

**Testimony of
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**New York State Legislature
Senate Standing Committee on Finance
Assembly Standing Committee on Ways and Means
Hearing:**

**The 2010-11 Executive Budget Recommendations for the
Department of Environmental Conservation**

January 26, 2010

Chairman Farrell, Chairman Kruger, Vice Chair Krueger, Chairman Sweeney, Chairman Thompson and members of the legislative fiscal and environmental conservation committees, thank you for this opportunity to discuss Governor David A. Paterson's budget recommendations for the Department of Environmental Conservation for the 2010-11 State fiscal year.

DEC marks two important anniversaries this year. One hundred years ago, the State of New York recognized the importance of protecting the environment by establishing the Conservation Department to ensure that fish and wildlife, natural habitat and open space were preserved and managed for the public to enjoy. And forty years ago, DEC was established as a means of linking New York's historic conservation ethic with new, progressive environmental quality programs designed to address generations of unchecked industrial pollution.

DEC's creation was spurred by the first Earth Day celebration, which marked the birth of the modern environmental movement. On that day, April 22, 1970, I joined tens of thousands of marchers on Fifth Avenue, and millions more in cities and small communities across America who were simultaneously rallying to demand action to address our country's devastating environmental legacy. Along with the establishment of DEC, that powerful national demonstration by grassroots activists prompted the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other state environmental agencies, and the passage of a string of seminal environmental laws, including Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, which radically changed the way we regulate air pollution, safeguard our water and protect our land.

Over the last four decades, as a result of the work of the dedicated men and women at DEC, we have made astounding environmental gains. Before the creation of DEC, environmental contamination left our state with fouled air, water and land, dwindling wilderness and extinct or imperiled wildlife. Today, instead of serving as an example of environmental devastation and indifference, New York State stands as a beacon for responsible, progressive environmental policy in this nation.

Just as the first Earth Day served as the tipping point for lasting environmental change, today, forty years later, we face another such tipping point, this time fueled by widespread concern about the impacts of climate change. Governor Paterson has called for an 80 percent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and the development of a Climate Action Plan to meet this ambitious goal. The plan will build upon the raft of initiatives undertaken by his administration to better understand and address the impacts of climate change. And thankfully, we now have a president who understands that this is an environmental crisis, not a political annoyance. In the first year of the Obama Administration, there has been a massive change in climate at the White House.

As I have traveled around the state talking to people in many communities, it has become clear to me that DEC's priorities and programs reflect the core beliefs and values of all New Yorkers: ensuring our place as good environmental stewards, vigorously protecting our natural resources and facing today's challenges with a continuing commitment to the fundamental truth that a clean and ecologically healthy environment is both our greatest asset, and a prerequisite to our future success and well-being.

As we look back over 40 years of achievements, we are reminded of how important New York's commitment to the environment has been. Protecting the environment has translated into economic growth through programs that support the cleanup of brownfields, clean our water and air and create vibrant eco-tourism opportunities. To highlight some of the most obvious, our abiding commitment to DEC's core responsibilities has provided outstanding recreational opportunities for our citizens through the conservation of open space and sound stewardship of state-owned land. It has resulted in an enhanced quality of life in virtually every community as our water bodies have become cleaner, the air safer to breathe, and the land safer to use and enjoy for work and recreation. And perhaps most importantly, our unwavering commitment to a strong environmental ethic has succeeded in preserving and protecting the natural resources that are all too easily taken for granted. Even in these very tough economic times we must remember and honor these achievements and continue to be leaders. We cannot backslide on our many victories. For the sake of future generations and the long-term well-being of our communities, we must stay faithful and steadfast in our commitment to sound and progressive environmental policies and programs.

I admit that it will not be easy given the unprecedented fiscal constraints. As Governor Paterson has repeatedly pointed out for the past year and a half, however, we need to realistically acknowledge the scope and extent of the financial crisis and take the necessary steps to deal with it. These steps will have an impact on DEC and all state agency operations. Nonetheless, our collective commitment to progressive and protective environmental policy must not be compromised. I have great faith and confidence in DEC's team and remain optimistic and enthusiastic about what we will achieve this year, despite the hard choices that will need to be made.

Budget of Necessity, Not of Choice

Governor Paterson's 2010-11 Executive Budget makes significant spending reductions in order to eliminate a \$7.4 billion deficit and institutes key reforms to put New York on the road to economic and fiscal recovery. The Executive Budget proposal includes spending reductions across every area of the budget; limits State spending to far below both the Governor's proposed spending cap and the rate of inflation; implements the most significant public higher education reforms in a generation; and provides fiscal relief to local governments through an aggressive mandate reform agenda.

