Memorandum of Support

April 26, 2021

S.6191 (Kaminsky)/A.5390-A (Fahy)

Summary: Relates to including an effort to combat the biodiversity and climate crises in the state’s land acquisition policy; sets a goal of the state to conserve at least 30 percent of New York’s land by 2030.

Statement of Support: In the last 40 years, wildlife populations have declined by 60% as the result of habitat loss, climate change, and other environmental factors. Only 12% of U.S. land has been conserved as national parks, wilderness areas, permanent conservation easements, national wildlife refuges, national monuments, or other protected areas, while 19% of New York State land is currently conserved or protected. According to the UN International Convention on Biodiversity, in order to stop the dual extinction and climate crises and preserve clean water, clean air, and a stable climate, 50% of the planet must be conserved by 2050. This bill would direct DEC and relevant state agencies to set strategic goals for achieving the conservation of at least 30% of New York State’s land and waters by 2030, aligning our state with national and international goals. Agencies would be tasked with identifying land available for conservation and prioritizing the conservation of land that would promote biodiversity, preserve open space, and protect green space in urban areas. The bill would also ensure any conservation plan takes the needs of environmental justice communities into account.

Conserving more public lands and managing them to sustain wildlife and natural systems is essential to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. This legislation aligns with the goals outlined in the $3 billion Environmental Bond Act, which include restoring habitat and preventing catastrophic flooding. To help meet the goal of protecting 30% of New York’s lands and waters, wetland protection should be prioritized. Wetlands are important to preserve community resilience in the face of climate change, mitigate the impacts of flooding, filter surface waters, protect drinking water supplies, and provide habitat to fish, birds, insects, amphibians and mammals. Proposed legislation (S.5116) would reform how the state protects wetlands by repealing regressive burdens on wetlands regulation and grant the DEC authority to regulate the majority of the state’s wetlands, regardless of size. Additional wetlands protections could play a vital role in helping New York reach the goal of 30% of lands and waters conserved by 2030.

Achieving the vision of a climate-resilient and adaptive New York State is not possible without immediate and proactive action. This legislation, along with the proposed $3 billion Environmental Bond Act and S.5116, would combine powerfully to safeguard natural systems and combat climate change.

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter Strongly Urges Your Support of S.6191/A.5390-A

2 https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/reports/2019/08/06/473242/much-nature-america-keep/#:~:text=A%202018%20CAP%20study%20found,monuments%2C%20or%20other%20protected%20areas.