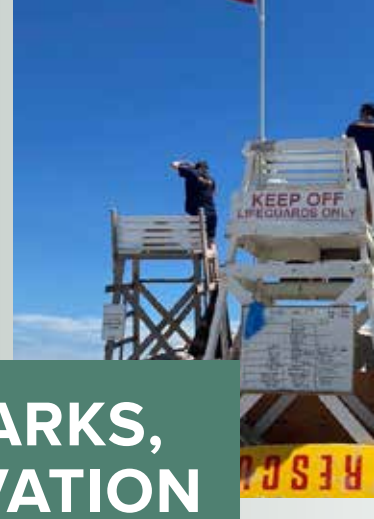
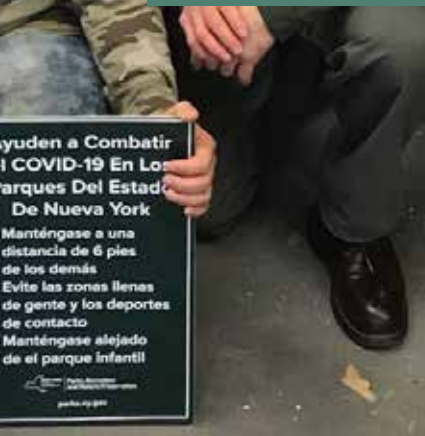




NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL OF PARKS, RECREATION & HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



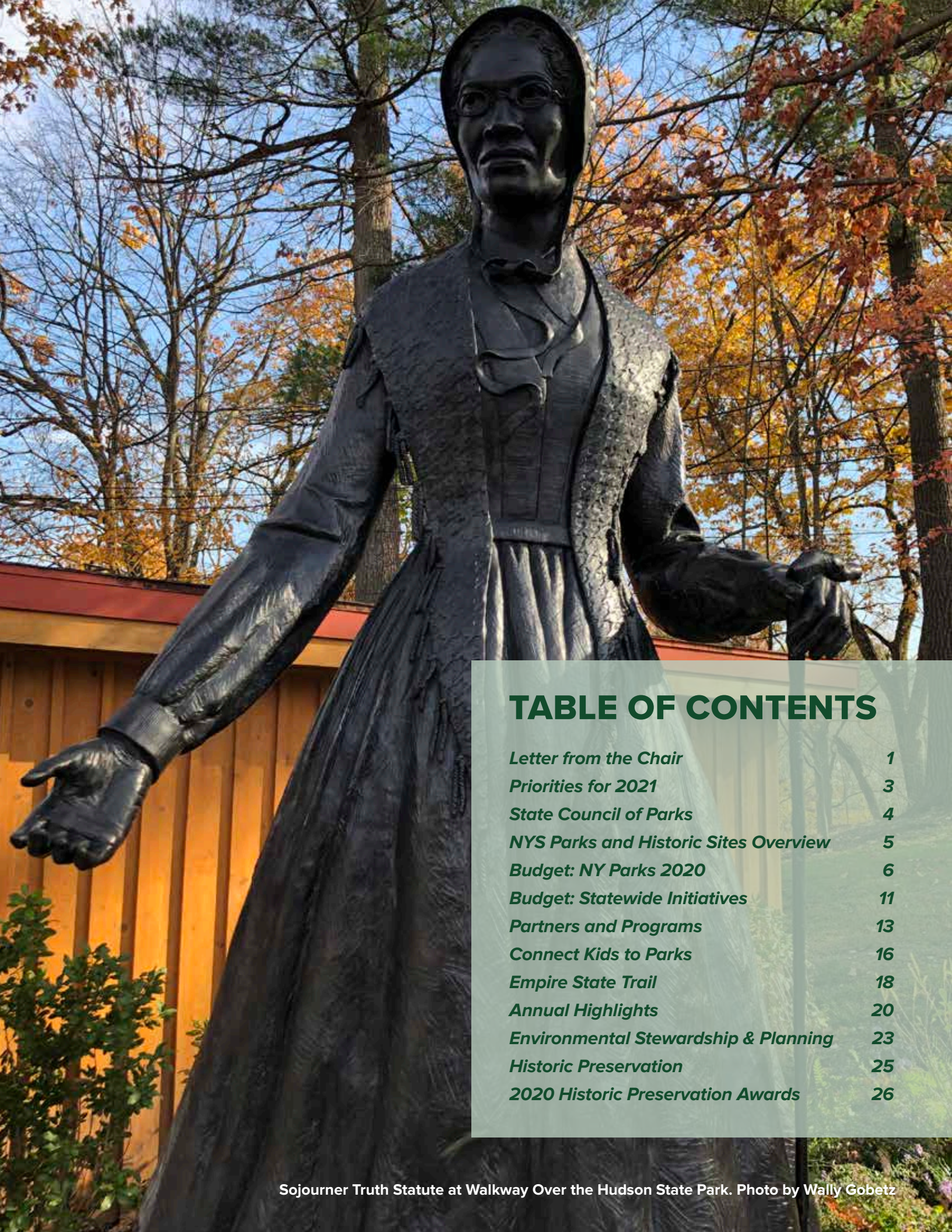


TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Letter from the Chair</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Priorities for 2021</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>State Council of Parks</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>NYS Parks and Historic Sites Overview</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Budget: NY Parks 2020</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Budget: Statewide Initiatives</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Partners and Programs</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Connect Kids to Parks</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Empire State Trail</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Annual Highlights</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Environmental Stewardship & Planning</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Historic Preservation</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>2020 Historic Preservation Awards</i>	<i>26</i>



Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

**State Council of Parks,
Recreation and
Historic Preservation**

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

ERIK KULLESEID
Commissioner

LUCY R. WALETZKY, M.D.
State Council Chair

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor
Executive Chamber
Albany, New York 12224

February 2021

Dear Governor Cuomo,

The State Council of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation is pleased to submit its 2020 Annual Report. This report highlights the State Council of Parks and the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's achievements during 2020, and sets forth recommendations for the coming year.

On behalf of the State Council of Parks, I commend you on your extraordinary leadership throughout the pandemic. Your clear and consistent communication and decisive actions have helped us all navigate these extremely difficult times. As the uncertainty continues into 2021, I remain grateful for your steady hand and your brilliant team of advisors guiding New York to recovery.

Under your leadership, New York's state parks have remained open throughout the COVID-19 crisis. In fact, our state's public lands became sources of respite and sanctuary for a record 78 million visitors during our darkest days. New Yorkers came to their parks for fresh air, exercise, and reprieve from the emotional stress of quarantine, economic slow-down and the uncertainty of the times. In this report you will find examples of how the New York State Parks workforce rose to this challenge, ensuring that our parks remained safe and available to New Yorkers when they needed them most.

