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# **Assembly Republican Hunting and Fishing Task Force Interim Report**

**James N. Tedisco**  
Republican Leader

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Task Force Chairman



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## Executive Summary

In May 2005, the Assembly Republican Hunting and Fishing Task Force was created. The Task Force, chaired by Assemblyman Will Barclay, was charged with hosting a series of public forums across the state to gather ideas on improving and promoting the hunting, fishing and trapping industries in New York.

At forums held in Albany, Schroon Lake, Ilion, Blasdell and Pawling, Task Force Members spoke with hunters, trappers, anglers and business owners, as well as local government and tourism officials. Forums specifically focused on ways to enhance the outdoor sports industry and increase the number of recreational anglers and hunters around the state. Recreation land investment, game species management and relations between traditional outdoor sports enthusiasts and the community were also discussed.

The Task Force made several recommendations to improve the industry. Some of the proposals are contained in the Assembly Republican Restore New York plan, while others are newer proposals that have been generated from the Task Force hearings. These measures include: boosting youth involvement; making it easier for tourists to obtain fishing licenses; providing greater access to hunting and fishing land; enhancing the hunting, fishing and trapping experience; investing in fish hatcheries; controlling the cormorant population; reimbursing the Conservation Fund for Chronic Wasting Disease expenses; and implementing the “I Love New York Outdoors” campaign.

This interim report examines the issues raised at the 2005 Task Force forums and sets forth legislation focused on improving the outdoor sports industry in New York. Additional forums will be held in 2006 and 2007 so that concerns in all regions of New York are represented.



*Assemblymembers Joe Giglio, Jack Quinn, Task Force Chairman Will Barclay and Jim Hayes listen to local sportsmen and women at a forum in Blasdell.*

## **OVERVIEW — Hunting and Fishing in New York State**

The hunting and fishing industries play a vital role in New York State's economy. There are 150,000 residents who hunt, more than 850,000 residents who fish, and over 490,000 residents who do both. In 2001, the hunting industry was responsible for over \$820 million in total expenditures to the state's economy. Moreover, it was estimated that New York's marine recreational fishing industry contributed more than \$1.3 billion to the state's economy and supported 21,000 jobs. In 2004, approximately 500,000 anglers used New York's waters for their sport and recreation - making some 4.6 million trips to the Empire State.

Several areas across the state have developed niche markets to maximize their sporting seasons. It is the job of government to ensure that these regions continue to grow and capitalize on the hunting and fishing market in the state. In order to do so, it is necessary to develop laws, programs, policies and regulations that provide access for sports enthusiasts and build upon New York's recreational success stories.

### **Phase I: Information Gathering and Public Awareness**

In the spring of 2005, the Assembly Republican Task Force on Hunting and Fishing initiated Phase I of their mission which was to gather information and increase public awareness of the traditional outdoor industries in New York. Throughout the first year, the Task Force conducted five public forums. The forums were held in the Capital Region, Essex County, the Mohawk Valley, Western New York, and the Mid-Hudson Region.

The Task Force public hearings have provided an avenue for local outdoors enthusiasts to voice their concerns about issues affecting them at the state and local levels. The events featured many individuals with different perspectives on the issues and provided well-rounded discussions.

In conjunction with the public hearings and roundtable discussions, the Task Force visited numerous businesses associated with these outdoor industries, including fish hatcheries, private hunting clubs, fish and game clubs, and commercial fishing operations. These visits allowed Task Force members to hear the concerns of all parties and to see first hand the problems affecting these industries. The Task Force will continue to visit other regions of the state over the next two years to gain more insight into the hunting and fishing industries at the state and local levels.



*Assembly Republican Hunting and Fishing Task Force Chairman Will Barclay joins Assemblymen Marc W. Butler, Jim Bacalles and local sportsmen and women at a forum in Ilion.*

## **Phase II: Developing Recommendations**

Phase II of the Task Force mission was to develop recommendations for legislation, programs, policies and regulations, to improve the viability of hunting and fishing across New York. These measures were based on the information the Task Force received during the year and were primarily focused on improving the viability of hunting and fishing across New York State.

