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Parks & Trails New York
Preliminary Comments on the Development
Of the Master Plan
For Jamesport State Park Preserve
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Please accept the following comments from Parks & Trails New York on the development of the master plan for the Jamesport State Park and Preserve.

Parks & Trails New York commends Commissioner Ash and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) for undertaking a concerted effort to address the master plan backlog that currently exists in the State Park System. By proposing to complete five master plans in each of the next five years, OPRHP is undertaking an aggressive planning campaign that will help ensure the health and vitality of the State Park System for future generations. We also applaud Governor Paterson, the State Senate and State Assembly for their leadership in providing the largest infusion of capital funding in the history of OPRHP, as well as much needed additional staff for the agency, which includes the planners and biologists required to take on the ambitious master planning schedule.

At the recent public information meeting on the development of the master plan for the Jamesport State Park and Preserve, OPRHP outlined a list of priority themes and initiatives that have been developed to guide the agency's decision making as the master planning process moves forward. Among those priority themes are: Revitalizing our Parks and Historic Sites, Natural Resource Stewardship and Interpretation, Creating Connections and Sustainability. Parks & Trails New York agrees with OPRHP's assessment of the priority issues that must be addressed, not only in the master plan for the Jamesport State Park and Preserve, but in every master plan the agency develops. We also recognize that one of OPRHP's greatest challenges is balancing the stewardship of our natural resources with providing opportunities for a wide range of recreational activities. We believe, however, when developing a master plan, particularly for a State Park and Preserve, that responsible stewardship of our natural resources must be OPRHP's primary concern.

The designation as a State Park Preserve is an indication that Jamesport is an extraordinary holding among the many natural treasures that make up the New York State Park System. This special designation requires that an added degree of care be taken when developing a master plan. OPRHP must ensure that each of the Park's resources are managed in a way that will protect and preserve

them for generations to come as required by Article 20 of New York's Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation law (PRHPL) – the law governing State Park Preserves.

The information packet distributed by OPRHP at the public information meeting contains a good summary of the characteristics of the Jamesport State Park and Preserve (hereinafter the Park) and the issues of concern that planners must address in the master plan. Parks & Trails New York shares many of the same concerns, and offers the following recommendations.

Natural Resources – The designation of the Park as a Park Preserve under Article 20 of the PRHPL includes several oversight responsibilities. Among these responsibilities are maintaining the integrity of park land, flora, fauna, and scenic vistas and providing for the management of all unique, rare, threatened or endangered species of flora and fauna within the Park. As mentioned in the information packet, a 2004 study by the New York Natural Heritage Program identified 16 different ecological communities and one endangered species, the Piping Plover. Although the 2004 survey did not identify any rare plant species, based on habitat characteristics there is the possibility that some rare plants may be present. Parks & Trails New York recommends further investigation to establish an accurate assessment of plant species located within the Park

The Natural Heritage Program study also identified Hallock's Pond as the most noteworthy natural resource in the Park, having been tentatively classified as a coastal pond. There is a chance, however, that Hallock's Pond may actually be a coastal plain pond, a rare occurrence.

The master plan being developed for the Park must include specific provisions to ensure the protection and preservation of the Park's flora and fauna as well as the freshwater ponds and Howell's spring located within the Park's boundaries. The plan should also include provisions to eradicate or manage invasive species, both terrestrial and aquatic, in a way that will prevent or control their encroachment into other areas of the Park.

Interpretation/Education – With people spending less time outdoors in their formative years it becomes increasingly important that the stewards of our natural resources provide education and guidance to the public as to how we can best protect and enjoy our environment. All master plans for State Parks should address how visitors will be educated about the features of the park that make it special. This can include signage, interactive displays, or a nature center. The master plan should also provide opportunities for education and interpretation of the natural world as a whole, a big picture approach to learning about the environment and global environmental issues.

Interpretation and education are particularly important in the Park Preserve setting. Once again, because of the Park's designation as a Park and Preserve there are additional requirements that must be met to comply with PRHPL Article 20. Namely, providing personnel trained in the natural sciences to staff the Park and manage educational and scientific programs within the Park, and establishing public environmental education classes to be conducted by naturalists in cooperation with other governmental agencies. Parks & Trails New York strongly supports staffing Jamesport State Park and Preserve with personnel trained in the natural sciences and education and further supports OPRHP's cooperation with other agencies to ensure that the public has the opportunity for meaningful educational experiences while visiting the Park.

Connections – Parks & Trails New York urges OPRHP to continue its campaign to acquire conservation easements on lands abutting or near the Park. We also recommend exploring the

possibility of creating links between any multi-use trails that may be created in the Park and the surrounding lands that are currently subject to conservation easements.

Recreation - Parks & Trails New York concurs with the OPRHP's decision to designate multi-use trails, beach access and other passive activities such as birding and sightseeing as the initial recreational activities allowed in the Park. We urge OPRHP to develop within the master plan a recreational use plan that is in accord with the Park's designation as a Park and Preserve.

Infrastructure –As is the case at many, if not all, of the state's 213 State Parks and Historic Sites, there will be challenges in the area of infrastructure revitalization at Jamesport. As OPRHP has embarked on a multi-year program to overcome its backlog of capital projects and revitalize the State Park System, it is imperative that the Plan for Jamesport include an accurate assessment of all of the infrastructure needs in the Park including buildings, roads, bridges, water systems (both drinking and sewer) and any other man made improvements in the Park. The more hard evidence the agency can present to the public, the Governor and the Legislature regarding capital needs, the more likely it will be that the necessary capital funding will be provided in future state budgets. Parks & Trails New York also recommends that when assessing the infrastructure needs of not only Jamesport State Park Preserve, but all State Parks for which master plans are being developed, that consideration be given to the re-use and retro-fitting of existing structures as a way of keeping capital costs down.

Sustainability – The principles of sustainability should be incorporated into every component of the Plan. This includes employing sustainable building practices that conform to the requirements for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification for new buildings, and the use of energy conservation practices in existing buildings. The master plan should also provide for the use of energy efficient lighting and alternative fuel vehicles wherever possible. Finally, the master plan should evaluate the use, if any, of chemicals on the Park's grounds to determine if less toxic, yet effective, means of weed and pest control may be used.

Conclusion – Parks & Trails New York appreciates the opportunity to submit comments early in the master planning process. We look forward to working with OPRHP on this and many other projects. And, we look forward to the release of the Draft Master Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Jamesport State Park and Preserve.