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PARKS ADVOCACY GROUPS RELEASE PROPOSAL TO REVITALIZE UNDERFUNDED STATE PARK SYSTEM

Report suggests steps to restore funding and protect New York state parks

NEW YORK, NY — December 2, 2010 — Repeated budget cuts have threatened New York’s unparalleled inventory of state parks, leaving unmet maintenance needs that jeopardize the almost \$2 billion in economic activity the facilities provide to local communities, according to a report issued jointly today by the Alliance for New York State Parks and Parks & Trails New York.

The report calls for “strategic increases” to the budget for the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), both on the operating and the capital sides of the budget, and the establishment of a dedicated on-going revenue stream to ensure the continued viability of the system.

The report, entitled “*Protect Their Future: New York’s State Parks in Crisis*,” was issued jointly by the Alliance, a new initiative of the Open Space Institute created to protect and enhance New York’s parks, and Parks & Trails New York, a leading state parks advocacy group for more than 25 years. It condenses a fall 2010 analysis of system-wide maintenance needs, as well as the recent history of parks funding in New York, and concludes that—even as it’s being reported that state officials are again considering park closings—three actions are needed to protect and revitalize New York’s state parks:

- Restore funding for park operations by making strategic increases to the New York Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation’s (OPRHP) budget, allowing the agency to perform critical park functions.
- Increase capital funding and restore OPRHP sites by investing \$1 billion over the next decade to repair the park system’s deteriorated facilities and to address pressing safety issues.
- Ensure state parks’ viability for the future by establishing a new, dedicated funding stream for the park system.

The recommendations in the study complement Governor-elect Cuomo's "Cleaner, Greener New York Plan," which pledges to keep state parks and historic sites open, recognizing them as economic drivers, particularly upstate.

"These are tough but realistic proposals that, if implemented, will not only rejuvenate our park system but will serve as catalysts for local economies statewide," said Carol Ash, who resigned recently after four years as OPRHP commissioner and is now serving as an advisor to the Alliance. "These facilities generate almost \$2 billion of spending each year, and as maintenance and upkeep needs are addressed, that number will only rise."

The 12-page report traces OPRHP funding trends over the past 20 years—focusing in particular on the last two years, which saw the office reeling from \$35 million in budget cuts while visitorship at the state's 178 parks and 35 historic sites remained strong and even increased 3.5 percent this summer. Before a last-minute infusion of state funding this spring, harsher cuts would have likely led to cutbacks to more than 40 percent of the system, including the closure of dozens of parks for the first time since New York State created the nation's first state park 125 years ago.

"New Yorkers love and need their parks, as demonstrated by the outcry heard from every corner of the state last summer in response to the threatened park closures," said Robin Dropkin, Parks & Trails New York's executive director. "They're also willing to roll up their sleeves for them through a growing network of park friends groups. The three-fold plan outlined in the report today will give New Yorkers a revitalized, sustainable park system for generations to come, and we look forward to working with the new administration to realize this plan."

The two groups will use the report as a guide as they advocate for increased parks funding in the upcoming legislative session.

"New York's parks are among the best in the country, but they're sorely in need," said Erik Kulleseid, the director of the Alliance. "This report highlights a process by which our parks system can be restored, and the Alliance intends to partner with the Cuomo administration to help implement this shared vision."

The full report can be found at both: <http://www.allnysparks.org/2010report.pdf> and www.ptny.org/pdfs/advocacy/parkreport2011.pdf

The Alliance for New York State Parks is an initiative founded in 2010 with the mission of protecting and enhancing New York's state parks and historic sites for present and future generations. The Alliance advocates for New York's state park system directly and by working to build an organized and effective constituency for parks. It also assists the system by securing public and private financial support. The Alliance is a program of the Open Space Institute.

*Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) has been the state's leading advocate for parks and trails for more than 25 years. Through its work with friends groups and grassroots constituencies and reports such as **Parks at a Turning Point** and **The NYS Park System: an Economic Asset to the Empire State**, PTNY has directed public attention to New York's chronically underfunded state parks and documented the system's \$2 billion value to the state. In 2010, PTNY's grassroots organizing campaign was instrumental in keeping all parks open in the face of severe proposed budget cuts.*