This report centers on specific ideas that were repeated throughout the events and are consistent with the goals and mission of the Task Force. Some ideas were initially introduced through the Assembly Republican Conference's Legislative Package, *Restore New York*, due to the desire of the entire Conference to improve the state's hunting and fishing industries. However, a majority of the ideas were developed solely through recommendations made at Task Force forums. For example, the legislation to lower the big game hunting age was a direct result of constituents voicing their concerns at the public forums and roundtable discussions.



*Assemblymembers Teresa Sayward, Marc W. Butler, a hatchery employee and Assemblyman Tom O'Mara tour the Warren County Fish Hatchery before a forum in Schroon Lake.*

## **ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE**

The following is an overview of ideas and recommendations presented at the Assembly Republican Hunting and Fishing Task Force hearings in 2005. The Task Force will further build on these ideas and develop legislation, when possible, to promote the success of the hunting and fishing industries in New York.

In conducting regional hearings and touring local hunting and fishing businesses, the Hunting and Fishing Task Force sought to:

### **INCREASE YOUTH PARTICIPATION:**

Increasing youth participation in hunting is one of the biggest issues facing the industry today. Every year, fewer individuals participate in the sport due to physical limitations or age restraints, and there are very few younger sports enthusiasts to replace them. If the state does nothing to increase youth participation, the industry will suffer and diminish even further. The Task Force is exploring ways to encourage youth participation such as lowering the big game hunting age, creating programs for groups that get youth involved, and making schools more "hunter-friendly."

#### ***Lower the Hunting Age***

To promote youth participation in hunting, the Task Force recommends lowering the big game hunting age from sixteen to fourteen. At every Task Force event, constituents said the current age limit

prohibits many young people from participating in the sport. If young people are not allowed to expand their hunting skills, they will engage in other hobbies. Many officials warned that by the time they are of age to hunt big game, they will already have new interests. It is necessary to allow young people to fully explore what hunting has to offer.

Currently, many neighboring states have lower big game hunting ages. The big game hunting age in these states are as follows: New Jersey – age ten; Vermont - no age limit and Connecticut – age twelve. Therefore, New York’s youth and their families are forced to go out of state to enjoy the sport, putting New York at an economic and competitive disadvantage.

Also, in the day and age of PlayStation and Xbox, getting youth involved in any outdoor activity can be difficult. The Task Force seeks to make it easier for youth who are interested in hunting to maintain that interest and obtain all the positive benefits of the sport.

***Develop an award program, sponsored by the Assembly Republican Conference, to highlight certain organizations***

To help ensure more youth participation, the Task Force supports the award program created as part of *Restore New York* to highlight organizations and individuals who encourage youth participation in outdoor sports. Interest in the hunting and fishing industry in New York has been declining over the years. In order for this tradition to rebound and remain strong in New York, it is necessary to introduce individuals to outdoor sports at a young age and to illustrate all the positive benefits. Across New York, there are numerous youth and civic organizations that are constantly reaching out to young people to expose them to outdoor sports. These organizations are critical to the future of the hunting industry.

***Support the efforts of hunting and fishing groups that introduce youth to outdoor sports and the positive benefits of such sporting activities***

To further promote youth participation in hunting and fishing across the state, the Task Force supports efforts to introduce youth to hunting and fishing and teach them the positive benefits of such activities. Currently, there are many groups that are working to get youth interested and involved in hunting and fishing. The awards program created in *Restore New York* is just one way to help support the efforts of these civic and youth organizations by recognizing their success. The Task Force will continue to support new and innovative efforts of these groups and their hard work.

***Develop ideas on how to make schools more hunter-friendly, including a Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) educational program for the schools***

To promote the positive benefits of hunting in New York, the Task Force recommends creating a DEC education program that could be used in schools. Currently, there is a very negative perception of hunting in New York State. To make the industry prosper, outdoorsmen need to highlight the positive benefits of these sports. However, their efforts are often met with resistance. At one forum, an individual said he had supplied free copies of a hunting magazine to his school library for educational purposes, but later learned they were being immediately discarded. By informing children of all that hunting has to offer, we may be able to correct misconceptions, spark interest and cultivate more outdoor enthusiasts.



