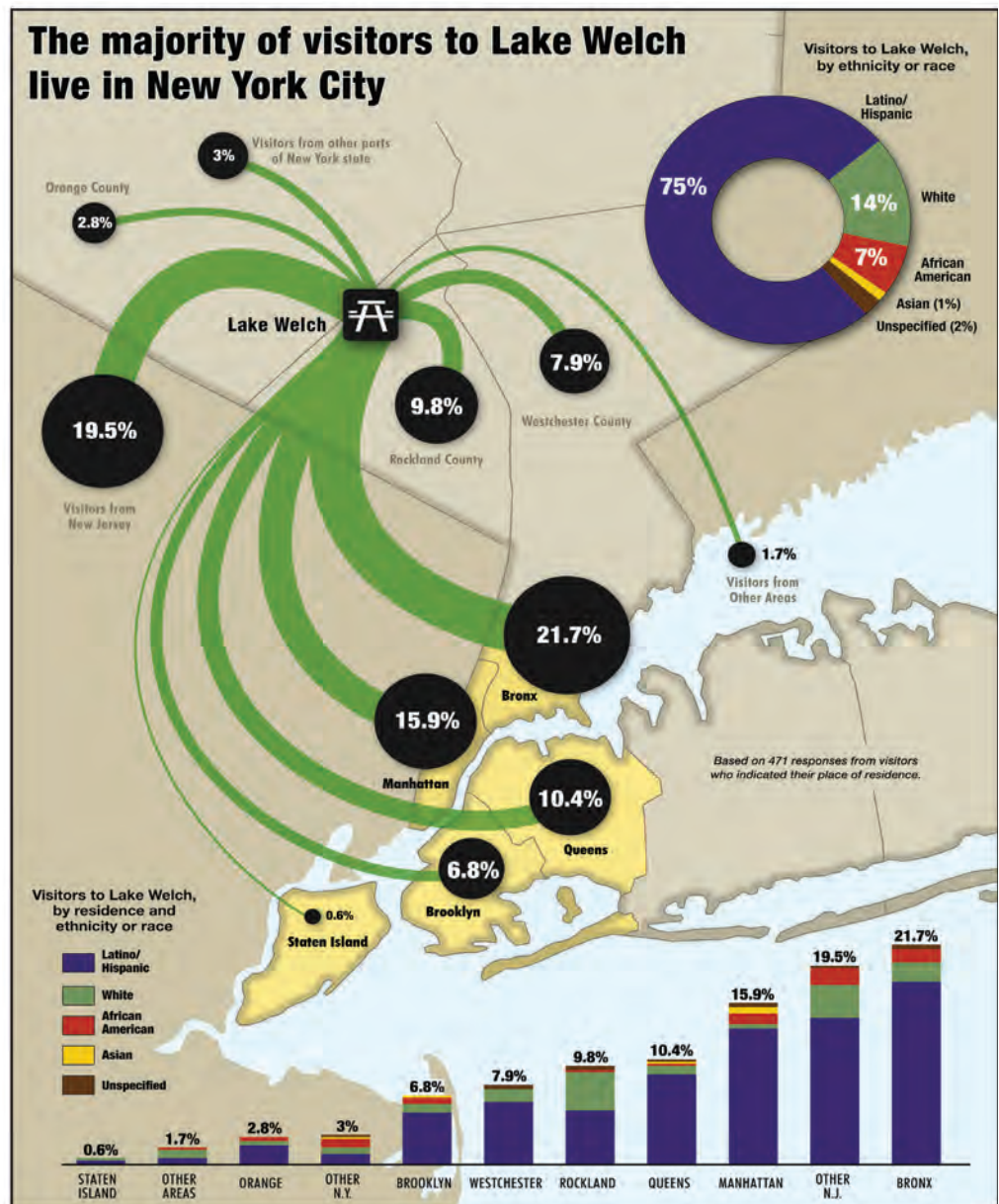


# The Pulse of Parks: Harriman State Park's Lake Welch

A celebration of diversity at a lakefront park close to New York City

A REPORT OF THE OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE'S ALLIANCE FOR NEW YORK STATE PARKS SUMMER 2013

“We need a place for people without a lot of money—it’s very important to our families,” says one visitor. “Without spaces like Lake Welch, we would have very few options. We come from New York City and there is no place like this there.”



## A welcoming beach destination for urban residents

Lake Welch, a 216-acre water body in Harriman State Park, is a favorite destination for families who live in and around New York City. Less than an hour north of the city, the park offers hiking trails and camping and picnic areas tucked into the wooded hills of the Hudson Highlands.

