November 19, 2020

Robert Mujica, Director
NYS Division of Budget
New York State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

RE: Formal Hearing on NYSDEC Budget

Dear Mr. Mujica,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments as part of the NYS Division of Budget Formal Hearing on the agency budget for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) for FY2022. Thank you to Governor Cuomo and NYSDEC Commissioner Basil Seggos for work to lead on environmental issues, both here in New York and nationally. We are aware of the significant deficit that New York State faces due to the COVID-19 pandemic and, along with New York State, are advocating that Congress provide aid to state and local governments as part of any federal relief and/or stimulus legislation.

Our organizations wish to reiterate our support for environmental funding as outlined in a letter sent to Governor Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Heastie on October 14, 2020 (Attachment 1). Signed by more than 175 environmental advocacy, conservation, recreation, business, local government, labor, agricultural, forestry and environmental justice organizations, the letter calls on state leaders to recognize public funding to protect clean air and water, create and maintain local parks and enhance recreation, tackle climate change and its impacts, and conserve natural resources for its critical role in protecting and improving the health, safety and prosperity of all New Yorkers. With the $3 billion Environmental Bond Act removed from the November 2020 ballot, it is imperative that New York State maintain other sources of environmental funding which create good-paying jobs, strengthen local economies, and advance environmental justice in frontline communities.

In addition to supporting the attached letter, we write to express support for the staff at NYSDEC who work each day to administer important environmental capital funds, and carry out the mission of the agency, which protects our air and water, public lands and those who use them, wildlife and habitat, and all the other natural resources that New Yorkers depend on. In addition, our state is now doing a tremendous amount of work of implementing New York’s nation-leading climate law while simultaneously working with communities to recover from and adapt to climate change impacts. Our environmental agencies need sufficient and strong staffing levels. And, at the same time, this year as the COVID-19 pandemic tore through New York State, NYSDEC teams were working alongside other agencies to build and staff infrastructure needed to increase our nation-leading testing program and ensure communities in some of the hardest hit areas had facilities to increase hospital surge capacity.

![DEC FTEs 2000-2020](chart.png)
Despite NYSDEC’s growing mandate and importance to so many aspects of life throughout New York, their staff levels have fallen. While there has been a small uptick in FTE levels at NYSDEC in the last few years, overall total FTEs have been reduced by more than 740, or 19% since 2000, which occurred prior to Governor Cuomo’s first term. DEC was disproportionately impacted by staff cuts during the Great Recession, a trend Governor Cuomo reversed. As you and other state leaders work to address New York’s fiscal challenges, we urge you to recognize the importance of NYSDEC and at least maintain the agency’s staff levels and authorize DEC to fill appropriated, open positions. Furthermore, we urge you not to offload staffing expenses at environmental agencies into critical environmental capital funding programs. Environmental funding can help drive New York’s economic and public health recovery.

Our state’s environmental funding programs support hundreds of thousands of jobs, save communities and taxpayers money, and support several multi-billion-dollar sectors of the economy, including but not limited to agriculture, outdoor recreation, construction, tourism and commercial fishing. These programs also leverage federal, local and private dollars to deliver important services to residents, which New York cannot afford to lose. Our NYSDEC workforce is on the frontline, working with communities to tackle climate change, reduce flooding and other impacts of extreme weather, protect natural resources including clean air and water, deliver environmental justice programs, and much more. With these many important benefits in mind, we urge Governor Cuomo to maintain funding for important and successful environmental funding programs and for the NYSDEC workforce.

Sincerely,

Adirondack Council, Kevin Chlad, Director of Government Relations
Adirondack Mountain Club, Michael Barrett, Executive Director
Agricultural Stewardship Association, Teri Ptacek, Executive Director
Alley Pond Environmental Center, Inc, Irene V. Scheid, Executive Director
Appalachian Mountain Club, Mark Zakutansky, Director of Conservation Policy Engagement
Atlantic States Legal Foundation, Lhakpa tsering, Executive Director
Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, Jeff Senterman, Executive Director
Champlain Area Trails, Chris Maron, Executive Director
Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director
Columbia Land Conservancy, Troy Weldy, President
Defend H2O, Kevin McAllister, President
Empire State Forest Products Association, John Barttow, Executive Director
Environmental Advocates NY, Kate Kurera, Deputy Director
Environmental Defense Fund, Mark W. Rupp, Director, State-Federal Policy & Affairs, Ecosystems
Finger Lakes Land Trust, Andrew Zepp, Executive Director
Friends of Georgica Pond Foundation, Sara Davison, Executive Director
Friends of the Bay, Heather Johnson, Executive Director
Friends of the Upper Delaware River, Jeff Skelding, Executive Director
Friends of Tillson Lake, Inc., Morey A Gottesman, President
Genesee Valley Audubon Society, June Summers, President
Green Ossining, Suzie Ross, Chairperson
Groundwork Hudson Valley, Brigitte Griswold, Executive Director
Indian River Lakes Conservancy, Elliott D Hillback Jr, Board Chairman
Land Trust Alliance, Meme Hanley, New York Senior Program Manager
Nassau Hiking & Outdoor Club, Guy Jacob, Conservation Chair
Natural Areas Conservancy, Sarah Charlop-Powers, Executive Director
Natural Resources Defense Council, Rich Schrader, Policy and Legislative Director
New York League of Conservation Voters, Julie Tighe, President
New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), Elizabeth Moran, Environmental Policy Director
New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, Joshua Howard, Executive Director
NY Climate Reality Chapters Coalition, Tim Guinee, NY Legislative Action Coordinator
NY State Pollution Prevention Institute, Charles J. Ruffing, Director
Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency, Dereth Glance, Executive Director
Open Space Institute, Kim Elliman, CEO
Orange County Land Trust, James Delaune, Executive Director
Palisades Parks Conservancy, Heather Loebner, Executive Director
Peconic Baykeeper, Peter Topping, Baykeeper
Peconic Land Trust, John v.H. Halsey, President
Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, Jim Bonesteel, Executive Director
Riverkeeper, Jeremy Cherson, Legislative Advocacy Manager
Saratoga PLAN, Maria Trabka, Executive Director
Scenic Hudson, Ned Sullivan, President
Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, Roger Downs, Conservation Director
South Shore Audubon Society, Brien Weiner, President
The Battenkill Conservancy, Lorraine Merghart Ballard, Executive Director
The Nature Conservancy, Jessica Ottney Mahar, NY Policy & Strategy Director
The Trust for Public Land, Carter Strickland, New York State Director
Waterfront Alliance, Cortney Worrall, President and CEO
Wildlife Conservation Society, John F. Calvelli, Executive Vice President, Public Affairs
Woodstock Land Conservancy, Maxanne Resnick, Executive Director