



**January 30, 2025**

**New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation & New York City Council  
Committee on Fire and Emergency Management Joint Hearing  
Oversight: Preventing Brush Fires in Parks**

Testimony by: Marit Larson, NYC Parks, Assistant Commissioner of Natural Resources & Planning

Good afternoon, Chair Krishnan, Chair Ariola, members of the Parks Committee and Fire & Emergency Management Committee, and other members of the City Council. I am Marit Larson, Assistant Commissioner of Natural Resources & Planning for New York City Parks. I'm pleased to be joined today by members of our senior staff, including Ben Osborne, Assistant Commissioner of Forestry & Horticulture, Kristy King, Chief of Natural Resources, Norman Chan, Director of Emergency Management and Matt Drury, our Chief of Citywide Legislative Affairs.

To echo the sentiments just expressed by Chief Esposito in his testimony, protecting New Yorkers — along with our vital natural areas and greenspaces — is of the utmost importance to NYC Parks. Brush fires in our parks and natural areas can be dangerous and damaging, and we work closely with FDNY to ensure that fires in city parks are extinguished as quickly as possible. Of course, FDNY is primarily responsible for all fire response in the City, including in parks, and we are grateful for the bravery and responsiveness of our city firefighters, and for FDNY's incredible partnership.

Upon observing a fire in a park or natural area, NYC Parks staff are trained to immediately contact FDNY, to ensure the fire can be dealt with as quickly as possible, and then to also contact Parks Central Communications, who send broadcast notifications to key Parks managers and staff, so that we can monitor and coordinate additional assistance as needed. As FDNY firefighters work to extinguish flames during fire incidents, our dedicated staffers are available to provide operational support in a variety of ways, including assisting with crowd control or, if necessary, the removal of standing or fallen trees to facilitate FDNY's access to impacted areas.

By definition, all natural vegetated areas can be susceptible to fires, and brush fires have occurred in parks to varying degrees over the years, but thankfully, widespread large scale brush fires have not been especially common in recent decades. However, in late 2024, New York City experienced a historic drought, which contributed to a significant increase in brush fires in city parks, particularly in natural areas. We coordinated closely with FDNY to ensure public safety in and near affected areas and worked diligently to inspect and remove known tree hazards along accessible paths, trails, and heavily trafficked edges after fires were extinguished. Our Natural Resources crews quantified and mapped the fire extent, which totaled over 41 acres out of 6,800 acres of Parks' forested natural areas citywide. The largest fires occurred in 10 different parks in four boroughs on 13 different dates from mid-October through mid-November. This was the most significant set of brush fires impacting forested parkland dating back decades.

Following the recent brush fires, we have begun a dedicated internal effort to detail "lessons learned," to refine and improve our fire response protocols, and communication guidelines, and we are participating in the Brush Fire Task Force recently created by FDNY. We're also



pleased to report that to assist with recovery efforts following the dissipation of the fires, the NYC Green Fund has generously allocated funding for direct, non-competitive grants, available to partner organizations that care for natural areas which were impacted by the fires. In consultation with NYC Parks and the Natural Areas Conservancy, the NYC Green Fund is reviewing applications for the grants, which will fund forest recovery activities in those parks, including seeding native groundcover and replanting trees and shrubs. We are very grateful for the NYC Green Fund's incredible support and look forward to being able to share more details about these grants in the near future.

Regarding our proactive efforts, we strive to manage and maintain the 14,000 acres of natural areas around New York City in a manner that helps minimize occurrences of brush fires. Our agency's Forest Management Framework, a 25-year plan jointly developed by NYC Parks' Natural Resources Group and our partners at the Natural Areas Conservancy, guides the management and restoration of our city forests, including brush fire prevention measures. Strategies described within the framework include the removal of overabundant and fast-growing species, such as phragmites and mugwort, which can cause fires to spread faster and burn longer, as well as planting appropriate trees and shrubs to increase species diversity and improve overall ecosystem health. We also work to restore degraded habitats to native plant communities that are less prone to fire, such as coastal forests and emergent freshwater wetlands, where appropriate. We appreciate the Council's strong support of these efforts over the years and look forward to continuing that partnership.

As one might imagine, it is exceedingly difficult to identify the precise cause for any given brush fire in a natural area, but human activities are typically the cause. We would like to remind all New Yorkers of the importance of following park rules and acting responsibly while enjoying our parks, because discarded cigarettes, campfires, flammable debris, and fireworks can ignite brush fires that can cause tremendous damage. Park visitors should report any signs of smoke or fire to 911 immediately, and they can subscribe to Notify NYC for important fire-related safety updates. Of course, our agency does everything in its power to educate park visitors about our rules and address dangerous behavior, and our Parks Enforcement Patrol officers, Urban Park Rangers and other staff caring for our parks all play a vital role in keeping our parks safe from brush fires. But, we cannot do it alone.