- Governor Paterson's 2010-2011 Executive Budget is a clear signal that the days of overspending and overtaxing are finished and the era of accountability is here.
- Since taking office, Governor Paterson has warned that New York is facing an inevitable fiscal reckoning. The mistakes of the past – squandering surpluses, papering over deficits, relying on irresponsible fiscal gimmicks to finance unsustainable spending increases – have led New York to a financial breaking point.
- If we fail to enact this budget and close the deficit in full, then the people of New York will be subjected to increased uncertainty and inevitable mid-year cuts.
- *Agency Spending.* The Governor's budget contains more than \$1 billion in reductions to State agency operations spending, including \$500 million in additional across-the-board agency cuts, \$250 million in negotiated workforce savings (including \$28 million from administratively rescinding, for the second consecutive year, the scheduled general four

percent salary increase for non-union management/confidential employees), prison closures, youth facility right-sizing, agency mergers, shared service initiatives through Governor Paterson's Office of Taxpayer Accountability, and other actions.

- Nobody wants to make these cuts. They are painful, they are difficult and they will have a real impact on people's lives. But delaying action will not only make the problem worse, it will make it harder to solve in the future.

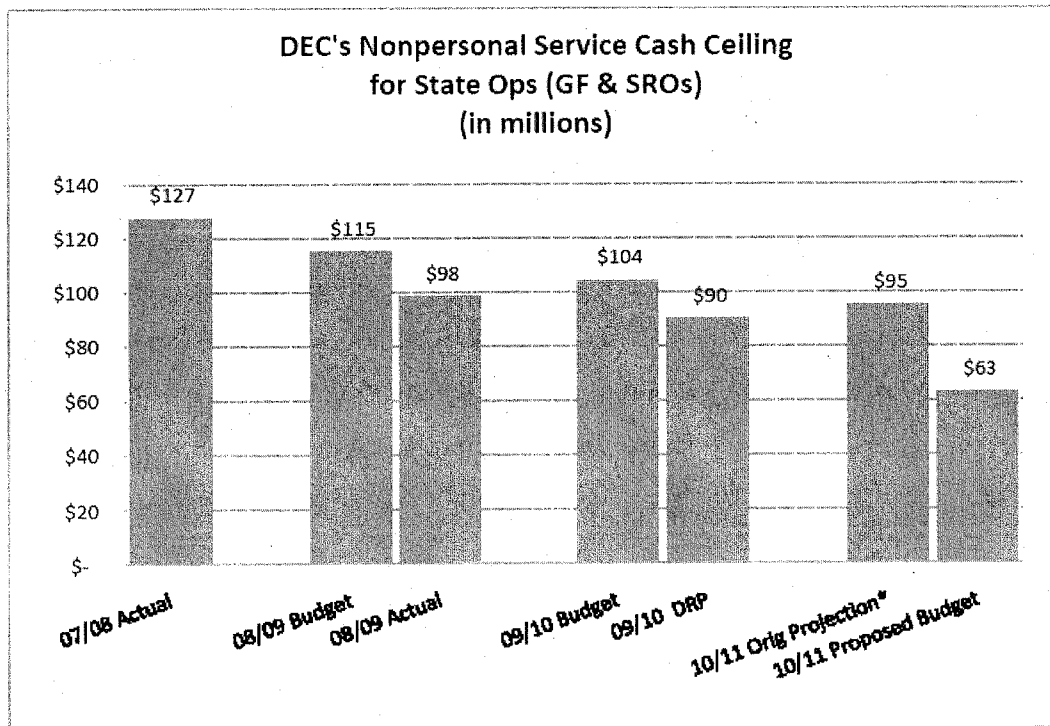
The 2010-11 Executive Budget for DEC

Today, I will provide you with an overview of the impact of the proposed FY 2010-11 budget on DEC's staffing and operations, discuss the Environmental Protection Fund, speak to ongoing efforts to obtain critical federal funds and highlight some important program areas.

Staffing and Expense Reductions

As we have struggled to address the fiscal crisis, all agencies have needed to share in the pain. To achieve the necessary spending reductions over the past eighteen months, DEC has considered every cost cutting measure and efficiency available to try to limit the impact of reduced funding and staffing. Agency operations have been evaluated, re-evaluated, prioritized and evaluated again to find ways to end redundancies, to make smart management decisions, and to determine how time and energy are best spent and focused.

