

2015 ANNUAL REPORT

New York State Council of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation



Seneca Art & Culture Center at Ganondagan State Historic Site



Franklin D. Roosevelt State Park



Letchworth State Park Nature Center groundbreaking



Governor Andrew M. Cuomo at Minnewaska State Park, site of new Gateway to the park.

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Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

State Council of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

ROSE HARVEY
Commissioner

LUCY R. WALETZKY, M.D.
State Council Chair

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor
Executive Chamber
Albany, NY 12224

February 2016

Dear Governor Cuomo,

The State Council of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation is pleased to submit its 2015 Annual Report. This report highlights the State Council of Parks and the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's achievements during 2015, and sets forth recommendations for the coming year.

First, we continue to be enormously inspired by your unprecedented capital investment in New York state parks, which has resulted in a renaissance of the system. With a total of \$521 million invested in capital projects over the last four years, we are restoring public amenities, fixing failing infrastructure, creating new trails, and bringing our state's flagship parks back to life. New Yorkers and tourists are rediscovering state parks, and the agency continues to plan for the future based on your commitment to provide a total of \$900 million in capital funds as part of the NY Parks 2020 initiative announced in your 2015 Opportunity Agenda. We are thrilled that your Executive Budget for 2016-2017 includes \$90 million in state parks capital funding in the next year.

The revitalization of the state park system is perfectly timed with your parallel tourism initiatives, promoting New York State's natural, cultural, historic, agricultural and recreational sectors. As was so beautifully on display in this summer's I Love NY television ads, the park system complements your impressive efforts to draw both New Yorkers and visitors from around the world to explore the wonders of our great state. We are particularly proud that in 2015 Letchworth State Park was named the best state park in the nation, and Watkins Glen placed third, in a national USA Today reader poll, demonstrating that New York State is a indeed a destination for tourists near and far.

The State Council of Parks remains committed to continuing the tradition of philanthropic support for state parks and, together with the Alliance for NYS Parks and the Natural Heritage Trust, has raised millions in private funds and through partnerships to support signature projects throughout the State. In 2015, we broke ground on the nature center at Letchworth State Park and the visitor center at Thacher State Park and we've restored miles of carriage roads at Minnewaska State Park. Millions of dollars have been raised in private donations to support exhibits and long-term operations at these popular and iconic parks. Multi-million dollar transformations are underway at Jones Beach, Niagara Falls and Roberto Clemente State Parks. In 2016, through a partnership with the Department of Health, we will expand the Learn-to-Swim program to at least thirty state parks. In 2016, we look forward to supporting your Connect Kids initiative to bring more youth, particularly those from under-served communities, to state parks and nurture the next generation of environmental stewards.

As the agency puts your NY Parks 2020 investment to work building new and renovating deteriorated facilities we must also maintain them and protect this historic capital investment while best serving our visitors. While we understand the need to use resources wisely, we encourage an increased level of general fund support in the state budget to support not only the basic operations of State Parks but also to maintain the new and improved infrastructure resulting from your investment and meet the needs of a growing number of visitors. The enacted 2015-16 state budget included an allotment of \$111 million from the general fund out of a total agency operating budget of \$188 million, representing a spending reduction of 13 percent from 2009-10. We clearly understood the need for the state to reduce spending, and our facilities have adopted several measures to reduce costs while continuing to operate at a first-rate level:

- Reduced permanent staffing by 23 percent since 2008
- Significantly reduced mowing of park land without negatively impacting the visitor experience
- Reduced travel of staff
- Improved energy use through application of solar and LED lighting
- Automated several fee collection areas
- Increased usage of interagency collaboration and resource sharing
- Expanded friend group formation and involvement in operations
- Increased private fundraising to help offset operating needs

All of this has allowed the agency to attract over 62 million visitors a year—a remarkable 8 percent increase from when you took office—while maintaining the quality of the operations. However, due to inflation, expanded park operations, and increased capital spending, operating funds available to adequately support the system is becoming a serious issue. Additional operating funds are needed to ensure we maintain our facilities and not allow our infrastructure to slip into disrepair due to inadequate funding as was the case years ago.

Given the importance of the state park system to New York's tourism economy and economic vitality, we remain grateful for your investment and ask for your increased support for State Park operations to ensure that your legacy-making revitalization of our parks is lasting and preserved.

Sincerely,



Lucy Rockefeller Waletzky, Chair



Roberto Clemente State Park - Storm Resiliency





Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center



Taughannock Falls State Park
Learn to Swim Program



Walkway Over the Hudson State Park
Walkway Marathon

The State Council of Parks will advance four priorities in 2016

1. Build and Sustain a 21st Century Park System that Is Safe, Affordable and Welcoming.

In his *NY Parks 2020*, the Governor made a multi-year commitment to leverage a broad range of private and public funding to invest approximately \$900 million in state parks from 2011 to 2020, the largest capital infusion in the history of the park system. This historic investment supports the agency's parallel efforts to rehabilitate, reinvent, and redesign park operations to leverage state resources and provide safe, affordable and high-quality recreational and educational experiences to the more than 62 million people who visit our facilities annually. The State Council of Parks supports the Governor's commitment to include \$90 million of critical new capital funding in 2016-17 for state park improvements and infrastructure as well as adequate general fund support to maintain park operations, ensure a quality visitor experience and protect the infrastructure investment made possible by NY Parks 2020.

