



2024 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Parks & Trails New York

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BACKGROUND

The pandemic has abated, but the record popularity of our state park system has shown no signs of letting up. Millions more have now discovered that the path to health—physical, mental, economic—wends through New York State’s enviable network of parks, greenway trails and wild, open spaces.

*Since 1985, Parks & Trails New York has fought to protect, defend and expand New York State’s vast portfolio of public lands, including **180 state parks** and the **750-mile the Empire State Trail**, which Outside Magazine recently **ranked as the #1 greenway trail** in the United States.*

For 2024, the Centennial of our State Park System, we are ramping up our advocacy to ensure that our most popular parks, greenway trails and open spaces are equipped to accommodate the record demand for outdoor experiences. Though each of our proposed policy changes, bills and budgetary aims are different, they all add up to one thing: high-quality public lands that are welcoming and accessible to all.



Taughannock Falls State Park



ABOUT PARKS & TRAILS NEW YORK

Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) is New York’s leading statewide advocate for parks and trails, dedicated since 1985 to improving our health, economy, and quality of life through the use and enjoyment of green space. With thousands of members and supporters across the state, PTNY is a leading voice in the protection of New York’s magnificent state park system and the creation and promotion of more than 1,500 miles of greenways, bike paths, river walks, and trails.

PTNY is committed to enhancing the quality of life for all New Yorkers by improving and expanding access to parks, trails and public lands so that everyone can enjoy the outdoors and benefits of nature close to home.

PARKS & TRAILS NEW YORK 2024 BUDGET PRIORITIES



PTNY'S PRIMARY BUDGET PRIORITY: INVESTING IN THE NEXT CENTURY FOR NEW YORK'S WORLD-CLASS STATE PARK SYSTEM

Providing Quality Outdoor Recreation Experiences for all New Yorkers

The New York State Park System has come a long way from just over a decade ago, when nearly 100 sites were slated for closure due to past budget cuts. This would have been a devastating outcome never before seen in the state's history. However, due to the efforts of PTNY and our partners around the state, from that darkness has grown a stunning rebirth, as the New York Works program has invested \$1.5 billion in capital funding since 2010 for critical repairs to parks from Long Island to Buffalo and in all regions in between. Park visitation has increased by more than 40 percent over the past decade to nearly **80 million visits a year**, underscoring that parks and access to nature are a human necessity.

In addition to providing access to nature and places to recreate, our public lands are also vital economic drivers, **boosting the state's economy by \$5 billion annually** – leveraging a **9-to-1 return on the state's investment** – and **creating 45,000 jobs**. The park system is also integral to our climate strategies, protecting critical habitats and improving quality of life and local resilience for millions of New Yorkers.

However, the state is at a turning point, as we look to the next century of our state parks system. Our state leaders have a decision to make – do they want to once again allow our iconic system to fall into disrepair, driving away visitors and starting a downward cycle of under-utilization, leading to economic loss and negative health and environmental impacts in communities across the state? ***Or will we invest in the future of this world-class system, providing residents and visitors with accessible facilities, welcoming diverse users and further enhancing the livability of our communities?***



PARKS & TRAILS NEW YORK

2024 NYS BUDGET PRIORITIES



1) SECURE A BASELINE OF \$250 MILLION IN CAPITAL FUNDING FOR NEW YORK STATE PARKS, PLUS A ONE-TIME \$500 MILLION INFUSION FOR THE 2024 PARKS CENTENNIAL OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS

Parks capital funding allows for the continued revitalization of the system, addressing critical infrastructure needs and expanding opportunities for local recreation in urban and rural communities alike. However, the 100-year-old Parks system needs additional funding to transform flagship parks and address significant long-term challenges in the system. An additional investment of \$500 million over the next three years for the Parks Centennial will allow for long-shuttered facilities to be reopened; historic structures to be brought up to modern standards and protected against the impacts of climate change; and key amenities at the most popular parks to meet the demands of the public. This investment will be a down payment against a more than \$3.5 billion backlog in capital repairs needed at state parks. Funding will also ensure that OPRHP can meet new mandates to power its facilities with renewable energy sources and ensure that the state's greenest agency remains that.

