

# The Value of The NYS Canal System

## *New York's Multidimensional Waterway*

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Erie Canalway  
National Heritage Corridor  
2020

# Overview

New York State's 500-mile-long system of navigable waterways connecting the Atlantic Ocean with the Great Lakes is among the state's greatest assets. This historic and multidimensional waterway plays a central role in tourism, recreation, agriculture, power generation, water supply, commercial/ industrial activities, transportation, and community development.

More than 70% of upstate New York's population lives within 25 miles of the Erie Canal. The NYS Canal System is part of the economic and social fabric of communities from Buffalo to Albany along the Erie Canal, from Waterford to Whitehall on the Champlain Canal, from Syracuse to Oswego on the Oswego Canal, and from Seneca Falls to Geneva on the Cayuga-Seneca Canal.





# AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM

New York's canals are an integrated system of navigable waterways that provide a vital connection between the Atlantic Ocean and the upper Great Lakes. The canals contributed to the growth of commerce and industry throughout the Empire State in the 1800s and 1900s and are an integral part of economic revitalization strategies in communities across the state today.

The Canal System adds to the vitality and economies of cities, towns and villages along its length, as well as towns along the Hudson and St. Lawrence rivers, Lake Champlain, Lake Ontario, and Lake Erie. Boaters using the Canal System to travel throughout eastern North America also contribute to communities along the Atlantic Seaboard from Maine to Florida to the Great Lakes.



# PUBLIC BENEFIT

The NYS Canal System is public infrastructure that provides public benefit, just as state parks and roadways do. The benefit of the waterway is not merely to boaters. Positive economic benefits flow to businesses, industries, agriculture and canal communities.







# TOURISM ECONOMIC IMPACT

An estimated **\$1.3 billion annually** is generated by multi-day vacationers, events, boat tours, bicycle and paddle-sport rentals and historic site/museum tours along the Erie, Champlain, Oswego and Cayuga-Seneca Canals.



# HERITAGE TOURISM

The Canalway Corridor's distinctive heritage—its engineering marvels, historic vessels and sites, events, and canal communities—add to the experience of traveling along the canals.

Multiday visitors spent on average seven times more than day trippers, with boaters spending the most per trip (\$865), followed by cyclists (\$563) and paddlers (\$542).





# RECREATION

The NYS Canal System is central to an emerging world-class recreation corridor that also includes the Empire State Trail and the NYS Canalway Water Trail. No other state in the nation boasts more than 850 miles of interconnected navigable inland waterways and 750 miles of continuous trails. This corridor serves both New York State residents and people from around the world who are attracted to its multi-day and multi-recreational opportunities for boating, cycling, paddling, and hiking.





# BOATING

There was a total of 85,746 lockages and lift bridge openings during the 2019 canal season; 81,620 of those were for recreational vessels including tour boats, small-ship cruise ships, hire boats, and privately-owned pleasure boats.

The Canal System is part of the Great Loop, a 6,000-mile boating route. Each year, hundreds of Great Loopers enjoy the NYS Canal System; they visit towns, dine in restaurants, purchase supplies, and have boat repairs done, spending significant dollars along the way. There are also seasonal migrations by boaters who use the canals to move between summer cruising grounds in upstate New York and the Great Lakes and winter ports in the south.





# SUSTAINABILITY

The impacts of boaters, paddlers, cyclists, hikers, car travelers, and event goers are **additive**. Each contributes to the vibrancy and economic sustainability of the entire recreation corridor.







