



December 12, 2025

The Honorable Kathy Hochul  
Governor of New York State  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

## RE: Adirondack Park FY27 Funding Priorities

Dear Governor Hochul,

While the federal government is rolling back national climate mitigation, clean air and water standards, wetland protection, public land protections and wilderness stewardship across the country, people continue to look to New York to exemplify the highest standards of environmental stewardship. You have demonstrated high standards in your efforts to prioritize conservation of Whitney Park, and that is making a real difference at this critical time for the largest Park in the lower 48. Now, we urge your administration to continue the efforts to address the many challenges and opportunities facing the

Adirondack Park that continue to need State attention and investments. We applaud the Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) efforts to acquire Whitney Park to add it to the Forest Preserve, the Department of Transportation's (DOT) efforts to implement road salt reduction practices throughout the Adirondacks to protect water quality and human health, and the Adirondack Park Agency's (APA) efforts to hold an adjudicatory hearing for the first time in 14 years to provide needed scrutiny of a unprecedented proposal. Additionally, your administration's ongoing actions to institute Visitor Use Management in the Forest Preserve, to update policies that help make the Adirondack Park more welcoming and accessible to all New Yorkers, and to improve critical infrastructure throughout the Park need to continue at full pace.

In this upcoming budget, the people and natural resources of the Adirondack Park need your support and the State resources set forth in your budget. As you develop your Executive Budget proposal for the 2026-27 fiscal year, please consider the following list of critical investments as core parts of your agenda for ensuring that the Adirondack Park remains resilient, vibrant, affordable, and protected for generations of New Yorkers:

- At least \$425 million for the Environmental Protection Fund;
- At least \$500 million for the Clean Water Infrastructure Fund;
- Funding to foster Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Climate Justice in the Adirondacks; and
- At least \$90 million in capital funds for DEC.

These budgets requests are further explained below.

### **At least \$425 Million for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)**

The EPF funds projects that drive regional tourism, and make clean water affordable for local economies and environmental protection initiatives in New York. The EPF was funded at \$400 million for many years, and it was increased to \$425 million last year. The EPF needs to be funded with at least \$425 million this year with a goal of increasing the EPF to \$500 million annually to meet the many demands across the State for these funds that assist numerous local governments and organizations.

**\$50 Million for Open Space Protection:** \$50 million for open space protection and land conservation is needed to ensure that we conserve the land and waters that provide numerous benefits from clean drinking water to public spaces for outdoor recreation. Funding for open space protection is needed to protect the preeminent 36,000-acre Whitney Park, located in Hamilton County in the Adirondacks, that has been a priority in the State Open Space Conservation Plan for decades and is available for purchase. The open space funding should include at least \$3 million for the Land Trust Alliance Conservation Partnership Program and at least \$1.5 million for their Conservation Easement Programs.

**At least \$50 Million for State Land Stewardship:** The current need for funding for stewardship of State land is greater than the \$50 million allocated last year and will increase as more land comes under

State ownership. At least \$50 million, with a goal of increasing this funding to \$65 million, for State Lands Stewardship divided between DEC and OPRHP is necessary. This funding should include the following at least:

- \$10 million for Adirondack Visitor Safety and Wilderness Protection.
- \$2.5 million for Parks and Trails Grants Program.
- \$1 million allocated to DEC in last year's budget for conducting the long-required and long-overdue Carrying Capacity Study on the Saranac Chain of Lakes should be reallocated. This funding is needed to facilitate the implementation of the Carrying Capacity Study required by the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan to analyze the increasing human pressure on the Saranac Chain of Lakes and to address the escalating need to protect these natural resources from degradation resulting from overuse. This effort will help to protect the character of a region that attracts people year after year.
- \$2 million should be included for the Survey of Climate and Adirondack Lakes Ecosystems (SCALE), a multi-year study of how climate change impacts waterbodies in the Adirondacks. SCALE researchers from Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS), Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), the Ausable Freshwater Center and other academic partners are examining how climate change impacts the baseline conditions of waterbodies, and exploring the relationships between climate change and harmful algae blooms, food webs, and mercury bioaccumulation. The information from SCALE will inform future climate policymaking and guide strategic investment in greenhouse gas reduction and climate resiliency.
- We also support funding for Adirondack Architectural Heritage's management of educational and interpretative programs at historic Camp Santanoni.

