

Most Say They Will Miss Departing DEC Commissioner

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DEC Commissioner Joe Martens.

One day after the statewide ban on hydraulic fracturing was made official, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Joseph Martens announced he will leave his position.

Martens sent an email to DEC staff Tuesday announcing his departure after four years leading the agency. Martens was unavailable for comment, but the DEC released his email.

In it, he praises DEC response to environmental and natural emergencies. He cites accomplishments that include lowering the cap on greenhouse gas emissions, funding for flood control structures and coastal erosion projects, simplifying hunting and fishing licenses, reforming the state's brownfield program and obtaining 10-year reauthorization of the superfund program, and purchase of the Finch-Pruyn lands in the Adirondacks, which he noted as one of the largest additions to the forest preserve in the state's history.

He also writes that "at long last, we concluded our review of hydraulic fracturing and decided that there was simply too many unknowns and the

possible risks too great to allow it to go forward.”

Adirondack Park Local Government Review Board Executive Director Fred Monroe had heard rumors that the commissioner might leave and says local governments are sad to see him depart. “He’s been probably the best commissioner for local government to work with since I’ve been involved so sorry t see him go. He’s made it a point to be concerned about Adirondack communities as well as the forest preserve and the preservation of the natural resources. He’s been concerned about the economy of communities in the North Country which has been very refreshing. And he’s just very knowledgeable on all the issues. It’s been great.”

Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve staff partner Dave Gibson says Martens’ tenure had many high points. “Including obviously the decision not to allow hydraulic fracturing. That was certainly one project that I’m sure he wanted to see through. Another one is the Finch lands. Three of the big four projects have been completed that are now in the public domain. So I know he was staying in part to complete as much as he could of that big project in the Adirondacks.”

Adirondack Council Executive Director Willie Janeway says Martens has advanced a pro-Adirondack agenda. “For us in the Adirondacks perhaps what’s biggest is the improvement and change in the culture of the communities and environmental organizations working together; completing the 61,000 acres. He helped guide us through the majority of this land acquisition. Working with communities making sure they economically benefit while protecting these natural resources. And it’s a legacy that he can always be proud of.”

People of Albany United for Safe Energy — spokesperson Sandy Steubing has both praise and criticism for the commissioner. “We are grateful for his decision on fracking for natural gas here in New York and we’re very pleased that he stood his ground. However we are disappointed that he has not declared fracked oil that we get from North Dakota he has not stopped that oil from coming in to the Port of Albany. Which he could do.”

The Business Council of New York calls Martens an excellent leader of the agency. Director of Government Affairs Darren Suarez hopes a replacement will have the same skills. “We honestly had a great commissioner. If Commissioner Martens had a twin that would be excellent. I think probably the closest thing to his twin would be Marc Gerstman. The same passion for the environment but the same recognition that we can actually make good things happen and they don’t have to be at a cost for the environment or for the business.”

DEC Executive Deputy Marc Gerstman will become Acting Commissioner. Martens is taking a job as a consultant with the land preservation organization Open Space Institute, which he led before he was appointed DEC

Commissioner in 2011.

Below is the email Commissioner Martens sent to DEC staff announcing his departure, provided by the DEC:

"I am writing to let you know that I will be stepping down as DEC Commissioner during July. Marc Gerstman, my Executive Deputy, will serve as Acting Commissioner to ensure a seamless transition and continuation of the many initiatives we have in the works. First and foremost, I want to thank Governor Cuomo for giving me the opportunity to lead the Department for the last four plus years. It has been an honor, an education and a gift. It has been a gift because it has given me the opportunity to work with an amazingly talented and dedicated staff that is committed to environmental excellence, stewardship and service to the public.

I could not be prouder of the way you responded to each and every emergency Mother Nature threw at New York State (and there were many). Most recently, our Rangers and ECOs demonstrated their unique skills to help track down and bring dangerous felons to justice. I'm also proud of the leadership we have shown in virtually every one of our program areas. We lowered the cap on greenhouse gas emissions, we secured funding for flood control structures and coastal erosion projects that had been neglected for years, we identified nitrogen as an enemy to water quality and resiliency in our coastal bays and marshes, we reinvested in public access to state lands and renewed our commitment to universal access, we invested in our fish hatcheries, we tackled tough marine resource allocation issues, simplified our hunting and fishing licenses and promoted outdoor sports and activities like never before, we banned the sale and importation of elephant and rhinoceros ivory, we reformed the brownfield program and secured reauthorization of the superfund program for ten years, we were instrumental in helping to secure the future of Kodak Park and we undertook one of the largest additions to the forest preserve in the state's history. And, at long last, we concluded our review of hydraulic fracturing and decided that there was simply too many unknowns and the possible risks too great to allow it to go forward.

Throughout all of these initiatives, you continually worked to improve and streamline the way we do business. I am perhaps most proud of the way you have worked creatively with our local government partners as well as our stakeholders: business, agricultural and environmental, to solve problems. Collectively, we have put into practice the belief that when we work together, the public and private sector, we are all better off.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for all your help, support and for the good work that you do every day for this and future generations of New Yorkers."