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New report cites need to close gaps in Canalway Trail to benefit upstate economy

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ALBANY, N.Y. – As the bicycling season winds down, the Canalway Trails Association New York (CTANY) says that progress has been made this year toward completing the 360-mile Erie Canalway Trail from Buffalo to Albany, but that more effort is needed to fill critical gaps in the trail before it can reach its full potential as a major tourism destination and local community resource.

CTANY, in collaboration with Parks & Trails New York, has released *Closing the Gaps: A Progress Report on the Erie Canalway Trail*, which summarizes the status of efforts to complete the longest multi-use trail in the country, including recent progress and current obstacles to closing the remaining gaps. The 2010 report is the first of what will become an annual update on progress and remaining gaps that CTANY hopes will help focus attention on the importance of finishing the trail.

Closing the Gaps presents several facts about the Erie Canalway Trail, including the following.

The trail is now about 75% complete as an off-road path.

Funding became available this year for two sections of trail: Newark to Lyons (Wayne County) and through the City of Rome (Oneida County), totaling approximately 10 miles.

Six major gaps in the trail remain to be filled. These are between Amherst and Lockport (Niagara County; 6 mi.), Lyons to Port Byron (Wayne, Seneca and Cayuga Counties; 30 mi.); Camillus to DeWitt (through Syracuse; 12 mi.); Utica to Little Falls (Oneida and Herkimer Counties; 20 mi.); Amsterdam to Rotterdam Jct. (Montgomery and Schenectady Counties; 7 mi.); and from part way through Cohoes to Watervliet via Green Island (Albany County; 5 mi.). While the cost of completing these gaps is estimated at approximately \$50 million, drawing 100,000 multi-day bicycle tourists annually could contribute \$120 million per year to the upstate economy. The Katy Trail in Missouri, one of the oldest long-distance trails, attracts 350,000 bicyclists per year; the Erie Canalway Trail has the drawing power to exceed that. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, in collaboration with Parks & Trails New York and the NYS Canal Corporation, convened a roundtable discussion in September to consider ways to complete the

trail from Utica eastward. The response among municipal, county and state officials and representatives of the business and not-for-profit sectors was so positive that she plans to hold addition sessions on other parts of the trail corridor.

Alan Vincent, president of CTANY, said, "We believe that completion of the Erie Canalway Trail not only will enhance the quality of life in communities across the state but will make the trail a world-class tourism attraction that, with a rather modest investment, will help revitalize villages, towns and cities all along the canal corridor. We hope that this report will help our elected leaders realize that closing the gaps in the trail is a vital part of an upstate New York economic development solution."

Robin Dropkin, executive director of Parks & Trails New York, said, "The Erie Canal Corridor has all the right ingredients to become an international bicycle touring destination: picturesque villages, impressive historic sites and museums, charming B&B's and inns, ample campgrounds, and country stores and farm stands but what it lacks is a trail that is fully complete. Finishing the Canalway Trail will create jobs while making a valuable investment in the infrastructure of communities Upstate."

"With seventy-five percent of the Erie Canalway Trail from Buffalo to Albany now complete it is already a long distance touring destination," said New York State Canal Corporation Director Carmella R. Mantello. "Completing the remaining gaps in the trail will make it one of the longest multi-use trails in the country, thereby expanding the economic, health and quality of life benefits the trail already provides to Canal communities."

The full *Closing the Gaps: A Progress Report on the Erie Canalway Trail* is available on [the Parks & Trails New York website](#)