**\$1 Million for Adirondack and Catskill Visitor Interpretive and Information Centers:** We support funding Visitor Centers at \$1 million, with \$250,000 each for Paul Smith's Visitor Interpretative Center (VIC); the SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) Adirondack Interpretative Center (AIC); and the ADK High Peaks Information Center. These facilities are strategically located and help to inform the millions of visitors traveling to popular destinations in the Adirondacks every year. Continued funding of these centers is critical as they serve to protect the Forest Preserve, keep recreators safe, educate youth and the public, and highlight community assets. When visitors have an enjoyable experience on the Forest Preserve, they want to come back again.

**\$20 Million for Invasive Species Control and Management:** We support funding the Invasive Species Account with at least \$18.55 million, split evenly between prevention and interdiction and eradication. These funds assist local governments and many entities across New York in their work to educate the public about invasive species and stop their spread. The Adirondack Park is the only place in New York with many waterbodies that remain free of invasive species infestations and we need to keep these waters free and pure. Cornell's New York State Hemlock Initiative works in the Forest Preserve and across the state to protect Hemlock Forests from Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. Invasive species diminish property values, and impede recreation tourism.

**\$600,000 for Science and the Environment:** The Adirondack Watershed Institute (AWI) at Paul Smith's College and the Atmospheric Science and Research Center (ASRC) Whiteface Mountain Field Station are leading environmental research in air, water, and forests in the Adirondacks and New York State. Their research has led to efforts to combat road salt and cross-state air pollution, which both directly harm public health. AWI, ASRC and the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies should be allocated \$200,000 each.

**\$4 Million for Smart Growth Grants:** We support continued funding of at least \$3.8 million for the Smart Growth program for communities in the Adirondack and Catskill Parks. Smart Growth planning leads to business development, affordable housing, and increased revenue for municipalities.

**At least \$500 Million for Preserving Clean Water and Promoting Community Vibrancy**

We know that you appreciate the growing need to fund critical infrastructure because clean water is essential to building sustainable growth and development and promoting water affordability in our small Adirondack communities while protecting our precious natural resources that make this place so special. To encourage affordable housing and to increase the overall housing stock, clean water infrastructure is an essential part of the equation, but too often Adirondack communities cannot make ends meet without State funding. In recent years, New York State has stepped up its assistance to communities in the North Country, but there many more water, wastewater and sewer capital projects that still need to come to fruition. Please urge the Environmental Facilities Corporation to update its scoring rubric to make rural hardship communities more competitive in the intended use plan, as we continue to hear about challenges with securing the scoring necessary to get important projects funded.

The Clean Water Infrastructure Fund should be allocated at least \$500 million in your Executive Budget.

**Road Salt Pollution Reduction:** We support funding as part of the Water Infrastructure Improvement Act for road salt management and control efforts in Adirondack Park communities to fund new technology and equipment for highway maintenance and pilot testing with alternate winter road maintenance programs. This funding helps local municipalities implement the recommendations of the Adirondack Road Salt Reduction Task Force report, which documented solutions and strategies needed to reduce road salt pollution. Investments in road salt reduction have proven effective at dramatically reducing pressures on local winter road maintenance budgets. We also support the expanded eligibility for funds from the Water Quality Improvement Projects Grant program to purchase equipment for salt reduction best management practices.

**Fostering Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Climate Justice for the Adirondacks**

**Timbuctoo Institute:** The Timbuctoo Institute introduces high school students from New York City to a broad spectrum of green job opportunities, fostering the next generation of environmental stewards and climate advocates. This program provides an important link, helping guide people towards careers that pay people to protect our environment. In the summer of 2025, 131 students from all five New York City Boroughs participated in the program. The program served students in 83% of NYS Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus (Caucus) Senate districts, 72% of NYS Caucus Assembly districts, 48% of all NYS Senate districts, and 37% of all NYS Assembly districts. The program has the potential to grow stronger in future years. Please include \$2.1 million for the Timbuctoo Institute this year.

**The Adirondack Diversity Initiative:** The Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI) works to make the Adirondacks a more welcoming and inclusive place for residents and visitors while ensuring a vital and sustainable Adirondack Park for future generations. ADI addresses a broad range of diversity issues, such as race and ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, across 14 counties. We support funding of at least \$420,000, with a goal to increase that funding, to ANCA and ADI as it continues to grow its program's impacts and effectiveness.

