

2026 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Agriculture & Markets / Parks & Recreation

Testimony of
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Thank you Senate Finance Committee Chair Krueger, Assembly Ways and Means Committee Chair Pretlow, Ranking Members Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Ra, and members of the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, for the opportunity to present Scenic Hudson's perspective on Governor Kathy Hochul's Executive Budget Proposal for the 2026-2027 state fiscal year.

Scenic Hudson's mission is to sustain and enhance the Hudson Valley's inspirational beauty and health for generations to come. We are doing so by preserving land and farms and creating parks that connect people with the inspirational power of the Hudson River while fighting threats to the river and natural resources that are the foundation of the Hudson Valley's prosperity. Our work is making the Hudson Valley a model for responding to climate change and providing the people of the Hudson Valley with the tools and support they need to strengthen their communities and advocate for themselves.

I would like to thank the Governor and the State Legislature for your leadership in enacting a FY 2025-26 budget that included historic investments in critical environmental and climate resiliency programs. Your collective work secured a record-high \$425 million investment in the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) with no "offload" for agency staffing costs, \$200 million for State Parks capital improvements, and \$500 million in Clean Water Infrastructure Act funding. In an era of fiscal uncertainty, the FY 2026-27 budget and legislative sessions present an opportunity to maintain the increased investments you have worked so hard to achieve, and begin working toward the even bolder benchmarks required to meet both the historic and forthcoming needs of our state's communities.

The following are Scenic Hudson's priorities for the SFY 2026-2027 budget session. Scenic Hudson encourages the Legislature to:

- At least maintain the Environmental Protection Fund at \$425 million and work to increase the appropriation to \$500 million annually in future years,
- Provide at least \$290 million in capital funds for NYS Parks and NYS DEC,
- Support the Governor's proposed \$500 million allocation for clean water infrastructure,
- Advance the Governor's proposed "Sun and Soil" program, and
- Include language in the budget that addresses the State's distributed solar goal, native plants, residential solar tax credits, and payments to municipalities that host state parks.

Environmental Protection Fund

The EPF is New York's only dedicated capital investment program for the environment. It supports more than 100 environmental programs that provide a broad array of resources benefitting all New Yorkers. We thank the Governor and the Legislature for committing a historic \$425 million to the EPF in last year's budget. At the same time, demonstrated demand for EPF-funded programs continues to outpace available funding by a wide margin. In response, **Scenic Hudson joins with the New Yorkers for Clean Water and Jobs coalition in urging the Legislature to at least maintain the EPF appropriation at \$425 million in the FY 2027 budget, and begin working to increase the appropriation to \$500 million annually in future years.** Doing so will contribute to the expansion of programs that protect our environment, enhance our communities, and bolster our economy. From safeguarding clean water to promoting climate resilience, an increased EPF would help to ensure a healthier, more vibrant future for our state through the advancement of the goals envisioned in New York's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act.

We are supportive of funding for individual EPF line items and programs at the following levels:

- **Hudson River Estuary Program & Mohawk River Basin Suballocation:** \$8 million (Governor proposed at \$7.5 million)
We highly value the critical work of the The Hudson River Estuary Program (HREP). Through technical assistance and grants, community education, and foundational research, funding for this program has wide-reaching community impacts. We are grateful for the \$7.5 million allocated in the FY 2026 State Budget for the Hudson River Estuary Management Plan, but due to an error that unintentionally increased the Mohawk River Basin suballocation from \$1 million to \$1.5 million without a corresponding increase to the overall appropriation, this allocation actually represents a \$500,000 decrease in funding for HREP itself. Both the Hudson River Estuary and Mohawk River Basin Management Programs are critical to the health of these vital natural resources, and **we respectfully urge the Legislature provide a total of \$8 million for the Hudson River Estuary Management Plan in the FY 2027 State Budget - to restore the funding level of \$6.5 million for the Hudson, while maintaining the increased \$1.5 million suballocation for the Mohawk.**
- **Greenway Trail Connections:** \$10 million (new line item)
Currently, New York State has no dedicated funding for greenway trails. Scenic Hudson, as part of a broader coalition of land trusts and environmental organizations, respectfully requests **the inclusion of Greenway Trail Connections as a new line item under the Parks and Recreation Account of the EPF.** Greenway trails are essential infrastructure that connect people to the outdoors, encourage climate-friendly transportation, and improve wellness through accessible recreation opportunities. An initial allocation of \$10 million (\$8 million for construction, \$2 million for planning) in the FY 2027 State Budget would provide the infusion of capital needed to make the many planned and proposed trails across the state a reality, guaranteeing an improvement in recreational trail access for all New Yorkers.
- **Soil and Water Conservation Districts:** \$18.65 million (Governor proposed at \$18.65 million)
Much of the current work to transition farms to climate-resilient farming practices in New York State would not be possible without local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). SWCDs play a pivotal role in providing targeted funding and delivering technical assistance to farmers and land managers in every county in the state. This helps to enable the on-the-ground application of