Even with the challenges of operating during the COVID-19 pandemic, the agency continued to work towards implementing the NY Parks 2020 capital program throughout the year. This report features over a dozen major projects completed this summer. NY Parks 2020 has been an unqualified success in transforming the State Park system. The Council wholeheartedly supports your proposal to fund the next generation of infrastructure improvements, known as NY Parks 100. Your investment in the state's public lands will leave a legacy of conservation, access, and economic stimulus that will be appreciated by generations to come. While programming was limited this year due to the pandemic, the agency continues to reach underserved youth and expand access to parks through the Connect Kids to Park program. We support efforts to expand this initiative to create Ladders to the Outdoors—extending access and opportunity for all New York State youth to develop skills for a lifetime of outdoor enjoyment.

Continued on next page

The State Council of Parks remains committed to seeking philanthropic and other outside support for state parks and historic sites. On our own and through partners like the Natural Heritage Trust, the Long Island Power Authority, the New York Energy and Research Development Authority, the New York Power Authority, the Open Space Institute, Scenic Hudson, and the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation, we and State Parks raised more than \$20 million in outside funds in 2020 to support essential capital projects, exhibits, and long-term operations at state parks and historic sites throughout New York. In addition, our friends of parks groups, large and small, continue to grow in strength and capacity to provide high quality programs and pursue 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, which has been funded through the EPF with your support.

To protect the historic Parks 2020 capital investment while best serving our visitors, we recommend an increased level of general fund support in the state budget to support not only the basic operations of State Parks but the maintenance of new and improved infrastructure resulting from your investment, which must meet the needs of a growing number of visitors. We understand that COVID-19 has had serious and unprecedented impacts on the state budget, and that we must all do our part to share in the burden. The State Council will continue to support efficiency measures and strengthen partnerships that sustain park operations and programs. By ensuring adequate operational resources for State Parks we guarantee a safe and high-quality experience for the 78 million people who visit our parks, in both good times and bad.

In these extremely challenging times, we extend our deep gratitude for your continued commitment to keeping our state's remarkable public lands remain to all New Yorkers and to fighting threats to our state's natural resources, whether from over-development, encroachment, or environmental hazards. Your stewardship is remarkable and your strong leadership is more needed now than ever. We are proud to be your partners in this effort.

Sincerely,



Lucy Rockefeller Waletzky
Chair, State Council of Parks

The State Council of Parks will advance five priorities in 2021

1 Building Better Parks: New York Parks 100

Governor Cuomo has made investing in tourism and recreation a vital piece of his economic development agenda. The Council strongly supports Governor Cuomo's proposal to launch NY Parks 100, renewing an historic commitment to investing in and expanding the state parks system by committing at least \$440 million over the next four years. This critical period of revitalization will culminate in the 2024 celebration of the 100th anniversary of the State Park Act, which first created our nation-leading state park system in 1924 under Governor Al Smith. NY Parks 100 will continue crucial investments in park infrastructure while expanding access to the full range of New York State's recreational and cultural offerings. The initiative will focus on creating places to recreate locally, relieving overcrowded parks, welcoming new visitors, and protecting New York State's environmental and historic legacy. This new plan will ensure people from all communities and across all ages and abilities can fully experience our natural resources, our culture, and our heritage.

2 Equity in Park Access: All Are Welcome Here

The State Council of Parks shares the agency's priority to expand equitable access to parks so that people from all communities and across all ages and abilities can fully experience our parks and historic sites. In addition to the Council's continued advocacy for Connect Kids to Parks, we support the agency's diversity and inclusion initiative which seeks to reach new park users, promote access, and diversify the workforce.

3 Promote and Celebrate Our Parks

The State Council will continue to assist the agency in implementing marketing initiatives to create a strong brand for our parks and historic sites. We also support efforts to encourage responsible stewardship, volunteer initiatives such as I Love My Park Day, and promotion of leave-no-trace principles as park visitation increases.

4 Stewardship of Natural and 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 they are left unimpaired for future generations.

5 Advocacy

Wherever state parks and historic sites are threatened by potential or existing boundary (or certain visual or toxic) encroachments, we will mobilize and form plans to stop them.

6 Ensure Adequate Operating Funds Amid Record Visitation

As demonstrated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, New Yorkers are relying on their parks more than ever. To ensure that all visitors continue to have access to safe outdoor places for recreation and respite, we support adequate funding in the state budget for state park operations including staff and maintenance.

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’s powers and duties are to: a) review the policy, budget, and statewide plans of State Parks, and make appropriate recommendations regarding their amendment or adoption; b) submit reports to the Governor, no less than once each year, concerning progress in the area of state parks, recreation, and historic preservation, including recommendations for the future, and covering such other matters as the council may deem appropriate; and c) act as 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 must be residents of the state and are appointed to seven-year terms by the Governor, are 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. The Commissions are also charged with reviewing and approving the Region’s annual budget request prior to its submission to the Commissioner of State Parks.



2020 Regional Commission Chairs

LUCY WALETZKY
Chair, SCOP & Taconic Commission

DALTON BURGETT
Chair, Allegany Commission

CORNELIUS B. MURPHY
Chair, Central Commission

W. DAVID BANFIELD
Chair, Finger Lakes Commission

PETER HUMPHREY
Chair, Vice-Chair & Genesee Commission

BRYAN ERWIN
Chair, Long Island Commission

LEISLE LIN
Chair, New York City Commission

CINDY ABBOTT LETRO
Chair, Niagara Commission

DAVID MORTIMER
Chair, Palisades Commission

HEATHER MABEE
Chair, Saratoga-Capital District Commission

HAROLD JOHNSON II
Chair, Thousand Islands Commission

DOUGLAS PERRELLI
State Board for Historic Preservation

**SCOP Chairs toured Green Lakes State
Park, Annual Meeting October, 2020**



Bear Mountain State Park

2020

New York State Parks and Historic Sites Overview

The State Park System is one of New York's greatest treasures. Today, the system comprises 250 State Parks and Historic Sites encompassing nearly 350,000 acres. New York's Parks and Historic Sites provide affordable outdoor recreation and education opportunities to 78 million visitors each year. These facilities contribute to the economic vitality and quality of life of local communities, while directly supporting New York's tourism industry. Parks also provide a place for families and children to recreate and exercise, promoting healthy lifestyles and helping combat diseases like obesity and diabetes.

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 a statewide parks, historic preservation, and open space mission. The agency has an "all funds" operating and capital budget of approximately \$488 million and is staffed by 1,981 permanent employees and more than 4,500 seasonal positions during the peak operating season.

State Parks is responsible for managing a vast array of public facilities across 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, 26 golf courses, 36 swimming pools and spray-grounds, 63 beaches, 27 marinas, 40 boat launch sites, 25 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 parks system has long been recognized as one of the best and most diverse in the nation. Among the 50 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 as visit Yellowstone. Niagara Falls is the oldest state park in the nation and Washington's Headquarters was the first property acquired with public funds for the express purpose of historic preservation and patriotic visitation.