2. Connect the Next Generation to the NYS Park System

Compelling anecdotal and sociological research points to the conclusion that youth are less connected to the outdoor environment; absent an effort to reverse this trend, we risk a future of declining park visitation and alienation from the natural environment. The State Council of Parks supports programmatic initiatives to connect the next generation of New Yorkers to their parks through offering increased educational and recreational opportunities aimed at youth, removing barriers to access and encouraging service engagement at state park facilities.

3. Promote and Celebrate our Parks

The State Council will continue to assist the agency in implementing marketing initiatives to create a strong brand for our parks and historic sites. We also support the message of "this parkland is your parkland" to promote stewardship and responsibility among our park visitors and partners and initiatives such as I Love My Park Day that encourage volunteerism and pride in our state parks and historic sites.

4. Stewardship of Natural Resources

The State Council of Parks recognizes the importance of the stewardship of our natural resources and the need to protect, preserve and conserve them throughout our state park system to ensure that they are left unimpaired for future generations.





Rock Island Lighthouse State Park



Boating Safety Education

The state park system is one of New York's greatest treasures. Today, the system totals 215 state parks and historic sites encompassing nearly 350,000 acres. New York's parks and historic sites provide affordable outdoor recreation and education opportunities to more than 62 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 healthy lifestyles and helping combat childhood obesity.

The Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (State Parks) is responsible for

the operation and stewardship of the state parks system, as well as advancing a statewide parks, historic preservation, and open space mission. The agency has an "all funds" operating and capital budget of approximately \$338 million (FY2015-16 adjusted budget) and is staffed by 1,735 permanent employees and more than 4,500 seasonal positions during peak operating season.

State Parks is responsible for managing a vast array of public facilities within 180 state parks and 35 historic sites. New York has one of the most developed state park systems in the nation, encompassing a huge inventory of public facilities including 5,000 buildings, 29 golf courses, 36 swimming pools, 67 beaches, 27 marinas, 40 boat launch sites, 18 nature centers, 817 cabins, 8,355 campsites, more than 2,000 miles of trails, 106 dams, 604 bridges, hundreds of miles of roads, and dozens of historic structures listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

New York's state park system has long been recognized as one of the best and most diverse in the nation. 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 second 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.



Riverbank State Park

The term "State park system" as used in this report refers to New York's 180 State parks and 35 State historic sites.



Franklin D. Roosevelt State Park - New Bathhouse and Entry Area

State Council of Parks

LUCY ROCKEFELLER
WALETZKY,
Chair and Taconic Commission

DALTON BURGETT,
Allegany Commission

CORNELIUS B. MURPHY,
Central Commission

W. DAVID BANFIELD,
Finger Lakes Commission

PETER HUMPHREY,
Vice-Chair and Genesee Commission

BRYAN ERWIN,
Long Island Commission

LEISLE LIN,
New York City Commission

CINDY ABBOTT LETRO,
Niagara Frontier
Commission

PHILIP WHITE,
Palisades Commission

HEATHER MABEE,
Saratoga-Capital District
Commission

HAROLD JOHNSON II,
Thousand Islands
Commission

ROBERT MACKAY,
State Board for
Historic Preservation

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

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.



Riverbank State Park - Ice Rink



Clermont State Historic Site



National Purple Heart Hall of Honor

Roles and Responsibilities: Members, Regional Park, Recreation and Historic Preservation Commission

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 relationship. 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, trailway 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.





**NY Parks
2020**

New York Parks 2020

Since Governor's Cuomo's historic NY Parks 2020 initiative began, New York State Parks has completed infrastruc-



ture projects in every region of the state that have enhanced the visitor experience and launched a renaissance in the state-wide capital program.

With leveraged funds, in four years the program has invested \$531 million in projects that have or will improve 133 of 215 state parks and historic sites; over 230 projects have been completed or are underway.

State Parks Operating Budget

State Parks is a "direct operations" agency – it runs facilities, not programs. Ninety percent of the agency's operating budget goes to pay the direct costs incurred in operating New York's 215 State Parks and Historic Sites.

The enacted 2015-16 State Budget includes \$188.3 million in appropriations for agency operations (encompassing state General Fund support, federal programs, agency-generated special Revenue funds). This represents a General Fund spending reduction of about 13 percent from 2009-10 to 2014-15.

2015 Capital Highlights

Transforming Flagship State Parks

Multi-year, multi-million transformations are underway at Jones Beach, Niagara Falls State Park and Roberto Clemente State Parks which will modernize, restore and improve these iconic parks for the millions of people who visit them every year. Thirty parks, including those in underserved communities, will receive transformative improvements under NY Parks 2020.

