



AN INITIATIVE OF THE OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE

“Pennies for Parks”

One Cent Plastic Bag Fee Will Fund and Maintain New York’s State Parks

New York’s State Park system is comprised of 178 state parks and 35 historic sites. Some of our state’s most iconic attractions and destinations are state parks. From Jones Beach, Bethpage, Riverbank and Bear Mountain to Saratoga Spa, Allegany and Niagara Falls, New York’s state parks are among the most spectacular and popular state parks in the nation. Last year alone, more than 57 million people visited state parks. An independent study shows that every \$1 spent in public park investment stimulates \$5 in private sector activity.

State parks and historic sites are chronically underfunded.

New York’s depleted state parks system is facing another round of budget cuts. The executive budget reduces funding for New York’s 178 state parks and 35 historic sites by more than \$17 million. Despite record attendance and proven public support for state parks, the proposed budget continues the trend of reduced investment in our once great state park system. While it is reassuring that the agency has no plans to close parks, it is difficult to see how they will be able to achieve required savings without serious reductions and even closure of some park operations.

State parks and historic sites face continuing deterioration of infrastructure.

The crisis facing New York’s state parks goes far beyond this year’s operating budget proposal. From failing swimming pools, bathrooms and crumbling masonry to outdated water and electrical systems, our parks have been diminishing before our eyes for decades. Although parks may technically be open, there are pools, restroom facilities, campsite and other amenities not open to the public due to continuing deterioration of the system. An assessment completed last year by state parks estimated that more than \$1 billion is needed to repair, restore and update parks and historic sites throughout the state.

“Pennies for Parks” will provide long-term funding to support and maintain state parks.

Three out of four New Yorkers support a penny surcharge on plastic grocery store bags if the funds are dedicated to keeping state parks open and well maintained. “Pennies for Parks” (P4P) would generate more than \$60 million a year, while reducing the number of bags that end up littering our communities or burdening our landfills and will be completely avoidable to consumers who choose to use reusable bags.

“Pennies for Parks” appeals to New Yorkers.

As indicated, 73 percent of New Yorkers favor dedicated one cent surcharge to support state parks. New York consumers use, on average, 440 bags per year. In total, this is about 6.6 billion bags. This includes bags dispensed at drug stores, grocery stores and restaurants, but does not include those used for newspapers or at retail outlets, such as department stores. A one cent fee per bag would cost the average consumer only \$4.40 each year. An avoidable expense of \$4.40 a year is not too much to ask of consumers who will appreciate that this funding is being used for a community benefit.

What if consumers stop using plastic bags entirely?

In an ideal world park advocates would love to see people stop using plastic bags. This would make for less waste and a cleaner world. In reality, this will most likely not be the case. And even a substantial drop of generated funding in New York would still be critically important to state parks. While it may not always be at the \$66 million level, there will always be a steady stream of funding from this source as long as plastic bags are in use; one that can provide a sustainable funding base from which to build state park coffers.

Plastic bag taxes have been embraced across the country.

In other areas of the country that have implemented plastic bag fees and bans, consumer resistance was minimal. In Washington, D.C., a five-cent fee on plastic bags has been in place since January 2010, with little disruption. Proceeds from the fee go to the Anacostia River Protection Fund. Vermont is currently considering a charge.

Cities such as San Francisco, Portland (Oregon), and Brownsville Texas have banned the use of plastic bags completely.

Reducing the plastic bag reliance is good for New York’s environment.

There is a compelling policy rationale for directing this revenue to parks. Despite their convenience, plastic bags are not good for the environment and people realize this. They are a major source of litter and contribute significantly to this country’s dependence on oil. It takes 430,000 gallons of oil to make 100 million plastic bags.