



2025 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Parks & Trails New York

A photograph of several cyclists riding across a wooden bridge over a river, surrounded by lush green trees. One cyclist in the foreground is wearing a blue shirt and a black helmet, with their hand raised. Other cyclists are visible further down the bridge.

PARKS & TRAILS NEW YORK 2025 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As we conclude the centennial celebration of New York's State Parks in 2024 and gear up for Parks & Trails New York's 40th anniversary in 2025, this is a defining moment. Our public lands—325,000 acres of parks and historic sites, 5 million acres of forests and wetlands, and over 2,000 miles of greenway trails—are more than just places; they are the heart of our communities, our economy, and our shared future.

The time to act is now. Parks and public lands fuel New York's economic vitality—creating more than \$5.6 billion in visitor spending—as well as bolster public health and connect us to the natural world. But with federal support uncertain, we must unite outdoor recreationalists, environmental stewards, and community stakeholders to protect and invest in these invaluable resources. Together, we can ensure New York's legacy of conservation leadership continues.

To meet the continuing rise in visitation, and match the vital economic value that our public lands provide to our state and local communities, PTNY seeks critical increases in EPF funding. In specific, **PTNY advocates for increases to fund greenway trails, better serve Friends groups stewarding public lands through grants, and create greater access for schools connecting kids to the great outdoors.**



ABOUT PARKS & TRAILS NEW YORK

Parks & Trails New York (PTNY)—celebrating its 40th year in 2025—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. Our mission is to expand, protect, and promote a network of parks, greenways, and public lands throughout our state for use and benefit of all.

● NY SWIMS

We led the coalition that was vital in securing a critical investment of **\$100 million to expand and redevelop public swimming and cooling facilities** across the state, plus crucial Learn-to-Swim programs for vulnerable populations.

● EPF LEVELS

As a member of the steering committee, PTNY was instrumental in securing **\$400 million in funding for key environmental programs** that benefit all New Yorkers, including recreation and stewardship initiatives, natural resource management, and habitat restoration projects.

● PARKS MAJOR PROJECTS

OPRHP made significant contributions to in 2024 as a result of sustained or expanded capital and operations funding.

Centennial Celebrations: A series of events commemorated 100 years of New York State Parks, focusing on their historical, cultural, and recreational importance.

Bayard Cutting Arboretum Visitor Center: A new visitor center was unveiled with updated facilities and resources.

Reopening of the Appalachian Trail at Bear Mountain: After significant restoration work, this iconic trail segment reopened, providing hikers enhanced accessibility.

● GREENWAY PROGRESS

Expansion of the state's Greenway Trails network continues to provide New Yorkers with safe, accessible places to walk, bike, and enjoy nature. In 2024, **work progressed on major regional greenway networks**, like the Long Island Greenway, Hudson Valley Greenway Network, and Southern Tier Trail.

In August, the second phase of construction of the Adirondack Rail Trail was completed, extending one of the state's newest premier destinations by 15 miles for a total of 25 miles from Lake Placid to Floodwood Road. The final 9 miles to Tupper Lake will be completed in 2025.

Genesee Valley Greenway State Park received \$10 million in federal Transportation Alternatives Program funding to resurface, repair, and reactivate 30 miles of trail in Western NY.

New York City's federally-funded Greenway Expansion Plan saw work commence on two corridors, with planning underway to complete the Harlem River Greenway and the Queens Waterfront Greenway. New York City also received a \$96 million federal grant to allow for the construction of a greenway along 10th Avenue in Manhattan.

● PARKS CAPITAL

We secured **\$200 million for the State Parks capital program**, driving the ongoing transformation of the system. This funding addresses decades of deferred maintenance, helps to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030, and ensures parks can effectively accommodate a growing number of visitors—84 million in 2023.

● DEC ADVENTURE NY

For nearly a decade, PTNY has advocated to preserve the DEC's capital fund, known as Adventure NY funding, at \$90 million. With new and exciting accessibility initiatives being provided by the agency, we are focusing on **expanding this funding to \$100 million** in the upcoming budget.

● DEC MAJOR PROJECTS

DEC has shown commitment to sustainability, accessibility, and community in protecting New York's natural resources.

Establishment of the Large Forests Grant Program: DEC announced \$4.5 million in funding to support landowners in creating forests. This aligns with New York's climate resilience goals, contributing to the 25 Million Trees by 2033 campaign and reforestation targets for carbon neutrality by 2050.

Accessibility Improvements in State Facilities: DEC expanded accessibility initiatives, such as adaptive equipment rentals and outdoor recreation programs outdoor recreation, to ensure public lands welcome all New Yorkers.

Milestone Celebration for Adirondack Visitor Access: Enhanced accessibility initiatives across in the Adirondacks, like new trails and visitor services that promote inclusivity.