2) MAINTAIN STATE PARKS' OPERATIONS BUDGET TO ENSURE INCREASED VISITATION NEEDS ARE MET

Visitation to our State Parks continues to break records each year, and while OPRHP's staff levels have increased recently, it is vital that operations funding remains at its current level. Ensuring that the agency has the funds needed to provide a strategic deployment of and that all visitors continue to have access to safe outdoor places for recreation and respite is paramount.

3) PROVIDE \$90 MILLION IN CAPITAL FUNDING FOR NYS DEC'S ADVENTURE NEW YORK PROGRAM

The Adventure NY funding addresses a variety of capital needs to improve access to lands managed by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, including rehabilitation campgrounds, and upgrades to trails, day use areas, and other recreational facilities. Continuing \$90 million in annual investment in the Adventure New York program will further our state's commitment to the protection and stewardship of our precious open spaces and help ensure our public lands are welcoming and accessible for all.

4) ENSURE FULL AND SUSTAINABLE FUNDING OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FUND



Maintain the Park and Trail Partnership Grants at \$2 million

This competitive grant program supports projects that strengthen non-profit grassroots organizations; enhance public access, stewardship and recreational opportunities; and address barriers to diversity, equity and inclusion at our state parks, historic sites, trails, and public lands across New York. Every year, demand for this program exceeds available funding, and we aim to grow the program to \$4 million per year in coming years.



Maintain the Connect Kids to Parks Grant Program at \$3 million

The Connect Kids to Parks Grant program provides students, especially youth from Title 1 communities, with access to nature and history via field trips to state and federal parks, forests, historic sites, and other outdoor recreation areas.



Increase funding for the Parks, Preservation and Heritage Program

The Parks, Preservation and Heritage Program (Municipal Parks) provides matching grants to projects that plan, acquire, and develop municipal parks and recreational facilities in cities, with a requirement that **nearly 40% of funding be directed toward Environmental Justice communities**. We hope to see this program grow to \$40 million per year in coming years.

PARKS & TRAILS NEW YORK 2024 NYS LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



PTNY'S PRIMARY LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY: GREENWAY TRAILS FOR A GREEN FUTURE BILL PACKAGE

Seven bills to support the expansion and the safe, convenient use of NY's greenway trail network

On the cusp of the New York State Parks' Centennial in 2024, Parks & Trails New York envisions a fully realized network of linear greenspace—accessible to all New Yorkers and functioning as a driver for equity, public health, and the economy—connecting New York State for the next 100 years and beyond.

In 2017, New York State announced the creation of the 750-mile Empire State Trail (EST), connecting Buffalo to Albany and the Canadian border to NYC. The \$200 million in state funding leveraged an additional \$100 million in additional funding to close gaps in existing trails, construct new trails, and extend other trails, and provided signage marking existing trails as part of the EST and necessary enhancements including trailheads, informational signage, and other amenities for trail users. Despite this investment, EST remains far from reaching its full potential as a world-class recreational, economic, and transportation asset. Large sections are unsafe and unfinished, and key connections are lacking. **The trail currently reaches only 24 of New York State's 62 cities.** A third of the EST is on-road, without physical separation from fast moving cars and trucks. The trail currently fails to reach Long Island, key parts of New York City, and dozens of nearby upstate cities and parks.

While additional funding is critical to meeting this need, **policy and regulation changes are also needed to ensure that trail users can have a safe, enjoyable, high-quality experience on New York's greenway trails.** Funding for expansion must be met with additional support for ensuring that greenway trail networks are well-maintained to consistent standards. Meanwhile, additional regulatory changes can explore the opportunities to extend greenway networks along existing utility corridors, to overcome natural and man-made barriers in extending greenway, and to provide the state and local governments with the flexibility to direct transportation funding to meet residents' demands for additional greenway infrastructure. These changes can be made in advance of hoped-for future allocations of funding for expanding the state's greenway network, ensuring that New Yorkers are getting the greatest value for their investments.



Erie Canalway Trail

PARKS & TRAILS NEW YORK

2024 NYS LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



1) PASS THE GREENWAY TRAILS FOR A GREEN FUTURE PACKAGE

In Fall 2023, PTNY spurred the introduction of a new package of legislation that would greatly enhance trail user safety and spur the development of new greenway trails across New York State. This package consists of three bills that enhance trail user safety and four bills that would remove regulatory barriers, create incentives, and explore other opportunities to expand New York's network of greenway trails to serve all New Yorkers.

