

PLEASE HELP US SAVE NEW JERSEY'S PARKS AND HISTORIC SITES!

Attached is information concerning the proposed new state budget that would severely cut the budgets of the Divisions of Fish and Wildlife and Parks and Forestry of the Department of Environmental Protection, eliminate staff, close parks, and cripple others. Fighting these cuts is so important that we are not the least bit sorry to be filling your mailboxes.

Even if you have never written a letter on an issue, **PLEASE WRITE NOW!** For suggestions as to recipients, please see below.

The press releases and editorials attached have much more information than you can use, but here are a few additional talking points relating to the D & R specifically.

- The Canal Park is used for cycling, walking, hiking, jogging, birding, canoeing, picnicking, camping, nature appreciation, enjoyment of scenery, photography, and horseback riding; it serves as a gateway to the Delaware River, for boating, paddling, tubing, and swimming, among other recreations.
- The canal is the subject of historic interest, in its structures and buildings, and the history that can be interpreted surrounding it, from Revolutionary War activity to 19th century industrial progress in which it played an active role.
- The proposed DEP budget states:
 - The methodology for closure or elimination of services was as follows:
 - What is the approximate visitation/attendance at the site?
 - What is the revenue generated by an area compared to operational and staffing costs?
 - Are similar public services provided at a nearby state site?
 - Can the area be effectively closed to the public and will such closure result in savings?

The D & R, with an estimated 1,870,723 visits in 2006, is one of the most heavily used in the state; only Liberty State Park and perhaps Long Beach Island SP (both staying open) have comparably high attendance figures, and the answers to “nearby state site” and “can the area be effectively closed” is a resounding “NO”. The D & R cannot charge admission except at its Bulls Island campsite because it is not a self-contained unit with controlled entrance. It seems that it is being unduly penalized because of this geography. Shouldn't heavy usage outweigh the bottom line?

- If DEP would totally overhaul its lease system and had maintained its real estate all along the D & R could bring in considerable revenue.
- DEP proposes consolidations between the four regional offices. We would suggest that total elimination of this intermediate layer of Parks and Forestry management and a shakeup in Trenton should be considered. We would further suggest that an outside study of upper and middle management would ultimately accrue more savings than cutting people and closing facilities on the ground. The park superintendents should be allowed more responsibility and choice – they know their facilities best and which of their staff members and programs are most successful. The parks without exception are already just scraping by—we know this to be true, but are convinced they could do some belt-tightening that would not have to involve closures and staff dismissals.
- Since 1974, the park has served us well as **Central New Jersey's back yard**. It offers a respite for residents of all ages, physical abilities, skin colors, and economic/ educational levels. It is free, always open, and user-friendly.
- **Proposed direct effects upon the D & R:**
 - CLOSED:** Bulls Island and access areas and parking lots along the feeder and river access;
 - GONE:** our good friends who interpret the park to students of all ages, naturalist Stephanie Fox and historian Vicki Chirco; this means so no more walks, talks, guided bike rides, workshops, exhibitions, scientific wildlife study and protection, historical research, programs, and mentoring of school children;
 - GONE:** Coleen and her maintenance staff on the feeder, resulting in
 - REDUCED MAINTENANCE:** greater expense to eventually restore what is allowed to run down and deteriorate.
 - REDUCED MAIN OFFICE HOURS IN WINTER** (something we probably can temporarily live with, although it involves staff hours and wages).

A broader overview of the subject was presented by Margaret O’Gorman of Conserve Wildlife in the budget committee’s public hearings. It can be accessed at http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/legislativepub/budget%202009/032608/_O’Gorman_M.pdf .

The NJ Senate and Assembly budget committee meetings to consider the DEP section of the proposed budget are scheduled for April 23 at 10:00 am and April 17 at 2:00 pm, respectively, so we must act fast. Members of the Senate budget committee in districts that border the canal are Barbara Buono, chair, Shirley Turner, and Leonard Lance; all budget committee members but one have good environmental and historical preservation voting records. We, their constituents, must tell them how we feel. Even if they don’t read them all, if there is a huge pile of letters voicing opposition and a very small second pile, they will have ammunition to vote their consciences. The Assembly budget committee chair is Louis D. Greenwald, and members in districts along the canal include Joseph Vas and Joseph R. Malone. Contact information for all legislators is at www.njleg.state.nj.us. We suggest writing to those mentioned and to your own legislators. We suggest also writing to Governor Corzine (whose purpose in devising this budget was to be responsible and even-handed and cut all departments proportionally – he will be looking only at the bottom line and has little if anything directly to do with which cuts are made); DEP commissioner Lisa Jackson, and Parks and Forestry acting director, Jeanne Mroczko (the suggested cuts are of their design, but this was something they were forced to do) – their contact information is at <http://www.nj.gov/dep/easyaccess/nathisres.htm#parksandforestry>), and please don’t forget letters to the editors of your local papers! Please ask friends, neighbors and relatives to write, too. If you really cannot write, please phone or email. This is not a situation where you can leave it to others. **EVERY MESSAGE COUNTS!**

Thank you!

Barbara Ross