National Purple Heart Hall of Honor

2020

New York Parks 2020



As State Parks pivots toward NY Parks 100, we look back on the achievements of Governor Cuomo's historic NY Parks 2020 initiative. Under that program, beginning in 2011, New York State Parks has completed infrastructure projects in every region of the state, enhancing the visitor experience and launching a renaissance in the statewide capital program. With leveraged funds, in ten years the program has invested \$1.25 billion in projects that have improved or will improve 200 state parks and historic sites—800 projects have been completed or are underway. In addition, since 2011 Governor Cuomo has created four new parks with a special focus on underserved and urban communities. Four Freedoms Park on Roosevelt Island opened in 2012. Buffalo Harbor State Park opened in 2015. Hallock State Park Preserve opened in Suffolk County in 2017. Shirley Chisholm State Park,

the largest state park in New York City, opened in 2019. In 2020 the Governor announced the completion of the Empire State Trail, the nation's longest multi-use trail connecting communities across the state.

NY Parks 2020 Highlights: 2020

National Purple Heart Hall of Honor Expanded

In November, Governor Cuomo announced the completion of a major \$17 million expansion of the National Purple Heart Hall of Honor in Orange County, not far from where George Washington first established the Badge of Military Merit, the inspiration for the modern Purple Heart. The 7,000-square-foot National Purple Heart Hall of Honor features improved visitor access and new, spectacular exhibits, with an increased emphasis on stories of individual award recipients. The facility is reopened to the public following an accelerated one-year construction schedule.



Fair Haven State Park

Finally, a Visitor Center at Minnewaska State Park

Governor Cuomo announced the opening of the first visitor center, ever, at Minnewaska State Park Preserve on the Shawangunk Ridge in October. A public-private partnership with the Open Space Institute created the modern facility overlooking Lake Minnewaska to welcome and guide visitors arriving to explore the 24,000-acre preserve and provide public amenities and education and programming space. The project installed modern facilities that are necessary to welcome hundreds of thousands of annual visitors, which the park has attracted since the administration of Governor Mario Cuomo acquired the site of a former resort hotel in 1987. The new visitor center caps a \$27 million public-private multi-phase investment to modernize the gateway to Minnewaska State Park Preserve.

Jones Beach Energy and Nature Center

Governor Cuomo announced the opening of the Jones Beach Energy & Nature Center in September. The center opened during Climate Week to educate and inform the public about how energy shapes New York's natural systems, and how this same energy can be harnessed to advance New York's nation-leading plan to combat climate change. Established by New York State Parks in partnership with the Long Island Power Authority, the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, the New York Power Authority, the Environmental Protection Fund, the Open Space Institute, and the Rauch Foundation, the pioneering facility will help visitors of all ages become better stewards of the environment and smart energy consumers.

REDI-Project Complete at Fair Haven State Park

The first phase of a new climate-resiliency project at Fair Haven Beach State Park on Lake Ontario was completed in August. The project, which is supported by the Resiliency and Economic Development Initiative spearheaded by the Governor in the wake of 2019 flooding along Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River, has restored parking capacity that had been damaged by high water and flooding twice within the past three years. Phase II of the resiliency and improvement project will restore dunes and construct a new boardwalk that includes educational and interpretive signage.



Jones Beach Energy and Nature Center

Major Improvements to Thousand Island Parks

Just in time for summer, Governor Cuomo announced the completion of improvement projects at Southwick Beach State Park and Westcott Beach State Park, on the eastern shore of Lake Ontario. The first major improvements to the popular beachfront parks in 50 years, upgrades at Southwick Beach feature a new bathhouse and concession building, as well as restored dunes and new “green” parking lots that enhance resiliency and protect water quality. At Westcott Beach, eight new accessible cottages, with fully equipped kitchens and full bathrooms, were built on a bluff with a commanding view of the lake.

Roosevelt Bathhouse Restored at Saratoga Spa State Park

First opened in 1935 by former New York Governor and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the iconic Georgian Revival-style bathhouse at Saratoga Spa State Park has been closed since falling into disuse in the 1980s. The bathhouse’s reopening is part of a \$2.3 million transformational project that is restoring and improving upon the grandeur of the Roosevelt Baths. The bathhouse’s historic lobby has been restored; new restrooms installed; new heating, ventilation and plumbing systems added; toxic asbestos removed; and programming space added for a planned arts and wellness center.





Letchworth State Park

Transformation of Niagara Falls State Park Continues

The completion of the \$6.2 million Welcome Plaza at the Niagara Falls State Park Prospect Street entrance creates a more seamless connection between the park and the City of Niagara Falls business district, helping visitors better orient with the offerings both inside and outside of the park. The plaza also improves pedestrian and vehicular safety, helping reduce traffic congestion through the redesign of the motor coach arrival area, and enhances the patron experience through general landscaping upgrades, clearer wayfinding signage, uniform park furnishings, enhanced lighting, and improved pedestrian circulation. The Welcome Plaza project is the penultimate piece of a \$70 million revitalization of Niagara Falls State Park landscape that was launched in 2011.

New Recreation Area at Letchworth State Park

The Lower Falls Recreation Area provides a new opportunity to enjoy one of the Finger Lakes Region's top tourism destinations. The establishment of the new recreation area involved the removal of an unused swimming pool at the South Complex Area, and the restoration of an historic bathhouse that is used by the whitewater rafting concessionaire, Adventure Calls Outfitters. The new recreation area provides table games, badminton and pickle ball courts, bocce and shuffleboard, as well as a fitness loop.

Historic Jones Beach Game Area Restored

The renovation of the West Games Area at Jones Beach State Park features a new mini-golf course; refurbished and new court games; new benches, tables, fencing and lighting; and additional site improvements. This work is part of the Governor's NY Parks 2020 Plan, and includes \$1.9 million from the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. New and improved gaming areas include new cornhole and pickleball courts as well as refurbished courts for shuffleboard and paddle tennis.



