



**Niagara River Greenway Commission  
Greenway Related Projects and Programs**

**Crow's Nest Stair Extension Project Submission**

**January 30, 2024**

## **Niagara River Greenway Commission Consultation and Review Form**

Date of Submittal:

Project Registration Number (*office use only*):

Type of Review Required (please check one):

- Mandatory Consultation for proposals seeking Greenway Funding
- Voluntary Review and/or Endorsement for proposals not seeking Greenway Funding

**PROJECT SPONSOR INFORMATION**

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Name:            | New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation |
| Mailing Address: | 3160 De Veaux Woods Drive, Niagara Falls                              |
| State:           | NY  |
| Zip Code:        | 14305   |
| Federal ID#:     | 14-740026K  |

**PROJECT TYPE (Please check only ONE)**

- Trail Development / Improvement  Interpretation / Cultural Monuments
- Ecosystem / Riparian Habitat Restoration  Stewardship
- Niagara River Greenway Placemaking / Public Access / Wayfinding

**FUNDING COMMITTEE**

- Host Community Standing Committee  Ecological Standing Committee
- Buffalo and Erie County Standing Committee  State Parks Standing Committee
- Unsure at this time / N/A

**TOTAL AMOUNT REQUESTED**

**ADDITIONAL FUNDING FROM OTHER SOURCES**

| Source                                    | Amount   |
|---|--|
| Land and Water Conservation Fund          | \$2,500,000 received (+\$1M LWCF supplement request in progress) |
| New York Works – (NYS Parks Capital Fund) | \$3,500,000 (24-25 NYS Budget)                                   |
| Private Funds – Maid of the Mist          | \$1,000,000  |

**PROJECT INFORMATION**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Project Name:  | <u>Crow's Nest Stair Extention</u>               |
| Location (include GPS coordinates if possible):                      | Niagara Falls State Park (43.085921, -79.068841) |
| Project Site Address:  | 332 Prospect St, Niagara Falls                   |
| State:   | NY   |
| Zip Code:  | 14303  |
| Minor Civil Division(s):   |  |
| County:  | Niagara County                                   |
| Project Proponent Property Interest (own, lease, easement or other): |  |

**AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL**

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Name:             | <u>John Honan</u>                       |
| Title:            | Capital District Manager                |
| Business Address: | 3160 DeVeaux Woods Drive, Niagara Falls |
| State:            | NY                                      |
| Zip Code:         | 14305                                   |
| Work Number:      | 716-299-0811                            |
| Cell Number:      | 716-990-2449                            |
| E-Mail Address:   | John.honan@parks.ny.gov                 |

**PROJECT POINT OF CONTACT**

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Name:                | <u>Nancy Busch</u>   |
| Title:               | Senior Engineer  |
| Organization / Firm: | New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation |
| Business Address:    | 3160 DeVeaux Woods Drive, Niagara Falls                              |
| State:               | New York   |
| Zip Code:            | 14305  |
| Work Number:         | 716-299-0812   |
| Cell Number:         | 716-264-3212   |
| E-Mail Address:      | Nancy.busch@parks.ny.gov   |

## PROJECT NARRATIVE

Please attach material which responds to the following six items in the order that they are presented.

1. **In a brief paragraph, describe the project and its purpose, how and when it will be accomplished, and why it is important.**

This project consists of the construction of new stairs and an overlook structure which will connect the existing Crow's Nest feature to Prospect Point at Niagara Falls State Park. The intent of the stairs is to operate them as a one-way egress from the lower gorge during the busy season, and as a two-way access to the overlook during a portion of the off season. The project will relieve pedestrian congestion in the lower gorge during the busy season, where the only current means of egress is the elevator inside of the observation tower. The stairs will provide recreation opportunities by creating access to the lower part of the gorge and to Niagara Falls, and the overlook will allow people to experience the Falls from a very close and unique viewing perspective. The construction of these stairs will respect the historic and natural character of the site by using discrete methods and natural materials to minimize environmental impacts and will create new experiences and viewing opportunities near the Falls.

