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STATEMENT FROM PARKS & TRAILS NEW YORK ON PARKS BUDGET IN FY 2025 STATE BUDGET PROPOSAL

(ALBANY, NY) - Governor Kathy Hochul's proposed FY 2025 Executive Budget seeks to provide a necessary increase in funding for parks and public lands, but fails to rise to the level needed while simultaneously cutting resources for vital programs. As New York celebrates the Centennial of our State Park System in 2024, it is imperative we continue to invest in our beloved parks, greenway trails, and open spaces, which provide the critical infrastructure necessary to meet the rising demand for public green spaces along with the expansive health, economic, and climate mitigation benefits they provide.

The Governor's Executive Budget maintains a baseline of \$200 million for New York Works capital funding. It also introduces \$100 million in new funding as part of the Centennial NY SWIMS initiative intended for signature projects like reopening Lake Sebago Beach in Harriman State Park and converting the East Bathhouse at Jones Beach State Park into a world-class swimming facility. While the aforementioned projects are critical to ensuring all New Yorkers have access to the recreational and health benefits of New York's most popular parks, the investment is a drop in the bucket of the total \$3.5 billion State Park infrastructure backlog. PTNY calls on the legislature to work with the Governor to ensure that the FY 2025 budget invests a baseline of \$250 million in capital funding, including a full \$500 million in *new* capital funding over the next three years to address dire infrastructure projects that cannot be funded through the annual capital allocation due to their scale.

In addition to these necessary increases in capital funding, we also call on the legislature and the Governor to reverse the proposed \$25 million cut to the nominally \$400 million Environmental Protection Fund. This cut, in the form of a new line to offload \$25 million in staffing costs onto the EPF, would weaken the EPF's critical environmental programs. We join our partners from around the state in calling on the legislature to completely reject all offloads and restore the EPF to a full \$400 million dedicated entirely to projects.

Even with room for improvement, the Governor's Executive Budget proposal remains an important indicator of how far we have come in prioritizing our public green spaces. Just a decade ago nearly 100 State Parks and Historic Sites were slated for closure due to budget cuts. The more than \$1.5 billion in capital funding invested since that critical advocacy moment in 2010 has led to over 40% growth in visitation, totaling nearly 80 million visits in 2022 alone. Other transformative investments include the Park & Trail Partnership Grant program, a vital grassroots program maintained at \$2 million in the Governor's Budget.

Our public lands—as vital economic drivers—are also a smart investment, contributing more than \$3.7 billion per year to the state's economy. That 10-to-1 return on investment also creates tens of thousands of jobs statewide. To maintain this value for New York, it is crucial we continue financially backing our state park system. A failure to address the \$3.5 billion dollar backlog in infrastructure needs will only serve to exacerbate the capital cost in the long term.

We must boldly invest in the future of this world-class system: one that is welcoming to a diversity of users, provides residents and visitors alike with accessible facilities, and further enhances the livability and health of our communities into the next century and beyond. We look forward to working with the legislature and the Governor to see this vision of a New York State leveraging and investing in the diverse health, economic, and environmental stewardship benefits our public lands provide realized in the final budget.

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