



**NEW YORK STATE
OFFICE OF PARKS, RECREATION AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

ROSE HARVEY
Commissioner

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

**Testimony Before the Joint Fiscal Committees of the State Legislature
On the FY 2014-15 Executive Budget**

**Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
Commissioner Rose Harvey**

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Good Morning, Senator DeFrancisco and Assemblyman Farrell. Thank you for inviting me to discuss Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget proposal for State Parks. Thank you also Senator Little and Assemblywoman Markey, Chairs of the Tourism & Parks Committees, as well as other members of the Legislature for inviting me here today.

I am Rose Harvey, Commissioner of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. I am charged with overseeing one of our Nation's greatest treasures – the New York State park system. New Yorkers take great pride in the 179 parks and 35 historic sites that comprise our park system and we are looking forward to opening our 180th park this year on Buffalo's waterfront. Governor Cuomo recognizes our park system's powerful economic and environmental benefits across the state. He has introduced initiatives that are connecting people to parks; tackling longstanding infrastructure challenges; and keeping parks open, welcoming and available for all New Yorkers.

The 2014-15 Executive Budget provides State Parks with the tools to continue serving New Yorkers in several important ways. It maintains level funding for park operations so that we may offer valued recreational and educational services to park visitors. The Executive Budget also continues our commitment to modernizing and revitalizing the park system's infrastructure and public facilities. Finally, it maintains robust funding for the Environmental Protection Fund.

The park system again had a very successful year in 2013. Despite the devastation from Superstorm Sandy, all of our parks were open by Memorial Day weekend. State Parks attracted more than 60 million visitors statewide for the second year in row, and throughout the season, our parks hosted major events, such as concerts, festivals and athletic competitions, which provide an economic boost to local economies.

The success the park system had in 2013 has helped the State attract large, national-scale events. This past year alone, the PGA of America announced that Bethpage State Park on Long Island will host two of professional golf's biggest events – the PGA Championship in 2019 and the Ryder Cup in 2024 – at the famed Black Course. Our historic sites are closely involved in the Governor's "Path Through History," a statewide roadmap that ties historically and culturally significant sites, locations and events throughout the Empire State. This effort to highlight New York's rich heritage showcases New York State's history and cultural significance and promotes tourism and economic development in communities in every region of the state.

Our agency administers one of the strongest historic preservation programs in the Nation. Last year, the State Historic Preservation Office advanced 97 listings to the State and National Registers of Historic Places, assisting property owners in the preservation of historic structures. We reviewed 5,800 state and federal projects for compliance with historic preservation laws, completing the reviews in an average of 11 days. State and federal historic rehabilitation tax credits spurred more than \$1.1 billion in projects statewide to redevelop commercial properties listed on the National Register, and more than \$14.3 million in home improvements to help revitalize historic neighborhoods.

In order for our parks to continue serving their communities and remain anchors of our tourism economy, the Executive Budget continues making the investments in the system the Governor initiated two years ago. There is \$90 million in New York Works funding for capital improvement projects to provide visitors with safe, welcoming and modern facilities in our state parks and historic sites. The first two rounds of this landmark funding have enabled the agency to advance 192 separate projects within 81 parks and historic sites to restore, repair, or enhance public facilities, while improving energy and operational efficiency.

This year's \$90 million of New York Works funding will allow dozens more improvement projects to begin in 2014 at parks and historic sites across New York – which will continue to create local jobs, encourage tourism, and transform our park system for the 21st century.

In his State of the State address, the Governor announced the Adventure License, a new initiative to improve service for many outdoor recreational enthusiasts. The Adventure License includes the option for a Lifetime Empire Passport, offering New Yorkers the option of paying just once and experiencing all that parks have to offer for the rest of their lives, saving frequent visitors thousands of dollars over a lifetime, and creating a way for people to show their lifetime support for our irreplaceable state park system.

For those who enjoy New York's waterways, the Adventure License will make it easier to carry on the tradition of safe boating. New Yorkers who have taken a safe boating course and received their Boating Safety Certificate, can with just a few easy steps choose to have the certification noted on their driver license or non-driver ID. Boaters who participate in the Adventure License initiative will no longer need to carry a boating safety certificate while operating a motor boat or personal watercraft on New York's waters.

Finally, the Executive Budget contains \$157 million for the Environmental Protection Fund. OPRHP administers funding from four EPF categories – State Lands Stewardship and Open Space land purchases, which are both shared between OPRHP and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), along with the Local Parks and Historic Preservation Grant Program and the Zoos, Botanical Gardens and Aquariums (ZBGA) Program. The Executive Budget includes level or increased funding for all four categories. For the past two years, the Local Parks and Historic Preservation Grants were included in the Governor's Regional Economic Development Council awards, and have proved to be an effective mechanism for promoting tourism and economic development in local communities across the state.

Thank you again for your commitment to our magnificent State park system. As always, I am truly appreciative for the tremendous support that members of the Legislature have provided to our agency, and I welcome your questions.