**Promotion of the Adirondacks as a Destination for African American Heritage Tourists:** July 4, 2027, will mark the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of slavery in NY. On that date, the Adirondack Experience will open a \$3M exhibition celebrating the history of African Americans in the region. Marketing efforts directed to African American heritage tourists will link the new exhibition to the John Brown Farm State Historic Site, the North Star Underground Rail Road Museum, and 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary activities around the state. We support the State funding being sought for this effort.

**\$90 Million for DEC Capital Projects:** We support \$90 million in funding for capital projects, including Adventure NY projects, that improve access to New York's wide array of State lands, and support DEC's efforts to develop a comprehensive accessibility policy to guide and promote accessibility and inclusivity in a way that is consistent with the State Land Classifications that apply to the Forest Preserve in the Adirondacks and Catskills.

### **Increase Forest Rangers, DEC and APA Staffing**

This past summer a tragic death of a DEC Assistant Forest Ranger exposed problems with the oversight of Forest Rangers in the field. These brave officers need to know that they are valued and supported. They must be fully staffed and their numbers increased to ensure that they can excel at serving the public safety needs of the people recreating in the Adirondack Forest Preserve and protecting the public lands that they safeguard. We cannot continue to ask them to do more with less when they are putting their lives on the line. By increasing Ranger staffing, costly Search and Rescue missions can be prevented. This is beneficial to state coffers, and to local economies.

The budget should include funding to increase and diversify the current Forest Ranger force.

Finally, the October 2025 letter from Blake Washington, Director of the Budget, asked State agencies to review their rules and regulations and propose reform for “those which are outdated”. The Adirondack Park Agency Act has not been updated in any meaningful way since its adoption in 1972. Now 50+ years late, the Adirondack Park faces unprecedented environmental, social, and economic pressures. Climate change, overuse of trails and waterways, fragmented forests, an acute shortage of affordable housing, and outdated development standards threaten the long-term health of both the Park’s natural resources and its communities. The APA Act must be modernized and updated to meet these 21st-century challenges. Additional APA staff should be added to the Agency’s ranks to help with drafting and implementing updates to the APA Act so that the agency can be a preeminent leader in environmental protection.

### **Redevelop Closed State Facilities on the Forest Preserve**

We urge you to work with the State Legislature to formulate a constitutional amendment(s) that allows the closed correctional facilities on the Forest Preserve to be rehabilitated and redeveloped or repurposed so that they can provide a public benefit for the communities where these facilities are located.

### **Conclusion**

We applaud your efforts to meet the critical needs facing the environment and small rural communities of the Adirondack Park and we urge you to continue to build on your agenda for the Adirondack Park by supporting each of the budget priorities set forth above. There is much work to be done, and we stand ready to support your administration as it advances these policies and programs. Thank you very much for your support of the natural resources and human communities in the Adirondack Park.

Sincerely,

Raul J. Aguirre, Executive Director, Adirondack Council  
David Gibson, Managing Partner, Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve  
Cortney Koenig Worrall, Executive Director, Adirondack Mountain Club  
Claudia Braymer, Executive Director, Protect the Adirondacks! Inc.  
Scott Ireland, Executive Director, Adirondack Lakes Alliance  
Scott Ireland, President, Schroon Lake Association  
Roger Downs, Director of Conservation, Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter  
Pete Nelson, Chair, Adirondack Wilderness Advocates  
Erin Tobin, Executive Director, Adirondack Architectural Heritage  
Daniel Kelting, Ph.D, President, Paul Smith’s College

Maureen Cunningham, Executive Director, Adirondack Watershed Institute  
Bill Brosseau, Director, Paul Smith's College Visitor Interpretative Center  
Kelley Tucker, Executive Director, Ausable Freshwater Center  
David Kahn, Executive Director, Adirondack Experience  
Elizabeth Cooper, Executive Director, Adirondack North Country Association  
Jamie Brown, New York Program Manager, Land Trust Alliance  
Rob Hayes, Senior Director of Clean Water, Environmental Advocates NY  
Paul B. Hai, Associate Director, Adirondack Ecological Center at  
SUNY ESF's Newcomb Campus and Director, Timbuctoo Institute  
Greg Whalin, NY Chapter Chair, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

cc:

Kathryn Garcia, Director of State Operations, Executive Chamber  
Ashley Dougherty, Secretary for the Environment, Executive Chamber  
Blake Washington, Budget Director, NYSDOB  
Amanda Lefton, Commissioner, NYSDEC  
Barbara Rice, Executive Director, NYSAPA  
Kathy Moser, Acting Commissioner, NYSOPRHP  
Marie Therese Dominguez, NYSDOT