Promoting Healthy, Outdoor Active Recreation

NY Parks 2020 will build or improve 100 playgrounds, with 47 completed to date. Athletic fields, facilities and trails have been modernized, restored and repaired, from the ice rink at Riverbank State Park to the carriage trails at Minnewaska State Park Preserve.

Connecting People with Parks

Construction is underway at the Letchworth Nature Center and the Visitors Center at Thacher State Park and last spring the Seneca Arts & Culture Center opened at Gandondagan State Historic Site.

Rejuvenating our World Class Park System

Over half of NY Parks 2020 funds are directed toward projects that significantly improve the nuts and bolts of the system and repair basic infrastructure, from renovated bathhouses, repaired water systems, and new environmentally-friendly parking lots.

Preserving Historic Sites and Cultural Assets

From renovations to a Hudson River great estate to a historic lighthouse on the St. Lawrence River in the Thousand Islands, NY Parks 2020 is preserving our State's historic and cultural assets, protecting our connection to the past and contributing to a vibrant historic tourism economy in New York State.

Sustaining New York's Natural Environment

NY Parks 2020 is investing in projects that will not only protect parks from the effects of climate change but also improve the energy efficiency of our system. Since 2012, \$2.4 million has been allocated for solar installations in 12 parks; the largest is a \$1.7 million 500-kilowatt system at Robert Moses State Park.

Energizing Local Economies

NY Parks 2020 is revitalizing facilities that attract major events and tourism, including Bethpage State Park which will host the PGA Championship in 2016 and the Ryder Cup in 2019. State Parks annually catalyze 20,000 tourism jobs in local communities and the NY Parks 2020 is creating additional construction and engineering jobs.

Partners & Programs



I Love My Park Day Volunteers

Parks & Trails New York's

I LOVE MY PARK *days*

The fourth annual **I Love My Park Day** hosted with **Parks & Trails New York** on Saturday, May 2, 2015 saw 6500 volunteers who contributed 16,000 hours to 200 cleanup, improvement, beautification and stewardship projects at 95 state parks and historic sites. Save the Date for the 5th Annual I Love My Park Day, Saturday, May 7, 2016.

The **New York State Parks Learn-to-Swim Program** expanded to 15 State Parks in 2015, serving hundreds of children in free or low-cost programs.

Next year, the program will again expand to at least 30 parks. Learn-to-Swim is supported through a partnership with the New York State Department of Health, the American Red Cross, the National Swimming Pool Foundation and the Northeast Spa and Pool Foundation.



The **Friends Of Recreation, Conservation and Environmental Stewardship (FORCES)** program is cooperatively funded by State Parks, the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) and donor support from the Alliance for New York State Parks, a program of the Open Space



Jones Beach State Park - Learn to Swim Program

Institute. To date, through the pilot effort with SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) and a growing network of 14 participating collegiate institutions, FORCES has now engaged more than 1000 students in six regions of the state park system, creating opportunities for a wide range of mutually beneficial partnerships that enhance State Parks while simultaneously providing students real world experiences and the opportunity to further their academic programs.



Grafton Lakes State Park - Learn To Swim Program



Taughannock Falls State Parks - FORCES

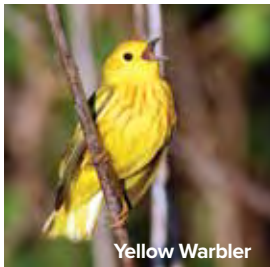


Audubon in the Parks

Photo credit: Diana Ngai (Audubon For the Birds! Education Coordinator).



Since the inception of **Audubon in the Parks**, Audubon has been active in 50 State Parks around New York. With 27 Audubon Chapters, Audubon New York staff and centers, and 215 state parks and historic sites located across the state, this initiative has a strong impact on New York's priority birds and habitats.



Yellow Warbler

First Day Hikes are part of a national initiative led by America's State Parks to get people outdoors, with over 400 hikes scheduled this year in all 50 states. Kids and adults all across America will be participating in First Day Hikes, getting their hearts pumping and enjoying the beauty of a state park. In New York, hundreds of people participate in hikes at nearly 40 parks.



Bethpage State Park - First Day Hikes

Annual Highlights





Green Lakes State Park - Wicked Woods Halloween



Allegany State Park



Ganondagan State Historic Site

Allegany Region

4 parks, 1.8 million visitors

From cabins to golf courses, visitors to the Allegany



Region saw many improvements over the last year. At **Allegany State Park**, three rental cabins were restored with assistance from the Friends of Allegany State Park, and the bathhouse at Quaker Lake Beach was renovated. The Allegany Regional Park Commission is spearheading the creation of the Allegany Arboretum to honor those who have made significant contributions to the park. Through a partner-

ship with the Town of Westfield and assistance from Regional Commission member Tom Erlandson, the grounds of Barcelona Lighthouse on Lake Erie were restored and reopened to the public, marking the first public event there since the state took ownership. The Shipwreck Bluffs Disc Golf Course at **Lake Erie State Park**, the first 18-hole disc golf course in Chautauqua County, adds to the growing and popular complex of disc golf courses in Western New York. With continued support from a strong public-private partnership, the Friends of **Midway State Park** is constructing a new mini-golf course at the region's amusement park, reviving a tradition for western New York families.

