

November 23, 2009

Senate Majority Conference Leader John L. Sampson
Senate Minority Leader Dean G. Skelos
Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver
Assembly Minority Leader Brian M. Kolb

Via Hand Delivery

RE: Deficit Reduction Plan and EPF

Dear Sirs:

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to express our strongest objections to potential cuts to the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and specifically, to the open space land acquisition allocation within the EPF. We understand that the state faces serious financial difficulties but sacrificing investments in New York's environment is simply not the way to address them.

As you know, the EPF has been a source of local aid and job creation and retention for over 15 years. Whether it has been landfill closure and municipal recycling programs or municipal parks and zoos, botanical gardens and aquaria, the EPF recognizes and reinforces the linkage between the economy and the environment.

We oppose the Governor's deficit reduction proposal to reduce the EPF by \$10 million. Additionally, we are deeply troubled with reports about proposals to place a moratorium on land purchases in New York State. Land protection has been a hallmark of New York's environmental heritage for more than a century. Protecting open space, including working landscapes like farms and forests, our waterfronts, and natural places, protects jobs, safeguards drinking water and forms the foundation of the State's tourism industry. Open space also buffers public infrastructure from flooding and other storm events, which are projected to become more severe in many climate change scenarios. Land protection offers an important service in carbon sequestration, helping New York mitigate climate change. Open space protection is also an important part of the State's smart growth strategy and helps avoid costs associated with poorly planned development.

While the EPF has been a steady source of capital for a variety of environmental projects, unfortunately it has been used far too often to help balance the State's budget. Nearly \$500 million has been diverted from the fund over the years, often with a promise that it will be repaid. As a consequence of those "loans", there is a substantial backlog of projects estimated at more than \$300 million. Yet, more cuts are being considered. This doesn't make sense.

The open space protection programs funded by the EPF permanently protect New York's priceless resources, such as drinking water. As we've discovered in the Catskills, which supplies more than 9 million New Yorkers with their fresh water, it is far less expensive to protect a drinking water supply than it is to clean it up after it's been contaminated. This is precisely what the EPF was designed to do: to provide a steady, pay-as-you-go revenue stream to protect and enhance New York's environmental infrastructure, in good times and bad.

Thank you for your continued efforts to preserve and expand the EPF, including this past April, when you enacted a budget that eliminated a proposed \$45 million sweep and restored proposed cuts. We urge you to stand firm in your commitment to New York's environment and resist efforts to undermine New York's dedicated investment to New York's environment and economy

Sincerely,

Brian L. Houseal, Executive Director, Adirondack Council

Andy Zepp, Executive Director, Finger Lakes Land Trust

Lisa W. Ott, President, North Shore Land Alliance

Joe Martens, Executive Director, Open Space Institute

John v.H. Halsey, President, Peconic Land Trust

Steve Rosenberg, Vice President, Scenic Hudson

Paul Hartman, Director of Government Relations, The Nature Conservancy in New York

Linda Garrett, Executive Director, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust

Edward Goodell, Executive Director, New York-New Jersey Trail Conference

cc: Governor David A. Paterson
Senator Antione M. Thompson
Assemblymember Robert K. Sweeny