

New York State Council of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation

2008 ANNUAL REPORT



Cover Photo:
Clarence Fahnestock State Park



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New York State Council of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

David A. Paterson
Governor

Carol Ash
Commissioner

Lucy R. Waletzky, M.D.
State Council Chair

The Honorable David Paterson
Executive Chamber
Albany, NY 12224

November 2008

Dear Governor Paterson,

The State Council of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation is pleased to submit our 2008 Annual Report.

This report describes the State Council's priorities for 2009, highlights the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's achievements over the past year, and sets forth recommendations for improving the stewardship of New York's 213 state parks and historic sites.

Energized by Parks Commissioner Ash's leadership, the Council has become much more active. We have educated elected officials about the crucial necessity of addressing our parks and historic sites' \$650 million backlog of capital investment needs. We have initiated planning for a statewide private fundraising campaign, to be led by the 86 members of the Regional Park Commissions. And we are strengthening collaboration with our friends groups and organizations that support the state parks and historic sites

2008 has been a momentous year for state parks. Through your leadership, New York State launched a long-needed revitalization effort by investing more than \$100 million in the state park system. We respectfully request that your FY2009-10 Executive Budget continue this initiative by again providing \$100 million in capital funding next year. At this time of economic stress and "staycations," New Yorkers need access to safe and affordable parks more than ever – to provide recreation, education, and to refresh their body, mind, and spirit. And park capital investments strengthen local economies, especially upstate, by generating tourism dollars, creating local construction jobs, and supporting vibrant communities that are essential to your administration's commitment to making New York a great place to live, work, and raise families.

We also ask that the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation be provided the operational budget funding needed to maintain the quality of our state parks, historic sites, and recreational and education programming, now and in the future. We recognize the challenging fiscal climate facing New York State. But given the economic and public health benefits provided by our state parks, we urge that OPRHP be provided sufficient operational funding to keep our parks safe and open to the public.

We would be honored by the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the pressing needs of our beautiful state parks and historic sites. We are greatly appreciative of your leadership as our Governor.

Sincerely,

Lucy R. Waletzky M.D.

Lucy Rockefeller Waletzky, M.D., Chair



STATE COUNCIL OF PARKS: 2009 Priorities

**The State Council of Parks has
adopted four priority initiatives for 2009:**

- 1. State Parks Revitalization Program.** The State Council strongly supports the inclusion of \$100 million in capital funding in the FY2009-10 State Budget, to advance the second year of the State Parks Revitalization Initiative. This \$100 million investment, which will be focused on remedying health and safety problems and assuring that clean and enjoyable recreational opportunities are available to all New Yorkers, is urgently needed to maintain the state's commitment to addressing the \$650 million backlog of capital improvements in New York's 213 state parks and historic sites. These parks and sites host more than 55 million visitors each year and directly contribute to economic vitality in every region of our state.
- 2. Education and Advocacy.** The State Council and Regional Commission members will strive to further educate State Legislators, local elected officials, community leaders, parks and historic preservation organizations, the media, and the public about the challenges and capital investment needs facing the state parks system.
- 3. Private Fundraising Campaign.** In 2009 the State Council will launch a formal private fundraising campaign – seeking support from individuals, corporations, and foundations – to leverage and enhance New York's investment of public funds in revitalizing the state park system.
- 4. Partnerships with Friends Groups.** The State Council and Regional Commissions will continue to strengthen our collaboration with "Friends Groups" to leverage volunteer efforts and increase private support for the state parks and historic sites.

State Council of Parks and Regional Park Commissions

The State Council of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation – usually known simply as the “State Council of Parks” – is a 14-member body established by Article 5 of the state Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law (PRHPL). The State Council is comprised of the chairs of the eleven Regional Park Commissions, the chair of the State Board for Historic Preservation, and the Commissioners of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and the Department of Environmental Conservation.

As defined in PRHPL Section 5.09, the State Council’s powers and duties are to: a) review the policy, budget and statewide plans of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and make appropriate recommendations regarding their amendment or adoption; b) submit reports to the Governor, not less than once each year, concerning progress in the area of state parks, recreation and historic preservation, including recommendations for the future, and covering such other matters as the council may deem appropriate; c) and act as a central advisory agency on all matters affecting parks, recreation and historic preservation.

The eleven Regional Parks Commissions, created by Article 7 of PRHPL, represent each of the state parks regions, with the exception of the Palisades (which is represented by the Palisades Interstate Park Commission) and the Adirondack & Catskill Park Region (which is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environmental Conservation). Regional Commission members must be residents of the state and are appointed to seven year terms by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate, and serve without compensation. Regional Commissions serve as a central advisory body on all matters affecting parks, recreation, and historic preservation within their respective regions, with particular focus on the operations of the state parks and historic sites. The Commissions are also charged with reviewing and approving the region’s annual budget request prior to its submission to the Commissioner of State Parks.

State Council of Parks

LUCY WALETZKY,
Chair and Taconic Commission

DALTON BURGETT,
Allegany Commission

EDWARD AUDI,
Central Commission

DAVID BANFIELD,
Finger Lakes Commission

PETER HUMPHREY,
Genesee Commission

HERBERT BALIN,
Long Island Commission

CYNTHIA WAINWRIGHT,
New York City Commission

JEAN KNOX,
Niagara Frontier Commission

SAM PRYOR,
Palisades Commission

HEATHER MABEE,
Saratoga-Capital District Commission

HAROLD JOHNSON II,
Thousand Islands Commission

ROBERT MACKAY,
State Board for Historic Preservation





Letchworth State Park

OVERVIEW



New York State Parks and Historic Sites Overview



The state park system is one of New York's greatest treasures and is the finest in the nation. In the 123 years since the creation of Niagara Reservation State Park in 1885 – the oldest state park in the nation – the system has grown to 213 state parks and historic sites encompassing 325,000 acres of protected lands and waters. New York's parks and historic sites provide affordable outdoor recreation and education opportunities to more than 55 million visitors each year. These facilities contribute to the economic vitality and quality of life of local communities and directly support New York's tourism industry. Parks also provide a place for families and children to recreate and exercise, promoting public health and helping combat the childhood obesity epidemic.

The Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation is responsible for the operation and stewardship of the state park system, as well as advancing a statewide parks, historic preservation, open space protection, and smart growth mission. The agency is staffed by 2,275 permanent employees and more than 5,000 seasonal positions, with an "all funds" operating budget of approximately \$380 million. Drawing upon these resources, OPRHP is responsible for operating an extensive

network of public recreational facilities that includes 5,000 buildings, 28 golf courses, 53 swimming pools, 76 beaches, 27 marinas, 40 boat launching sites, 18 nature centers, 817 cabins, 8,355 campsites, more than 1,350 miles of trails, extensive utility systems, 106 dams, hundreds of miles of roads, and 604 bridges.

New York's state park system has long been recognized as a national leader. Among the fifty states, we rank first in the number of operating facilities and first in the total number of campsites. We are fifth in total acreage and third in total annual visitation. Attendance at Niagara Falls State Park is greater than that of Grand Canyon and Yosemite National Parks combined, and more than twice as many people visit Jones Beach each year than visit Yellowstone. Niagara Falls is the oldest state park in the nation and Washington's Headquarters is the first property acquired with public funds for the express purpose of historic preservation and patriotic visitation. The Bethpage Black is the first publicly owned golf course to host the U.S. Open Golf Championship. The 109th United States Open Championship® will return there in 2009.



¹ The term "state park system" as used in this report refers to New York's 178 state parks and 35 state historic sites.



Saratoga Spa State Park

PRIORITIES



State Council of Parks Priorities

Over the past year, working closely with State Parks Commissioner Carol Ash, the State Council of Parks and the eleven Regional Parks Commissions have focused on four primary areas. These initiatives will continue to be the Council's top priorities for 2009:

1. State Parks Revitalization Program.

The FY2008-09 state budget provided \$132 million in capital funds to launch the revitalization of New York's State Park System.



Throughout this summer and fall, capital improvement projects have been and are being designed and built in 100 state parks and historic sites across the state – making long-needed and highly visible improvements that will greatly improve the public's use and enjoyment of park facilities. OPRHP is on track to spend and encumber all of these funds by the end of the fiscal year. But measured against the need – a capital projects backlog exceeding \$650 million – it is critical that New York maintain momentum on the State Park Revitalization Initiative by providing another \$100 million in the FY2009-10 state budget. This is the Council's highest priority for next year, and is consistent with the directive that all state agencies maintain "flat" budgets next year.

2. Education and Advocacy.

Over the past year, State Council and Regional Commission members became more fully educated about the challenges and opportunities facing the parks and sites in their region. Most Commission members "adopted" parks and/or historic sites in their region, learning about those facilities' specific needs and priorities. And, Commission members advanced advocacy efforts to educate State Legislators, local elected officials, community leaders, parks and historic preservation organizations, and the media about the capital funding challenges facing the state parks system. For example, last February the State Council held a Legislative Outreach Day in Albany, meeting with more than 60 Senators and Assembly members and their staffs. Regional commission members also hosted a number of legislative visiting days in our parks and historic sites, providing Senate and Assembly members with a first hand look at the capital investment needs of our parks and historic sites. These outreach and advocacy efforts will be continued in 2009.



3. Private Fundraising Campaign.

The State Council recognizes that private fundraising is critically important, to leverage and enhance New York's investment of public funds in revitalizing the state park system. Over the past year, the State Council hired a private fundraising consultant to help design a statewide private fundraising campaign. More than 100 State Council and Regional Commission members participated in interviews to help define and shape the campaign, which will be formally launched in 2009.

4. Partnerships with Friends Groups.

The State Council and Regional Commissions are working to strengthen our collaboration with "Friends Groups." Last January, the State Council and the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation organized a conference that pulled together more than 200 representatives of Friends Groups and state park and historic site managers from across the state. This fall, we are following up with a series of regional Friends Groups meetings. These efforts are yielding renewed partnerships to leverage volunteer efforts and increase private support for state parks and historic sites.

To support this statewide effort, State Council Chair Lucy Rockefeller Waletzky attended many Regional Commission meetings to encourage their active engagement, to keep them fully informed of ongoing parks and historic site activities throughout the state, and to explain the expanded responsibilities of commission members (which are summarized in the "Roles and Responsibilities" document attached as an appendix to this report).



Green Lakes State Park

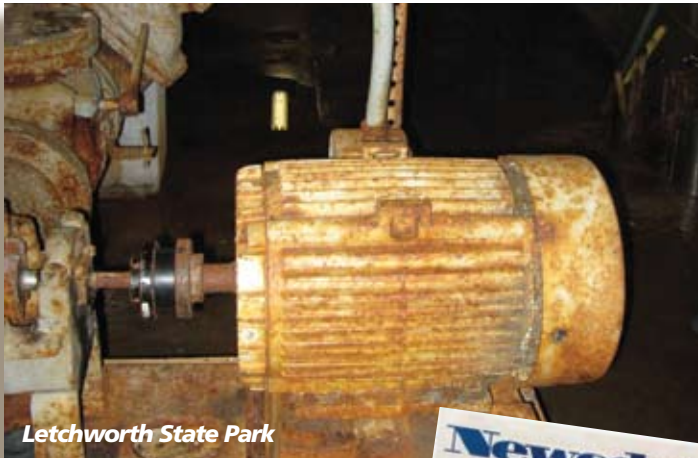
REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE