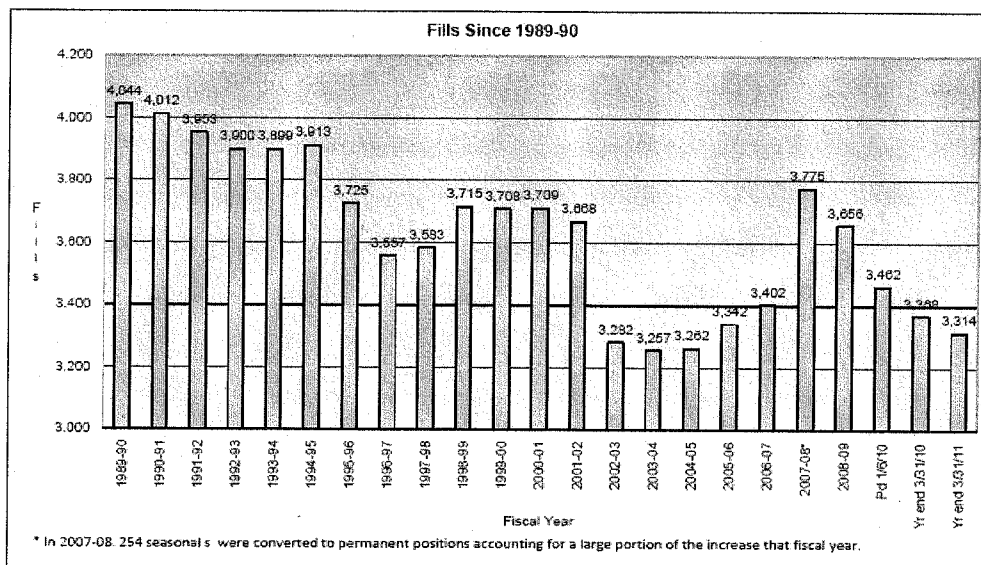
The funding constraints that we face are real and have had tangible impacts. As you know, both the 2009-10 budget and the deficit reduction package you enacted late last year required a tightening of operating expenses, with DEC trimming eight percent, or roughly \$2.4 million in administrative costs below spending in the 2008-09 fiscal year, which itself was cut thirty percent from the prior year.



*2009-10 Financial Plan Midyear Update

The Department continues to search every day for ways to reduce non-personal service expenditures to minimize impact on the public. We have reduced printing costs through greater use of the electronic distribution of documents; seen 12 percent reductions in vehicle miles traveled; severely eliminated statewide staff and program meetings; and set a high bar for any travel and equipment replacement and upgrades. We've also taken advantage of every opportunity to achieve energy savings, advance cost-effective sustainability goals and find other NPS efficiencies. The Executive budget proposes to further reduce operational expenditures and DEC will be required to continue to look for ways to absorb those reductions. Realistically speaking, however, given the cost reduction steps already taken, and the extent to which much of our remaining NPS spending is for fixed costs, it is likely that further reductions will manifest themselves in the services we provide to the public.

As you know, an across the board hiring freeze has been in place to shrink the public workforce and lower the growth of state agency expenses. The 2009-10 enacted budget called for a staffing reduction at DEC through attrition, and this was later supplemented by last year's voluntary severance program. As a result, so far we have lost 314 staff over the last two fiscal years, with more losses expected during the remaining months of this fiscal year. The proposed Executive budget contemplates that DEC will lose an additional 54 staff through attrition by the end of State fiscal year 2010-11, which will bring us to a total fill level of 3,314. When considering how that fill level compares to prior years, it is important to bear in mind that in 2007, 254 long-term virtually full-time seasonal items were reclassified as permanent employees, creating an anomalous spike in the agency's fill level. If those conversions are backed out, by the end of the next fiscal year DEC will be at its lowest fill level since the early 1980s.



Last year, I testified that we would respond to the cuts this fiscal year by rethinking business processes, eliminating redundancies, implementing efficiencies, utilizing time-saving technology, and investing in resources most likely to succeed. It is a testament to the dedication

of DEC staff, despite the deep cuts to date, that we are continuing to deliver the programs the public expects, and we are intent upon maintaining those services to the best of our ability within the fiscal constraints. As we take the needed steps to operate within the proposed budget, I have instructed my executive and management staff that no program will be held harmless, no idea or option will be off the table, and every creative tool we can conceive of will be used to mitigate the impacts of our reduced resources.

