

## OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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### February 2024 Transparency Plan Update

**AGENCY NAME:** Department of Environmental Conservation

#### DELIVERABLES ACHIEVED SINCE 2021

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) set forth dozens of initiatives and exploratory ideas in its [October 2021 Transparency Plan](#) (“Transparency Plan” or “Plan”). Since then, the agency made significant progress in expanding its already robust access to information. Many technology enhancements are underway, and DEC remains committed to “increase access and transparency” as stated in the plan.

#### DECinfo Locator

A focal point of DEC’s commitment to transparency is the [DECinfo Locator](#). This interactive map provides access to DEC documents and public data regarding the environmental quality of specific sites in New York State, as well as information about State lands and sites and opportunities for outdoor recreation. DEC provides a [detailed help document](#) as well as a [brief video tutorial](#) to assist users, and also invites the public to complete a [short survey](#) on their DECinfo Locator experience as part of our efforts to further enhance user experience and continue to build out the functionality of this important tool.

DEC’s Transparency Plan includes efforts to make additional data layers available on DECinfo Locator and develop mobile capabilities for this application. DEC added the following [layers](#) to DECinfo Locator following the issuance of the Plan:

- Water Wells
- Combustion Facilities
- Radiation Control Permit Facilities
- Vehicle Dismantling Facilities
- Household Hazardous Waste Collection Facilities
- Northern/Southern Zone Hunting Boundary
- Disadvantaged Communities Layer
- Waste Tire Handling and Recovery Facilities
- Recyclables Handling and Recovery Facilities
- CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations)
- Scrap Metal Processors
- CSLAP (Citizens Statewide Lake Assessment Program)
- Inactive Solid Waste Landfills
- Clean Water Plans
- Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) 12 (Watershed Boundaries)
- Environmental Easements
- Sediment Caps

In addition, DEC provided information or training on features and functions of DECinfo Locator:

- Greene River Basin Summit Presentation, May 2022
- NYS Association of Towns Newsletter, June 2022
- Public Sector Network Government Digital Insights Presentation, December 2022
- NYS Forum Presentation, February 2023
- NYS Conservationist, June/July 2023
- NYS Association of Conservation Commissions Annual Meeting, June 2023
- NYSGeoCon 2023 Conference, September 2023
- NYS Association of Towns Annual Meeting, February 2024
- Several presentations to internal staff, including division-specific presentations, a statewide presentation, and a Central Office poster session.

While DECinfo Locator is accessible from [mobile devices](#), DEC continues to pursue the development of mobile capabilities to improve functionality and enhance the user experience.

### **DEC Open Data Program**

DEC also advanced and completed planned enhancements to its Open Data Program. DEC prepared an internal Open Data Procedures Manual in January 2022, which advised DEC programs how to submit, update, and review data sets. DEC also conducted live training for DEC personnel about Open Data and the dataset submission process in February 2022. DEC prepared a brief video reviewing Executive Order 95, DEC's Open Data initiative, and publishable data requirements, which is available to personnel on the agency's internal Open Data information webpage. DEC published its [catalog and schedule of data sets](#) online with embedded links to the NY Open Data webpages for ease of access. DEC promotes the Open Data offerings on the [DECinfo Locator webpage](#) and its [FOIL webpage](#).

In addition, DEC increased the number of data sets available through the State's Open Data [website](#) and expanded Open Data offerings to include:

- [Statewide Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Beginning 1990](#)
- [The Northern-Southern Hunting Zone Line Map dataset](#)
- [Citizen Statewide Lake Monitoring Assessment Program \(CSLAP\) Map](#)
- [Waste Tire Abatement Sites \(dataset\)](#)
- [Waste Tire Abatement Sites \(map\)](#)
- [MOVES \(Motor Vehicle Emissions Simulator\) 2020 Input Data Tables](#)
- [Tickets Issued by DEC's Division of Forest Protection](#)
- [Birding Trail Locations](#)

### **DEC Website Modernization**

A key component to improve public access to information centered on rebuilding the agency's [website](#) on a modern platform that provides greater search capability and

mobile device functionality. DEC launched its redesigned public website December 1, 2023 and announced it via [press release](#):

“[t]he site is significantly easier to use with cellphones, streamlines navigation, includes more powerful search capabilities, and offers new multimedia features to provide a more engaging visitor experience...The redesigned site offers a more responsive design and intuitive functionality, whether visitors are using a desktop, laptop, tablet, or handheld device. Features include streamlined navigation and new content presentation capabilities that allow DEC to better integrate video and other visual media. Updated DEC website URLs are all plain text, improving the ability of search engines to find and connect users to content. To ensure visitors can still find favorite web pages from the old design, DEC has established redirects to the new web pages. Expanded, task-focused navigation makes it easier for visitors to find regulatory, environmental protection, licensing, and environmental education content and resources more quickly. Larger call-to-action sections make it easy to [purchase licenses](#), search for [job openings](#), sign up for topic-specific newsletters through [DEC Delivers](#), or subscribe to DEC’s [Conservationist Magazine](#).”

