

# Study: state parks are substantial asset

**ECONOMIC IMPACT:** Thousand Islands region spurs \$63m in spending, employs 882 people

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ALBANY — A new study prepared for a park advocacy group calls New York's state park system "a valuable economic asset to the Empire State."



In the Thousand Islands region of the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, state parks employ 882 people while generating \$63 million in local spending.

There are 15 state parks in Jefferson County, seven in St. Lawrence County, and one in Lewis County.

"Clearly, the impact of the state park system on New York's economy is sizable — the benefits exceed the direct costs of maintaining the state parks many times over," the report states. "The benefit-to-cost ratio is more than 5-to-1 — more than \$5 in benefits for every \$1 in costs."

Statewide, the report said state parks are responsible for more than 20,000 jobs and in excess of \$1.94 billion in "output and sales for private businesses."

"New York's state park system produces substantial revenue for New York's businesses and jobs for New Yorkers," said Robin Dropkin, executive director of Parks and Trails New York, in a press release. "The governor and Legislature should reinvest in our state parks to put money in New Yorkers' pockets today and for the state's economic future."

During the 2007-08 season, the Thousand Islands region's parks hosted an estimated 1.72 million

visitors. Of these, 21.4 percent were estimated to be non-local. The report estimates tourists spent \$12.5 million to \$25.7 million in "visitor expenditures," which include things such as groceries, gasoline, lodging and spending in bars and restaurants. The park system's budget for 2008-09 totaled \$340.7 million, including operating expenses of \$253.1 million and capital costs of \$87.6 million. The Thousand Island region's portion totaled \$17.0 million, divided between capital costs of \$6.1 million and operating expenses of \$10.9 million.

The region's operating expenditures of almost \$11 million supported 244 jobs, while stimulating \$16 million in business sales and \$4.4 million in employment income. The region's capital costs of slightly more than \$6 million supported 87 jobs, while boosting \$9.1 billion in business activity along with \$2.9 million in employment income.

The Office of Parks reported Friday that there already were more than 45,300 advance reservations for campsites, cabins and cottages at parks across the state. Because people are vacationing closer to home as the recession continues, Ms. Dropkin said, state parks need continued funding for capital projects.

"(Parks) has more than \$100 million worth of shovel-ready revitalization projects ready to go, including health and safety projects such as dam and sewage system repair, road construction and maintenance, facility refurbishment, and habitat restoration," she said. "Unfortunately, there is no federal stimulus money for state parks. Therefore we call on the state to reinvest in our state parks, put money into our communities, put New Yorkers to work and restore our parks for our children and grandchildren to enjoy."

Eileen Larrabee, spokeswoman for the Office of Parks, listed a few such projects in the north country. They include:

- \$420,000 for Westcott Beach to improve the drinking water system.
- \$1 million for Wellesley Island to rehabilitate park roadways and fix playgrounds.
- \$350,000 for Whetstone Gulf to rehabilitate an aging campground comfort station.

- \$400,000 for Keewaydin to rehabilitate an **aging campground comfort station**.

- \$80,000 for Keewaydin to repair a **failing marina bulkhead**.

The full report, prepared by the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst for the group Parks and Trails New York, is available online.

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Parks and Trails New York: [www.ptny.org](http://www.ptny.org)