



01/06/2009

## State Park opens

By KRISTIN SHAW

**SCHODACK—With baby Jeremy riding comfortably in his papoose, resident Terry Field said Sunday that he is thrilled to be able to walk in the park with his family. Ten weeks after Schodack Island State Park was closed due to state budget cuts, the park on Route 9J reopened Tuesday, December 30.**

"When I heard the park was closing, I couldn't believe it. It's such a great place to be all year round," Mr. Field told *The Independent*. "We love coming during all the different seasons just to relax and hang out. It's very peaceful. I'm glad the state and the town were able to work together to get this park open again."

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and the town reached a partnership agreement to reopen the park on a limited basis for passive recreation during the winter season. The Town Board approved the cooperative agreement, reached with the participation of Rensselaer County and the Village of Castleton-on-Hudson.

The conditions permit public access seven days a week from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. With the help of local volunteers, the town will assume responsibility for monitoring activities there during the day, locking the park each night, and plowing the roads in the event of snow and ice. The park will not be staffed and the buildings, including restrooms, will remain closed and winterized, but the park will be accessible for hiking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.

"It is particularly gratifying to see groups and individuals coming together for their community in these challenging economic times," said Carol Ash, state parks commissioner. "I am grateful to Beth Secor, the town of Schodack and the park volunteers who are responding to this local need in an innovative way."

Supervisor Secor said that Schodack park is one of the most popular recreational facilities in town. "I'd like to thank our local residents who have strongly advocated for reopening the park and willingly volunteered to assist with its operation," she said.

The agreement will remain in effect until the state resumes full management of the park in the spring of 2009.

Schodack Island was one of five State Parks and State Historic Sites in the Saratoga/Capital District Region that experienced reductions in services as part of a statewide fiscal austerity plan. It has been closed to the public since Columbus Day.

County legislators Alex Shannon and Martin Reid are two of the many county lawmakers who fought to reopen the park, saying it is popular throughout the year and important to local residents. The state had closed the park with little notice, citing a shortfall of state finances, prompting an outcry from residents and local elected officials. Mr. Reid and Mr. Shannon sponsored resolutions calling for the reopening of the park, saying the sudden closure was unfair to residents.

They attended a park volunteer education program Monday, December 29 at the town hall. About 30 people attended the meeting. The two legislators plan on volunteering and helping efforts to keep the park open.

While welcoming the reopening of the park with volunteers, both legislators have said state funds will still be needed to maintain the park and have asked the state to update residents on whether state funds will be made available.

A report by the non-partisan advocacy group Parks & Trails New York notes that general operating funds for state parks will remain below 2008 budgeted levels in the proposed 2009 budget. The capital fund for state parks will be dramatically reduced under the proposed 2009 budget.

The brunt of the cuts in operating hours for state parks is expected to continue to be felt in upstate New York. Mr. Shannon and Mr. Reid have noted their concern about the impact of the park closures on the upstate region, as families will need inexpensive recreational sources close to home.

This is noted by the trail group in a report on the impact of the proposed budget at [www.ptny.org](http://www.ptny.org)

While the volunteer effort will help reopen the Schodack park, some state funds will be needed for maintenance during 2009.

"It would be a real disappointment if the state did not restore funding for Schodack Island State Park," said Mr. Reid.

To contact reporter Kristin Shaw email [kshaw@IndeNews.com](mailto:kshaw@IndeNews.com)