



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Darrel J. Aubertine

## Sen. Aubertine Fighting to Keep State Parks Open

DARREL J. AUBERTINE March 24, 2010

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## Senate Majority Committed To Saving Our Parks

*Senate Democrats Preserve Recreational Facilities and Bolster Small Businesses*

(Albany, NY) Today, the Senate Majority and advocates stood together in support of State Parks.

On Monday, the Majority Conference unanimously voted for a budget resolution which restored all \$11.5 million of the Governor's budget cuts to parks operations. If enacted, the cut would have resulted in the closure of 57 State Parks and reduced operations at an additional 22 State Parks.

The use of parks for recreational activities generates \$1.9 billion in revenue, five times the agency's total budget. The closure of these parks would have a devastating effect on small businesses, restaurants, and other economic engines in communities who are largely based around the tourism revenue generated by these parks.

**Senator Darrel J. Aubertine (D-Cape Vincent) said, "The parks and historic sites in my region are a \$60 to \$70 million economic engine and we cannot afford to lose this economic impact. We are moving forward and well on our way to ensuring that these parks and historic sites remain open. We need to continue working together, regardless of party lines, to stand up and support the small businesses that depend on these parks and historic sites to draw in visitors."**

Senate Majority Conference Leader John L. Sampson said, "State Parks are part of our history and our future. They are the economic engine that drives our tourism industry. We need a fair and responsible budget, and cutting our parks is neither a fair or responsible solution to the fiscal crisis. While Senate Republicans claim they support our parks, but refuse to vote for them, the Senate Majority kept its promise to our parks and the families who enjoy them."

Senator Jose Serrano (D-Bronx/Manhattan), Chair of the Senate Committee on Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks and Recreation said, "The people of New York have spoken with a clear and united voice - they do not want their State Parks to close. Not only are parks a sound source of revenue by generating \$5 for every \$1 invested by the state, but they also help to improve our quality of life through the enriching programs and recreational opportunities they provide. I am proud to stand beside State Parks advocates and my colleagues to prevent unprecedented parks closings."

Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D/WF–35th District) said, “Our State parks and historic sites are important environmental, cultural and recreational components of our economy. The beautiful sites that commemorate our history, and all that our parks have to offer are treasures that we must preserve and protect in a responsible manner. From a purely economic standpoint, New York's State Park system generates \$1.9 billion in economic activity, five times the Agency's total budget. The restoration of this funding is a sensible approach for overcoming our fiscal challenges.”

Senator Brian X. Foley (D-Blue Point) said, "I've been proud to lead the effort to save state parks on Long Island and across New York State. During these tough economic times, families increasingly rely on our parks for affordable, safe, and family-friendly recreation close to home. Our commitment to fully restoring parks funding will save state parks and preserve them for children and families for generations to come."

#### **State Parks facts:**

- Over the past two years, State Parks have been cut by \$46 million, which equates to 25% of the agency's operating budget.
- 85% of the agency's operating budget goes directly toward operating New York's 213 State Parks and Historic Sites.
- The agency has already eliminated 1,000 permanent seasonal workers.
- Last year's budget cuts resulted in service reductions at 100 State Parks and Historic Sites (shortened seasons and reduced hours of operation).
- State Parks received 56 million visitors in 2009, an increase of 1.9 million visitors from 2008.
- State Parks provide affordable, close to home recreational opportunities to more than 56 million people each year.
- Park revenues account for a third of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's (OPRHP) operating budget.
- State Parks account for only one quarter of 1% of the overall state budget.

Senator Antoine M. Thompson (D-parts of Erie and Niagara counties) said, "Our parks are an asset to the people of New York State. They are used for recreation and tourism and we have to do anything in our power to save them."

Senator José Peralta (D-Queens) said, "Parks and historic sites are an efficient contributor to our state's economy and also provide families with affordable recreation that they are looking for right now. In rejecting the Governor's proposal to cut funding and close State parks and historic sites, the Senate Majority is preserving not only State treasures, but jobs for New Yorker's in an extremely difficult economy."

Senator Neil D. Breslin (D-Albany) said, "Restoring funding to Parks will save the recreational environment that many New Yorker's depend on. Thatcher Park is one of the most precious resources in my district that provide trails for summer hiking, mountain biking and fields for children to play. It is important that we protect and preserve Thacher Park to give all families a place for recreation, education and cultural enrichment. I commend Senator Sampson for his leadership and support for Public parks."

Senator Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan) said, "It seems rather simple to me: you can't say that you support parks and then vote against parks. This is one of the most difficult budgets, I believe, that any of us in the Legislature has had to balance. But by listening to New Yorkers' values and priorities, we were able to responsibly manage reductions to obtain a balanced budget which protects our parks. It is precisely in times such as these in which people utilize parks and historic sites as a means for affordable recreation for their families. We have a commitment to not turn our backs on our people or our parks."