● BOND ACT FUNDING

These projects prove the Environmental Bond Act is driving tangible improvements in infrastructure, public health, and environmental sustainability across New York:

Green Infrastructure Projects: \$60 million was allocated for green infrastructure projects aimed at combating climate change. These include projects like bioretention basins, porous pavements, and stormwater management initiatives in communities such as Binghamton, Buffalo, and Mamaroneck. These investments enhance flood resilience, improve air quality, and offer new recreational spaces

Water Quality and Flood Resilience Projects: Initiatives to improve water quality, restore natural habitats, and enhance flood resilience were launched, including stormwater management projects and floodplain restoration efforts in cities like Utica and Ogdensburg.



2025 BUDGET PRIORITIES

OUR PRIMARY PRIORITY

Welcoming All to New York's Revitalized, World-Class Public Lands System

Providing Quality Outdoor Recreation Experiences for all New Yorkers

Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) is the state's leading advocate for public lands. In the 40 years since our founding, we have successfully prevented the closure of 100 sites during a critical budget crisis, championed the effort to close gaps in the Erie Canalway Trail, and developed the foundational concepts for the Empire State Trail. Through grants and grassroots support, we've directed \$10 million to community groups and engaged over one hundred thousand volunteers, ensuring cherished public spaces thrive. Today, these efforts contribute to the remarkable success of nearly 85 million park visits and nearly 10 million annual users on the nation-leading Empire State Trail.

These accomplishments have delivered profound benefits statewide. New York's public lands are economic powerhouses, with the state park system alone generating returns on par with the agricultural sector. Every \$1 million invested yields \$10 million in sales, \$4 million in labor income, and \$7 million in state GDP. Beyond economic impact, these lands are essential to New York's climate strategies: safeguarding critical habitats, enhancing local resilience, and improving quality of life for millions.

As we celebrate our history, we look forward with purpose. After nearly \$2 billion invested in revitalizing New York's public lands, it is time to realize their full potential: making these spaces welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for all. Our vision is clear—foster vibrant communities that embrace and benefit from these shared treasures. Public lands are for everyone, and together, we can ensure they remain vital anchors of health, equity, and history for generations to come.

2025 BUDGET PRIORITIES

1. Robust and Sustainable Funding for the EPF

About the EPF: New York's Environmental Protection Fund is a key source of dedicated funding for environmental programs, ranging from land conservation and outdoor recreation to clean water and farmland protection. Established in 1993, funding comes from the state's real estate transfer tax, ensuring a consistent revenue stream.

The EPF plays a crucial role in implementing New York State's climate goals under the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. Projects funded by the EPF are aligned with the state's efforts to achieve carbon neutrality, enhance public access to natural resources, and support vulnerable communities in adapting to climate change. The EPF helps fund industries that generate approximately \$40 billion annually for the economy and hundreds of thousands of jobs.

We stand with our coalition members in **calling for a \$500 million fund, an increase from \$400 million in 2024**. We are adamant that EPF funding remains dedicated to programs benefiting communities, rather than agency staffing. The EPF is essential for addressing environmental justice and creating healthy, vibrant, livable communities.

3. Expand the Connect Kids to Parks Program to \$4 million

The Connect Kids to Parks program, launched in 2016, provides grants to schools and youth organizations, covering the cost of transportation and educational experiences at state parks and historic sites. The program has successfully enabled nearly 800,000 students to visit public lands, many of whom would not have had the opportunity due to rising costs of transportation and other challenges. Demand for the program has grown exponentially since COVID pandemic restrictions were lifted, with applications increasing by more than 500% from 2021 to 2023. In 2024, field trip requests significantly exceeded available funds which denied more than 250,000 students the opportunity to enjoy and learn from the outdoors. **A \$1 million expansion of this program aligns with the state's broader goals** for education, environmental justice, accessibility, improved mental health and inclusivity.

2. Funding for Greenway Connections & Enhancements

Over the last 20 years, New York State has built an impressive network of multi-use trails, exemplified by the completion of the 750-mile Empire State Trail in 2020. The EST benefits the communities it touches, boosting local economies, fostering outdoor recreation, and providing safe pathways for exercise and transportation. However, the EST doesn't connect to 35 of NY's 50 largest communities, including Queens, Brooklyn, and Long Island—home to 40% of the state's population.

To address these missed connections, **we propose a \$10 million annual investment to expand and enhance New York's trail network**. This funding would dedicate \$8 million to build new trails and repair existing ones, and \$2 million to support regional planning and prepare future projects for construction. With a focus on underserved communities, we recommend capping local matching requirements at 10% or waiving them for financially challenged areas. By prioritizing inclusivity and equity, this initiative ensures all New Yorkers can benefit from the trail network's potential to foster healthier communities, boost local economies, and create a more connected state. Join us in urging state leaders to make this vision a reality.



2025 BUDGET PRIORITIES

4. Expand the Park and Trail Partnership Grants to \$4M

This competitive grant program strengthens and supports grassroots nonprofit organizations affiliated with New York State Parks (OPRHP) and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Since its launch in 2015, the program has awarded \$9.9 million to 245 projects across the state but remains oversubscribed, leaving **\$5 million in requests unmet over the last few rounds alone.**

Expanding funding for the PTPG program would address urgent needs by supporting shovel-ready projects, implementing master plans, and enhancing infrastructure across New York's public lands. With over 120 Friends groups affiliated with OPRHP and DEC seeking larger awards to meet growing demands, this investment is essential to accommodate rising visitation and ensure the continued quality, accessibility, and sustainability of the state's public lands.

