Parks & Trails New York Applauds Governor Cuomo’s Historic Investment in Parks, Environment and Grassroots Friends Groups in Budget

ALBANY, N.Y. – Parks & Trails New York, a statewide nonprofit advocacy organization, applauds Governor Andrew Cuomo’s budget proposal for State FY 2016-2017, which includes historic investments in state park infrastructure, environmental programs, and grassroots Friends organizations that will help grow the economy, promote tourism, and enhance the quality of life for all New Yorkers. The Governor’s proposed budget puts New York in a position of national leadership in the protection of natural resources and the advancement of outdoor recreation.

New York State Parks and Historic Sites
The Governor’s proposed budget includes a $90 million investment in Parks 2020 funding to address the backlog of infrastructure needs at New York State Parks and Historic Sites. The Governor’s proposal keeps up the momentum in revitalizing New York’s state parks as part of his multi-year commitment of $900 million through 2020. The budget proposal also holds steady the operations budget of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP).

“Governor Cuomo continues to champion the revitalization of New York’s state parks system,” said Robin Dropkin, Parks & Trails New York Executive Director. “Parks & Trails New York applauds the Governor’s commitment to healthy state parks and historic sites. This substantial capital funding will help address critical needs in every region of the state and secure New York’s parks and conservation legacy for future generations.”
Governor Cuomo has shown unprecedented support for New York’s state parks and historic sites during his administration. Yearly capital infusions have allowed OPRHP to begin to address the more than $1 billion in infrastructure needs and critical safety repairs at state parks and historic sites, such as replacing aging water and sewer systems, rehabilitating restrooms, and repairing bridges, dams, roads, leaky roofs and swimming pools. This investment in our state park system, leveraged with additional private and federal money, creates local jobs, boosts tourism in communities across the state, and helps to grow the state’s economy sustainably.

“Governor Cuomo’s budget proposal reflects his recognition of the important role state parks play in local economic growth, protecting important natural areas for enhanced sustainability and quality of life, and providing affordable, close-to-home recreational opportunities to New Yorkers,” said Dropkin.

The Governor also announced the launch of a “Connect Kids” Park Access Program. This innovative multi-pronged initiative will build on the Governor’s Parks 2020 plan by enhancing access to parks by underserved youth. The program includes grants to school districts to transport children to State Parks and, in partnership with the National Park Service, free entry to State Parks for all 220,000 fourth grade students and their families in 2016.

“The Governor’s budget proposal not only continues the exciting 21st Century transformation of our state parks system, it will build a new generation of park stewards,” said Dropkin.

Parks & Trails New York looks forward to working with the Governor and the Legislature to keep the momentum going for parks, including partnering with the Governor and OPRHP for the fifth annual I Love My Park Day in May to celebrate and enhance New York’s state parks and historic sites.

**Environmental Protection Fund**

Parks & Trails New York also applauds the Governor for proposing to provide $300 million for the state’s Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), an increase of $123 million over the current fiscal year. The EPF protects clean air and water and supports parks, trails and farms, among many other job-creating programs. Parks & Trails New York is pleased to see the Governor’s continued support for the enhancement of this critical source of funding for New York’s communities. Parks & Trails New York is particularly appreciative of the increased funding proposed for state land stewardship and public access, open space land conservation, and the municipal park grants program, all of which suffered deep cuts during the state’s financial crisis.

**Park and Trail Partnership Program**

Included in the Governor’s budget proposal for the EPF is a second round of $500,000 for the NYS Park and Trail Partnership Program, a new capacity-building grants program for organizations that promote and support the state parks system. The competitive grants program, administered by Parks & Trails New York in partnership with OPRHP, will reap large benefits, enabling groups to leverage more private and federal funding, marshal more volunteer power, and augment the Governor’s historic investment in parks. 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.
“There is tremendous interest in the Park and Trail Partnership Program and its potential to transform Friends organizations and their ability to steward state parks and historic sites,” said Dropkin. “We are thrilled to see continued funding for this innovative program included in the Governor’s budget proposal and look forward to announcing the first grant awardees in March.”

**Parks & Trails New York’s 2016 Legislative Priorities**
Parks & Trails New York also announced the release of its 2016 legislative priorities. The policies and programs supported by Parks & Trails New York reflect the essential role of parks, trails and greenways in New York’s economic growth, the health of its residents, and the long-term resiliency and sustainability of its communities. In 2016, Parks & Trails New York will work to ensure that our natural, recreational and cultural treasures are an integral part of the state’s economic, transportation, health, and environmental strategies. PTNY’s 2016 legislative priorities may be viewed online here.

**About Parks & Trails New York:** 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. For more information, visit [www.ptny.org](http://www.ptny.org).

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