Senator Diane J. Savino (D- Staten Island/Brooklyn) said, "The economic benefits that our state parks and historic sites generate, including jobs, tourism, and customers for local businesses, vastly outweigh our minimal investment. Furthermore, at a time when obesity rates are skyrocketing, New Yorkers cannot afford to lose any free or affordable exercise and recreational activities."

Senator David J. Valesky (D-Oneida) said, “Our parks are the crown jewels of New York State. These state parks and historic sites are important not just for the recreation they provide, but are a critical component of our tourism industry, contribute to our quality of life and promote regional economic well being. The Senate Democratic majority has fought to save our parks, and as we move through the final stages of budget negotiations, I implore my colleagues in the Legislature to leave politics aside, and to work together to make sure that the end product of this budget protects our parks.”

Albert E. Caccese, Executive Director of Audubon New York, and 28 year veteran of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Executive Staff said, “Our State Parks are critically important economic engines that support local economies and an ever growing ecotourism industry, providing billions in revenue to the state each year. Closing Parks and cutting the Environmental Protection Fund is the wrong choice and will only further compound and prolong the economic woes facing the state. We applaud the New York State Senate for leading the charge to keep our Parks open and protect the EPF, and urge the Assembly and the Governor to join with them in supporting these important restorations in this year’s budget.”

Shawn McConnell, Campaign for Parks Director, Parks & Trails NY said, “Thanks to the members of the Senate who passed their budget resolution Monday, New Yorkers across the state are a step closer to once again enjoying the many benefits of their parks and historic sites. Now it is up to the Assembly and Governor to ensure all of New York’s State Parks and Historic sites remain open.”

Robert Moore, Executive Director, Environmental Advocates of New York said, "Environmental Advocates of New York is pleased to see that the State Senate has advanced a sound budget resolution. By restoring the Environmental Protection Fund to \$222 million and some resources to the Department of Environmental Conservation, as well as ensuring that state parks stay open, the Senate plan shows real 'love' for New York's air, land and water. The Senate's resolution is an excellent starting point for budget negotiations. Environmental Advocates calls on the Assembly and the Governor to ensure that the final New York State Enacted Budget is as protective of our shared environment.”

Adirondack Council Executive Director Brian L. Houseal said, “We want to thank the Senate Majority and Conference Leader Sampson for their efforts to keep our New York State Parks and Historic Sites open. In

the Adirondacks, John Brown's Farm will now be available for the millions of tourists who visit the region on an annual basis. This dedication to protecting special places has also been extended to restoring cuts to the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and its land acquisition category."

Neil Woodworth, Executive Director of the Adirondack Mountain Club said, "We would like to thank the Senate majority for supporting critical environmental programs and our majestic state parks, and we are certain that current and future generations of New Yorkers will thank them too. These programs cost relatively little, and in many cases generate revenue or help the state avoid higher costs in the future, so these restorations are fiscally prudent as well."

"As North Country residents and members of the freedom education project John Brown Lives!, we appreciate the Senate's efforts to keep open John Brown's Farm and other parks and state historic sites. This is sacred ground, a site of conscience" said director Martha Swan. "The State of New York has been the caretaker of this historic legacy for nearly 115 uninterrupted years and it must assure its continued protection as a State Historic Site."

The Friends of John Boyd Thacher and Thompsons Lake State Parks said, "We laud the New York State Senate for their proposal to restore funding to our state parks. While still guarded, awaiting full budget approval, we express thank yous for the many people who enjoy the parks, including Thacher Park. We'll still be able to picnic, play and enjoy Nature. School children will still hike along the Indian Ladder Trail, where they may catch their first newt or frog, and walk along the shores of an ancient sea that stretched from New York to Virginia. And couples will join in marriage in the scenic outdoors along the Helderberg Escarpment. We again thank the New York State Senate for their fortitude in keeping state parks open for the people of New York, and visitors from beyond our borders."

Clark "Skip" Hults, Superintendent of Newcomb Central School, "As Superintendent of Newcomb Central School in the heart of the Adirondacks, I greatly appreciate the efforts of the Senate leaders who have called for restoration of funding to New York's state parks and historic sites. Last year, as part of a Social Studies and English Language Arts unit on slavery, our students in grades 3-6 visited the John Brown Farm in Lake Placid. Standing at the gravesite where Brown and 11 fellow Harper's Ferry raiders are buried and touring the house with expert interpretation from the site's staff had a very profound impact on

the students, and I am certain that the knowledge and empathy they gained visiting the John Brown Farm will stay with them throughout their lives. Another invaluable backyard classroom is the Visitor Interpretive Center in our town. Both the Farm and the VIC are important touchstones where our children connect with their history and the natural world. I hope the Governor will remember the children and keep them open.”

Laura Haight, senior environmental associate with NYPIRG said, "We are enormously grateful to the State Senate Majority for its commitment to restore critically needed funding to keep our parks open, enforce environmental laws, and support community efforts across the state, from recycling programs to open space protection. These programs will benefit all New Yorkers, regardless of where they live. We all need clean air, safe drinking water, and access to outdoor recreational opportunities.”

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