

PRESS RELEASE

Friends of New York's Environment

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for more information:

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Erica Ringewald (518) 210-9903 cell

FRIENDS OF NY'S ENVIRONMENT CALL ON GOVERNOR TO DROP PLANS TO ALTER ENVIRONMENTAL FUNDING FORMULA

ASSEMBLYMAN SWEENEY, SENATOR THOMPSON JOIN GREEN GROUPS TO RELEASE NEW REPORT ON YIELDS OF ENVIRONMENTAL INVESTMENTS

(ALBANY, NY)—Assemblyman Robert Sweeney (D-Lindenhurst) and Senator Antoine Thompson (D-Buffalo), chairs of their chambers' respective Environmental Conservation committees, joined environmental groups, farmers and business owners today to call attention to the vital role the Environmental Protection Fund plays in New York's communities. In response to yesterday's passage of deficit reduction measures, the groups called on state leaders to hold back from making further cuts to the already depleted Fund and to keep the current funding formula in place in the 2009-2010 budget.

"A clean and healthy environment provides countless benefits to New Yorkers. The environment is an important economic engine. Taking into account the harsh fiscal realities facing New Yorkers and the state, I urge careful consideration of the economic benefits generated by the Environmental Protection Fund before it goes under the knife," said Assemblyman Robert Sweeney.

"New York's environmental assets are irreplaceable and raiding the Environmental Protection Fund would turn back the clock on the progress of the environmental movement in New York State," said Senator Antoine Thompson.

The Fund generates big economic benefits. For example, solid waste programs help support an industry with \$1.3 Billion in revenue and 30,000 jobs. New York's wildlife watchers contributed an estimated \$1.6 Billion (and \$250 million in state sales tax revenue) to the state's economy in 2006 supporting thousands of jobs. In addition, state parks, beaches, zoos, botanical gardens and aquariums—all supported by Environmental Protection Fund dollars—play a leading role in New York's travel and tourism industry.

The lawmakers were joined by the Friends of New York's Environment, a partnership that includes more than 100 organizations from across the state. The group released a new report, *The Environmental Protection Fund: Preserving New York's Natural Heritage & Quality of Life* highlighting Fund-supported success stories. The Friends of New York's Environment have criticized Governor David Paterson's budget proposal for State Fiscal Year 2009-2010 as disproportionately cutting the Fund, thus derailing projects already approved and years in the making. Visit http://www.eany.org/issues/reports/EPF_2009.pdf to download a copy of the report.

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The Governor's budget proposal also includes changing the Environmental Protection Fund's funding formula by updating New York's bottle deposit law to include non-carbonated beverages such as bottled water and sports drinks, and requiring beverage companies to transfer unclaimed bottle and can deposits to the Fund. An estimated \$118 million in unclaimed deposits would replace the Fund's current revenue source—the Real Estate Transfer Tax (RETT). These deposits represent a great source of supplemental revenue, but should not serve as the primary source of Environmental Protection Fund dollars.

The Friends report includes projects from every corner of New York, including working farms, wildlife preserves, community gardens, the historic restoration of the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church in Harlem, and New York businesses that have successfully leveraged Fund resources to create jobs and reduce waste, among others. Like most projects supported by the Environmental Protection Fund, those included in the report have used its monies to secure matching funds from private and public sources.

Paul Hartman, Director of Government Relations for The Nature Conservancy in New York stated, "The Nature Conservancy commends the Legislature for having the foresight and commitment to create the EPF in 1993. Over the last 15 years New York has protected natural resources, promoted tourism, safeguarded our agricultural economy and provided property tax relief to localities through EPF programs and services. It is that same foresight and commitment that we need the Legislature to embrace again this year during these troubled times. The EPF stands out amongst the crowd of worthy state-funded programs for its ability to impact every region of the state and provide benefits to every New Yorker. For a very small cost to the state (only one-quarter of one percent of the State Budget) New York can fully fund the EPF, fulfill past commitments and safeguard our environment, economy and public health."

"Governor Paterson is faced with some tough choices this budget season and we'd be fools not to anticipate cuts to critical programs and services. What we didn't expect were changes to the Environmental Protection Fund's funding formula," said Alison Jenkins, Fiscal Policy Program Director, Environmental Advocates of New York. "The Governor's proposed budget will undermine the stability of environmental funding in New York and make it impossible for the state to meet its green goals in the years ahead."

