

New York State Council of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation



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New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation

State Council
of Parks



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KATHY HOCHUL

Governor

ERIK KULLESEID

Commissioner

BRYAN ERWIN

Chair, State Council of Parks

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor
Executive Chamber
Albany, New York 12224

February 2024

Dear Governor Hochul:

The State Council of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation is pleased to submit its 2023 Annual Report. This report highlights the State Council of Parks and the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's achievements during 2023, and sets forth recommendations for the coming year.

This report features several major capital projects completed in 2023, as well as programs that deepen access and connection for all communities to state parks and historic sites. Your investment in and strong support for the state's public lands that have allowed these initiatives to advance will leave a legacy of conservation, access and economic stimulus that will be felt for generations to come. The State Council of Parks remains committed to seeking philanthropic and other outside support for state parks and historic sites. On our own and with our partner organization, the Natural Heritage Trust, State Parks raised more than \$20 million in outside funds in 2023 to support essential capital projects, exhibits and long-term operations at state parks and historic sites throughout the State. Our friends groups – from large to small – continue to grow in strength and ability, providing high quality programs and working on important projects that are invaluable to our parks. We thank Parks & Trails New York for partnering with us to build our friends groups network, and for administering the important capacity-building Park & Trail Partnership Grant funded through the EPF with your support.

I have made it a priority to engage with state and local leaders to educate and advocate on the importance of state parks in every community of our state, from Long Island to Niagara Falls. I have encouraged my fellow State Park Regional Commission chairs to do the same. As we celebrate the Centennial of the State Council of Parks in 2024, it is more important than ever that we acknowledge the multitude of ways state parks positively impact our communities and ensure that we all act together to support them for the next generation.

One hundred years ago, New York State made a historic investment in establishing parks for all New Yorkers. Throughout this tumultuous century, through economic depressions, wars both hot and cold, the digital age and of course, pandemics, our parks have been a constant for all New Yorkers to enjoy. Whether a camping trip at Four Mile Creek State Park, rafting at Letchworth State Park, a round of championship-level golf at Bethpage, a day splashing in the surf at Jones Beach or a simple walk in the woods at Robert H. Treman State Park, these places have been our own thin slice of heaven. We now embark on our second century, with another historic round of investment from you and with the responsibility to continue to ensure that all New Yorkers, no matter where they are in our great state, no matter what figure is listed on their paycheck, no matter how they or their ancestors got to New York, have their own corner of the beach, their own open space to breathe, their own place to just...be."

We extend our deep gratitude to you for your continued commitment to ensuring that our state's remarkable public lands remain accessible to all New Yorkers. The State Council of Parks has been and will continue to be proud partners in this effort.

Sincerely,

Bryan Erwin

Chair, State Council of Parks

NEW YORK STATE PARKS AND HISTORIC SITES OVERVIEW

The State Park System is one of New York's greatest treasures. Today, the system totals over 250 parks, historic sites, recreational trails, golf courses, and boat launches. New York's Parks and Historic Sites provide affordable outdoor recreation and education opportunities to more than 84 million visitors each year. These facilities contribute to the economic vitality and quality of life of local communities and directly support New York's tourism industry as well as provide places for families and children to recreate, exercise, spend time together outdoors, and support health and well-being.

The Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (State Parks) is responsible for the operation and stewardship of the state parks system as well as advancing statewide parks, historic preservation, and open space mission. The agency has an "all funds" operating and capital budget of approximately \$605 million and is staffed by 2,453 permanent employees and more than 4,500 seasonal positions during peak operating season.

State Parks is responsible for managing a vast array of public facilities within its 250 sites. New York has one of the most developed state park systems in the nation, encompassing a huge inventory of public facilities including 5,000 buildings, 28 golf courses, 24 swimming pools and spray-grounds, 54 state parks with beaches, 27 marinas, 40 boat launch sites, 26 nature centers, 830 cabins, 128 cottages, 8,555 campsites, more than 2,000 miles of trails, 106 dams, 604 bridges, hundreds of miles of roads, and dozens of historic structures listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

New York's State Park system has long been recognized as one of the best and most diverse in the nation. Among the fifty states, we rank first in the number of operating facilities and first in the total number of campsites. We are fifth in total acreage and second in total annual visitation. Attendance at Niagara Falls State Park is greater than that of Grand Canyon and Yosemite National Parks combined, and more than twice as many people visit Jones Beach each year than visit Yellowstone. Niagara Falls is the oldest state park in the nation and Washington's Headquarters is the first property acquired with public funds for the express purpose of historic preservation and patriotic visitation.

State Council of Parks and Regional Park Commissions

The State Council of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation – known simply as the "State Council of Parks" – is a 14-member body established by Article 5 of the state Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law (PRHPL). The State Council is comprised of the Chairs of the eleven Regional Park Commissions, the Chair of the State Board for Historic Preservation, and the Commissioners of State Parks and Environmental Conservation.

As defined in PRHPL Section § 5.09, the State Council of Parks is a central advisory agency on all matters affecting parks, recreation, and historic preservation.

