

**Friends of Tillson Lake, Inc.
P.O. Box 228
Gardiner, NY 12525**

May 14, 2018

Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of the State of New York
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Ms. Rose Harvey, Commissioner
NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
625 Broadway
Albany NY, 12238

We recently learned about the plans of Palisades Interstate Park Commission (PIPC) to drain Tillson Lake in Gardiner, NY, remove the dam and restore it to a natural stream corridor. PIPC cites its inability to obtain funding to bring the dam into compliance to ensure its long-term safety.

We strongly oppose this plan for the following reasons:

1. Tillson Lake is a valuable, accessible recreational resource.

- For almost 100 years (save for 12 years when it was drained by its private owners), people from Ulster county and visitors from as far as New York City have been using this lake to picnic, fish, kayak, birdwatch, or spend a relaxing time with family and friends. Tillson Lake is a critical part of Minnewaska State Park Preserve (MSPP) - the only one of its lakes designated for fishing, and one of two lakes where boating and kayaking are allowed. It complements the range of outdoor activities that MSPP has to offer.
- Tillson Lake is the most accessible area within the MSPP for people with disabilities. They can easily access the lake area because it is a manageable distance from the parking lot. The boat launch is conveniently located, allowing people who may have difficulty walking to experience kayaking, boating and fishing.

2. Removal of the Lake is strongly opposed by people and communities throughout the region.

- Tillson Lake is the only lake in Southcentral Ulster and an important venue for recreational activities in the region. During a recent Town Hall meeting in Gardiner to discuss PIPC Executive Director James Hall's letter announcing plans to remove Tillson Lake, over 100 people showed up from Gardiner, Wallkill, Shawangunk, Pine Bush, Walden, Newburgh,

New Paltz, Kingston and New York City to voice their outrage at PIPC's plan to remove the dam and de-water Tillson Lake and offer their support to save it. People shared personal stories of their connection with the lake.

- In a follow-up event called “I Love Tillson Lake” Day, over 150 people attended to support saving Tillson Lake; writing letters and sharing experiences and ideas. Some people who have moved to other towns came back to visit the Lake and volunteered to help our campaign. This outpouring of support has led to the establishment of Friends of Tillson Lake, Inc., a 501(c)(3) corporation dedicated to opposing attempts to remove the dam and drain the lake.
- In response to a clamor from its residents, the Town of Gardiner issued an official resolution advocating for saving Tillson Lake, a copy of which is attached. Residents from neighboring towns are petitioning their respective Town Boards to do the same.

3. The State cannot abrogate its responsibility for maintaining the Lake.

- Many people celebrated the State’s acquisition of Tillson Lake in 2006 because it meant continued public access and better stewardship and protection – our taxes working for us! Soon after it was added to MSPP, the jewel of the State Park system, the Master Plan listed repairs to Tillson Lake dam as a high priority. However, due to lack of funds, no repairs to the dam have been undertaken to date.
- Failure to undertake necessary repairs to the dam has certainly contributed to its further deterioration. PIPC is concerned that the dam may fail in the event of a 100-year flood. Breaching the dam and draining the lake will deprive an entire region of a beloved amenity. The community considers it a “breach” of trust by the State of New York and many feel a sense of real betrayal.

4. Removing the lake will destroy a critically important ecosystem.

- Having existed for almost 100 years, Tillson Lake has developed its own ecosystem and established an important corridor for wildlife including birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians and plants. Largemouth bass, spotted bass, catfish, crappie and brown trout are all found in the lake along with several species of turtle, frogs, ducks, loons, herons, bald eagles, ospreys and other birds of prey. Removing the lake will destroy this well-established ecosystem.
- A noted New York wetland and water resources specialist says that restoration and rehabilitation of the 25-acre lake area could well be more costly and complicated than fixing the dam. Fields of grass are not going to be sufficient restoration. Such a large disturbed area would be susceptible to being overrun by invasive species.

5. PIPC has given wildly divergent estimates for fixing the dam, and the cost of remediation has not been adequately considered.

- In the letter of James Hall to homeowners near Tillson Lake, he cited a cost of \$7 million to \$9 million. From the 2012 Engineering Assessment Report, the base Class 5 estimate was \$2.67 million, with a possible range of \$1.33 million to \$5.34 million. In the same report, the corresponding base cost to de-water and revert to a stream was \$1.04 million, with a possible range of \$0.52 million to \$2.09 million. The estimate only focused on earthwork for breaching the dam, related mobilization and preparatory work. No estimates were included for wildlife management, site remediation and rehabilitation.
- Once these costs are known, we will have a more realistic estimate of the budget shortfall. PIPC, NYSOPRHP, elected local and state officials as well as concerned private individuals can work together to find the money to close the funding gap. In addition to diligently paying our taxes, we have established a 501(c)(3) corporation called Friends of Tillson Lake, Inc. to facilitate the participation of private citizens in this endeavor.

Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Harvey, Tillson Lake is very important to us. We are counting on you to help save Tillson Lake for the use and enjoyment of a vast number of your constituents now and for future generations. Certainly, creative funding possibilities exist to protect this precious regional asset.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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President

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On behalf of Friends of Tillson Lake (see attached list)

Cc: US Sen. Chuck Schumer
US Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand
US Rep. John Faso
NYS Sen. John Bonacic
NYS Assemblyman Kevin Cahill
Ulster County Executive Mike Hein
Gardiner Town Supervisor Marybeth Majestic
PIPC Executive Director James F. Hall