

2020

annual report

THE OUTDOORS — A LIFELINE



PARKS & TRAILS
NEW YORK

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Dear Friend of New York's Parks and Trails,

Thank you for being there for us, and our treasured parks and trails, during this very difficult year. Your support proves that community is one of our greatest resources.

We can all agree that 2020 was a year unlike any other. The nationwide pandemic, fiscal crisis, and racial justice awakening made some weeks feel like a year, while staying home to protect our communities made some months feel like a day.

Through it all, our public green spaces have been there for us.

Walks, bike rides, and outdoor visits with family and friends have been a lifeline for so many.

At the same time, decades-worth of PTNY advocacy and effort came to fruition this year. New York State now boasts the longest multi-use trail in the nation—the Empire State Trail. Parks 2020's decade of investment has led to the revitalization of New York's premier state park system, which has seen a 34% increase in visitation since 2011. And, while the financial picture for our state and nation remains uncertain, our dedication to maintaining funding for parks, trails and public lands to thrive endures.

Parks & Trails New York, like many nonprofits, has not come through the pandemic unscathed. Canceling our eight-day, 750-person Cycle the Erie Canal ride was a blow, financially and emotionally. And, instead of joining together with 8,000 other volunteers for I Love My Park Day—the largest single-day, statewide volunteer event in New York—we held a month-long virtual campaign encouraging individual volunteerism.

But, in the face of difficulty, we have always rolled up our sleeves and gotten back to work. We are excited to say that Cycle the Erie Canal and I Love My Park Day—celebrating its tenth anniversary this year—will be back in 2021. And while both events will look different to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of our communities, we are ready for the challenge.

And we know you are with us. Your generosity, commitment, and support have been vital during this crisis. From signing the “Parks Pledge” to ensure our public green spaces stayed open and safe during the pandemic to increasing your membership and donor support during a tough financial time, you have been at the heart of PTNY's wins—this year, last year, and for the years to come.

So, the next time you are out enjoying a quiet walk or spending time with friends and family at your favorite green oasis, know that your support and commitment is a key reason why our treasured outdoor spaces not only survive, but *thrive*.

For all New Yorkers, and for the generations to come, thank you.

With deepest appreciation,



Robin Dropkin
Executive Director



Joe Scott
Board Chair

Robin Dropkin Joe Scott

What We've Learned from Covid: Green is Good for Public Health

2020 was a challenge, but our parks, trails, and public lands were there for us through it all.

From thousands signing a pledge to ensure our public green spaces stayed open and safe to grassroots Friends groups stepping up in this time of need, bright points abounded in an otherwise dark year. Here are some of our favorite silver linings:

750 Miles **of Empire State Trail!**

Connecting Manhattan to Canada, and running along the Erie Canalway Trail between Buffalo and Albany, the longest multi-use trail in the nation means many happy cyclists in 2021.

78 Million **visits in 2020**

Our State Parks saw a record-breaking number of visits from New Yorkers seeking nature to exercise, meet safely with friends and family, or just enjoy a breath of fresh air during the pandemic.

\$900,000 **in Grants**

28 groups received funding through the Park and Trail Partnership Grants program administered by PTNY. Since the program's inception in 2015, a total of \$2.7 million in grants have been awarded for 111 projects, leveraging \$1.5 million in private funds.

1,000 **Park Pledges**

In response to COVID-19, PTNY developed a campaign to encourage safe and responsible use of New York State's parks, trails, and green spaces. New Yorkers' voluntary adoption of safe practices kept many of our favorite outdoor spaces open during the pandemic.

2,400 **Respondents to the Statewide Greenway Survey**

With our partner, the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, PTNY created and managed a survey to gather New Yorkers' priorities and needs for the 2021 Statewide Greenway Trails Plan.

\$900 Million **per year for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)**

Congress passed the Great American Outdoors Act, fully funding the LWCF, which has contributed more than \$348.4 million to conservation projects in NYS. PTNY is proud to have been a leader advocating for America's most important conservation program.

Parks & Public Lands: Providing Peace in 2020



2020 made clear what outdoor lovers like you have known for a long time—our public green spaces are crucial to our health... and happiness. From celebrating special times with family to an alternative to the gym, New York's public lands saw record-breaking visitation in 2020. PTNY was there to make sure our treasured outdoor spaces had the support they needed.

REGIONAL MEET-UPS GO VIRTUAL

As the world turned, so did PTNY—we shifted from in-person to virtual. While we missed being together, digitally connecting allowed many more Friends groups to take part in our series of four Regional Friends Gatherings this year. More than 100 attendees, representing 37 different Friends groups, “got together” to learn about important updates, connect, and celebrate wins. Guided by PTNY and our partner, the Office of Parks, Restoration and Historic Preservation, grassroots groups also shared challenges and strategies for operating during the pandemic.