The eleven Regional Parks Commissions, created by PRHPL Article 7, represent each of the State Parks Regions except for the Palisades (which is represented by the Palisades Interstate Park Commission) and the Adirondack & Catskill Park Region (which is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environmental Conservation). Regional Commission members, who must be residents of the state, are appointed to seven-year terms by the Governor, confirmed by the Senate and serve without compensation. Regional Commissions serve as central advisory bodies on all matters affecting parks, recreation, and historic preservation within their respective regions, with a focus on the operations of State Parks and Historic Sites.

STATE COUNCIL OF PARKS 2024 PRIORITIES

The State Council of Parks will advance four priorities in 2024:

1. NYS Parks Centennial 2024

In 2024, New York will celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the State Council of Parks, which forged the state park system that New Yorkers know and love today. The Council strongly supports the NYS Parks Centennial commemoration that will highlight New York's historic investment in state parks & historic sites and the partnerships that support our mission. The initiative will focus on investing in projects and programs that provide a high quality outdoor recreational and cultural experience, connecting and engaging a new generation of visitors by expanding access and ensuring a vibrant, accessible, and welcoming Park system for the next 100 years. #SeeYouOutThere

2. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Access

The State Council of Parks shares the agency's priority to expand diverse and equitable access to parks so that people from all communities and across all ages and abilities are included and can fully experience our parks and historic sites. We support the agency's Our Whole History initiative, an effort to ensure that the state's historic sites embrace narratives that reflect the diversity of our state and nation's history. We will continue to work with Governor Hochul and community leaders to recruit and appoint regional commission members who reflect the communities we serve.

3. Stewardship of Natural & Historic Resources

The State Council of Parks recognizes the importance of the stewardship of our natural resources and the need to protect, preserve and conserve them throughout our state park system to ensure that public lands are left unaffected for future generations of visitors. We support the agency's Climate Change Action Plan and its efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change on our public lands.

4. Advocacy

The State Council of Parks will continue to assist the agency in promoting and protecting our parks and historic sites. We support efforts to encourage responsible stewardship, such as leave-no-trace principles and volunteer initiatives like I Love My Park Day and Park Advocacy Day. The Council will also continue to advocate against actions that threaten physical or visual encroachment on state park or historic boundaries, as well as advocate to ensure adequate operating support for parks.

NYS PARKS CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

Green Lakes State Park

Three million dollars in improvements at Green Lakes State Park in Onondaga County were completed this summer. A new cabin camping area, a nearby playground and four-season bathhouse were designed to host groups through its Ladders to the Outdoors program that works to increase youth's access to outdoor recreational spaces, equipment, transportation, and skills development in underserved communities.



New playground at Green Lakes State Park



Hempstead Lake State Park

Northern Ponds at Hempstead Lake State Park

A \$47 million multi-year project included two miles of new Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant stone dust and bridle trails, an observation deck, improvements to the park's Northern Ponds to mitigate flood risk and reduce pollution, and rehabilitation of the 150-year-old Hempstead Lake Dam. These vital infrastructure improvements will help transform the park's offerings to the public while also making it more climate-change resilient. The final phase of the overall \$47 million improvement plan upgraded the park's 144-acre Northern Ponds complex, with nearly \$17 million in major improvements to mitigate flood risk on the Mill River, reduce pollution entering Hewlett Bay, and improve recreational trails. As one of the largest wetland projects ever completed by New York State Parks, the construction of eight acres of emergent wetlands now allows runoff from Southern State Parkway to slowly flow through to filter and purify the water before it enters Northeast Pond.

Saratoga Spa State Park - Roosevelt Drive Redevelopment

The \$4.2 million redevelopment of Roosevelt Drive within Saratoga Spa State Park improves transportation safety within the park by adding pedestrian and bicycling pathways adjacent to the park's busiest stretch of roadway, which connects the Avenue of the Pines with the golf course, pools, picnic areas, and the Roosevelt Baths and Spa. A new Welcome Terrace, referred to as The Arcade, sits at the entrance of the Saratoga Spa State Park's neo-classical Roosevelt Campus. It will feature a circle of benches to create the perfect spot for park visitors to socialize, relax, and take in their surroundings. For a limited time, people can adopt and dedicate one of these benches.



Saratoga Spa State Park



New Hither Hills State Park Solar Farm

Hither Hills State Park Solar Farm

A newly installed solar array now provides carbon-free, sustainable power at Hither Hills State Park in Montauk. This shift to power Hither Hills with solar builds on New York's nation-leading climate goals and Governor Kathy Hochul's effort to increase use of renewable energy across all state properties. Now fully installed and operational, Hither Hills is the 50th solar powered project statewide since 2012. Using daylight harvesting to offset electrical usage, the \$750,000 project brings State Parks' total solar production to 6.2 MW installed statewide -- including 15 ground-mount, 30 roof-mount, and five pole-mount systems -- covering around 15 percent of the agency's total annual electricity consumption.

Allegany State Park Quaker Trail Area

A new \$6.8 million multi-use trail at Allegany State Park provides an accessible alternative for bikers, hikers and campers to reach the park's popular Quaker Lake beach area. The new trail opened in time for the summer camping season at Allegany State Park, which boasts the largest campground in the state park system. The Quaker Run Area trail extension project is also supported by \$2 million in State Parks capital funds as well as \$1.22 million from the Ralph C. Wilson Foundation, \$2.88 million from a Transportation Alternative Program grant from the Department of Transportation, and a Land and Water Conservation Fund grant.



