



Nassau Hiking & Outdoor Club, Inc.

AFFILIATED WITH N.Y. - N.J. TRAIL CONFERENCE

www.nassauhiking.org

February 3, 2021

Public Hearing Committee on Health

Re: Fund the Long Island Greenway Project

We enthusiastically support and celebrate NYS's efforts to develop a comprehensive inventory and plan for greenways. NHOC members live in Nassau and Suffolk Counties as well as NYC, and our organization regularly schedules outings in many Long Island communities and throughout the five boroughs of NYC. Consequently, we are frequent-use stakeholders.

[Intrinsic Value of Greenways](#)

Greenways are important venues for bonding with the natural world, a crucial component of healthy living. Greenways allow for daily immersion as a vital means of transportation to markets, schools, libraries and residential neighborhoods, thereby alleviating the obstacle of busy urbanites and suburbanites having to wait for the next chance to spend a full day in a park.

Research demonstrates that being immersed in natural settings benefits our mental and physical wellbeing. Numerous books and articles outline the details of studies that all point to the same conclusion- humankind's separation from the natural world is both unnatural and unhealthy. Conversely, the more we immerse ourselves in natural settings, the more we deeply connect with our true identities. Humans are biologically and emotionally an intricate part of nature, despite all our modern habits of turning ourselves away from our foundational reality. Just like eating whole, unprocessed foods to inhabit our bodies with essential nutrients, we must immerse ourselves in nature to fulfill our holistic, basic human needs.

The NYSDEC website outlines the following benefits of exposure to forests and trees:

- boosts the immune system
- lowers blood pressure
- reduces stress
- improves mood

- increases ability to focus, even in children with ADHD
- accelerates recovery from surgery or illness
- increases energy level
- improves sleep

The NYSDEC site also has numerous links to research that provide much more information and evidence about the health benefits of proximity to vegetation.¹

While just being close to trees benefits us in sundry ways, even if we just sit among them, it also significantly enhances both our motivation to exercise and what we obtain from exercising. In the June 2015 issue of *Consumer Reports on Health* magazine, an article entitled *Fitness factors* discussed research from the UK's University of Exeter and the University of Essex. The study found that calorie burning on a treadmill was equivalent to walking in nature; however, being outdoors in a natural setting did more than an indoor walk to boost energy and reduce stress, depression and negative emotions.

More than just reduce stress and improve immune system function generally, breathing in forest air specifically fights cancer. Natural killer cells fight cancer by killing tumor cells. Trees produce aromatic volatile compounds called phytoncides, which induce human natural killer cell activity. Forest bathing is the best way to get a dose of phytoncides, which can last up to a month. ²

As more New Yorkers utilize greenways for zero-carbon transportation, the less fossil fuels will be burned in combustion engines, thereby supporting the mandates of our landmark climate legislation, the CLCPA. We support the use of greenways by all nonmotorized vehicles, including electric scooters and electric bicycles, if rules of the road are established and posted to protect the safety of pedestrians and dog walkers. Pedestrians must be given specific right-of-way on all multi-use trails.

Greenways are merely parks and preserves that extend for many snakelike miles rather than being limited to one community, as most parks are. When greenways connect with existing parks and preserves, they serve to extend each individual park's reach, both for wildlife and people. The 25-mile phase one segment of the Long Island Greenway connects 13 parks. Because of this connectivity, the LI Greenway will multiply and strengthen the individual prominence of each park and the ecosystems each supports. The LI Greenway will create a functional link between each of the parks, and consequently, the whole will be monumentally greater than the sum of its parts.

Perhaps most profoundly, greenways can serve a role in national security by facilitating community. Hiking, biking, birding and other groups of like-minded individuals create social networks on greenways. Isolation breeds social depravity, and in our hyper-polarized nation the risk for greater extremism looms large. QAnon, for example, started as a baseless conspiracy theory spouted in online posts by a shadowy figure named "Q" but has since exploded into a cultish fringe-right movement that's been linked to crimes and is now deemed a potential domestic terror threat by the FBI. "Q" uses game technology to draw in lonely, isolated individuals who yearn for identity. The more people have opportunities to engage in constructive social outdoor spaces, the fewer will succumb to extremist predators who seek gullible followers. It takes just one unhinged individual to wreak untold damage and violence; perhaps that one person could be redeemed by participating in a population of greenway enthusiasts.

