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Introductory Remarks CERM 2022

Hello, Katie Petronis the DEC's Deputy Commissioner for Natural Resources was supposed to be here today to do the opening remarks for the conference. Unfortunately, she injured her leg on Monday and is unable to attend today. She asked me to fill in for her today and wanted me to share her disappointment in not being able to attend today.

Thank you all for coming to the Catskills and the Catskill Environmental Research and Monitoring Conference. Often referred to as CERM. The work being done by all the researchers here is essential to the success of the Catskill Park! We collectively are shaping what the Catskill Park will look like in 50 years! This conference is a great opportunity for land managers, government officials, and residents of the Catskills to learn about the most recent research taking place in the Catskills. It is also an opportunity for researchers and scientists to share their work with their peers. And of course, it is a great opportunity for networking.

In 1884 a State appointed Forestry Commission concluded that the Catskill area was unworthy of inclusion in the proposed forest preserve due to decimation from logging and the tanning industry. Thankfully the Catskills were included. We now know not all of it was lost... there are still old growth stands in the Catskills. River systems have cleaned themselves out over time; and flora and fauna have returned to the cutover landscape.

In 1904, when the Catskill Park was created, the Catskill Park encompassed 576,000 acres and just under 93,000 acres were constitutionally protected as forever wild lands. Here we are 118 years later... the Park is now around 700,000 acres with 290,000 acres of constitutionally protected land. Today Most visitors don't realize what the landscape once looked like and the environmental degradation the area suffered. The Catskills provides 90% of NYC drinking water and provide opportunities for unconfined recreation and solitude.

In the last 50 years DEC has added 55,000 acres to the Catskill Forest Preserve. What do the next 50 years hold? What will the Catskills look like in 50 years? As land managers and researchers, we can have some influence on the future. There are challenges ahead including impacts from increased use, climate change, invasive species, and changing land use patterns.

In the past DEC has committed to partnering with many researchers and institutions that are here this week and is committed to do so in the future. The Catskill Advisory Group called on DEC to strengthen its ties with researchers and make more scientific/data driven based decisions. If you are watching, you will see that these conversations are becoming actions:

DEC Staff led by Pine Roehrs have been studying the effects of informal trails in the Catskill High Peaks for over 4 years. Staff are in the process of engaging the public to reach a consensus on what the desired conditions should be for this area. Next staff will be laying out a vision for us to achieve the desired conditions. DEC has used to great success the Catskill Science

Collaborative to inform our efforts in the past and will continue to partner with research on the Catskill peaks.

The Department is also entering into a Visitor Use Management process, for the Kaaterskill Clove. Researchers and scientists will be essential in informing our consultant and the Department during this process. The work we do collectively will set the stage for future management of the Clove. To be successful we will need data to inform our decisions.

Your work will be invaluable as we work to understand the effects of climate change on the Catskill region and the State's natural resources. DEC is committed to making data driven management decisions. We need your help collecting and analyzing the data and research evidence to inform these decisions.

At the CERM conference 50 years from now they will be looking back and reflecting on the past and the current state of the Catskills. I am sure they will appreciate the historical data they have as a reference point and the work you have all done to preserve and enhance the future of the Catskill Region.

Thank you for the great work you are doing, I am sure you will enjoy the conference.