It is critically important that we do the best job possible in implementing the reductions proposed in the budget. DEC's budget is complex, including large amounts of funding from several dozen special revenue accounts and federal grants in addition to the general fund. We are at a point where there is no margin for error, and the decisions we make to implement this budget must be careful and wise. Accordingly, my staff and I will be using the remainder of this fiscal year engaged in a comprehensive planning effort to best address the potential impacts of the further reductions.

Article VII Proposals

The budget includes three legislative proposals related to DEC: one of which addresses efficiency measures which will replace archaic processes with modern technology and allow other administrative changes to enable DEC to better serve the public; the second will eliminate defunct and redundant boards, commissions and task forces; and the third will continue the waste tire program.

Environmental efficiency and modernization

To modernize DEC's requirements for public notices and reduce fiscal and administrative burdens, the budget proposes to establish uniform public notice requirements; repeal the requirement for certain annual reports; streamline statutory permitting and billing requirements; and allow New York to recover reimbursement when we help other states combat forest fires and similar natural disasters. These provisions will help modernize our agency operations while maintaining open and transparent public notice and participation.

Elimination of boards and commissions

The budget includes provisions to eliminate a number of boards, commissions and task forces. I am in the interesting position of having been involved in creating several of these while in the Legislature, and now as Commissioner being responsible for the work product of some of the same entities. Unquestionably, these bodies were well intentioned and, if able to operate with appropriate staff and agency resources, would serve valuable public policy purposes. The reality, however, is that many of these bodies were created without consideration of the resources needed for them to succeed, and given our now significantly reduced staff and past and looming cuts in non-personal services, administering them all is simply not possible. This proposal recognizes that over the course of time, some of these entities have outlived their relevance, or are duplicative of other activities. This measure will serve to free increasingly scarce staff time and agency resources for core functions.

Waste tire management program

The Waste Tire Management and Recycling law sets forth New York State's priorities for the management of waste tires, establishes the \$2.50 fee on each new tire sold, and directs the funds for cleaning up the illegal stockpiles of waste tires in communities across the state. When the program began, DEC identified sites holding over 34 million spent tires. This year, I am proud to report that over 29 million waste tires, 80 percent of the state's non-compliant waste tires, have been dealt with. Twelve of the 17 largest tire dumps in the state have been completely cleared, including the infamous Fortino tire site in Oswego which had between 11 and 12 million tires piled up on its property. Nearly all of the waste tires cleaned up under our program have been recycled for beneficial uses, such as landfill liners and road construction material. The budget proposes to continue this successful program, now due to expire at the end of the year, and expand its scope to address other critical environmental priorities related to the collection, treatment and management of solid and hazardous materials.

The Environmental Protection Fund

The 2010-11 Executive Budget includes \$143 million for the Environmental Protection Fund. The EPF supports projects and programs administered by DEC and sister agencies to protect open space, undertake programs, capital projects and provide grants to municipalities, non-for-profits and schools for critical environmental projects supporting state environmental goals. I appreciate the support the Legislature has consistently provided for the EPF, but must recognize that at this time a reduced EPF is necessary due to the overall State fiscal situation. With respect to the EPF for the current fiscal year, we anticipate that the entire \$180 million in EPF funds provided in the state fiscal plan will be fully committed.

In contrast to prior years, the proposed EPF for FY 2010-11 does not include an appropriation for open space conservation. The moratorium on land acquisition under this line reflects the state's severe fiscal constraints. Accordingly, while DEC will be completing three very important projects using the dedicated funding from the current year's EPF -- these are the Big Indian project in the Catskills, the Finch-Pruyn conservation easement in the Adirondacks, and the acquisition of the last two undeveloped Finger Lakes, Hemlock and Canadice Lakes, in central New York. During the next fiscal year we will focus our efforts on critical stewardship and other necessary activities necessary to care for and manage our land assets.

One of the key programs funded by the EPF is stewardship. Stewardship funds are used to help DEC and the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) manage New York's several million of acres of public lands for the direct benefit of your constituents, including three million acres of constitutionally protected forest preserve in the Adirondack and Catskill Parks, 750,000 acres of state forest and unique areas, 200,000 acres of wildlife management areas, 610,000 acres of working forest easement lands and all of the state parks and historic sites. Active, on the ground management is required to ensure that the millions of residents and visitors who hunt, fish, hike, camp, boat or swim and observe wildlife are able to access these special places and connect with nature. For the past few years, alternative capital funding was available for stewardship through a special \$100 million OPRHP bonding program.