Allegany State Park Quaker Trail



NYC Council Member Lincoln Restler speaks at gateway unveiling

Marsha P. Johnson State Park Gateway

A new gateway entrance to Marsha P. Johnson State Park in Brooklyn honors Marsha P. Johnson, a transgender woman of color who was a pioneer of the LGBTQIA+ civil rights movement, born 78 years ago. This bold and artful park entrance gateway is intended to embody Marsha P. Johnson's spirit and legacy and to complement the park and surrounding neighborhood. The \$2.3 million ornamental gateway at the Kent Avenue/North Eighth Street entrance will welcome visitors into the Brooklyn park. The gateway builds on other completed improvements to the park including extensive new landscaping - including native species perennial gardens and 'Marsha's hillside' to honor her love of nature, a new great lawn, dozens of new trees, permeable pathways, new park furnishings, permanent interpretive panels documenting Marsha's life, work, and community, a Park House to host educational and community programming (including much needed park restrooms), and a substantial sitewide storm-water management system to improve drainage throughout the park.

Bear Mountain State Park - Trailside Zoo

This \$1.8 million improvement project added three new, state-of-the-art animal habitats and a public loop trail — replacing a row of four smaller exhibits at the popular Trailside Zoo. To accomplish this, the previous exhibit infrastructure was first removed, allowing the area to be reclaimed. The new, larger habitats were then carefully integrated into the landscape, incorporating spectacular natural rock outcroppings. Rustic animal night houses, built from local stone and lumber to resemble the nearby museum, round out the site. Funding for the project was sourced from a \$680,000 endowment, with the remainder from New York State Parks capital funds and grants. All of Trailside's featured animals are local, native species (such as black bear, eastern coyote, beaver, bald eagle, various owls and hawks, etc.) and virtually all are non-releasable and could not survive in the wild. Thus, unlike conventional zoos, Trailside functions both as an environmental education and native animal rescue facility.



Sylvia the bobcat lounging in her new habitat at Trailside Museum & Zoo

STATEWIDE INITIATIVES

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Conscious efforts led by State Park staff to ensure that 'All Are Welcome' at parks and historic sites have helped reach and represent a spectrum of identities among ability, age, culture, gender, justice system involvement, language, race, religion, sexuality and socioeconomic and veteran status. In June, State Parks received the inaugural Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Leadership Award from the Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Council, in recognition of the agency's contributions towards advancing statewide DEIA initiatives.

The agency designated an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator to inventory and increase accessibility throughout the state park system. Rockefeller State Park Preserve hosted Abilities Day to try out adaptive trail equipment and offer alternative healthy movement. Other facilities have added to their supplies of adaptive equipment, including kick sleds at Grafton Lakes and Glimmerglass State Parks.

Parks hosted the inaugural Hispanic Heritage Month celebration at Roberto Clemente State Park to honor the workforce's rich Hispanic/Latino culture and history. Spanish-speaking staff were invited to participate in a recording session for the Spanish Centennial promotional video as part of the goal to increase the inclusivity of Park resources.



Abilities Day at Rockefeller State Park Preserve

Throughout the year, State Parks has participated in multiple interagency efforts, including the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Statewide Food Drive coordinated by the Office of General Services and the campaign led by the NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence to support survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. Parks also sponsored events hosted by the Office of Diversity & Inclusion Management, including Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Black History Month, Celebrating LGBTQIA+ Pride, and Veterans Appreciation Day.



Inaugural Hispanic History Month Celebration at Roberto Clemente State Park

During the summer season, free transportation was offered through the Nature and Adventure Bus programs to increase access to parks. An estimated 1,000 patrons were shuttled to Thacher State Park and about 600 people were transported to eight sites in the Niagara Region, where Ladders to the Outdoors provided programming and free swimming. As part of the Girl Scouts Love State Parks nationwide initiative, 20 parks and historic sites hosted 1,300 scouts to strengthen connections to the outdoors.

Several working teams are conducting outreach and recruitment within communities traditionally excluded and underrepresented in the workforce, the outdoors, and historic interpretation. The DEIA and Recruitment Teams tabled at events, including the NYS Association of Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislators,

Inc.'s 52nd Annual Legislative Conference; the Disability Rights & Employment Awareness Month Symposium; the New York State Fair, Binghamton University's Multicultural Career Fair, and A Village Inc.'s wellness-focused South End Night Market.

The Our Whole History initiative elevates underrepresented voices through events such as the Pinkster Festival at Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site, the oldest and first documented celebration enjoyed by enslaved, free Africans and their descendants; the celebration of Juneteenth at John Brown Farm State Historic Site to recognize the effective end of chattel enslavement in the United States; 'The Match' at Schuyler Mansion State Historic Site highlighting the historical diversity of identities in royalty; and with website updates connecting the under-told histories of Black, Women's, and LGBTQIA+ communities to OPRHP. State historic preservation staff and special guests provided opportunities to engage virtually through interactive and informational webinars that

showcase the immense knowledge that historic site staff have. Philipse Manor Hall Historic Site won an Award for Excellence from the Greater Hudson Heritage Network to recognize the reinterpretation and renovation that fully incorporates “Our Whole History” stories of the Indigenous people from whom the Philipse lands derive, enslaved Africans from whose work and trade the Philipse family prospered during the pre-Revolutionary era, and the family’s various journeys.