Central Region

20 parks, 7 historic sites, 2.6 million visitors

Several partnerships resulted in unique programs throughout the Central Region in 2015. At the State Park at the NYS Fair, college volunteers from the agency's FORCES Program joined with the NYS Bluebird Society and the State Office of Children and Family Services to construct nearly 2,000 bluebird houses providing a fun and educational family activity to the park's visitors over the eleven days of the Fair. Over 6,600 people attended the annual Wicked Woods Halloween event at **Green Lakes State Park**, the park's largest annual event that offers a variety of family activities in collaboration with the Town of Manlius, and Villages of Fayetteville and Manlius. Visitors to the western section of the Old Erie Canal Trailway can now learn about the trail's history and features thanks to 24 new interpretive panels created and installed in partnership with Chittenango Landing Canal Boat Museum. NY Parks 2020 also funded significant improvements at Chittenango Landing historic site, as well as upgrades to cabins at several parks throughout the Central Region where campers now enjoy many new amenities.

Finger Lakes

25 parks, 2 historic sites, 3.2 million visitors

A project that will transform the visitor's experience, the Seneca Art & Culture Center opened last fall at the **Ganondagan State Historic Site**. The 17,300-square-foot Center tells the story of Iroquois contributions to art, culture and society for more than 2,000 years through specially designed interactive exhibits and historical artifacts. A collaborative venture



Letchworth State Park - Nature Center Groundbreaking



Planting Fields Arboretum State Historic Park - Sensory Garden



Jones Beach State Park - July 4th Fireworks

between New York State, the Seneca Nation, Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council and many private donors made year-round interpretive facility possible. The Region expanded a partnership with Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit to provide bus service during the summer to **Buttermilk Falls, Robert H. Treman, Allan Treman and Taughannock Falls State Parks** and formalized an agreement with the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce to staff a visitor information counter in the new comfort station and multipurpose room at the Overlook at **Taughannock Falls State Park**. Last spring, **Watkins Glen State Park**, one of the state's most visited parks, was recognized as the third best State Park in USA Today's Reader's poll.

Genesee Region

8 parks, 1.2 million visitors

Significant progress was made this year on the **Letchworth State Park Nature Center**, a signature NY Parks 2020 project. Lt. Governor Kathy Hochul joined the Agency and supporters at the center's groundbreaking, and a five-year agreement was reached with SUNY Geneseo on a partnership to develop research, programming, and exhibits at the Nature Center. The agreement includes a \$75,000 contribution for equipment. Genesee Regional Parks Commission Chair Peter Humphrey has led a fundraising campaign with the Natural Heritage Trust and Open Space Institute that has raised \$2 million toward the Center's construction, educational exhibits and endowment. NY Parks 2020 also funded the construction of two new bathhouses at the park's Highbanks Campground in time for the 2015 camping season and upgrades to communication systems

in the park. **Letchworth State Park** was named "America's Best State Park" by readers of USA Today last spring, a designation that resulted in increased visitation and recognition for one of the state's most magnificent parks. Progress also continues along the **Genesee Valley Greenway**, with several new projects planned or completed. Trail users enjoyed a series of new interpretive hikes offered along seven different sections of the 90-mile Greenway and an additional seven will be offered next year

Long Island Region

26 parks, 1 historic site, 18 million visitors

The historic revitalization of **Jones Beach State Park** continues with phase one of renovations to the West Bathhouse complete, including restoration of the exterior façade and historic windows and upgrades to the swimming pool. The Central Mall mosaics, a defining and beloved historic feature of the park, were restored this year, appearing now as they did over 85 years ago. The Field 6 Concession and Comfort Station building welcomes visitors with a refreshed interior, improved layout and contemporary restrooms. To the delight of generations of visitors, the park again hosts the July 4th Fireworks and the Holiday Lights in the Park. NY Parks 2020 has also funded projects at **Sunken Meadow State Park** including renovations to the Main Bathhouse and a new irrigation pond at the golf course. A new and modern comfort station was built at Wildwood State Park to better meet the needs of campers. **Planting Fields Arboretum State Historic Park** now includes a special new place for people of all ages and abilities. Designed

and built with support from the Planting Fields Foundation, the Sensory Garden features an array of vibrant flowers, grasses, edible herbs, vegetable and textured and scented plants, offering a variety of multi-sensory experiences. The main parking area at the park is also being rehabilitated with environmentally sustainable features and upgraded lighting.

