



New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

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Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor

Rose Harvey
Commissioner

Testimony Before the Division of Budget on the Capital Budget of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Commissioner Rose Harvey

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Good Morning. Thank you for inviting me to discuss Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget proposal for the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. **(SLIDE 1)**

I am Rose Harvey, Commissioner of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. I am charged with overseeing one of our state's greatest treasures – the New York State park system. **(SLIDE 2)** New Yorkers take great pride in the 179 parks and 35 historic sites that comprise our park system. **(SLIDE 3)** Governor Cuomo has added two parks to our remarkable system—the FDR Four Freedoms State Park opened to the public last October in Roosevelt Island, New York City and our newest state park is taking shape in the Buffalo Harbor. Governor Cuomo recognizes the state park system's substantial economic and environmental benefits, and he is committed to connecting people to parks, keeping them open and available for all New Yorkers, and tackling our longstanding infrastructure challenges.

(SLIDE 4) Among the fifty states, our annual visitation of more than 60 million ranks second in the nation. Niagara Falls is the oldest state park in the nation and Washington's Headquarters is the first publicly-owned state historic site. For more than a century, New York has invested in world-class recreational and educational facilities at our state parks and historic sites. **(SLIDE 5)** Today, our agency is responsible for managing a huge inventory of public facilities including 5,000 buildings, 29 golf courses, 52 swimming pools, 76 beaches, 27 marinas, 40 boat launch sites, 18 nature centers, 817 cabins, 8,355 campsites, more than 1,350 miles of trails, more than 100 dams, 640 bridges, hundreds of miles of roads, and dozens of historic structures listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. New York's 350,000 acre state park system reflects the beauty, diversity, and grandeur of our state. It truly is one of New York's great public assets.

(SLIDE 6) Tourism and outdoor recreation is a growing and diverse economic super sector that is a vital cornerstone of successful communities. State Parks are a big part of the equation. A

2009 study by the Political Economy Research Institute of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst found that spending by State Parks and its visitors support \$1.9 billion in economic activity and **20,000 private-sector jobs** (in addition to State Parks jobs). About 40 percent of the total is by people coming from outside the community to visit a park, and spending on transportation, lodging, groceries, restaurants, and other shopping.

(SLIDE 7) As we host millions of visitors from across the state and the globe, it is critical that we provide them with safe and welcoming facilities. Yet when Governor Cuomo took office, our park system's infrastructure was deteriorating. Chronic underfunding of the agency's capital budget had resulted in a \$1.1 billion backlog of unfunded capital needs and 83% of parks in disrepair.

Governor Cuomo has made a commitment to revitalize the park system. As part of the NY Works program to modernize the state's infrastructure and spur job creation, Governor Cuomo committed \$89 million for state park capital improvement projects in the 2012-13 state budget and followed up with an additional \$90 million in the current fiscal year.

(SLIDE 8) Across the state, we have aggressively moved forward on health and safety-related projects, critical infrastructure rehabilitation, and much-needed visitor facilities. Examples include upgrading drinking water systems, repairing deteriorated restrooms and replacing dilapidated playgrounds. In the 18 months since the Governor launched the NY Works program, 80 projects have been completed and construction is underway on another 60 projects. Additionally, the investment in parks capital projects are creating engineering and construction-related jobs across the state, many involving small businesses. The total \$179 million in NYWorks funding, along with leveraged funds, is creating an estimated 2,560 construction and engineering jobs.

These projects are helping to fix our aging infrastructure and convert New York's parks and historic sites into a welcoming, transformative, 21st Century parks system – with facilities that are aesthetically compelling, energy and operationally efficient, and built to last.

