head of Community Engagement
Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, Jim Bonesteel, Executive Director
Riverkeeper, Jeremy Cherson, Associate Director of Government Affairs
Rivers & Mountains GreenFaith, John Seakwood, Organizer
Rockland Audubon Society, Elizabeth Cherry, President
Saratoga PLAN, Robert K. Davies, Executive Director
Save the Great South Bay, Inc., Robyn Silvestri, Executive Director
Save the Sound, David Ansel, Vice President of Water Protection

Saw Mill River Audubon, Anne Swaim, Executive Director
Scenic Hudson, Carli Fraccarolli, Government Relations Manager
Seneca Lake Guardian, Yvonne Taylor, Vice President
Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, Roger Downs, Conservation Director
Skaneateles Lake Association, Frank Moses, Executive Director
South Shore Audubon Society, Russell Comeau, President
Sustainable Westchester, Noam Bramson, Executive Director
Teresa Murphy, Audubon Society of the Capital Region, President
The Conservation Fund, Thomas R. Duffus, Vice President & Northeast Representative
The Nature Conservancy, Jessica Ottney Mahar, New York Policy & Strategy Director
The New York Botanical Garden, Aaron Bouska, Vice President for Government and Community Relations
Third Act Upstate New York, Michael Richardson, Co-facilitator
Thousand Islands Land Trust, Jake R. Tibbles, Executive Director
Tompkins County Climate Protection Initiative, Peter Bardaglio, Coordinator
Trust for Public Land, Tamar Renaud, NYS Director
Westchester Land Trust, Kara Hartigan Whelan, President
Western New York Land Conservancy, Marisa Riggi, Executive Director
Wildlife Conservation Society, John F. Calvelli, Executive Vice President, Public Affairs
Woodstock Land Conservancy, Andy Mossey, Executive Director
Zonta Club of Buffalo, Kathleen O'Leary, Zonta USA Caucus Rep. District 4
+ POOL, Kara Meyer, Managing Director

cc:

(VIA EMAIL)

Karen Persichilli Keogh, Secretary to the Governor
Kathryn Garcia, Director of State Operations
Blake Washington, Director, Division of Budget
John O'Leary, Deputy Secretary for Energy and Environment
Ashley Dougherty, Assistant Secretary for Environment