

The Friends of New York's Environment

Protecting our land, air and water

Legislature Defends Integrity of Environmental Fund and Reopens Parks Funding Level Disappointing, But Will Remain Dedicated to Programs

ALBANY, NY (05/28/2010) – More than 100 environmental, conservation, civic, agricultural, recreation and community groups concerned about protecting New York's land, air and water are thankful that an agreement was reached to reopen state parks. It is critical that the 55 closed state parks and historic sites will be re-opened in time for Memorial Day, so that New Yorkers can connect with nature and communities can continue to benefit from the economic activity parks, campgrounds and natural areas generate.

While today's agreement reopens our state parks, it is bittersweet for New Yorkers as it comes at a high price - greatly reduced funding for environmental programs. New York's dedicated funding source for more than 30 environmental programs, the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), will receive \$134 million for the 2010-11 state fiscal year, a 37 percent cut from last year's funding level and one of the lowest levels of funding in a decade. This disproportionately large cut comes on top of the nearly \$500 million that has been swept from the EPF in recent years, which has created a significant backlog of unfunded projects, straining organizations, municipalities and others partnering with the state on environmental programs.

An important victory was achieved as part of the deal with the Legislature's rejection of "offloads" proposed to the EPF by the Governor. This protected the integrity of the Fund. Offloading funding for state agency operations and certain state tax payments into the EPF would set a dangerous precedent and undermine the original intent of the Fund. These programs could have also potentially used up most of the EPF in future years, leaving behind nothing for the important programs the Fund was created to support.

The groups thanked the leaders of the Senate and Assembly for their work to defend the EPF from damaging proposals advanced by Governor David Paterson during this year's budget negotiations. Groups were especially thankful to Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee Chair Robert Sweeney (D-Lindenhurst), Senate Environmental Conservation Committee Chair Antoine Thompson (D-Buffalo), Assembly Tourism Committee Chair Steve Englebright (D-East Setauket), and Senate Tourism Committee Chair Jose Serrano (D-East Harlem) for their leadership and strong support for and defense of New York's environmental programs.

Created in 1993, the EPF provides dedicated funding for New York's land and water protection, solid waste reduction, waterfront revitalization, working farms, and other critical environmental programs in every county across the state. In addition to protecting natural resources, these programs create and maintain jobs, generate economic activity and protect public health.

As the remainder of the budget is negotiated, the Friends of New York's Environment will urge the Legislature to revisit the EPF and create a repayment plan for the nearly half a billion dollars that has been taken in recent years for non-environmental purposes. Such a plan, which would take effect in the out-years, is necessary to enable the State to address the large backlog of conservation and restoration projects. A repayment plan is essential for the State to protect the clean air, water, and land that benefit all New Yorkers.

The Friends of New York's Environment is a broad partnership of more than 100 environmental, conservation, civic, agricultural, recreation and community groups working together to secure increases in dedicated funding to protect our land, air and water thereby safeguarding New York's health, economy and environment.