

Open Space



Renaissance and Rejuvenation

Restoring Pride in New York's State Parks

Setting the stage for a state parks renaissance, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and state legislators have crafted a budget that seeks to rejuvenate 48 aging and dilapidated parks.

Just two years ago, budget woes nearly shuttered 90 New York State parks and historic sites. Thanks to an army of grassroots activists and supporters, funding was restored and the parks stayed open. The threat of park closures, however, reminded public leaders throughout New York that our parks matter, and it created public awareness in the failing condition of the state's facilities.

Once defined by Frederick Law Olmsted's splendid design at Niagara Falls and the legendary vision of Robert Moses at Jones Beach, the parks system has in recent years become better known for its failing bathrooms and faulty bridges, crumbling trails and stonework and outdated water and electrical systems.

In 2010, the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) identified a system-wide capital backlog of more than \$1 billion. A *New York Times* travel feature on Niagara Falls summed up the situation in one word: "shabby."

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Our Mission

The Open Space Institute (OSI) protects scenic, natural and historic landscapes to ensure public enjoyment, conserve habitats and sustain community character.

Since 1964, OSI has protected over 116,000 acres in New York State and through loans and grants assisted in the protection of more than 1.9 million acres from Quebec to Georgia.



Niagara Falls

Reflections on Life & Land

Dear Friends,

The Open Space Institute's land protection efforts continue to expand into new geographies and with broader strategies. In this edition of *Open Space*, let me call your attention to two OSI initiatives that enhance conservation: our advocacy for New York's state parks, and our research on where and how best to protect land. OSI's mission will always be about protecting the most vulnerable open spaces and the most dramatic landscapes, but conservation is more than just buying land. It has many layers.

Deprived of capital maintenance for decades, New York's state parks have been in crisis. Two years ago, as many as 90 of our 213 parks and historic sites might have closed had public outcry not saved them. Launched that same year, OSI's Alliance for New York State Parks has helped engineer the first steps of a turnaround—including an \$89 million funding package—in a remarkably short time.

Learn more about this important OSI program: how it helped influence policy and highlights New York's spectacular but underfunded park system.

Outside of New York, OSI has successfully partnered with land trusts throughout the southern Appalachian region of western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee and northwestern Georgia. Now we turn to coastal North Carolina, where some of the most biodiverse forests in the country sustain a timber industry that supports tens of thousands of people.

Realizing that this region is at a critical juncture, OSI has released a study that will guide nonprofits, government agencies and landowners as they consider protection strategies for this 33-county area.

I hope these articles give you new insight into what we do at the Open Space Institute. As always, thank you for your generosity, which permits us to apply informed conservation to our important landscapes and open spaces.

Kim Elliman
President and CEO

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1350 Broadway, Suite 201
New York, NY 10018
Tel: 212.290.8200
Fax: 212.244.3441
www.osiny.org

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Jeff Simms
Production: Susan Morningstar
Graphic Design: Jenkins & Page
Printer: Wheel-Grace
Front cover photos:
Inset photo: Bear Mountain
Lodge Below: Bear Mountain
State Park; Photo: New York
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Keeping Working Forests as Forests

OSI's North Carolina Timber Industry Study



North Carolina Forestry Association

A pine forest in North Carolina

Eastern North Carolina is one of the most productive locations in the world for growing trees. From Brunswick County to Pasquotank County, prime forestland dominates the landscape, luring investors from around the world to the Tarheel State's coastal region.

In addition to employing nearly 80,000 people, working forests here offer inestimable value to the public by protecting clean water sources and wildlife habitat while buffering the state's substantial investment in already-conserved public lands.

"Retaining Investment in Working Forests," an Open Space Institute report developed in collaboration with the Partnership for Southern Forest Conservation (PFSFC), studies the 33-county eastern North Carolina region—one of 11 priority areas in the Southeast where OSI has identified innovative opportunities for landscape-scale working forest conservation. OSI's report considers the economic realities facing North Carolina's forestland owners, with a focus on timber investment management organizations (TIMOs) and real estate investment trusts (REITs), managers of large real estate holdings for investors.

"Eastern North Carolina has risen to the top of our priority list because of its unique concentration of working forests with strong associated markets, a plethora of at-risk species, outstanding water resources and an established conservation infrastructure," said Peter Stengel of the U.S. Endowment for Forests & Communities and chair of PFSFC. "This report will provide a base from which to launch significant efforts to keep these working forests working into the future."