New York City Region

7 parks, 7.5 million visitors

Volunteerism, new partnerships and major projects marked a busy year in the New York City region. Hundreds of volunteers from Bloomberg LP completed significant work at two state parks in New York City. At **Riverbank State Park**, over 400 college intern volunteers and 200 corporate volunteers painted 3,000 linear feet of sea rail and planted 400 perennials in the park's courtyards. In October, 100 corporate volunteers joined community members at **Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve** in Staten Island to install 800 linear feet of deer fencing; paint the long barn and farm house and remove 15 yards of invasive species. Through a program partnership with the Bronx Children's Museum, **Roberto Clemente State Park** is hosting students from PS 274 in an after-school program to create a series of large murals celebrating the park's flora and fauna. The murals will cover the extensive construction fence now bordering the park as it undergoes a substantial renovation. Once the renovation is complete in 2017 the murals will move inside the park to decorate the main building forever. In September, the **Roberto Clemente State Park** community gathered

at the park to celebrate the enormous renovation of the bulkhead, esplanade, and upper plaza. The \$35 million project is funded by the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery with CDBG funds, New York Works, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. and City Councilwoman Vanessa Gibson. Long Island City's four-legged residents have a new dog run to enjoy at **Gantry Plaza State Park**, funded by the Queens West Development Corporation's public infrastructure fund.

Niagara Region

18 parks, 2 historic sites, 11.7 million visitors

New York's newest State Park, **Buffalo Harbor State Park** continues to transform as phase two of construction begins that will introduce new outdoor access. Visitors have enjoyed the widely popular new playground and other amenities at the park that is reinventing and reinvigorating Buffalo's waterfront. The Niagara Falls community gathered this summer to honor historian and author Paul Gromosiak with a dedication of a monument in Heritage Park located at **Niagara Falls State Park**. Widely considered the park's unofficial historian, Mr. Gromosiak has spent countless hours volunteering and has been a part of major initiatives over the last several decades. Over 300 Niagara Falls City school children visited the park for a free field trip program that included transportation, lunch, a trip to the Aquarium, viewing of the Niagara Legends of Adventure Movie and tour of the Falls. A new Welcome Facility on Goat Island opened, serving as a ticketing center and a much needed restroom facility. Former Niagara Regional Commission member Tom Yots led two workshops on historic preserva-



Gantry Plaza State Park - New Dog Walk



Niagara Falls State Park - Paul Gromosiak, Park Historian



Ft. Niagara State Park - Solar Program

tion benefits for Western New York stakeholders. Advancing the agency's sustainability goals, the Niagara Region dedicated the largest solar array currently running a state park facility at **Ft. Niagara State Park**.

Palisades Region

20 parks, 7 historic sites, 4.8 million visitors

Governor Cuomo launched a major fall tourism campaign at **Minnewaska State Park** in early October and announced the construction of a new \$7.3 million project to improve the gateway to the park including a new visitor center, pavilion and improved parking area and flow. Young visitors to **Rockland Lake State Park** are enjoying a new, destination playground with many exciting play features. The Leaf design of the playground emphasizes the themes of learning, exercise, accessibility and fun. Since 2012, New York State Parks has built or improved 47 playgrounds throughout the state as part of NY Parks 2020. The **National Purple Heart Hall of Honor** unveiled newly redesigned galleries in August. Highlights of the new exhibit include tributes to all five branches of service; a new video featuring nine Purple Heart recipients; a timeline interactive of America's military conflicts as well as theme-based personal stories of recipients. Artifacts and stories featured throughout the galleries offer visitors an incredible journey through military history as well as reminders of human sacrifice and the cost of freedom.

Saratoga-Capital District Region

12 parks, 8 historic sites, 4.7 million visitors

The beloved northwoods **Moreau Lake State Park** grew by over 700 acres this year thanks to the work of the Saratoga Regional Parks Commission to permanently preserve lands formerly part of the McGregor prison. The project advances the north-south trail route through Saratoga County atop the Palmertown Ridge, and brings this southern Adirondack Park to over 5,600 acres. Another signature NY Parks 2020 project advanced at **Thacher State Park** where the Open Space Institute/Alliance for NYS Parks is raising \$1 million by leading a coalition of partners including the Regional Commission, the Friends of Thacher Park, and the local community to develop exhibits and orientation for the new Thacher Park Center, the 100 year old iconic park's first visitor center. With support from the National Park Service, the Friends of the Battlefield and members of the Empire State Metal Detector Association volunteered a total of 320 hours in October to help archaeological consultants recover artifacts at **Bennington Battlefield State Historic Site**, a pivotal Revolutionary War battlefield on the Walloomsac River in the Town of Hoosick.