State Parks Revitalization Initiative



Staatsburgh State Historic Site



Letchworth State Park



Clarence Fahnestock State Park

In last year's Annual Report (issued in November, 2007), the State Council called for a major new program to revitalize the state park system. Simply stated, New York's state parks and historic sites are suffering from decades of underinvestment, with the result that too many of our facilities are deteriorated and in dire need of rehabilitation. Many parks have significant health and safety concerns that require attention, such as outdated water supply systems, aging wastewater treatment plants that don't meet current standards, electrical systems that don't meet code, landfills that although inactive were never closed to state standards, underground petroleum storage tanks that don't meet state regulations, and dams that require rehabilitation. In addition, many of our park buildings and infrastruc-



ture – our visitor centers, recreational facilities, cabins, campgrounds, swimming pools, nature centers, and historic buildings – are aging and deteriorating, diminishing the outdoor experience for the more than 55 million people that come to our parks every year.

During 2007, OPRHP initiated a comprehensive assessment of the agency's capital investment needs, developing a detailed list of priority projects at each of New York's 213 state parks and historic sites. To date this assessment has identified more than \$650 million of critical capital investment needs within four categories:

- **Health and Safety Projects (Total = \$95 million).** Through its ongoing environmental audit program, OPRHP has identified sewage treatment and drinking water supply systems, underground petroleum tanks, dams and bridges, inactive landfills, and substandard electrical systems that require rehabilitation or replacement.

- **Remediation of Existing Facilities (Total = \$440 million).**

This category is by far the largest, comprising more than 60% of OPRHP's total identified capital need. It encompasses capital maintenance and rehabilitation of existing infrastructure in the parks and historic sites – replacing facilities that invariably wear out over time such as roofs, heating and plumbing systems, contact stations, campgrounds, boat launches, picnic shelters, recreation fields, pools and swimming areas, visitor centers, bathrooms, roads, parking areas, and maintenance centers. It also includes a significant backlog of repair and maintenance needs for historic buildings and structures at our historic sites, as well as energy-efficiency investments in aging buildings. The needs assessment did not attempt to capture every possible existing need in this category, but rather catalogued the highest priorities that require immediate attention.

- **New Facilities Development (Total = \$85 million).**

This category captures capital investments needed to develop new facilities – primarily public use amenities at the many new state parks acquired over the past decade. Many parks acquired over the past decade consist of a sign, a car pull-off, and little else. Investments are needed to create contact stations, parking areas, restrooms, picnic and swimming areas, marked trails, etc. to make these new acquisitions available to the public.

- **Natural Resource Stewardship (Total = \$35 million).**

The state parks' natural resources – plants, wildlife, and ecosystems – face many threats, such as pollution of lakes and rivers, impaired wetlands, invasive species, soil erosion, global warming, and sea level rise. The needs assessment identifies a number of park-specific projects to restore habitats and ecosystems needed to assure that natural resources in the state parks remain "unimpaired for future generations."

Of these four categories, OPRHP has identified the first two – addressing health and safety issues, and rehabilitating failing infrastructure and deteriorated facilities – as its highest priority.

Fortunately, in 2008 New York State responded to the state park system's urgent funding needs. Under the leadership of Governor Paterson and with unified support from the Senate and Assembly, the enacted FY2008-09 state budget created a new \$95 million State Parks Capital Initiative to supplement OPRHP's capital budget. This investment, coupled with other state, federal, and private funds available to State Parks, enabled the agency to implement a \$132 million capital program for rehabilitation and improvements to our parks and historic sites.² All told, the agency is advancing 337 capital design and construction projects in 100 state parks and historic sites across New York State. OPRHP has aggressively advanced these projects - the agency is on track to fully spend and encumber the entire \$132 million capital program within the current fiscal year.



Allegany State Park



Verona Beach State Park



Allegany State Park

²Other sources of capital funding available to OPRHP include the state Environmental Protection Fund, the federal Land & Water Fund, state and federal legislative member items and earmarks, federal transportation funds, mitigation payments, and private contributions.

FY 2009-10 Budget Recommendations



The State Council of Parks is grateful for the \$95 million State Parks Capital Initiative provided in the FY2008-09 budget. This investment has enabled OPRHP to undertake hundreds of park improvement projects that otherwise never would have been possible – yielding tangible and lasting benefits for all New Yorkers.

Nonetheless, last year's \$95 million appropriation represents only a first step toward addressing the \$650 million backlog of capital projects that exists across the state park system.

It is vitally important that New York State maintain momentum in the State Parks Revitalization Initiative. The State Council of Parks respectfully requests that Governor Paterson and the Legislature appropriate another \$100 million in capital funding in the FY2009-10 state budget to continue the revitalization program. This investment will enable OPRHP to address a number of pressing health and safety concerns in the state parks and historic sites. It will also directly support economic development by strengthening recreation and cultural tourism, which is one of the state's largest industries, and creating local construction jobs in communities across the state.

In addition to increased capital funding, it is vitally important that OPRHP be provided operational budget funding needed to maintain the quality of our state parks, historic sites, and recreational and education programming.

In response to anticipated state revenue shortfalls stemming from the state's challenging economic picture (in particular the difficulties facing Wall Street and the financial sector), the administration instructed all state agencies to reduce their FY2008-09 state operations funding by 10.35% (comprised of a 3.35% spending reduction in May and a second 7.0% reduction in August). For OPRHP, the 10.35% equates to a funding cut of \$16.9 million.

While operating budget reductions of this magnitude are challenging for all state agencies, the budget cuts have hit the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation particularly hard. During Governor Pataki's administration, OPRHP suffered from round after round of budget cuts. During this period, the agency lost 250 parks maintenance and operations staff. Over this same twelve-year period, 26 new state parks were acquired and the acreage of the state park system expanded by


25%. As a result, any non-essential OPRHP programs and expenditures were eliminated years ago.