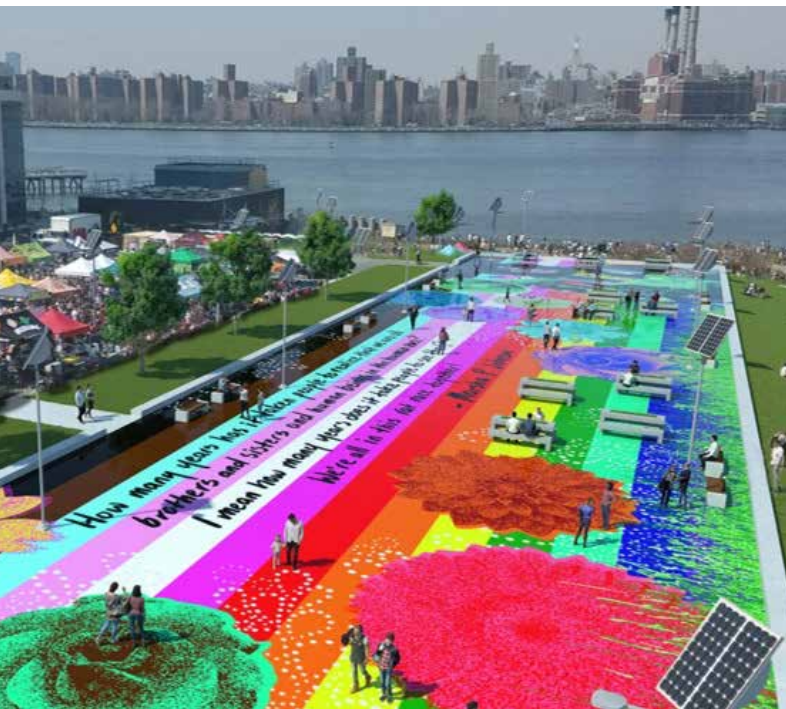
Jones Beach State Park

Marsha P. Johnson State Park

In August, Governor Cuomo announced the rededication of East River State Park in Brooklyn for the late LGBTQ civil rights activist Marsha P. Johnson. On what would have been her 75th birthday, State Parks officially opened and released renderings of transformational changes coming to Marsha P. Johnson State Park, the first state park in New York to honor a LGBTQ person and transgender woman of color. The State will improve park facilities and install public art celebrating Johnson's life and her role in the advancement of LGBTQ rights. The improvements represent the largest investment in the park since its opening.

Celebrating Women's History at State Parks

In August, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage, Governor Cuomo unveiled a seven-foot bronze statue of eminent abolitionist and suffragist Sojourner Truth at The Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park in Ulster County. In addition, on the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution granting women the right to vote, Governor Cuomo announced an effort to stabilize and preserve the childhood home of prominent 19th-century women's rights activist Susan B. Anthony, in Washington County. Work to preserve the 1832 two-story brick home on Route 29 in Battenville, where Anthony lived from ages 13 to 19, includes repairs to the roof, masonry, and drainage, as well as mold remediation and water damage, plus the acquisition of a neighboring property to improve access.



Left: Martha P. Johnson State Park
Right: Four Freedoms State Park



Niagara Falls lighted in celebration of Juneteenth

2020

Statewide Initiatives

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

As the Black Lives Matter movement laid bare the impact of systemic racism on all parts of our society, including in outdoor recreation, New York State Parks strengthened its commitment to ensuring that all people feel not only welcome and safe at parks, but feel they belong in the outdoors. The agency connected to the #DiversifyOutdoor movement to amplify diverse voices among park users, broaden its outreach, and engage with diverse communities on matters related to park programming and outdoor recreation. The agency also established a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Team and a Recruitment Working Group. These convened a cross-section of employees from different work units and perspectives to survey and evaluate recruitment, retention, and diversity and inclusion practices, in order to analyze current practices, set goals, and implement new procedures to address and improve the agency's workforce diversity. To continue its efforts to advance equity and access to the outdoors for all, the agency launched the Ladders to the Outdoors program. This program is currently underway in the State Parks Niagara Region, providing introductory programs for those new to the outdoors and underserved communities with all necessary equipment, skills instruction and transportation included. The agency aims to replicate the program in all regions with private funding.

Several special events at state parks and historic sites this summer also celebrated our state's vibrant diversity and important events in civil rights history. In June, Commissioner Kulleseid once again hosted Pride Month across the state parks system. Pride Flags flew at State Park facilities and visitors shared their experiences with the #prideoutside hashtag on social media. As part of the state's commemoration of Juneteenth, the American Falls at Niagara Falls State Park were illuminated in the Pan African flag colors, as a symbol of the agency's continued willingness to acknowledge, inform, and begin difficult conversations about the history of slavery and racism. At the beginning of the summer, John Brown Lives!, the Friends Group at John Brown Farm State Historic Site, created a "Memorial Field for Black Lives" exhibit to honor the lives of Black and brown New Yorkers lost to racism. In August, the Four Freedoms Park Conservancy transformed the granite stairs at Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms State Park into a field of sunflowers surrounding the words of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of sex," noting that voting is an integral way of ensuring that hard-won freedoms are maintained, and that in United States history, the fight for voting rights has often gone hand-in-hand with fights for civil liberties.

Stewardship and Sustainability

State Parks is committed to adapting to climate change, reducing greenhouse gas emissions from parks operations, and being a part of the solution to the climate crisis. To this end the agency in 2020 continued its work to build resiliency along shorelines including Lake Ontario, the St. Lawrence River, and in New York City and Long Island. The agency also reduced its electrical demand to reduce its carbon footprint. By 2040, 100 percent of the state park system will be powered by renewable energy sources. Parks staff are being trained to install photovoltaic solar arrays, and solar installations have been completed in 31 state parks. The agency also added plug-in electric vehicles to its fleet, and this year installed 40 charging stations at State Parks facilities with plans for another 40 stations next year. Finally, State Parks phased out single-use plastic items from parks vendors to reduce plastic waste in the environment.

Land Acquisition

Land acquisition has also been an important part of the agency's planning and stewardship activities: filling in gaps at parks and historic sites, creating linkages and connections between sites, and protecting ecological and scenic resources. Since Governor Cuomo took office in 2011, State Parks has added more than 15,500 acres, most notably in the Taconic and Palisades regions where preserving open space provides critical habitat corridors, creates a protective buffer to existing parks, and offsets increased development. Significant acquisitions in 2020 included multiple acquisitions to allow better interpretation at State Historic sites, including the Susan B. Anthony State Historic Site, Johnson Hall State Historic Site and Bennington Battlefield State Historic Site. 157 beautiful acres were added to Schunnemunk Mountain State Park, along with 116 acres to Sterling Forest State Park and 129 to Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve. The agency has over 35 open space acquisitions additionally underway.

New State Parks Explorer Mobile App for Visitors

In July, State Parks marked the beginning of the summer season by launching a new mobile app for smart devices to provide useful information about the variety of destinations and activities available throughout the Empire State's parks and historic sites to current and prospective visitors. The New York State Parks Explorer App is a free, user-friendly resource for visitors to plan outdoor adventures while staying connected to long-time favorite parks and sites. Users can learn more about top destinations and discover new must-see locations with rotating curated content, and will enjoy quick access to park information, including directions, hours, amenities, fees and rates, trail maps, helpful know-before-you-go details, and important updates and alerts. Visitors can also link directly to online camping reservations and easily access select State Parks' social media channels to share their experiences.



2020-2021 Capital Recommendation

The State Council of Parks is proud to support Governor Cuomo's NY Parks 100 initiative which will invest \$440 million over four years into the transformation of the New York State Park system.

PARTNERS & PROGRAMS



Friends of Fillmore Glen State Park

First Day Hikes are part of a national initiative led by America's State Parks to get people outdoors, with over 400 hikes scheduled in all 50 states. Kids and adults across America participated in First Day Hikes, getting their hearts pumping and enjoying the beauty of a state park. In New York, nearly 4,000 people participated in hikes at 85 parks on January 1, 2020.