WORKSHOP SERIES SUPPORTS THE GRASSROOTS

Many nonprofit groups—including Friends groups supporting state parks and public lands—had a hard time in 2020. It was a perfect storm: increased visitation; inability to safely have large, in-person volunteer and fundraising events; and a financial crisis hitting the nation. PTNY hosted three Friends to Friends workshops to address programming in the time of COVID, connecting with the local park community to provide support and strategies for membership and fundraising during a pandemic.

“The beauty of the trees, the birds singing, the sight of a waterfall bring an undeniable peace to my heart and soul. Our parks are my safe and peaceful place during these trying times in our world.”



“The parks have been so important, not only for my mental health but to give our local community a safe place to get outside while practicing social distancing. It’s giving many people who may have never visited our parks a chance to see the beauty we have to offer!”

HIGHLIGHTING THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF FRIENDS GROUPS

With PTNY’s advocacy efforts ensuring full Environmental Protection Fund funding for FY20/21—and \$1million for Park and Trail Partnership Grants—we were ready to (safely) celebrate by hitting the road. We caught up with grassroots groups across the state to promote their important work. We loved presenting “Big Checks” to groups like Friends of Fillmore Glen State Park for their three-day Fillmore Days festival, featuring a bathtub race from the park to downtown Moravia.

Friends groups

work at the grassroots level to support parks, historic sites, trails, and other public lands. They bring in more than 675,000 visitors every year, offering across-the-board programming (like STEM-specific content for youth), annually raising over \$17 million for state parks and historic sites, devoting an average of 131,000 hours of volunteer work and more... all with most operating on a budget of \$10K or less.



New York State: The Leader in Multi-Use Trails

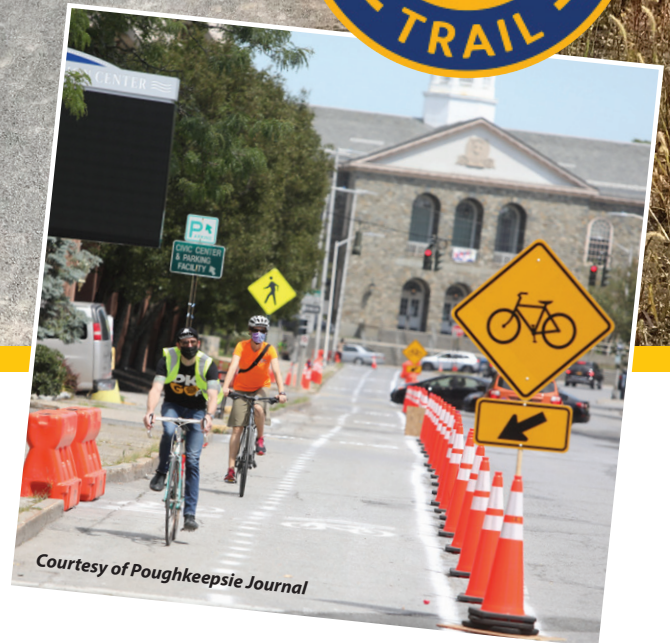


THE EMPIRE STATE TRAIL: LONGEST MULTI-USE TRAIL IN THE NATION

The very last day of 2020 saw a much-awaited celebration: the official opening of the Empire State Trail (EST). The EST is the culmination of decades of advocacy, trail development work, planning, and elbow grease. Over the last decade, use on the Erie Canalway Trail has grown by 151%. We can't wait for all of the joy and dollars the EST will bring to New Yorkers and their communities statewide.

CYCLISTS BOOST ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN COMMUNITIES DURING COVID

Multi-use trails are a big economic driver for towns, regions, and the state as a whole. Trail counts show 2020 was a record-breaking year, with 3.97 million visits to the Erie Canalway Trail alone, putting money directly into local communities. Together, the Erie Canalway Trail and Hudson River Valley Greenway are estimated to bring in more than \$274 million from trail users annually.








PTNY's two signature programs to promote business and economic development for trailside communities—Bicycles Bring Business (B3) and Bike Friendly New York—both saw growth in 2020. Our B3 virtual event attracted more than 100 participants eager for strategies to create bike-friendly cultures in their towns and regions, and Bike Friendly-certified businesses grew to 150 across the state this year.

NEW EDITION OF CYCLING THE ERIE CANAL GUIDEBOOK

It's not the worst situation when years of advocacy through our "Close the Gaps" campaign lead to new miles of trail... and a necessary update for our Cycling the Erie Canal guidebook. The updated 5th edition is packed with detailed information on the trail, trip planning, sightseeing, and much more! Get your copy today at ptny.org/shop






Build the Future of New York's Parks and Trails with Us!

