



Kudos to governor for focus on parks and the outdoors in 2012-2013 budget

New York's state park system is getting a much-needed boost from Governor Cuomo. As promised in his State of the State address, the Governor's proposed 2012-2013 Executive Budget includes \$89 million for infrastructure improvements at 48 state parks and historic sites. These improvements are part of the new New York Works Fund to address the state's aging infrastructure.

"Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) applauds the Governor for making this smart investment in our state park system and recognizing the strong connection between economic vitality and outdoor recreational opportunities," said Robin Dropkin, PTNY Executive Director.

Outdoor recreation is a major component of New York State's economy, contributing \$11.3 billion to the state's tourism economy each year—over 25 percent of the state's total tourism industry—according to a 2010 report by the New York State Comptroller's Office.

PTNY's 2009 report, *The NYS Park System: An Economic Asset to the Empire State*, showed that the state park system annually contributes \$1.9 billion to the state economy, a 5 to 1 return.

Despite our park system's importance to the state's economy and New York's legacy as a leader in parks and conservation, our state parks remain chronically underfunded. While the most visible threat to the park system came in 2010, when 88 parks and historic sites were threatened with closure, the real long-term threat may very well be the park system's crumbling infrastructure.

The Parks Agency estimates the capital backlog at \$1 billion. This includes critical safety repairs such as rehabilitating dams, replacing aging water and sewer lines, and bringing electrical systems into compliance with fire codes.

The proposed budget calls for a 2.5% decrease in the parks operating budget, similar to other agencies. However, we must not forget the parks operations budget is down 22% from a few years ago, which has already translated into less maintenance and reduced hours and services.

The infusion of capital funding to address critical infrastructure needs in the state park system will help ensure New York's parks and conservation legacy remains intact. Investing in our state park system must be a part of any effort to make New York's economy sustainable and create jobs.