Enhancing Greenways

Once established, to improve the quality of greenways themselves and attract more visitors and user groups, plans should include best locations for planting more trees and establishing native plant gardens at appropriate locations along greenways.

Long Island and NYC Connectivity

We certainly appreciate that the Greenways Plan recognizes the Long Island Greenway as a potential and needed extension of the Empire State Trail and has provided an opportunity to provide the proposed route as part of the GIS maps that will form the appendices to the report.

However, the implementation schedule of proposed greenway expansions does not include any in New York City. NYC is a critical link for the entire Empire State Trail that should expand from the very eastern end of Long Island all the way to the current borders of the NYS trail. Moreover, because 43% of NYS residents live in NYC where residents rely more on public transportation than automobiles, and therefore where more people will make use of greenways, the Greenways Plan must do more to include specific targets for NYC.

Funding Greenways

While we understand that funding greenway projects presents a challenge during our current fiscal crisis, it is imperative that we find appropriate and fruitful means for expanding the State's network of trails. Funding for greenways should be dedicated for the same reasons we fund parks and preserves. There's a reason why the Covid-19 pandemic has also witnessed a significant increase in park visitations. We must view funding the Department of New York State Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation not as a luxury, but as a necessity for human health.

Cap-and-trade offsets cover a portion of compliance obligations, effectively increasing emissions in a capped sector on the theory that offsets recognize a corresponding number of emissions reductions outside the capped sector. Offsets are designed to change where reductions occur but not the total amount.³

However, we cannot expect to rely on offsets for funding. The CLCPA restricts offsets to only 15% of state-wide baseline emissions, and all offset projects are required to be located within 25 miles of the emissions. RGGI allows offsets but hasn't relied on a significant number, possibly because the carbon price is too low for offsets to make much of a difference to polluters' bottom lines.³

Moreover, offsets often create more problems than they solve. Regulated industries demand high volumes of low-cost offset credits to limit market-wide carbon prices. It is hard to escape the conclusion that offsets have allowed higher volumes of emission credits and lower compliance costs primarily by eroding environmental quality. Offset programs offer a stealthy strategy for emitters to water down program ambitions.³

Estimating how much greenhouse gas emissions would be avoided on greenways would be difficult to determine and impossible to verify. Given the deep carbon cuts mandated by the CLCPA, the limited number of offsets should be sought primarily from protecting large intact forests.

There are currently several bills in the NYS Legislature that would raise billions of dollars of revenue for NYS. Given the plethora of health benefits natural landscapes provide, significantly increasing the funding for the Department of New York State Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation is one important reason we must pass legislation that provides the revenue we need to move New York forward. Revenue enhancement for parks benefits all New Yorkers, including those who need to step up and pay more of their fair share.

Conclusions

The State of the State Briefing Book was released on January 15, 2021. In the section titled “Part 2: Build Out New York State Parks” the Launch NY Parks 100 Capital Plan is discussed and specifically mentions creating an Empire State Birding Trail Network. This plan dedicates \$440M over the next four years. However, there was neither mention of specific funding for the Long Island Greenway nor greenways in NYC. We hope that the Governor gives serious consideration to specifically including both NYC and Long Island expansions of the Empire State Trail in his 2022 State of the State plans.

When Governor Cuomo proudly proclaimed, "There's no trail like it in the nation —750 miles of multi-use trail literally from Manhattan to the Canadian Border, from Buffalo to Albany," he must have known that NYC and Long Island- regions with the densest populations and highest taxes in the state- were being left out of the Empire State Trail. We downstate folks are New Yorkers too, and we deserve the benefits and a piece of the action this landmark trail provides.

For a Green NY,

Guy Jacob, Conservation Chair, NHOC

Resources:

1. NYSDEC: Immerse Yourself in a Forest for Better Health: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/90720.html>
2. Nutritionfacts.org: <https://nutritionfacts.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c1bae6687e1e6ab175fb56913&id=13322aae2c&e=71c467aa17>
3. *Making Climate Policy Work* by Danny Cullenward and David G. Victor

Germane Quotes:

"Every walk in nature one receives far more than he seeks." - John Muir

"When we try to pick out anything by itself we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe." - John Muir