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## State critters join EPF lobbying effort

By Andrew Beam

Some of the state's best-known animals — snapping turtle, beaver, blue bird and brook trout — have found new employment.

A coalition of environmental groups are using these creatures in a new ad campaign that was recently launched by environmentalists to convince the Legislature to restore funding to the state Environmental Protection Fund.

A press conference was held on March 9 to show in detail the coalition's plan for highlighting the issue in a comedic, and topical, manner.

The fund would see a \$69 million cut under Gov. David A. Paterson's 2010-2011 Executive Budget, bringing the total down to \$143 million. The coalition is asking for the EPF's budget to be restored to \$222 million. According to Environmental Advocates of New York Executive Director Robert Moore, cuts to the EPF and the Department of Environmental Conservation amount to 10 percent of the \$500 million being cut from all state agencies.

An ad appearing in newspapers and Web sites around the state shows some of the state's official animals standing at a podium announcing their resignation due to the abuse the EPF has suffered.

"The ad is manipulative on behalf of the state critters," said New York League of Conservation Voters Communications Director Dan Hendrick, "But it's been building up over many years. The animals have decided enough is enough."

The environmentalists are also utilizing a section of newspapers where people often go to find new friends -- The personal ads.

Messages such as "EPF looking for BFF" have begun appearing in newspaper personal ads, on Craigslist and even on a billboard near the I-787 and I-90 interchange in Albany. The billboard is visible from the Capitol, as well as from the Department of Environmental Conservation's headquarters.

"EPF and environmental agencies have suffered disproportionate cuts, even in good times, which really adds insult to injury," Moore said, pointing out that in recent years, the EPF has seen \$500 million swept into the budget's General Fund for non-environmental purposes.

"Last year alone, \$150 million was taken from the Environmental Protection Fund, and to take those kinds of cuts in funding, and to take those kinds of raids, and put on top of them a 34 percent reduction this year, is crippling to the environmental programs that are dependent on these sources of revenue," said Moore

The cuts would affect programs such as open space protection, farmland protection, waterfront revitalization and could negatively affect some municipal parks, said Nature Conservancy State Government Relations Director, Jessica Ottney.

"Many of our major urban centers rely on the EPF to protect our clean drinking water supply at a cost that's much lower than providing chemical treatment to our waters," she said.

Adirondack Council Communications Director John Sheehan points out that New York's timber industry has since moved overseas due to cuts to the EPF, driving away paper companies from the Adirondack Park.

"Over the past 20 years, the state has acquired the development rights of 600,000 acres in timber company land in the Adirondack Park through conservation easements paid for by the Environmental Protection Fund," he said. "Those easements are not only protecting the jobs of the loggers working in the Adirondacks, they're also ensuring that these lands are sustainably harvested, protected from environmental degradation and remained in timber harvesting for the future."

According to Moore, the coalition is spending \$30,000 for this first round of advertising.