research-informed climate-resilient farming practices while promoting farm economic viability and environmental sustainability. In the Climate Action Council's Scoping Plan, expanding SWCD capacity is a key component of multiple strategies to achieve our state's climate goals. **We respectfully encourage the Legislature to support the Governor's proposed \$18.65 million for SWCDs in the FY 2027 State Budget.** Increasing funding to \$18.65 million would help to further build District capacity to assist and educate farmers and land managers as they concurrently navigate the impacts of climate change on their land, contribute to state and regional economies, and continue to produce nutritious local food.

Scenic Hudson deeply values its working relationship with SWCDs, partnering with them and our local farming community through our [Regenerative Agriculture Demonstration Area initiative](#) to promote important environmental, economic, and sustainability objectives in the Hudson Valley.

- **Climate Resilient Farming Program:** \$19.5 million (Governor proposed at \$19.1 million)
We were thrilled that the Climate Resilient Farming Program received a \$4.25 million increase in the FY 2026 Budget. We sincerely appreciate this increased investment in direct response to the demonstrated needs of New York's farmers to advance sustainable, climate smart practices while enhancing their economic bottom line. To continue to build on this good work and amplify the positive impact of this program in support of state climate and farm viability goals, **we urge the Legislature to maintain a minimum of \$19.5 million for this essential program in the final FY 2027 State Budget.**

In the recent past, we have seen as much as \$33 million be put directly to work on farms across the state in a single year through the Climate Resilient Farming Program. Even this, however, was not sufficient to fulfill every funding request from New York farmers, which totaled over \$40 million. Now is not the time to cut back on funding for this program that supports our working farms on the front lines of a changing climate. Maintaining at least \$19.5 million in funding will support the farmers who are already using these methods, and enable more farmers to adopt both centuries-old and innovative practices that reduce on-farm emissions, sequester carbon, protect and increase water quality, increase food system resiliency and farm viability, and provide essential ecosystem services.

- **Farmland Protection:** \$25 million (Governor proposed at \$25 million)
Protecting farmland and avoiding its conversion to other uses is a critical step in achieving the state's conservation goals and ensuring that these precious lands are available to feed our communities and achieve climate solutions. The need to protect farmland is especially urgent in fast-growing regions of the state — such as the Capital Region and the Hudson Valley — facing acute development pressure and conversion of working farms to non-agricultural uses. To enable more farm families to permanently protect their land while ensuring it remains in farm production and affordable for future farmers, **Scenic Hudson respectfully requests maintenance of \$25 million for Farmland Protection Implementation Grants in the FY 2027 State Budget.** We, along with our partners in the Alliance for New York's Farmland, were grateful for the \$4 million increase this program received in the FY 2026 State Budget, and look forward to a continuation of this significant funding.

Scenic Hudson is continuing our work to conserve farmland in the Hudson Valley's Foodshed. Updates on this work are available at <https://www.scenicHUDSON.org/our-work/conservation/farms/>.

