

NEWS RELEASE



For more information:

John F. Sheehan
518-432-1770 (ofc)
518-441-1340 (cell)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, Tuesday, February 7, 2012

**FOUR YEARS OF CUTS HAVE PUNISHED ENVIRONMENTAL FUNDING
RESTORATION NEEDED TO PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCES AND TOURISM**
*Adirondack Council Makes Plea for Environmental Protection Fund, Department of Environmental
Conservation, Adirondack Park Agency*

ALBANY, N.Y. – Deep cuts to major environmental initiatives and staff losses at state regulatory agencies over the past four years are threatening the Adirondack Park’s natural resources and tourism, the park’s largest environmental organization said today.

Scott Lorey, Legislative Director for the Adirondack Council, called for an immediate increase in the state’s Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and in staffing at the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Adirondack Park Agency.

The Adirondack Council doesn’t accept public funding or taxpayer-supported donations of any kind. Lorey’s comments were part of his testimony in front of the NYS Legislature’s joint budget hearings on the 2012-13 environmental spending plan at the State Capitol.

“Four years ago, I was here in front of you, just as I am today, days after the Giants defeated the Patriots in a Super Bowl,” Lorey said. “In 2008, the state budget was \$121.6 billion and the Environmental Protection Fund had reached its highest level of \$255 million. Still, it accounted for only about 2/10ths of one percent of the overall budget.

“Fast forward to 2012: While the Giants are still doing well, the environment is not,” Lorey said. “While the state budget has increased by \$11 billion, to \$132.5 billion, the EPF has been reduced by roughly 40 percent. It is now down to \$134 million, and accounts for only 1/10th of one percent of the overall state budget. The EPF is far from being fully funded at \$300 million, as the legislature had promised in 2007. Parkland acquisition has been slashed by nearly 75 percent down to \$17.5 million. Invasive species control has been reduced to \$3.4 million, when it should be \$10 million or more by now.”

The EPF has been the main source of environmental funding for large, capital projects including landfill closure, recycling facilities, parkland acquisition, farmland protecting, invasive species management, park stewardship and historic preservation.

Since 2002, nearly \$500 million has been “swept” out of the EPF and put into the state’s general fund to pay for other obligations of the state, he said.

“The EPF has been reduced, robbed and repurposed over the last decade, in both good economic times and bad. It is about time that you help the EPF recover,” continued Lorey. “We need at least \$180 million this year to start to chip away at the massive backlog of projects that have been promised funding. It is your duty to ensure this happens.”

Environmental agencies have also been impacted by recent budget cuts. The Adirondack Park Agency (APA) will see its staff level stay the same as last year at 56. However, the APA only employs

54 people at this time and faces numerous retirements in the coming year. The staff level is about 25 percent lower than the 72 people employed at the Agency in 2008. The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) will also see another flat budget, with just under 3,000 staff. This is 650 fewer people than it employed in 2008, he noted.

“Staffing at the APA is so low, the agency has closed the state’s only two visitor information centers in the Adirondack Park, turning them over to private entities,” he said. “This is a dangerous gamble when the Adirondack Park accounts for billions of dollars in tourism revenue.

“Think of how many anglers may not fish in our waters if they are filled with invasive species,” he said. “How many hikers won’t visit their favorite spot this year if the trails are not well maintained? How many outfitters won’t be hiring additional staff if the land near their store isn’t available and open to the public?”

“What is the impact if regional land conservancies close their doors because the state didn’t fulfill its commitments to them in a timely manner?” he continued. “What will be the impact to our waters if non-point source pollution funding dries up? How many farms will fail because they couldn’t wait years for farmland protection funding to arrive?”

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 New York’s 9,300-square-mile Adirondack Park. The Council carries out its mission through research, education, advocacy and legal action.

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