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Testimony before the Joint Budget Hearing of the State Legislature on the FY 2017-18 Executive Budget

Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Commissioner Rose Harvey

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Good Morning, Chairwoman Young, Chairman Farrell, Senator Funke and Assemblyman O'Donnell of the Tourism and Parks Committees, and distinguished members of State Legislature. Thank you for inviting me to discuss Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget proposal.

As Commissioner of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, I oversee New York's outstanding system of more than 250 individual state parks, historic sites, boat launches and recreational trails. As many of you know, your constituents have a great sense of pride and ownership in their park system. It is one of the most esteemed institutions of our state government, where New Yorkers of all ages and backgrounds come together for fun and friendship, learning and healing, to experience New York's great outdoors and history, and build mind and muscle. Thanks to Governor Cuomo's leadership, we're doing much to bring people together, revitalize facilities, keep parks and historic sites welcoming to all, and provide outstanding experiences for residents and tourists alike.

The park system again had a very busy and successful year in 2016. Attendance at our parks, beaches and campgrounds continues to climb. Parks hosted major events, concerts, festivals and athletic competitions, which in turn provide a deeper and better experience for our visitors and an economic boost to local economies.

The 2017-18 Executive Budget will help us continue this success story. The budget will enable us to maintain visitor services and continue the progress we've made renewing our

facilities, while embarking on several exciting new initiatives in outdoor recreation and the environment. The Governor proposed completing the Hudson River Valley Greenway and Erie Canalway trails by 2020 to create the Empire State Trail, the largest state multi-use trail in the nation. The state will develop 350 miles of new trail to create a 750-mile pathway. The Trail will be an exceptional new resource for recreation for New Yorkers, while driving economic growth and wellness in communities along its route. Studies estimate that for every $1 million invested in multi-use trails, nearly 10 jobs are created and every $1 invested yields $3 in direct medical benefits.

With $120 million allocated this year, the Executive Budget continues Governor Cuomo's NY Parks 2020 commitment to invest $900 million in State Parks by 2020, helping reverse decades of decline and neglect in our parks. Since the Governor launched NY Parks 2020 in 2012, we have advanced more than 383 separate projects within 130 parks and historic sites to enhance, restore and repair public facilities. Last year, I was happy to see many of you out in the parks, as we reopened the historic West Bathhouse at Jones Beach; toured the renewed Terrapin Point at Niagara Falls; opened the Humphrey Nature Center at Letchworth; celebrated a new partnership with Major League Baseball to serve 1,500 youth at Roberto Clemente State Park; and reviewed the future gateways to the Walkway Over the Hudson, and much more.

The Executive Budget continues the historic $300 million investment in the Environmental Protection Fund to help enhance our stewardship of the State's natural and cultural resources. The EPF dollars are crucial to State Parks' work to protect and provide access to the natural and cultural treasures sheltered within our park system. This includes a proposal to double the State's investment in the Connect Kids program to:

- Provide free transportation to schools, particularly in underserved communities, for educational field trips to our parks and historic sites. Schools in every part of the state are taking advantage of this program and I urge you to encourage schools in your districts to apply.
- Rebuild environmental and historic education centers and programs.

- Provide free Learn-to-Swim programs, adding to the nearly 30 parks last summer that offered lessons to thousands of children in communities where opportunities are limited.
- Improve parks with the Park and Trail Partnership Program, which with our partner Parks & Trails New York, provides competitive grants to friends groups that support State Parks and historic sites; and
- Offer a ten-month hands-on job training program in state parks and on state lands through the Empire Conservation Corps program.

Our agency also administers one of the nation's strongest historic preservation programs. We continue to lead in the number of listings on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, which provide critical protection and incentives to sites important in New York. Notable places recognized last year include:

- The New York State Barge Canal, which with support from our partners at the National Park Service and the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor was designated a National Historic Landmark
- Stonewall Inn was designated by Governor Cuomo to be a State Historic Site, in coordination with President Obama's Stonewall National Monument designation
- The Woodstock Festival site was nominated to the National Registers, another sign that we remain a progressive leader in advancing the recognition of diverse sites.

Last year, the State Historic Preservation Office reviewed 18,000 submissions representing almost 8,900 publicly funded, licensed, or permitted projects for their potential impacts to cultural resources. In response to the growing number of projects reviewed, the office recently introduced the Cultural Resource Information System, an on-line database has greatly expedited our consultation process, with average review times dropping significantly. We believe it is a great example and a model in the historic preservation world.

And make no mistake, New York's embrace of historic preservation is improving the economy. Federal and state Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit programs have grown

exponentially, with steady increases in the number of historic buildings being revitalized with the incentive each year. Based on recent figures, in fiscal year 2016 our office approved nearly $1.5 billion of investment in the past fiscal year, roughly half of which has been invested in upstate communities, demonstrating that the program has emerged as one of New York's signature economic development, job creation, and community renewal tools.

Thank you again for your commitment to our magnificent State Park system and our historic preservation programs. As always, I appreciate the support that you and your colleagues provide our agency. I welcome your questions.