

Central New York

ENVIRONMENT

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Thoughtful exploration of local places and perspectives

CNYE Editorial

Vote yes on the Bond Act

By Lee Gechas

Central New York Environment strongly urges our readers, and indeed all New York residents who care about the condition of our environment, to vote for the Clean Water / Clean Air Bond Act on November 5.

This legislation, which calls for the borrowing of \$1.75 billion, will provide much-needed and otherwise unavailable capital for a variety of environmental projects that will benefit a wide range of constituencies. The common thread is that this is an investment in the

portation to recycling infrastructure to park improvements and historic preservation.

Even though borrowing \$1.75 billion seems like a drastic step, remember that all bond act expenditures will be for capital projects, open space acquisition to protect drinking water, landfill closures, pollution abatement and development of clean-fuel transportation - initiatives which will reap benefits for decades to

money is spent for the purposes that it is allocated for. Bond Act funds should be spent on imaginative, effective and efficient environmental solutions, and not pissed away as handouts to well-connected contractors and consultants.

In sum, it is money we need to spend. The benefits of passing this

bond act now will be a cleaner and healthier environment, a more efficient environmental protection infrastructure and more jobs attracted to New York State in the future.

(See page 3 for a specific breakdown of Bond Act expenditures.)

Debunking Onondaga Lake myths, pages 8-9

New York will not have to sacrifice its high environmental standards to keep and attract business and tourist dollars. Money from the bond act will help small businesses comply with stringent clean air and water regulations. Money will be available to construct new recycling transportation infrastructure. Clean water funds from the bond will help revitalize the Long Island Sound fishing industry, as well as the Finger Lakes and Lake Champlain tourism industries. And funds allocated to remedy Onondaga Lake sewage problems could help spur local development, recreation and tourism.

Certainly the Bond Act is politically motivated, but it strikes an admirable balance between downstate and upstate projects. It also addresses an impressive range of environmental needs, from safe drinking water to clean-fuel trans-

state politicians will never come up with a pay-as-you-go plan to do the necessary environmental work, yet voters can and must make this happen.

No, the Bond Act will not solve all the state's lingering environmental problems. But it will provide desperately needed funds to build the infrastructure that can keep our state less polluted, healthier, more energy efficient and more competitive as the 21st century approaches.

Environmentalists need to diligently make sure that all the



Photo by Dave Listowski

Angelo Barnello of Liverpool hauls in a 12-pound carp from Onondaga Lake. A clean lake could bring fishing derbies and tourist dollars to Central New York.

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Bond Act builds environmental infrastructure

Here is a breakdown, provided by Governor Pataki's office, of how the \$1.75 billion provided for in the Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act would be spent.

SAFE DRINKING WATER PROGRAMS - \$355 MILLION

New York State has never funded a safe drinking water program. This bond act will provide, for the first time ever, financial assistance to construct safe drinking water facilities. Strengthened state and federal safe drinking water requirements have resulted in increased pressure to improve water supply systems. These investments will provide vital public health protection.

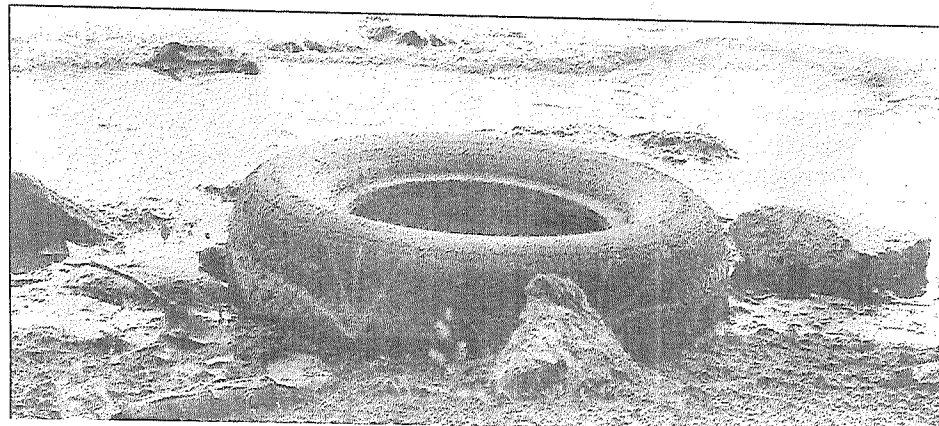
- \$265 million will be used to capitalize a state revolving loan fund to help achieve safe drinking water standards, making more than \$1 billion available for loans.

- \$90 million in grants will be provided to aid in the construction of infrastructure upgrades, especially in financially distressed communities.

CLEAN WATER PROGRAMS - \$790 MILLION

New York's priceless water resources remain significantly impaired by antiquated sewage treatment plants and stormwater runoff. An investment in pollution controls will dramatically improve water quality. The most significant contributor to water quality impairment is urban and agricultural runoff. A substantial investment in water pollution control technology now will prevent future degradation.

