



**New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation**

KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

ERIK KULLESEID
Commissioner

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Krueger, Chairwoman Weinstein, Senator Serrano, Assemblyman O'Donnell and members of the State Legislature. Thanks for inviting me today.

I'm honored to represent Governor Hochul on behalf of our state park system, which includes 250 state parks, historic sites, golf courses, boat launches and recreational trails. These facilities are essential to societal health and well-being for people from all communities.

Last year, our parks – and our incomparable parks staff – welcomed more than 78 million visitors for the second straight year, and overnight stays at campgrounds were the highest ever. New Yorkers continued heading to parks in record numbers for relief from the COVID pandemic. This follows a decade of steady growth – an overall increase of 41 percent since 2008. Simultaneously, during 2021, State Park staff provided direct support statewide to more than 500 individual COVID-19 mission requests, such as test site support and equipment distribution. Additionally, staff provided support for 16 individual storms.

The Governor's proposed budget for the agency is precedent setting, reflecting her deep personal support for the park system. As a frequent visitor herself, she recognizes the value of parks and historic sites and supports the work that needs to be done for our basic infrastructure and to meet the needs of our visitors. The Governor's Executive Budget increases operations spending and sets staffing at its highest since 2009, allowing us to begin rebuilding our workforce challenged by the hiring freeze. Retention and recruitment of Park Police are a priority. I have directed the Agency to begin planning for a Park Police Training Academy in the Fall.

Governor Hochul will accelerate and enhance our NY Parks 100 initiative, proposing \$200 million in bonded funding for our capital program. This 80 percent increase over last year will position New York State to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the State Parks Act of 1924, which established the system we know today. It is a vote of confidence in this agency's capacity to get things done, and amplifies our ability to meet the recreational and cultural needs of New Yorkers, visitors and tourists.

The funding will help design an exciting new State Park at the High Falls area of downtown Rochester, and build on far-reaching enhancements to outdoor recreation we saw last year, including:

- Completing a \$30 million renovation of the Franklin D. Roosevelt State Park swimming pool in Westchester County. The project modernized the park system's largest pool – covering nearly an acre in surface area.
- Opening the first-of-its-kind Autism Nature Trail at Letchworth State Park to invite those with Autism Spectrum Disorder and other developmental disabilities to push boundaries and develop new skills.
- Creating the new "Gorgeview" area in Niagara Falls State Park – the largest expansion of the park since 1885 – by removing a segment of the former Robert Moses parkway. Adding to that, we broke ground on a \$46 million state-of-the-art visitor center.
- Opening the \$8.3 million Environmental Education and Resiliency Center at Hempstead Lake State Park in Nassau County. The center offers space for hands-on learning and community outreach, and is part

of a multi-million dollar parkwide transformation to reduce flood risk, improve water quality and enhance recreational access along the Mill River corridor.

- Celebrating the opening of The Pines@SPAC, a \$9.5 million renovation at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, a world-class arts and culture destination in Saratoga Spa State Park, that improved visitor services and created new four-season event space.

By increasing funding for the EPF to a historic \$400 million, the Executive Budget will enhance our stewardship of natural and cultural resources; and better connect parks to people. Notable programs include:

- Doubling funds for the successful and vital Parks and Trails Partnership grants, administered by Parks and Trail New York, which aids the not-for-profit friend's groups that support our public lands.
- A 50 percent increase to our "Connect Kids" program, which allow children from economically distressed communities to experience state parks and historic sites and get job skills training at our parks and sites.
- A 30 percent increase to the Local Parks/Historic Preservation Grant Program, which provides matching capital grants to local governments and non-profits.

Our parks will be eligible for funds from the \$4 billion Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act. If approved by voters in November, this bond act will make significant environmental investments across the State and help address the impacts of climate change. As one of the largest owners of coastline in New York State, our Agency looks forward to working with the Governor and Legislature to identify projects focused on restoration, water quality and climate change mitigation.

Our Division for Historic Preservation continues its nation-leading work to document, preserve and enhance historic resources. New York State has now approved the rehabilitation commercial tax credit in more than 1150 historic properties, incentivizing nearly \$14 billion in private investment since the establishment of the current federal program criteria in 1993. Most of this work occurred since the New York State Rehabilitation Tax Credit was established in 2007 and enhanced in 2010. In the next few months, the New York State Historic Business Preservation Registry, created through legislation sponsored by Senator Serrano and Assemblyman O'Donnell, will be announced with business nominations from members of the legislature.

As always, I welcome you to visit in the coming year, and to see in person the amazing service we provide. Thanks for your support for New York's magnificent natural and historic places – and the millions who benefit from them. I look forward to working with you to make the park system the best it can be.