**PROMOTE THE HUNTING AND FISHING INDUSTRY IN NEW YORK:**

***Extend the requirements of the 480-A program***

To help increase game species in New York, the Task Force recommends amending the Section 480-A program to require that landowners make their land able to sustain game species. The Section 480-A program encourages the long-term ownership of woodlands to produce forest crops and increase the likelihood of a more stable forest economy. This program gives tax exemptions to landowners who are committed to producing forest crops and following a management plan approved by the DEC. The

management plan, prepared by a forester, shows the boundaries and size of the forest, the types and sizes of trees it contains, and how to produce and harvest forest crops.



*Assembly Republican Hunting and Fishing Task Force Chairman Will Barclay joins Assemblymen Tom O'Mara, Jim Bacalles, preserve owner Jim Muncey and Assemblyman Willis H. Stephens, Jr. on a tour of the Ten Mile River Preserve.*

This proposal, part of *Restore New York* (A.9324 of 2006), requires landowners who want tax exemptions under the Section 480-A program to include provisions to make their land suitable for game species. Currently, landowners must create a management plan that details their goals for timber and how they will replant the forest. This proposal would require a biologist to work with the forester to create provisions within the management plan that meets the goals of the owner and makes the land more suitable for game species. This land is already open space with no commercial development and is a prime habitat for game

species. Increasing habitat will have many benefits, such as increasing game species population and ensuring sports enthusiasts are satisfied with the amount of wildlife they encounter during a season.

***Support efforts to increase access to public and private lands for hunting opportunities***

To expand hunting opportunities, the Task Force supports increasing access to lands for hunting. At every Task Force event, access has been a top concern. The amount of land open to the public for outdoor sports is declining. Efforts to increase access would be appreciated by constituents. Every year, more land is purchased for commercial property, limiting available open space for outdoor sports. In addition, the purchase of hunting lands by private individuals or state agencies also limits public use of this land.

Assembly Republicans are calling on state agencies to assess the land under their jurisdictions to determine if it is appropriate for outdoor sports. Currently, most of these lands are open to certain outdoor enthusiasts, such as hikers or canoeists, but not to hunters. It is wrong for certain outdoorsmen to be excluded from using this prime land to enjoy their outdoor sport.

The issue of access to private lands is problematic due to concerns about landowners' liability. Many private landowners will not allow hunters on their land because of fear of being held liable in the event of an accident. Assembly Republicans have proposed limiting landowner liability in the past and will continue to push for this change (A.9338 of 2006).

The Assembly Republican Conference also urges the New York City Department of Environmental Protection to provide additional hunting opportunities in the downstate region. Due to limited hunting areas there, residents cannot easily experience outdoor sports first-hand. Creating more hunting opportunities in and around New York City will encourage more people to try this traditional outdoor sport.

Assembly Republicans encourage state agencies to purchase open space that can be used for a variety of outdoor activities, including hunting and fishing. In the past, New York has been active in purchasing open space to preserve our environment. Often, these lands are not open to traditional sports. The Task Force recommends providing as much access to quality bodies of water and hunting lands as possible.



*Ten Mile River Preserve owner Jim Muncey leads Assemblymen Jim Bacalles and Willis H. Stephens, Jr. on a tour of the Ten Mile River Preserve.*

***Support efforts to replace money taken from the Conservation Fund to pay for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) emergency action***

To replenish the Conservation Fund, the Task Force supports efforts to replace the money taken from the Fund to pay for the CWD outbreak in 2005. This outbreak forced New York to spend money on testing deer for CWD, containment efforts, and prevention of future outbreaks. The funds used to combat CWD were diverted from the Conservation Fund. This fund is used by DEC for the care, management, protection, and enlargement of the state's fish, game and shell fish resources. The use of money from the Conservation Fund to pay for the outbreak caused many residents to become concerned that other projects would go unfunded, further distressing New York's hunting and fishing industries.