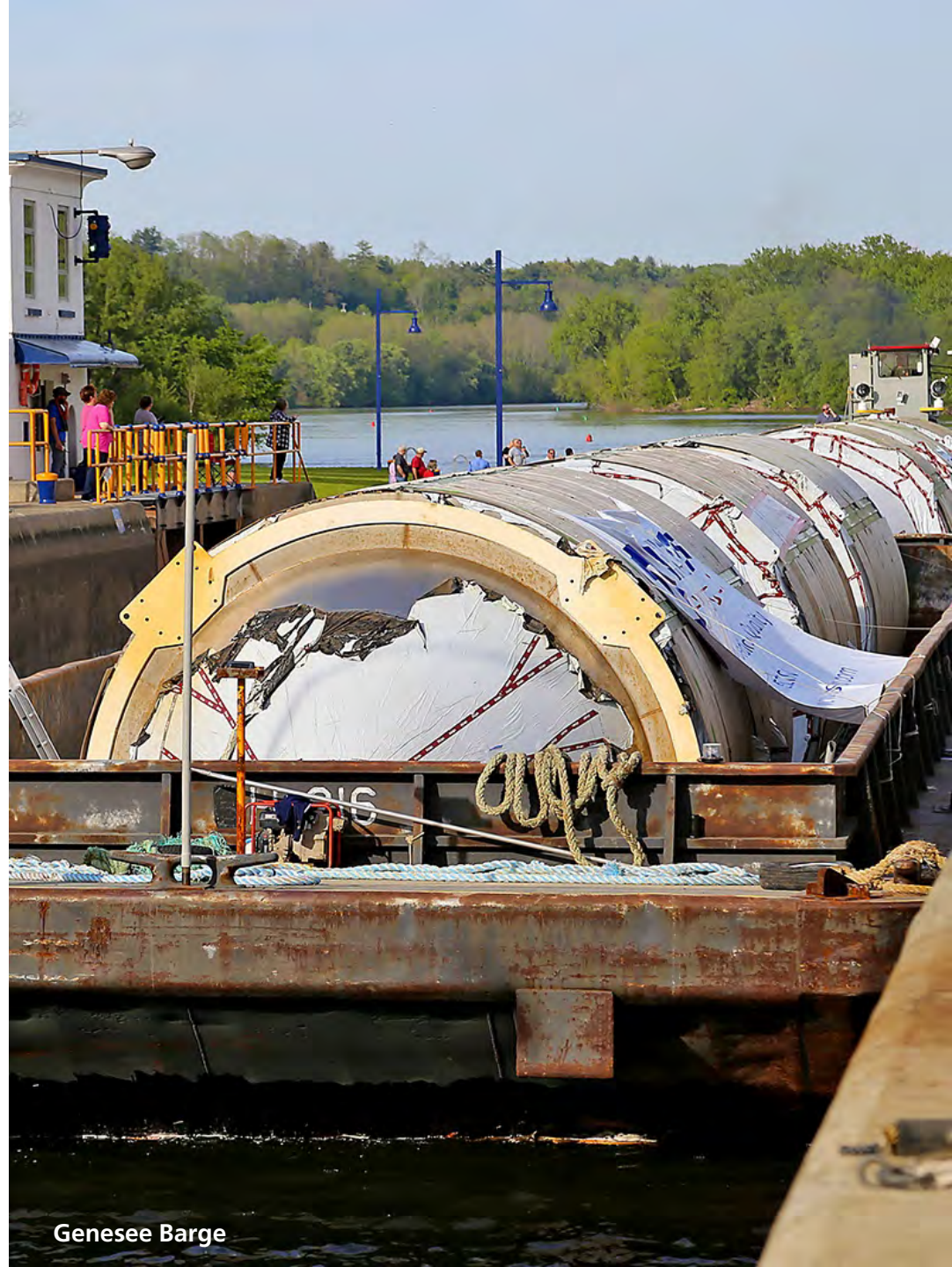
## NON-TOURISM ECONOMIC IMPACT

In 2014, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced that **“the New York State Canal System, a vital link for interstate commerce, supports over \$6.2 billion annually in non-tourism economic activity across the state.”** In 2014 Canals supported 26,472 jobs, \$1.6 billion in personal income, and \$702 million in tax revenue, both directly and indirectly.