Moreover, OPRHP is essentially a "direct operations" agency – 83% of the agency's operating budget goes to pay the direct costs – including permanent and seasonal staff, equipment, utilities, and similar expenses – incurred in operating New York's 213 state parks and historic sites. With so much of the budget dedicated to direct park operating costs, in order to accommodate the \$16.9 million (10.35%) budget cut, OPRHP has had no choice but to reduce services in the parks and historic sites – reducing hours and/or seasons of operations, cutting recreational and educational programming, and in some cases closing parks.

Earlier this fall, the Director of the Budget issued the annual "call letter" for agency budget submissions. The call letter instructs all agencies to submit "no growth" budgets. For State Parks, this would mean making this year's \$16.9 million spending cut permanent. Adding in inflationary increases (negotiated state union contracts, increased energy costs, etc.) – this would translate into a permanent budget cut of approximately 15% for State Parks.

While we recognize the challenging fiscal climate and the need for all state agencies to tighten their belts and contribute to solving the state budget shortfall, a 15% cut to State Parks' operating budget would do great damage to the state park system. Because the parks agency's budget is so heavily weighted toward direct facility operating costs, a cut of this magnitude would inevitably result in widespread park closures, significant reductions to agency staffing levels, and reduced programming. The agency would also be forced to defer or eliminate greatly-needed facility maintenance work – with the effect of further adding to the state park system's \$650 million capital project backlog.

The State Council recognizes the challenging fiscal climate facing New York State. But given the economic and public health benefits provided by our state parks, we urge the Governor and the Legislature to provide the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation with sufficient operations budget funding to enable the agency to operate and maintain New York's magnificent state park system. In difficult financial times, our parks and historic sites can make a vital contribution to New York's economy and well-being – they need and deserve adequate funding.





Taconic State Park - Copake Falls Area

ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS



Annual Highlights

The mission of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation is to provide safe and enjoyable recreation and interpretation opportunities for all New York State residents and visitors and to be responsible stewards of our valuable natural, historic, and cultural resources. Over the past year, through funding provided by the \$132 million State Parks Capital Initiative and the efforts of the agency's talented, hard-working staff of 2,275 permanent employees and more than 5,000 seasonal positions, the agency has made great strides in advancing this mission for the people of the State of New York and the more than 55 million people that visit the state parks and historic sites each year. Below is a short sampling of highlights and successes achieved over the past year in each of the eleven OPRHP regions.

Allegany Region

- **Allegany State Park – Capital Improvements.**

A number of long-deferred major capital improvements were initiated or completed during



Allegany State Park

the past twelve months at Allegany State Park, funded through the State Park Capital Initiative. Cabin restoration and upgrades were accomplished on Anderson Trail, and the rehabilitation of several cabins on

Congdon Trail is scheduled to begin this fall. A new washhouse is currently being constructed in the Cain Hollow campground, replacing an existing deteriorated building. The remediation of the Cricks Run landfill is scheduled to be completed this fall and will finalize an environmental stewardship project of removing all landfills within the park. Approximately 15 miles of park roads were repaired and resurfaced within the park. The combined cost of these capital projects is approximately \$4,000,000.

- **Allegany Region Park Improvements.** Capital improvements were completed at other parks within the region. A new pedestrian bridge was installed in Lake Erie State Park, replacing a deteriorated bridge that provides access to a picnic area, gazebo, and park trails. Structural repairs and upgrades to the restrooms were completed in the historic Hippodrome building at Midway State Park. Bulkhead repairs and roof replacements at

the marina and pavilion buildings at Long Point State Park, and the installation of a new water system at Midway, are scheduled to be started this fall.

Central Region

- **Green Lakes State Park – Swimming Beach Improvements.** State Parks broke ground on the construction of a new \$2.3 million bath-



Green Lakes State Park

house at the swimming beach in this highly popular park. The previous bathhouse, constructed in the early 1960s, was deteriorated and did not meet today's public use or building code requirements. The new bathhouse will incorporate many of the existing architectural styles of the original Green Lakes Park buildings constructed in the 1930s, blended with today's building code updates, full accessibility, modern building construction, and green technologies. It will include new public restrooms, changing areas, lifeguard and first aid stations, a centrally located concession area, and a rental pavilion for private events, all under a 1930s style roof with dormers, gables and natural light and ventilation. The new bathhouse will be opened to the public for Memorial Day weekend, 2009.

- **Oquaga Creek State Park Improvements.** Central Region staff is overseeing engineering, design, and construction of a \$910,000 project to rehabilitate and reconstruct 2½ miles of park roads, public parking areas, and various drainage structures within the park, all of which have greatly deteriorated or failed since the park's original construction in the late 1970s. Concept planning for this major "park facelift" began in late 2007, with a scheduled completion date of October, 2008.

Finger Lakes Region

- **Watkins Glen State Park.** OPRHP acquired a parcel of land opposite the main entrance to this park in downtown Watkins Glen. The agency will remove unsightly buildings from this parcel that detracted from the scenic quality of our park entrance. Over the coming year, we will undertake design work for a total reconstruction of the park entrance area, including a new visitor center, upgraded interpretive signage, and rehabilitated parking area, taking advantage of the newly acquired parcel to improve traffic flow and pedestrian safety at this heavily visited park.
- **Catharine Valley Trail.** On June 7th, Finger Lakes State Parks opened a key bridge over NY Route 14 along the Catharine Valley Trail.



Finger Lakes State Park

This trail is a 12-mile long linear park connecting Watkins Glen State Park and Mark Twain State Park in the Southern Tier of New York State. Most of the trail is on portions of abandoned Northern Central Railroad and Chemung Canal towpath corridors. This multi-use trail will accommodate hikers, bikers, equestrians, and others on a fully accessible path that is scheduled for completion in 2009.