The 2005-06 Deficiency Appropriation Bill added \$7.5 million to the Environmental Enforcement, Fish, Wildlife, and Marine Resources and Operations programs to support the cost of monitoring CWD. The Task Force supported these efforts to replenish the Conservation Fund and will continue to support any additional efforts to direct funds into this account.

***Support a more accessible out-of-state fishing license that can be purchased immediately***

To ensure easy access to fishing licenses, the Task Force recommends allowing licensed guides to issue licenses to all customers, whether or not they are residents of New York, through a phone

registry or via the Internet. Currently, hunting and fishing licenses can be purchased at a variety of stores in the state. However, buyers are subject to store hours and locations. Over one million anglers annually fish in New York waters, generating over \$1 billion in revenue. This number could increase if New York adopted a system that would make obtaining a fishing license easier. Under current law, there are a limited number of individuals authorized by DEC to issue hunting and fishing licenses. Accessibility to these individuals is limited, especially in rural areas.

***Support additional funding for fish hatchery repair and maintenance***

To improve fish hatcheries in New York State, the Task Force supports additional funding for fish hatchery repair and maintenance. The fishery program is in need of considerable capital investment. Currently, DEC is working on a report to determine the specific cost, which is expected to be in excess of \$20 million.



*Assemblyman Tom O’Mara and a member of the Southtowns Walleye Association fish on Lake Erie before the Blasdel Forum.*

***Manage and control the cormorant population***

The Task Force supports management and control of the cormorant population. The double-crested cormorant is a colonial nesting species which lives on Lakes Erie, Ontario, Oneida, and Champlain, as well as on Long Island. The population has increased in recent decades and has become a large problem. These birds eat many varieties of fish, and kill trees, shrubs, and other vegetation. The birds are protected under the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty of 1918.

In New York State, the federal Public Resource Depredation order is in effect and allows state fish and wildlife agencies to control the cormorant population as it threatens native, economically beneficial species. Currently, the Department of Environmental Conservation has a program to control these birds. The Task Force applauds their efforts and will continue to support programs to further minimize the problems cormorants create for the fishing industry.

***Create an advertising campaign that would survey and attract out-of-state anglers and hunters***

The Task Force recommends the creation of an “ILOVE NY OUTDOORS” advertising campaign to attract out-of-state sports enthusiasts and provide information on our hunting and fishing industries. Other states have similar advertising campaigns that have assisted in improving the viability of these industries.



## *CONCLUSION*

The first year of the Assembly Republican Hunting and Fishing Task Force has been successful. The public forums and roundtable discussions have prompted the development of numerous pieces of quality legislation which seek to promote the viability of these industries in New York. However, the development of legislation is just the beginning. The Task Force will need the continued support of outdoor enthusiasts if we wish to see positive changes that benefit the industries. This interim report will serve as a foundation for the Task Force to help revitalize hunting and fishing in New York State. It does not represent the final findings of the Task Force. The report simply represents a conclusion of the first year of the Task Force's travels. As mentioned before, the Task Force will travel for two more years to ensure that the success of these informative public forums is spread to all areas of the state.

## Albany Public Forum

WHEN: Tuesday, June 21, 2005

WHERE: Legislative Office Building, Albany

### MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Assemblyman Pat Casale, Host  
Assemblyman Will Barclay, Chair  
Assemblyman Joseph Saladino, Vice Chair  
Assemblywoman Teresa Sayward, Vice Chair  
Assemblyman Jack Quinn  
Assemblyman James Tedisco  
Assemblyman Gary Finch  
Assemblyman Tom O'Mara  
Assemblyman Dan Burling  
Assemblywoman Nancy Calhoun  
Assemblyman Marc Butler  
Assemblyman Jim Bacalles  
Assemblyman Charles Nesbitt  
Assemblyman Chris Ortloff  
Assemblyman Cliff Crouch  
Assemblyman Pat Manning

