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Budget could cut funding to state parks

By: Kaitlyn Ross

ALBANY, N.Y. -- "They're not a luxury, they're something that a lot of people have come to rely on as a way to get away from the city. A safe place to bring their kids to play, a good inexpensive vacation alternative," said John Sheehan, Adirondack Council Director of Communications.

Sheehan calls the Adirondack State Park the country's first official place to take a "staycation" in this down economy and that over the past two years, attendance at the parks has skyrocketed.

"There are 70 million people who live within a day's drive of a park. We have seen a dramatic increase in people who are taking short, but meaningful vacations," Sheehan said.

But those getaways may soon come to an end. Under Governor Paterson's budget plan, state parks would lose \$20 million, which means they will either have to find new ways to raise revenue, or shut down some of their parks.

Parks officials are being tight lipped about what they are planning on doing.

In a statement, they said, "No final decisions have been made yet on how parks will achieve its savings target, and therefore reports on specific park closings are simply misleading and inaccurate....The state is facing an economic crisis in which all areas of state spending, including health care, education and parks, will be impacted."

But even without a final list, supports of the parks have popped up everywhere, from Facebook to Twitter and online petitions, New Yorkers are angling to save their hometown park, knowing some will be cut.

"We aren't sure which parks exactly will close. We haven't been given a list of those they expect to shut. But given the money that's being taken from the budget, it's inevitable that parks will close and we will lose personnel," Sheehan said.

Supporters of saving the state parks will hold a rally on March 3rd at the Capitol to keep them open. The state parks division says it will have the final list of the parks and historical sites that are slated for closure within the next two weeks.