

Audubon NY Testifies on Conservation Trust Fund

By Al Caccese

IN 1998, Governor George E. Pataki called for the creation of an Empire State Task Force on Land and Water Conservation Funding, in an attempt to revitalize the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), a program that was brilliantly conceived by Congress in the mid-1960s, but was being completely ignored in the late 1990s. Under the direction of State Parks Commissioner Bernadette Castro, and then-DEC Commissioner John Cahill, and with the active participation and leadership of Audubon New York and a diverse coalition of conservation, municipal and sportsmen organizations, New York State successfully led the fight to restore stateside funding.

As a result, since Fiscal Year 2001, more than \$13 million has been made available to New York State, and its municipalities, in 50% matching grants for the planning, acquisition, development and improvement of parks and recreational facilities. During this time, approximately 60 additional projects have been funded throughout the state for such purposes as open space protection, ball field construction and

trail alignment. Since 1965, more than 1100 projects, located in every county in the state, have received stateside LWCF funds.

The proposed Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2004 now provides for LWCF funding within the Conservation Trust Fund. Known as CARA-lite, this Fund is authorized at the \$2.08 billion level and includes the state and federal side of the LWCF, as well as other conservation funding programs supported by Audubon New York, such as State Wildlife Grants, Cooperative Endangered Species, USFS Forest Legacy and North American Wetlands Conservation, to name a few.

In April 2003, Executive Director David J. Miller provided testimony to both the Senate and House Appropriations Committees, Subcommittees on Interior and Related Agencies, urging full funding at the \$2.08 billion level. Highlighting requests for \$200 million for stateside LWCF and \$125 million for State Wildlife Grants, Miller implored the Congress to live up to the promises and commitments of the past, and to invest in this nation's communities, families and children's future.

Executive Director Testifies on NYS Budget

By Al Caccese

ON MARCH 4, 2003, David J. Miller, Executive Director of Audubon New York, testified before the Joint Legislative Committees on the New York State Budget. He recognized the multi-billion dollar deficit facing the State, and reminded the Committees that he conceded the need to allow a one-time sweep of the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) during the prior fiscal year, in response to the unimaginable challenges faced in the wake of September 11.

He argued, however, that the time for sacrifice has passed, and intelligent investment in capital-intensive environmental projects would help to create jobs and stimulate the economy, while addressing critical environmental needs. Audubon would not support another sweep and urged full funding for the original categories of the EPF at the \$125 million level. Specifically, funding was recommended at a minimum of \$40 million for Open Space and \$10 million for Farmland Protection, as well as \$1 million for the Bio-Diversity Research Institute. Mr. Miller objected to all General Fund off-loads and the addition of new program categories that were not associated with additional funding. He reminded the Committees that the EPF was created as a dedicated fund so that it would provide a reliable source of funds for priority environmental projects in good, as well as bad times.

Audubon New York also raised the specter of a new Bond Act, since the \$1.75 billion Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act, which was overwhelmingly supported by voters in 1996, was almost totally committed. A new Smart Growth or Quality Communities initiative in the range of \$3-5 billion would create thousands of jobs with which the state and its municipalities can protect open space and farmland, improve parkland, build nature centers, provide for smart growth transportation initiatives and generally improve the economic and environmental quality in New York.

Mr. Miller expressed concern for the loss of well-qualified professionals in the environmental, conservation and parks positions at the Department of Environmental Conservation and New York State Parks. He recommended certain fee increases which would be associated with the services they provide and suggested they not go to the General Fund, but rather remain with the agency or department in which they are generated. He also suggested careful consideration be given to unclaimed nickel deposits, which should be captured and dedicated for agency staff and programs. In addition, he advocated for the expansion of the program to noncarbonated beverages.

Mr. Miller concluded by urging the committees to view the environment as an opportunity, and with appropriate investment, a critical path to the overall recovery of the State.

New Grassroots Advocacy Efforts Launched

By Audubon New York Staff

AS PART OF Sean Mahar's role as Grassroots Advocacy Coordinator, he is working on further development of the *Audubon Action Network* in New York. This free email based network allows the user to take action quickly and easily on pressing environmental conservation issues nationally, statewide, and locally. Members of this action network will receive monthly email updates of legislative activities on the state and national level. They will also receive periodic action alerts,

when their help is needed immediately, instructing them on how they can take action on a certain issue.

With your help, Sean hopes to make this program bigger and more successful, by increasing the number of people who are involved. He feels that the *Audubon Action Network* is one of the more successful ways to communicate quickly and effectively to all members of Audubon, and give them a great opportunity to become involved in current environmental issues.

ADVOCACY IN ACTION!

An Audubon Action Evening in Buffalo

By Sean Mahar

IN THE MIDST of a large ice storm, representatives from the National Audubon Society public policy division, Audubon New York, and Members of the Buffalo Audubon Society put together Buffalo's first "Audubon Action Evening" in downtown Buffalo, New York. With the issue of drilling in the Arctic refuge still on Congress's hotplate, concerned citizens, environmentalists, students, and even an Arctic Fox joined together to tell their Congressman, Jack Quinn, that they opposed drilling in the Alaskan National Wildlife Arctic Refuge.

This event took place at the Pearl Street Brewery, on April 4, 2003, and thanks to the great efforts of members of the Buffalo Audubon Society, National and State programs, we were able to bring together many people from the Buffalo area. The goal of the night was to gain as much support as possible to learn about the Arctic Refuge, and to take action to protect it from oil drilling. Participants were able to meet other conservationists in the Buffalo area, learn about the refuge and background on the issue of drilling in the Arctic refuge, and were presented with different ways they could take action. They were able to sign petitions or postcards that would be presented to Congressman Quinn, or they could take home the information to write their own letters to be mailed to the Congressman.

These letters, postcards, and petitions joined the growing numbers of voices that have been generated by the National Audubon Society's campaign to save the Arctic Refuge from oil drilling. These also add to the various ways Audubon enables its members, and all conservationists, to take action on important conservation issues. Through the Audubon Advisory, the Take Action website, and the State action website, Audubon gives conservationists many ways to be active, and make a difference. On any important conservation issue, the more our lawmakers hear from their constituents, the better the chance they will embrace the conservation point of view. That is why it is always crucial for you to call, write, fax, or email your legislators on issues that are important to you, and allow your voice to be heard.

The evening was highlighted by the appearance of an Arctic Fox, from the Fox Wood Wildlife Rescue Rehabilitation and Education Center, which provided the centerpiece for discussions about the ecological sensitivity of the area, and conservation needs in Alaska. Everyone was able to learn about the habitat needs of these foxes, and how susceptible they are to habitat change.

To learn more about current conservation issues that are occurring in the legislature both nationally and in New York, please sign up for the *Audubon Action Network* using the form on this page.



Let Your Voice Be Heard

Join the Audubon Action Network!

You can make a difference in Albany and Washington DC!

Do you want to make a difference in Local, State and National issues? Here is your chance. As part of the *Audubon Action Network* you will receive monthly email updates of current conservation issues that are pressing in the State and Nationally. Also, you will receive email Action Alerts when your help is needed immediately on an issue. When you join, your voice will join thousands of others calling on legislators to support conservation issues.

YES! Please sign me up for the *Audubon Action Network!* The network is completely free and will not cost you anything.

Clip and mail to Sean Mahar, Audubon NY, 200 Trillium Lane, Albany NY 12203 or email to nyaction@audubon.org.

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Email Address: _____

**required information*