

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 9, 2024

Contact: Paul Steely White, Executive Director
psteelywhite@ptny.org / 518-434-1583

Parks & Trails New York Statement on Governor Hochul's 'NY SWIMS' Initiative

[Albany, NY] - Parks & Trails New York, the leading statewide advocate for parks, trails and public lands, celebrates Governor Kathy Hochul's visionary 'NY SWIMS' initiative, unveiled as the fourth proposal of her 2024 State of the State address on Friday. This transformative plan, aimed at dramatically expanding access to safe swimming, arrives at a pivotal moment where public health, climate resilience, and equity converge. The investment in public swimming through resource expansion in our state parks could not come at a better time, during NYS Parks' Centennial Year in 2024.

PTNY wholeheartedly commends Governor Hochul's dedication to investing in minoritized and underserved communities, addressing long-standing disparities in access to water recreation facilities, and directing increased capital funding to State Parks for expanded capacity. The commitment of an additional \$150 million in grant funding for 10 new landmark public swimming pools in high-need areas is a monumental leap towards equitable access for all New Yorkers.

As the New York State Parks System celebrates its Centennial in 2024, 'NY SWIMS' promises a welcome reversal of decades of disinvestment, ensuring our public parks offer state-of-the-art swimming facilities to the thousands of visitors frequenting our most popular water recreation locations daily in summer. We are particularly pleased with the Governor's commitment to redesigning the Jones Beach East Bathhouse and Lake Sebago Beach in Harriman State Park, acknowledging Parks & Trails New York's instrumental role in advocating for, and securing, this significant investment. The need for urgent funding at these popular but shuttered facilities was made painfully clear to PTNY leadership during a tour of these two flagship facilities. PTNY is committed to advocating not only for equitable access to public lands now, but to building out these iconic facilities for the next century of users.

At Jones Beach, the Governor's proposed critical capital infusion will convert an abandoned, dilapidated pool complex into a regional destination that will include an accessible spray park and state-of-the-art green technology. The updated facilities will also incorporate a unique Learn to Swim feature to enhance safety for children and inexperienced swimmers. The Lake Sebago swimming area—shuttered from extensive damage from dual tropical storms in 2011—will once again be able to welcome thousands of visitors each summer weekend, serving as a much needed oasis for families seeking relief from urban heat islands in the hot summer months. The updated swimming facilities at Lake Sebago will include new bathing facilities, storm resilient design elements, and a reimagined beach to better meet the needs of all New Yorkers. PTNY is

excited to advocate for the reinstatement and update of these once premiere and well-loved locations that, prior to their closing, served tens of thousands New Yorkers annually.

Governor Hochul's initiative also focuses on programming to make swimming more accessible to communities. The initiative's focus on addressing the lifeguard shortage through a grant program, and expanding the Free Learn-to-Swim program at State Parks, underscores the commitment to building a culture of safe, equitable and enjoyable aquatic experiences for the park system's 80 million annual visitors.

'NY SWIMS' stands as a historic investment in swimming, water safety, and equity in access to recreation for New York State. Parks & Trails New York, as a fervent advocate for accessible and inclusive outdoor experiences, is eager to continue working collaboratively with the Governor's office and our legislators to further address the totality of our park system's needs. PTNY is grateful for this much-needed investment, and also recognizes the close to \$3.5 billion backlog in parks infrastructure funding needed to adequately serve our communities and maintain our status as a nation-leading destination for public lands and outdoor recreation.

About Parks & Trails New York

Parks & Trails New York 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's trail programs, which aim to transform unused transportation and other corridors into vibrant public places, have furthered dozens of trail projects and hundreds of miles of trail over the last 30 years. For more information, visit www.ptny.org

#####