NYS Commission on African American History at Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site

State Parks supported the WAMPUM/OTGOÄ exhibition at Ganondagan State Historic Site’s Seneca Art and Culture Center, featuring important Indigenous objects returning from the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, wampum belts, and contemporary work from Haudenosaunee artists. The exhibit highlighted Ganondagan as an invaluable cultural resource in the OPRHP system and exemplifies the importance of relationship building for meaningful cultural interpretation. In line with these efforts, the NYS Office of General Services displayed a Wampum belt on loan from Ganondagan at the Empire State Plaza, and OPRHP staff participated in the Canandaigua Treaty Commemoration to further commitments of collaboration.

The ornamental gateway at Marsha P. Johnson State Park was unveiled with a ribbon cutting to greet visitors with Marsha P.’s enduring spirit. Communities came together for Drag Story Hours, Transgender Day of Visibility, and for Transgender Day of Remembrance, a solemn reminder of the disproportionate violence experienced by transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Across the state, from Gloversville to Niagara Falls, agency employees attended LGBTQIA+ pride events and supported the delivery of the Pride Month proclamation.



Transgender Day of Visibility at Marsha P. Johnson State Park

PARTNERS & PROGRAMS

First Day Hikes

In 2023, thousands of park visitors (two legged and four-legged) turned out across the state on January 1 to enjoy First Day Hikes and embrace nature's winter beauty. More than 80 hikes were hosted in communities across New York at state parks, historic sites, state forests, and other public lands.



Shirley Chisholm SP FDH '23



Tacoma SP - Copake Falls FDH '23



Catharine Valley Trail FDH '23



Saratoga Spa SP FDH '23



Letchworth SP FDH '23

I Love My Park Day

The twelfth annual I Love My Park Day was held Saturday, May 6, 2023 at 150 state parks, historic sites, and public lands across New York. The event, sponsored by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Parks & Trails New York, and the Department of Environmental Conservation, is the largest single-day volunteer event in New York State and enhances parks, historic sites, and public lands, and raises awareness of the state's outdoor recreation assets and their needs.



Sunken Meadow SP ILMPD '23



Sterling Forest SP ILMPD '23



Selkirk Shores SP ILMPD '23



Allegany SP ILMPD '23



Woodlawn Beach SP ILMPD '23

Parks & Trails Grant Program

The Park and Trail Partnership Grant Program is funded through the state Environmental Protection Fund. The grants support partner group efforts to raise private funds for capital projects, perform maintenance and beautification undertakings, provide educational programming, and promote public use of the parks through hosting of special events. Grants are administered in partnership with Parks & Trails New York. Recipients must raise outside funding of at least 10 percent of the grant amount received. In 2023, \$1.8 million in grants supported 27 not-for-profit organizations involved with stewardship of state parks, trails, historic sites and public lands. Grants are aimed at initiatives that enhance the preservation, stewardship, interpretation, maintenance and promotion of New York State parks, trails, historic sites and public lands; increase the sustainability, effectiveness, productivity, volunteerism and fundraising capabilities of not-for-profit organizations that promote, maintain and support New York State parks, trails and state historic sites and public lands and promote the tourism and economic development benefits of outdoor recreation through the growth and expansion of a connected statewide network of parks, trails and greenways.





OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE

Open Space Institute

Committed to protecting open space and making the outdoors more welcoming and accessible to all, the Open Space Institute (OSI) is adding expertise and raising private dollars to leverage public investments at New York State Parks and Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) properties.

OSI and New York State Parks will each celebrate milestones in 2024, with OSI reaching its 50th anniversary and New York State Parks marking an incredible 100 years since its creation. In addition to a full slate of anniversary initiatives for each organization, OSI is working with New York State Parks to help guide the next 100 years of the State Park system. The “Centennial Pulse of the Parks: A Celebration of Visitors at 100 Years of the New York State’s Park System” report will be a park visitor-inspired blueprint for developing future park programs, amenities, improvements, and more.

In 2023, OSI’s collaborations with State Parks led to innovations and improvements across a broad range of parks and geographies. In Orange County, OSI worked with State Parks and the United States Military Academy at West Point to design and build a creative new trail bridge at Schunnemunk State Park—the sixth consecutive year that cadet engineering students constructed a trail bridge within a state park. And at Fahnestock State Park, OSI continued efforts to enhance the park with construction of a 65-foot pedestrian bridge and streambank stabilization along the Hubbard Perkins Loop Trail.



Construction along the High Point Carriage Road at Minnewaska State Park Preserve

In late summer 2023, OSI and State Parks celebrated the restoration of the High Point Carriage Road at Minnewaska State Park Preserve. This project was a major accomplishment in OSI’s decades-long commitment to the park, successfully connecting the park’s interior with Sam’s Point, and marking the restoration of more than 15 miles of Minnewaska’s Victorian-era carriage roads. And as a recipient of a \$500,000 Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) grant, OSI will continue this effort with the restoration of the rest of the Lake Awosting Carriage Road, making the park’s carriage roads fully safe and accessible for a wide range of visitors, park staff, and emergency personnel.