2. **Referring to the Niagara River Greenway Plan, clearly document and describe how the proposed project will advance the Niagara River Greenway vision including the goals, principles, and criteria that define that vision.**

Referring to Chapter 3 of the Niagara River Greenway Plan, the Crow's Nest Stair Extension Project advances the vision of the Niagara River Greenway through the following guiding principles and goals:

### Guiding Principles:

- **Excellence:** The stairs and overlook at the veil of Niagara Falls have been designed to work with the natural landscape to provide a world class experience; allowing people to encounter the power of the Falls and the beauty of the gorge firsthand.
- **Sustainability:** The current access to the Crow's Nest is via the elevators in the observation tower. The addition of a non-powered option to access and egress from the gorge (stairs) will decrease the energy required to operate the elevators.
- **Accessibility:** This project will increase accessibility to the lower gorge area at Niagara Falls. The current configuration of the Crow's Nest Stairs extends only part of the way up the slope, with the only means of accessing this area being the observation tower elevator. The stair egress option will provide access for those who are not comfortable utilizing the elevator and contending with the crowds of people on them. It will also provide two-way access to the overlook area during portions of the year, creating access and an experience that has not be available in the past.
- **Public Well-Being:** This project creates a water-based recreation opportunity to soak in the beauty of the Falls while standing on the new overlook, and to feel the mist from the Falls while walking up and down the stairs. The stairs out of the gorge will also provide a physical challenge for those who are seeking to test their endurance and increase their physical well-being, similar to the stairs that exist at Whirlpool and Devil's Hole State Parks.

- **Authenticity and Celebration:** The overlook feature of this project provides an uninterrupted view and experience of the power of Niagara Falls. The location of the overlook blocks out the built environment around you and instills a sense of the Falls as it may have been hundreds of years ago. The design of the lower stairs incorporates the existing rock, and the upper portion of stairs skims the wall of the gorge, adding to the experience of being surrounded by the natural world.
- **Partnerships:** This project is being completed through a partnership of public and private organizations including NYS Parks, Maid of the Mist, Land and Water Conservation Fund and currently seeking funding from Niagara River Greenway.

Goals

- **Improve access/make connections:** This project is designed to create an opportunity for more people to experience the lower gorge area of Niagara Falls State Park. It creates a direct, non-powered access to the edge of the Falls, giving more people the ability to interact with one of our region’s most amazing natural features.

**3. Define the budget for the total proposed project and include costs for the following:**

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Planning                         | \$0   |
| Construction                     | \$9,000,000 (including construction oversight services) |
| Acquisition                      | \$0   |
| Administration                   | \$0   |
| Operation and Maintenance / Year | \$0   |
| <b>TOTAL PROJECT COST</b>        | <b>\$9,000,000</b>                                      |

**Identify all sources of funding and the amount of funding expected from each source. Identify and quantify funds that are already on hand or have been allocated for the proposed project. Explain how the project will be operated and maintained.**

Additional sources of funding for the Crow’s Nest Stair Extension include New York Works (Parks) contributing \$3,500,000, The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) contributing \$2,500,000 with a pending request for an additional \$1,000,000, and The Maid of the Mist contributing \$1,000,000. The total funding for this project, including the \$1,000,000 requested from the Greenway, comes to \$9,000,000. The design of this project has been completed through different funding sources, and all funding being requested from the Greenway will be used towards the construction of the project. Once construction is complete, it will be operated and maintained by NYS Parks.

**4. Describe the measures taken at the local level to gain community and government support for this project (hearings, petitions, public surveys, resolutions of support or other methods). If this project has been cited or described in a local planning document or some equivalent thereof, attach copies of that documentation highlighting the sections that are relevant to the proposed project. Describe the role of municipal agencies, stakeholder groups, consultants, volunteers or others who will be involved in the proposed project.**

A conceptual study was completed in 2020 by Trowbridge, Wolf, Michaels Landscape Architects to determine the feasibility of completing a connecting staircase between the top of the existing Crow's Nest and Prospect Point. The study concluded with a set of conceptual designs, which were narrowed down to a preferred option by Parks. A public meeting was held in November 2022 in Niagara Falls and renderings of the preferred option were presented, and comments were considered. The meeting had minimal attendance and no negative feedback was received. WSP, Inc. was then hired to complete the final design of the project. The design phase of the project is set to conclude in April 2024 with the project being bid in May 2024.

- 5. Describe and document the environmental setting and existing conditions at the proposed project site. If you are not the owner of the property include a letter(s) or resolution(s) evidencing support for the project by the owner. Provide photographs, conceptual plans and drawings that show the site as it presently exists and how the site will change with the addition of the proposed project. Describe how your project will comply with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). The existence of wetlands, significant upland and aquatic habitats, and plant or animal species that are classified as rare, threatened, or endangered should be noted. Explain how such natural resources will be protected and/or enhanced. Cite any relevant project-related studies.**

The Crow's Nest area of Niagara Falls State Park is the space immediately adjacent to the northern edge of the Falls. The land is generally large talus (rocks and boulders) left behind by the erosion of the gorge as Niagara Falls recedes. Currently there is a set of concrete stairs that extend approximately two-thirds of the way up the slope to a small overlook. The mist from the Falls maintains a uniquely wet and sometimes icy environment throughout this area.

