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GOVERNOR SIGNS BILL CREATING NIAGARA RIVER GREENWAY COMMISSION

Greenway Will Reconnect Communities to River, Promote Tourism and Create New Jobs Announces 34-Acre Land Purchase to Enhance Recreation and Access to Niagara River

Governor George E. Pataki today signed into law legislation creating the Niagara River Greenway Commission. The Commission, first called for by the Governor in his 2004 State of the State Address, will aid in the planning and development of a greenway of interconnected parks, river access points and waterfront trails along the Niagara River from Lake Erie at Buffalo to Lake Ontario at the site of the historic Fort Niagara.

The Governor also announced today that the State is acquiring 34 acres of land along Spicer Creek in the Town of Grand Island which will provide new public access and recreational opportunities along the Niagara River. The parcel is adjacent to Town parkland and will be managed jointly by the Town and the State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). The land will be open to Western New York residents and visitors for passive outdoor recreational activities such as bird watching, hiking, fishing and canoeing.

"Today's bill-signing is the next step in fulfilling our vision for an interconnected Greenway along the Niagara River stretching from Buffalo to Fort Niagara," Governor Pataki said. "The Niagara River Greenway Commission will provide a solid framework for open space protection and public access along the Niagara River and build on our success in revitalizing Niagara Falls and its parkland. I'm proud that this new Commission will work with local governments and our Western New York delegation to boost tourism, enhance recreation and create new jobs and economic opportunities for the people of Western New York.

"Protecting valuable open spaces such as the Spicer Creek property is critical in the effort to develop a continuous Greenway along the Niagara River. Through these and other conservation initiatives, we are working to connect communities within the Niagara River corridor, preserve one of the State's most important ecosystems, and open up new outdoor recreational opportunities for residents and visitors to the region," Governor Pataki added.

The Governor was joined by State and local officials at a bill signing ceremony today at Fisherman's Park in the city of North Tonawanda, where he also announced that the New York Power Authority (NYPA) will provide \$200,000 to aid in the planning and development of the Niagara River Greenway.

U.S. Representative Thomas M. Reynolds said, "The Niagara River Greenway Commission is another important tool to increasing tourism and economic development, improving public access of promoting our area's vast natural resources. This is good news both for our area and all of New York State."

Assembly Republican Leader Charles H. Nesbitt said, "The Niagara River waterfront boasts some of New York's most spectacular scenery. The establishment of this Greenway Commission will help to ensure the preservation of that natural beauty. I congratulate Governor Pataki for seizing on this unique opportunity to marry the conservation of open spaces with the stated goals of creating jobs and promoting tourism in our region. The people of Western New York will benefit on all counts."

Senator George D. Maziarz said, "I commend the Governor for acting on our shared view that the Niagara River Greenway Commission will be an important part of the Niagara Region's future. We must act as responsible stewards of this tremendous natural resource which flows right through our backyard. The Commission will help us build the partnerships necessary to promote greenway access for local residents and international visitors alike."

Senator Dale M. Volker said, "Across our great state, Governor Pataki has been an ardent supporter in improving and protecting our State's natural resources, recreational assets and enhancing open space preservation. Creating the Niagara River Greenway Commission will allow for the smart, efficient, and a long-term planning use of this incredible natural asset that will be accessible to our residents, and preserve it for future generations of New Yorkers and their families. As Co-Chairman of the Western New York State Legislative Delegation, I would like to thank Governor Pataki for his continued commitment in partnering with local governments, and I look forward to working with him, and my fellow colleagues in the State Assembly, to improve and protect one of our regions most precious God-given natural resources."

Senator Mary Lou Rath said, "The creation of the Niagara River Greenway Commission is an important step in the revitalization and development of communities located in the Niagara region. By working together with local government officials and various historic preservation experts, this commission will greatly benefit communities along the Niagara River by expanding recreational opportunities for tourists and visitors and attracting new investment dollars to the entire region."

Senator Byron W. Brown said, "The Governor's signing legislation to create the Niagara River Greenway Commission begins an historic time for Western New York. I, for one, look forward to working with the Niagara River Greenway Commission to expand tourism and recreation along the trails and shores of Lake Erie, Lake Ontario and the Niagara River."

Assemblyman Samuel Hoyt said, "I am delighted to join the Governor today for this historic announcement. My bill, which the Governor signed today, will create a dynamic synergy between Buffalo, Niagara Falls and all the communities in-between as we work

together to develop a comprehensive waterfront access strategy. As one of the remaining undeveloped first-growth areas along the shoreline, Spicer Creek is a unique piece of our region's waterfront and has significant environmental and ecological importance. On behalf of my constituents on Grand Island, I thank the Governor for joining us in protecting the Spicer Creek wetlands and the various wildlife found here, and for contributing to public waterfront recreational areas. The work of this commission will be felt for generations to come, and I am looking forward to the positive social and economic impacts these efforts will bring for our region."