The ninth annual I Love My Park Day was canceled in 2020 due to the COVID crisis. Instead, **Parks & Trails New York** together with New York State Parks launched a social media campaign to encourage safe, socially-distant outdoor recreation at state parks. During the month of May, Parks & Trails used the hashtag #ShowParksLoveChallenge on their website and social media to virtually share various ways for New Yorkers to celebrate and care for our parks and outdoor spaces.

To leverage grassroots support for State Parks, Governor Cuomo created the **Park and Trail Partnership Grant Program** in 2015. Funded



through the Environmental Protection Fund and administered by Parks & Trails New York, 29 partner organizations received \$900,000 in 2020 to advance their work to raise private funds for capital projects; perform maintenance tasks; provide educational programming; and promote public use through special events. Since its inception, the program has awarded 111 grants totaling \$2.7 million to strengthen Parks, historic sites and public lands for years to come. A new round of funding is currently available, with applications due by March 11, 2021 and awards announced in June.



Lake Minnewaska Visitor Center



OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE

Committed to protecting open space and making the outdoors more appealing and welcoming to visitors, the **Open Space Institute (OSI)** is adding expertise and raising private dollars to leverage public investments at State Parks and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) properties. In 2020, OSI partnered with State Parks and raised \$3 million to construct and open the new Lake Minnewaska Visitor Center; completed a new 2-mile multi-use connector trail at Bluestone Wild Forest in the Catskills; restored

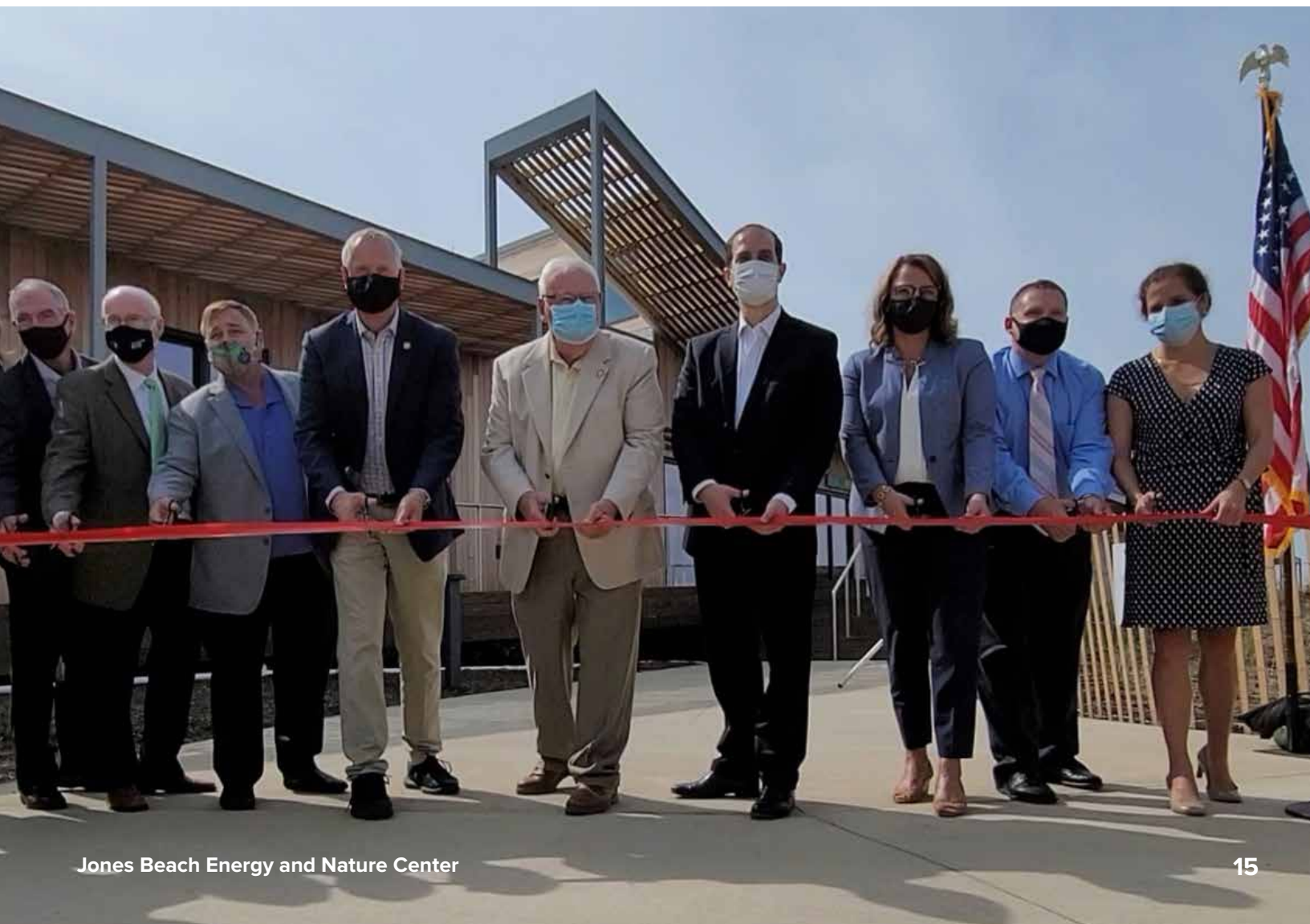
the northern 9.5-mile section of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail in Ulster County, now part of the Empire State Trail; constructed two new trailheads and parking areas at Fahnestock State Park; improved trailhead parking and visitor access at OSI's Adirondack Upper Works property to better disburse explorers to the popular Adirondack High Peaks Wilderness; and led the way in gaining passage of full and permanent funding for the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. In 2020, OSI added 1,500 acres to State Parks and DEC and protected nearly 12,000 acres more, to be added to State Parks and DEC properties in the future.

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation

Since 2018, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation has granted nearly \$14 million to support park projects in the Western New York region. The grants are administered by the Natural Heritage Trust. The Foundation supports the Ladders to the Outdoors program at seven state parks in Western New York; the Western New York Greenways initiative, bridging the gaps in the Niagara River Greenway and the 750-mile Empire State Trail; and the completion of the Genesee Valley Greenway, creating a world-class trail system in Western New York. Together, these and other programs connect the next generation of visitors to outdoor recreation at state parks in the Niagara Region.

Interagency Energy Partners

New York State Parks has partnered with several public energy agencies in support of capital projects and program at park facilities. On Long Island, the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA), the New York State Energy and Research Development Authority (NYSERDA), and the New York Power Authority (NYPA) supported construction at the Jones Beach Energy and Nature Center, which combats climate change through its energy-efficient design and educational efforts. LIPA provides operating support to the Center. NYPA also continues to be a significant partner at Mine Kill State Park, Robert Moses State Park, and Niagara Falls State Park, supporting projects and facilities that enhance visitor experience. NYPA assisted State Parks with procuring private capital for the solarization of all power in the Taconic Region as well.



A photograph showing a man in a green jacket and cap, seen from the back, talking to a group of children in a forest. The children are wearing winter gear like hats and masks. One child is holding up a small red and yellow flag. The background is filled with trees.

