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September 23, 2014

Venetia Lannon
Regional Director Region 2
1 Hunter's Point Plaza
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Long Island City, NY 11101-5407

Re: Construction of the Putnam Rail Trail in Van Cortlandt Park
(NYS DEC) Application ID # 2-6001-00014/00008

Dear Region 2 Director Lannon:

We write in support of our constituents comments on the attached letters¹ concerning the above stated federally funded project. We are deeply concerned with the progress of the project, as well as the procedural and environmental issues raised in the letters.

Recently, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYCDPR) placed plans for the Putnam Trail in Van Cortlandt Park on hold to address the concerns of your agency. This was the result of a NYSDEC hearing noticed and held in September 2013². We have heard that the NYSDEC asked NYCDPR to provide more information concerning the trail and the wetlands.

Could you address your agency's concerns and what changes you propose?

We also understand that if there is a change, the existing NEPA/4(f) would need to be re-evaluated. As environmental concerns were ignored in the previous design as described in the NEPA-CE (Categorical Exclusion), we recommend that as an interested party to the action, the NYSDEC address the following:

1. The lack of a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) for the trail drainage design. Current conditions allow runoff into the water bodies and the last plan did not include any change to this construct. This is not a restoration project; it is a new project in a critical environment. There appears to be no drainage designed to capture stormwater discharges, including runoff, and brownfield leachate. Instead it merely lets it drain to the lake or wetland (and eventually into the Harlem River) – in violation of the Clean Water Act. Most of the trail is within 100 feet of a sensitive area, water body, 100 year floodplain, or other seasonal wetlands, and the water table is high throughout the park itself. It is difficult to determine the impact of the brownfield leachate or the stormwater on Van Cortlandt Lake, the wetlands, or the other hydrological ecosystems, without a watershed plan and/or water budget. Especially as it applies to the Class 1 Wetlands, the SWPPP should include a description of the contribution of the vernal

¹ Find two letters to the USDOT –IG: <http://www.waterblogged.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/US-DOI-Putnam-Trail-Bonx-NY-Section-4F-request-073014.pdf> & <http://www.waterblogged.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/SavethePutnam-Letter-to-USDOT-IG-081214.pdf>

² http://www.dec.ny.gov/enb/20130828_not2.html

wetland to the east as well as the pollution and runoff from the Saw Mill Parkway and the upper Tibbett's Brook as it travels from the north in Westchester County. It should also present the best management practices that will abate the discharge and drainage to the base flow of the water body.

2. The previous proposed action to sequester brownfield areas. Capping with asphalt, concrete or 12 inches of soil, seems no longer acceptable. Bioremediation practices could be adopted.
3. Finally, the sponsor limited stakeholder support by ignoring two of the three community boards in the joint interest area. Moreover, there was no Putnam Trail user survey. The public should be invited to participate and observe the development of the SWPPP as well as given an opportunity to review the plan on a regular basis throughout the planning, construction and maintenance phases, to make sure that sensitive areas are protected, and that it does not violate the Clean Water Act.

We respectfully request that you address the aforementioned concerns with respect to the environmental and stakeholder issues in the critical area of the Van Cortlandt Lake, its Wetlands, and Tibbetts Brook.

In conclusion, we hope you, as an interested party, support our position that a new Section 4 (f) evaluation and determination in accordance with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Guidance is needed; that it be made public before the parties accept the recommendation; and that the 4(f) consider the environmental concerns described herein and others raised by the public.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.



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cc:

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