- **Pinnacle State Park – Great Eastern Trail.** The Great Eastern Trail was extended this summer from the Pennsylvania border to Pinnacle State Park. The nine-state Great Eastern Trail paral-

els the Appalachian Trail and will ultimately connect to the nation's longest trail, the North Country National Scenic Trail. The Finger Lakes Trail Conference worked with State Parks and other land owners to open the new 14-mile trail segment. Pinnacle State Park was proud to host the opening ceremonies for this link on July 26th of this year.

- **New Playgrounds.** Twelve new playgrounds were constructed at parks throughout the



Finger Lakes State Park

region. This \$1.2 million project created highly visible and very popular playgrounds in many of our facilities. Public response has

been overwhelmingly positive. Children and their families, whether camping or on day trips, are enthusiastic about the new equipment. At each playground installation, community members and staff from other parks pitched in, along with the regional maintenance crew, in an old fashioned "barn raising" style event.

Genesee Region

- **Letchworth State Park Improvements.** Drawing upon the new State Parks Capital Initiative,

Genesee engineering staff initiated design of a number of high priority park improvement projects, including waterline



Letchworth State Park

improvements, construction of public rental cabins, and construction of a new washhouse to serve campers. In addition, approximately 7 miles of park roads were repaired and re-paved, and the park's two largest parking lots

at the Highbanks Recreation Area were resurfaced – addressing critical but long-deferred park infrastructure needs.

- **Letchworth State Park – Council Grounds Rustic Viewing Pavilion.** In recognition of the 100th anniversary of William Pryor Letchworth's donation of his property to create the State Park, a replica of the 19th century Rustic Viewing Pavilion was re-constructed at the Council Grounds. This site includes a relocated Seneca Council House. The pavilion, which was handmade by a specialized craftsman and was funded by a federal grant from the Save America's Treasures program, completes the major phases of restoration for this site.
- **Hamlin Beach State Park Office & Police Station.** In October, OPRHP initiated construction of a new park office and Park Police Station at Hamlin Beach. The new building will replace a badly deteriorated former cottage that had served this purpose for several decades. To aid park visitors, the new facility will be in a much more visible location and will feature increased public access, enhanced meeting/conference space, and energy efficient design, and will comply with current requirements for State Park Police facilities.

Long Island Region

- **Brentwood State Park.** In August, Commissioner Ash joined state and local officials in



Brentwood State Park

a groundbreaking ceremony at Brentwood State Park, a major athletic complex that will provide greatly needed playing fields in this underserved area. This first phase of con-

struction, which includes sixteen soccer fields and four baseball fields, will cost \$9 million. Funding is coming from a state Senate legislative item and OPRHP's capital budget. The athletic fields are slated to open in the summer of 2009.

- **Robert Moses State Park – 100th Anniversary.** This summer, Robert Moses State Park celebrated its 100th anniversary. To mark this event, OPRHP invested nearly \$1 million in park improvements, including a major renovation to the bathhouse, comfort stations, locker rooms, beach shop, and concession food service area. The renovated facility retains its historic design features, right down to repair of the historic clock on the cupola.
- **Jones Beach State Park – Water Tower Rehabilitation.** This summer, OPRHP initiated a major rehabilitation of the world-famous Jones Beach water tower, which had deteriorated to the point where cracks appeared on its exterior facing. Through this \$3 million project, the



Jones Beach State Park

- interior steel structure that supports the water tower's 316,000-gallon freshwater tank will be strengthened. The brick façade will be re-pointed and its famous copper cap will be replaced. The water tower supplies potable water to all of Jones Beach and the Coast Guard Station.
- **Jones Beach & Heckscher State Parks Events.** The 2008 Bethpage Federal Credit Union Memorial Day Weekend Air Show drew 440,000 visitors to Jones Beach over two days, and the July 4th Fireworks Program was enjoyed by nearly 150,000 park visitors despite inclement weather. The July, 2008 New York Philharmonic Concert at Heckscher State Park drew a record crowd of nearly 45,000 park visitors.
- **Bethpage State Park – US Open Preparations.** Over the past year, OPRHP and the United States Golf Association (USGA) advanced planning for the 2009 United States Open

Golf Championship® Tournament, which will be held on the Bethpage Black course from June 15th to the 21st. A number of course improvements have been completed, and OPRHP and USGA are preparing to stage an outstanding event for the estimated 300,000 spectators who will attend to see the world's best golfers compete for the US Open title.

New York City Region

- **Riverbank State Park Improvements.** This year the OPRHP Capital Initiative is providing \$6 million for the much needed replacement of the deteriorated entrance traffic circle and complete reconstruction of all roofs and HVAC equipment. In addition, the park's landscaping has been upgraded, including rehabilitation of irrigation lines, new plantings, and replacements of more than 100 trees donated by the Million Tree Project. The New York City State Park Commissioners are in the planning stage of a fund-raising campaign for additional projects, including replacing the aging track.
- **Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve – Interpretive Center.** With only a small farm-



Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve

house available for both office space and programming, OPRHP has long sought a public visitor center at the 260-acre Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve. This fall, OPRHP will open the new 3,500 square foot Interpretive Center which includes exhibits and classroom space, as well as an outdoor pavilion. The Center will exhibit the cultural and natural history of the park and host a variety of educational programs. Assistance in raising the funds for this project was provided by Friends of Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve.

- **Public Programming.** Again this year, OPRHP took advantage of its New York City setting to host a strong variety of programming and special events. Unique events this year included the transformation of the Tobacco Warehouse at Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park into an outdoor theater for a production of Macbeth; a new performing arts series, "Live at the Gantries," at Gantry Plaza State Park; a new film series, "Movies Under the Moon," at East River State Park; and a series of live raptor shows for elementary school children.

