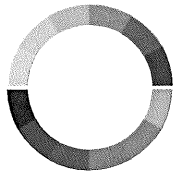


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**OPEN SPACE
INSTITUTE**

ALLIANCE FOR
NEW YORK STATE PARKS

**Testimony Before Joint Fiscal Committees of the State Legislature on the
FY2014-15 State Budget
Open Space Institute's Alliance for New York State Parks
Erik Kulleseid
Senior Vice President/Executive Director**

January 28, 2015

Senate Finance Chair DeFrancisco and Assembly Ways & Means Chair Farrell, Chairman O'Mara, Chairs Little and Markey, distinguished legislators – thank you for the opportunity to discuss Governor Cuomo's proposed budget as it relates to our state parks and the Environmental Protection Fund.

I am Erik Kulleseid, Senior Vice President at the Open Space Institute and Executive Director of its Alliance for New York State Parks program.

OSI is one of New York's leading land and park conservation nonprofits. As such, we are grateful that with his budget proposal, Governor Cuomo is expressing a renewed commitment to the state's Environmental Protection Fund and support for farmland protection; continuing his state park revitalization initiative; and introducing a new plan to support the growth of successful park friends groups.

Throughout its 40-year history, OSI, working with our land conservation partners, has added more than 40,000 acres to state parks. These transactions achieve a variety of goals, from creating new parks and adding valuable acreage, to providing important buffer zones and connectivity.

The overall effect on the state park system has been significant. OSI's work accounts for more than 10 percent of the state park system's total acreage of more than 335,000 acres.

And with its Alliance for New York State Parks program, OSI has extended its commitment to public enjoyment of parks through advocacy, private fundraising and support of public-private endeavors that are adding to the revitalization of New York's magnificent state park system.

And it is this ongoing revitalization of our state parks that is the focus of my remarks today. The \$110 million in state parks capital funding included in this proposed budget builds on \$270 million allocated by the Governor and the Legislature over the past three years to restore and upgrade state parks throughout New York. After decades of deferred maintenance and underinvestment in our state parks infrastructure, leading to a capital backlog totaling more than \$1 billion, these investments are long overdue. We are deeply grateful to Governor Cuomo and members of the legislature for this continuing commitment to New York's most spectacular natural treasures. What a stunning turnaround from 2010 when 90 parks were slated for closure!

Finally, we are exceptionally pleased to support the governor's inclusion of \$500,000 in the EPF for capacity-building grants to state park and historic site friends groups. The program, to be managed by our partners at Parks & Trails New York, is modeled on the extraordinarily successful Land Trust Conservation Partnership administered by the DEC and the Land Trust Alliance. The program promises to give a major boost to the nonprofit groups across the state that work to bring private funding and volunteer labor into our unparalleled state parks and historic sites. All New Yorkers will benefit.

Thank you for your time this afternoon and for the work you do to advance the cause of protecting and enhancing New York's precious environmental and recreational resources.