

Environmental Advocates Push for Robust Conservation Funding at Joint Legislative Hearing

Albany, NY – Environmental advocates from across New York State convened in Albany on January 28, 2025, for a Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the 2025-2026 Executive Budget Proposal concerning Environmental Conservation. The hearing, held in the Legislative Office Building, provided a platform for stakeholders to voice their concerns and recommendations regarding the Governor's budget and its potential impact on the state's environment and energy sectors.

Key Themes and Concerns

Throughout the day-long hearing, several key themes emerged, reflecting the diverse environmental challenges and priorities facing New York. Among the most prominent issues were **funding for environmental programs, implementation of climate initiatives, water quality protection, and land conservation.**

Several committees were represented at the hearing, with Senator Liz Krueger, Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, and Assemblymember J. Gary Pretlow, Chair of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, playing leading roles. The proceedings also involved members of the Senate and Assembly Environmental Conservation Committees, including Senator Pete Harckham and Assemblymember Glick.

Budget Priorities and the Environmental Protection Fund

A central focus of the hearing was the **Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)**, a critical source of funding for various environmental projects across the state. Many organizations, including Scenic Hudson and the New Yorkers for Clean Water and Jobs coalition, urged the Legislature to **increase the EPF to \$500 million** in the SFY 2025-26 budget. Advocates argued that this increase would expand programs that protect the environment, enhance communities, and bolster the economy.

Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE), emphasized the importance of empowering communities and advocating for solutions that protect public health and the natural environment.

Clean Water Infrastructure

Another key request was to increase the Clean Water Infrastructure Act allocation to **\$600 million** to update water infrastructure, remove toxins from drinking water, and address the impacts of climate change. Environmental Advocates NY specifically called for at least 35% of Clean Water Infrastructure Act funds to be directed toward DEC-designated Disadvantaged Communities (DACs). Riverkeeper emphasized that clean water is non-negotiable for the majority of New Yorkers.

Voices from the Adirondacks

Stakeholders from the Adirondacks voiced specific needs related to the region's unique environmental and economic landscape.

- **Funding for State Land Stewardship** was a key priority to address overuse, including \$1 million for a carrying capacity study of sensitive water bodies in the Adirondack Park.
- **Restoration of funding for Visitor Centers** was requested to support educational and interpretive programs.
- **Increased staffing for the Adirondack Park Agency (APA)** was deemed necessary for effective management and protection of the park's resources.

Concerns Regarding Climate Initiatives

While many supported the state's climate goals, concerns were raised about the implementation and potential impacts of certain climate initiatives.

- **Cap and Invest Program:** Several organizations, including Environmental Advocates NY, voiced opposition to Governor Hochul's delay of the Cap & Invest program.
- **Clean Transportation Standard:** Senator Terrence Murphy inquired about the status of the Clean Transportation Standard study and its expected release date.
- **Advanced Clean Truck Rule:** Assemblymember Palmesano and others expressed concerns over the Advanced Clean Truck Rule and its potential negative impacts on the trucking industry and municipalities.
- **Renewable Energy Transition:** There were questions about the costs associated with transitioning to renewable energy sources, with some arguing that the costs have not been reasonably estimated.

Land Use, Open Space, and Conservation

Several groups advocated for prioritizing land use and open space, emphasizing the importance of conservation and sustainable development.

- **Conserving 30% of New York by 2030:** The state has a goal to conserve 30% of its lands by 2030, an effort that requires accelerating land and water protection programs.
- **Increase EPF funding for open space:** Advocates requested increasing funding for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and specifically allocating more to the Open Space account.
- **Streamline land acquisition:** There were requests to modernize the state land acquisition process by allowing the use of title insurance and enabling DEC to independently acquire conservation easements.
- **Wetlands Regulations:** Senator O'Mara voiced concerns about wetlands regulations impacting various sectors, urging the Department to ensure sufficient staffing for case-by-case applicability for projects with wetland issues.

- **Sustainable Agriculture:** Targeted funding was requested for Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) to promote sustainable agricultural practices and protect farmland.

Specific Issues and Projects

Beyond the broad themes, the hearing also touched on specific environmental issues and projects across the state.

