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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – March 26, 2015

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NEW REPORT CITES ADDITIONAL PROGRESS IN “CLOSING THE GAPS” IN ERIE CANALWAY TRAIL

ALBANY, N.Y. – Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) and the Canalway Trails Association New York (CTANY) have released their fifth annual report, *Closing the Gaps: A Progress Report on the Erie Canalway Trail 2014*. The report is intended to update canal corridor communities and national, state, and local decision makers on recent progress and current trail status as well as underscore the need for the resources and political support to ensure the 360-mile Erie Canalway Trail is quickly finished.

According to the report, 281 miles of the Erie Canalway Trail are now open to the public between Albany and Buffalo. Of the remaining 79 miles, 24 of those miles have an identified source of funding and are programmed for work to start within the next three years. For 55 miles of trail, there is still no identified funding and/or right-of-way issues present challenges to defining or developing a trail route. When finished, the Erie Canalway Trail will be the longest, continuous statewide multi-use trail in the nation.

“The Erie Canalway Trail is without parallel in scenery, history, and charm but it can’t reach its full potential as an international tourism draw and economic engine for more than 200 trail communities until it is complete,” said PTNY Executive Director Robin Dropkin. “We are very pleased with the

progress that has been made in closing the gaps and thank the Canal Corporation and local governments for their vision and commitment. We hope that opportunities such as the state's CFA grants program and continued strong support for closing the gaps among trail users, corridor residents, and at all levels of government will make it highly probable that the entire 79 miles of trail will be under construction or in design by the 2017 bicentennial of the start of construction of the original Erie Canal."

According to the first comprehensive study of the Erie Canalway Trail visitor, released by PTNY in 2014, the trail presently receives an annual trail traffic volume of more than 1.58 million visits per year, which generates an economic impact of approximately \$253 million and supports 3,440 jobs in the local economies within the trail corridor. *The Economic Impact of the Erie Canalway Trail: An Assessment and User Profile of New York's Longest Multi-use Trail* was funded in part by the New York State Canal Corporation and Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor.

Since PTNY and CTANY launched the "Closing the Gaps" campaign in 2010 in conjunction with Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, interest in completing the Erie Canalway Trail among citizens, community leaders, and local, state, and federal government officials continues unabated.

Canal Corporation Director Brian U. Stratton said, "Governor Cuomo recognizes the strategic importance of the Erie Canal and Erie Canalway Trail as economic engines for upstate New York. Under the Governor's administration, 32 miles of new or rehabilitated trail have been completed, are planned or are now under construction. In 2014 alone, 11 miles of Erie Canalway Trail were constructed by the Canal Corporation in Monroe and Oneida Counties, demonstrating Governor Cuomo's enduring commitment to achieving the full potential of this important resource."

Accomplishments of 2014 include:

- **The NYS Canal Corporation completed three miles of new trail in the City of Rome in Oneida County.**
- **Work began on the eight-mile gap between Amherst and Lockport in western New York.** Under the direction of the NYS Canal Corporation, construction will begin in early 2015 on five miles of new trail. The remaining three miles of trail are under design. When the

gap is complete, it will result in more than 130 miles of continuous off-road trail in western New York.

- **Funding was awarded for nine miles of new trail in Wayne, Herkimer, and Montgomery Counties.** Funding awards from the federal Transportation Enhancements and Transportation Alternatives Programs will be used to construct three new trail segments: one mile in the Wayne County Village of Clyde, two miles in the Town of German Flatts in Herkimer County, and six miles between South Amsterdam and Pattersonville in Montgomery County.

Focus for 2015

Additional progress in closing the gaps will result from the efforts of local Canalway Trail communities, the Regional Economic Development Councils, the NYS Department of Transportation, and the NYS Canal Corporation working together to address specific needs and challenges in discrete trail segments. CTANY and PTNY will continue to support and promote those efforts and, through initiatives such as a new website devoted exclusively to Erie Canal tourism to be launched in late Spring, actively market the trail to cyclists and adventure tourists as well as reinforce the importance of the Canalway Trail to tourism, local economies, and the health and the quality of life of Canalway Trail-community residents.

Marlene Bissell, CTANY board president, said, “While the members comprising CTANY represent organizations along all of the New York State Canalway Trails, together we recognize the importance of closing the gaps on the Erie Canalway Trail. We look forward to working with the Canal Corporation and PTNY to continue the progress we have made during the past year.”

Closing the Gaps: A Progress Report on the Erie Canalway Trail 2014 is available on the Parks & Trails New York [website](http://www.ptny.org), www.ptny.org.

Parks & Trails New York is the state’s leading advocate for parks and trails, working since 1985 to expand, protect and promote a network of parks, trails and open spaces throughout the state for use and enjoyment by all. For more than 17 years PTNY has worked with the New York State Canal Corporation, CTANY, and Canalway Trail communities to foster development of the trail and

oversee the Adopt-a-Trail Program. PTNY promotes the trail through its annual 400-mile Cycle the Erie Canal bike tour, *Bicyclists Bring Business* community roundtables and Canal Clean Sweep events and its publications, *Cycling the Erie Canal: A guide to 400 miles of adventure and history along the Erie Canalway Trail* and *Bicyclists Bring Business: A Guide for Attracting Bicyclists to New York's Canal Communities*. For more information, visit www.ptny.org or call 518-434-1583.

The Canalway Trails Association New York is an all-volunteer organization that works both statewide and locally with citizens, state agencies and municipalities to develop the Erie Canalway Trail as a world-class multi-use recreational trail and international bicycle tourism destination. In partnership with the NYS Canal Corporation, PTNY and others, it encourages the proper maintenance of the trail by coordinating the Adopt-a-Trail Program.

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