Because of the size of their holdings, TIMO and REIT investors are both critical conservation partners and important contributors to local economies. The average size of forestland ownerships in North Carolina is less than 15 acres, but the seven TIMO and REITs with forestland in the region hold an average of 153,000 acres. If the state is to maintain regional markets and jobs, it is essential that this land remain forest.

However, only 2 percent of the state's working forests are protected with conservation easements—one of the primary tools that landowners, NGOs and government agencies have used to keep forests in forest use. Although development has slowed since the real

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Open Space Institute

Retaining Working Forests:
Eastern North Carolina



Download a copy at:
www.osiny.org/NCTimoReport

OSI's study emphasizes that nonprofits, landowners and policymakers must work together to identify ways to keep forestland as forest.

Keeping Forests

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estate boom of 2006, OSI's analysis suggests that as many as 344,000 acres in the region are targets for conversion to other uses, which would cost North Carolinians jobs while compromising water quality and wildlife habitat.

North Carolina is currently the leading forest-related employer in the eastern United States. Statewide, forestry contributes nearly \$5 billion to North Carolina's gross domestic product while generating \$445 million in income taxes each year.

Forestland in eastern North Carolina also plays a critical role in maintaining rural drinking water quality. The conversion of these forests to other uses would increase sediment and nitrogen loading within estuaries, degrading household and municipal water sources for some 4 million people.

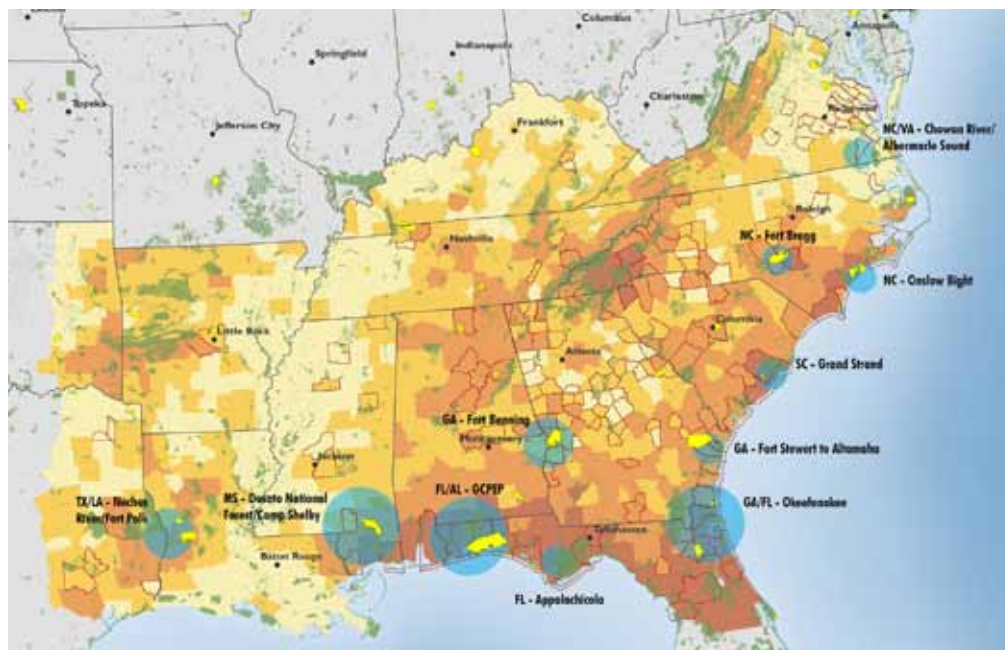
Finally, the eastern part of the state boasts the richest coastal biodiversity in the United States outside Florida. The region supports endangered wildlife habitat, with as many as 83 at-risk species

per county, including the red-cockaded woodpecker, Bachman's sparrow, red wolf, Carolina crawfish frog and mimic glass lizard.

As the lasting implications of the 2008 economic downturn become clear, OSI's study emphasizes that nonprofits, landowners and policymakers must work together to identify ways to keep forestland as forest.

Conservation groups and landowners elsewhere have used working forest easements to protect large forests. OSI's report examines why the easement model isn't being used in eastern North Carolina and evaluates other conservation tools, such as Department of Defense programs, wetland mitigation, endangered species banking and longleaf pine restoration credits.