As part of its core mission of making parks and green spaces more welcoming and accessible, OSI unveiled its “Growing Greenways: West of Hudson Greenway Trails Vision Plan,” an ambitious plan to develop a unified, primarily off-road trail network spanning more than 250 miles and connecting eight trails across more than 20 communities in Ulster, Sullivan, and Orange counties. To date, OSI has already achieved several trail projects outlined in the Growing Greenways Plan that are strengthening connections between, and improving public access to, state parks and DEC properties.

OSI’s trail work in the Hudson Valley will be a boon to Empire State Trail (EST) visitors: in Ulster County, along the Walkkill Valley Rail Trail – a key link in the EST – OSI restored a 5.5-mile stretch of the trail after securing \$800,000 in funding from the county. Along the O&W Rail Trail, which has the potential to serve as a southwestward extension of the EST, OSI improved more than five miles of existing railbed, protected an additional 2.4 miles of unimproved railbed, and launched a feasibility study to investigate turning the O&W into a contiguous, 57-mile shared-use greenway trail stretching from the City of Kingston in Ulster County southwest to the City of Port Jervis in Orange County.

In the Adirondacks, efforts to enhance and promote a southern entrance to the popular Adirondack High Peaks continued as work began to restore the historic MacNaughton Cottage at OSI’s Adirondack Upper Works property in Newcomb. The larger project is aimed at better dispersing visitors throughout one of the most popular areas of the Adirondacks. OSI also initiated the design of a new trailhead and parking area at the eastern end of the Adirondack Rail Trail in the Village of Lake Placid, funded in part by an OSI-secured \$500,000 EPF grant.



Renderings of restored MacNaughton Cottage at Adirondack Upper Works

OSI also continued its decades-long commitment to protecting and expanding New York’s irreplaceable public lands. In Ulster County, OSI acquired more than 235 acres to improve connections between the Shawangunk Ridge and the Catskill Park; protected nearly 65 acres of a site adjacent to the Shawangunk State Forest renowned as the best hang-gliding location on the East Coast; and added more than 250 acres to the Sundown Wild Forest. In Dutchess County, OSI purchased nearly 120 acres adjacent to West Mountain State Forest to protect intact and connected forests and increase public access to land.

Connect Kids to Parks and Ladders to the Outdoors

Since 2016, the Connect Kids Field Trip Program has awarded over 11,228 field trip grants. The grant, funded through the Environmental Protection Fund, covers the costs of transportation and program fees for any grade from a Title 1 school district. In 2023 alone 1,548 field trips have brought 108,063 students to the outdoors.

Initially funded with a 2020 grant to the Natural Heritage Trust from the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation, Ladders to the Outdoors seeks to increase access to outdoor recreational spaces, equipment, transportation, and skills development in underserved communities near state parks in Western New York. In just four years, the program has served over 36,000 youth and hosted over 700 programs in state parks and historic sites. Ladders to the Outdoors has developed over 170 partnerships with schools and community based organizations, vastly expanding outreach.

In 2023, with support from CNY Community Foundation, the Gifford Foundation, the Central Regional Commission, and the United Way of CNY Grant, funding supported the Central New York Ladders to the Outdoors program, served 1,500 youth at 15 different activities and programs including camping at the state’s first LTO camping area at Green Lakes State Park.



Guided hike at Pebles Island State Park



Kayaking at Beaver Island State Park



Guided hike at Reinstein Nature Preserve



New LTO cabin at Green Lakes State Park



Earth Day Outdoor Exploration event at Green Lakes State Park

DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP & PLANNING

Environmental Stewardship

The OPRHP Climate Change Action Committee, established in April of 2022, continues to advance the agency's efforts to meet the Governor's environmental and energy goals. The agency has established policies on both energy and climate change to direct the agency in its actions. Committee working groups have advanced progress on vulnerability assessments and adaptation planning for park facilities, starting with coastal parks on Long Island.

Division of Environmental Stewardship and Planning

In 2021, Commissioner Kulleseid announced the establishment of the Lucy Rockefeller Waletzky Award for Environmental Stewardship. The award, created in recognition of Dr. Waletzky's contributions to and inspiration for the agency's stewardship program, will recognize staff teams, alone or in partnership with volunteer, nonprofit or other partners, for projects that improve the natural resources or ecology of a state park or historic site. At the agency's 2023 Annual Awards Dinner, held in November, the Commissioner named the Long Island Regional Stewardship and Education team with the award for their work on piping plover conservation.

FORCES

The Friends of Recreation, Conservation and Environmental Stewardship (FORCES) was launched in 2008 in our Central Region with the intention of boosting and growing volunteerism within New York State Parks. The program has expanded from one to seven regions, and there are now 48 affiliated institutions and seven High Schools/BOCES partnership. Up to 100 FORCES stewards are hired throughout the various seasons each year and the number continues to grow.