CONNECT KIDS TO PARKS

Saratoga Spa State Park

In 2016, New York State launched the **Connect Kids to Parks** program to enhance educational and recreational opportunities for school-age children while promoting parks and historic sites in every corner of the state.

A key program in this initiative is the **Connect Kids to Parks Field Trip Grant Program**. Since 2016, the Connect Kids Field Trip Program has awarded over 4,000 field trip grants and has served over 300,000 students throughout New York. In the 2019 school year, participation in the grant program grew by 30 percent. The grant, funded through the Environmental Protection Fund, covers transportation costs and program fees for students at any grade level within Title 1 school districts. While Connect Kids programs were dramatically curtailed due to COVID, the program did serve youth this summer via smaller, socially-distanced programs and virtual education programs at state parks and historic sites. Further, building on the success of Connect Kids, the agency launched a new program in the Niagara Region called Ladders to the Outdoors with generous funding from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. Ladders to the Outdoors will develop sustained connections with youth and build the outdoor recreational skills to enjoy a lifetime exploring New York's public lands. The **Ladders to the Outdoors** program addresses the lack of equitable access to outdoor recreational spaces, recreational equipment, transportation,

and skills development opportunities in underserved communities. To remove barriers to access, the intent of the program is to provide free equipment and instruction for robust programs like swimming, hiking, biking, boating, camping, and sports.

Last summer, Connect Kids supported a modified summer camp at the **Fresh Air Fund's Camp Junior** in Harriman State Park. While overnight summer camp programs did not take place in 2020, the Fresh Air Fund organized day trips for families from the Bronx to enjoy the camp experience at Camp Junior. Fresh Air Fund staff provided programming to the families and the Connect Kids grant program funded the transportation costs.

The **New York State Parks Learn-to-Swim Program** also took place this summer on a smaller scale. With strict safety measures in place, programs were held at six parks across the state, offering lessons for all age groups. Now in its seventh year, the Learn-to-Swim continues to be supported through a partnership with the American Red Cross, the National Swimming Pool Foundation and the Northeast Spa and Pool Foundation.



Learn to Swim at Mine Kill State Park





In December, Governor Cuomo announced the completion of the **Empire State Trail**, now the nation's longest multi-use state trail. Of the trail's 750 total miles, 75 percent are off-road trails ideal for cyclists, hikers, runners, cross-country skiers, and snow-shoers. The new recreational trail, which runs from New York City through the Hudson and Champlain Valleys to Canada, and from Albany to Buffalo along the Erie Canal, will provide a safe and scenic pathway for New Yorkers and tourists to experience New York State's varied landscapes. The Empire State Trail is expected to draw 8.6 million residents and tourists annually.

The Empire State Trail will be open year-round, including winter. It connects 20 regional trails to create a continuous statewide signed route. As part of the 58 distinct projects comprising the effort to complete the Trail on time, more than 180 miles of new off-road trails were created and 400 miles of previously disconnected, off-road trails were linked to eliminate gaps and ease engineering challenges in high traffic areas such as railroad and water crossings.

The New York State Department of Transportation improved 170 miles of on-road bicycle routes to enhance safety and travel on low-speed rural roadways and city streets when possible. New York State also installed 45 gateways and trailheads along the route to welcome visitors,

and branded the trail with signage, interpretive panels, bike racks, and benches.

In Western New York, the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation funded four gateways to provide a welcoming connection for trail visitors at key access points in Buffalo Harbor State Park in Buffalo, at the western entrance to the Erie Canal in Tonawanda, at Five Locks Park in Lockport, and in Genesee Valley Park in Rochester. The gateways include kiosks featuring local and statewide trail information, bicycle racks, and shaded granite block seating. Each gateway features a "Ralph C. Wilson, Jr." memorial plaque honoring the late owner of the Buffalo Bills. The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation provided \$2.6 million dollars for the gateways.

The new Empire State Trail website provides quick and easy access to trail information including segment descriptions, access points, trail distances, parking areas, restrooms, and nearby amenities and attractions. The website's responsive and user-friendly design allows users to access interactive maps from mobile devices, zoom in to specific locations of interest, and download/print maps of trail segments. Cyclists can print "cue sheets" with highly detailed directions for following a selected trail segment. The site also features information about the variety of activities and destinations on or near the trail such as campgrounds, parks, historic sites, and popular local attractions.



Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Empire State Trail Gateway at Buffalo Harbor State Park



2020

State Parks COVID Response and Operations

From the very beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, New York State Parks were integral to the state's massive response effort. Park facilities and staff were immediately deployed to construct and operate testing sites, facilitate the delivery of test samples across the state, and serve as volunteers in the contact-tracing program. Since last March, Parks has provided direct support to more than 800 requests related to statewide COVID-19 missions, including the volunteer efforts of more than 350 Parks staff-members. Testing and vaccine sites were set up at several agency facilities, including at Jones Beach, Harriman, and Saratoga State Parks. Parks drivers have traversed tens of thousands of miles to deliver well over one million units of PPE, supplies, and equipment to locations throughout the state. Currently, more than 80 Parks staff provide continuous support, 7 days per week, to vaccine distribution and testing sites, warehouses, stockpiles, and state emergency operations. The agency led Central New York's test sample collection and delivery efforts from Clark Reservation for more than two months.

From March through early summer New York State was on pause. Non-essential businesses were closed or curtailed, and New Yorkers were encouraged to stay home as much as possible. Throughout the pause, however, the state parks remained open. Recognizing the importance of outdoor recreation to the emotional and physical

well-being of New Yorkers, Governor Cuomo waived state park entrance fees and park staff kept facilities operating safely. Millions of New Yorkers visited state parks during this time, with attendance up eight percent through May. Parks were a refuge and a safe-haven for exercise and socializing in fresh air. Park staff responded to unique challenges in innovative and friendly ways to ensure that all visitors felt safe and welcome during these trying months. From parking issues to mask compliance, park staff communicated safety protocols in a clear and consistent way.

To keep visitors safe, State Park consulted continuously with the Department of Health to implement safety protocols to keep our facilities open that included:

- Reducing normal summer season capacity by up to 50%, through limits on parking and other means of entry
- Assigning staff as social distance ambassadors
- Implementing measures to maintain social distance for both employees and visitors, including signage, distance markers, directional arrows, and physical barriers
- Strictly adhering to mask mandates
- Asking pool visitors to sign-in with contact information to enable potential contact tracing measures



Starting Memorial Day weekend, state beaches opened for swimming and camping resumed across the state by early June. New Yorkers flocked to parks at unprecedented levels. In the **Long Island Region**, more than 17,000 cones were placed every day in parking lots to reduce density. In the **New York City Region**, staff kept swimming pools open when most other public pools were closed, giving families a much-needed break from the heat. Park staff constantly monitored safety conditions along roadways at popular Hudson Valley trailheads in the **Taconic and Palisades Regions**. In the **Saratoga-Capital District Region**, staff at Thacher State Park opened the popular Indian Ladder Trail as a one-way circuit, installing hand-sanitizing stations and social-distancing ambassadors along the trail.