Assemblywoman Francine DelMonte said, "When the Niagara River Greenway is completed, tourists will have an added incentive to visit and stay in Niagara Falls. The Greenway will complement the Niagara Wine Trail, the casino and other tourist attractions throughout Niagara County. I hope that we can continue to work together in a bipartisan manner to get results for Niagara County."

Joel A. Giambra, Erie County Executive said, "Providing greater public access to green space is important for promoting tourism and improving the quality of life in Western New York. Governor Pataki truly understands the importance of protecting upstate New York's greatest natural assets for future generations of New Yorkers and visitors to enjoy."

Bill Ross, Chairman of the Niagara County Legislature said, "The signing of the Greenway act will allow Niagara County a greater opportunity to compete for tourism dollars on the Niagara Frontier while presenting to the people of Western New York the potential of 35 miles or better of community parkland."

State Parks Commissioner Bernadette Castro said, "With Governor Pataki signing this new law, the Niagara River Greenway will help fully integrate the physical connection linking neighborhoods from Buffalo to Fort Niagara along these scenic waterfronts. Following the Governor's unprecedented investment in our State parks here in the Niagara region, this State and local partnership is the next step to further defining the area's rich natural heritage. We look forward to working with the Greenway Commission and the local communities as a successful draft plan is developed that will safeguard these recreational resources and enrich the visitor's experience and the quality of life for western New Yorkers."

DEC Commissioner Erin M. Crotty said, "This project promises to help fulfill Governor Pataki's ambitious vision for this region by protecting valuable open space and improving public recreational opportunities. We look forward to working closely with the Town of Grand Island to manage this important parcel as part of the Town's park system."

Louis P. Ciminelli, chairman of the Power Authority said, "This is a hugely important day for the Niagara Frontier. As a life-long resident of Western New York, I've watched the Niagara River and recognized the potential for enhanced tourism, economic growth and environmental progress for years. Today, I am proud and happy to be part of this positive step forward."

The Niagara River is a priority project identified in the State Open Space Conservation Plan in recognition of its unique ecosystem that supports significant fish and wildlife habitat. The 34-acre property being acquired by the State is located along East River Road in the Town of Grand Island and includes rights to a portion of the bed of the Niagara River along 1,600 feet of its shoreline. The property is bounded to the south by Spicer Creek, and is largely located within a State-regulated Class I wetland.

Under Governor Pataki's leadership, the State has protected more than 780,000 acres of land - an amount of land roughly equal to the size of the state of Rhode Island. In his State of the State address this year, Governor Pataki set forth the goal of making New York a national leader in open space preservation, building on an earlier commitment made in 2002 to protect an additional one million acres of land within ten years.

The Governor's plan to create the Niagara River Greenway is the final step to restoring Frederick Law Olmsted's 19th century vision for open space and conservation areas along the Niagara River. Olmsted, America's greatest landscape architect, once described the Niagara River corridor as one of the most beautiful places in America, equal to or exceeding Yosemite Valley in California.

Under the legislation signed into law by the Governor today, the Greenway Commission will be responsible for developing a plan that will:

- Designate the specific boundaries of the Greenway;
- Create an inventory of existing park and other lands under the jurisdiction of the State, public corporations and municipalities;
- Identify other lands that can contribute to the purposes of the Greenway;
- Recommend how the Greenway could be linked to upland and interior communities in order to promote linkages to the River;
- Evaluate how economic development activities in proximity to the Greenway can support and complement the Greenway; - Identify ways for the Commission to work with municipal, State and Federal agencies, public and private corporations, not-for-profit organizations and private property owners and interests; and
- Make recommendations for the on-going operation and maintenance of the Greenway.

The Commission's draft plan will be subject to public comment and hearings and must be approved by the municipalities within the designated boundaries of the Greenway. The plan then shall be submitted to the Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation within two years of the effective date of the Act for review and approval.

The Commission will be responsible for establishing advisory committees, including a Local Government Advisory Committee consisting of the chief elected official of each municipality adjacent to the River, and a Citizens' Advisory Committee consisting of various interest groups.

Activities of the Commission will be coordinated with each municipality and their park, cultural, and local planning activities. The Commission will not have the power of eminent domain.

The Commission will be made up of 14 voting members, with eight appointed by the Governor. Two of the eight will be appointed upon the recommendation of the Temporary President of the State Senate, and two upon the recommendation of the Speaker of the Assembly. Each of those appointments must be comprised of residents of a municipality adjacent to the Niagara River.

Additionally, six voting members of the Commission will serve "ex officio." They include the Secretary of State; and the Commissioners of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; the Department of Environmental Conservation; the Department of Transportation; and the Department of Economic Development; as well as the Chairperson of the New York Power Authority, or their designees.

Each of the appointees will serve a term of four years. The members will receive no compensation for their service and the Governor will select a chairperson for the Commission.

The Commission will meet at least once every two months until approval of its plan by the Commissioner, and will meet quarterly thereafter.