### **DEC FOIL Response Time**

DEC also committed to reducing response time for FOIL requests, while maintaining the quality of document production and review. Although DEC has maintained the average response time for FOIL requests over the last three years, the already-low processing times remained constant for the thousands of requests received each year:

- In 2021: DEC received more than 17,000 FOIL requests; 85% of requests in 2021 were completed within 20 business days; and 97% were completed within 60 days. The average time to close a request in 2021 was 12 business days.
- In 2022: DEC received more than 16,000 FOIL requests. 82% of requests in 2022 were completed within 20 business days; and 98% were completed within 60 days. The average time to close a request in 2022 was 12 business days.
- In 2023: DEC received more than 14,500 FOIL requests. 83% were completed within 20 business days; and 98% were completed within 60 days. The average time to close the requests received in 2023 was 12 business days.

FOIL request volume has decreased 15% over the last three years, which likely correlates to DEC’s increase in information available through the DECinfo locator and other tools.

### **DEC Technology Enhancements**

DEC has had mixed success with initiatives related to technology applications. For example, DEC assessed initial feasibility for a public-facing document management system related to oil and gas facilities and determined the agency does not currently have the personnel or financial resources to successfully advance this investment. Oil and gas information is available on the [DEC website](#), including data and geographic information. The agency continues to develop a new permit tracking system (eTrack), which will improve access to permitting information. The agency component (Analyst

Portal) of eTrack is nearly complete. A public component (Applicant Portal) will be built with similar system functionality over the next year. That component will involve the ability to submit permit applications online and the applicant to access permitting documents associated with their project(s). In addition, DEC secured funding for a capital project to replace its Air Facility System, which will replace the current system and enhance the ability to manage permitting, compliance, enforcement activities, as well as Title V air facility emissions tracking. DEC released a Request for Information (RFI) in the New York State Contract Reporter on January 2, 2024, to learn about available technology options. Subscribers to the Contract Reporter can access the RFI [online](#).

### **DEC's Language Access Program**

DEC created a language assistance location available from the "Help Center" in the universal footer on every DEC webpage, which directs a visitor to DEC's [Language Assistance webpage](#). In addition, each DEC webpage features a "Translate" icon at the top of each page which directs a visitor to select from 14 languages to have the webpage instantly translated.

DEC developed internal guidance for procuring and using interpreters for virtual public meetings and hearings. DEC also developed a supplemental list of vendors outside of OGS language vendors to deploy when requested languages are not available under the contracted vendors. In addition, the agency built a language access toolkit and training for personnel to review language access policies, state requirements, and the procedures for translating documents and requesting an interpreter, which is available on the agency's intranet.

DEC prepared a notice of language services in 10 languages for inclusion in certain outgoing communications to ensure that the public is aware they can request interpretations for hearings and meetings. These measures will improve public access and involvement in DEC programs across the state, particularly in Environmental Justice communities historically overburdened with environmental pollution in the New York City metropolitan area and statewide. DEC also developed text to be included in press releases and other notices to let the public know that they can request an interpreter:

*Interpreter services shall be made available to deaf persons, and translator services shall be made available to persons with limited English proficiency, at no charge for either service, upon written request. Requests should be received 10 calendar days before the meeting, but DEC will make every effort to fulfill requests received closer to the meeting date. Requests can be directed to the NYSDEC Division of Communication, Education, and Engagement, either by mail (address: NYSDEC, 625 Broadway, Albany, New York 12233-4500), by telephone (518-402-8044) or by e-mail (language@dec.ny.gov).*

## **DEC Social Media Outreach and Education**

DEC has greatly expanded the use of live broadcasts using Facebook and Instagram and increased its social media presence and activities. DEC has 178,000 followers on Facebook (+42,000 since 2021), 88,700 followers on Instagram (+41,700), and 39,100 followers on X [formerly Twitter] (+12,100). There are more than 10,600 subscribers to DEC's YouTube channel, which now has more than 600 videos posted and more than 5 million views. DEC conducts several weekly Facebook Live and Instagram Live broadcasts on various topics from various locations throughout the state.

To help improve live broadcasts, DEC provided two internal training sessions since 2022 and prepared online resources for additional assistance. Since releasing the transparency plan, DEC completed five case studies on the effectiveness of various digital media platforms to show reach and impact of digital campaigns.

DEC's email delivery service, which is an outreach effort that offers subscriptions to more than 100 major newsletter topics, has more than doubled since the issuance of the Plan. [DEC Delivers](#) has grown from 333,000 subscribers in October 2021 to 774,000 in 2024.

## **Program-Specific Improvements**

In the transparency plan, DEC advised the agency would geo-reference [State land PDF maps](#) on DEC's website as they were updated, estimating the activity should be completed in approximately two years. The project is approximately 92% complete, with 426 georeferenced maps on DEC's website out of 476 state forests, although some of the larger properties have two or more maps.

