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State park supporters look to 2011

By: Erin Vannella

They fought hard to keep them open this summer. Now state park supporters are dropping hints to campaigning politicians about next year. Please keep our parks open. We'll accept cash. Our Erin Vannella reports.

VOORHEESVILLE, N.Y. -- "It's just a gorgeous fall day so we thought we'd take advantage of the nice weather and come out. It's free and it's fun you know," said Rotterdam resident Alexa Reyes.

New York's state parks shine all signs of success. Attendance is up 3.5 percent for the summer, but the good times may be changing with the leaves.

"We think the end is here," said Parks and Trails New York Executive Director, Robin Dropkin. "There cannot be any more cuts."

2011 state budget prospects are dim says Dropkin, and with parks having expanded by 25 percent while the budget decreased 18 percent, a mere desire to keep parks open won't be enough. They need money.

"We are advocating that at the least, the park budget just stay flat," said Dropkin. "Right now parks is operating with 1400 fewer maintenance people, engineers, life guards, and park police than they were a couple years ago."

Not to mention, a healthy park system helps itself. Supporters say the parks generate close to a billion dollars in revenue every year.

"A report that came out last year showed that there was actually a five to one return on investment," said Dropkin. "For every dollar the state invests, it gets back five dollars in economic activity."

So why not invest in nature, ask park go-er's. There's nothing to lose.

"I would be really disappointed," said Reyes. "We go to parks all the time even if we have to drive an hour or two and go to several different ones. It's just a nice thing to do."

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