



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

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**Andrew M. Cuomo**  
Governor

**Rose Harvey**  
Commissioner

**Testimony Before the Joint Hearing of the Fiscal Committees of the State Legislature  
On the FY 2013-14 Executive Budget**

**Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation  
Commissioner Rose Harvey  
February 4, 2013**

Good Morning, Senator DeFrancisco and Assemblyman Farrell. Thank you for inviting me to discuss Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget proposal for State Parks. Thank you also Senator Little and Assemblywoman Markey, Chairs of the Tourism & Parks Committees, as well as other members of the Legislature for being here today.

I am Rose Harvey, Commissioner of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. I am charged with overseeing one of our state's greatest treasures – the New York State park system. New Yorkers take great pride in the 179 parks and 35 historic sites that comprise our park system. Governor Cuomo recognizes the state park system's substantial economic and environmental benefits, and he is committed to connecting people to parks, keeping them open and available for all New Yorkers, and tackling our longstanding infrastructure challenges.

We are grateful that the 2013-14 Executive Budget provides us with the tools to continue serving our citizens in several important ways. First, the Executive Budget maintains level funding for park operations so that we may again keep all of our parks and historic sites open and offer valued recreational and educational services to park visitors. Second, the Executive Budget continues an infusion of new capital dollars to address a backlog of capital rehabilitation and improvement projects. Third, the proposal strengthens the Environmental Protection Fund. Finally, it extends and improves the state historic rehabilitation tax credit, an important economic development tool in urban areas.

Let me begin by addressing our agency's operational spending. State Park visitors continue to benefit from the reforms and stability that Governor Cuomo has brought to the budget

process. Rather than facing park closures and cutbacks, all of our facilities opened on time in 2012, and we hosted over 60 million visitors. Attendance at state parks and historic sites was the best in a decade. Overall attendance increased five percent (5%) over the previous year, and overnight stays in state park campgrounds were up six percent (6%). Throughout the season, our parks hosted major events, such as concerts, festivals and golf tournaments, which provide an economic boost to local economies. The Executive Budget continues to provide stability for park operations in 2013-14. The proposal effectively keeps spending on agency operations level and does not include any fee increases for state parks or historic sites.

As we host millions of visitors from across the state and the globe, it is critical that we provide them with safe and welcoming facilities. The Executive Budget proposes \$90 million in funding for capital improvement projects in our state parks and historic sites, along with an additional \$5 million for the Department of Agriculture and Markets for the State Fair and for ski facilities operated by the Olympic Regional Development Authority. This is a continuation of the \$89 million investment Governor Cuomo, in partnership with the Legislature, began in the park system in the 2012-13 state budget.

With the current year funding, State Parks is improving 55 parks and historic sites. Across the state, we have aggressively moved forward on health and safety-related projects and critical infrastructure rehabilitation. Examples include upgrading drinking water systems, repairing deteriorated restrooms and replacing dilapidated playgrounds. Less than a year after the funding was approved, 20 of these projects have been completed, construction is well along on another 39 projects, and work is now starting on 15 other projects. The remaining state park capital projects funded in the 2012-13 budget are currently in the design and bidding process. Construction contracts will be awarded in the coming months and work will begin this summer.

The Governor's commitment to provide \$90 million of new capital funding in 2013-14 will maintain momentum in rehabilitating and improving state parks and historic sites across the state. This smart investment will create local construction and engineering jobs, enhance community vitality, support New York's vital tourism industry, and transform our aging infrastructure into a sustainable park system for the 21st century.

The Executive Budget also proposes \$153 million for the programs supported by the Environmental Protection Fund, an increase of \$19 million that is funded by a transfer of \$15 million of unclaimed bottle deposit receipts and at least \$4 million from better enforcement of the unclaimed deposit program. This honors the Governor's commitment to the Legislature to strengthen the EPF in his budget proposal. OPRHP administers funding from four EPF categories: State Lands Stewardship and Open Space Land Purchases, which are both shared between OPRHP and the Department of Environmental Conservation

(DEC); the Local Parks and Historic Preservation Grant Program; and the ZBGA Program. Under the Governor's budget, all four categories receive increased funding next year.

Last, but certainly not least, the Executive Budget strengthens New York State's historic preservation efforts. The Governor's budget reauthorizes the state historic preservation tax credit program through 2020. The program, which had been scheduled to sunset in 2015, provides tax credits of up to \$5 million to private developers that rehabilitate historic buildings in economically distressed communities. The rehabilitation tax credit has proved to be a significant tool to promote the revitalization of urban areas and mainstreets, especially upstate. The budget also makes the tax credits refundable, which will attract additional investors to the program.

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

