New Report Touts Economic Importance
of Erie Canalway Trail

—1.6 million visits generate $253 million in economic impact—

Parks & Trails New York (PTNY), the state’s leading not-for-profit park and trail advocacy organization, today announced the release of its new report, The Economic Impact of the Erie Canalway Trail: An Assessment and User Profile of New York’s Longest Multi-use Trail. This first comprehensive study of the Erie Canalway Trail (ECT) visitor demonstrates an annual trail traffic volume of more than 1.58 million visits per year, which generates an economic impact of approximately $253 million and supports 3,440 jobs in the local economies within the trail corridor.

The study, which was funded in part through grants from the New York State Canal Corporation and the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, confirms that overnight stays have a major impact on visitor spending. While overnight visitors to the ECT constitute only 18.25% of the total volume of visits, they generate 84% of overall spending.

The ECT extends 360 miles through 14 New York State counties between Albany and Buffalo. Presently, the ECT is more than 75% complete as an off-road trail – 277 miles are open for public use. In addition to providing a venue for a wide variety of recreational activities – walking, jogging, bicycling, bird watching, pet walking, cross-country skiing and, in some locations, snowmobiling and roller blading – the ECT also offers picnic areas and opportunities to eat, stay, shop, and visit attractions in the hundreds of historic towns and villages along its length.
“During our many years working with the NYS Canal Corporation, the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, and local governments to develop and promote the Erie Canalway Trail, we gathered much anecdotal evidence of the trail’s economic benefits, but now we have the data to back it up. We hope these results will serve as a catalyst for additional efforts to promote this world-class trail that plays such an integral role in the cultural and economic fabric of more than 200 communities in Upstate New York, said Parks & Trails New York Executive Director Robin Dropkin. “We are especially grateful for the strong partnership and financial support of the Canal Corporation and Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, which helped to make this study possible,”

“New York State’s Canal system and the Erie Canalway Trail are vital economic engines for upstate New York and we are very appreciative of the support Governor Cuomo has provided in our efforts to promote them,” said Canal Corporation Director Brian U. Stratton. “Not only does the iconic Canal corridor generate hundreds of millions of dollars in tourism spending each year, but our Canals drive more than $6.2 billion in non-tourism economic activity across the state. This study helps further strengthen the economic importance of the Canal system and help bolster the communities that line its shores.”

Bob Radliff, Director of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, said, "Having hard data that shows the Canalway Trail's positive economic impact is vital. We are proud that our support for this study will fuel continued efforts to unleash the trail’s full potential for millions of Upstate NY residents who live, work and play in more than 230 communities along the way."

Kenneth Adams, Empire State Development President, CEO & Commissioner, said, “The Erie Canalway Trail is one of New York State’s unique and treasured assets and the new Parks & Trails New York report underscores its importance in attracting visitors and boosting the local economy. This report is valuable for how it helps us better understand the economic impact on the State in both visitor spending and job creation, providing our Division of Tourism with much needed insight to further promote this popular attraction.”

“The Erie Canal Corridor is one of America’s richest treasures, and holds enormous potential that we are still unlocking,” U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand said. “As shown from this report, the Erie Canal continues to fuel our economy and provide New Yorkers with miles of adventure and endless recreation. As New York’s first Senator from upstate in nearly 40 years, I will always
NYS Senator Betty Little, Chair of the Senate Committee on Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks and Recreation, said, “In my opinion, the most impressive fact learned through the study is the economic impact of the overnight visits. The trail is a tremendous resource for many, a recreational asset offering something for users of all ages and physical ability and interests. Most of the users live close to the trail but it is the vacationers who drive the economic impact so important to the local communities and area businesses. With more marketing, that impact would surely grow.”

Belinda McElroy, General Administrator of the Empire State Bed & Breakfast Association, said “ESBBA is thrilled to witness the release of PTNY’s Erie Canalway Trail Economic Impact Study. Bed & breakfast owners along the Canalway Trail have long benefited from the business the visitors bring. Being able to quantify the impact that the trail makes on our local communities, and knowing the profiles and spending habits of trail visitors, will bring significant business benefits to bed & breakfasts and other lodging businesses along the trail’s route.”

Who visits the Erie Canalway Trail?
Data from the study’s trail user surveys reveals much about the demographics and preferences of Erie Canalway Trail visitors that can aid tourism officials, government leaders, and local businesses in their marketing, promotion and economic development efforts.

Typical Trail User
Typical users of the ECT are employed members of Generation X (ages 30-49) who are slightly more likely to be male than female. Half of those surveyed said they live within five miles of the trail. A large number of trail visitors bicycle on the trail for health and fitness for less than an hour at least once a week. They are interested in the history of the canal and credit the trail for having a positive effect on their well-being.

Typical Erie Canalway Trail Vacationer
Only 22% of those surveyed on the Erie Canalway Trail indicated they were vacationing. Yet, because most of these vacationers stay overnight, they have a major economic impact. Typical trail vacationers are affluent, highly educated, employed Baby Boomers who live outside the ECT region and visit the trail to bicycle with one to three others for more than two hours. Almost
70% are male. The trail and the opportunity to bicycle and view the scenery attract them to the area.

“PTNY will use the study results to advance its ongoing efforts to “Close the Gaps” and complete the remaining 83 miles of the ECT. The data will also inform PTNY’s efforts to market the Erie Canalway Trail to the national and international adventure traveler and cycling tourist,” said Dropkin.

Quantitative and qualitative research for the study was conducted for Parks & Trails New York by Paul A. Scipione, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus and Director of the Survey/Research Center at the State University of New York at Geneseo’s Jones School of Business. Results are based on trail counts and more than 500 user surveys undertaken by SUNY Geneseo students at multiple locations along the 360-mile trail from June to September 2012, as well as surveys of travel and tourism officials and owners of businesses located no more than one mile from the ECT.

Link to Executive Summary.
Link to Full Report.

Parks & Trails New York is the leading statewide nonprofit organization, working since 1985 to preserve and enhance a network of parks, trails and greenways for all New Yorkers for generations to come. PTNY actively promotes the Canalway Trail through its annual Cycling the Erie Canal bike tour, guidebook, and website. PTNY also works with local business owners and elected officials to attract and meet the needs of bicycle tourists through its Bicyclists Bring Business workshops and handbook. Learn more at www.ptny.org.

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