Student Conservation Association

Through a partnership with AmeriCorps and the Student Conservation Association, State Parks currently supports two conservation programs as part of the Empire State Conservation Corps: The Parks Corps and the Hudson Valley Corps. Together, 45 volunteers are placed in hands-on learning experiences in a variety of environmental disciplines.



Long Island Piping Plover Team receives the Lucy Rockefeller Waletzky Award for Environmental Stewardship

NYS PARKS ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS

Allegany Region

In 2023, the opening of the Quaker Run Multi-Use Trail in Allegany State Park offers a six-mile accessible trail supported by grants from the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation, Transportation Alternatives Program, and the Recreational Trails Program. Midway State Park had an exciting year, with the culmination of a multi-year community and grant supported restoration project to bring a 1948 Ferris Wheel to the historic Midway State Park and the celebration of the park's 125th Anniversary.

The National Amusement Park Historical Association and Elected Officials recognized Midway State Park for 125 years of continuous operations and its generational impact on the community and region.

The Commission continues to support the effort to restore the Barcelona Lighthouse. Design plans were completed in 2023 to renovate the Barcelona Lighthouse tower, which will go to construction in 2024.



Unveiling of 1948 Ferris Wheel restoration

Central Region

The Central region completed its first full season of the Ladders to Outdoors (LTO) program. Close to 1,300 youth from the Syracuse area participated in dozens of outdoor recreational and environmental education programs. Dozens of new community partnerships were formed to strengthen outreach. With support from community partners, the state's first group outdoor recreation and camping area dedicated to LTO opened at Green Lakes State Park. This accessible and welcoming base camp is the entry point for our youth and community groups to learn about the outdoors, experience camping and have many more adventures throughout the park. For its efforts on community engagement and youth recreation, the region received the Boys and Girls Club Champion for Children Award. The region is expanding the park's footprint by acquiring six of seven properties adjacent to Green Lakes along route 290. The seventh and final property is expected to close during the 2024. The Green Lakes State Park bathhouse received the 2023 Central New York American Public Works Association project of the year award.



Green Lakes State Park Bathhouse

Finger Lakes Region

2023 was a strong year for Finger Lake State Parks, with Watkins Glen seeing an all-time high for attendance of 1.2 million visitors. Friends groups across the region held numerous events to support First Day Hikes, I Love My Park Day and special events and programs. The Friends of Robert Treman State Park produced and held a dedication ceremony for a plaque honoring Robert H. Treman, our first Commissioner for the Finger Lakes and founding member of the State Council of Parks. The event was attended by two of Robert Treman's descendants, Carol des Cognets, Robert H. Treman's granddaughter and Willem Clendenin, Robert Treman's great-great-grandson. Plans are well underway to commemorate the Centennial Anniversary with events and activities across the region in 2024.



Robert H. Treman honorary plaque unveiling

Genesee Region

The Genesee Commission continued its focus on advocacy and community outreach in 2023, including a meeting with area legislators at Darien Lake State Park. More such meetings are to come in 2024. The Commission is also focused on recruitment and orientation of all its members, and is close to having a full full commission roster.



Genesee Commission

Long Island Region

The Long Island Commission recruited 'youth adjuncts' to attend December's meeting as part of its effort to engage with new park users and the next generation of park leaders. The Commission also supported efforts to form new friends groups at Jones Beach, Orient Beach and Wildwood State Parks. It worked with local elected officials on support for projects in Hempstead and Orient Beach State Parks. The Commission hosted fundraisers at Jones Beach (Sting, JT concerts) and Bethpage Black to support park programs, and funded an ice cream truck for end of season at LISP Regional HQ.



Marching Cobras at Denny Farrell Riverbank SP birthday celebration



Commissioner Kulleseid accepts citation from group of LISP

Commissioner Kulleseid with regional director Leslie Wright

New York City Region

In addition to virtual Commission meetings, the NYC Commission toured the fully renovated Marsha P. Johnson State Park in May 2023, seeing firsthand how fully the community has embraced the substantial park renovation. The May tour foreshadowed the grand opening of the park's joyous new decorative gateway on what would have been Marsha P. Johnson's 78th birthday on August 24, 2023 was a big anniversary year in the NYC Region: Roberto Clemente State Park celebrated its 50th anniversary and Denny Farrell Riverbank marked its 30th year. NYC Commission Chair Leisle Lin joined Commissioner Kulleseid and 30,000 friends and family to celebrate Riverbank's birthday featuring a wide variety of performances and activities for all ages.

Niagara Region

The Niagara Commission had a busy year supporting programs and projects throughout the region. Commissioner Samika Sullivan attended the New York State Fair with children from the Packard Court Community Center and about 100 other children as part of Ladders to the Outdoors Day. Many Commission members attended the ribbon cutting of the new Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Welcome Center at Niagara Falls State Park on December 18, 2023.