A check of the NYS Natural Heritage Program (NHP) Database and consultation with NHP staff indicates there are no known rare, threatened, or endangered plants or animals within the project area. Additionally, Regional Environmental Stewardship staff surveyed the site and did not locate any rare, threatened, or endangered species. Peregrine falcons are known to occur nearby and prefer cliff ledges as suitable nesting habitat. While there will be removal of a minor amount of cliff face as part of this project, an abundance of cliff ledges will remain in and throughout the area and the entire Niagara Gorge.

The project limits occur in and around the NHP designated significant natural communities of calcareous talus slope woodland and calcareous cliff communities. While work will occur in small areas overlapping these communities, these areas have been disturbed previously for viewshed management and through rock removal for safety purposes. Due to that previous disturbance, the quality of the habitat within the project limits has already been altered and compromised. All restoration plantings will follow the OPRHP Native Plant Policy.

Early consultation with the Biologist for the NYS Parks Niagara Region indicated the potential for sensitive plant communities near the spray zone of the falls. Modifications were made during design to avoid this area and reduce impacts to the vegetation and plant community that may occur in the spray of the waterfall.

The Environmental Analyst for the NYS Parks Niagara Region will review this project under SEQRA as a Type 1 action. NYS Parks is in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and will provide feedback before SEQR is completed.

6. Please attach the proposed project timeline, identify any relevant milestones, and provide an estimated date for project completion/opening. If funded, it is expected that the project sponsor or point of contact will notify the Commission of the project opening date as it nears completion. *(Note: This addition to the application was made September 2018.)*

The proposed project timeline is listed below:

| <b>Crow's Nest Stair Extension Project Timeline</b> |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| Design  | Present – April 2024 |
| Advertisement                                       | April 2024           |
| Bid opening   | May 2024             |
| Estimated Contract Award                            | July 2024            |
| Mobilization and Setup                              | September 2024       |
| Substantial Completion                              | November 2025        |
| Project Closeout                                    | June 2026            |

Appendices:

