



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 13, 2024

“GREEN SCARF BRIGADE” SPEAKS, LEGISLATURE RESPONDS

Statement from Parks & Trails New York on ‘One-House’ FY 2025 Budget Proposals

(ALBANY, NY) – Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) celebrates vital support from the New York State Legislature for increased funding for our public lands, recognizing the critical need to invest in our beloved parks, greenway trails, and open spaces. This support for increased funding comes after more than 140 Friends Groups, environmental and public health advocates, and other representatives of the “green scarf brigade” traveled to Albany last month to make the case for increased funding to match the recent multi-year increase in parks visitation and parks-related economic activity.

We applaud the Senate for proposing a full \$250 million in annual New York Works capital funding for New York State Parks. This funding is critical to addressing the estimated \$3.5 billion backlog in State Park infrastructure needs, ensuring continued investment to provide access to the recreational and health benefits inherent in public lands for all New Yorkers. PTNY strongly urges both chambers and the Governor to come together and include \$250 million for Parks Capital in the final FY2025 New York State Budget.

We are also happy to note both the Assembly and Senate’s rejection of the proposed \$25 million cut to the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) for staffing costs to state agencies. PTNY further commends both houses for maintaining record funding levels for the Municipal Parks Grant Program, Park & Trail Partnership Grant Program, and the Connect Kids to Parks Program. We urge a rejection of cuts proposed by the Assembly to the state land infrastructure, access, and stewardship projects line, and support increasing the overall line to the \$50 million proposed by the Senate. We laud the Senate’s proposal to raise the EPF to a record \$425 million in total, and are excited to continue working towards a \$500 million EPF in the future.

Prioritization of critical parks funding from the Senate and Assembly is a clear demonstration of broad support for these investments, serving as an important reminder of how far we have come in centering the important impacts of our public green spaces. From just over a decade ago, when nearly 100 State Parks and Historic Sites were slated for closure due to budget cuts, 2023 saw record-breaking attendance of 84 million visitors to the State Park System. This totals a 40% growth in visitation over the same period, critically supported by more than \$1.5 billion invested in capital funding since 2010. These investments have had undeniable impacts on our state’s economy, as recent figures show that, economically, *New York’s public lands now rival the agricultural sector, contributing more than \$3.7 billion per year to the state’s economy*. That 10-to-1 return on investment also creates tens of thousands of jobs statewide. Parks pay off—and we must continue investing to ensure communities around the state can reap the rewards.

As the Governor and the Legislature work together on a final budget deal, we urge our leaders to provide a full \$250 million in New York Works capital funding for State Parks, \$100 million for signature Parks projects as part of the NY SWIMS initiative, at least \$400 million for the Environmental Protection Fund, and a full \$90 million for NYSDEC’s Adventure NY capital funding in addition to robust operations funding to allow for full staffing levels at NYS OPRHP and NYSDEC. We look forward to continuing to work with the Legislature and Governor to see this vision of a New York State leveraging and investing in the diverse health, economic, and environmental stewardship benefits our public lands provide realized in the final budget.

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About Parks & Trails New York:

Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) is New York's leading statewide advocate for parks and trails. Since its founding in 1985, PTNY has been fighting to improve our health, economy, and quality of life through the use and enjoyment of green space. With assistance from members, supporters, and partners from across the state, PTNY is a prominent voice for the protection and expansion of New York's magnificent state park system and multi-use trail network, including more than 1,500 miles of greenways, bike paths, and river walks. Learn more at www.ptny.org.