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NEWS RELEASE

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New Report Highlights Impact of Friends Groups

Groups raised \$9 million and donated 10,000 volunteer hours toward revitalization of NYS Park System

ALBANY, N.Y. – Parks & Trails New York (PTNY), the state’s leading advocate for parks and trails, today released [*You Gotta Have Friends*](#). The report summarizes the results of a census of the non-profit Friends organizations that support New York’s state parks and historic sites and demonstrates that these grassroots groups are poised to make an even greater contribution to the renaissance of the New York State park system.

“Friends groups often accomplish Herculean tasks on shoestring budgets,” said Parks & Trails New York Executive Director Robin Dropkin. “What they lack in money, they make up for in time, creativity, hard work and commitment.”

A Friends group is a group of individuals who work to support, steward, and promote a park or historic site, or multiple sites. They come in all shapes and sizes. The smallest are all-volunteer organizations, some of which are only loosely organized; others are registered non-profit organizations with regular meetings and bylaws. The largest Friends groups are conservancies and foundations capable of raising large sums of money for the care of their parks and historic sites. Currently there are 90 state park and historic site Friends groups in New York State.

PTNY conducted a census of Friends groups in the winter of 2015-2016. Among the major findings of the census, Friends groups raised nearly \$9 million in 2015 and donated more than 10,000 hours of work in preserving and enhancing state parks and historic sites every year. Most of the funds raised go towards capital improvements, programs and events such as I Love My Park Day. Many groups also provide significant operations support to the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). Programs hosted by Friends groups were enjoyed by nearly 300,000 visitors. Friends groups do all of this with limited resources; more than half of the responding Friends groups have budgets of \$10,000 or less and the vast majority—70% of those who participated in the census—have no paid staff.

Friends groups in other states face similar challenges with limited resources, but a major way in which New York stands apart is the strong bipartisan support of state leaders. Through the NY Parks 2020 initiative, Governor Cuomo has committed \$900 million of public and private funding to go towards the revitalization of state parks through 2020. The Governor and legislative leaders have also provided two years of support for the innovative NYS Park and Trail Partnership Program, a \$500,000 capacity-building grant program for state park and historic Friends groups funded through the NYS Environmental Protection Fund.

In its report, available online at <http://ptny.org/publications/reports>, PTNY makes several recommendations based on the results of the census and the most significant needs identified. The recommendations are to:

1. Provide financial resources to build the capacity of Friends groups;
2. Provide opportunities for networking and information-sharing among Friends groups; and
3. Provide opportunities for developing resources and training on non-profit best practices.

Rose Harvey, Commissioner of the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation said, “Our Friends groups go above and beyond to make our park system a success. We rely on their energy, talents and commitment to improve and connect people to parks, historic sites and trails across New York.”

About Parks & Trails New York: Parks & Trails New York is the leading statewide advocate for parks and trails, dedicated since 1985 to improving the health and quality of life of all New Yorkers by working with community organizations and municipalities to envision, create, promote, and protect a growing network of parks, greenways and trails throughout the state for all to use and enjoy. For more information, visit www.ptny.org.

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