# COMMERCIAL TRANSPORTATION

The NYS Canal System continues to play a critical role in New York's transportation network. While commercial traffic is no longer the canals' chief use, bulk cargoes (e.g. crushed stone) and high value specialty cargos (e.g., Genesee Brewery tanks, GE steam turbine rotors, US Navy sonar components) continue to be shipped via canal. In some cases, the canal provides the only viable method of transporting these shipments.



Genesee Barge



# WATER SUPPLY

Businesses, industries and farming operations rely on the Canal System for its abundant, reliable and inexpensive supply of water. Natural waterways along the Canal System and associated feeders and reservoirs provide safe, reliable water to support more than 220,000 residents annually that reside in the Capital and Mohawk Valley Regions. Public water supply facilities supported by the NYS Canal System generate \$18.8 million annually in total economic impact through the distribution and sale of water.





# AGRICULTURE

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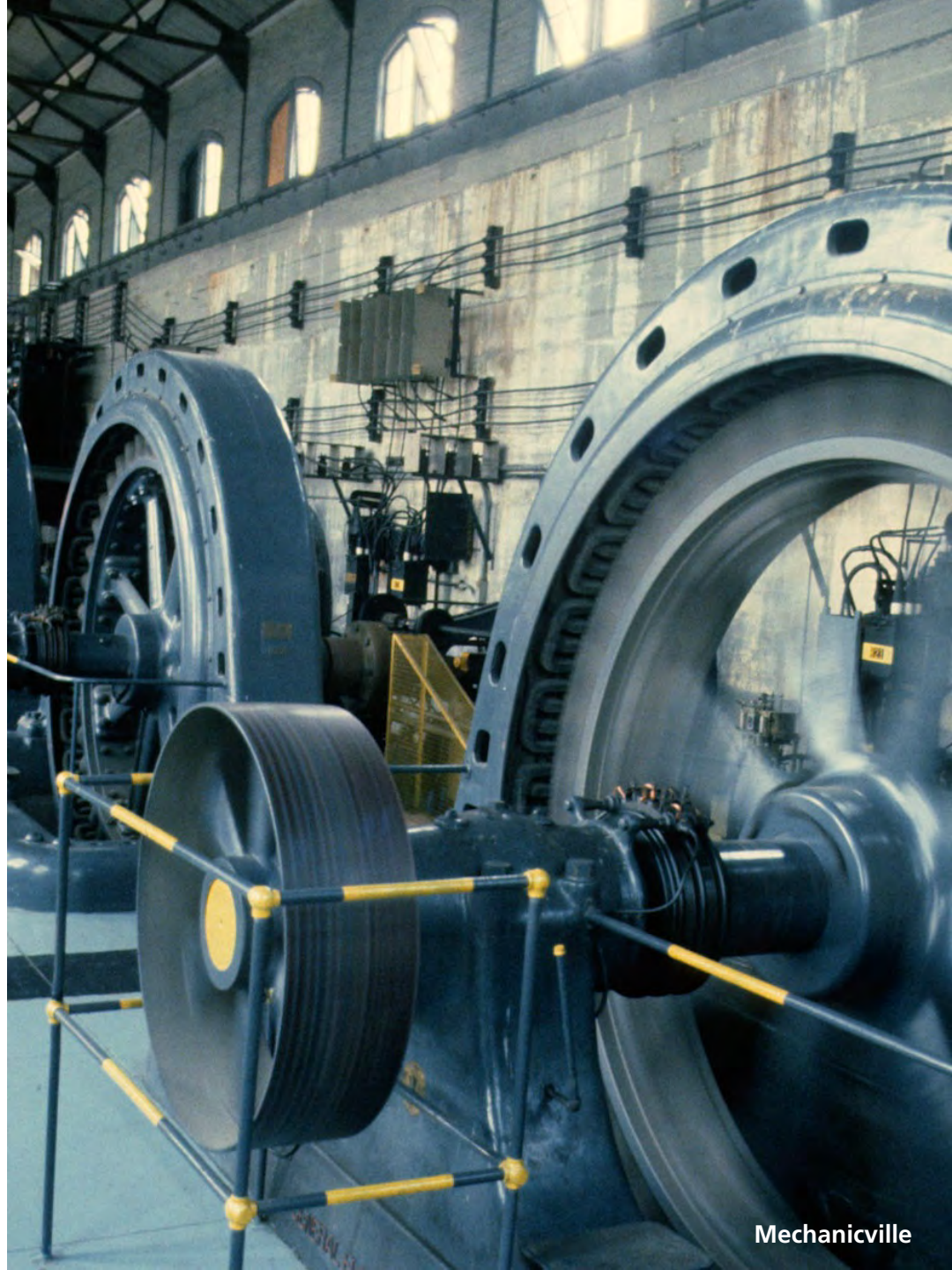
In the Finger Lakes and Western New York regions, crop irrigation is the primary agricultural use of Canal System water. The greatest benefit is to local farms and economies, where irrigation supported by Canal System water is most common.





