



**Testimony before the Joint Budget Hearing of the State Legislature
on the FY 2016-17 Executive Budget**

Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Commissioner Rose Harvey

January 28, 2016

Good Morning, Chairwoman Young, Chairman Farrell, and distinguished members of the Tourism and Parks Committee and the State Legislature. Thank you for inviting me to discuss Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget proposal.

As Commissioner of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, I am charged with overseeing New York's outstanding system of 180 parks and 35 historic sites. New Yorkers take great pride in their parks, and thanks to Governor Cuomo's leadership, we've done much to connect more people to parks, revitalize facilities, keep parks and historic sites open and welcoming to all, and provide outstanding recreational and interpretive experiences for residents and tourists alike. The 2016-17 Executive Budget maintains level funding for park operations so that we may offer valued services; provides robust capital funding to continue modernizing and revitalizing park facilities and infrastructure; and last but not least, dramatically increases the Environmental Protection Fund to help enhance our stewardship of the state's natural and cultural resources.

The park system again had a very busy and successful year in 2015. We had historic high attendance at our parks, beaches and campgrounds. Letchworth and Watkins Glen State Parks were ranked the first and third best state parks in America by readers of USA Today. Our facilities last year and this year have and will host more and more major events, concerts, festivals and athletic competitions to provide a deeper and better experience for our visitors, and in turn provided an economic boost to local economies. For instance, the **SmorgasBURG** food

market at East River State Park in Brooklyn the Memorial Day Air Show, reinstate Fourth of July fireworks and the Holiday Light Show at Jones Beach celebrations to come of the 50th anniversary of the Saratoga Performing Arts Center and the Walkway Over the Hudson marathon. And this year, Bethpage State Park in Farmingdale is scheduled to host The Barclays PGA Tour event this summer, followed by the PGA Championship in 2019 and the Ryder Cup in 2024, bringing in 100,000 visitors and worldwide television coverage.

As part of Governor Cuomo's NY Parks 2020 plan to invest \$900 million in State Parks by 2020, the Executive Budget continues to make significant capital investments in the parks that serve their communities and anchor our tourism economy. This year, using funds allocated in fiscal year 2015-16 and earlier, we will begin construction to modernize and create the Cave of the Winds museum/interpretive/ticket center at Niagara Falls State Park and break ground on a new market place at Jones Beach State Park and complete a major rehab of the historic West Bathhouse. We'll open a state-of-the-art nature center at Letchworth State Park host visitors to the just-opened Seneca Art and Cultural Center at Ganondagan State Historic Site and welcome campers to Schodack Island State Park in the Hudson Valley, where we've built the system's first new full-service campground in decades. Of course, we continue to fix and modernize the infrastructure throughout all our parks on which basic and new services rely. In fact, since the Governor launched Parks 2020, we have advanced more than 230 separate projects within 133 parks and historic sites to enhance, restore and repair, public facilities. From the opening the new Buffalo Harbor State Park on the city's waterfront to the transformation of Roberto Clemente State Park in the Bronx, our parks depend on this infrastructure.

This year's Executive Budget provides \$90 million in capital funding for State Parks improvements, which will leverage a broad range of additional public and private funding to finish what we started last year and begin new projects. Once again, we expect to launch dozens of critically important capital projects across the State, including the Watkins Glen entrance Thacher visitor center Green Lakes campground new cabins at Sampson and modernizing numerous sewer, water and electric systems. Once completed in 2020, we will have made transformative changes at over 30 of our flagship locations and parks that serve communities of need.

As you know, the Governor has proposed to nearly double the Environmental Protection Fund in the upcoming fiscal year. As a result, all of the EPF funding for programs traditionally administered by State Parks will increase, including State Lands Stewardship funding, which is crucial to our staff's work to protect and provide access to the natural and cultural treasures

sheltered within our park system. The EPF budget continues two new programs established last year: The Park and Trail Partnership Program, which with the assistance of Parks and Trails New York, provides competitive grants to friends groups that support State Parks and historic sites; and the Excelsior Conservation Corps, a hands-on job training program that will enhance New York's natural resources and recreational opportunities.

The Governor has also introduced new investment that will provide funding to expand environmental education, and support the new Connect Kids initiative, which will provide transportation grants to schools to bring children in underserved areas to State Parks and lands.

Our agency also administers one of the strongest historic preservation programs in the nation. Last year, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) advanced nearly 100 listings to the State and National Registers of Historic Places. State and federal historic rehabilitation tax credits spurred more than \$550 million in commercial redevelopment projects statewide, with many more located in upstate communities than in previous years. Applications for the state historic tax credit for homeowners also reached a new high with over 270 projects in the pipeline for rehabilitation. 2016 is the 50th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which established historic preservation policy for the nation. New York will join in nationwide efforts to recognize this event.

Thank you again for your commitment to our magnificent State Park system. As always, I appreciate the support that members of the Legislature provide our agency. I welcome your questions.

