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State should invest in public parks, trails

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Gov. David Paterson missed an opportunity in his State of the State address to set an environmental agenda that would create jobs and protect our state's parks, trails and green spaces.

An investment in public parks, trails and green spaces not only helps the environment, public well being and beauty of our state, but creates economic benefits as well. The New York State Park system generates \$1.9 billion for private businesses around its parks and supports 20,000 jobs. The state enjoys \$5 in benefits for every \$1 it invests in its parks. A commitment by Paterson to our park system makes complete fiscal sense, and would likely enhance our economic recovery—especially in upstate New York, home to most of our state parks.

The State Park system is currently teetering at the edge of park closures. Over the last 18 months, the State Park Department's budget has been cut by 25 percent and the agency has lost nearly 1,000 permanent and seasonal staff. If the state continues reducing State Park's budget by another 5 percent to 10 percent, it will have no choice but to close parks—an unprecedented and tragic step in our state's history. In order to preserve and protect our parks, the governor and the Legislature must maintain 2009-10 levels of funding to state parks.

Shawn P. McConnell

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