



Testimony before the Joint Budget Hearing of the State Legislature
on the FY 2026-27 Executive Budget

Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
Acting Commissioner Kathy Moser
January 27, 2026

Good afternoon, Chairperson Krueger, Chairperson Pretlow, Senator Serrano, Assemblymember Kim and members of the State Legislature.

On behalf of Governor Hochul, thank you for the opportunity to speak about our New York State parks and historic sites. I am grateful for Governor Hochul's nomination to lead the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

I joined the agency in October 2025, ten months into the second century of the state park system. As a lifelong advocate for public lands, outdoor recreation, and conservation, I am eager to lead this agency into its next era.

Our state parks are fundamentally about **affordability, wellness, and access**. At a time when families are looking for ways to stay healthy, connected, and engaged without breaking the bank, our parks provide something truly special: experiences that are open, welcoming, and within reach for all New Yorkers.

Every day, our parks help people unplug, get outside, and reconnect—with nature, with history, and with one another. This year, we are launching hundreds of **wellness activities across our system**, from guided hikes and nature education to yoga and mental health-focused programming. Building on Governor Hochul's **Get Offline, Get Outside** initiative, we are bringing families into parks to build lifelong habits of wellness and stewardship. Expanding youth programs like our Explorer Club, Ladders to the Outdoors, and Connect Kids to Parks will help reach more underrepresented communities and ensure that all New Yorkers benefit from high-quality recreation.

The Governor's robust \$340 million capital allocation for our agency will enable us to continue planning a strong future for our parks and historic sites. We've made great progress reversing decades of decline in our 100-year-old park system. Still, we face the challenges of aging infrastructure, rising capital costs, and the welcomed influx of 85+ million annual visitors. We'll dedicate funding to address these challenges and ensure access, resiliency and sustainability for the long term.

At **Denny Farrell Riverbank State Park in Harlem**, we are investing in upgrades to an already thriving open space and community center so it can better provide safe, modern facilities for all who visit.

In **Rochester**, formerly industrial land is becoming a natural asset for the community at **High Falls State Park**. Along the **Niagara River Gorge**, we are expanding the footprint of Niagara Falls State Park and strengthening stewardship of one of the world's most iconic landscapes.

This summer, thanks to the leadership of Governor Hochul, we'll see the payoff of recent investments: from the pool at the Jones Beach East Bath House to new swimming facilities at Sojourner Truth State Park to upgrades at Buffalo Harbor and Selkirk Shores State Parks.

Our parks are also gateways to history. Current planning is underway for **History PaRC**, a Preservation and Resource Center at Peebles Island, which will connect New Yorkers more deeply with the stories that shaped our state and nation. As we mark the **250th anniversary of the American Revolution**, our agency will activate programs, exhibits, and events across New York through a Whole History lens that includes stories of all New Yorkers which have been left out.

When it comes to Parks infrastructure improvements, it is critical to recruit and retain skilled tradespeople to maintain our facilities. That is why this year, we are launching a pilot program, the **New York State Parks Trades Corps**, to provide career opportunities and fill the state's urgent need for skilled tradespeople while restoring historic park infrastructure. These partnerships strengthen both our parks and our workforce.

The impact of our parks is undeniable. One out every 20 New Yorkers visited a state park on the Fourth of July. In 2025, we welcomed tens of millions, from enjoying time at our pristine beaches to exploring waterfalls at USA Today's best state park - Letchworth.

People also gathered for more than 100 major concerts and large scale events along with thousands of local programs, including festivals, polar plunges, marathons, I Love My Park Day and the nation's largest Breast Cancer Walk. Our parks are where New Yorkers come together.

New York State's park system is already grappling with the impacts of **climate change; you have already heard about extreme weather events that effect infrastructure and ecosystems**. We've made significant progress in adapting to climate change and strengthening environmental stewardship planning - from our work to solarize the park system to improve access to charging infrastructure.

Every day, we are committed to ensuring the safety and security of staff and visitors. Our Park Police and Rangers are crucial to the safety and peacefulness of our park system, particularly our ability to host major events. We will graduate a new class of officers in April. We are moving ahead with new security upgrades, including fencing and lighting, security cameras and license plate readers, along with enhanced training for staff on visitor engagement, emergency response and public safety.

None of this happens without the people behind our parks—the frontline staff, rangers, lifeguards, maintenance staff, educators, and volunteers and partners who make these experiences possible. Their dedication is the foundation of everything we do.

In the coming months, I look forward to a strong and productive collaboration with the members of the Legislature. Our agency must expand **partnerships across all** levels of society – with other state agencies, NGOs, communities, and local representatives to drive results, steward our lands and historic resources and reflect the interests of the communities we serve. Together, we will continue to strengthen access, preserve our history, and ensure our parks remain a source of pride, wellness, and opportunity for generations to come.

Thank you for your continued support of New York State Parks.