



OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE

Testimony of the Open Space Institute Before the Joint Legislative Hearing on Agriculture/Parks and Recreation for New York State Fiscal Year 2026-2027

Testimony of:

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Thank you, Chairpersons and distinguished members of the Legislature, for the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of the Open Space Institute (OSI). OSI is proud to be one of New York's longstanding conservation partners, working shoulder to shoulder with NY State Parks and other state agencies, municipalities, grassroots groups, private landowners, and so many others to protect land, expand public access, and make our parks and greenways safer and more enjoyable for all.

For more than four decades, OSI has partnered closely with New York State to expand, protect, and enhance state parks. Over that time, we have helped add ten percent to the total acreage of the state park system, safeguarding landscapes that provide recreation opportunities for people of all ages and abilities, wildlife habitat, climate resilience, and economic stimulation for surrounding communities.

But OSI's work extends far beyond conservation. We leverage private philanthropy to deliver infrastructure improvements, new trails, trailheads, visitor amenities, and safety enhancements that make parks more welcoming for everyone. These investments ensure that visitors experience the true natural beauty and significance of the land itself.

Among OSI's innovative initiatives is our long-standing commitment to developing, connecting, and expanding greenway trail networks. Most recently, OSI and its partners secured \$1.1 million through the Environmental Protection Fund for a new trailhead that will provide a picnic pavilion, four-season restrooms, and parking area at the eastern terminus of the Adirondack Rail Trail (ART) in Lake Placid. As one of New York's newest premier multi-use corridors, the ART connects Lake Placid, Saranac Lake, and Tupper Lake, and offers year-round recreation for cyclists, walkers, skiers, and snowmobilers. The trail has already exceeded expectations, drawing nearly 160,000 visits in its first year. Through strategic public investment combined with private donations, OSI will deliver a gateway that matches the popularity and character of the wonderful new ART.

Turning to the state's continued support for outdoor recreation, I want to express OSI's sincere gratitude to Governor Kathy Hochul for her proposed FY27 Executive Budget, which includes a \$340 million

investment in capital improvements for New York's state parks and strong support for land stewardship, the Land Trust Alliance's NYS Conservation Partnership Program, the Park and Trail Partnership Grants program, Connect Kids Outdoor Recreation Program, and funding for municipal public parks. This continued commitment is essential at a time when public lands continue to see year-over-year visitor growth, and when nature is increasingly interwoven with personal and community health, wellbeing, and quality of life.

We also applaud the Governor's vision and leadership in advancing numerous major new park projects and improvements. These investments will reshape communities, expand public access to nature, and reinforce New York's position as a national leader in conservation and outdoor recreation.

Governor Hochul's proposal to invest in the development of Rochester's High Falls State Park is historic. High Falls is a singular natural feature located in the heart of a major urban center. By creating a new state park in an urban setting, the Governor is supporting an innovative community revitalization opportunity. This park will reconnect residents and visitors with the Genesee River, bolster economic activity, and provide new outdoor experiences for people of all ages and abilities in a place where access to nature was previously limited.

In the Hudson Valley, Harriman State Park is one of the crown jewels of our state park system—an expansive landscape loved by millions, and one which OSI has been proud to expand and improve over many years. But its infrastructure is aging and, in many places, has been damaged by strong storms and years of high visitation. The Governor's proposed investments will support essential improvements that enhance safety, restore degraded trails and facilities, and protect the park's ecological integrity.

Riverbank State Park is one of New York City's most important urban parks and a vital community hub in Harlem. Planned renovations here will modernize aging infrastructure and restore the park into a vibrant destination that offers health benefits, welcoming cultural spaces, and a positive reinforcement of community identity.

The investments in the Governor's budget represent encouraging long-term commitments to the well-being, happiness, and economic vitality of New York.

Research and experience show that public parks, trails, and greenways provide extraordinary value to visitors. Beyond well-documented benefits to physical, mental, and public health, and local economies, greenways offer safe, off-road corridors for walking and biking, helping people of all abilities move through their regions without needing a car. Further, protected lands support clean water, wildlife habitat, flood mitigation, and natural carbon capture and storage—benefits that are increasingly important and valued by the public.

Finally, OSI is pleased by Governor Hochul's nomination of Kathy Moser to lead New York State Parks. Kathy brings deep experience, a collaborative spirit, and an unparalleled understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing our public lands. Her nomination is a meaningful step forward for the parks system, and OSI is confident she will be a strong champion for the continued revitalization of New York's state parks.

On behalf of the Open Space Institute, I thank Governor Hochul and the Legislature for their steadfast commitment to New York's public parks, trails, and open spaces. With continued investment and collaboration, we can build a stronger, healthier, more vibrant, and more resilient New York—one where every person, in every community, has access to the outdoor spaces that enrich their lives.

Thank you for your time and consideration.