### IN ATTENDANCE:

- \* Denise Sheehan, Acting Commissioner, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
- \* Howard Cushing, President, NYS Conservation Council
- \* Wallace John, Legislative Vice President, NYS Conservation Council
- \* David Miller, Chairman, Conservation Alliance, Wildlife Consultant – NYS Trappers
- \* Gerald Leggieri, President, NYS Trappers
- \* Tom King, President, NYS Rifle and Pistol Association
- \* Russ Williams, Vice President, NYS Rifle and Pistol Association, Founder, Conservation Alliance of New York
- \* Kevin Armstrong, President, New York State Bowhunters
- \* John Maczek, President, Tri-Village Bow Hunters
- \* Ray Gawlas, Director, Schenectady County Conservation Alliance
- \* Tom Agar, Chairman, Rensselaer Co. Walleye Pond
- \* Richard C. Johnson, Member, Brunswick Sportsman's Club, Director, Rensselaer County Conservation Alliance
- \* Joe Liuni, 3rd Vice President, Federated Sportsmen Clubs of Ulster County
- \* Larry Hughson, President, Federated Sportsmen Clubs of Ulster County
- \* Patricia Arnold, Region 6 State Sportsmen's Representative, Fish and Wildlife Management Board
- \* Jim Petreszyn, Region 7 representative, Fish and Wildlife Management. Board
- \* Donald Wood, Former President, Helderberg Bassmasters
- \* Joseph A Vivenzio, Owner, River Run Troutfitters
- \* William Gleason, Commodore, Castleton Boat Club
- \* Henry Cioccaro, Owner, HWC Guide Service

## Schroon Lake Public Forum

WHEN: Monday, July 18, 2005

WHERE: Schroon Lake Central School, Schroon Lake

Task Force members toured the Warren County Fish Hatchery  
and the Schroon Lake Fish and Game club

### MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Assemblywoman Teresa Sayward, Host & Vice Chair  
Assemblyman Will Barclay, Chair  
Assemblyman Chris Ortloff  
Assemblyman Pat Casale  
Assemblyman Pat Manning  
Assemblyman Tom O'Mara  
Assemblyman Marc W. Butler

### IN ATTENDANCE:

- \* Denise Sheehan, Acting Commissioner, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
- \* Stewart Buchanan, Director, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Region 5
- \* Donald Sage, President, Schroon Lake Fish and Game Club
- \* Pete Casamento, Owner, Adirondack Champlain Guide Service
- \* Gary Kauffman, Member, Warren County Conservation Council
- \* Richard Foran, Member, Warren County Conservation Council
- \* Richard Haag, Secretary, Adirondack Conservation Council
- \* James Hotaling, Guide, Lake Champlain Guide Service
- \* Robert Brown, President, Franklin County Federation of Fish and Game Clubs
- \* Robert J. Monacchio, Chairman, Conservation Fund Advisory Board
- \* William Wellman, Vice-President, Trout Unlimited Region 5
- \* Bob Pioli, Member, Tupper Lake Rod and Gun Club
- \* Michael Savage, Member, Tupper Lake Rod and Gun Club
- \* Samuel Grimone, Blue Line Sports Shop
- \* Robert Hodorowski, White Tails Unlimited
- \* Ron Rybicki, Saratoga County Council of Fish and Game Clubs
- \* Bob Henky

## **Ilion Public Forum**

WHEN: Wednesday, July 27, 2005

WHERE: Ilion Fish and Game Club, Ilion

### MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Assemblyman Will Barclay, Task Force Chair  
Assemblyman Marc W. Butler  
Assemblywoman Dierdre "Dede" Scozzafava  
Assemblyman Jim Bacalles  
Assemblyman Cliff Crouch