5 WAYS TO SUPPORT:

-  **Become a member**
-  **Donate (and get your employer to match)**
-  **Give at the office through EarthShare.org**
-  **Give Stock, Mutual Funds, or support PTNY through your Donor Advised Fund**
-  **Join our Legacy Society**

Visit ptny.org/get-involved/ways-to-give to learn more or contact Linden Horvath, Development Director, at lhovath@ptny.org or 518-434-1583.

5 WAYS TO GET INVOLVED:

-  **Volunteer for I Love My Park Day or Canal Clean Sweep**
-  **Join us for an Advocacy Day at the Capitol**
-  **Join a Park or Trail Friends Group**
-  **Adopt a Trail**
-  **Sign Up: Receive updates on important park and trail issues and newsletters full of new outdoor places to explore**

Visit ptny.org/get-involved/volunteer or www.ptny.org/enews-signup to learn more, call our office at 518-434-1583 or email ptny@ptny.org.



2020 Financial Summary

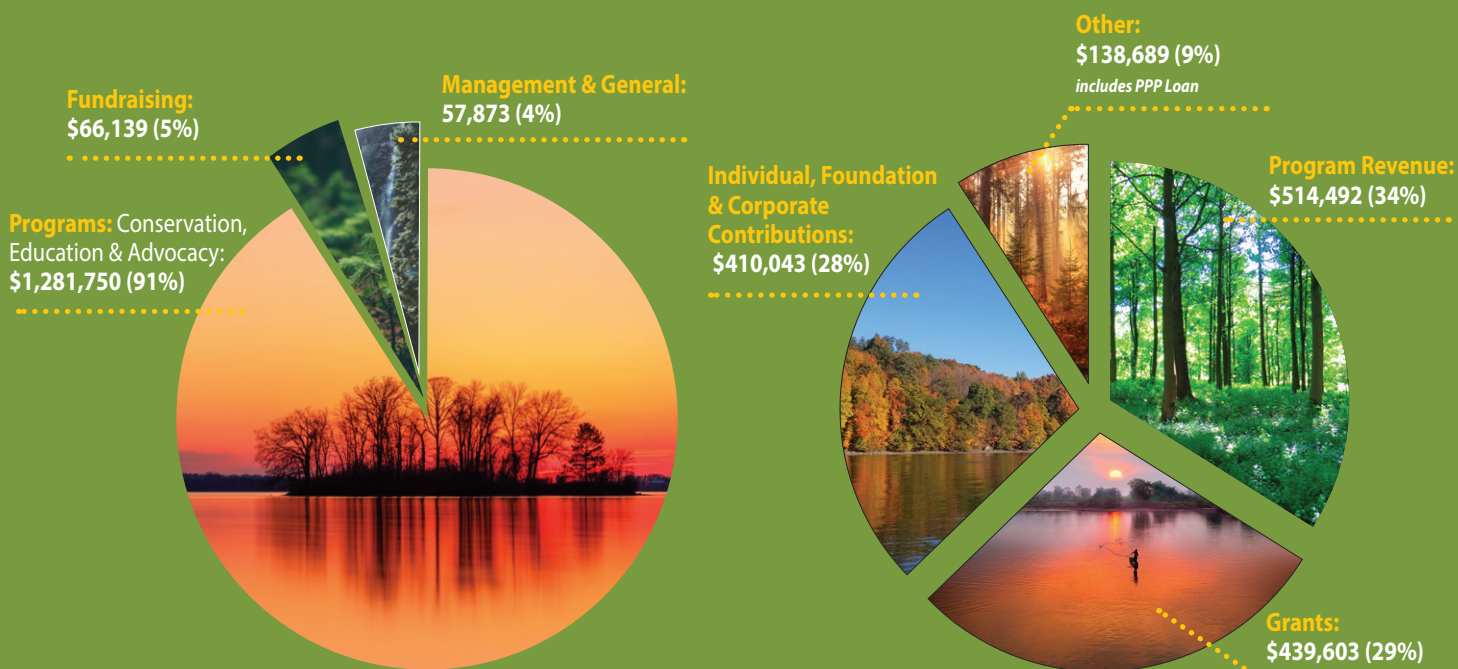
The charts represent overall income and expenses for Parks & Trails New York for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2020.

OPERATING EXPENSES

TOTAL: \$1,405,762

OPERATING SUPPORT & REVENUE

TOTAL: \$1,502,827



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are an outlet for me to get out and
experience the restorative effect of
nature in a time of stress."*

— Pamela

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— New York's parks, trails, and public lands.



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making a difference for your favorite green spaces.**