With this means of funding our various stewardship obligations in place, the historic stewardship allocations in the EPF were able to be reduced. This year, however, facing a 17 percent increase in debt service, the bonding option is no longer available. The Executive Budget has accordingly restored the stewardship funding line in the EPF to \$30 million. It is impossible to overstate the importance of this funding line in the EPF. It enables us to protect and maximize the recreational value of the state's significant investment in public land by providing for the widest range of opportunities and sound conservation management practices. To provide just a few examples, OPRHP and DEC use stewardship funds to open and maintain public fishing access sites, boat launches, viewing platforms and trailheads, groom and maintain over 4,500 miles of roads and trails, repair and replace lean-tos, bridges, gates and dams, post signs, prepare maps, and provide educational/interpretive information. These capital expenditures are not simply an adjunct to land acquisition – they are the means by which we offer the public the benefits of our world-class natural resources.

Another area I'd like to highlight is our acclaimed Hudson River Estuary Program. This extraordinarily successful program has built upon extensive community outreach, public-private partnerships, and significant stakeholder participation up and down the river, resulting in "value-added" benefits which include scientific research and community education programs to help us protect the Hudson River. The Hudson River Estuary Program is one of the best and most comprehensive ecological and environmental estuary protection programs in the nation and serves as a model for ecosystem-based management programs. The estuary program enjoys enormous community and constituent support precisely because of its comprehensive approach to protecting, preserving, enhancing, learning from, and utilizing the Hudson River. It is a program in which we should all take pride, and the proposed EPF recognizes this success with continued funding.

The 2010-11 Executive Budget also authorizes EPF expenditures for a number of other important purposes and programs, including:

- Municipal recycling and household hazardous waste programs;
- Assessment and recovery of compensation for natural resource damages to the Hudson River;

- Water quality improvements;
- The Ocean and Great Lakes initiative;
- South Shore Estuary Programs;
- New York's Pollution Prevention Institute;
- Our crucial battle against Invasive Species.

The Importance of Federal Funding

As state funding has become increasingly scarce, we have been working to take advantage of every available federal funding opportunity to assist us in making sure that our important work continues. Last year, DEC staff and I worked with local elected officials and our non-government partners on efforts to increase the federal funds available to the state for environmental initiatives, and I intend to ramp up this effort this year. In collaboration with Governor Paterson's Washington office, other agencies and our non-government partners, I worked with New York's Congressional representatives on the funding opportunities that became available to us – from the historic American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) to the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and increased funds to restore Long Island Sound. Our joint efforts were fruitful and led to unprecedented funding for wastewater treatment through ARRA and enhanced Federal Fiscal Year 2010 appropriations. These funds have and will continue to flow through DEC to create jobs for New Yorkers in projects and activities that will truly benefit our environment.

President Obama's creation of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which Governor Paterson strongly endorsed, provides New York State with a tremendous opportunity to improve environmental quality and natural habitats throughout western and northern New York. DEC has been working with our sister agencies, as well as with municipalities and non-government organizations, to maximize partnerships and take advantage of these newly available federal dollars. As we fill out our applications for the FY 2010 Great Lakes funds, we also are planning our efforts to build support for a second year of Great Lakes Restoration funds.

Now more than ever it is critical to maximize alternate funding sources to accomplish DEC's mission. DEC was successful last year in advocating for additional federal funding for ongoing programs such as increased base funding for programs delegated under the Clean Air Act. For FFY 2011, we will also work to increase federal support for activities delegated to the state pursuant to the Clean Water Act and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. As we do this, we will be looking for ways to avoid federal requirements for set asides, mandated matches or other "strings" that would hamper our ability to take advantage of these crucial dollars.

