

THE DAILY GAZETTE

Parks investment a small price for benefit

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We were disappointed to read the March 4 editorial (“State has higher priorities for taxpayer money than parks”) which pit investment in state parks against investment in other worthy programs. On the contrary, parks — like our schools and libraries — are essential community resources and an integral part of the state’s infrastructure.

Our iconic park system is the oldest in the nation, and one of the most heavily visited, generating \$2 billion annually to the economy — a 5-to-1 return on investment — and supporting 20,000 jobs, exclusive of park employees. The tourism dollars generated by parks are critical, especially to struggling upstate economies.

Most New Yorkers don’t have the resources to belong to private recreation clubs or take expensive vacations. Parks provide affordable, close-to-home recreational and physical fitness opportunities for all New Yorkers. In addition, parks are often the first line of defense against severe weather events and play an important role in storm and flood protection.

The economic, health, and resiliency benefits parks provide don’t sound like extras to us.

Decades of underfunding combined with the age and heavy use of our park system have put tremendous stress on park infrastructure. In 2006, Parks & Trails New York released a report highlighting the many challenges facing state parks, in particular the enormous capital backlog. A 2010 agency assessment documented \$1.1 billion in health, safety and infrastructure needs in every region of the state — outdated sewer, water, and electrical systems, deteriorating bathrooms, crumbling roads, bridges and dams, historic buildings falling into disrepair.

NY Parks 2020 lays out a multi-year investment goal, including funds already invested over the past three years, and includes private philanthropy and other public monies leveraged by the state’s investment. The \$110 million proposed for this year is a fraction of the state’s overall budget — less than one-tenth of 1 percent — and a small investment, especially when you consider all the benefits parks provide.

Continuing to invest in the restoration and revitalization of New York’s 215 state parks and historic sites will enable these treasured places to more fully realize their potential as economic engines for local communities and as destinations for healthy outdoor recreation for all New Yorkers.

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