

SPEAKING OUT FOR PARKS

Parks' needs for more resources will not be resolved by smarter budgeting alone. We—the citizens who use and care about our parks—have to speak out.

Without an engaged citizenry working together to advocate for parks, there will inevitably be a drift of state resources away from parks and toward other needs that *do* have advocates.

New York needs—and Parks & Trails New York is committed to organizing and supporting—a strong citizens' **Campaign for Parks**, a voice for all New Yorkers who care about our parks.



FDR State Park
Duct tape can hold a park system together only so long.

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The promise held in the proposed executive state budget for 2008-2009 must be just the beginning of a multi-year initiative to revitalize our magnificent but neglected state park system. The hard work is still ahead of us.

Let there be no turning back.

About Parks & Trails NEW YORK

Parks & Trails New York, a non-profit organization, works statewide to protect New York's parks and help communities create new parks. Our mission is to expand, protect and promote a network of parks, trails, and open spaces throughout our state for use and enjoyment by all.

Join our **Campaign for Parks**—help us build a statewide grassroots coalition to press for major capital funding and ongoing operating budgets that will restore and enhance New York State's park system. Call us today. Or visit our website: www.ptny.org.



No Turning Back

The Campaign to Restore and Enhance our Parks

The Governor has proposed \$100 million in essential funding for New York's deteriorated state parks in 2008-2009. Our citizens' campaign is working to ensure that this funding is included in the final state budget.

New York State's system of state parks is an unmatched legacy—an asset that offers endless opportunities for outdoor recreation, and preserves priceless landscapes and ecosystems for future generations. But it's a system that needs help.

In 2006, after a year-long study of the state of the state's park system, Parks & Trails New York published a special report, *Parks at a Turning Point* (available at www.ptny.org). We found very dedicated staff—and major infrastructure problems, the result of years of underfunding.

OVERVIEW

- ◆ Parks & Trails New York's 2006 *Parks at a Turning Point* report found aging, deteriorated, unsafe, and closed facilities and more than two dozen new "parks" that hadn't been opened to the public.
- ◆ Recent analysis has found that **park capital needs are about \$650 million.**
- ◆ Governor Spitzer has proposed a **\$100 million capital initiative** for state parks in 2008-2009.
- ◆ The **Legislature must include** the entire \$100 million in capital funding in the final state budget.
- ◆ **There must be a multi-year commitment** to fund the \$650 million in parks' capital needs.

Here is the current situation:

- ▶ Over the past 12 years the state park system expanded by more than 25 percent, adding 26 new parks. Yet, when adjusted for inflation, the capital budget decreased by 50 percent during the same period. (See chart, page 3)
- ▶ Years of underinvestment and deferred maintenance have resulted in a backlog of capital projects that the parks agency estimates to be \$650 million.
- ▶ The impacts of the funding backlog are painfully apparent. Visitor facilities have been shut down because of safety or health problems; some heavily used parks have damaged or inadequate

bathrooms; and many buildings, parking lots and playing fields are seriously deteriorated.

Though parks account for less than one half of one percent of the total New York State budget, that small investment delivers major benefits to New Yorkers.

The recreational opportunities parks afford are important to the health and well-being of our citizens. The tourism and lifestyle assets they deliver are important to the efforts to rebuild our state's economy, especially Upstate.



Chittenango Falls State Park

The park system as a whole is clearly at a turning point, when further delays in making essential investments could do real damage to its long-term viability.

What has been accomplished since we issued *Parks at a Turning Point*? The short answer: **some very good things—but there's much more to be done.**

A NEW DIRECTION

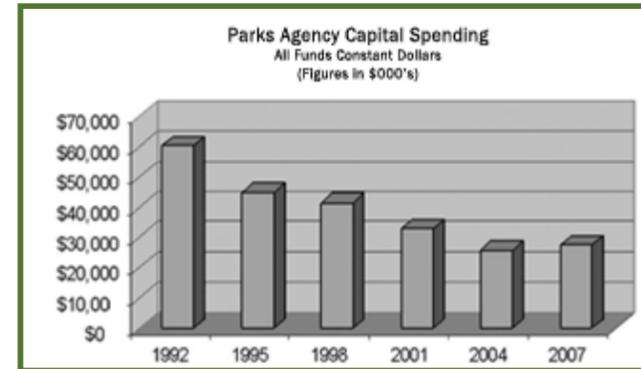
Eliot Spitzer took over as Governor in 2007 with a platform that, among other things, committed the new administration to better stewardship of the state's environmental and recreational resources:

- ▶ He appointed Carol Ash, an experienced environmental professional and former director of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, as the Commissioner of OPRHP.
- ▶ Commissioner Ash, in turn, embraced the findings of **Parks at a Turning Point** and began a determined pursuit of the resources needed to address the problems outlined in our report.
- ▶ As a result of years of underinvestment and deferred maintenance, the total backlog of park capital needs is estimated at \$650 million.
- ▶ For fiscal year 2008-2009 the Governor has proposed \$100 million in capital funding for park infrastructure. When added to capital funding from other sources the total proposed park capital budget for fiscal year 2008-2009 is \$147 million.



