

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

April 13, 2017

Contacts:

James Meerdink, Parks & Trails New York, (608) 217-9202, jmeerdink@ptny.org

Eileen Larrabee, Open Space Institute, (518) 427-1564 x 127, elarrabee@osiny.org

Katherine McCarthy, American Heart Association, (518) 626-8759,

Katherine.McCarthy@heart.org

Melissa Abramson, REI, (914) 703-9377, mabrams@rei.com

Andrew Dupuy, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, (202) 974-5119, drew@railstotrails.org

Health, Environment, and Recreation Groups Applaud Funding for 750-mile Empire State Trail in Final NYS Budget

Historic \$200 million investment will create the nation's longest multi-use trail

ALBANY – The final New York State FY18 budget represents a major step forward for tourism, health, and recreation with the inclusion of \$200 million in landmark funding to build the nation's longest multi-use trail, the 750-mile Empire State Trail.

The budget allocates \$123 million to the Hudson River Valley Greenway Communities Council to complete the remaining 40% of the Hudson River Greenway between New York City and the Southern Adirondacks, and \$77 million to the New York Power Authority to complete the remaining 20% of the 360-mile Erie Canalway Trail between Buffalo and Albany. The funding will also create bicycle-friendly enhancements to the on-road Bike Route 9, connecting the Empire State Trail to the Canadian Border.

The project will connect a rich network of State and National Parks, Historic Sites, and cultural amenities, including the Erie Canal, Walkway Over the Hudson, Saratoga National Historical Park, the cities of Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany, and New York, and the Adirondack and Catskill Mountains.

Once complete in 2020, the Empire State Trail will add 350 miles of new multi-use trail and on-road enhancements to the State's existing network of trails and greenways, enhancing New York's appeal as a destination for outdoor recreation and heritage tourism. The Trail will also bring new recreation and outdoor opportunities to hundreds of communities and millions of New Yorkers who live along the route, contributing substantially to local economies, public health, and the State's environment.

Advocates and trail supporters have called for a connected network of trails throughout the state for decades. Besides the benefits to local communities, they've cited the significant economic impact that such a network would provide. Diverse support for a statewide trail network was a critical factor in ensuring the funding that the Governor proposed in his executive budget was included in the final budget, with New Yorkers voicing their support for the proposal at an advocacy day in Albany, at in-district visits with legislators, and through numerous petitions and social media campaigns.

"The Empire State Trail makes New York the foremost trail state in the nation. We applaud Governor Cuomo and the New York State Legislature for recognizing the role trails and outdoor recreation play in promoting healthy communities, economic development, and tourism," said **Robin Dropkin, Executive Director of Parks & Trails New York**, the leading statewide advocate for parks and trails.

Kurt Feilke, REI Retail Director for the northeast district said "The co-op is grateful to Governor Cuomo and the State Legislature for funding this historic opportunity. By adding 350 more miles of multi-use trail and road enhancements to the Empire State Trail, New York will be creating new journeys for the most adventurous cyclists, plus the chance for local runners, walkers and cyclists to just get outside. At REI, we say that a life outdoors is a life well lived. The State is making it easier for all its citizens to enjoy the outdoors, to live healthier lifestyles, to have fun with friends and family. The communities and businesses near the trail will be stronger too. Well done."

"The Empire State Trail will be a nationally significant trail that will yield economic, health, and transportation improvements for New Yorkers. The benefits of connecting trails from urban centers to rural communities are many; closing trail gaps and completing networks create new pathways for people to get to work, school, and community amenities" said **Tom Sexton, Northeast Regional Director, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy**.

"We want to thank Gov. Cuomo for proposing the Empire State Trail, and Senate Leader John Flanagan and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie for making the trail a reality," said **Bob Elling, paramedic and chair of the New York State Advocacy Committee of the American Heart Association**. "Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of all Americans, and stroke is No. 5. Exercise is a great way to prevent both heart disease and stroke, and the Empire State Trail will provide a safe and scenic way for many New Yorkers to get out and improve their health."

"OSI is grateful to the Governor Cuomo and legislature, and thrilled to see the Empire State Trail advance," said **Erik Kulleseid, Senior Vice President at the Open Space Institute**. "We anticipate an explosion in trail building across the state as communities link up and more and more people lace up their sneakers and set out to explore the natural beauty of New York State."

"The Empire State Trail is a success in-the-making for the Governor and Legislature, and we congratulate them for their leadership in securing funding for completing the trail in the

recently-adopted state budget. Increasingly, New Yorkers and visitors to our state are enjoying active lifestyles and exploring our rich cultural and small-town attractions. The trail will capitalize on these trends to deliver economic and quality of life investments," said **Andy Bicking, Director of Public Policy for the environmental group Scenic Hudson.**

Trail groups and advocates look forward to assisting the Governor, the Legislature and the various state agencies responsible for developing the Empire State Trail by promoting use of the system, creating helpful resources and programming that encourage wider use, and helping local communities to make connections to and benefit from the statewide route.

###