



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Neil D. Breslin

## Governor Cuomo announced the groundbreaking of a \$7 million visitor center at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Albany County

NEIL D. BRESLIN October 15, 2015

Governor Cuomo announced the groundbreaking of a \$7 million visitor center at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Albany County that will serve as an active learning site for natural resource and environmental topics as well as a model of green building techniques.

“The new visitor center will help support tourism and outdoor recreation for tens of thousands of visitors at this great Capital Region destination,” Governor Cuomo said. “We are committed to promoting New York's top-notch parks and recreation areas and we know that once visitors experience them for themselves, they will keep coming back.

The new visitor center will offer hands-on exhibits and displays that are appropriate to persons with a variety of special needs, and Braille, large print and audio format guides for each trail will continue to be available. The Five Rivers Center will continue to offer programs and activities as construction allows, and is expected to be completed in December 2016. The building will feature wood harvested from onsite trees, solar photovoltaic system, operable window and roof vents, low flow toilets, LED lighting and motion detection capabilities, rain water collection and grey water system, which means water from sinks is

collected and used to flush toilets.

The new building will replace the existing visitor center, which was originally a cafeteria at the Albany State Office Building Campus. Envision Architects in Albany designed both the new center and the adjacent Wendy Repass Suozzo Guided School Program building, which was dedicated in June 2012. Staff from the State Department of Environmental Conservation built the Guided School Program building with partial fiscal support from the Repass family in collaboration with The Friends of Five Rivers and the Natural Heritage Trust. Once the new visitor center is completed, both buildings will be LEED certifiable.

“For decades Five Rivers has served as a living museum, offering people of all ages a rich variety of guided and self-guided opportunities to experience nature directly,” said Incoming Acting DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos. “We applaud Governor Cuomo for his continued efforts to offer New Yorkers and visitors new ways to experience the state’s vast natural resources.”

The Office of General Services awarded \$7 million in contracts to build the new center to: AOW Associates, Inc. of Albany for construction; Lacorte Companies, Inc. of Troy for electrical work; DiGesare Mechanical, Inc. for plumbing; and Family Danz Mechanical LLC of Albany for heating, ventilation and air conditioning installation. The contract for fabricating exhibits will be awarded in the near future.

OGS Commissioner RoAnn Destito said, “Governor Cuomo is a strong advocate of sustainable construction and I am pleased that OGS has been able to partner with DEC on this building that will have numerous green features including geothermal heating and cooling, solar hot water panels and a vegetative roof. The educational and environmental benefits this project brings to the community will be experienced for years to come.”

The Five Rivers Center encourages community involvement and participation and environmental stewardship through first-hand connection to nature. Local community members have a sense of place and ownership, which is critical to offering quality programs and services. The Department of Environmental Conservation's partnership with Friends of Five Rivers is an important public/private model that has been a showcase for many years for inspiring and training the next generation of environmental leaders.

Senator Neil Breslin said, "Not only is the new learning center itself a model for environmental sustainability, the numerous programs that will be offered at the center will only further deepen our understanding of and need for environmental stewardship. I applaud Governor Cuomo, and Commissioners Destito and Seggos for their continued efforts to make sure New Yorkers have numerous ways to enjoy our state's natural resources."

Senator George Amedore said, "Five Rivers has long been a staple in our community, allowing visitors to learn about nature in a hands-on environment that sparks an appreciation for the outdoors. The new visitor center demonstrates New York's commitment to instill an appreciation for the outdoors in future generations."

Assemblyman John McDonald said, "The Five Rivers Environmental Education Center is a resource our community relies on to promote healthy living and outdoor activities, and it is encouraging to see investment for future generations to use. I look forward to the expanded programming and continued availability on Saturdays for families to enjoy this area together."

Assemblywoman Pat Fahy said, "Five Rivers has been a regional treasure for my family and thousands of families in the Capital Region, offering a chance to learn about and experience nature at its very best. I applaud the Governor for his commitment to preserving and

improving what is truly a gem. Current and future generations of New Yorkers will appreciate this investment for decades to come."

Dr. Robert J. Gordon, President of the Friends of Five Rivers, said, "Thousands of school children participate in the Guided School Program each year, and many of them are excited to bring their families back to Five Rivers to experience the joy of discovering nature together. The new visitor center will inspire visitors from both near and far to get outdoors and enjoy this very special place."

Jaimz Edwards, Executive Director and Chairman of Youth Ed-Venture and Nature Network, said, "Youth Ed-Venture and Nature Network uses the power of nature to transform urban youth and we are excited to bring Albany City youth to the new visitor center at Five Rivers. Getting children outdoors is a proven way to help them in school and to learn about various career options in natural resources and environmental sciences."

Upwards of 70,000 visitors annually come to Five Rivers Center for school and youth programs, public programs, and programs and services for adults. The new center will be open 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday. The state-of-the-art center will draw not only new visitors to Five Rivers, but also repeat visitors as the exhibits and seasons change.

Saturday programs include guided hikes, watching wildlife, snowshoeing and camping that inspire people to get outdoors. Thursdays offer family fun after-school programs for students in k-5 that focus on outdoor exploration, with each week looking at different topics like birds, insects, trees and ponds.

On-site lessons for school classes are taught in partnership with the Friends of Five Rivers through the Guided School Program. Lessons taught by Friends docents focus on natural history topics by getting students into streams, fields and forests to witness environmental

concepts first hand. Supported by Friends of Five Rivers scholarships, nearly fifty percent of schools participating in the Guided School Programs are from urban school districts of Albany, Schenectady and Troy.

In 2016, Five Rivers will also host Excelsior Conservation Corps members to work on a history trail throughout the center's grounds. Governor Cuomo recently announced the launch of the Excelsior Conservation Corps, a new residential AmeriCorps environmental education and stewardship program for 18 to 25 year olds. Corps members will research and document the rich history of wildlife management and the important role of the Civilian Conservation Corps as part of the Five Rivers story. They will build kiosks with interpretive displays highlighting the history of area and create a trail guide to provide additional information on each topic. To apply to be in the inaugural class of ECC, visit [www.ny.gov/ECC](http://www.ny.gov/ECC) for more information on the Corps.

Five Rivers Environmental Education Center is located at 56 Game Farm Road, Delmar, NY 12054. Visit <http://www.dec.ny.gov/education/1835.html> for more information on the center and watchable wildlife opportunities.