The Adirondack Council is dissatisfied that Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo’s proposed budget has largely withheld funding increases from environmental agencies during a time when the state is working toward a $2 billion surplus.

The proposed budget for the state Department of Environmental Conservation would decrease annual state funding from last year by $43 million, or 5 percent, from $919 million to $876 million.

But that decrease is primarily due to the completion of projects funded by the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, according to a budget summary released by the governor’s office. Morris Peters, a spokesman for the state Department of Budget, could not specify on Thursday what projects were completed.

“It’s very clear that these funds are related to the ARRA, and the fundamental point is that the budget is not being cut,” Mr. Peters said. “It was an infusion of federal capital, and the DEC’s budget is essentially flat.”

Another major cut slated in the DEC budget stems from a $12 million decrease in the DEC’s annual debt payment toward the $1.75 billion Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act approved in 1996 under former Gov. George Pataki. Compared to last year, the agency’s payment will drop by 14 percent from $85 million to $73 million. By 2016, when the debt will be paid off, the annual payment is projected to be $68 million.

The sticking point for the Adirondack Council, according to spokesman John F. Sheehan, is the $12 million paid by the DEC last year toward the 1996 environmental bond act.

That money will go toward non-environmental programs proposed by the governor, he said, instead of being used for environmental programs.

“The net loss is at least $12 million on what the state plans to spend from one year to the next, and from our perspective that’s a cut in environmental support,” Mr. Sheehan said. “The state has the obligation of funding the
Environmental Protection Fund and paying debt service on that bond. And now that payments on that bond have dropped so substantially, we’d like to have it put back into the EPF rather than diverting it to non-environmental purposes,” such as tax relief programs. “We might be able to understand this proposal in tough times, but not when you have a budget surplus of $2 billion.”

Compared to last year, funding toward the state Environmental Protection Fund — applied toward big-ticket projects not included in agencies’ budgets — would increase from last year by $4 million, from $153 to $157 million. In fiscal year 2008-09, by contrast, the state allocated $250 million toward the fund.

The DEC’s budget calls for operational spending to increase by $1.8 million, or 0.7 percent, mainly due to increased personnel costs. The net total of agency employees is projected to increase by only one, from 2,916 to 2,917. Marginal reductions in the budget include the transfer of IT positions to the Office of Information and Technology Services, along with decreases in “non-personal service and local assistance spending,” according to the budget summary.

The DEC is short-staffed in comparison to recent years because of cuts in state funding, Mr. Sheehan said. Of particular concern is the dwindling number of forest rangers who staff the state Adirondack Park Agency, which spans an area of about 9,000 square miles. The agency is now staffed by 57 rangers, but in 2005 it had 74.

“Our feeling for the last several years has been the ranger force is too small for the preserve and amount of size they have to cover,” he said.

Due to its budget surplus, Mr. Sheehan contends the state could now afford a significant investment toward land acquisition and conservation efforts in the Adirondacks region. During the summer of 2012, the state acquired 69,000 acres of property throughout the Adirondacks from The Nature Conservancy for $49.8 million, to be paid off over five years. The state plans to develop recreational plans and determine land classifications to make the land accessible to the public, but no progress has been made yet, Mr. Sheehan said.

“It’s going to be a couple of years before the state completes the entire transaction, and we’re concerned the delay has led to other delays for projects queued up behind it,” he said.

David H. Gibson, partner of the nonprofit environmental group Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Reserve, said the shortage of DEC rangers in the
Adirondacks and Catskill Mountains has become a severe problem.

In 1963, the region was staffed by 106 rangers; today, “we have 100,000 more acres of state land and almost a million conservation easements, but we still have an authorized force of 106 rangers in the field,” Mr. Gibson said. Staffing “may be held flat for this budget, but the real problem is you don’t have people coming through the training academies to provide recruits. Academies aren’t held every year, and if you have attrition, we could be facing a really serious problem in five years.”

Other state environmental agencies saw marginal funding increases under the governor’s proposed budget.

Funding for the state Department of Agriculture and Markets would rise slightly by $3 million, or 2.7 percent, from $119 million to $122 million. The state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation would garner an increase of $10 million, or 3.6 percent, from $282 million to $292 million.