### IN ATTENDANCE:

\*DEC Region 6 Director Sandra LeBarron  
\*Stephen Pierson, Captain, DEC Region 6  
\*Gary Bullis, President, Herkimer County Conservation Alliance  
\*Tom King, President, New York State Rifle and Pistol Association  
\*Tim McCormack, Retired, Remington Arms Company  
\*Charles Branigin, Owner, Bushwack Adventures / First VP, NYSOGA  
\*Martin Seeley, Board Member, New York State Bowhunters  
\*Matt Stublely, Executive Director, Herkimer Co. Chamber Of Commerce  
\*Robert Kazmierski, Owner, Bob's Taxidermy Studio /  
\*Founder, Wildlife Sports and Educational Museum  
\*Ed Freedman, Shooting Sports Chairman, Ilion Fish and Game Club  
\*Lisha Thayer, Recording Secretary, United Mineworkers  
\*Frank "Rusty" Brown, COMPAC Chairman, United Mineworkers  
\*Jerry Roberts, Owner, Fort Noble Adirondack Adventures  
\*William Lloyd, President, Herkimer County Conservation Alliance  
\*Robert Beigh, Outdoor Guide  
\*Scott Capes, Outdoor Guide  
\*William Lloyd  
\*Robert Grose  
\*Donald Combs  
\*William Lintz  
\*Joe Sullivan, Fulton Chamber of Commerce  
\*Dean Morey  
\*Hank Zakrzewski



## Blasdell Public Forum

WHEN: Monday, August 15, 2005

WHERE: Newton Abbott Fire Hall, Blasdell

Task Force members toured Lake Erie with the Southtowns Walleye Association

### MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Assemblyman Will Barclay, Chair  
Assemblyman Jack Quinn, Host  
Assemblyman James P. Hayes  
Assemblyman Jim Bacalles  
Assemblyman Joseph Giglio  
Assemblyman Thomas O'Mara

### IN ATTENDANCE:

- \* Abby Snyder, Acting Regional Director, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Region 9
- \* Russ Biss, Natural Resources Supervisor, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Region 9
- \* Dave Woodworth, President, Southtown's Walleye Association
- \* Chuck Godfrey, President, Erie County Sportsmen's Federation
- \* Dan Tone, Region 9 Director, Small Game Committee, NYS Conservation Council
- \* Ken Mathison, President, SCOPE
- \* Paul Stoos, Representative, Alden Rod and Gun Club
- \* Richard Davenport, VP, Sales and Marketing, Global Outdoor Adventures
- \* Robert Church, Assistant Regional Representative, Safari Club International
- \* Bob Keicher, Area 24 Representative, Safari Club International
- \* Joseph Dimino, NYS Bowhunters Association
- \* Eric Thomas, Owner, Bristol Hill Outfitters
- \* Alex Whittinghill, Owner, Great Lake Taxidermy
- \* Richard Kozak, Director, Southtown's Walleye Association
- \* Joseph Fisher, Erie County Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs
- \* Will Elliott, Outdoor Writer
- \* Dave Kaufman, Genesee County SCOPE
- \* Mike Cocchiola, Secretary, Monroe County SCOPE

## **Pawling Public Forum**

WHEN: Monday, October 17, 2005

WHERE: Pawling Mountain Club, Pawling

Task Force members toured the Ten Mile River Preserve

### MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Assemblyman Will Stephens, Host  
Assemblyman Will Barclay, Chair  
Assemblyman Tom O'Mara  
Assemblyman Jim Bacalles

### IN ATTENDANCE:

- \* Bill Rudge, Natural Resources Supervisor, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
- \* Dr. Bruce Akey, DVM, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets
- \* Richard Allbrecht, Representative, State and Dutchess County Farm Bureaus
- \* Bill Conners, Chairman, NYS Fish and Wildlife Management Board and Legislative Vice-President Federation of Dutchess County Fish and Game Clubs
- \* Ray Merlotto, NYS Conservation Council
- \* Matt Vanacoro, President, Putnam County Fish and Game Clubs
- \* William Emslie, Federation of Dutchess County Fish and Game Clubs, Coastal Conservation Association of New York and Hudson Valley Chapter of CCA of NY
- \* Arthur Cecchini, Putnam County Federation of Sportsmen Clubs
- \* Jim Muncey, Owner, Ten Mile River Preserve
- \* Dr. Philip Bonanno, Owner, Pawling Mountain Club