



STATE BUDGET: Paterson plan could hit parks hard

January 19, 2010 11:29 pm

— Gov. Paterson’s proposed budget cuts are expected to force the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation to close a number of parks across the state.

“There will be a serious impact on (state) parks but there has not yet been a determination of how many or which specific parks or historic sites will be affected,” a state parks spokesman said Tuesday.

Shawn McConnell, director of Campaign for Parks, an advocacy group, said park closings will exacerbate the state’s economic woes. He cited a 2009 report that showed the statewide parks system generating \$1.9 billion for private businesses and supporting 20,000 jobs. It was reported earlier that the state received \$5 in benefits for every \$1 it invests in its parks, McConnell added.

“The state parks department will have to decide how many parks to close, and which ones. But with a cut in funding of this magnitude, we know for certain there will be significant closings,” said Robin Dropkin, executive director of Parks & Trails New York.

Mark Thomas, western district director for the regional parks, announced Dec. 17 that the state parks’ budget had been cut 25 percent, resulting in the loss of nearly 1,000 permanent and seasonal staff.

“Unless things change, it will be tough to open all our parks (next season),” Thomas told the regional commission.

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