"We are at a critical juncture and must identify new markets and strategic incentives for retaining large working forests," said Kim Elliman, OSI's CEO and president. "In this report, we state the challenges and find some new opportunities for achieving conservation at scale."



The Core Working Forest Areas map highlights: forests at risk of fragmentation (blue), strong wood markets with a high number of at-risk species (dark yellow and orange) and regions anticipated to lose over 10% of forestland (red outlines)

Land Matters *News & Events*

View from the Rosendale Trestle

The next stage of the renovation of the historic Rosendale Railroad Trestle has begun, and OSI projects that the 150-foot-high bridge will reopen to the public before the end of 2012. This winter the old decking and railings were removed, and the fabrication and installation of the new railings began in March. OSI and its partner the Wallkill Valley Land Trust will complete the decking with volunteer help.

The Trestle will be a landmark along the extended and refurbished Wallkill

Valley Rail Trail, which will run for 24 miles through the towns of Gardiner, New Paltz, Rosendale, Ulster and on to Kingston.

The total cost of repairing the Trestle and making it safe for hikers and bikers will be \$1.1 million. Community support for the project has been crucial: contributors have raised nearly \$800,000 thus far.

Go to www.TracktheTrestle.org to donate toward the project and track progress as we enter the home stretch.



Greg Miller

Rosendale Trestle seen from OSI-protected Joppenbergh Mountain

Planning for Lower Hudson Valley Growth



Behan Planning and Design

The Open Space Institute, in partnership with the Environmental Defense Fund, Pattern for Progress, the Regional Plan Association, Scenic Hudson and The Trust for Public Land, has launched a smart-growth plan that will address carbon emissions, economic efficiency and quality of life in the lower Hudson River Valley.

Contracted by the New York Department of State, the partners will use smart-growth principles, such as proximity to infrastructure and designated conservation areas, to analyze

several growth scenarios from the present to 2035. The results will aid state planners as they identify the areas that can accommodate population and economic growth while minimizing greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental damage.

Ultimately, the groups will produce a plan and implementation strategy for a region-wide smart-growth approach, with priority growth and preservation areas.

Habitat Protection Program a Success

After three years, OSI has concluded a conservation finance project to protect wildlife habitat in the northeast. Launched in 2009 with the generous support of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Saving New England's Wildlife initiative has regranted all \$5 million of its capital to land conservation projects in New Hampshire, Maine and Massachusetts. The Fund supported 30 projects in all and helped protect some 20,000 acres of critical wildlife habitat valued at more than \$50 million in the most densely populated corner of America.

OSI selected Saving New England's Wildlife projects strategically for their ability to generate additional support for the protection of ecologically rich and diverse lands. In aggregate, the projects drew \$45 million in critical but scarce public and private funds to the topmost conservation priorities in the region.

OSI's Conservation Finance Program remains active in New England through its Community Forest Fund and Transborder Land Protection Fund.



Brett Cole

Renaissance

(cont. from page 1)

“State parks should be a source of pride for New Yorkers, not embarrassment,” said Erik Kulleseid, executive director of the Alliance for New York State Parks, a program created by the Open Space Institute in the wake of the 2010 parks crisis.

Earlier this year, Governor Andrew Cuomo proposed an \$89 million funding package for parks capital improvements. Now approved, the money will come from the New York Works Fund, an economic stimulus program intended to promote job growth. Much of the work will target major repair projects that have been on the back burner for years, if not decades.

Water and sewer systems at Bear Mountain and Harriman State Parks; the failing track, gymnasium and ice rink at Riverbank; and the deteriorating historic bathhouse, public facilities and first aid stations at Jones Beach are among dozens of “shovel-ready” projects slated for repair and improvement.

“The Alliance applauds the action of Governor Cuomo and the commitment of the state legislature to approve this investment,” Kulleseid said. “These funds will start us down the road of restoring New York State to its rightful place as a national leader and exemplary steward of some of the country’s most magnificent

landscapes, as well as many valued recreational and cultural assets.”

Although the governor’s funding package is a great start toward reversing decades of underinvestment in state parks, a permanent solution is needed to rebuild and properly maintain the properties.

