

EDITORIAL: Is Liberty State Park doomed?

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The other shoe is dropping at Liberty State Park. Goodbye, precious parkland. Hello, cheesy entertainment venues. Gov. Chris Christie has long wanted to plow under a large swath of the park to throw up hotels and amusements and whatever else redevelopers say might generate revenue on the site. It's all part of Christie's euphemistic "Sustainable Parks" concept to squeeze more money out of our green spaces by destroying large portions of them.

So this week the administration unveiled some ideas in an 18-page report produced by the state Department of Environmental Protection with the express purpose of examining prospects for large-scale development of the park.

Do not believe a single word from anyone in the administration, including the DEP itself, trying to temper concerns of environmentalists and others wishing to preserve the integrity of the park. Do not accept anything public officials or anyone else connected with the project say in support of the wondrous ways that new construction and the remainder of the existing park will blend together for the greater good of all. A DEP spokesman went so far as to trivialize the plans as similar to "enhanced amenities" at parks like Yosemite and Yellowstone. Yosemite is more than 760,000 acres, Yellowstone tops 2 million. Liberty State Park is 1,200 — half of which are underwater.

This represents an anti-environmental attack on land over which developers have long drooled, and the DEP is merely serving as a Christie minion. The governor, as is his nature, is again bowing down to the biggest pockets, but he's not alone in this. Some Democratic leaders in North Jersey haven't exactly been trying to stop it either, although Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop, for one, vows his opposition.

Alarms went up late last year when Christie inserted a last-minute amendment in a larger bill that would give oversight of the park to the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority. The key phrase in the amendment was a provision allowing the authority to "evaluate, approve, and implement any plan or plans for the further preservation, development, enhancement, or improvement of Liberty State Park."

The obvious intent of the amendment is to clear a path to future development, and the last-minute maneuvering was designed to suppress public awareness and comment. The DEP report on developing the park was already in the works, and a later move to "clarify" the legislation by reinforcing the DEP commissioner's final say over any project in the park makes little difference to the Christie administration. The governor will make sure DEP is on board, or boot out the naysayers.

We urge anyone who cares at all about Liberty State Park to pursue every available course to block the administration's redevelopment plans — through public protests, legal action, political activism, whatever it takes. And not *just* because of the plans themselves, the details of which can still take many forms.

The administration does not deserve to get its way on this. This has been a wildly dishonest process from the beginning, and that cannot be forgotten or dismissed, regardless of any merits the project might have.