As I reported in testimony prepared for a hearing called by Assemblyman Sweeney last month on the status of our commitment of federal stimulus funds, through ARRA DEC received the largest allotment of Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) funding ever provided to a state for wastewater infrastructure – \$432 million. For the first time in over two decades, the federal stimulus program provides for principal forgiveness for municipalities for wastewater infrastructure improvements, making as much as fifty percent of the funds available in the form of grants. To maximize total infrastructure investment, DEC and the Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC) leveraged local investment with the infusion of ARRA monies and the state's existing SRF allocation, allowing us to fund nearly \$1 billion in clean water projects in every corner of the state. It was a significant challenge to ensure that New York's ARRA projects meet the tight federal "shovel ready" deadlines to ensure that we both fully utilize the state's allocation and position New York to absorb funding that may become available in the event that other states are not as successful as New York. DEC and EFC staff have been working over the past year to put New York's federal stimulus dollars to work quickly and effectively. Presently, our entire allotment of clean water funding is under contract and ready to go to construction when the weather permits. I have every confidence that working with our partners at EFC and the Department of Health (DOH), New York will meet all of ARRA's funding requirements and deadlines. With EFC's dedicated staff we have been diligently working with communities to make sure that construction commences in the coming year, and we expect to meet all deadlines.

In addition to providing a major cash infusion for wastewater and drinking water projects, ARRA also included funding for green innovation and green infrastructure projects. I am proud to report that that New York has developed perhaps the best green infrastructure program in the country. "Green infrastructure" is defined as either green wet-weather infrastructure such as by decentralizing stormwater treatment by holding, infiltrating or cleaning stormwater through soils and vegetation, rather than by traditional "grey" infrastructure such as hardscape collection, conveyance and storage structures; greening existing clean water infrastructure to make it more energy efficient; and other innovative green programs such as capturing energy from methane off-gases. In New York, grant recipients are building green roofs, planting trees and tree boxes, establishing rain gardens, vegetated swales, pocket wetlands, infiltration planters, and vegetated median strips, reforestation, and protecting and enhancing riparian buffers and floodplains, powering their equipment with on-site methane, and making systems more energy efficient. These alternative approaches provide a multitude of benefits, including reducing the severity of combined sewer overflows, reducing costs for construction, operation and maintenance of grey infrastructure, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, greening urban centers, and improving economic development by making communities more attractive.

In 2010, I will be working with our Congressional Delegation to enact jobs legislation that includes additional funds for wastewater treatment. I also will continue my efforts to maximize the state's allocation of our base grants and to secure new funds for particularly threatened areas such as Long Island Sound.

Accomplishments

Even in this difficult fiscal climate, we have had a host of achievements over the past year. I would like to highlight a few of these:

- Issued the draft Hazardous Waste Siting plan, which had been ignored by prior administrations and was more than 20 years overdue;
- Adopted the 2009 State Open Space Plan, which emphasizes community involvement, local opportunities, and the multiple benefits of open space conservation;

- Provided guidance for reviewing greenhouse gas pollution emissions in the SEQR process, and are well on the way to updating the Environmental Assessment Form used in SEQR reviews;
- Issued updated general permits for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations and Stormwater;
- Helped businesses save money and reduce the use and generation of hazardous materials through the Pollution Prevention Institute;
- Provided a new “Help for Businesses” link on DEC’s homepage which links to useful information on permit applications, greening your business and a range of other business assistance;
- Received a federal no-discharge zone designation for the South Shore of Long Island and, working with the Thruway Authority, petitioned for such designation for all 500 miles of the Canal System;
- Established controls that serve as a national example on ballast water discharges to limit the spread of invasive species;
- Successfully responded to invasive species attacks of Snakeheads, Emerald Ash Borer and Oak Wilt;
- Continued successful implementation of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which has so far raised approximately \$180 million for New York State;
- Launched the process to develop Governor Paterson’s ambitious State Climate Action Plan – to meet the Governor’s 80X50 goal;
- Created the Climate Smart Communities program to assist communities attacking climate change – so far 46 communities have taken the pledge;
- Tightened the state’s open burning regulations to protect residents in smaller communities from exposure to pollutants;
- Issued program guidance for remediation programs and brownfield cleanups designed to assist local economic development agencies and municipalities redevelop brownfield sites and provide guidance on cleaning up sites to reduce transaction costs and time;
- Encouraged project planners to engage early with regional and central office permitting staff;

- Expanded our “Stop Smoking Trucks and Idling Vehicles Program” to target emissions from trucks that are polluting areas with high truck traffic and high asthma rates;
- Created a first in the nation Government to Government policy for working collaboratively with Indian Nations on environmental issues.

Programs of interest

Before I move on to responding to your questions, I want to highlight a few programs of interest, including the expansion of the bottle bill, the establishment of the marine fishing license and finally, natural gas exploration in the Marcellus shale formation.