(SLIDE 9)

I'd like to discuss our capital program priorities, which include:

- Revitalizing Niagara Falls State Park
- Rehabilitating Existing Facilities and Repairing Aging Infrastructure
- Improving Health and Safety
- Preserving our Historic and Cultural Assets
- Enhancing Recreational Opportunities (playgrounds, trails, athletic fields)
- Advancing Exciting New Projects Through Public-Private Partnerships

Revitalizing Niagara Falls State Park (SLIDE 10)

Niagara Falls State Park is one of the New York state's top tourism destinations. More than 8.6 million people visited last year. Unfortunately, with all the wear-and-tear it receives, the worn-down condition of the park threatened to overshadow its world famous views.

To protect this iconic destination, we've made a multi-year, \$25 million commitment to revitalize Niagara Falls State Park, the nation's oldest state park. The plan calls for us to restore the park's most heavily used areas, including its primary viewing points, walking trails, historic buildings, and plantings. Three projects valued at \$4.5 million are complete (Cave of the Winds Elevators, 3 Sisters Islands, & Luna Island). The first phase of the multi-year plan featured the \$1.8 million restoration at Three Sisters Islands (**SLIDE 11**) that includes a new trolley shelter, expanded parking area, new pedestrian walkways and overlooks, enhanced landscaping, as well as new railings. Luna Island underwent a \$1.1 million overhaul, including new pedestrian walkways, overlook improvements, enhanced landscaping as well as new benches, light posts and railings. (**SLIDE 12**) The Cave of the Winds saw a \$1.7 million renovation of the tunnel that leads visitors to the gorge as well as the installation of new high speed elevators. (**SLIDE 13**)

(**SLIDE 14**) Three projects valued at \$10 million are either under construction or soon will be including Prospect Point/Lower Grove, the North Shoreline Trail, the Luna Island Bridge, along with parking lot improvements and new passenger trolleys. The designs for the remaining projects will be bid in early 2014.

Public health and safety improvements (SLIDE 15)

Let me now discuss what the public will not see but is essential to their health and safety. We are undertaking a number of projects across the state to address health and safety issues. We have outdated drinking water systems that need to be replaced. We have aging sewage treatment systems that have exceeded their useful life. We have dams on the state's "high hazard" list that do not meet modern dam safety standards, and bridges that have been flagged as potential hazards. We have failing electrical systems and natural gas lines that need to be replaced.

For example, construction commenced this spring on a \$2.5 million project to connect the southern end of Letchworth State Park to a nearby municipal water system, replacing the park's outdated drinking water supply. This project will ensure a safe and adequate supply of potable water to this highly utilized area of the park, and restore water service to sections that have recently been taken off line.

Rehabilitation of existing facilities and repair of aging infrastructure (SLIDE 16)

A major priority is simply to repair and improve existing public use facilities. Most of our projects underway include replacing facilities that have long exceeded their practical and operational effectiveness and are in various stages of disrepair, including roofs, heating and plumbing systems, contact stations, campgrounds, boat launches, picnic shelters, recreation fields, pools, swimming areas, visitor centers

(**SLIDE 17**) Then we have roads --not sexy- but essential to access to our parks and as you know access is one of our highest priority. And we are creating green parking lots, converting asphalt to green space, putting in bioswales, trees to catch and absorb our runoff--such as Glimmerglass where we are going to improve water quality.

(SLIDE 18) Bathrooms are in dismal condition (as shown here) and we're improving 41 throughout system. This is a fundamental public park service--you remember and don't come back.

(SLIDE 19) We are re-opening fundamental recreational facilities that have been cordoned and closed off. At Riverbank State Park in West Harlem, we invested \$3.4 million to restore a heavily used athletic and capital facilities, including a gym floor, running track and a worn and deteriorated artificial athletic field – which had been closed for months for safety reasons – enabling us to resume serving the approximately 250,000 school, youth program, and recreational visitors per year who play on the field.

(SLIDE 20) In rural and remote areas, we are improving our camps sites, particularly our youth camps---that serve nearby populations with high incidence of diabetes, asthma and obesity. These camps service over 20,000 kids from the Bronx (and NJ). We are going to fix them in phases. As you can see they are in total disrepair – and we are losing campers.