- **Open Space / State Land Conservation:** \$42 Million (Governor proposed at \$42 million)
As New York State continues to direct funding towards the protection of our natural lands, **we respectfully request maintenance of this effort by allocating \$42 million in the Open Space / Land Conservation line item in the FY 2027 State Budget.**

Conservation of land and water plays a large role in achieving climate goals. Scenic Hudson developed the [Hudson Valley Conservation Strategy](#) (HVCS) in part to identify the best potential conservation investments for achieving a resilient, functional, and productive landscape in the Hudson Valley region. Guided by the HVCS and our existing conservation strategies, we have conserved more than 53,000 acres, including creating or enhancing more than 65 parks, preserves, and historic sites that provide places for people to relax, enjoy recreation, and be inspired by the valley's natural beauty and heritage. Maintaining critical funding for open space and land conservation will allow Scenic Hudson and our regional and statewide partners to continue conserving the New York State land that matters most.

- **Site Cleanup and Preparation Funds:** \$2 million (Governor proposed at \$500,000)
The FY 2026 State Budget allocated \$500,000 via the EPF Open Space / Land Conservation account for the “reimbursement of costs incurred by land trusts in contract with, and prior to transfer of title to the State of New York for building removal and other site cleanup and preparation costs to prepare the parcel for sale to the State”. While we are grateful for this available funding, we have seen the associated costs of just one project amount to \$500,000. **Increasing the allocation to \$2 million for this purpose in the FY 2027 State Budget** would further empower the State's land conservation partners to make needed improvements on the front end, thus reducing the amount of work to be undertaken by the State once it takes ownership of a given property.
- **Conservation Partnership Program (CPP):** \$3 million (Governor proposed at \$3 million)
We join with the Land Trust Alliance in giving thanks for the allocation of \$3 million for the CPP in the FY 2026 State Budget. The CPP is a successful public-private partnership between DEC and the Land Trust Alliance that offers competitive grants to New York land trusts to advance local land conservation projects. The CPP is a model of efficiency as appropriated dollars are awarded annually in coordination with DEC, delivering tangible outcomes for communities and directly advancing New York's Open Space Plan. **Sustained funding for this program at \$3 million in the FY 2027 State Budget** will help New York land trusts conserve more local lands for the climate, health, and economic benefits they provide, as well as directly advance New York's Open Space Plan.

Parks Capital Funding

Scenic Hudson is grateful to the Governor for maintaining a \$200 million allocation of capital funds for the New York State Parks system and a \$90 million allocation of capital funds for the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), both of which are essential for preserving outdoor spaces that so greatly benefit our community members. Given the ongoing need for parks capital across the state, **we urge the legislature to support the Governor's proposal for the Parks Capital Fund, and encourage efforts towards an increase in DEC capital funds to \$100 million in the FY 2027 State Budget.** This trajectory of investment will help further address climate change through smart management of state-owned, site renewable energy to help state lands become carbon neutral, address the backlog of deferred maintenance,

maintain the state’s national leadership in connecting people to nature and outdoor recreation, and meet goals for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Clean Water Infrastructure

We appreciate the Governor’s proposal of \$500 million for clean water infrastructure - a direct response to the request from the New York Clean Water Coalition, of which Scenic Hudson is a member. However, **we are concerned with the allocation of \$200 million for “water infrastructure projects necessary to promote housing preservation and development in regions throughout the state”**. While we generally support funding for much-needed development throughout the state, it is imperative that available funding go towards existing infrastructure needs.

New York communities need an estimated ~\$90 billion in funding to update water infrastructure, remove toxins from their drinking water, and address the impacts of climate change. Additionally, to meet the requirements of federal clean water regulations, communities need increased funding to be able to comply with stricter standards and required infrastructure upgrades. A \$500 million investment in the Clean Water Infrastructure Act in the FY 2027 State Budget will certainly help empower New York to tackle both longstanding and emerging threats to our water supply, and the direction of additional resources to these issues would be welcomed.

