

**ADIRONDACK COUNCIL * AUDUBON NEW YORK * CITIZENS CAMPAIGN FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT * ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCATES OF NEW YORK *
NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP * NEW YORK LEAGUE OF
CONSERVATION VOTERS * HUDSON RIVERKEEPER * SIERRA CLUB ATLANTIC CHAPTER *
THE NATURE CONSERVANCY NEW YORK ***

PRESS RELEASE

Released: October 1, 2010

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**GREEN GROUPS CALL OUT GOVERNOR PATERSON FOR DECIMATING
NY'S ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCY
STAFF CUTS WILL LIMIT DEC'S AIR & WATER QUALITY MONITORING, OIL & CHEMICAL SPILL
CLEAN-UPS & FUTURE OVERSIGHT OF NATURAL GAS DRILLING**

(ALBANY, NY)-Conservation and environmental groups today called on Governor David Paterson to stop anticipated staff cuts at the State's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). According to sources at the DEC and the Division of Budget, 209 staff layoffs have been ordered by the end of the year. Coupled with staff lost to retirement incentives and budget cuts, the latest round of layoffs will reduce agency staff to the lowest levels since the 1980's, with serious consequences for the DEC's ability to respond to environmental hazards, not to mention critical routine functions such as monitoring air and water pollution, as well as natural resources protection and stewardship.

"Without staff for day-to-day functions like monitoring air and water pollution, not to mention resources to clean up toxic spills, Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Pete Grannis will have to hitchhike across the state to conduct taste tests of New York's water quality," said Alison Jenkins, Fiscal Policy Program Director, Environmental Advocates of New York. "And despite what budget spokesman Eric Kriss has to say, the DEC's functions are critical to health and safety."

During just the first three days of this week, 119 spills in need of review and clean up were reported to the agency. On September 30th, the DEC received a report that a truck had run over a fire hydrant, resulting in at least 15 gallons of motor oil spilled onto the schoolyard at Cumberland Head Elementary School near Plattsburgh. Spills such as these are a fire and explosion hazard and the agency no longer has resources or staff to even investigate such spills, regardless of size or location.

"Monitoring sewage discharges, protecting our drinking water, bays and estuaries, and cleaning up toxic waste sites are not luxury items that can be dispensed with without endangering public health and safety. This budget balancing scheme will make us sick," Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment.

"DEC has already been forced to close an air-quality monitoring station in the western Adirondacks because of budget cuts earlier this year," said Adirondack Council Executive Director Brian L. Houseal. "Invasive species such as spiny water fleas are infesting pristine waters in the southern Adirondacks unchecked. Lake George is also dealing with new invasive species whose spread might have been prevented if DEC personnel were still on the job."

"This latest round of DEC job cuts demonstrates that New York State is no longer interested in upholding basic environmental laws," said Roger Downs, Conservation Program Manager with the Sierra Club

Atlantic Chapter. "Crippling the DEC's ability to protect our natural resources and enforce violations is a violation of law in and of itself."

"These staff cuts couldn't come at a worse time for the fight for clean water," stated Paul Gallay, Executive Director and Hudson Riverkeeper. "In the wake of already crippling DEC budget cuts, these layoffs will prove to be even more detrimental to our river which is stricken by sewage pollution from aging infrastructure, toxic PCBs and lethal power plant intakes. This also confirms that the agency will not be equipped to provide the necessary regulatory oversight to prevent the type of industrial pollution that has already ravaged much of the Marcellus Shale region due to gas drilling operations. Now more than ever, it is crucial for the DEC to work synergistically with Riverkeeper and other watchdog groups to make sure our environmental laws are enforced."

"Additional staff cuts at the New York's environmental agency mean the next governor will be left with an environmental agency in tatters, just in time for an increase in responsibilities thanks to the rush to drill for natural gas in the Marcellus and Utica Shale formations," said Marcia Bystry, President of the New York League of Conservation Voters.

The layoffs, which should be announced soon, come after the agency has already approved 260 employees for early retirement incentive. In 2007-08, the DEC had 3,775 staff. The target for the end of the year is 2,926 staff, a decrease of 849 staff or 22 percent. These are the lowest staff levels since the 1980's, despite an increase in the agency's responsibilities.

"Additional proposed cuts at DEC could lead to degraded habitat quality and value of public lands, limit the state's response to invasive species outbreaks, and diminish the DEC's ability to protect economically important state resources. Just this year, the invasive Emerald Ash Borer was discovered in our state's forests. DEC must have adequate resources and staffing to address invasive species, that can devastate forests, impair important industries including forestry and tourism that provide jobs throughout our State," stated Darryl Banks, Deputy Director for Conservation Strategies and External Affairs for The Nature Conservancy in New York.

"Is there no end to the disdain the Paterson Administration has exhibited toward the environment?" said Albert E. Caccese, Executive Director of Audubon New York. "These proposed layoffs, compounded by the recent early retirement incentive, have decimated the DEC and other environmental agencies, and hurt our ability to receive federal funds at a time when President Obama is making record investments in protecting birds, other wildlife and their habitats. We want to know who's looking out for New York's air, land and water, because the DEC can't and Governor Paterson clearly just doesn't care."

"The DEC has already trimmed all the fat out of its budget, now it has to amputate limbs," said Laura Haight, senior environmental associate with NYPIRG. "Governor Paterson's actions will be devastating to New York's environment."

The agency is responsible for providing oversight for air and water quality, open space, forests, wetlands, gas and oil drilling, hazardous waste, hunting and fishing, invasive species eradication, dam safety, and many other programs. The wellbeing of all New Yorkers depends on the DEC to enforce existing environmental laws.

The layoffs are in addition to other budget cuts for non-personal services such as travel and equipment for inspections and testing for chemicals such as pesticides. With resources for these critical activities cut in half since the 2007-08 budget year, the agency can only afford to respond to 150 oil spills rather than the annual average of 350.

The organizations calling on the Governor include The Adirondack Council, Audubon New York, Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Environmental Advocates of New York, New York Public Interest Research Group, New York League of Conservation Voters, Hudson Riverkeeper, Sierra Club Atlantic chapter, and The Nature Conservancy New York.