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**Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

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Commissioner

**Testimony before the Joint Budget Hearing of the State Legislature
on the FY 2015-16 Executive Budget**

Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Commissioner Rose Harvey

January 28, 2015

Good Morning, Senator DeFrancisco and Assemblyman Farrell. Thank you for inviting me to discuss Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget proposal for State Parks. Thanks also to members of the Tourism & Parks Committees, and all of the members of the Legislature here today.

As Commissioner of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, I am charged with overseeing our exceptional New York State park system. New Yorkers take great pride in the 180 parks and 35 historic sites in our park system. Governor Cuomo's leadership is helping connect people to parks, revitalize facilities, and keep parks open and welcoming for all New Yorkers.

The 2015-16 Executive Budget enables State Parks to continue serving New Yorkers in several important ways. It increases capital funding to continue modernizing and revitalizing park infrastructure, maintains level funding for park operations so that we may offer valued services to New Yorkers, and increases the Environmental Protection Fund.

The park system again had a very successful year in 2014. I am pleased to announce today that State Parks attracted 62 million visitors in 2014, a three percent increase over 2013 and a nearly eight percent increase over the Governor's first term. Additionally, the number of overnight stays at our campgrounds was the highest on record. Our parks hosted major events, such as concerts, festivals and athletic competitions, which provided an economic boost to local economies. As an example, Bethpage State Park in Farmingdale is scheduled to host PGA Tour event The Barclays next year, follow by the 2019 PGA Championship and the 2024 Ryder Cup.

The State Park system grew last year with Governor Cuomo's official designation of the Buffalo Harbor State Park as New York's 180th State Park. By launching Buffalo's first State Park along the city's waterfront, we are creating a destination that will attract visitors from all over to experience some of the best that Buffalo has to offer.

As part of his efforts to enhance sporting and recreational opportunities, Governor Cuomo introduced the New York State Adventure License Series in 2014, which includes lifetime and multi-year options for the Empire Passport, our popular annual pass. Sales of our new three-year Empire Passports are particularly brisk, with 17,000 three-year passports sold during a special Cyber Monday promotion last holiday season.

Our agency administers one of the strongest historic preservation programs in the nation. Last year, the State Historic Preservation Office advanced 100 listings to the State and National Registers of Historic Places. We heard the public and streamlined our review process which enabled us to evaluate more than 5,400 state and federal projects, completing our review in an average of 11 days. State and federal historic rehabilitation tax credits spurred nearly \$500 million in commercial redevelopment projects statewide.

The Executive Budget continues to make significant capital investments in the parks that serve their communities and anchor our tourism economy. The agency will leverage a broad range of public and private funding for a total investment of approximately \$900 million in State Parks by 2020, including \$110 million in the upcoming fiscal year. The funding will launch dozens of capital improvement projects to provide visitors with safe, welcoming and modern facilities in our state parks and historic sites. The first three rounds of this landmark funding have enabled us to advance over 200 separate projects within 109 parks and historic sites to restore, repair, or enhance public facilities.

The Executive Budget also establishes two exciting initiatives that will enhance and leverage a robust volunteer program in our park system. First, it includes \$1 million to establish the Excelsior Conservation Corps. Following in the spirit of FDR's Civilian Conservation Corps, the program will provide ten-month positions for young adults to work in State Parks and State Forests on trail building, facility maintenance, volunteer project leadership, and education programs. Second, the budget includes \$500,000 to create new Friends Groups Capacity Grants, which will provide competitive grants to non-profit Friends Groups that support parks, historic sites, rail-trails, and other recreational facilities.

The Capacity Grants are included in the Environmental Protection Fund, which is proposed to increase to \$172 million in the upcoming fiscal year. EPF funding is level or increased for all programs administered by State Parks.

Thank you again for your commitment to our magnificent State Park system. As always, I am truly appreciative for the tremendous support that members of the Legislature have provided to our agency, and I welcome your questions.