Developing virtual field trips was a project the Niagara Commission took just after Covid. One of the early groups taking advantage of virtual trips was a school group, p4c from Hawai'i 'Ohana. This summer, they allowed the students to select three destinations from the dozens visited over the years for a true road trip! They chose Niagara Falls State Park as their top destination choice. The Environmental Education team met with them during their two-day stay at the Falls, taking interpretive hikes around Niagara Falls and its gorge, experiencing the Cave of the Winds, and getting to see (and touch) their first ever snake in the wild! NYS Lt. Gov. Delgado visited Cataract House Park, the site of a key stop on the Underground Railroad just outside Niagara Falls State Park in July. Doug Perrelli showed him some of the artifacts that have been found and discussed the importance of the site. The Niagara Region Commissioner is planning a Centennial Bike Ride for the Parks Centennial next year. It is envisioned to be an event for people of all ages, abilities and communities to enjoy!



Students from Hawaii visit Niagara Falls State Park

Palisades Region

The Commission received a grant of \$69,000 from the Mary Harriman Foundation to support Harriman State Park's Regional Nature Museums, a 110-year-old program that provides hands-on nature and environmental education to thousands of young people each year, primarily through Harriman's Park Group Camps. The grant will support staff costs and the program's long-term sustainability.

PIPC continued its management of family camping services at Sebago Cabins, which has provided rental camping opportunities for more than a century. New playground equipment will be installed this season.

The Bear Mountain Ice Rink saw more patrons participating in open public sessions and the local hockey leagues. The rink has been in continuous operation since 1955.

Trailside Museums & Zoo opened new bobcat, fox, and porcupine exhibits in 2023. The exhibits cost approximately \$1.9M, with PIPC contributing approximately \$800,000 toward the completion of this exciting new addition to the 96-year-old

facility. The Commission intends to focus on additional upgrades to the facility over the next few years.

The Commission received a \$350,000 grant from the Federal Highway Administration to support improvements to the Palisades Interstate Parkway Visitor's Center near Exit 17.

The Commission used an existing endowment to help replace the roof of Perkins Tower at the top of Bear Mountain, which was damaged during a 2022 windstorm. PIPC contributed \$124K towards the \$157K project. The Commission also started receiving new endowment funds for the maintenance and repair of Perkins Tower from the estate of Penelope Wilson, a Perkins family descendant.

The Commission partnered with the NYS Bridge Authority to support a program celebrating the 100th anniversary of the opening of the Bear Mountain Bridge. The program is ongoing, with a series of public events planned to take place throughout 2024. The Commission signed on to become an advisory group member to the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council on the development of a feasibility study for a multi-use recreation path between the George Washington and Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridges.



In 2023, PIPC digitized and made available a series of films that were created between the 1920s and 1970s, including archival footage of Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt during visits to Harriman and Bear Mountain State Parks. These videos can be found at www.nyheritage.org.

Saratoga-Capital Region

This year was a busy one and saw the Commission focus on diversifying and broadening the accessibility of the parks through achieving a complete and diversified Commission and supporting the parks and sites through assistance to the Friends groups and volunteers.

Funding Access for All projects is underway, including: providing funding for annual Nature Bus program, purchasing an additional 900 feet of Access Trax mobility mats, and an accessibility ramp for Schoharie Crossing's Enders House.

Taconic Region

After joining the Taconic Commission and touring the various facilities in the region, Commission member Linda Tarrant-Reid proposed a bi-annual magazine to be distributed digitally to help

visitors get a sense of the marvelous assets State Parks has in the Taconic Region.

The lead story centers around the inaugural ride on the Copake Iron Works Railroad, championed by Commission Chair Edgar Masters, and named for the Pomeroy Family. The Pomeroy family owned the iron works many years ago and are well-known for funding historical markers and other programming that extols our state's history. Commission member activity highlights include: Emily Saland hosted



Commissioner Kulleseid's Centennial Kickoff at Walkway over the Hudson; Randy Fleischer is facilitating discussions with the Friends on an upcoming capital project at John Jay; Fred Osborn aiding in community discussions regarding visitation and impact in the Hudson Highlands as it pertains to the Fjord Trail; Pamela Tillinghast Dubitsky looking at the nexus between state and county parks in Westchester, and Jared Rodriguez seeking to make trail and park connections part of a Complete Streets program along the Route 9 corridor in Westchester.



Thousand Islands Region

The Thousand Islands commission traveled to the Lake Champlain area of the region this year, to meet with park staff and tour facilities. They visited sites that are in need of repair and/or replacement in future capital projects, and toured the new maintenance complex at Cumberland Bay State Park. Meeting with park staff, engineers and contractors gave the group some new insights into how things are progressing in the field. The commission has also been working this year to fill some vacancies on the commission.

Division for Historic Preservation

The Division for Historic Preservation is the designated State Historic Preservation Office for New York and administers a variety of programs and services in collaboration with government agencies, organizations, and residents of New York State. In 2023, the Division received over 760 applications for homeowner tax credits program and approved nearly \$50 million in investments in historic homes throughout the state. The office approved a nation-leading \$1.195 billion in tax credits for historic commercial properties.

Notable among 69 nominations to the state and national registers for historic places are the nominations of Todd Union in Monroe County for LGBTQ history and Central Harlem North Historic District, significant for Black Social History. 36 NYC Housing Authority projects were also listed in support of utilizing federal and state historic tax credits in advancing renovations to public housing.