Bigger, Better Bottle Bill

The 2009-10 State Budget included the first expansion of the state’s Bottle Bill since its establishment in 1982. While implementation of many of the new provisions was delayed by litigation, DEC is pleased to report that water bottles in New York now have a five-cent deposit, which will result in increased recycling rates for these products, and funding has begun to be received by the state from unclaimed deposits. Although administered by the Department of Taxation and Finance, DEC can report that as of the end of the calendar year, the state has received approximately \$19 million in unclaimed deposits.

Marine fishing license

The federal Magnuson-Stevens Act requires establishment of a federal registry of all saltwater anglers that fish in marine waters or for marine species such as Striped Bass and Shad, but exempts anglers with state licenses which collect comparable information. This registry is needed to provide accurate data on angler participation and harvest in marine recreational fisheries from all coastal states. Until now, the data has been collected by NOAA Fisheries Service under the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistical Survey, which has provided very poor estimates on angler participation and catch. Implementation of New York’s recreational marine fishing license allowed New York to request an exemption from the federal registry for its marine anglers since, via the license, New York can provide the requisite information to NOAA Fisheries Service. The National Marine Fisheries Service has recently determined that as a result of the state program, anglers with a New York marine fishing license are exempt from the federally-mandated registry.

During the first three months the recreational marine fishing license was available, approximately 60,000 licenses were sold, along with 19,000 pre-purchased for calendar year 2010, generating \$1.3 million in revenue for the Conservation Fund's Marine Resources Account.

Marcellus shale and other gas exploration

For the last two years, DEC has spent an enormous amount of time and effort working on the parameters under which gas drilling using a technique known as high volume hydraulic fracturing combined with horizontal drilling could take place in the Marcellus shale formation. Following Governor Paterson's direction that DEC consider the potential environmental impacts of this process, in 2008 we conducted a round of public hearings on a proposed Scope for a supplemental generic environmental impact statement (SGEIS) to cover this activity. We received over 3,000 comments on the Draft Scope, and in February 2009 we issued the final scope, which provided the framework for the draft SGEIS released last September. DEC received a tremendous amount of input from the public and elected officials, including many of you here today. We have received over 13,000 comments on the draft SGEIS, which staff are reviewing as we speak. The process has generated many substantive and thoughtful comments, suggestions and ideas which DEC will review with other involved agencies, including the DOH, Department of Public Service, NYSERDA and the Department of Agriculture and Markets, before moving forward.

Many people have expressed concerns about DEC's ability to appropriately manage and oversee the development of the proposed unconventional gas drilling in the Marcellus shale. While the Governor recognizes that the Marcellus play represents a significant economic opportunity, he has said that we will not permit any drilling activity until any potential threats to the environment, especially drinking water, have been addressed. Accordingly, this budget provides support for DEC to hire 29 staff across multiple divisions, including Mineral Resources, Water, and Solid and Hazardous Materials, to ensure that when any drilling takes place DEC is able to provide appropriate regulatory oversight and enforcement. My primary concern and responsibility is to protect the environment and I want to reiterate, as I have at every opportunity: under my watch DEC will not allow drilling to go forward until we are confident that the environment will be protected.

Moving Forward

As I noted earlier, we've made great progress on New York's environmental agenda, but we have much more to do. While our "to-do" list continues to grow and our resources are limited, we will not compromise on clean air and water, we will not relax protections on our spectacular natural assets, and we will not backslide on the significant progress we've made over the last 40 years in our efforts to protect and preserve New York's environment.

In addition to what I've outlined today, we will continue to seek out partnerships with sister agencies, municipal partners, industry, non-profits and academia – anyone who can assist us in our charge and help New York emerge from this fiscal crisis stronger, healthier and better than before.

DEC staff will continue to lead the way. Almost every day I learn of a novel initiative, a creative concept, or a new idea generated by DEC staff for tackling a problem. Innovation is always welcome, and it is particularly important during this difficult time. The truth is, something good for the environment happens at DEC every day, and that will continue even as we do our part to address the state's economic problems.

It is my great honor and privilege to lead an agency with such remarkable breadth and impact in this state and to work with such skilled, dedicated professionals. And despite the difficult but necessary cuts to the Department in the Governor's Proposed Executive Budget, DEC remains strong and up to the tasks ahead.

As always, Governor Paterson and I and the extraordinary staff at DEC look forward to working with you and your colleagues to address issues under our jurisdiction.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you.