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Bonds for state parks

LI jewels need this funding authorized

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Time is wearing away at Long Island's state parks. The state has dealt with the problem of grass poking through parking lots at Sunken Meadow. But such items as the water tower at Jones Beach and a bridge at Belmont Lake still need work. So a squeeze on the money for maintaining and improving parks is worrisome. The legislature has to help.

Our parks benefit us bountifully. A new report by Parks & Trails New York, an advocacy organization, shows that Island parks lead those in all the other regions of the state in numbers of visitors and state dollars spent on the parks. Across New York, they account for 20,000 jobs - nearly 4,000 here on Long Island - and that doesn't include park employees.

That's one strong argument for maintaining the state's investment. The other is that in a recession, more than ever, we need the inexpensive uplift parks can provide. But decreased spending equals physical decline of the facilities. And new parks need cash to develop.

The state's Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has a list of \$650 million in capital needs - \$100 million of that ready for action now. Last year, the state made a start by making its biggest-ever parks investment. Now the budget crisis is endangering that progress.

This year's capital spending was already scheduled to be more modest, even before the elimination of \$19 million that was to have come from the embattled Environmental Protection Fund. And last year's \$75.5 million in bonds is pretty much gone. So the office needs the legislature to authorize a \$40-million bond issue, to keep the park-saving momentum of last year from vanishing. Our parks are too valuable in too many ways to be allowed to decline.

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