Appendix A: Site Location Figures

Appendix B: Site Photos and Renderings

Appendix A  
Site Location Figures



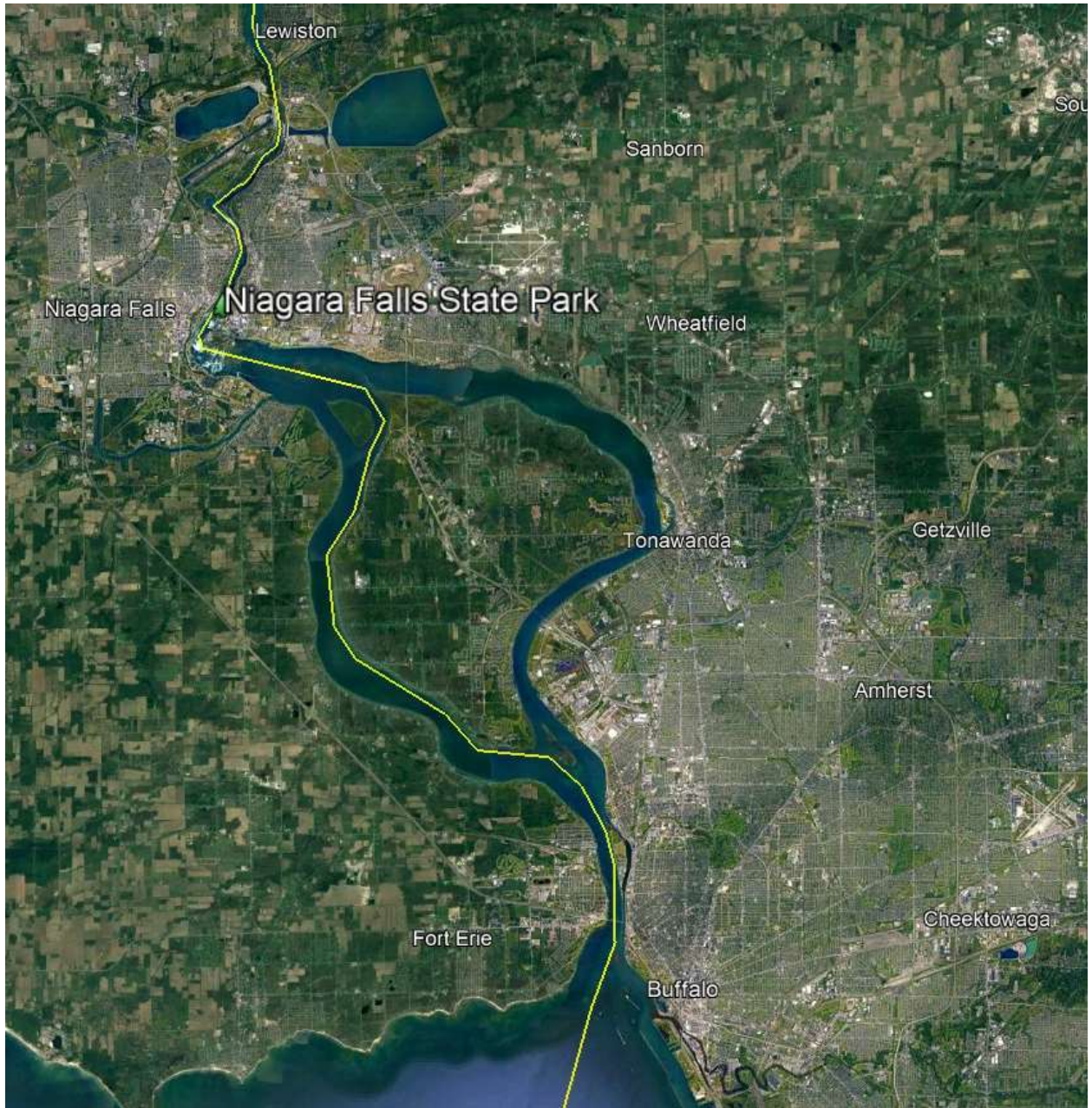


Figure 1: Niagara Falls State Park Location



Figure 2: Project location at Niagara Falls State Park shown by red box

Appendix B  
Site Photos and Renderings



Photo 1: Existing view looking from the observation tower to the south-east



Photo 2: Proposed view looking from the observation tower to the south-east



Photo 3: Existing view from Canada looking east

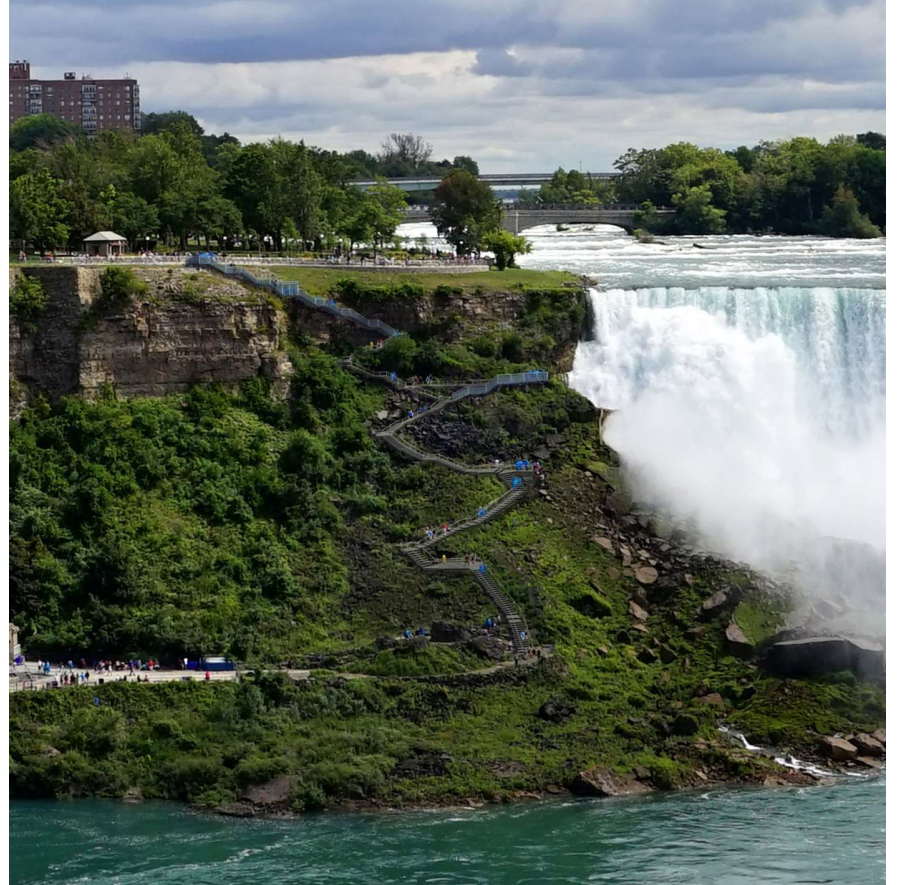


Photo 4: Proposed view from Canada looking east