6. Expand Funding for Dept. of Environmental Conservation

Adventure NY funding for the Department of Environmental Conservation has remained at \$90 million annually for over a decade. This funding has been effectively utilized to address critical capital needs, including rehabilitating campgrounds, upgrading trail systems, enhancing fishing and wildlife viewing access, and developing other recreational facilities across New York's public lands. As the DEC places greater emphasis on accessibility and inclusivity for all New Yorkers, the time has come to **expand the state's annual investment in Adventure NY to \$100 million.** This increase will meet growing demand and support the improvement of our shared natural spaces.

5. Expand Funding for the Municipal Parks Program

The Parks, Preservation, and Heritage Program (commonly referred to as the Municipal Parks Program) offers matching grants to support the planning, acquisition, and development of municipal parks and recreational facilities in local communities. Importantly, 40% of the Program's funding is dedicated to Environmental Justice communities, ensuring equitable access to green spaces for underserved populations. **We support expanding this Program's budget to \$40 million annually** to meet demand for funding, which is more than \$90 million. Expanding funding, while also making the application process more accessible and reducing the required match for nonprofits and municipalities, will create more local opportunities for New Yorkers to enjoy the benefits of the outdoors.

7. Secure Funding for OPRHP to Expand Outdoor Access

Maintain \$200 million in NY Works Funding for State Parks Capital funding for parks is essential to revitalizing the system, addressing a substantial multi-billion-dollar backlog of critical infrastructure repairs while creating more opportunities for recreation in both urban and rural communities. Over the past decade, park visitation has surged by more than 40%, underscoring the importance of continued investment. These funds will enable the reopening of long-closed facilities, modernize historic structures to meet accessibility standards, and ensure that the Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) can comply with mandates to transition its facilities to renewable energy sources. This trajectory of reinvestment is vital for preserving the value and functionality of New York's parks for future generations.

2025 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

For 40 years, Parks & Trails New York has been a steadfast partner to all who value and enjoy the state's public lands. While our advocacy has consistently emphasized securing funding to maintain a world-class park system and the agencies that steward it, we recognize that some challenges are best addressed through legislative action. Following our 2024 success with the Greenway Trails for a Green Future legislative campaign and the unanimous passage of the Empire State Detours Bill in both legislative chambers, we are inspired to prioritize key issues critical to the continued evolution and enhancement of New York's public lands in 2025. While the Empire State Trail Detours Bill was vetoed by Governor Hochul in December 2024, we will be revising the bill to address the Governor's concerns and look forward to seeing the bill become law.

GREENWAY TRAILS FOR A GREEN FUTURE

Safe Greenway Trail Crossings

Clarify that bicyclists using a crosswalk as part of a greenway trail have **the same right-of-way protections afforded to pedestrians**. By treating all trail users consistently, confusion and safety risks for bicyclists will be reduced.

Highway Funding Flexibility

Identified as a priority in the 2021 Statewide Greenway Trails Plan, this bill would **allow municipalities to use funds from the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS)** for the construction and maintenance of bicycle lanes and greenway trails. The bill would not mandate or direct any use of funding for greenway trails, but would provide communities with the flexibility to use these limited funds in the manner that best meets their needs.

Empire State Trail Detour Requirement

Require the establishment of safe detour routes during temporary closures of sections of the Empire State Trail. New York State welcomes thousands of visitors from around the world for long distance, multi-day trips on the Empire State Trail. This bill ensures that trail users are provided safe alternative routes to continue their trips when the trail must be closed for safety or construction.

Greenway Trail Liability Protection

Encourage the development of rails-with-trails, power line trails, and other greenway trails by **clarifying the liability of property owners who allow the public to access their land** for recreational purposes. This bill protects property owners who allow recreational access to their property from actions resulting in harm or death, removing a barrier to trail creation.

2025 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Parks RX

Parks Rx is a public health initiative that empowers healthcare providers to "prescribe" park visits or outdoor activities to improve physical and mental health. By leveraging the proven benefits of time in nature, it addresses chronic illnesses, mental health challenges, and overall well-being. Our vision emphasizes building partnerships among public health and land management agencies, local providers, and community nonprofits. Parks Rx aligns with the Governor's Get Offline and Get Outdoors Initiative and complements agency efforts to enhance accessibility. We believe this program can offer marginalized New Yorkers in environmental justice communities healthier lives while fostering connections to our iconic public lands.

Safe Streets and Transportation Equity

PTNY is a leading member of the New York State Safe Streets Coalition and New Yorkers for Transportation Equity. We strongly support the advocacy priorities of these coalitions, requiring complete streets principles be incorporated into maintenance projects, defining safe passing distances for motor vehicles overtaking cyclists, allowing cyclists to more safely navigate streets by treating stop signs as yield signs, preventing unnecessary highway widenings, and requiring a state goal for vehicle miles traveled reductions as a critical part of climate action.





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