 ‘IT WOULD BE THE ‘IT WOULD BE THE RIGHT THING TO DO’ RIGHT THING TO DO’

Petition seeks Indigenous name for High Falls park Petition seeks Indigenous name for High Falls park

Steve Howe Steve Howe Rochester Democrat and Chronicle | USA TODAY NETWORK

Before there was a place called Rochester, there was Ga’sgöhsagöh. ● The Haude nosaunee name, pronounced “ga-SGO-sa-go,” described the High Falls area and the site where the city would be located, meaning “at the waterfall.” Now, advocates are petitioning to change the name of the proposed Rochester state park to reOect this. ● For Trish Corcoran, who is Tonawanda Onondowaga, naming the park centered on the waterfall Ga’sgöhsagöh State Park would make it distinct and honor the location’s heritage. There’s already a High Falls State Park in Georgia and while the park’s stated goals include exploring the industrial heritage of the area, Ga’sgöhsagöh would honor more of the history of the falls, she said.

“I think that it would be so much stronger, so much more marketable, and it would be the right thing to do to name it ... Ga’sgöhsagöh,” Corcoran said. She teaches Indigenous and environmental studies at the Harley School, and is co-chair of Rochester Indigenous Peoples’ Day and an artist.

Corcoran said the naming would also address one of the signiScant issues facing Indigenous people in the United States: invisibility. A 2014 review of kindergarten through 12th grade curriculum found 87% of state history standards nationwide did not mention Native American history a]er 1900.

“There’s a huge invisibility problem and that’s intentional because of what has happened in the past,” Corcoran said. “But we would love to move forward, and we would love to be seen, and this is a good way to do that.”



Trish Corcoran is an advocate to name the proposed state park in Rochester as Ga'sgöhsagöh State Trish Corcoran is an advocate to name the proposed state park in Rochester as Ga'sgöhsagöh State Park, a Haudenosaunee name for the area around the falls. Park, a Haudenosaunee name for the area around the falls. STEVE HOWE/DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

High Falls High Falls

When she has met with people in the community to discuss the idea of renaming High Falls State Park, Corcoran said, they've been supportive.

A petition on Change.org has more than 800 signatures. Other local names with Indigenous origins include the Genesee River, which means pleasant valley, and Lake Ontario, a Wendat word meaning "great lake" or "beautiful lake." And the time to make the change to the proposed park's name is now, Corcoran argued, before signage has been printed and installed.

"Words are powerful and language matters," she said.

What's planned for High Falls State Park What's planned for High Falls State Park

The state park designed for Rochester is expected to roll out in phases, with the Srst being a reimagined and redeveloped High Falls Terrace Park. Remediation work continues in the gorge with Rochester Gas & Electric and Bausch and Lomb.

The park is expected to open in stages over the coming years.

Park planners hope to bring together recreation, history and ecology into one seamless, 85-acre urban oasis. The limited space in the gorge means the plan doesn't include large parking areas and has vehicle

access at only one place on each side of the river.

Plans call for construction of roughly 5 miles of paved pathways, six overlooks, three restroom buildings, and other amenities.

At the Ooor of the gorge, there will be trails, steps, lawns, woodland groves and overlooks. Some of the highlighted locations include pedestrian bridges spanning the river, seating and possible food trucks at Incinerator Plaza, playgrounds, multipurpose Selds and an overlook on the island near the base of the soaring 80-foot waterfall.

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