

# Records Show Most New York State Parks Lose Money

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As the state moves forward on closing state parks this year, records show that most of them are money losers and only about two dozen turn a profit each year.

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ALBANY \_ As the state moves forward on [closing state parks this year](#), records show that most of them are money losers and only about two dozen turn a profit each year.

Typically, a park that loses money doesn't have much impact on the state's budgeting: Some that make money offset the losses of the others, or the money is made up through general appropriations in the state budget.

But state officials have had to take a closer look at which parks are profitable and which ones are drains on state finances amid New York's fiscal downturn.

Because of funding cuts, the state Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation and Gov. David Paterson have proposed the massive closure of 55 parks and historical sites -- the first time in New York history a state park would be shuttered.

State officials said the revenue-generating ability of each park was a factor in coming up with the closure list. The 125-year-old park system is the oldest in the nation with 178 parks and 35 historic sites.

"We're in the business of running parks not closing parks," said parks spokeswoman Eileen Larrabee, but she said parks' finances was one of the factors in deciding which ones to recommend closing.

For the 163 state parks that had revenue figures, they lost nearly \$29 million in the 2008-09 fiscal year, which was the latest data available. In all, 23 of them earned a profit, the biggest being at Beth Page in Long Island, with a \$3.5 million profit, and Niagara Falls State Park, with a \$2.7 million profit. Letchworth State Park in the Finger Lakes made a slight profit of about \$175,000, records show.

Six state parks, however, lost more than \$1 million each.

The biggest deficit was at the Riverbank State Park in New York City with a \$5.4 million loss and Harriman State Park in Rockland/Orange counties with a \$1.7 million loss. Jones Beach in Long Island lost \$1.4 million and Earl W. Brydges Art Park in the Niagara region lost \$1 million.

The state has proposed some service cuts or facility closures at many of the parks that have lost money.

The Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation has had its budget slashed about 40 percent over the past two years, leaving it with a budget of about \$185 million. State officials estimate it would cost about \$6 million to keep the 55 parks and historical sites open this year - a small amount compared to the state's \$136 billion budget.

Lawmakers have vowed to restore the money to keep the parks open, but without a budget deal, parks officials are moving forward with the closure plans. They said parks set for closure will have little maintenance and are being shuttered.

Parks supporters said that even if some parks lose money, the parks make up the difference through the economic benefit they bring the regions in which they are located. A recent study conducted on behalf of parks advocates showed that every dollar invested in parks and historic sites generates \$5 in economic activity. In 2008, they generated \$1.9 billion in economic activity, the study contended.

"They may not make the money back to the state, but they certainly make the money back to our general economy in the sense of bringing in visitors and tourists," said Robin Dropkin, executive director of Parks & Trails New York, a statewide advocacy organization.

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