



**Catskill Park Coalition**

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**Coalition Members**

*Co-Chairs*  
Catskill Center  
Catskill Mountainkeeper

*Members*

Catskill Heritage Alliance  
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Natural Resources Defense  
Council  
Catskill 3500 Club  
Adirondack Mountain Club  
Catskill Association for  
Tourism Services  
Catskill Mountain  
Foundation  
Central Catskills Chamber  
of Commerce  
Central Catskills  
Revitalization Corporation  
Community Greenways  
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Delaware Highlands  
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Friends of the Catskill  
Interpretive Center  
Friends of the Upper  
Delaware River  
Hudson Valley Hikers  
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New York New Jersey Trail  
Conference  
Open Space Institute  
Parks and Trails New York  
Rip Van Winkle Hikers  
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Shandaken Art Studio Tour  
Theodore Gordon Flyfishers  
Trout Unlimited  
Woodchuck Lodge  
Woodstock Land  
Conservancy  
Zen Mountain Monastery

December 14, 2022

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 2023-24, 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, annual Forest Ranger Academies, and supporting 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; \$200,000 line for the Catskills Visitor Center; \$150,000 line for Catskill Science Collaborative; \$750,000 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 2022-23:**

**Public Safety and Catskill Park Management** -- *Given the exponential 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 Region 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;
  - **\$200,000 line, directed to the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development for the Maurice D. Hinchey Catskills Visitor Center** for operations, staffing, and programming;
  - **\$150,000 line, directed to the Cary Institute for Ecosystem Studies for the Catskill Science Collaborative**, which directs research on topics of importance in the Catskills;
  - **\$750,000 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.

- **New Catskill Park Funding:**
  - A new line containing at least **\$200,000 for Catskill Stewards, directed to the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development and Catskill Mountainkeeper**, to support the existing education and stewardship program to address increasing numbers of visitors across the Park.

**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;
- **Supporting construction of Phase 1 of the U&D Rail Trail** in a corridor that runs adjacent to New York State Forest Preserve Lands in the Town of Shandaken. Funding for Phase 1 will cover the conversion of a 2.5 mile stretch of the abandoned Ulster & Delaware Railroad Corridor into a public recreational trail from the Belleayre Beach Day Use Area west to Highmount and the Belleayre Ski Center, including the rehabilitation and repurposing of two historic railroad bridges;
- **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.

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  
Robert Mujica, State Budget Director  
John O'Leary, Deputy Secretary for Energy and Environment  
Ashley Dougherty, Assistant Secretary for Environment  
Sean Ewart, Assistant Secretary for Energy  
Caitlin Stephen, Senior Policy Advisor for Environment  
Basil Seggos, Commissioner, NYSDEC  
Erik Kulleseid, Commissioner, NYSOPRHP  
Robert Rodriguez, Secretary of State  
Richard Ball, Commissioner, NYSDAM  
Marie Therese Dominguez, Commissioner, NYSDOT