Eligible projects will include upgrades to existing sewage treatment plants, funding for nonpoint source controls, wellhead protection, watershed protection, habitat restoration and aquifer protection in areas such as the Long Island Pine Barrens. Bond issue



Great Lakes Protection - \$25 million

The Great Lakes basin suffers from a variety of water quality problems that have gone unaddressed for years. These lakes are the source of drinking water for a large part of central and western New York. Toxics, eutrophication, and conventional pollutants will be addressed in lakes Erie and Ontario, the Niagara River and the Great Lakes sub-basin.

Finger Lakes Cleanup - \$25 million

The Finger Lakes suffer from nonpoint pollution, particularly from agricultural runoff, which contributes to deteriorating water quality in the lakes. Funding will support a program to address point and nonpoint sources of pollution.

Peconic and South Shore Estuaries - \$30 million

The Peconic and South Shore Estuaries are threatened by elevated levels of nitrogen, depressed levels of dissolved oxygen, and habitat loss. Bond Act money will be used for nitrogen removal, habitat restoration and nonpoint source pollution abatement. These improvements will restore the astounding natural productivity of these important estuaries.

Dam Safety - \$15 million

Many municipally owned dams are in disrepair and in need of capital investment to ensure their continued safe operation. These investments will serve to protect not only downstream residents but also the water quality and habitats that exist below these dams.

State Facilities Compliance - \$25 million

Many state-owned facilities need cap-

proceeds will not be used to meet existing commitments.

Hudson River Estuary Protection - \$25 million

This treasure is threatened by shoreline and upland development. The Hudson River Estuary Management Plan, recently released by the governor, identifies a number of needed capital projects, including aquatic habitat restoration projects at Hudson South Bay Wetland and Manitou Marsh.

Long Island Sound Cleanup - \$200 million

Long Island Sound's needs have reached a critical point, with fragile ecosystems and the fishing industry at risk. The Long Island Sound Study has identified a significant need for nitrogen-limiting sewage treatment plant (STP) upgrades to address the hypoxia problem. Additionally, the program will fund important habitat restoration projects.

Lake Champlain Improvements - \$15 million

Champlain Valley communities cannot move forward to improve lake quality without state assistance. Phosphorus control from point sources has been identified as a major factor in the impairment of the lake. A pending water quality agreement with Vermont will limit phosphorus from STPs and nonpoint sources. These improvements will bring the lake up to water quality standards.

Onondaga Lake Cleanup - \$75 million

Onondaga Lake, the only lake in the country that is an inactive hazardous waste site, will never be of recreational or ecological value without a major commitment from the state. Funds are needed to aid the county in the upgrade of the Metro STP so that Onondaga Lake can meet ambient water quality standards.

New York Harbor Estuary Improvements - \$25 million

In order to continue its ecological recovery, New York Harbor requires a number of aquatic habitat restoration and water pollution control projects, including combined sewer overflow upgrades, that have been identified and are in need of funding.



Debris clutters the shoreline of Onondaga Lake.

Photo by Dave Listowski

violations of the state's water pollution control laws. These funds will allow the state to treat and prevent water pollution at state-owned prisons, hospitals, parks and other facilities.

Small Business Compliance Assistance - \$30 million

Many small businesses have difficulty paying for water pollution control equipment that New York requires. This money will help this vital segment of our economy to comply with the state's water quality laws and keep these employers here, instead of moving to states with less stringent environmental laws.

Small Community Assistance - \$50 million

Many small communities are facing mounting costs to treat municipal wastewater and implement flood control projects. This money will allow communities with a population of 75,000 an opportunity for state assistance with sewage treatment and controlling flood waters.

Open Space Program - \$150 million

New York State needs to acquire open space to protect important sources of drinking water. Development pressure and other problems are affecting the ability of communities to ensure safe sources of drinking water. An important way to protect the state's surface and groundwater resources is through purchase of conservation easements. This money will be used for open space protection associated with water quality improvements, including farmland preservation projects, and DEC and Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) land acquisition projects. The program will use the Open Space Plan as a guide, with an added emphasis on watershed protection.

State Parks - \$50 million

State parks are suffering from an aging infrastructure which limits recreational opportunities. Bond Act proceeds will fund the construction of new park facilities, improvements at existing facilities, and the protection of state-owned natural resources.

League of Conservation Voters endorses Bond Act

The proposed 1996 Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act brings New York State a unique opportunity to restore and protect its environment while also encouraging economic activity. The \$1.75 billion initiative will provide resources for clean air and water, open space preservation, improved management of hazardous sites and landfills, and economic development. With political leaders, business groups, and the environmental community now standing squarely behind it, the way is clear for New York State voters to approve the Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act this November 5th.

