

PATERSON IRRATIONALLY DISMANTLES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION WITH DEEP CUTS TO DEC & OTHER STATE AGENCIES

For more information:
John F. Sheehan
518-432-1770 ofc
518-441-1340 cell

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ALBANY, N.Y. – The Adirondack Council today called on Governor Paterson to stop dismantling environmental protection in the state, following Paterson's announcement that he would lay off 209 employees of the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) by the end of the year.

"These cuts are a direct threat to public health and safety. Not only are they unsustainable," said Adirondack Council Executive Director Brian L. Houseal, "they are unconscionable. DEC's ability to do its job has already been compromised. This will make a bad situation much worse."

"These additional cuts will ensure that environmental stewardship and enforcement will suffer across the state," Houseal explained. "DEC's acid rain and air pollution monitoring is already being shut down in the western Adirondacks. Water pollution inspections will suffer. Fish and wildlife poachers will have little to fear from rangers and game wardens, who don't have funds to adequately patrol their territories."

Houseal noted that Governor Paterson's staff cuts at the state's major environmental agencies (DEC, the Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation, Dept. of Agriculture & Markets, Department of State and the Adirondack Park Agency) had accounted for more than 40 percent of all state staff losses during the Paterson Administration.

With this most recent announcement, DEC will have seen its workforce reduced by 23 percent since 2008, when it was staffed at a level of 3,775 employees. The announced layoffs will bring DEC's staff statewide to a level of 2,925.

"The Department of Environmental Conservation and Adirondack Park Agency are now at their lowest staffing levels since the agencies were created in the early 1970s.

Several weeks ago, Governor Paterson announced the state would seek to lay off 2,000 employees due to the fact that the early retirement program had not reached the savings envisioned by budget planners. Some state agencies kept employees from participating in the early retirement program so that their positions would not be eliminated. DEC was not one of these agencies.

"This is the reward they get for trying to help the Governor achieve his goals," said Houseal. "In the last few weeks, 220 DEC employees have retired and are no longer protecting our air, water and other natural resources. This was a great loss of many dedicated employees who had spent long careers doing what is right for the environment across the state.

"This new plan for additional layoffs is just kicking a good agency while it is down," he said. "It has brought agency morale to an all-time low."

The Paterson administration has also cut DEC's non-personnel budget by more than 50 percent in the last two fiscal years. This pays for everything except salaries -- from gas for Forest Rangers to patrol the Adirondacks to the paper for fishing license applications and office supplies.

“This is the latest mark on the wrong side of the Governor’s environmental record,” noted Houseal. “Earlier this year, he ruthlessly cut the Environmental Protection Fund. He threatened a moratorium against open space protection, tried to close DEC campgrounds and state parks. In the Adirondacks, he de-funded the Visitors Interpretive Centers and cut by staff of the Adirondack Park Agency by 13 positions – about 20 percent. At the same time, the demand for Park Agency development and subdivision permits set an all-time record in August.”

Over the past three years, Governor Paterson has also raided \$90 million from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) proceeds meant for energy efficiency programs and directed the money to non-environmental spending, proposed to cripple local governments by capping the amount of taxes paid by the state on state-owned Forest Preserve lands and taken \$185 million from EPF to pay for general state obligations.

“We must send a strong message to the Governor and his budget staff that New York’s environment is not expendable,” concluded Houseal. “Without a DEC that can effectively do its job, all the gains that have been made in the last 40 years will all be wasted.”

Founded in 1975, the Adirondack Council is a privately funded, not-for-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the ecological integrity and wild character of the Adirondack Park. With members in all 50 United States, the Council carries out its mission through research, advocacy, public education and legal action.