The Environmental Protection Fund has been cut by \$50 million this year, from \$255 to \$205 million. Cuts to the Fund will derail hundreds of projects that range from conservation and recycling to public health and water quality across the state.

"At The New York Botanical Garden, we are environmental stewards and environmental educators. The Garden is also good for the economy via jobs, vendors and tourism. Cutting the EPF and eliminating the State's ZBGA funding will harm the Botanical Garden and Bronxites. If this drastic budget cut to zero funds is enacted, New York State will force the Garden to reduce free hours of visitation, severely scale back on environmental education programs for youth, shrink exhibitions and public programs and cut people's access to collections and facilities. The Garden's economic impact as a tourist attraction will take a hit. An investment in the Garden is an investment in the State's economic and environmental health. We support a fully funded EPF that maintains our traditional funding source, the RETT. Dismantling the ZBGA program after almost 30 years would strike a damaging blow to environmental education in New York State," said Gregory Long, President and CEO, The New York Botanical Garden.

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According to Glenn Hoagland, Director of Mohonk Preserve, “Last year the EPF’s Zoos, Botanical Gardens, and Aquaria (ZBGA) program funded four of the Mohonk Preserve’s education positions, in part, providing more than 3,180 students with 12,000 hours of engaging learning experiences and 42,000 visitors with insightful exhibitry at the Preserve’s Visitor Center.”

“Support from New York's Environmental Protection Fund sparked the birth of a community park where hundreds of children and families spend countless hours enjoying baseball, softball and soccer games. Sharing this natural space has been positive for our entire community,” said Andrea Aldinger, Development Director for the Chris Martin Field of Dreams in Alexander. “As we develop the park, we are very concerned with the proposal to cut and change the Environmental Protection Fund's funding formula; because without it, the Chris Martin Field of Dreams may never realize its full potential.”

“The Environmental Protection Fund has been a tremendous investment for New York State, funding protection of special places across the Adirondacks, the Catskills, the Hudson Valley, and New York City,” said Leslie Wright, NY State Director with The Trust for Public Land. “This report articulates the very real economic and public health benefits of the fund's successes, and makes clear the need to preserve and protect this investment in the current economic climate.”

“As a family farm, we have always worked hard to be good environmental stewards and we place a high value on protecting the land and water resources around us. The grant we received from the Environmental Protection Fund made it possible for us implement environmental practices that go even further to protect local aquifers and streams to better safeguard drinking water and tourism opportunities,” said Mike McMahon, EZ Acres Farm.

“With the Real Estate Transfer Tax as its primary source of funding, the Environmental Protection Fund was designed to be a source of monies for critical environmental projects in good times and bad,” said Tim Sweeney of Parks & Trails New York. “Replacing these dedicated funds with another funding scheme, as Governor Paterson has proposed, will have far-reaching negative consequences for the state’s environment and economy.”

“New York State has been a strong partner in the environmental recovery and economic development of the Beacon waterfront,” said Andy Bicking, Director of Public Policy for Scenic Hudson. “Through the Environmental Protection Fund, local government, the State of New York, and Scenic Hudson attracted a world class artist to design and develop a prominent park which is free to the public and has helped to attract outside investment in the community.”

“We ask Governor Paterson and Albany to be fair and strategic as they propose a state budget,” said John Calvelli, Executive Vice President of Public Affairs, Wildlife Conservation Society. “Just as President Obama and Mayor Bloomberg are calling for more investments in green jobs, education and environmental efforts, our state is cutting them disproportionately in the EPF. All our living museums educate millions of students each year on the environment and we pump millions of dollars into local communities. Investing in zoos, botanical gardens and aquariums is smart for our economy, our environment and education system.”

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“The Environmental Protection Fund makes up less than one-quarter of 1 percent of the overall state budget. For every \$100 New York government spends, it dedicates less than 24 cents to environmental needs,” said Brian L. Houseal, Executive Director of the Adirondack Council, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the wild character and ecological health of the 9,300-square-mile Adirondack Park. “Yet, Governor Paterson has proposed reducing this already inadequate amount to a mere fraction of itself. Other areas of the budget are being cut by 10 percent. Proposed cuts to the EPF amount to nearly 80 percent. It’s not fair and will hurt both the environment and our tourism economy.”