Sun and Soil Program

We celebrate the Governor’s announcement of the “Sun and Soil” program. This brand-new initiative will build on current State-supported agrivoltaics research and development projects across New York which investigate insights and best practices for siting solar arrays on active farms and farmland. The program will be advised by the Agricultural Technical Working Group (A-TWG), of which Scenic Hudson is a member alongside agricultural and land organizations, solar developers, academic experts, and government officials. The Sun and Soil program will further our scientific understanding of how solar arrays can not only coexist with agricultural activities like grazing and crop production, but also how they can help Hudson Valley farmers generate clean energy as an additional revenue source. As an added benefit, incentivized on-farm energy generation will provide farmers needed energy price stability in support of their agricultural operations. We applaud Governor Hochul’s commitment to funding innovative solutions for multiple stakeholder groups that tackle land, energy, and farm viability issues, and **offer the following suggestions for how to best build out this program:**

- New York has made important investments in agrivoltaics research, pilots, and demonstration projects. The time is now ripe for the State to put an incentive in place to help move agrivoltaics from the research-and-development stage into more widespread adoption. To do so, the Sun and Soil program should work to:
 - Define agrivoltaics to help determine which types of projects would qualify for the incentive,
 - Create an ongoing incentive, which could take different forms but should be flexible and appropriate to the size, scale, and type of project. It should also include some form of monitoring to ensure continued agricultural activity, and
 - Ensure that farmers who produce agricultural products as part of an agrivoltaics project do not lose the benefit of the Agricultural Assessment.
- The Sun and Soil program should provide support for farmers seeking to deploy behind-the-meter solar for on-farm electrical use, which would enable farmers to address growing energy costs and

pave the way for further on-farm electrification. Such support could be in the form of a tax credit, enhanced net metering, or low-interest loans.

- As the program evolves, attention should also be given to opportunities for pursuing electrification of farm equipment, charging station incentives, and on-farm energy conservation measures.

The Governor's Sun and Soil program offers the opportunity for practitioners to move from research and development into on-the-ground implementation of practices that put money in their pockets, contribute to farm viability, and mitigate the agricultural drivers of climate change while protecting our food systems from its increasing volatility. We encourage the State to look at modifying and supplementing existing programs to accomplish the goals of this program.

Budget Language

Scenic Hudson supports the inclusion of language in the final NYS budget that addresses the following:

- **S6570/A8758 - Accelerate Solar for Affordable Power (ASAP) Act**
The ASAP Act would help New York State meet its clean energy, affordability, and economic development goals by facilitating the rapid acceleration of our state's solar build-out. Doubling the state's goal to 20 gigawatts of distributed solar by 2035, and cutting through interconnection red tape, will make it cheaper and easier to bring community solar to New Yorkers.
- **S1690A/A3030A - New York Native Plants Program**
The New York Native Plants Program bill would help conserve, promote, and enhance the native ecology of New York state by encouraging the use of native plants and ecological-friendly methods and materials on state and local land.
- **S2626/A1373 - Increases the amount of residential solar tax credits**
Residential solar and energy storage are excellent avenues for NYS homeowners to contribute to the State's goal of carbon-free electricity generation by 2040. However, high up-front costs often hinder or outright prevent homeowners from installing solar equipment. This bill amends the NYS tax law to increase the tax credit for qualified solar energy system equipment expenditures from \$5,000 to \$10,000, and allows owners of a new business to receive the tax credit as a refund. Making solar more affordable will help to accelerate New York towards meeting the goals of the CLCPA.
- **A9278 - All Palisades Interstate Park state lands in Ulster County shall be subject to taxation for all purposes.**
Ulster County is home to thousands of acres of state parkland, including two of the more recently-established state parks, Sojourner Truth State Park and Franny Reese State Park. Because both parks are owned by the State through the Palisades Interstate Parks Commission, the properties are effectively removed from local tax bases due to sovereign immunity. However, the State can still elect to pay local taxes on state land by designating the land as taxable through the Real Property Tax Law. Amending RPTL § 532(e) to include the entirety of Ulster County in the existing list of places where land owned by the Palisades Interstate Park Commission is taxable would bring Ulster County in line with a taxation practice common throughout New York State.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. If you have questions about Scenic Hudson's positions or work, please contact me at cfraccarolli@scenicHUDSON.org.