**“People share their stuff or leave it for the next person,” observes one parkgoer. “People are more outgoing here; we talk to each other.”**

### Park attracts visitors from throughout metropolitan area

More than half (54 percent) of surveyed park visitors live in New York City. The Bronx accounts for 21 percent of all visitors, with the largest numbers coming from southern and western portions of the borough; 32 percent come from the other boroughs combined. Twenty percent come from New York’s northern suburbs (Rockland, Westchester, and Orange) and 18 percent from nearby New Jersey counties (Passaic, Bergen, Hudson, and Essex). Other New York and New Jersey locations contribute smaller numbers of visitors.

The broad sandy beach of Lake Welch has become a popular getaway for Hispanic families in particular. Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of Lake Welch visitors are Hispanic, of whom a large majority of those identified themselves as Dominican.

A native of Mexico recalls his first impression of the park: “I had never seen such a beautiful place ... It has become my favorite place in the U.S. when I want to spend time with my family.”

### Families and day-trippers are regulars at the park

The pattern at Lake Welch is for families to come early, choose a spot, and stay for hours. In addition to the typical park activities—swimming, fishing, playing sports, and enjoying the outdoors—socialization is a major attraction for patrons. The park often serves as an extension of people’s living rooms, kitchens, and backyards. From food preparation and cooking to playing dominoes and children’s games, group activities are popular.

For Hispanic visitors, the Spanish language and familiar cultural practices of many fellow patrons create a strong sense of community. “People share their stuff or leave it for the next person,” observes one parkgoer. “People are more outgoing here; we talk to each other.”

### About Lake Welch and Harriman State Park

Harriman State Park, spanning Rockland and Orange counties, was created in 1910 when the Harriman family gave a large parcel of land to the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, which manages the property today.

Now comprising 44,000 acres, it is the second-largest park in New York’s state park system. It features 31 lakes and reservoirs, three swimming beaches, 200 miles of hiking trails, two public camping areas, a network of group camps, miles of streams and scenic roads, and scores of wildlife species, vistas, and vantage points. The Appalachian Trail runs through the park—its closest point to New York City.

#### ABOUT THIS STUDY

A capital needs assessment completed in 2010 by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation identified a statewide backlog of more \$1 billion. The state parks suffer from broken and outdated facilities, the result of decades of insufficient funding for regular maintenance and infrastructure improvement. Recognizing the parks’ importance to all New Yorkers, Governor Cuomo and the state legislature have taken first steps to remedy the problem.