Roberto Clemente State Park in the Bronx needs \$16 million to rebuild the deteriorating bulkhead on which it sits.

- ▶ The Governor has proposed adding 32 new staff at OPRHP. These positions, along with the 52 positions added in last year's state budget, are an important first step in rebuilding OPRHP, which lost more than 250 staff positions in the last decade.
- ▶ OPRHP has developed a list of nearly 300 ready-to-go projects in more than 100 parks statewide to be implemented as part of the \$100 million capital initiative in fiscal year 2008-2009.



Adjusted for inflation, state parks' capital budget today is 50 percent less than it was in 1992.

Shortly after Commissioner Ash took the reins at OPRHP she began to research and document the agency's capital needs. An analysis by the new team at OPRHP determined that **the needs are about \$650 million over the next five years.**

OPRHP has divided these needs into four categories:

1. Health and Safety Projects—including sewage infrastructure, dams, electrical systems and bulkheads;
2. Rehabilitation of Existing Facilities—including campgrounds, boat launches, visitor centers, comfort stations and roads;
3. Development of New Facilities—including improvements needed to make newly acquired properties viable as parks; and
4. Natural Resource Stewardship—including restoration of habitats and ecosystems, and eradication of invasive species.

The agency's list of nearly 300 projects for fiscal year 2008-2009 includes capital needs in each of the state's 11 park regions. Clearly, the park system's problems are major—and statewide.

Highlights of the proposed project list for 2008-2009 include major investments of nearly \$15 million at Roberto Clemente State Park, \$10 million at Bear Mountain State Park and \$9.4 million at Letchworth State Park. The list also includes over

\$5 million at Niagara Falls State Park, \$4 million at Allegany State Park, and \$3.6 million at Saratoga Spa State Park, with the remainder of the \$100 million divided among hundreds of other projects throughout the state.

FUNDING SOURCES

This year, as in past years, New York State is facing difficult financial conditions. But this is no reason to abandon our state park system in its time of need. Our state leaders must revive the long and proud tradition of support for New York's public open space by providing the necessary funds, this year and in the coming years, to restore our state park system to a condition the people of New York State expect, deserve, and can be proud of.

Other sources of funding, such as private support, must also be vigorously pursued to bolster the state's multi-year parks revitalization initiative. Private investment in state parks is not a new concept. In fact, the New York State park system has been the beneficiary of private philanthropy from individuals, foundations and "friends" organizations for more than a century.

It is also essential to reverse the severe downward trend over the past several decades of the federal Land & Water Conservation Fund, the primary source of federal funds for state parks. New York's Congressional delegation must be made aware of the tremendous capital needs of New York's state park system and of how important parks are to their constituents.

In addition, a comprehensive and invigorated marketing plan to boost park attendance will, in turn, increase revenue on an ongoing basis.

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We hope that the 2008-09 budget will be seen in the years ahead as a turning point—when New York State began to make the investments necessary to give New Yorkers the outdoor opportunities they have a right to expect, and to pass the park system on in top shape for future generations.

But the job is just beginning.

A TURNING POINT

This year's proposal to add \$100 million in capital funding is a major first step in the right direction, but similar annual investments over the next five years will be required to overcome the years of underinvestment and deferred maintenance that plague our state parks and historic sites.

URGENT CAPITAL NEEDS

Based on the information available at the time, our 2006 report recommended a \$300 million, five-year capital plan for parks to repair infrastructure and address needs that were developing each year. This recommendation was endorsed by newspapers across the state—a number of which did their own stories on parks in their regions, confirming our findings.

A report card on our recommendations	
☑ = Done ☒ = Not done ◆ = In progress	
Develop a five-year capital plan for New York's state parks.	◆
Increase taxpayer support for parks by at least the same rate as the overall increase in state General Fund spending.	☑
Strengthen environmental stewardship in park planning and operations.	◆
Use park revenues to enhance taxpayer funding — not to supplant it.	☒
Enhance educational materials and programs for park visitors.	◆
Develop a comprehensive parks marketing plan to increase attendance.	◆
Develop and support a network of non-profit "friends" groups for parks.	◆