The initiative is timely. The state's water bodies are becoming severely degraded, and financial resources to implement existing cleanup plans and programs are lacking. The Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act will provide money for the cleanup of Long Island Sound, Lake Champlain, the Hudson River, and the Finger Lakes, among other major water systems. The Bond Act will

help municipalities upgrade the quality of their drinking water by providing grants and establishing a revolving loan fund. The Clean Air component of the Bond Act includes the conversion of coal-fired furnaces within some 300 schools. The Municipal Environmental Restoration Projects, or "brown-fields" program, will provide local communities with the resources to return abandoned industrial sites to productive uses, such as economic zones or community parks, as well as return them to the tax rolls, while following healthy Superfund cleanup guidelines.

The Pataki Administration, Senate and Assembly leaders, the business community and the environmental community worked intensely during the final days of state budget negotiations to resolve differences and hammer out a version that all could endorse and put before the voters. The New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV) worked closely with a coalition of

environmental groups to keep the dialogue moving forward and facilitate communication between all the parties involved. NYLCV Chair Paul J. Elston believes that "the consensus on the Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act opens up a new, more positive chapter in relations between the Pataki Administration, the environmental community, and New York State businesses."

An Environmental Bond Act proposed in 1990, which focused primarily on land acquisition, was actively opposed by business groups and some upstate politicians. Its failure by a mere 65,000 votes was partially attributed to the perception that land acquisition was a luxury item during a period when many individuals were losing their jobs. On the other hand, many voters were not even aware that it was on the ballot, much less what it represented.

This year, NYLCV is coordinating a campaign to educate voters about the benefits of the Clean

Water/Clean Air Bond Act in 1996. The cost to each New Yorker of improved air and water quality will be only \$5 per year over the next 30 years, and each of us benefit.

Governor Pataki believes the voters will approve the plan. "Today we begin a new partnership with local governments, environmentalists and the business community to reclaim New York's rightful place as a national leader in environmental protection," he said.

For updates on the Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act, or for information on how it may affect your community, please call the New York League of Conservation Voters at 212-777-3536.

The New York League of Conservation Voters is the bipartisan political arm of New York's environmental community, reaching elected officials, political candidates, businesses and voters to broaden electoral support for the environment.

— *League of Conservation Voters*

BOND ACT, continued from page 3

Municipal Parks and Historic Preservation Projects - \$50 million

Many local governments have been forced to delay needed capital improve-

AIR QUALITY PROJECTS - \$230 MILLION

Clean Transportation Initiatives - \$75 million

New York has a unique opportunity and obligation to become the leader in environmentally friendly technology, including the establishment of clean vehicle

made available to fund these capital improvements and allow municipalities to rehabilitate existing parks and develop new ones.

SOLID WASTE INITIATIVES - \$175 MILLION

Fresh Kills - \$75 million

The largest unlined landfill in the world needs to be closed to protect the health of hundreds of thousands of New York residents. Funds will be directed to help New York City with the costs of closing and capping the Fresh Kills landfill. Staten Islanders have expressed concerns about health impacts from the landfill, and the groundwater in the area has been made unsuitable for drinking.

Rural and Adirondack Landfills - \$50 million

The state and localities have made significant strides in protecting groundwater through closure of old, unlined landfills. But landfill closure is expensive. These funds will be available for closing, capping and other expenses associated with the problems of solid waste disposal in rural areas and especially in the Adirondacks, where the state can assist small municipalities in managing their own waste. Out-of-park waste should not be deposited in Adirondack facilities simply to pay the debt service.

Recycling Capital Program - \$30 million

Diverting recyclable materials from landfills decreases the potential for environmental harm through air, surface and groundwater contamination resulting from landfilling. Community recycling programs are at a critical point. These funds will be used for localities to develop and build transfer stations, materials recovery centers, transportation infrastructure, and other costs associated with recycling.

URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION (Brownfields) - \$200 MILLION

Cities around the state are suffering from chronic disinvestment, often caused by the prevalence of contaminated properties. The Bond Act provides \$200 million for urban environmental restoration projects (brownfields) in blighted areas. The money will provide grants to cities to undertake clean-up of abandoned industrial sites. These inner-city sites will then be used for open space or returned to environmentally responsible industrial use, creating new jobs and pristine undeveloped sites.

economic growth, including grants for purchase of clean fueled buses and other mass transportation designed to improve air quality. It is important that New York promote the production of electric, clean fuel and hybrid vehicles, fleet purchase programs, and infrastructure development. Both clean fuel vehicle and bus fleets also require a substantial commitment in depot construction and fueling stations to make these technologies cost-effective.

School Coal Conversion Projects - \$125 million

Over 300 schools in New York are still dependent upon antiquated, pollutant-emitting coal burning furnaces, many of which date back to the turn of the century. Bond Act proceeds will be used to help municipalities fund the cost of converting these boilers to cleaner burning fuels.

Small Business Compliance Assistance - \$30 million

Many small businesses have difficulty paying for air pollution control equipment that New York requires. This money will help this vital segment of our economy to comply with the state's air quality laws and keep these employers here, instead of moving to states with less stringent environmental laws.

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