



**Subject: Support for New York's Parks, Recreation, & Historic Sites**

**To:** The Honorable Members of the Joint Legislative Committee on Agriculture & Markets, Parks & Recreation

**From:** Peter Mullan, Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail President & CEO

**Date:** January 27, 2026

**Introduction & Purpose**

"Good day Senators Serrano and Hinchey; Assemblymembers Kim and Lupardo; and esteemed committee members. My name is Peter Mullan, and I represent the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail, a subsidiary non-profit of Scenic Hudson, Inc. I am here today to urge your continued support for our vital state parks and recreational resources, which are essential for all New Yorkers' well-being, economic vitality, and cultural and natural heritage."

**Key Points**

- **Accessibility & Equity:** "Our parks must be welcoming and accessible to all New Yorkers, regardless of identity or ability, aligning with the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan's goal of inclusive outdoor spaces. HHFT heartily endorses OPRHP's aim to create a fully inclusive park system by expanding accessible options and ensuring every New Yorker can enjoy state lands. HHFT also supports efforts to expand public transit access to parkland, as well as connecting routes between parks and trails accessible by bike."
- **Conservation & Resilience:** "Investing in natural resource protection, ecological repair, and climate-resilient infrastructure is critical. HHFT advocates for

increased funding to protect our natural landscapes from unintended environmental impacts and improve park infrastructure to ensure that demand for recreational space meets the needs of today and tomorrow."

- **Community & Economic Benefit:** "State parks drive tourism and create jobs. Investments in our parks help local economies and improve community quality of life by addressing issues like public safety, expanding volunteer and job opportunities for local youth, and improving infrastructure for seniors, families, veterans, and those with disabilities."
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** "New York State is fortunate to have more than 70 Friends groups and other non-profits that are standing ready to help fast track infrastructure and operational improvements in parks and historical sites. We encourage capital funding that leverages bold public-private partnerships to stretch taxpayer dollars further and maximizes collaboration between communities and nearby state parks and historic sites."
- **Mental and Physical Health:** "Extensive research demonstrates that regular access to nature improves physical and mental health, reduces stress and chronic disease risk, enhances cognitive functioning, and supports overall well-being across all ages—making parks and green spaces a critical public health investment for New York State."

### **Example**

"Right now, there are several examples of projects throughout the State that meet these criteria, just waiting for public investment to get underway. The Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail is one such project. As a public-private partnership project being implemented in collaboration with OPRHP in the Taconic Region, the Fjord Trail—specifically the northern reach from Breakneck Ridge to Beacon—has concluded its SEQR process and is shovel-ready. The positive benefits of this project for New Yorkers from New York City to Albany and beyond will be transformative. The Fjord Trail will deliver:

- safe and welcoming access to one of the northeast's most popular day-hiking destinations,

- connectivity by public transit via three Metro-North railroad stations,
- critical and long overdue infrastructure improvements including designated off-road parking, public restrooms, an ADA visitor center with interpretive and educational potential, and a 7.5-mile shared use main trail that meets or exceeds accessibility standards, and
- ongoing ecological repair and stewardship of a riverside corridor that has been devastated by industrial use.

Projects like this meet New York's vision for public open space that invites people of all ages and abilities to reap the physical and mental benefits of being in nature, and ensures the natural resources of our treasured parkland are monitored, repaired and protected."

### **Call to Action**

"We ask this committee to expand and/or support budget allocations for Parks included in Governor Hochul's budget proposal, including:

1. **Increase capital funding for transformative parks projects.** HHFT endorses the Governor's proposed State Parks capital plan, totaling \$340 million, but encourages expanding this allocation to best address long-standing needs, respond to current demands, and anticipate growing use by expediting worthy infrastructure projects that will attract exponential private investment.
2. **Support bold initiatives for enhanced equitable access and improved connectivity by public transportation** through an additional \$75 million for NY BRICKS to invest in projects that rejuvenate aging infrastructure, expand access to recreation in urban and underserved communities, and connect millions of New Yorkers to parks, trails, and historic sites.
3. **Promote responsible stewardship and sustainable management of our natural and historic assets.** Reaching \$500 million in the Environmental Protection Fund in the next fiscal year is not aspirational; it is a necessary adjustment to ensure that parks can meet real-world ecological stewardship demands, keep pace with use, and prevent long-term operational backlogs that ultimately cost the state

more.

New Yorkers are visiting public lands at historic levels and showing widespread support for conservation regardless of political ideology. The time is right for the legislature to double down on their commitment to parks projects that bring New Yorkers together and can be enjoyed by all.

Thank you for your time and dedication to preserving New York's irreplaceable outdoor spaces."