Niagara Frontier Region

- **Niagara Falls State Park – Greenway Projects.** This year, OPRHP initiated the first \$3 million of state park improvements funded by the New York Power Authority, as part of a 50-year relicensing agreement for the Niagara Power Project hydro-electric facility. In Niagara Falls State Park, design has been initiated for three park rehabilitation projects on Goat Island, Luna Island, and Three Sisters Island – to repair deteriorated facilities and enhance the park experience for the millions of people that visit this flagship park each year. In addition, OPRHP is utilizing Greenway funding to initiate improvements to the Gorge and Whirlpool trail systems, which provide dramatic views of the Niagara River.
- **Buckhorn Island State Park Bike Trail.** On July 24th, OPRHP, the New York State Department of Transportation (DOT), and the Town of Grand Island officially dedicated the new Grand Island Bike Trail Connection Project. Funded in part by \$170,000 from New York State Parks budget and \$750,000 in federal funds that were administered by DOT, the Grand Island Bike Trail Connection consists of 2.5 miles of multi-use trail segments to and within Buckhorn Island State Park, providing a safer path for bicyclists and pedestrians to observe natural areas and enjoy the park. Additional improvements include improved bike path alignment, higher pavement quality, and reduced vehicle speed limits on park roads to encourage safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists. The project is the result of a ten-year partnership involving OPRHP, the Town, and DOT.

- **Artpark.** Drawing upon funds from the State Parks Capital initiative and a legislative item secured by Assemblywoman Francine



DelMonte, OPRHP initiated design and construction of several improvements to Artpark State Park's main stage theater and outdoor amphitheater. Fueled by a solid line-up of free concerts and a production of the classic "Beauty and the Beast," Artpark attendance figures increased by 5.5 percent over last summer. More than 230,000 visitors enjoyed the diverse programming offered by Artpark this summer. Event attendance has risen by 174 percent since 2002, not even counting those who visit the park to enjoy hiking, biking, and fishing.

- **125th Anniversary Celebration.** On June 9th, the Niagara Frontier Region Commission, joined by Commissioner Ash and former Commissioners and staff, commemorated its 125th Anniversary, featuring a presentation on the history of the Niagara Parks Commission. This historic Commission was established in 1883 to preserve the scenic beauty of Niagara Falls. The Commission created Niagara Falls Reservation, which is the oldest state park in the nation and helped lay the groundwork for the creation of state park systems throughout America and the world.

Palisades Region

- **Bear Mountain State Park – Park Improvements.** Access from the Bear Mountain main parking area to the park's pool and trailside zoo was improved to meet Americans with Disability Act requirements. Previously, the primary access for the general public had

been a set of steep stairs to a tunnel under Route 9W. This means of access was an impediment to



Bear Mountain State Park

people with disabilities and children in strollers. Renovation of this access and associated landscaping has greatly improved visitors' access to these heavily used park facilities at Bear Mountain. Funding of \$1.1 million was provided by the New York State Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration.

- **Bear Mountain State Park – Perkins Tower Restoration.** The Perkins Memorial Tower was constructed in the early 1930s and serves as an observation tower at a breathtaking scenic overlook atop Bear Mountain. Water damage was beginning to take a toll on this significant structure. Restoration of the tower included a complete repointing of the exterior and restoration of interior public spaces including beautiful tile mosaic features. This \$480,000 project was funded through a private donation.

Saratoga-Capital Region

- **Saratoga Spa State Park Improvements.**

Drawing upon funds from the State Parks Capital Initiative, OPRHP initiated more than \$1 million in improvements at Saratoga Spa State Park. The large Peerless Pool complex, including the handicapped-accessible main pool, slide pool,



Saratoga Spa State Park

and toddler pool, were rehabilitated including installation of a new pool liner to improve durability, eliminate water leakage, and improve the comfort and footing of swimmers. A number of the park's roads, parking areas, bike paths, and walking trails were resurfaced. Improvements were made to the Little Theater. And OPRHP entered into a new concession agreement for the Gideon Putnam Hotel and Conference Center, requiring the operator to invest more than \$19 million in private funds to upgrade the historic hotel over the 20-year life of the agreement.

- **Johnson Hall State Historic Site – Landscape Restoration.** With attendance on the rise at this historic site in the Mohawk Valley constructed by Sir William Johnson in the 1760s, improvements are underway to restore the historic grounds and develop pedestrian pathways throughout the 30-acre landscape. The site hosts popular events every year, including Johnstown's 250th anniversary celebration this past September.
- **Cherry Plain State Park – Campground Improvements.** The camping experience at Cherry Plain, located in Rensselaer County, was dramatically improved by constructing two new restroom/shower buildings to replace the badly deteriorated facilities constructed in the 1950s. The beauty and seclusion of this lovely park even caught Hollywood's attention. The major motion picture "Taking Woodstock" will include scenes that were filmed at Black River Pond in the park.

Taconic Region

- **Mills-Norrie State Park – Staatsburgh School Rehabilitation.** OPRHP initiated the rehabilitation of this vacant school building located within the park, to serve as the new Taconic Regional Headquarters. Regional staff have been "temporarily" located in the basement of the Mills Mansion since 1938 – this project will provide modern offices for regional staff, space for public programs, and allow the mansion basement to be converted into an interpretative area for the visiting public. The school rehabilitation, which will receive LEED green building certification, has received a major gift from Council Chair Dr. Lucy Waletz-

ky, with the balance of the project funded through the State Parks Capital Initiative.

