

Adirondack Mountain Club

Before the Senate Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation

**Testimony on the Expansion of the NYS Returnable Container Act
Submitted by Allison Beals**

March 4, 2009

Members of the Senate, thank you for the opportunity to testify on proposals to expand New York State's Returnable Container Act (bottle bill).

The Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) strongly supports the passage of the expanded bottle bill in the 2009-2010FY budget. We commend the Assembly and the Senate on their commitment to expanding New York State's Bottle Bill. The bill addresses several key issues concerning the handling of recyclables and returnable containers. The proposal will expand the bottle bill to cover most non-carbonated beverages, redirect unclaimed deposits to the state, and increase the handling fee for stores.

The original bottle bill, passed in 1982, allows New Yorkers to return soft drink and beer deposit containers for recycling. Over the past twenty years New Yorkers are averaging a 75 percent recycling rate for these beverage containers. Since the enactment of the bottle bill our state has experienced a 70-80 percent reduction in beverage container litter and a 30 percent reduction in overall litter. While the bottle bill has been very effective it does not include non-carbonated beverages, which have become increasingly popular. When the original bottle bill was enacted non-carbonated drinks barely existed in the marketplace. However, non-carbonated beverages currently make up approximately 25 percent of the beverage market and the majority of beverage container litter.

The passage of an expanded bottle bill covering most non-carbonated beverages will significantly reduce litter throughout New York State. Currently, there is no monetary incentive for consumers of non-carbonated beverages to recycle these containers. Instead we continue to see increasing amounts of non-carbonated beverage containers littering our streets and other public areas. Furthermore, the Forest Preserve and state parks would greatly benefit from an expanded bottle bill because those tempted to simply drop their water or juice bottles in a park or on a trail would most likely think twice if the bottles could be redeemed for a deposit.

Also of concern to ADK is the issue of unclaimed deposits. Currently, beverage companies redeem unclaimed deposits on beverage containers amounting to a total of well over \$100 million dollars. The proposed legislation would require the beverage industry to submit unclaimed deposits to the State for recycling and other environmental initiatives in the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). ADK agrees that the reclaimed deposits should be used for environmental initiatives; however, we believe that the escheat should not be the primary source of funding for the EPF. ADK has always supported the expanded bottle bill first to increase the rate of recycling, and second to supplement the EPF with the unclaimed deposits, not supplant any funds that should come from the Real Estate Transfer Tax (RETT).

If enacted, the expanded bottle bill will provide incentives for consumers of non-carbonated beverages to recycle rather than litter while also supporting local recycling initiatives. The Adirondack Mountain Club supports the passage of the proposal set forth by the Governor in the Executive Budget with the restoration of the RETT as the primary source of funding for the EPF. We hope that the legislature will seriously consider including the expanded bottle bill in the 2009-2010 budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important proposal.