The Division secured federal grants to help support historic preservation work in the state park system, including funds for exterior restoration at Senate House State Historic Site (Palisades) and Barcelona Lighthouse (Allegany). Federal grants were also obtained to fund maritime heritage education projects at Jones Beach State Park and Connetquot River State Park Preserve.

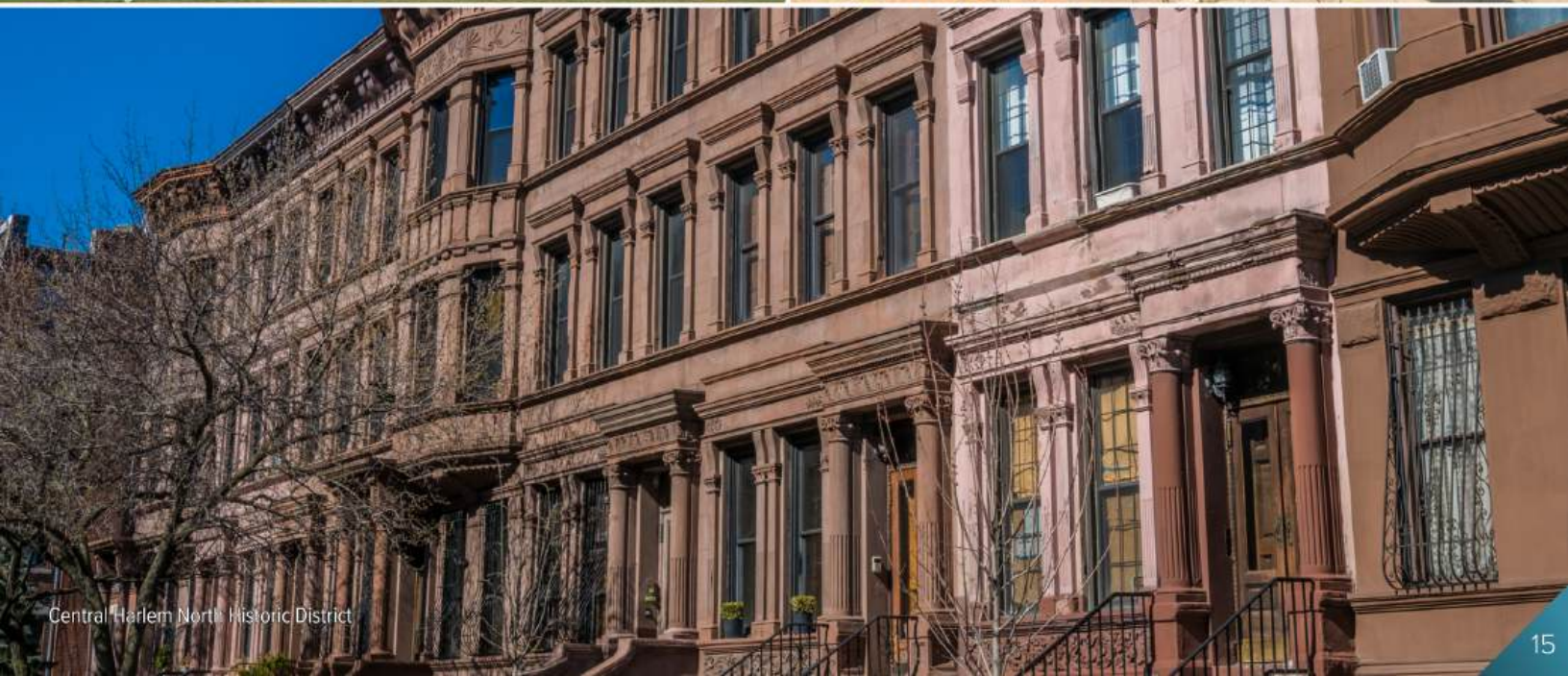
The Division continues to prepare for national and state commemorations such as the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution and the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of Emancipation in New York in 2027.



Barcelona Lighthouse



Senate House State Historic Site



Central Harlem North Historic District

2023 REGIONAL COMMISSION CHAIRS

BRYAN ERWIN

Chair, SCOP & Long Island Commission

WENDY MYERS BRAND

Acting Chair, Allegany Region Commission

CORNELIUS MURPHY, JR.

Chair, Central Commission

W. DAVID BANFIELD

Chair, Finger Lakes Commission

NATHAN COOGAN

Chair, Genesee Commission

LEISLE LIN

Acting Chair, New York City Commission

CINDY ABBOTT LETRO

Chair, Niagara Commission

BRYCE O'BRIEN

Chair, Palisades Commission

HEATHER MABEE

Chair, Saratoga Commission

EDGAR MASTERS

Chair, Taconic Commission

DOUGLAS PERRELLI

Chair, State Board for Historic Preservation





New gateway at Marsha P. Johnson State Park



Saratoga Spa State Park



Marching Cobras at Denny Farrell Riverbank SP birthday celebration



First Day Hike at Genesee Valley Greenway State Park



Unveiling of 1948 Ferris Wheel restoration at Midway State Park



Sojourner Truth State Park Ribbon Cutting



Sculpted by professional sand sculptor John Gowdy at Jones Beach State Park in celebration of the NYS Parks Centennial



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

**State Council
of Parks**

Albany, New York