- **Harmful Algae Blooms and Salt Pollution:** Senator Harckham raised concerns about harmful algae blooms and salt pollution in freshwater drinking sources, particularly from road salt.
- **Emerging Contaminants:** Assemblymember Glick and Senator Hinchey inquired about efforts to address emerging contaminants in water, including PFAS and 1,4-dioxane.
- **Crypto Mining:** Senator Parker questioned the status of the generic environmental impact statement required by the crypto mining moratorium bill of '22.
- **Bethpage Park Cleanup:** Senator Kaplan inquired about the Department's stance on pushing for a full cleanup of Bethpage Park on Long Island.
- **Greenwich Power Plant:** Assemblymember Palmesano raised concerns about the Greenwich Power Plant on Seneca Lake, including the potential loss of power and tax revenues if the plant were to shut down.

Voices of Dissent and Alternative Perspectives

While the majority of speakers advocated for increased environmental funding and stronger regulations, some expressed concerns about the potential economic impacts of certain policies.

- **Police Benevolent Association of New York State:** Officer Matt Krug, representing Environmental Conservation Officers, focused on the needs of the 283 New York State Environmental Conservation Officers, advocating for better resources and equipment.
- **Solar Energy Industries Association (NYSEIA):** Expressed concerns about the lack of support for the solar industry in the Governor's budget, urging legislators to advance policies that support a solar-powered Empire State.

Looking Ahead

The Joint Legislative Public Hearing served as a crucial opportunity for environmental advocates, government officials, and concerned citizens to engage in a dialogue about the future of environmental conservation in New York State. As the Legislature moves forward with the budget process, the voices and concerns raised at the hearing will undoubtedly play a significant role in shaping the final outcome. It remains to be seen how the Governor and Legislature will address the competing priorities and allocate resources to safeguard the state's environment and promote a sustainable future for all New Yorkers.

List of Testimonies Submitted

Many organizations and individuals submitted written testimonies for the hearing, covering a wide range of environmental issues and perspectives. The list of submitted testimonies includes:

- Adirondack Council.
- ACE NY.
- Adirondack Wild.
- Alexis Goldsmith, Beyond Plastics.
- Allegro Power, LLC.
- Alliance for a Green Economy.
- American Chemistry Council.
- American Water Works Association, NY Section.
- Audubon.
- Beyond Plastics.
- Buffalo's Best Bottles.
- Building Decarbonization Coalition.
- Can and Bottle Return.
- Caroline Chen (NYLPI).
- Carson Power.
- Catskill Center.
- Caz Cans.
- Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE).
- CleanCapital.
- Clean+Healthy New York.
- Coalition of Living Museum.
- CVE North America.
- Delaware River Bason Commission.
- Department of Public Service.
- Dept of Environmental Conservation.
- Distributed Sun LLC.
- DSUN.
- Earth Justice.
- Empire State Redemption Association.
- Empire State Redemption Center Association.
- Empty Can Industries, LLC.
- Environmental Advocates NY.
- Environmental Defense Fund.
- Environmental Justice Alliance NYC.
- Finger Lakes Land Trust.
- Food & Water Watch.
- Fridays for Future.
- Green Bottle Redemption Center.

- Green Legal and Education Fund Inc.
- Interstate Environmental Commission.
- Julianne Vogt, Bottle Bill.
- Kendall Sustainable Infrastructure, LLC.
- Land Trust Alliance.
- Natural Resource Defense Council.
- Nature Conservancy.
- New Leaf.
- New Yorkers for Clean Power.
- NY Civil Liberties Union NYCLU.
- NY League of Conservation Voters.
- NYPIRG.
- NY RENEWS COALITION.
- NYSERDA.
- NY Wine Policy Institute.
- NYS Council of Churches.
- Open Space Institute.
- Peconic Land Trust.
- Pfister Energy.
- PlugPV.
- Police Benevolent Association NYS.
- Protect the ADKs.
- Public Utility Law Project.
- Reinvent Albany.
- Rewiring America.
- Riverkeeper.
- Save the Sound.
- Scenic Hudson Org..
- Sheridan Hollow Alliance for Renewable Energy.
- Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter.
- Ski NY.
- Solar Energy Developers and Installers.
- Solar Energy Industries Association.
- Stacy Bradt.
- Sure We Can (SWC).
- Surfrider Foundation.
- The Land Trust Alliance Before.
- Two Cans Redemption.
- WE ACT for Environmental Justice.
- Scenic Hudson Org.
- Department of Public Service.
- Dept of Environmental Conservation.
- Adirondack Wild Friends of the Forest Preserve.
- Citizen Action of New York.

- Food & Water Watch.
- Green Legal and Education Fund Inc.
- Julianne Vogt, Bottle Bill.
- Kendall Sustainable Infrastructure, LLC.
- Open Space Institute.
- Ski NY.
- Sure We Can (SWC).
- Stacy Bradt.
- The Land Trust Alliance Before.
- ACE NY.