Thacher State Park - Visitor Center Groundbreaking

Taconic Region

13 parks, 6 historic sites, 4.2 million visitors

NY Parks 2020 funded a major renovation to the bathhouse and entry area for the largest pool in the state park system, located at **FDR State Park**. The garden-like entrance features new site furnishings, filtering rain garden and native plantings. The bathhouse includes a renovated interior, new roof and lighting features. Bikers and walkers alike now enjoy more of the Harlem Valley Rail Trail after completion of a 1.2-mile extension, extending the rail trail north from the **Taconic State Park** Office to Orphan Farm Road. The **Walkway Over the Hudson State Park** hosted the first Walkway Marathon and Half-Marathon in June, attracting over 2,500 athletes to the Hudson Valley. The race was the first certified “green race” in New York State, following guidelines set forth in the Athletes for a Fit Planet Pledge of Sustainability. **Olana State Historic Site** and the Thomas Cole National Historic Site co-hosted a landmark exhibition of contemporary art to highlight the pivotal role of the two properties in shaping America’s art and culture. The exhibit drew widespread acclaim and received coverage in the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, CBS Sunday Morning and other national media outlets. Continuing the family’s remarkable legacy of support for state parks, David Rockefeller donated \$4 million to establish an operating endowment at **Rockefeller State Park Preserve**.

The gift is one of the largest private donations ever to State Parks and will be used to fund environmental programming, stewardship of the preserve, and maintenance of historic carriage roads.

Thousand Islands

26 parks, 1 historic site, 1.6 million visitors

Campers and swimmers will enjoy new facilities at state parks in the Thousand Islands Region. A new beach bathhouse at **Wellesley Island State Park** replaces an outdated building and features a camp store, recreation room and laundry room that will be operated by a concessionaire. The facility also has an attached large covered pavilion with a fireplace. A very popular camping loop at the Park received all new infrastructure including utilities and paving. A new bathhouse was also constructed at **Grass Point State Park** and provides needed lifeguard rooms, storage space and restroom facilities for beach-goers and nearby campsites. This building, along with a recently completed playground, makes a very attractive day-use area of the park. Extension of the multi-use Black River Trail will begin in the spring of 2016, adding about a mile of 10’ wide paved trail with funding from the NYS Transportation Enhancement Program. In another project advancing the Agency’s sustainability goals, installation of a 9.9 kW solar array was completed this summer at **Keewaydin State Park** and should generate about 1/3rd of the power needed to run the Regional Office.



Bennington Battlefield State Historic Site



Grass Point State Park



Franklin D. Roosevelt State Park - New Bathhouse and Entry Area

Division for Historic Preservation



Division for Historic Preservation launches new online Cultural Resources Information System (CRIS)

2015 saw the launch of CRIS, an advanced Geographic Information System that combines access to the State Historic Preservation Office's extensive digitized databases with remote entry of information and paperless environmental review. Moving to paperless environmental review is already paying off – the number of projects received for review increased 20% from 2014 to 2015, the responses remained timely and paper records were greatly reduced.

Hurricane Sandy Relief Assistance

The federal Hurricane Sandy Relief Assistance for Historic Properties program awarded \$11 million to 30 capital projects to repair and restore historic buildings, landscapes and cemeteries damaged by the hurricane. Approximately \$2 million is being used to inventory historic resources in flood-prone areas as a way to help ensure quick response to future disasters.

50th Anniversary Celebrations

2016 marks the 50th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which established the country's preservation policy and created the network of State Historic Preservation Offices to carry out the act on behalf of the National Park Service. The Division for Historic Preservation is working to celebrate the an-

niversary, including: co-sponsoring a statewide historic preservation conference, which will be held in the Capital Region next spring; publishing the 2015-2020 New York State Historic Preservation plan; and producing a series of videos highlighting personal stories about historic places across the state.

2015 NYS Historic Preservation Awards

This annual awards program honors excellence in historic preservation and community revitalization across the state. The 2015 ceremony was held on December 3rd in the restored Assembly Parlor at the State Capitol in Albany. This year's awards pay tribute to the following achievements:

- After sitting vacant for several years, the former 1927 DeWitt Clinton Hotel was rehabilitated by the Columbia Development Companies as the **Renaissance Albany Hotel**. The \$48 million project utilized preservation tax credits to restore the building's exterior and public spaces and rejuvenate its hotel rooms. The local landmark has been transformed into vibrant contemporary hotel, helping to revitalize downtown Albany.
- Created at the end of the 19th century, **Camp Santanoni** is one of the best preserved examples of a grand Adirondack camp. The 12,990-acre wilderness retreat retains an impressive range of buildings, including the gate lodge complex, farm and main lodge. Thanks to the commitment, cooperation and hard work of the New York State Department



Savona Free Library



Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region



Renaissance Albany Hotel

of Environmental Conservation, Adirondack Architectural Heritage and the Town of Newcomb, the camp has been preserved for the public's enjoyment and education.

- Built in 1892, the old **Brooklyn Fire Headquarters** is a particularly fine example of Romanesque Revival architecture as applied to a civic building. The fire house remained in use until the 1970s and was later converted into apartments for seniors and low income residents. A successful partnership between the Pratt Area Community Council and MDG Design and Construction, using preservation tax credits, rehabilitated the long neglected landmark and updated it for contemporary use.
- When the **Savona Free Library** purchased a former funeral home in 2011, it intended to demolish it to construct a new library. Through the state environmental review process, the library was encouraged to rehabilitate the 1830s Federal era house. As a result, the library decided to update the existing library and restore the historic house as an annex, now called the Mary Helen Joint Meeting House. The revitalized landmark offers space for library activities, including story hours, family movie nights and special events.
- The **Pike Block** includes a collection of 19th century buildings that were constructed when Syracuse was a thriving commercial and industrial center. Several years ago, the local CenterState Corporation for Economic Opportunity and Adapt

CNY formed a partnership to redevelop the vacant buildings, and selected VIP Development Associates as the project developer. The \$25 million project, which utilized various sources of funding, including preservation tax credits, transformed the abandoned buildings into a lively commercial and residential complex.