- **Mills-Norrie State Park – Trail Improvement Project.** OPRHP is completing the "Hopeland Trail" project on this 107-acre property, that was added to the park several years ago but until now was not accessible to the public. OPRHP crews are developing an entrance and parking area, complete with gates, signage, and an information kiosk. Two featured trails, 1.6 miles in combined length, allow visitors to experience a series of diverse habitats as they wind through the landscape. Utilizing a section of an historic laneway, one trail has been designed as an accessible recreation path, the first of its kind in the region. Funding for the project was provided by a private donor through Scenic Hudson.
- **Lake Taghkanic State Park West Bathhouse Renovations.** This 50-year old building was



Lake Taghkanic State Park

completely renovated with upgraded restrooms, showers, lifeguard facilities, a concession with covered dining area, and a new park office. The \$2.3 million project was completed using State Parks Capital Initiative and federal and Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) funding.

- **Taconic State Park – Copake Falls Wading Pool.** This major rehabilitation project has transformed the swimming area of the Taconic Region's first park, which opened in 1927. Originally created to provide a shallow swimming area adjacent to the deep waters of the Ore Pit Pond, the Wading Pool provides user friendly features such as a rustic cedar foot bridge, a cascading spillway, waterside seat walls, stone coping with animal engravings,

a natural gravel pool bottom, a small sand beach area, a new drinking fountain, and native species plantings. The project was completed by OPRHP's capital construction crew in time for a Memorial Day weekend grand opening and was enthusiastically enjoyed by park visitors of all ages all summer.

- **Fahnestock & Hudson Highlands State Parks – Friends Group.** A new Friends Group was formed to support these two parks, which doubled in acreage in the last ten years. Regional Commissioner Jane Alexander played a leadership role in the formation of this promising organization.

Thousand Islands Region

- **Wellesley Island, Southwick Beach & Westcott Beach State Park Improvements.** The Region has designed, bid, and awarded contracts for the construction of eight new public restroom and shower buildings to be constructed in these three parks, which are our highest occupancy facilities. Ground-breaking in October, 2008 will allow for these buildings to be on-line for our 2009 season opening. This \$3.4 million initiative was made possible through funding from OPRHP State Parks Capital Initiative.
- **Robert G. Wehle State Park Improvements.** OPRHP received private contributions in 2006 and 2007 totaling \$579,000, from the Robert G. Wehle Charitable Trust, to support development of this park located on the shoreline of Lake Ontario. These funds have been used to build a new Visitors Center with year-round bathroom facilities, construct a new park shop/office building, and rehabilitate the park entrance road and parking lot. Regional construction crews performed all building construction and the Jefferson County Highway Department performed the road and parking area surfacing work.
- **Water Quality Investments.** The Region has been on an aggressive, multi-year program to improve its wastewater treatment systems. In 2008, we eliminated an outdated, high energy use sewage treatment plant at Kring Point State Park and replaced it with an underground sand filter system. This fall, we



Kring Point State Park


are upgrading the public recreational vehicle sewage pumpout facility at Macomb Reservation State Park. In the spring of 2009, Cedar Point State Park will hook up to the Village of Clayton's municipal treatment sewage system, eliminating another outdated sewage treatment plant. All of these efforts will improve environmental conditions and reduce energy use in state park facilities.

New York State Park Police

- **Park Police Academy.** The agency acquired Camp Cass, an unoccupied youth detention center in Albany County, and has transformed the facility into a state-of-the-art residential police training center for the New York State Park Police. For many years the State Park Police have been conducting training at facilities rented at great expense and without any permanent site for administrative functions or for the storage of training records or equipment. The new Academy has ample classroom space, a modern gymnasium, computer lab, fitness center and dormitories. The agency is preparing to host our first formal class at the new Academy.



State Board for Historic Preservation



During 2008, OPRHP initiated the creation of a new Five-Year Historic Preservation Plan for New York State. The plan, required by National Park Service as a condition for federal funding, will establish a series of recommendations and implementing actions to strengthen New York's protection of historic resources. While that plan will speak to priorities for OPRHP's Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau and the management of our state historic sites – it will go well beyond OPRHP's programs, to set forth a vision and goals for historic preservation efforts across the state, encompassing actions by state and federal agencies, local governments, preservation advocates, and others.

To secure public input, OPRHP has held 12 public outreach meetings across the state, presented at four professional conferences, held workshops for State Board for Historic Preservation and State Historic Preservation Plan Advisory Committee, and conducted more than 60 interviews with experts in the field. The draft plan is now being written, and seven goals have been identified to serve as an organizing format for the plan's proposed implementation actions:

- Use historic preservation, heritage development, and tourism as catalysts to improve New York's state and local economies.
- "Level the Playing Field" by expanding existing financial incentives and technical assistance programs to stimulate rehabilitation and reuse in older and historic residential and commercial areas.
- Integrate historic preservation into smart growth policies, local and regional planning, and decision-making to enhance economic competitiveness, community sustainability, and quality of life.
- Strengthen connections and work collaboratively with many partners to accomplish plan goals.
- Expand and strengthen education, outreach, and capacity building efforts.
- Promote historic and cultural resource preservation as a core principle of sustainability and green building efforts.
- Encourage increased identification, interpretation, preservation, protection and stewardship of both prehistoric and historic sites and artifacts located on private and state-owned lands.

Later this fall, OPRHP will release a full draft plan for public review and comment, with the goal of presenting the final plan to the National Park Service for approval before March, 2009.

