Senator Foley, Assemblyman Ramos Host Parks Rally

BRIAN X. FOLEY   June 3, 2010

| ISSUE: **STATE PARKS**

Senator Brian X. Foley (D – Blue Point) and Assemblyman Phil Ramos (D – Central Islip) celebrated the passage of legislation that will keep state parks open for the remainder of the year by hosting a rally at Brentwood State Park with community members and advocates for the parks.

On Friday, the senate and assembly passed legislation that will prevent the closure of 57 state parks and historic sites. The funding for the operation of these facilities will come from

the General Fund, in the form of a reallocation of the revenue from the Real Estate Transfer Tax (RETT). By funding the parks in this way, the integrity of the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) as a dedicated fund for preserving open space will be safeguarded. Keeping state parks open for the remainder of the year will save close to 4,000 jobs on Long Island.

"Our state parks are more than open spaces of land with benches, ball fields and play sets," said Senator Foley. "Parks are gathering places for the community. They are where our children learn the value of teamwork while playing sports. They are where we all learn to appreciate the beauty of our natural environment. They are where neighbors come together to make an impact on their community or to simply enjoy one another's company. In these tough economic times, our parks have become even more important as local, affordable locations for families looking to spend quality time together."

"Keeping the parks open is absolutely the right course of action, and it's essential that they're open for Memorial Day Weekend," said Assemblyman Ramos. "Yes, New York is facing very serious economic challenges, but closing the parks made no sense at all because they generate far more revenue than they cost to operate. Between the jobs they provide and the tourism dollars they bring in, the parks are critical to supporting local economies and the state's economic health as a whole. Closure would have not only been another blow to an already hurting economy, but it would have also deprived families and kids of a whole range of inexpensive, healthy and educational activities. Our state parks provide affordable recreation for working families, and they provide opportunities to teach our children about community, sportsmanship and the great outdoors. During these tough economic times people rely on the park for free recreational activities."

"The nearly 10,000 people who joined our site in support of saving Long Island's unique coastal and historic treasures will be grateful to once again enjoy our parks, which provide low-cost recreation opportunities for families and support tourist-related business in

communities across the region," said Allison Lyons, organizer of the "SAVE LONG ISLAND PARKS" Facebook page. "We thank the Governor and Legislature for agreeing to open New York's parks and historic sites."

Over the last two years, funding to state parks has been cut by 25%, a total of $46 million. Budget cuts last year resulted in service reductions in the form of shortened seasons and reduced hours at 100 state parks and historic sites. Despite this, the number of New Yorkers who access state parks has steadily increased. In 2009, 56 million people visited state parks, up 1.9 million from the previous year.

In addition to bringing in enough revenue to cover one third of the operating budget of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, recreational activities at state parks brings revenue to surrounding communities. Small businesses and restaurants, among other businesses, will lose the nearly $1.9 billion in revenue that is now seen annually.

"Today is a great day for Long Island's families because we have crafted a solution that will allow us to protect our state parks in the same way that we have protected other items, like education funding, in the past," said Senator Foley. "I am glad that we have been able to bring this issue to a close in time for the holiday weekend."