



For Immediate Release

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Adirondack Wild Asks for More DEC Forest Rangers in State Budget

Albany, NY – While applauding large portions of Governor Cuomo’s proposed environmental budget, including support for the Governor’s Restore Mother Nature Bond Act, *Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve* submitted testimony to the State Legislature which calls for additional DEC Forest Rangers and trail crews and the testing of a pilot reservation system to reduce congestion and damage to the High Peaks Wilderness.

“The Governor’s budget proposals call for more durable trails, controls on overuse and education to improve stewardship of the Adirondack High Peaks Wilderness. All of that is great. However, none of that can be successful without investing more in DEC Forest Rangers and trail crews,” said Adirondack Wild’s David Gibson.

“We ask the State Legislature to work with Governor Cuomo to add 20 additional DEC Forest Rangers to the current force of 134 positions. The real need is to double the Ranger force, so 20 new rangers funded by the DEC operating budget would represent a very modest but vitally important beginning,” Gibson testified.

“Forest Rangers are on the front lines of Governor Cuomo’s public land stewardship program. They are educating the public and responding to public safety on our public lands, yet their numbers – just 106 field rangers statewide - are stuck where they were 50 years ago,” Gibson said.

On trail improvements, Adirondack Wild stated that “we see little evidence in the executive budget that trail work in the High Peaks and elsewhere will actually accelerate this year.” While Governor Cuomo has added \$3 million to the Environmental Protection Fund for stewardship, nearly half of that money is dedicated to shuttle buses. The group asks that \$2.5 million in stewardship funds be dedicated for Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve trail crews.

Adirondack Wild is also asking the Legislature and Governor to carve out a small amount in the budget to pilot test a reservation system into the most congested portions of the High Peaks Wilderness. Reservation systems are a management tool successfully used in other

popular, overused Wilderness areas in the U.S. DEC would study and carefully set limits on the number of people hiking specified, heavily impacted trails to the High Peaks. They would issue online reservation permits up to those limits - just as the state has done for years at State Campgrounds, holding back some for same-day use. DEC would then monitor and evaluate the system.

In other comments, Adirondack Wild urged the legislature to reduce the Governor's proposed \$14 million spending on a new lodge at Whiteface Mountain, characterizing that as bloated overspending on a single project, and to shift half of that money to Wilderness trail crews and DEC Forest Rangers.

Concerning the Adirondack Park Agency's proposed budget, Adirondack Wild urged the Legislature and Governor to redirect new capital spending on a new APA headquarters and devote the money instead to needed programs at APA, including an analysis of Parkwide trends, measuring cumulative impacts of development permits, and establishing regulations for conservation subdivision design and for enforcing the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan.

Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve is a not-for-profit, membership organization which acts on behalf of wilderness and wild land values and stewardship throughout the region. More on the web: www.adirondackwild.org.