- The **Cadence Square** development is an outgrowth of the Canandaigua VA Medical Center's plan to revitalize the health care facility for the 21st century. Cazenovia Recovery Systems and the Finger Lakes Addictions Counseling and Referral Agency undertook the \$11 million project, which combined the rehabilitation of vacant **Building 14** for transitional housing and supportive services with the construction of new apartments for veterans in need. Preservation tax credits assisted in this most worthy endeavor.
- The **Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region** seeks to stimulate interest in the region's Underground Railroad movement; recognize local historic figures; and preserve archival and built resources, including the 19th century residence of Stephen and Harriet Myers, who were African American leaders in Albany's Underground Railroad movement. The history project, and particularly co-founders Mary Liz and Paul Stewart, have made an extraordinary contribution to bringing forward an underrepresented theme in regional history for the public's benefit.

NYS Parks Division of Law Enforcement



Saratoga Spa State Park



12th Session Basic School graduated thirty-five officers



New York State Park Police

The Division of Law Enforcement continues to provide excellent police services to state park visitors, neighboring communities, and employees of the Agency. During a season of record-level visitation, increased special events, and peak use at critical time periods, New York's state parks and facilities were maintained as safe havens of public use by the Police Officers, Rangers and civilian employees of the Division.

With proactive and highly visible uniformed patrols, the members of the Division engaged with visitors, offered assistance, and maintained control of large and sometimes unruly crowds. The Division ensured that the rights of individuals were protected, and enforcement actions were initiated properly, maintaining a high standard of demonstrated integrity and public trust.

Throughout the summer, State Park Police provided essential services, including crowd control, major event

planning and coordination of law enforcement and emergency management, to ensure an enjoyable and safe experience at the three primary concert venues at state parks: Jones Beach Amphitheater, the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, and Artpark.

To maintain a high quality of service, members of the Division are trained at the State Park Police Academy in Rensselaerville. Recruit, in-service, and Public Safety Ranger training was conducted at the Academy in 2015, along with other specialized training programs, Agency training, and other training partnerships. The 12th Session Basic School graduated thirty-five State Park Police Officers to assignments in state parks across New York State in April. Completing Field Training in late June, these officers were fully integrated into the Division patrol force for the peak season. The 13th Session began in October, and is scheduled to graduate nineteen new State Park Police Officers for summer 2016 operations, helping to ensure an effective and well-staffed patrol force.

Environmental Stewardship



Saratoga-Capital District Environmental Education

NY Parks 2020 has funded 120 natural resource stewardship projects totaling \$5 million. These projects protect, restore and conserve New York's biodiversity, including: protection of rare and endangered plants and animals; enhancement of grassland habitat; restoration of wetlands, streams and lakes; forest conservation and protection from harmful invasive species; innovative methods to reduce storm-water runoff; and water quality improvements.

State parks are home to 800 locations of rare plants and animals and 400 high-quality natural communities ranging from old-growth forests in Allegany State Park, to grassy summits in Taconic, to dunes and beaches on Long Island and Lake Ontario. Thanks to a long-standing partnership between State Parks and the New York Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP), biologists conduct field inventories to identify, evaluate, and map these natural assets. This year, NYNHP biologists conducted field surveys in 42 parks and responded to over 50 requests for information to help guide planning, minimize



Selkirk Shores State Park - FORCES

impacts, and prioritize stewardship actions. NYNHP is an affiliate of the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and is the primary source for information on rare species in the state.

State Parks' Water Quality staff monitored water quality at 20 lakes and ponds in 8 parks. The team implemented 4 aquatic invasive species management projects that included hand pulling, suction harvesting, grass carp, and benthic mats. Staff developed new signage, data management, and training protocols and for the first time all beach sampling results were posted daily on the Parks website. Additionally, staff provided educational materials and training sessions to park managers to help prevent bathers or pet exposure to harmful algae blooms.

In 2015, ten boat stewards inspected more than 13,000 watercraft and trailers for aquatic invasive species at 23 boat launch sites across the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain. In August, the stewards collaborated with FORCES and the Oswego County Soil and Water Conservation District to implement a two-day water chestnut hand harvest in Selkirk Shores State Park on Eastern Lake Ontario. The crews removed 240 bags of wet biomass (about 9,600 pounds) and reduced the infestation by approximately 40%.