(SLIDE 21) Same is true out in Western New York. This summer, we were pleased to reopen the popular and much improved Group Camp 5 in the Quaker area of Allegany State Park. The \$733,000 project helped improve one of the most popular group camping areas in our entire system. Though popular, the 90-year-old cabins at Group Camp 5 had fallen into an extreme state of disrepair, held together by duct tape, served by pit toilets. NY Works funding enabled us to replace deteriorated cabins with 18 new four-bed cabins along with construction of a modern bathroom, including showers and a small laundry. We had a family of many generations return for its reopening---very touching---this is what these camps do.

(SLIDE 22) I'm a big believer in playgrounds, trails, and athletic facilities which encourage families with children to engage in healthy, active play, and help spark a lifelong connection to parks, nature and healthy, active recreation – and attract new visitors to our parks. And they are not a huge investment.

We are building 25 new playgrounds across the state. For instance, this true destination playground (at Roberto Clemente in the Bronx) with a user-activated spray feature to cool patrons in the summer; a range of climbers, spinners, slides and overhead ladders; and integrated shade and benches to keep the playground safe and comfortable for both children and But playgrounds are important at our campgrounds. **(SLIDE 23)** Or this playground at Verona Beach for the many families who stay at the campground.

Preserving our historic sites (SLIDE 24)

Postponing repairs and capital maintenance and repairs has left our state's historic sites and cultural landmarks vulnerable to irreversible deterioration. These iconic destinations need dedicated stewardship to survive from one generation to the next. In 2012-13, nearly a quarter of our capital projects involved improvements to historic buildings and structures.

(SLIDE 25) The crumbling estate wall of the Staatsburgh State Historic Site in Dutchess County was a visible sign of the disinvestment in our park system. We are repairing the masonry wall as part of a larger \$4.2 million historic preservation project at the site.

(SLIDE 26) Olana State Historic Site, the home of Hudson Valley landscape painter Frederic Church, is one of our premier historic sites. Its estimated annual impact on the community is \$8 million, supporting 270 jobs. Yet unaddressed leaks in the roof were causing water infiltration into this unique, historic building. A \$1 million contract through the NY Works initiative enabled us to repair the site's roof, and preserve a key piece of history, by repairing metal roofing and built-in gutters, installing new flashing and downspouts, and selective removal and replacement of slate.

(SLIDE 27) We are rehabilitating the iconic West Bathhouse at Jones Beach State Park, one of our state's most important and historic parks, as part of a \$12 million investment in the flagship park visited by 6 million people annually.

(SLIDE 28) Trails and Stewardship Projects.

We are building trail connections – such as the bridges that will establish an eight-mile Black Diamond recreation trail outside Ithaca, restoring historic stonework in the Niagara Gorge and repairing popular carriage trails at Minnewaska State Park in Ulster County.

As stewards of our state's natural treasures, a great part of our mission is to protect its natural beauty, open spaces and diversity of plant and animal life. Capital funding is needed for a variety of stewardship projects, including projects to prevent the spread of invasive species, protect rare plants and animals, plant trees and improve natural habitat at parks across the state.

Leveraging Public-Private Partnerships (SLIDE 29)

The governor has charged us with enhancing the use of public-private partnerships to improve our park system. The NY Works funding has enabled the agency to do so. We have used capital dollars leverage additional funding for park improvements from other sources, including private donations, grants and federal funding.

(SLIDE 30) Earlier this fall, we broke ground on the Seneca Art & Culture Center at Ganondagan State Historic Site in Ontario County, fulfilling a 30-year vision to build a permanent destination dedicated to Seneca contributions to art, culture and society at the site of the 17th Century Seneca town. New York State has committed \$3.9 million from NYWorks and the EPF toward the project, but significantly, the state's investment has helped leverage private funds from the Seneca Nation, and corporate, foundation, and private funds raised by the Friends of Ganondagan toward this \$11 million project.

