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STATEMENT FROM THE CONSERVATION ALLIANCE OF NEW YORK, INC

The newly formed “Conservation Alliance of New York, Inc.” (CANY) will host an informal meeting on March 10, 2004 from 8 -10 AM in the Albany Room of the Empire Plaza followed by a press conference at 10AM in room 130 LOB.

The Conservation Alliance of New York is an umbrella organization formed with a clear mission: to secure hunting, fishing, trapping, and other sustainable activities, such as agriculture and forestry, which use New York’s renewable natural resources, and to collaborate with others who share our vision.

Assemblyman Dan Hooker, an avid hunter, fisherman, and shooting sports enthusiast and member of the NRA, NYSRPA, NYSCC and SCI, “is happy to join the newly-formed Conservation Alliance of New York and is proud to help the organization get started. It has the potential to add another strong voice to the debate here in Albany which is exactly what we need. A unified, collective effort can help to turn the tide on issues.”

According to Dave Miller, Chairman, “CANY intends to represent the interests of New York’s sportsmen and women by providing a mechanism for them to get involved in issues affecting their interests, by educating the public about the facts concerning the sustainable use of renewable resources, and by focusing attention, both positive and negative, on program funding and staffing”.

Mike Zagata, former Commissioner for the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and CANY President, “feels strongly that there is a significant opportunity for CANY to work with other outdoors-related and business groups to improve the public support for these recreational and economic activities and thus heighten the political awareness of the need to improve funding and staffing for the natural resources component of the DEC”.

During its most recent meeting, the Board polled its membership and it was unanimous that examining DEC’s hatchery system and stocking program would be its first initiative. In 2002, sportsmen and women in New York supported a license fee increase which added about \$9 million to the \$31 million in license sales from the prior year. Thus the 2003 license sales component of the Conservation Fund amounted to about \$52 million (\$40 million in revenue generated from the sale of fishing and hunting licenses and \$12 million from an excise

tax on fishing and hunting equipment). However, the DEC was not allowed to spend that money for programs or staff and lost its “exemption” to maintain a staff of 80 in Fish Culture. That means they don’t have trained people to backfill vacancies. One result of having 7.5 unfilled fish culture positions was the premature release or transfer of 150,000 brown trout. This one incident has focused attention on the well-being of the entire program.

The hatchery program and stocking issue cut across both components of the DEC – natural resources and environmental quality. Therefore it provides an excellent chance for CANY to partner with other conservation, environmental, and business groups in an effort to improve the public’s understanding of the issue and thus gain the support needed to not just maintain the status quo, but to look at using general fund dollars to support the construction of hatcheries as an investment in the infrastructure necessary to support tourism.

According to the Board, once the fish are produced in sufficient numbers to meet the demand, the next issue to be addressed is when and where they are stocked. One of the difficult issues related to the “where” aspect is that of public access. If the land adjacent to a stream is posted, that stretch may not be stocked. The lack of stocking can have an adverse economic impact on neighboring communities. One way to remedy the lack of access is for the Governor, an admirer of Teddy Roosevelt, to use the “Open Fields” model supported by the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and acquire public fishing access along trout streams.

According to Dennis Money, Vice-Chairman, “the challenge is enormous, but the potential benefits to the people who enjoy recreating and doing business in New York are worth our focused attention”. The Legislature recognized this when they granted two free (no license required) fishing days statewide and four free fishing days annually per DEC region in an effort to attract young people to fish.

BACKGROUND

The DEC’s customers, including fishermen and businesses dependent upon tourism, are questioning the wisdom of saving \$50,000 or so of their money by not replacing the hatchery staff while prematurely releasing about \$300,000 worth of fish (dollar value per fish caught X 100,000 fish). The word is that three of the hatcheries - Rome, Randolph and South Otselic - are so dilapidated they may be closed for good – at a time when customer demand for stocked fish is increasing. According to former Commissioner Zagata “it would require tens of millions of dollars to restore the existing hatcheries to full production”.

As a first step toward developing a proposal for reversing this downward trend, the Board looked at the economics related to fishing. About 1.5 million people annually fish in New York, and according to a 1993 study by the Sport Fishing Institute, New York anglers annually spend \$838,311,000. That translates into 18,950 jobs, \$33,522,000 in State sales tax, \$19,429,000 in State income tax, and \$49,952,000 in Federal income tax.

A Cornell study on the economic impact of the Altmar Hatchery on the Salmon River documented that fish from a hatchery built at a cost of \$18 million produced an annual contribution to the economy of the surrounding communities of \$572 million. The economic contribution of trout fishing to the small Catskill community of Roscoe exceeds \$10 million. And the biggest benefit is not economic but environmental – fish are barometers of environmental quality. In New York’s classification system for drinking water, the best water is indicated by the fact that trout inhabit it. Their presence in the streams that encompass New York City’s reservoir system has helped convince EPA of the high water quality in the system. Because the stocking program is so important to New York, the Board recommends DEC refocus the way hatcheries are viewed – not as cost centers, but as economic investments in the infrastructure necessary to support tourism – the second largest industry in the State. The hatcheries could also be used to enhance children’s’ understanding of water – related environmental issues if they were used as environmental education centers. The DEC took a bold step by modifying a few hatcheries so they could accommodate visitors and thus affords the chance to educate the public, especially children, about the relationship between clean water and fishing opportunities.