

Coalition to Save Liberty State Park

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Dear Governor Christie:

We fundamentally disagree with your “Sustainable Parks” policy as state parks should not have to pay for themselves. State parks serve the Public Good and New Jerseyans’ quality of life!

We call on you to uphold your responsibility to ensure that the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) respects and protects our priceless public trust resources on behalf of current and future generations. Please abandon your current plans to privatize key portions of Liberty State Park (LSP) and other state parks. These plans are antithetical to the purpose of our public parks and natural areas, which should be free of commercial leases, except for appropriate small scale concessions that have a broad public consensus.

LSP is a state and national treasure. It is a peaceful and scarce, much needed sanctuary in one of our nation’s most densely populated regions. However, it is also jam-packed with people on summer weekends and hosts 5 million visitors each year. The park provides recreational, natural, and historical resources cost-free for people of all backgrounds, ethnicities, and religions to enjoy. It should remain that way. The park’s green openness with its signature views of our nation’s great cultural heritage - Lady Liberty, Ellis Island, lower Manhattan, the NY Harbor, and the Verrazano Bridge - uplift visitors from around the world.

During the horrific 9-11 attacks, LSP provided both a vital evacuation area from lower Manhattan and then hosted the NJ Family Assistance Center for months afterwards. Furthermore, Liberty Park is home to two NJ 9-11 Memorials: “Grove of Remembrance” and “Empty Sky.”

Since LSP’s 1976 opening, the overwhelming public consensus has always been for a natural, free, and non-commercial park. This is best demonstrated when hundreds of people showed up at NJDEP public hearings and many thousands more communicated opposition to a golf course in the 1990’s and a commercial waterpark in the early 2000s. Governor Whitman respected this public sentiment and rejected those proposals.

The new developer-driven plans that are being proposed are shamefully far afield from the original spirit and purpose of Liberty State Park, a park born of the people for public benefit, and would forever mar this precious recreational oasis.

The plans we stand against include: leasing away the landmark CRRNJ Terminal that taxpayers just spent over \$100 million to restore; replacing the historic CRRNJ terminal sheds with a hotel (Central Park has no hotels); confiscating the adjacent green space for hotel parking; seizing control of large-scale commercial event approvals and planning from LSP staff and handing it over to a commercial promoters who aim to maximize entrance fees; displacing Camp Liberty and the park maintenance area with private amusement parks and a commercial concert shell, building commercial indoor rental Sportsplex on what should be free-to-the public outdoor soccer and playing fields, and building another marina at the south end of the park when there is already a huge private marina in the park that excludes public use of the northern waterfront.

NJDEP consultants claim that this private development would divert 38 acres of public parkland, which itself is an extraordinary giveaway of valued urban open space. However, the proposed leases to event promoters, would clearly impact the *entire* park! These commercialization proposals would inevitably cause traffic jams and reduce visitor access to primary park amenities such as lawns, picnic areas, playgrounds, nature paths and the associated free parking.

State parks provide recreation, nature, history education, and outdoor experiences to millions of New Jerseyans, and they require only a small fraction of the overall state budget. In fact, support for parks, through the Green Acres Program bonds and funding, is one expense that has enjoyed taxpayer approval time and again. Many studies cite that parks also provide an economic boost by attracting people to nearby restaurants and small businesses. New York state has launched “NY Parks 2020 – Renewing the Stewardship of our State Park System” and will invest \$900 million in its state parks in the next five years; Governor Cuomo’s letter to New Yorkers begins with “The New York State park system is one of our state’s most treasured public assets, and one of the most prized services State government provides its citizens.”

In contrast, our own invaluable New Jersey State Park System has come under attack by your administration. The foundation for this assault started when knowledgeable park professionals at the NJDEP were replaced and silenced from the top by political consultants, namely NJDEP “Special Advisor,” Louis Valente. Valente, who answers only to Commissioner Martin and not park directors, is well paid with public tax dollars, yet is bent on using New Jersey’s public trust resources as piggy banks for private vendors.

Your administration has pulled funds and resources away from the already meager State parks budget and now claims that the parks must pay for themselves, as if having parks is a privilege, not a right we earn with our taxpayer dollars. Your “Sustainable Parks” policy will result in

turning priceless portions of state parks, and particularly Liberty State Park, over to large corporate interests – with inexorable harm to public access, and the character, purpose and spirit of these public lands that should be preserved for future generations.

We call on you to uphold your responsibility to ensure that the NJ DEP properly steward public trust resources on behalf of the public, and therefore abandon plans to commercialize Liberty State Park and all other state parks.

Sincerely,
Friends of Liberty State Park

NY/NJ Baykeeper

Jersey City Parks Coalition

Hackensack Riverkeeper

New Jersey Audubon Society

Ironbound Community Corporation

New Jersey Chapter Sierra Club

Environment New Jersey

Clean Water Action

Coalition to Preserve the Palisades Cliffs, Inc.

Bayshore Regional Watershed Council

Clean Ocean Action

American Littoral Society

Bike JC

NJ Environmental Lobby

NJ Highlands Coalition

Pinelands Preservation Alliance

League of New Jersey Conservation Voters

Hudson River Waterfront Conservancy

Harsimus Stem Embankment Coalition

Delaware Riverkeeper

Temple Beth-El of Jersey City

Riverview Neighborhood Association

Sgt Anthony Neighborhood Association

Friends of Van Vorst Park

Columbia Park Greenville Memorial, Inc

Bayside Park Neighborhood Association

Historic Paulus Hood Neighborhood Association

Pershing Field Garden Friends

Friends of Audubon Park

Hamilton Park Neighborhood Association

Communication Workers of America Local 1037

New Jersey Communities United

New Jersey Working Families Alliance

Latino Action Network

New Jersey Citizen Action

New Jersey Industrial Union Council

New Jersey Turnpike Employees Union, "IFPTE Local 194"

Raritan Headwaters Association

Jersey City Reservoir Preservation Alliance

Jersey City Environmental Commission

Jersey City Landmarks Committee

Bayonne Nature Club

Urban League of Hudson County

The Historic Jersey City & Harsimus Cemetery

Grace Van Vorst Church

Save Barnegat Bay

Washington Park Association of Hudson County

Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions

Keansburg High School Environmental Science Club

Jersey City Street Trees

Sustainable Jersey City

Bergen County Audubon Society

Jersey Care

Boys and Girls Club of Hudson County

NJ State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs

Jersey City Police Superior Officers Association