

UPDATE: January 2012

Keeping Parks in the Public Eye

Among the Alliance's top goals and achievements for 2011 was keeping our magnificent state parks and their deteriorating condition in the public eye. In doing so, we attracted the attention of the state legislature and the Cuomo administration.

In May, seizing on an otherwise positive Niagara Falls travel article in *The New York Times* that described the state park as "shabby" and "underfinanced," the Alliance's press outreach successfully caught the attention of *The Buffalo News* and other Western New York media outlets and sparked a public airing of the dilapidated condition of the park.

As the Office of Parks addressed the most immediate needs at Niagara and other parks, the statewide press continued to cover the parks story over the summer. In addition, the Alliance testified before the legislature and met with members of the Governor's office.

As we begin 2012, we are excited that our efforts are paying off. In his annual State of the State address, **Governor Andrew Cuomo recognized the needs of the state park system and indicated that the state will undertake rehabilitation projects at 48 state parks** under his recently announced New York Works Infrastructure Fund.

This is just the kind of public commitment needed in order to leverage private philanthropy.

We expect additional detail to follow in the Governor's budget proposal, but considering the capital needs of New York's state parks have long been pushed to backburner, this is a significant development.

Yet, with more than a billion dollars needed for repairs, restorations and updates throughout the system, state government, alone, cannot foot the bill to rebuild New York's 213 state parks and historic sites.

The Alliance is grateful for the commitment of our colleagues at the Open Space Institute. We find more and more opportunities to blend park system protection with OSI's land stewardship activities.

We are also fortunate to have a strong Commissioner, Rose Harvey, at the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, who is committed to nurturing the type of public-private partnership offered by the Alliance.

Counting Pennies:

The Alliance's **Pennies for Parks** proposal aims to reduce plastic paper waste and fund park infrastructure by way of a modest charge on plastic and paper shopping bags.

Legislation establishing the program was introduced in the Assembly (Englebright) and the Senate (Serrano).

While the legislation has not yet advanced, the Alliance continues to urge its passage.

On January 1, Montgomery County Maryland followed the lead of Washington, DC and implemented a 5-cent charge on plastic and paper bags.

Recognizing the benefits to the environment, consumers are taking these charges in stride. We continue to push for New York to be the first state in the nation to adopt a Pennies for Parks program.

Kicking Off Capital Campaigns to Restore State Parks

Private sector commitment is a critical component to ensuring the future of our state parks. We have two capital campaigns underway in the Hudson Valley and several more in the works:

Minnewaska State Park Preserve Thanks to individuals and a challenge grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, we have raised more than \$300,000 toward a \$500,000 campaign to restore the breathtaking Hamilton Point Carriage Road in Minnewaska State Park Preserve. We need to raise another \$80,000 by March 31 to draw down the \$16,000 balance of the Pew pledge. If you'd like to contribute and take advantage of the match, please call 518-427-1564 to ensure the gift is properly credited toward the matching grant.

Fahnestock State Park Through an Environmental Protection Fund grant secured by the Alliance and a lead individual contribution, \$800,000 has been raised toward a \$1,050,000 campaign to expand and modernize the 50 year-old, deteriorating visitor center at Canopus Lake in Fahnestock Park. In addition to making much-needed improvements to public restrooms, sustainable features such as solar water heating and efficient fixtures will be introduced. Later phases of the campaign will naturalize the austere beach environment to increase sustainability and better complement its stunning setting. Please consider a significant gift to that effort and help us spread the word.

Other Projects The Alliance is also laying the groundwork for multi-year and multi-phase campaigns to help restore flagship parks at Niagara Falls and Jones Beach. Working closely with the Office of Parks we have identified exciting projects at Niagara Falls that will be targeted for fundraising and corporate sponsorships. The Alliance is also currently working with the Office to identify the most important projects at Jones Beach. We have engaged Dan Biederman, widely credited for the extraordinary rebirth of Bryant Park in Manhattan, to advise and help us find partners for our leading parks.

Providing Support for Friends Groups

Building a stronger network of friends groups is a key goal of the Alliance. Through these efforts, we hope to strengthen their capacity to support their local parks and foster a more enthusiastic volunteer spirit throughout the state park system.

Friends Group Conferences. With our great partner, Parks & Trails New York, the Alliance hosted three regional friends group meetings this fall and assisted with a fourth. We found that the meetings fostered collective learning and integration. Our goal in the coming year is to create a leadership council to maintain momentum and set the agenda for future meetings.

Joint Projects. At Fahnestock, we are joining forces with the Friends of Fahnestock and Hudson Highlands State Parks on the Canopus Lake capital campaign. Our goal is to build the lasting capacity of FOFHH through our capital campaign collaboration. At Jones Beach we are working with Jones Beach Rescue and will use our capital campaign work to help build that friends group.