

**Comments of
Judith Enck, Deputy Secretary for the Environment
State Parks Budget Hearing
October 30, 2007**

In several minutes, we are going to hear from State Parks Commissioner Carol Ash, who will give a detailed presentation about the agency's capital budget needs.

But before Commissioner Ash speaks, I'm going to provide an overview of how parks and historic preservation issues fit into Governor Spitzer's statewide priorities and initiatives.

Investing in our State Parks and Historic Sites will directly advance a number of Governor Spitzer's priorities for New York State:

1. **Revitalizing Upstate.** Investing in State Parks can directly advance our goal of revitalizing upstate communities:

State Parks and Historic Sites are part of the fabric that defines many of our upstate communities:

- Washington's Headquarters in Newburgh
- The Albany Pine Bush Preserve and Schuyler Mansion in the City of Albany
- Crailo Historic Site in Rensselaer
- Peebles Island State Park in Waterford and Cohoes
- Johnson Hall in Gloversville
- Saratoga Spa State Park in Saratoga Springs
- Alan Treman Marine Park in Ithaca
- The Genesee Valley Greenway trail that links Rochester to Letchworth State Park
- The Darwin Martin House in Buffalo
- And perhaps most notably, Niagara Falls Reservation in the City of Niagara Falls

Improving these State Parks and Historic Sites and others like them across upstate New York and the Hudson Valley can play an integral role in revitalizing and strengthening our upstate communities.

2. **Economic Development.** State Parks are an important component of Governor Spitzer's economic development strategy:

- **Recreation and Heritage Tourism.** Tourism is one of New York's largest industries. The State Parks and Historic Sites attract more than 55

million visitors each year – making them a key component of the state’s recreation and heritage tourism industry. We believe there is great upside potential – that investments in improving the parks, coupled with smart marketing efforts through an expanded I Love New York program and other initiatives, can generate even greater visitation to the State Parks and Historic Sites, directly increasing New York’s tourism industry.

- **Attracting and Retaining Private Businesses.** Numerous studies have documented that quality of life is one of the key factors private companies consider in selecting where to locate new and expanded facilities. Vibrant parks promote vibrant communities – which result in businesses locating, investing, and staying in New York.
- **Construction Jobs.** Investments in improving our State Parks create local engineering and construction jobs. Small businesses and local companies are well positioned to successfully bid for State Parks improvement contracts.

3. **Meeting the Needs of Under-Served Communities.** Enhancing access to parks and recreational facilities in lower-income communities is a priority for the Spitzer administration:

- **New York City.** In the last two years, annual attendance at **Roberto Clemente** State Park in the Bronx exceeded 1.3 million visitors per year, and attendance at **Riverbank** State Park in Harlem topped two million visitors per year. We must do a better job providing urban open space opportunities, especially for children. OPRHP is uniquely positioned to do just that.
- Our State Parks on Long Island and the lower Hudson Valley provide an accessible and affordable outdoor recreational experience to millions of residents from the NYC metropolitan area.
- Under-served communities are not restricted solely to our inner city residents. State Parks are also a vital asset in many rural communities across the state that lack local parks.
- We have an obligation to assure that under-served communities across New York have access to safe, modern, and well-managed parks.

4. **Smart Growth.**

- **Open Space Protection.** In rapidly developing areas like Long Island and Hudson Valley, the State Parks provide vital open space resources. We need to aggressively pursue the efforts to acquire new parks, and to protect buffer lands around our existing parks, in rapidly developing areas. We also need to

link together protected state and local parkland with greenways and trails to make them pedestrian and bicycle friendly.

- **Sustainability.** Our State Parks present a great opportunity to demonstrate New York State's commitment to Sustainability. We can be a national leader in the demonstrating how energy efficiency, green building design, hybrid electric vehicles, recycling, and non-toxic pest control can be integrated into the design, construction, and operations of park facilities.

5. **Healthy Children.**

- **Children's Health.** Promoting active recreation in our parks is one of a number of strategies needed to combat our society's growing obesity problem.
- **Connecting Children to Nature.** The "no child left indoors" movement has highlighted the need to develop "environmental literacy" among our young people. We need to create a strong environmental ethic today and in the next generation – as we recognize the need to address the environmental issues posed by global warming.
- **Education.** New York's network of 35 State Historic Sites provide a living laboratory to teach our children about New York's history – from New York's pivotal role in the founding of our nation, to our role in slavery abolition and women's' rights movements, to honoring generations of sacrifice at the newly-opened National Purple Heart Hall of Honor at the New Windsor Historic Site.

6. **Creating a Legacy for the Future.**

- New York State has provided strong support for parks for more than a century.
- Niagara Falls State Park was the first state park in the nation.
- The Adirondack and Catskill Parks – with their mosaic of "forever wild" state ownership intertwined with developed hamlets and private lands – are a national and international model for simultaneously protecting our environmental while supporting appropriate economic development.

We have an an opportunity to be good stewards of this legacy – to assure that our State Parks and Historic Sites remain a vital part of New York today and for future generations.

I am particularly struck by the opportunities provided by our state parks system to get more children to enjoy the outdoors. In a book published last year,

“Last Child in the Woods” by Richard Louv, the author quotes a fourth grader who says “I like to play indoors better ‘cause that’s where all the electrical outlets are.”

Our magnificent state parks system will help pull out kids outdoors.

With this context, Commissioner Ash we welcome your presentation on the capital investment needs facing New York’s State Parks.