In the **Niagara Region**, the popular Maid of the Mist and Cave of the Winds at Niagara Falls State Park remained safely accessible to visitors through the implementation of several measures including limiting occupancy; placing physical distancing markers, directional arrows, and signage to remind visitors to maintain social distancing; and requiring all visitors to wear face coverings as a condition of admission. In the **Thousand Islands Region**, staff opened new vacation cottages at Westcott Beach State Park, and in the **Allegany Region**, camping remained a popular escape for families during all four seasons with enhanced cleaning procedures and modified schedules. State Park golf courses also opened by early summer, governed by new safety guidelines to ensure New Yorkers continued to have access to this valued recreational opportunity.



Jones Beach State Park COVID testing site

Meanwhile, State Park Police managed social distancing, emergency services, and safety protocol enforcement across the state. Park staff throughout the state parks system worked around the clock to communicate capacity alerts on several different platforms. Because of these and countless similar efforts, many New Yorkers enjoyed a summer—one that was otherwise limited in travel and typical vacation experiences—at their favorite state parks.

Although nature centers remained mostly closed throughout the pandemic, environmental educators launched virtual programs to stay connected with school groups and offer an educational alternative for families during remote school. Staff in the **Genesee Region** started a popular Nature Detective video series on YouTube to showcase the natural resources at Letchworth State Park. Nature center staff in the **New York City, Central, and Niagara Regions** used the educational mobile gaming platform Agents of Discovery to encourage youth to be active and learn about environmental stewardship. Their initiatives included special virtual events for Invasive Species Week and Pollinator Week. Historic site staff across the state also brought their programs online, hosting lectures and virtual tours all season long. Later in the summer, when small group gatherings were permitted under state guidelines, nature center staff in the **Allegany Region** served as social-distancing ambassadors while also offering small group environmental education programs.

At FDR State Park in the **Taconic Region**, staff led an innovative Learn-to-Swim program, taking a new approach to outreach by asking families as they enter the pool whether their kids would like a free swim lesson. This may serve as a model moving forward for engaging visitors and encouraging new types of recreational activities. In the **Central New York, Finger Lakes, and Niagara Regions**, 32 environmental stewards worked throughout the summer on conservation projects in the FORCES program. Three of the four projects worked with endangered species populations: the American Hart's-tongue Fern (AHTF), the Chittenango Ovate Amber Snail (COAS), and the Great Lakes Piping Plovers. Invasive species surveys were conducted in several parks in these regions. The Piping Plover team continued its work at Sandy Island State Park and surveyed additional sites in the 17-mile-long Eastern Lake Ontario Dune and Wetland Ecosystem for signs of plovers and potential habitat.

Over months of difficult challenges and great uncertainty, the staff of the New York State Park system provided essential and important services to millions of visitors, always adhering to safety protocols while at the same time facilitating quality experiences that boosted New Yorkers' spirits when they needed it most. In recognition of this tremendous group effort, the agency selected the entire New York State Park staff as the recipient of the 2020 Huttleston Award, the highest employee recognition honor.



Jones Beach State Park COVID vaccination site



Habitat restoration on the Niagara River

2020

Division of Environmental Stewardship and Planning

The Division of Environmental Stewardship and Planning (DESP) is dedicated to the protection, conservation and resiliency of the State Parks and Historic Site system. By working collaboratively with stakeholders and partners, the Division provides education, training, and tools necessary to make informed decisions that balance responsible recreation with the needs of the natural environment. These efforts will ensure a robust and sustainable Parks and Historic Site system now and for generations to come.

In 2020, 21 Division staff participated in various volunteer efforts related to COVID-19, including staffing the Emergency Operation Centers in Albany and Saratoga, serving as drivers to deliver PPE and test kits, and assisting DOH and DOL with data entry and call centers.

Water Quality Unit

The Water Quality unit collected and analyzed 2,063 water quality monitoring samples for 84 state park beaches. The unit also partnered with Lower Hudson PRISM to complete aquatic plant surveys on 17 bodies of water in five parks across the Palisades and Taconic Regions, as well as a water chestnut pull at Rockland Lake State Park, ultimately more than 7,000 pounds of water chestnut.

Wildlife Unit

The Wildlife Unit drafted guidance on nuisance black bear response procedure, finalized guidelines for the management of Canada Geese, and provided park staff with trainings, forms, and educational materials for the management of wildlife.



Invasive Species

Five trainings reached over 100 parks staff and SCA members. 75 distinct invasive species control plans were developed, while 233 invasive removal projects were conducted at 149 parks and historic sites encompassing nearly 900 acres. An additional 16,000 acres were surveyed for the presence of invasive species.

Boat Stewards

Stewards conducted 36,319 watercraft inspections to monitor for aquatic invasive species, detected and removed 5,384 invasive species, and educated 93,311 boaters about Clean-Drain-Dry during inspections.

Ecology

The completed Burntship Creek wetland restoration project at Buckhorn Island State Park accompanied the completion of the design, permitting, and bidding process for the Buckhorn Shoreline and Grass Island restoration projects. Stewardship Plans for Fahnestock and Rockefeller State Park Preserves were also completed.

Environmental Education

Hundreds of posts featured various state parks on the Environmental Education social media sites, while educational videos posted to the sites garnered tens of thousands of views. Meanwhile, 30 educators received training in Dialogic Interpretation.

Community Programs

The Division secured \$4.5 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for pool reconstruction at FDR State Park, while applying for \$3.5 million in grant funding on behalf of urban municipal park projects in underserved communities. In addition, the Zoos, Botanical Gardens, Aquariums (ZGBA) grant awarded more than \$15 million in 2020.

Planning

The Division hosted more than ten online public meetings. Planning activities included the completion of the Rockefeller Stewardship Management Guide, and the Johnson Hall Master Plan, and the Draft Statewide Greenway Trails Plan (and associated online map app). More than 2,400 public responses were collected during the Plan's development. The Division provided GIS support to the Empire State Trail effort in website and database development, as well as the production of interactive maps. Lastly, the Universal Trail Assessment was completed, covering 15 different trails totaling 9.63 miles at 98 State Parks.

Division for Historic Preservation

The Division for Historic Preservation leads the nation in the quantity and diversity of its historic preservation listings. In 2020, nearly 4,400 properties across 33 counties were added to the National Register of Historic Places, qualifying them to use the New York State Rehabilitation Tax Credit program or access state and federal grant programs to fund their historic preservation. Since Governor Cuomo and Legislature improved our State Historic credit incentives in 2013 and 2017, New York State leads the nation in encouraging private investment in the revitalization of historic buildings. In 2020, this program catalyzed \$1.3 billion in private investment to restore derelict commercial Main Street buildings and historic districts essential to local economic development. Over 90 percent of program applications come from upstate communities, both urban and rural, while program participation in New York City remains strong and is beginning to increase in the outer Boroughs. In total, this program has incentivized more than \$7.6 billion in historic resource redevelopment, and more than 700 additional projects are pending or in early planning stages.