“Andela Products is providing long term solutions by providing green collar jobs in the recycling industry - particularly glass recycling. The EPF has made this possible and should be funded as a successful strategy to revive New York's economy while making the state a better place to live, said Cynthia Andela, President, Andela Products, Ltd.”

“The cuts and changes being proposed to the Environmental Protection Fund will only delay the day of reckoning with New York’s environmental challenges,” said Marcia Bystry, president of the New York League of Conservation Voters. “The long-term protection of New York’s environment is too important to sacrifice, especially now when EPF dollars generate vital economic activity in every corner of the state.”

“The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter urges the Legislature to fully fund the Environmental Protection Fund at \$300 million, with revenues from the Real Estate Transfer Tax as the law currently provides,” stated Norreida Reyes, Conservation Director. “We must not cut these proactive programs that enhance and protect our air, land and water. Those programs are much less expensive than the costs associated with environmental clean-ups, public health impacts, and lost revenue from recreation and tourism. Cuts to the EPF will provide only an illusion of budget relief—the lost economic opportunities associated with the proposed cuts, especially in upstate economies, are in the tens of millions of dollars. It’s just not worth it.”

“The EPF not only helps New York acquire green space, it provides the stewardship funding needed to maintain these wild places and make them accessible to the public,” said Neil Woodworth, executive director of the Adirondack Mountain Club. “The Adirondacks, Catskills, Finger Lakes and other natural areas attract thousands of hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts to New York each year, but if we don't do a better job maintaining backcountry trails and protecting our assets, they'll stop coming.”

According to Brad Rogers, President of the New York Association of Conservation Districts, “On behalf of our member Soil and Water Conservation Districts, NYACD is pleased with the release of the EPF report. It is a great tool to use to promote the value of the EPF, and how the EPF contributes to New York State as a whole, in terms of protecting the water and land resources that are invaluable to the economy of our state. For example, New York Soil and Water Conservation Districts have made great progress partnering with local municipalities, farmers, and conservation organizations using EPF funds to put conservation best management practices on the ground. On their behalf, NYACD is asking the State to maintain 2008 EPF levels for 2009. To justify this request, past success of the EPF-funded Agricultural Non-point Source projects netted another 88 project applications totaling \$25 million in the current Round XV call for proposals. The statewide need is there - this is 2 times what is currently in the proposed budget.”

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“The Environmental Protection Fund helped the Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency (OCRRA) recycle over two million tons of material in the last decade. In addition, over 2,500 barrels filled with household hazardous waste were properly managed thanks to the financial support provided by the EPF. Composting equipment purchased with EPF support helps keep thousands of yards of organic material out of the waste stream. OCRRA’s greenhouse gas reductions thanks to these programs and others are simply astounding. The best news of all is that communities across New York State can proclaim similar environmental successes as a direct result of the financial support from the EPF. Such funding must continue to improve our environment for future generations, said Andrew Radin, OCRRA.”

“All of us in public life, the Governor, legislators and advocates will be judged on how this historic crisis is handled,” said Richard Schrader, the New York Legislative Director for the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). “We have to stop drawing an erroneous distinction between economic development and the protection of our vital natural resources. Both goals can be accomplished by the investment of \$300 million in clean water and air as well as the preservation of our public lands—this is a direct and galvanizing investment in the state and local economies.”

“Allowing the degradation of our parks, zoos, beaches and bays, recycling programs and other environmental resources in New York will increase our fiscal pain. These assets will cost more to restore in the future and New York will lose the critical revenue that they generate. Cutting the EPF is merely an emotional response to the budget crises, it’s not a smart nor beneficial action,” said Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment.

“The Environmental Protection Fund provides critically important funding to not only protect and restore the state’s natural resources but promote ecotourism and connect children and their families to nature,” said Albert E. Caccese, Executive Director of Audubon New York. “The Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary and Audubon Center is a shining example of how the EPF and the ZBGA program provide important support to local communities and enhances environmental education opportunities throughout the state.”

The Environmental Protection Fund was created in 1993 as a dedicated trust fund to preserve New York’s natural and historic heritage. Currently, the Fund is not dependent on state budget fluctuations and is supported by revenue from the state’s Real Estate Transfer Tax, which has been tested in previous economic downturns and remains a source of increased investment in environmental programs and protection. In 2007, a law was passed to grow the Fund to \$300 million in the 2009-2010 State Budget.