Invasive species remain one of the greatest threats to conserving biodiversity in our state parks, but progress to combat the threat continues. In 2015, two Invasive Species Strike Teams worked for 26 weeks to remove invasive plants from 278 locations in 56 parks across the state. Forest Health Specialists traveled over 8,000 miles, visiting 24 parks to survey 13,000 acres for invasive forest pest such as Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) and Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). For both the Invasive Species Strike Teams and Forest Health Specialists, the treatment and survey areas are mapped on handheld devices and this effort added 477 records to the iMap Invasives statewide database. Additionally, future monitoring and management recommendations are developed for each site to aid in prioritizing work for the coming season.

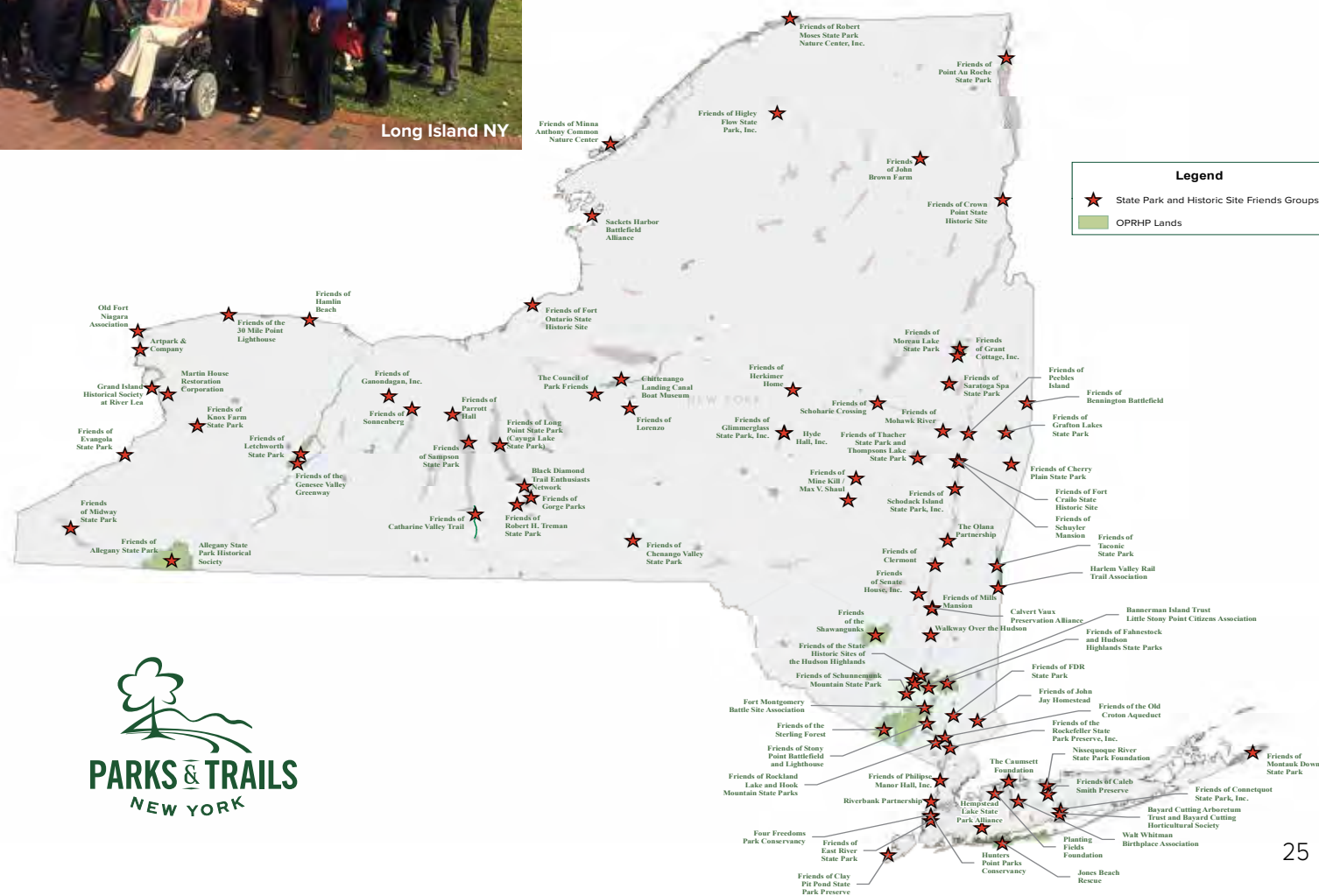
The Nature Times blog, launched in 2014, has been a resounding success. In 2015, the blog had more than 30,000 visitors from 40 different countries and over 22,000 page views. It features interesting stories and photos about stewardship and scientific research in our parks as well as fun facts about the plants and animals living there. Visit <http://nysparksnaturetimes.com>.



Friends Groups



A series of Friends gatherings around the state, organized by Parks & Trails New York and State Parks, provided an opportunity for regional park commissioners, park staff, Friends groups and other partners to share information and ideas for supporting and strengthening the state park system.





**Parks, Recreation
and Historic
Preservation**

**State Council of Parks,
Recreation and
Historic Preservation**

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