Federal RTC Projects, Completed and Pending Part III, 2011-2020

Region	Investment	Total Projects
ADKS	\$70,781,958	10
Allegany	\$27,270,723	4
Catskills	\$11,266,419	8
Central	\$558,132,033	68
Finger Lakes	\$179,565,710	53
Genessee	\$364,591,221	38
Long Island	\$10,100,000	4
New York City	\$4,623,866,449	95
Niagara	\$1,083,648,909	126
Palisades	\$76,075,870	52
Saratoga/Capital	\$589,857,101	173
Taconic	\$39,839,994	9
Thousand Islands	\$61,699,107	11
Total:	\$7,696,695,494	651

Federal RTC Projects, Completed and Pending Part II, 2015-2020

Region	Investment	Total Projects
ADKS	\$15,900,000	5
Allegany	\$44,580,125	13
Catskills	\$6,079,530	3
Central	\$244,126,790	38
Finger Lakes	\$61,221,158	34
Genessee	\$154,313,384	19
Long Island	\$0	0
New York City	\$2,971,158,899	42
Niagara	\$536,529,849	61
Palisades	\$94,166,363	53
Saratoga/Capital	\$238,819,367	128
Taconic	\$13,364,150	10
Thousand Islands	\$26,568,686	1
Total:	\$4,406,828,301	407

Federal RTC Projects, Pending Part I, 2015-2020

Region	Federal Credit Value	Total Projects
ADKS		8
Allegany		3
Catskills		4
Central		32
Finger Lakes		16
Genessee		13
Long Island		2
New York City		28
Niagara		70
Palisades		32
Saratoga/Capital		65
Taconic		14
Thousand Islands		6
Total:		293

2020 Historic Preservation Awards

Established in 1980, these awards are given by the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation each year to honor excellence in the protection and rejuvenation of New York's historic and cultural resources.

The 2020 State Historic Preservation Awards recipients are:

Binghamton Carnegie Library, Broome County

Excellence in Historic Building Rehabilitation

The former Carnegie Library in downtown Binghamton was transformed into SUNY Broome's Culinary and Events Center serving the school's hospitality programs. The \$21.5 million rehabilitation project successfully leveraged commercial tax credits to revitalize the historic building into a state-of-the art education and event facility.

①

Holley Gardens, Village of Holley, Orleans County

Excellence in Historic Building Rehabilitation

Constructed between 1930 and 1931, the former Holley High School had been vacant since 1975. In 2020, Home Leasing and Edgemere Development completed a dramatic rehabilitation of the building that has created 41 affordable housing units for seniors and new office and meeting space for the village government. The developers utilized both the state Historic Tax Credit and Low-Income Housing Tax Credit programs to assist with the adaptive reuse.

②

Cropsey Barn, New City, Rockland County

Excellence in Historic Building Rehabilitation & Conservation

The Cropsey family has made an extraordinary commitment in the rehabilitation and long-term use of a New York State and National Register listed property. In fear of losing an agricultural site to sprawl, the family transferred ownership of their eighteenth-century barn and land to the county with a restrictive covenant ensuring its agricultural future. Working with a group of traditional trades craftspeople and building conservators, the barn has been fully restored and is now used by the local County Sponsored Agriculture (CSA) association for planting and harvesting organically grown products.

③

Dr. Ferguson's House, Glens Falls, Warren County

Excellence in Historic Building Rehabilitation

When Dr. Ferguson's House was threatened with demolition, local preservationists Darren & Lisa Tracy stepped in to rescue it. With careful planning and cooperation, the Tracys rehabilitated the 1870 National Register-listed building using Federal and State Historic Tax Credits for use as an apartment building, thereby saving an important community treasure.

④



2020 Historic Preservation Awards

Onderdonk-Tallman-Budke House, Clarkstown, Rockland County

Excellence in Historic Building Rehabilitation

Constructed between the 1790s and 1870s, and last occupied in the 1930s, the Onderdonck-Tallman-Budke House had fallen into disrepair. With the help of town funds, the historic sandstone Dutch house was painstakingly restored and serves as an educational resource in Clarkstown's Germonds Park.

5

Carnegie Libraries of New York City

Excellence in Historic Documentation

What began in 2009 as a project by the Historic Districts Council to survey Carnegie Libraries in New York City culminated in the creation of a Multiple Property Documentation Form that was approved by the National Park Service in September 2020. Documenting the significance of these resources facilitates future listings for these beloved community buildings.

6

Fire Watchtower at Marcus Garvey Park, Harlem, New York City

Excellence in Historic Structure Rehabilitation

Known to many as the Harlem Fire Watchtower, the 1856 cast iron structure at Marcus Garvey Park is a community landmark owned by the City of New York. Spurred by citizen advocacy, a public-private partnership was established to restore Watchtower, which resulted in sizable contributions from the New York City Council, Mayor, and Borough President's offices. The resulting rehabilitation preserves an enduring symbol of Harlem's identity and historic legacy.

7

Mary E. Bell House, Center Moriches, Long Island

Excellence in Organizational Achievement

The restoration and historic registers listing of the Mary E. Bell House preserves a history of Black landownership on Long Island during the 19th century and documents the central role of women within the Black community of Moriches. Constructed in 1872, the home was occupied by the Smith and Bell families for more than 100 years. Owner Mary Bell rose to prominence in the community for her association with the Moriches AME Zion Church. By 2011, the house had fallen into disrepair. The town of Brookhaven acquired the property and entered into formal agreement with the Ketcham Inn Foundation to restore the building, which now operates as historic site.

8

Village of Heuvelton, St. Lawrence County

Excellence in Archeology Stewardship

The Village of Heuvelton unexpectedly discovered several historic burials of the former village "old cemetery" during a water tank and sewer rehabilitation project. Through careful research and coordination with various agencies, the village successfully and sensitively navigated the challenges of excavating the human remains for further study and re-interment.

9

2020 Historic Preservation Awards

Memorial Field for Black Lives, John Brown Farm State Historic Site, Essex County

Excellence in Historic Site Interpretation and Public Engagement

Working with the not-for-profit group John Brown Lives!, Artist Karen Davidson Seward created the Memorial Field for Black Lives as a space to acknowledge the struggle for equality in America in response to the brutal murders of unarmed Black Americans and widespread protests this summer. The exhibit debuted at John Brown Farm State Historic Site, the home and final resting place of an abolitionist who gave his life to end slavery.

Statewide Historic Preservation Advocacy Organizations

Excellence in Historic Preservation Organizational Achievement

2020 was unprecedented in its impacts on communities across New York State. The state's preservation organizations rose to the challenge of programming during a global pandemic and a politically tumultuous year. Their ingenuity, resilience, and creativity proved that preservation is imperative to quality of life, and will play an essential role in navigating the path to economic recovery.

10





**Parks, Recreation
and Historic
Preservation**

**State Council of Parks,
Recreation and
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