

February 28, 2025

Honorable Carl Heastie
Speaker of the New York State Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 932
Albany, NY 12248

Re: \$250M for Parks Capital in SFY 2025-26 New York State One-House Budgets

Dear Speaker Heastie,

We are writing to respectfully request that the New York State Senate and Assembly consider \$250 million in OPRHP Parks Capital appropriations in their SFY 2025-26 one-house budgets. This level of investment will ensure that the agency has the resources needed to maintain and enhance the park facilities that will provide visitors safe and positive experiences in our statewide system. New York's magnificent parks are the very foundation of the state's tourism and outdoor recreational industries, which have benefited from consistent investments in recent years, reversing the prior periods of deferred maintenance for critical park infrastructure.

The data is clear: New York's parks are an excellent investment. They are economic powerhouses that generate enormous returns on public funding. Every \$1 million invested yields \$10 million in sales, \$4 million in labor income, and \$7 million in state GDP. Thanks in part to increased funding in recent years, the public lands operated by OPRHP saw a record 88.3 million visits in 2024. That represents a 5% increase over the prior year and a 66% increase over the past 20 years. It is critically important that New York State continues to build on that momentum.

As you know, last year's (SFY 2024-25) Parks Capital Budget was \$300 million in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the State Parks System, while the SFY 2022-23 budget was \$250 million. We believe that OPRHP is facing inevitable increases in capital costs for projects poised for construction due to the tariff increases proposed and implemented by the new federal administration. This is not the time to decrease funding for this critical function of state government that will not only create direct jobs, but also provide multiplier effects in nearby communities and throughout the state.

As the land conservation organizations of the Hudson Valley and beyond, we look forward to continued partnership with OPRHP in stewardship of these critical destinations, and we thank you for your consideration and support of this request.

Sincerely,

Troy Weldy, President, Columbia Land Conservancy

Rebecca Thornton, President, Dutchess Land Conservancy

Robert Knighton, President, Greene Land Trust

Katrina Shindledecker, Executive Director, Hudson Highlands Land Trust, Inc.

Mike Oates, President, Hudson Valley Economic Development Corporation

Shaniqua Bowden, Co-Director, Kingston Land Trust

Mark King, Executive Director, Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy

Adam Ganser, Executive Director, New Yorkers For Parks

Erik Kulleseid, President & CEO, Open Space Institute

Ronald Zorrilla, Executive Director, Outdoor Promise

Paul Steely White, Executive Director, Parks and Trails New York

Robert Davies, Executive Director, Saratoga PLAN

Ned Sullivan, President, Scenic Hudson, Inc.

Peter Mullan, President, Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail

Jim Bonesteel, Executive Director, Hudson Taconic Lands

Christie DeBoer, Executive Director, Wallkill Valley Land Trust

Kara Hartigan Whelan, President, Westchester Land Trust

Andy Mossey, Executive Director, Woodstock Land Conservancy