



Catskill Park Coalition
PO Box 504
Arkville, NY 12406
P 845.586.2611
F 845.586.3044

September 22, 2023

Coalition Members

Co-Chairs
Catskill Center
Catskill Mountainkeeper

Members
Adirondack Mountain

Club
Catskill 3500 Club
Catskill Association for
Tourism Services
Catskill Heritage Alliance
Catskill Mountain Club
Catskill Mountain

Foundation
Central Catskills
Chamber of Commerce
Central Catskills

Revitalization Corporation
Community Greenways
Collaborative

Delaware Highlands
Conservancy
Friends of the Upper
Delaware River

Hudson Valley Hikers
Hunter Foundation
Natural Resources

Defense Council
New York New Jersey
Trail Conference

Open Space Institute
Parks and Trails New
York

Rip Van Winkle Hikers
Riverkeeper
Shandaken Art Studio

Tour
Theodore Gordon

Flyfishers
Trout Unlimited
Woodchuck Lodge

Woodstock Land
Conservancy
Zen Mountain Monastery

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
Executive Chamber
State Capitol
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Hochul:

Thank you for your leadership in delivering infrastructure and stewardship projects for the Catskill Park. We look forward to your continued commitment to ensuring the conservation of the Catskill Park for future generations, all while encouraging economic development and supporting our communities.

We write to you today to respectfully request your **support of the Catskill Park in your Executive Budget proposal for SFY 2024-25, per the priorities listed below.** Your commitment to this funding affirms tourism opportunities, natural resource protections, clean water, public health protections, climate resilience, recreational access, job creation, and quality of life for residents of and visitors to the Catskill Park.

- **Public Safety and Catskill Park Management** -- The NYSDEC must be adequately staffed, including new staff in the Division of Lands and Forests and annual Forest Ranger Academies, and support the newly created Catskill Park Coordinator role.
- **Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)** -- Fund the Environmental Protection Fund at \$400 million. Within the EPF, maintain existing funding lines for the Catskills including: \$10 million Forest Preserve line; \$250,000 line for the Catskills Visitor Center; \$200,000 line for Catskill Science Collaborative; \$500,000 for the "Save the Hemlocks" initiative; and \$300,000 in dedicated Catskills funding for Smart Growth Grants.
- **Supporting Local Economies** -- Support Catskills communities by investing in projects with direct community benefits. Improve cellular service, support construction of the U&D Rail Trail, expand affordable housing, and improve trail connectivity to downtown main streets.



Our organizations appreciate partnering with New York State, local governments, and other stakeholders to implement critical Catskill Park programs to conserve open space, steward our existing recreational resources, protect and improve water quality, promote responsible forest stewardship, build community resilience, and create new trails and public access. Investments in the Catskill Park support important jobs for our region across a broad spectrum of industries, and provide drinking water protection for millions of New Yorkers.

Catskill Park Coalition Priorities for the SFY 2024-25:

Public Safety and Catskill Park Management -- *Given the ongoing growth in the number of visitors, there is an increasing need for NYSDEC staff to properly address public safety and the Catskill Park's infrastructure and natural resources. As such, the Catskill Park Coalition calls for:*

- **Supporting the recently created Catskill Park Coordinator position** within the NYSDEC with adequate financial and staffing resources;
- **Staffing critical positions at the NYSDEC's Division of Lands and Forests in Regions 3 and 4** to better manage the Catskill Park and its more than 1.7 million annual visitors; and
- **Running an annual Forest Ranger Academy to maintain and increase Ranger staff** to provide a safe experience for all who visit the Catskill Park.

Environmental Protection Fund Priorities to Enhance and Protect the Catskills -- *Critical funding for the Catskill Park is provided within the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). The Environmental Protection Fund should be maintained at \$400 million to adequately protect New York's environment and specifically for the responsible protection and management of natural and recreational resources in the Catskill Park. Within the EPF, the Catskill Park Coalition calls for the following:*

- **Existing Catskill Park Funding:**
 - **\$10 million Forest Preserve line** to support Catskill and Adirondack Parks and address increasing visitor use;
 - **\$250,000 line, directed to the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development for the Congressman Maurice D. Hinchey Catskills Visitor Center** for operations, staffing, and programming;
 - **\$200,000 line, directed to the Cary Institute for Ecosystem Studies for the Catskill Science Collaborative**, which directs research on topics of importance in the Catskills;
 - **\$500,000 line directed to Cornell University for the "Save the Hemlocks" initiative** to fight the invasive Hemlock Woolly Adelgid with effective biocontrols;
 - **At least \$300,000 for Smart Growth Grants** dedicated to help Catskill communities and nonprofits sustainably improve the Park; and
 - Continued inclusion of funding for upgrades and improvements to the state-owned Belleayre Mountain Ski Center.

Supporting Local Economies -- *Supporting towns, villages, and hamlets within the Catskill Park by investing in projects with direct community benefits while addressing increasing visitor pressures is key to supporting local economies and protecting natural resources. Therefore, the Catskill Park Coalition calls for:*

- **Improving cellular service across the Catskill Park** – The lack of service across large portions of the Park is a public safety concern and a competitive disadvantage for local communities and businesses that cannot be discovered by visitors;
- **Expanding availability of affordable housing** within and adjacent to the Catskill Park; and
- **Improving trail connectivity** with connections to community main streets and within the existing trail network to expand recreational opportunities.

In addition to EPF funding, the Catskill Park Coalition looks forward to working with you on the implementation of the Environmental Bond Act in the Catskill Park and the greater Catskills region. This funding will provide additional resources to construct new and maintain existing Park and community infrastructure. However, the EPF funding identified above is **critical to the ongoing management of the Catskill Park and must be maintained within the EPF.**

Thank you for your leadership on Catskill Park funding, and your understanding of the important economic, public health, and natural resource benefits of environmental investments in the Catskill Park for our communities, and for all New Yorkers. We look forward to continuing our work with you and your administration to celebrate continued stewardship of the Catskill Park.

Sincerely yours,



Jeffrey Senterman
Executive Director, Catskill Center



Ramsay Adams
Executive Director, Catskill Mountainkeeper



cc:

Kathryn Garcia, Director of State Operations

Blake Washington, State Budget Director

Ashley Dougherty, Assistant Secretary for Environment

John O'Leary, Deputy Secretary for Energy and Environment

Sean Ewart, Assistant Secretary for Energy

Basil Seggos, Commissioner NYSDEC

Erik Kulleseid, Commissioner OPRHP

Robert Rodriguez, Secretary of State

Richard Ball, Commissioner, NYSDAM

Marie Therese Dominguez, Commissioner, NYSDOT