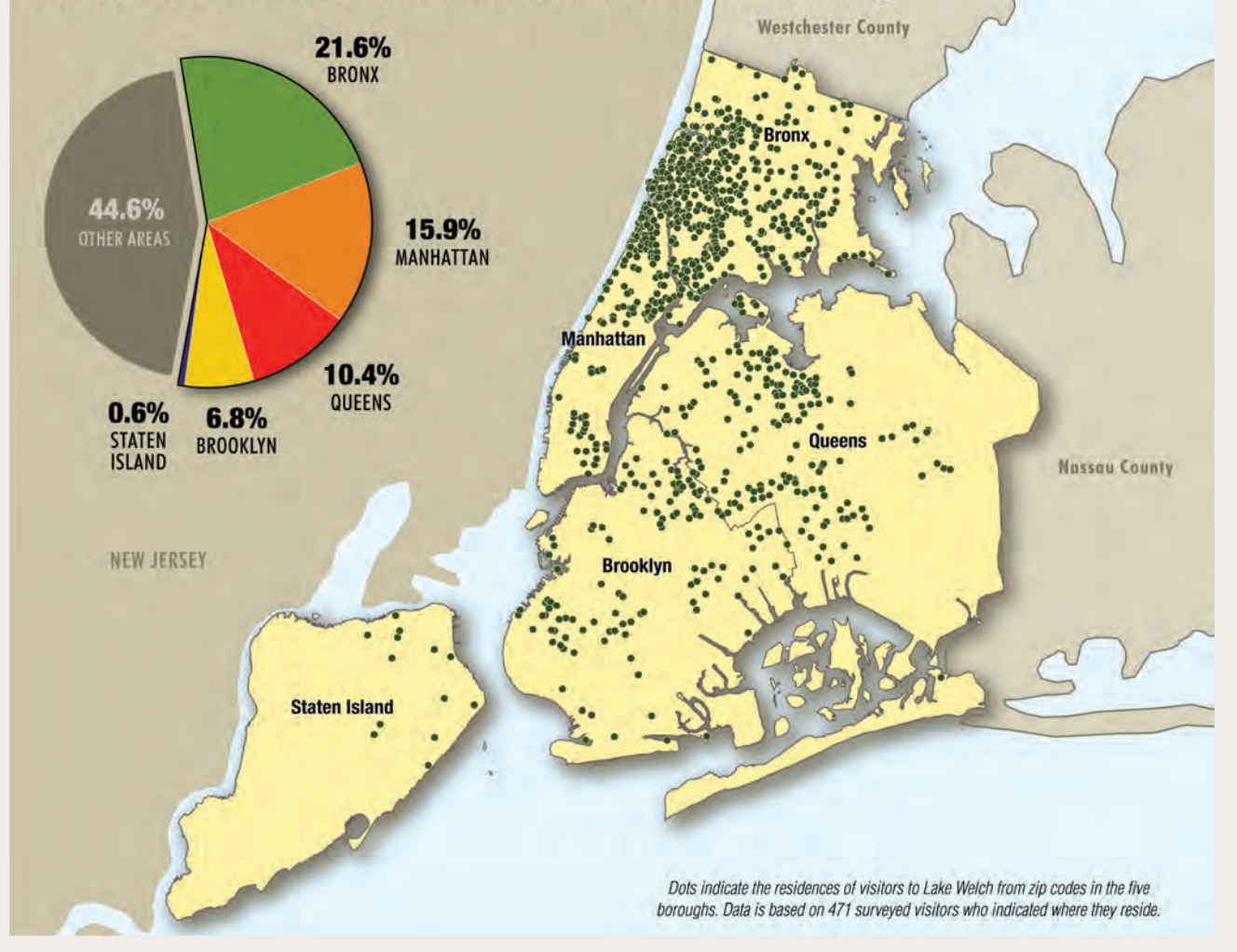
To evaluate the merits of continued investment, the Open Space Institute, with the support of the Dyson Foundation, commissioned a study of Lake Welch at Harriman State Park. The study, aimed at finding out who visits the park and how they

value it, was conducted by the Public Space Research Group at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

Researchers conducted a quantitative demographic survey over three days in July 2012. The survey adhered to standard protocols for random sampling, data collection, and analysis, and the results (based on 488 responses) can be considered statistically reliable.

The researchers then interviewed visitors over four days in representative locations in the park. This qualitative survey’s open-ended questions were designed to elicit information about how and why people used the park. For this portion of the study, 74 visitors were interviewed.

## Over 55% of visitors to Lake Welch come from New York City



**“I had never seen such a beautiful place ... It has become my favorite place in the U.S. when I want to spend time with my family.”**

### How investment in Lake Welch serves the public interest

New York’s 179 state parks were originally intended to serve people in their immediate geographic locations. However, many park visitors now travel across regions to enjoy the state’s natural, cultural, and recreational treasures. State parks north of the New York metropolitan area are destinations for millions of city residents.

Harriman State Park’s Lake Welch is a family-oriented, welcoming destination for people of diverse backgrounds. It is easily accessible to city dwellers, who value the relaxed, natural setting. With 300,000 to 400,000 visitors every year, however, Lake Welch needs care and investment. Harriman State Park requires more than \$45 million in repairs and upgrades, including \$1.2 million for Lake Welch.

Over the past two years, through a renewed commitment by Governor Andrew Cuomo and the state legislature, more than \$180 million has been allocated for state park investments, of which \$8.2 million is designated for Harriman State Park. A new comfort station at Lake Welch is one of the projects planned for Harriman. Continued investment in Lake Welch would ensure that this inviting state park can continue to offer high-quality, affordable, family-friendly recreation for its loyal visitors.



**A visitor who has been coming to Lake Welch for 45 years notes that the park offers “a way of getting away from the city. The air is clean and fresh; you’ve got water and trees. It’s a gateway.”**

#### **More information**

This study is one of three efforts to obtain data that in recent years the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has lacked staff and funding to collect. The other studies involve Harriman State Park and Walkway Over the Hudson.

The Alliance for New York State Parks works to protect and enhance state parks and historic sites for present and future generations.

Visit [www.osiny.org/alliance](http://www.osiny.org/alliance).

*Protect Their Future: New York’s State Parks in Crisis* describes the status of state parks.

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