Conservation Advocates React to State Budget Agreement
Growing Environmental Protection Fund Continues Progress Towards Full Restoration

ALBANY, N.Y. – Advocates for New York’s clean water, clean air and open space applauded today as an agreement on the next New York State Budget was announced including $162 million in appropriations for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). This is a $9 million increase over the current funding level.

The EPF, which once stood at $255 million, suffered deep cuts in recent years during the recession, falling as low as $134 million two years ago. Last year the EPF was increased to $153 million. This year’s dedication of additional funding to the EPF is a welcome use of the state’s budget surplus, and marks a continuation of the state’s reinvestment in environmental programs. EPF programs create jobs, lower costs to taxpayers and protect clean water and other valuable community resources.

In January, Governor Andrew Cuomo proposed an increased EPF in the Executive budget proposal to the Legislature. Environmental Conservation Committee Chairs Assemblyman Robert Sweeney (D-Lindenhurst) and Senator Mark Grisanti (R-Buffalo) worked with the Legislature to ensure the EPF remained a priority for additional funding. Both the Senator and the Assemblyman circulated letters in their respective houses of the Legislature calling for an EPF increase, and both received strong support from their colleagues. Each legislative one-house budget proposal included an increase in funding for the EPF. The final budget agreement continues the progress towards restoring the EPF and growing it to a sustainable level that more adequately meets statewide demand.

Jessica Ottney Mahar, director of government relations for The Nature Conservancy in New York said, “The Nature Conservancy thanks Governor Andrew Cuomo, Assemblyman Robert Sweeney, Senator Mark Grisanti, and all members of the New York State Legislature for their support for the EPF in this year’s budget. Throughout the process the value of the EPF to our communities, through providing good-paying jobs, clean water, community parks, local food, environmental education and so much more, was recognized. This year’s budget agreement represents important progress and we applaud all involved for their work to invest in our future.”

“Audubon New York applauds Governor Andrew Cuomo and legislative leaders, especially Senator Mark Grisanti and Assemblyman Robert Sweeney for committing new funding to the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF),” said Erin Crotty, Executive Director of Audubon New York. “This increased funding will advance environmental conservation efforts in New York by incentivizing innovative partnerships with private landowners and increasing environmental funding that will help restore vital habitat, sustain natural resources, and secure the economic vitality of our state.”

“This year’s budget is a step in the right direction for the Environmental Protection Fund,” said New York League of Conservation Voters President Marcia Bystryn. “We applaud Governor Cuomo, Senator Mark Grisanti, Assembly Member Bob Sweeney and members of the Legislature for strengthening New York’s investment in the environment. We hope to build on this success in the future and look forward to productive discussions with our state leaders to address the state’s full conservation needs.”
Ethan Winter, New York Conservation Manager for the Land Trust Alliance said, "We applaud Governor Cuomo and the state legislature for taking important steps toward a stronger Environmental Protection Fund. We are especially grateful for the vote of confidence in the New York State conservation partnership program, a nationally recognized model for collaboration between non-profit land trusts and the local communities they serve."

“The increased support that EPF funds provide for living museums in every corner of New York State allows us to continue educating millions of New Yorkers through innovative ecological literacy programs while also creating economic stability since living museums are tourism magnets and economic engines in our local communities," said Lois Carswell, Chairman of the Coalition of Living Museums. "The Coalition thanks Governor Andrew Cuomo, Speaker Sheldon Silver, Majority Leaders Jeff Klein and Dean Skelos – and is especially grateful to Assemblyman Robert Sweeney and Senator Mark Grisanti for their leadership to increase EPF funding this year. Thanks to their efforts, living museums can serve even more New Yorkers and continue to do what they do best: educating and inspiring new generations of conservation stewards."

"In your Adirondack Park, children and wild loons will forever benefit from the clean water, open space and community projects made possible by the Environmental Protection Fund. We appreciate that Governor Cuomo and Environmental Conservation Committee Chairmen Sweeney and Grisanti worked with the other legislative leaders to secure a partial restoration of vital funding in the EPF this year," said Adirondack Council Executive Director William C. Janeway. "In the months ahead we look forward to discussing how to build on this success and better meet environmental, infrastructure, public health, and resiliency funding needs on a more permanent and aggressive basis."

"We are pleased the Governor and Legislature have both recognized the importance of the Environmental Protection Fund again this year and taken modest steps to restore deep cuts made in previous years. The additional allocation to land preservation may benefit the environment and economy through creation of new parks, protection of wildlife habitat or climate change adaptation. We remain concerned that the Hudson River Estuary and our communities face unprecedented threats from the dramatic increase in the transport of crude oil authorized by the state. We look forward to working with the Cuomo administration and the legislature to create a better understanding of the urgency of safeguarding these vital resources," said Ned Sullivan, President of Scenic Hudson.

"These extra dollars for the EPF mean more protection for New York's environment, more protected wilderness and more resources to take of those precious lands," said Neil F. Woodworth, Executive Director of the Adirondack Mountain Club.

Peter Iwanowicz, Executive Director of Environmental Advocates of New York said: “Despite the modest increase in funding for this year’s EPF over past years, this budget falls well short of what is needed to protect the environment and provide our communities with the resources to grow healthy.”

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For more information on the Environmental Protection Fund and the “We Love New York” campaign, visit [www.keepprotectingny.com](http://www.keepprotectingny.com).