Statewide Stewardship Initiatives

In addition to the central focus on revitalizing the state parks and historic sites through increased capital funding, over the past year OPRHP launched three major initiatives to enhance the agency's stewardship of New York's 213 state parks and historic sites:

- **Natural Resource Stewardship and Interpretation.** In order to enhance our stewardship and interpretation of the state park system's incredible wealth of plants, animals, and ecosystems, during 2008 OPRHP launched an agency-wide natural resource initiative. Nine new biologists and two new Natural Heritage Program scientists were hired – and are now working with park managers and regional staff charged with managing our facilities. We also initiated preparation of an Environmental Interpretation Plan that will survey existing education efforts across the agency and set forth strategies for expanding our environmental programming efforts. The Interpretation plan will be completed in 2009.
- **Master Planning.** In 2008, OPRHP launched an initiative to develop 25 master plans over the next five years to guide management and development of state parks and historic sites. Eleven state parks have been selected for master plans over the next several years: Saratoga Spa, Caumsett, Jamesport, Minnewaska, Two Rivers, Midway, Allegany, Fahnestock, East River, Robert Wehle, and Green Lakes. In 2008, the agency finalized a master plan for the Black Diamond Trail, a rail-trail that will link four state parks in the Ithaca area.
- **Sustainability.** OPRHP has adopted a goal of becoming a leading state agency incorporating energy efficiency, green design, LEED certification, recycling, and green product procurement into all of the agency's activities and programs. The agency is in the process of drafting an agency-wide sustainability plan, which will be adopted this winter.



Conclusion

The programs described above are only a sampling of the many accomplishments achieved during 2008 across the state park system. The State Council of Parks commends Governor Paterson, the State Legislature, and the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation for launching the State Parks Revitalization Initiative and providing diverse, safe, and high-quality recreational and educational programming to the more than 55 million people who visited our state parks and historic sites last year. These efforts have improved the health of our citizens, supported vibrant local communities, and strengthened the state's economy.

We urge the Governor and Legislature – even during the challenging fiscal year ahead – to include \$100 million in the FY2009-10 state budget to continue the State Parks Capital Initiative, as well as provide the agency with urgently needed operational funding to assure the safe operation and stewardship of New York's 213 state parks and historic sites.



Appendix 1: Roles & Responsibilities of State Council and Regional Commission Members



Roles and Responsibilities: Members, State Council of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation October 16, 2007

The State Council, created by Article 5 of PRHPL, consists of the Chairs of the eleven Regional Parks Commissions (including a representative of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission), the Chair of the State Board of Historic Preservation, the Commissioner of State Parks, and the Commissioner of Environmental Conservation. The Governor appoints the Chair and Vice Chair of the State Council. The Council meets at least four times per year through in-person meetings and conference calls. The Council's statutory responsibilities include:

- Act as a central advisory agency on all matters affecting parks, recreation, and historic preservation.
- Review the policy, budget, and statewide plans of the agency and make appropriate recommendations regarding their amendment or adoption.
- Submit reports to the Governor, not less than once each year, concerning progress in the area of state parks, recreation, and historic preservation.

To advance these responsibilities, State Council of Parks members shall:

1. Endeavor to attend all State Council of Parks meetings.
2. During State Council meetings and through other channels, educate other Council Members, the State Parks Commissioner, and other Executive and OPRHP Staff about issues, priorities, challenges, and opportunities within their respective regions.
3. Communicate State Council and agency priorities and initiatives to all Regional Commission members. Encourage, motivate, and support fellow Regional Commissioners to enable them to fully engage in state parks issues.
4. Become educated about statewide parks, recreation, and historic preservation issues.
5. Develop and submit a written annual report to the Governor each October.
6. Undertake all responsibilities of Regional Parks Commissioners (attached).





Regional Park, Recreation and Historic Preservation Commissions

Members' Roles and Responsibilities

October 16, 2007

The ten Regional Park, Recreation and Historic Preservation Commissions, created by Article 7 of PRHPL, represent each State Parks region, with the exception of the Palisades (represented by the Palisades Interstate Park Commission) and the Adirondack/Catskill park region. Each Regional Commission consists of seven to fourteen members (the number for each commission is set in law). All Commission members, who must be residents of the state, are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate for seven year terms. The Governor designates the chair of each Commission. Each Regional Commission meets at least four times per year. The Regional Commissions are charged with acting as a central advisory body on all matters affecting parks, recreation, and historic preservation within their respective regions, with particular focus on the operations of the state parks and historic sites.

To advance these responsibilities, Regional Parks Commissioners shall:

- 1.** Endeavor to attend all Regional Parks Commission meetings.
- 2.** Learn about the operations, priorities, and programs of the region, and participate in the annual review and approval of the regional budget. Remain in regular contact with the Regional Director. Visit as many state parks and historic sites in the region as possible, and become acquainted with regional staff and park managers.
- 3.** Serve as an advocate for the state parks and historic sites within the region, including:
 - “Adopt” one or more state parks, or historic sites, so that every park and site in the region has a Regional Commissioner with whom they have a special relation-

ship. Actively participate in the formation or enhancement of Friends Groups, including considering making personal financial contributions, and assisting in fundraising efforts.

- Meet with State Legislators and other elected officials to educate them about issues, challenges and opportunities facing state parks and historic sites and advocate for state park funding and policy priorities.

4. Enlist the support of parks user groups, environmental and historic preservation organizations, land trusts, local community and business leaders, tourism officials, and other partners to advance state parks goals and priorities.

5. Become educated about parks, recreation, and historic preservation issues throughout the region, with particular emphasis on issues – such as inappropriate development, sprawl, illegal ATVs, climate change, invasive species, etc. – that threaten state parks and historic sites. Testify or appear as appropriate at environmental review hearings, local planning meetings, etc. regarding proposed projects that impact park and historic site resources.

6. Participate as appropriate in continuing education opportunities such as: attending the annual Facilities Managers conference; participating in park master planning, railway development, and parkland designation efforts (such as Bird Conservation Areas and Natural Heritage Areas) for individual parks; and attending parks, open space, and historic preservation conferences and training programs.

7. Assist in identifying qualified individuals to fill vacant Regional Commission positions.



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