“Pennies for Parks,” an Alliance-backed initiative, would create a dedicated funding source for parks through the imposition a five-cent fee on disposable grocery and retail bags. The fee would generate much-needed revenue for state parks while discouraging bag usage, thereby reducing litter and helping ease the burden on landfills.

Similar programs have been successful in Washington, D.C., and Montgomery County, Maryland. The Pennies for Parks legislation is currently under consideration in the New York State Senate and Assembly.

Even though the future of state parks is considerably brighter than it was two short years ago, much work remains. The Alliance’s long term-vision and commitment to protect and preserve our state parks is needed now more than ever.

As part of its efforts to strengthen public support for state parks, the Alliance continues its mission to promote public-private partnerships and engages in private fund-raising campaigns to build a healthy, vibrant park system for the 21st century.



The Alliance for New York State Parks projects include restoring the West Bath House at Jones Beach, Long Island, NY

Courtesy of New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Leveraging Our Strengths

Commissioner Rose Harvey on Building Partnerships for Parks

Rose Harvey was named Commissioner of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation in 2011, after 27 years with The Trust for Public Land, where she spearheaded a highly successful urban parks program. She spoke recently with Erik Kulleseid, the executive director of OSI's Alliance for New York State Parks, about the state of state parks, funding and partnerships.

This year Governor Cuomo's budget included state parks in the New York Works Fund, an economic stimulus program that will largely target the state's transportation needs—to fix roads and bridges that are crumbling—but also address environmental infrastructure. Why do you think state parks were included? What judgment does that reflect on the part of the governor?

The governor and his staff recognize two important park roles. First, he understands that the parks are affordable getaways for the 57 million people who visit them and that they serve people close to home, in their communities. Parks provide a service of recreation, relaxation and connection to nature that is affordable and accessible.

Second, I think Governor Cuomo recognized early on that this infusion of capital will create jobs and serve as an economic boost directly, just in the act of improving the parks, and indirectly as improved parks drive greater visitation, tourism and all the other economic benefits that parks provide to New York State.

Governor Cuomo has embraced public-private partnerships to help rebuild and restore state parks and historic sites. What evolution does that reflect and what is its significance?

I believe—and I know the governor believes this, too—that throughout every sector of New York State, expanded public-private and public-public partnerships are essential for the future of

government and its effectiveness and efficiency. Governor Cuomo is committed to restoring state government's can-do spirit, but part of that initiative means harnessing private sector energy wherever possible. With respect to parks, it's even more important now, particularly as we look at our operating budget and our staffing, to recognize that there are many things that the private sector can do better, even if the agency were fully staffed and flush with resources.

It's easy to forget that partnerships have long been a part of the parks system. Some of our greatest parks were created through the generosity of private individuals. Take Letchworth State Park, for example, which was assembled by William Pryor Letchworth and donated to the state in 1907. Bear Mountain State Park was created through the donation of 10,000 magnificent acres from the Harriman Family, along with financial contributions from other leading citizens. Private individuals have supported programs like our children's summer camps, and early on we also entered into agreements with businesses to build hotels, restaurants and other services that would deepen and lengthen the state parks experience.

So these partnerships are about leverage, about leveraging our respective strengths, recognizing that all of us have limited resources.

I see OSI's Alliance program as a perfect example of a partnership that has and will hugely leverage what we can do, park by park and at a statewide level. You've already done it in terms of providing support and technical services to our scores of friends' groups. You're focusing on our flagship parks where we hope to put New York Works capital, and you are going out and fundraising. It's partners like the Alliance that can do that much better than we can. We can focus on the act of spending our money, and you'll take it and match it and help us with the design and the aesthetics and all that goes into capital improvements.



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

Read the whole interview at
www.osiny.org/harvey

For information on the Alliance
for New York State Parks go to
www.osiny.org/Alliance

Open Space Institute

1350 Broadway, Suite 201
New York, NY 10018-7799
Tel: 212.290.8200
Fax: 212.244.3441

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Since the early 1990s, OSI has added over 8,000 acres to the Clarence Fahnestock State Park, in Putnam and Orange County, NY, more than doubling its size to over 14,000 acres. Noted for its wide array of biking, hiking and equestrian trails—including the Appalachian Trail—the park attracts 245,000 visitors yearly. Upgrading the facilities at Canopus Lake is a priority for OSI's Alliance for NYS Parks program.