



PRESS RELEASE



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OSI and Parks & Trails New York Applaud Governor Cuomo and State Legislature for Historic Funding Commitment to Environment and Parks

EPF Expansion, Continuation of Parks 2020 Underscore New York's Environmental Leadership

ALBANY, NY (April 4, 2016)—The Open Space Institute (OSI) and Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) today praised Governor Andrew Cuomo and members of the state legislature for their extraordinary leadership in supporting state parks and protecting clean water and other vital natural resources. The 2016-17 state budget agreement provides a record-level commitment for the state's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and maintains historic support for the revitalization of New York's magnificent state parks. In addition, the Park and Trail Partnership program will support projects that strengthen Friends Groups and enhance public access and recreational opportunities at parks and historic sites across the state.

"It's a great day for New York's state parks and environment thanks to Governor Cuomo and the legislature," said Erik Kulleseid, senior vice president Open Space Institute/Alliance for New York State Parks. "We are thrilled with the historic \$300 million EPF and excited that the governor's Parks 2020 initiative will continue fully-funded. From one end of the state to the other, our parks are New York treasures and their continued revitalization is tremendous."

"New York's state parks and historic sites are its crown jewels," said Robin Dropkin, Executive Director of PTNY. "The unprecedented multi-year commitment to our magnificent state park system by the Governor and Legislature has set in motion a remarkable park renaissance, one that has not been seen in our time. Surely, this will be one of the most enduring legacies left to the next generation of New Yorkers."

The agreement affirms the governor’s proposal to fund the EPF at \$300 million and represents an historic advancement in the conservation and protection of New York’s natural resources, including clean water, land preservation, job creation and stronger environmental communities. In addition, the spending plan’s \$90 million parks capital budget builds on \$380 million allocated over the past four years and reinforces ongoing park revitalization.

Leading the Way for State Park Revitalization

After decades of state park underinvestment resulting in a \$1 billion backlog in maintenance and repairs, Governor Cuomo launched his Parks 2020 initiative, resulting in a state park renaissance that is underway in every region throughout the state. Funding announced in the executive budget builds on this success.

The \$500,000 EPF appropriation for the Park and Trail Partnership Program, which PTNY administers in partnership with the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, will fund a second year of capacity-building grants for organizations that promote and support the State Parks system. The Program unlocks the potential of these organizations by increasing their effectiveness, productivity, and volunteer and fundraising capabilities. This will enhance park, trail and historic site stewardship, leading to even greater economic benefits from outdoor recreation and healthier, more sustainable and resilient communities.

“The State’s investment in grassroots Friends Groups perfectly complements the ongoing revitalization of our iconic state park system,” said Dropkin. “The capacity-building grants will enable groups to leverage more private and federal funding, marshal more volunteer power, and augment the State’s historic investment in parks. We look forward to seeing the transformational results from these innovative and important projects.”

An Extraordinary Commitment to Protecting New York’s Environment

Under the newly enacted budget, funding for the EPF will grow by \$123 million to a record-setting \$300 million. Among the EPF categories slated for increase are the open space acquisition fund, which will grow from \$26.5 million to 40 million—a category of funds used by OSI to create new parks and add acreage to existing parks. Throughout its 40-year history, OSI has been strongly identified with its conservation projects that create, protect, and enhance New York’s state parks.

“Through nearly 80 conservation successes, OSI has added more than 40,000 acres to New York’s state parks. With support from the EPF, these transactions achieved a variety of goals, from creating new parks and adding valuable acreage, to providing important buffer zones and connectivity,” said Kulleseid.

The Open Space Institute protects scenic, natural and historic landscapes to provide public enjoyment, conserve habitat and working lands and sustain communities. Founded in 1974 to protect significant landscapes in New York State, OSI has been a partner in the protection of nearly 2.2 million acres in North America. A leader in environmental conservation, OSI leverages its knowledge and attracts resources for strategic investments to make innovative land conservation happen. Visit OSI online at www.osiny.org.

Parks & Trails New York is the leading statewide advocate for parks and trails, dedicated since 1985 to improving the health and quality of life of all New Yorkers by working with community organizations and municipalities to envision, create, promote, and protect a growing network of parks, greenways and trails throughout the state for all to use and enjoy.