Trail User Safety & Experience



Right-of-Way for All Trail Users in Crosswalks | A8272 (Fahy) / S8210 (Cooney)

Clarify that bicyclists using a crosswalk have the same right-of-way protections afforded to pedestrians. By treating all trail users consistently, confusion and safety risks for bicyclists will be reduced.



Empire State Trail Detour Requirements | A8274 (Fahy) / S7807 (Serrano)

Require the establishment of safe detour routes during temporary closures of sections of the Empire State Trail. New York State welcomes thousands of visitors from around the world for long distance, multi-day trips on the Empire State Trail. This bill ensures that trail users are provided safe alternative routes to continue their trips when the trail must be closed for safety or construction.



Greenway Trail Design Standards | A8301 (Fahy) / S7806 (Serrano)

Direct OPRHP to promulgate uniform design standards for all new greenway trails established under its jurisdiction to ensure a consistent, simple, high-quality trail user experience across our statewide trail network.

Trail Network Expansion & Connections



Power Line Trails | A8311 (Fahy) / S7891 (Harckham)

Encourage the development of recreational multi-use trails in NYS's vast network of electric utility corridors by allowing utility providers to enter into written agreements for the construction and maintenance of power line trails. The legislation would also require utility providers to provide informational resources and to notify municipalities about the potential to build a trail in the corridor when planning for the expansion or construction of transmission lines. This bill will set the stage to expand the state's network of greenway trails by focusing on New York State's plans for billions of dollars in investment to update existing, and construct new, transmission lines.



CHIPS Funding Formula Update | A8273 (Fahy) / S7890 (Harckham)

Allow funding from New York's Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS) program provided to local governments for transportation purposes to be used to build bicycle lanes and greenway trails and updates the formula for the Local Highway Inventory that is used to calculate CHIPS allocations to include bicycle lane and greenway trail mileage. Identified as a priority in the 2021 Statewide Greenway Trails Plan, this bill removes a disincentive for the removal of motorized traffic lanes and increases critical funding for building and maintaining greenway trails.



Recreational Use Statute | A6004 (Barrett) / S2701 (Harckham)

Encourage the development of rails-with-trails, power line trails, and other greenway trails by clarifying the liability of property owners who allow the public to access their land for recreational purposes. Protects property owners who allow recreational access to their property from actions resulting in harm or death, removing a critical barrier to trail creation.



Bicycle & Pedestrian Access on Bridges | A8300 (Fahy)

Direct the NYS Bridge, Thruway and other Public Authorities to promote bicyclist and pedestrian access on bridges statewide and to consider the impact of capital projects on bicyclist and pedestrian access. Across New York State, bridges over water bodies, other roadways or railroads are often barriers to pedestrian and bicycle access, rather than connections. This bill will assess significant gaps and barriers in statewide bicycle/pedestrian networks to enhance connectivity.

PARKS & TRAILS NEW YORK 2024 NYS LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



2) REQUIRE A MORE RIGOROUS PROCESS FOR THE TAKING OF PARKLAND, OR PARK “ALIENATION.” | S252 (SERRANO)

Pending legislation would establish a more stringent process for park alienation, ensuring that it only occurs in instances of compelling public need where no alternative is available, and that any parkland taken by alienation is accompanied by replacement parkland. The process would delineate requirements for municipalities seeking to alienate parkland, clarify when alienation is necessary, provide for a thorough review process, and ensure that any replacement provisions are followed through on by establishing stringent reporting requirements and providing the attorney general with the necessary enforcement authority.

3) ENSURE THAT NEW YORK’S NETWORK OF PARKS, TRAILS AND PUBLIC LANDS IS WELCOMING TO ALL.

New York’s 180 state parks and numerous other trails, recreational areas and open spaces receive more than 100 million visits a year. However, these resources are not equitably accessible to all New Yorkers. Legislative changes are needed to ensure that access to all public lands is made affordable to all New Yorkers, focusing on populations for whom cost may be a prohibitive burden. Legislative solutions should be explored to ensure that access to public lands can be increased for those who have been historically excluded, building off 2022’s [Open Spaces for All report](#). Finally, information about New York’s public lands should be made available to a wider array of groups, including by making public access information available in all languages and by highlighting areas that are accessible to those with mobility challenges.



Fort Stanwix National Monument