

**Testimony before the Joint Budget Hearing of the State Legislature  
on the FY 2018-19 Executive Budget**

**Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation  
Commissioner Rose Harvey  
February 27, 2018**

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

As Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, I oversee New York's outstanding system of 250 individual state parks, historic sites, boat launches and recreational trails. I'm fortunate to lead an incredibly talented, dedicated and hard-working staff which takes great pride in caring for these properties and providing meaningful experiences for our visitors. New Yorkers are united in the belief that public parkland deeply benefits our society, our state and our communities. Parks are our common ground. They are the lands, refuges, open spaces that belong to us all – and from which we all benefit.

The park system had a very robust year in 2017. Despite a rainy peak season and extensive flooding along Lake Ontario, we welcomed more than 71 million visits – continuing the system's double-digit attendance growth since 2011. A recent economic impact study by Parks & Trails New York found our system, annually, supports \$5 billion in output and sales, 54,000 private-sector jobs and more than \$2.8 billion in additional state GDP. That is, every dollar of State Parks spending generates \$9 in sales statewide.

The 2018-19 Executive Budget provides for excellent stewardship for the lands entrusted to our care, while maintaining fiscal discipline needed in uncertain times. It provides level funding for agency operations and programs, continues our baseline \$90 million annual capital appropriation, and maintains the Environmental Protection Fund at its historic high.

The capital allocation will continue our NY Parks 2020 initiative to reverse decades of decline and neglect in our parks, and transform and modernize them for the 21st century. Since the Governor launched this \$900 million multi-year investment, with your huge support, we have initiated more than 700 improvement projects across the state, with more than 60 percent directed at rebuilding deteriorated infrastructure, reopening closed facilities, rehabilitating underused structures, resiliency and stewardship projects.

In partnership with the National Park Service and New York City, it is also our intention to open a new State Park on Jamaica Bay in Brooklyn in 2019 as part of the Governor's Vital Brooklyn initiative. In this first preliminary phase, the State will invest up to \$15 million to open the site to the public, creating 3.5 miles of waterfront paths and trails and new places for biking, hiking, fishing, kayaking, and environmental education.

In fully funding the EPF, the Executive Budget will enhance our stewardship of the State's natural and cultural resources – and connect more people to the environment. EPF State Park Stewardship dollars are crucial to State Parks' work to protect and provide access to the natural and cultural treasures sheltered within our park system. Schools in every part of the state are taking advantage of the Connect Kids to Parks Field Trip grant program, which provides free educational field trips to our parks, historic sites, and DEC environmental education

centers. State Parks now reaches 250,000 youth annually in its education programs, up from 75,000 in 2011.

Our Division for Historic Preservation continues to lead the nation in historic preservation programming. This past year we added over 1,500 properties to the National Register of Historic Places, bringing protections and preservation incentives to sites important to the history of our state. Last year, the State Historic Preservation Office reviewed 18,000 submissions for potential impacts to cultural resources, with review times dropping to an average of under ten days. Governor Cuomo's 2013 enhancements to the state historic rehabilitation tax credit program, with strong support by the Legislature, helped trigger more than \$3 billion in investment in historic commercial properties, with over two thirds upstate. We are proud to announce that New York State once again led the nation in 2017 with a record \$1.2 billion in investment.

Despite their success, the State historic credits were diminished in the overhaul of the federal tax code. With our program tied directly to the federal program, we are currently evaluating opportunities to decouple the state program to operate independently, reauthorize the program to restore investor confidence, and examine enhancements that would maintain investment in the state and mitigate the negative impact that federal tax reform process has created in New York.

Last January, Governor Cuomo announced the creation of the Empire State Trail, a 750-mile bicycling and walking trail spanning New York State, to promote safe, healthy outdoor recreation, enhance community vitality, and support tourism-based economic development. Considerable progress has been made, including release of the Empire State Trail Plan and a detailed design guide. Engineering designs are in process for more than 60 trail projects.

The Governor has also made a \$50 million commitment to complete the Hudson River Park in partnership with New York City.

Thank you again for your commitment to our magnificent State Park system and our historic preservation programs. The dollars invested in a park system help provide a safe place to be active and healthy; build mind and muscle, strengthen social bonds; and gain a greater understanding of our heritage – they are an investment in New York's health and economy. As always, I appreciate the support that you and your colleagues provide our agency. I welcome your questions.