(SLIDE 31) We're matching private donations to build a sensory garden at Planting Fields Arboretum on Long Island, providing an opportunity for the disabled to enjoy nature up close by showcasing plants that appeal directly to the senses.

(SLIDE 32) In Chautauqua County, Midway State Park's iconic carousel was restored to its historic and newly refurbished roundhouse building last summer, the result of a \$556,000 investment through NY Works and donations from the Friends of Midway, who are also leading an effort to repaint carousel horses in decorative finish that blends with the 1946 carousel's Art Deco style.

(SLIDE 33) Leveraging Capital Dollars with Concession Agreements to Improve Park Facilities

Examples of agreements with concessionaires and partners to make capital improvements include the Bear Mountain Inn – where concessionaire Guest Services has made upgrades and Bethpage State Park, where the PGA Tour and PGA of America are investing in the Bethpage Black golf course maintenance and improvements.

Looking Ahead—2014 and Beyond (SLIDE 34)

Our work is far from done. With continued capital investment, the Agency will further its efforts to fix our aging infrastructure, and convert and transform New York's parks and historic sites into a welcoming, transformative, 21st century park system with the following priorities:

- Continue to address the backlog of capital needs in existing facilities, infrastructure and health and safety
- Establish a new state park on the Buffalo waterfront
- Incorporate energy efficiency, green technology and automation in capital projects
- Protect our natural resources
- Build for future storm readiness

Continue addressing backlog of capital needs (SLIDE 35)

While the NY Works funding has enabled the agency to make great progress in addressing the backlog of capital projects, we still have a long way to go. We are now advancing 60 architectural and engineering design projects prepare advance shovel-ready capital improvement projects in nearly 50 parks in future years.

Here are examples of several projects currently under design that will require future capital funding to complete.

American Falls Bridge

Transform Flagships

Swimming Pool Upgrades at FDR and Rockland Lake

Bathhouses at Sunken Meadow and Jones Beach

Energy Efficiency, Green Technology and Automation (SLIDE 36)

Capital funding will also help us reduce our operating budget. Currently, one-third of the agency's operating budget is spent on energy purchases. We need to advance projects to expand use of solar energy, install efficient LED lighting, improve building insulation, upgrade HVAC systems and so on.

We're looking to improve operational efficiency through automation of our parking lots. We have piloted a number of pay-and-display parking meters at smaller parking lots and boat

launches with positive results. Automation has great potential to improve operational efficiency, but there are significant upfront capital costs.

Continuing Partnerships (SLIDE 37)

We're currently working with the Genesee Regional Park Commission to raise private dollars to build a much-needed Nature Center at Letchworth State Park, continuing our efforts to leverage capital funding.

Build storm resiliency (SLIDE 38)

Most people think of parkland is being important for providing places for fun and recreation. But Sandy, Irene and Lee have highlighted the fact that our parks serve as a crucial buffer for our communities, providing much-needed open space and often absorbing and mitigating the impact of these stronger and more frequent storms. Currently, we are undertaking a study at our coastal state parks to assess our vulnerability to storms and sea level rise. We will need continued capital funding to make our park infrastructure more resilient and strengthen them as buffers to the surrounding communities. These projects could include protective dune enhancement, beach nourishment, storm-water absorption, flood-proofing buildings, strengthening dams, relocating or protecting utilities lines and so on.

Conclusion (SLIDE 39)

The Governor's continued commitment to a robust capital funding program for our agency will maintain momentum in rehabilitating and improving state parks and historic sites across the state. This smart investment will create local construction and engineering jobs, enhance community vitality, support New York's vital tourism industry, and transform our aging infrastructure into a sustainable park system for the 21st century.

Thank you again for your commitment to our magnificent state park system. As always, I am truly appreciative for the tremendous support that members of the Executive team have provided to our agency and I welcome your questions.