
José M. Serrano
Chair, Cultural Affairs,
Tourism, Parks & Recreation



Steve Englebright
Chair, Tourism, Parks, Arts
and Sports Development

The Honorable David A. Paterson
Office of the Governor
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Paterson,

We write today regarding the very important issue of protecting our State Parks and Historic Sites. The FY 2010-2011 Executive Budget proposal sought to reduce funding for the Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation (OPRHP) by nearly \$65 million. If enacted, this proposed cut, compounded by previously implemented cuts, would result in the unprecedented closures of 55 State Parks and 14 Historic Sites throughout New York State.

By contributing a 5-to-1 return on investment to the state, parks help generate \$1.9 billion annually in economic activity. Furthermore, during times of economic uncertainty, people turn to parks and historic sites as a source of healthy and affordable recreational and educational opportunities. In fact, park visitation grew by nearly 2 million visitors last year to produce a whopping 56 million visitors.

Due to the significant role State Parks and Historic Sites play in the quality of life and economic viability of the state, both the Senate and Assembly sought to restore sufficient funding to OPRHP to prevent closures to any State Parks or Historic Sites. However, as budget negotiations continue beyond the April 1st deadline, the Legislature has thus far only agreed to pass emergency budget extender bills issued by your office. While we remain confident that a budget agreement will soon be reached in a manner which will prevent closures to State Parks and Historic Sites, in the interim we must adequately fund OPRHP. The continued passage of extender bills (or the lack of a current State Budget) could prevent the opening of 34 State Parks come May unless future extender bills provide sufficient funding to allow OPRHP to begin preparing for the upcoming summer season.

Adding adequate funding for our State Parks and Historic Sites would be an action of fiscal prudence, as a recent letter sent to you by the National Park Service notes. According to the letter from National Parks Service Regional Director Dennis R. Reidenbach, the closure of any State Parks and Historic Sites would jeopardize millions of dollars in federal funding from the federal government through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The letter also warns that closures may result in the suspension and debarment of all federal funds---potentially billions of dollars. Given the current economic situation our state is facing we cannot risk losing this essential federal funding.

For all the reasons mentioned above, we respectfully request that you appropriately fund OPRHP in any subsequent extender bills to ensure that the parks' summer season can get underway. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

José M. Serrano
New York State Senate
Chairman
Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks & Recreation

Steve Englebright
New York State Assembly
Chairman
Tourism, Parks, Arts and Sports Development