DEC also planned to include certain work plans in the Environmental Notice Bulletin for new construction and expansion of facilities on state lands. DEC's Forest Preserve work planning process expanded from just tree cutting considerations to include a more holistic review of all construction and maintenance activities on the Forest Preserve, as outlined in the recently adopted [Commissioner Policy #78](#) (CP-78), *Forest Preserve Work Plan Policy*. These work plans continue to be posted in the ENB, are also posted on [DEC's public web page](#). DEC's work with the Trail Stewardship Working Group continues, and the agency will work toward adopting trail guidance and specifications by the end of 2024.

DEC continues to provide this land acquisition data on their webpage. Land acquisition data is currently shared on an annual basis through [the Annual Land Acquisition Report](#), and [NYS Open Data](#). State Forest timber sales are currently posted on the [public webpage](#) by region. After the sales have been awarded (high bidder), those results are posted on the webpage, as well.

DEC updated the Hudson River Natural Resource Damage Assessment [webpage](#) to make case documents readily available to the public. The webpage also provides a brief description of the natural resource damage assessment process, Trustee contacts, and

links to the other Trustee websites (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration).

DEC employed a new approach to its fisheries public meetings in 2022 that entailed posting prerecorded YouTube presentations in advance of an open virtual public meeting to allow interested parties to view the information in advance, with the intent of affording more meaningful dialog and allowing the public to revisit the material if necessary. DEC determined this effort resulted in a low viewing rate and did not enhance participation at meetings. As such, DEC is no longer employing this technique.

DEC completed the [posting of public fishing rights](#) for approximately 1,300 miles of public fishing, helping anglers better understand the regulations, thus reducing unintentional violations and making fishing more accessible. In addition, the Bureau of Fisheries is in the process of verifying public fishing access on private lands that border managed stream reaches. Stream banks are being posted with “open for fishing” signs on those parcels that have provided permission. This new approach will help better manage angler expectations and provide anglers with confidence that they can indeed fish a stretch of stream managed for the public. This project is ongoing and more information is available online at [Inland Trout Stream Management In New York](#).

DEC has enhanced public access to information related to mining and reclamation issues. Efforts include publishing the workplan, groundwater study, and public meeting information for Long Island Mines [online](#). In addition, orphan wells data on Open Data is now updated nightly. DEC also makes mined land inspection reports available [online](#).

Since the issuance of the transparency plan, DEC released the following reports, as well as others:

- The [initial report](#) that addressed New York State’s Inactive Landfill Initiative was finalized in May 2021. The [first update](#) was issued in July 2022, and the third [Annual Report](#) was issued in July 2023.
- The water pollution control reports for the last four years are available on the DEC’s [SPDES Compliance and Enforcement webpage](#).
- DEC released the [Solid Waste Management Plan](#) in [December 2023](#), following a lengthy public involvement process that included an informational webinar and extended public comment period.
- The [interim and final reports](#) from the Catskill Strategic Planning Advisory Group (CAG) on promoting sustainable recreation in the Catskill Forest Preserve were released in January 2022 and January 2023.
- The final report of the [Adirondack Road Salt Reduction Task Force](#).
- The [2020-2022 Great Lakes Program Report](#) that highlights collaborative efforts to conserve, restore, protect, and enhance [New York’s Great Lakes](#) land and water resources.
- The State’s first-ever [statewide greenhouse gas emissions report](#) compliant with the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA).



- A report on [deer hunting by 12- and 13-year-old hunters](#).
- The New York State Ocean Acidification Task Force released its [Final Report](#).
- DEC issued the [2023 State of the Ocean Report](#).
- The Agency's Annual Report ([2022](#) is currently available; 2023 will soon be published).
- State Land Acquisition [reports](#).

## **INITIATIVES TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN 2024**

In the year ahead, DEC will continue to improve public access to information:

- Advancing technology application development that facilitates information gathering and sharing through 2024 and beyond.
- DEC, in collaboration with Sea Grant, will complete a story map to explain the regulatory process. Sea Grant recently completed the story map for the [Community Risk and Resiliency Act](#).
- DEC will also expand information available in Open Data NY related to federally funded well plugging work.
- DEC conducted a public kiosk survey, which concluded in December 2023. The results will inform the agency's development of a plan to update kiosk signage throughout the state in 2024 and beyond. In addition, DEC is currently developing a survey tool for staff to use when in the field to collect data on the status of kiosk structures and signage so DEC will have an up-to-date inventory of all current kiosk structures and signage to help prioritize enhancements.
- DEC is in the process of developing a fisheries handbook that will contain a set of guiding principles for fisheries management so the public can better understand how DEC manages the fisheries resource. The framework for the handbook is complete and includes information on DEC's mission, guiding principles, management philosophies, and protocols for interacting with the public. Work on the handbook will continue in 2024.

DEC is committed to public outreach, education, information sharing, and involvement. The efforts of the past two years demonstrate persistent improvements, as the agency dedicated personnel and money to enhance access to agency data and operations. There remains work to accomplish, and DEC looks forward to striving, as the State's motto declares, *Ever Upward!*