# POWER GENERATION

Renewable power is generated at 27 hydroelectric facilities located along the Canal System—enough to supply power to 54,000 homes. Approximately 9% of New York State's hydroelectric facilities are located on the Canal System, and these facilities produce an estimated 2.3% of the state's hydroelectric power.







# ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

The NYS Canal System includes rivers, land-cut canals, lakes, and reservoirs. Together, these waterways represent 40 percent of New York State's freshwater resources and drain nearly half of the state's total area. Management of the canals impacts underground aquifers, drinking water, fisheries, and wildlife habitats.



# WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY

Water quality and quantity are both essential—and good stewardship of land and water resources is critical. Common threats include point- and non-point source pollution, aging wastewater treatment infrastructure, poorly planned developments, and invasive species.



# STEWARDSHIP

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Numerous state, regional, and local agencies and organizations, as well as private citizens and businesses, play a role in land and water resource management that has a direct impact on the environmental quality of the Canal System.







Adams Basin

# NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT HISTORY

The U.S. Congress recognized the significance of New York's canals to our nation by establishing the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor in 2000. The Corridor spans 524 miles across the full expanse of the upstate New York. It includes the Erie, Cayuga-Seneca, Oswego, and Champlain Canals and their historic alignments. The Corridor encompasses 4,834 square miles in 23 counties and is home to 3.2 million people.



# NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

The NYS Canal System is a National Historic Landmark. This exclusive honor is reserved for properties of exceptional value in illustrating the history of the United States. Only 3% of properties on the National Register of Historic Places are designated National Historic Landmarks.







North Tonawanda

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Over the last twenty years, billions of dollars have been invested by the State of New York, canal communities, private businesses, and investors to improve waterfronts, build visitor and amenity centers to support tourism, redevelop former industrial properties on the water, improve water quality, and connect downtowns with the canal.

# SUSTAINED INVESTMENT

The NYS Canal Corporation's Canalway Grants Program, Department of State's Local Waterfront Revitalization Initiative, Governor's Regional Economic Development Councils (REDC), Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI), Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, and National Park Service have provided much needed funding and direction.





# WATERFRONT REVITALIZATION

The results speak for themselves. Visit communities that have invested in their waterfronts to see the impact of an impressive array of projects. Years of planning, public involvement, and public-private partnerships are reinvigorating waterfronts all across the Empire State.







# REFERENCES

- [Canal Visitor Profile and Event Impact Analysis](#)  
*Conducted by Level 7 Market Research for the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor through its nonprofit affiliate, the Erie Canalway Heritage Fund, Inc., and supported by a grant from Market New York through I LOVE NEW YORK, the state's Division of Tourism, as a part of the Regional Economic Development Council awards.*
- [New York State Canal Corporation Report on Economic Benefits of Non-Tourism Use of the NYS Canal System](#)
- [Erie Canalway Preservation and Management Plan](#)
- [Mohawk River Basin Action Agenda](#)





# LEARN MORE

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In partnership with the National Park Service

[eriecanalway.org](http://eriecanalway.org)



Erie Canal