Turning to the legislation being heard today, Preconsidered T2025-3015 would require NYC Parks, in consultation with other appropriate City agencies, to develop a plan to mitigate the occurrences of wildfires in parks and report annually on wildfires that occur in parks under its jurisdiction. We appreciate the intent of this legislation and look forward to working with the Council and FDNY to further discuss the most effective ways to achieve our shared goal of minimizing brush fire damage to our natural areas, be it through legislation or through similarly-themed efforts underway.

Introduction 800 would codify the criteria by which NYC prioritizes tree maintenance work and post a description of the criteria used to prioritize tree maintenance on its website. As the stewards of New York City's urban forest, we care for our city's street and park trees and respond to more than 100,000 forestry-related service requests from concerned New Yorkers each year. To help keep our tree canopy healthy and safe and ensure that the highest-priority tree work is addressed as quickly as possible, we have integrated modern tree risk management practices into the way we care for our urban forest.



Since 2017, we have formally incorporated industry standards for tree risk management established by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) into our tree work management approach. By applying our professional expertise in risk management, we are able to address the conditions that present the highest risk to public safety and property before other work. As part of our dedicated commitment to public transparency, this prioritized approach to tree maintenance is clearly outlined on our agency website, as well as through communication with constituents and other stakeholders regarding tree work service requests.

Though we already conduct our operations in a manner corresponding to the spirit of this legislation, it is important to note we generally advise against codifying operational practices via local law, because the agency requires flexibility to innovate and adopt new industry standards and best practices as they evolve over time. As such, we are opposed to the bill as it is currently drafted but would welcome the chance to work with the Council to identify how we can best achieve our shared goal of preserving the city's tree canopy while protecting New Yorkers and their property.

We'd like to thank the Council for this opportunity to testify, and for your support for our city's parks and open spaces. If there are any questions, we would be happy to join our partners at FDNY in answering those at this time.



January 30, 2024  
Testimony of John Esposito, Chief of Department, FDNY  
**City Council Oversight Hearing: Preventing Brush Fires in Parks**

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Good morning Chair Ariola, Chair Krishnan, and members of the Fire & Emergency Management Committee and the Committee on Parks and Recreation. My name is John Esposito and I am the Chief of Department at the New York City Fire Department. I am joined today by Kevin Woods, Chief of Operations. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak with you today about the important topic of preventing brush fires in New York City parks.

Recent events have highlighted the dangerous and destructive nature of brush fires. In Los Angeles, at least 28 people died as multiple fires swept across more than 45 square miles of the city. I spent a portion of last week traveling to California to see firsthand how firefighters on the West Coast are responding to these fires. It's a tragic situation, but we're making sure that our fire department learns lessons from their experience. We learn about best practices, about equipment, and about the ways that wildfires behave.

In New York, we experienced an historic surge in brush fires last fall. To give you a sense of the increase, in October and November of 2023, the City experienced roughly 120 brush fires. In October and November of 2024, that number jumped to more than 500. More than half of those came during a single two-week period. The scale of the brush fires increased as well. Whereas

most brush fires in previous years were smaller and relatively easy to contain, some of the fires in 2024 grew quite large very quickly.

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We were fortunate to avoid any lives lost or any residential or commercial property damage. But these fires destroy parkland and endangered the firefighters who respond to them. We cannot afford to underestimate the threat of brush fires and the possibility that they could become more dangerous for people and property in the future.

The bulk of the brush fires last fall took place during a severe and extended drought. A significant lack of rainfall created conditions in which dry vegetation ignited easier than usual, and persistent wind rendered the fires challenging to suppress. Many of the fires took place in isolated locations, requiring firefighters to transport hoses and equipment long distances into remote areas. They were often operating in treacherous terrain, dealing with hills and dense forest. Access to water was sometimes an issue, given a lack of fire hydrants in some areas.

Despite these complications, I am proud to report that the members of the FDNY rose to the occasion. We used the full complement of FDNY tools to respond. During the Inwood Hill Park fire, we used Marine units to draft water from the river. We also used technology in innovative ways, relying on drones and robotics to create situational awareness. Drone technology allows for real-time information for incident commanders who would otherwise be unable to see and understand the span of the fire. It also allows the FDNY to identify hotspots, which was integral to understanding spread. The task force also used drones preventatively to identify risk when inspecting fire sites and potential fire risk locations.

In response to last fall's surge, we created the Department's first ever Brush Fire Task Force. In announcing the task force, Commissioner Tucker emphasized the Department's commitment to protecting New Yorkers and keeping our members safe as they combat these fires. This will include enhancing training that focuses specifically on brush fires; exploring the acquisition of new and additional apparatus that is geared towards brush fires; and testing more specialized tools and equipment for members. One of the lessons that we've learned is the importance of wildland firefighter personal protective equipment, or PPE. Some of the gear used in structural firefighting is heavy and cumbersome, whereas wildland firefighting equipment is lighter and more flexible.

We've also expanded our coordination with our fellow city agencies. In addition to our ongoing work with the Parks Department, we have been working with the New York City Police Department about expanding our options for fighting brush fires. The Fire Department does not have a helicopter, but we have been training with the police on ways to use their helicopters in conjunctions with fire operations.

We've been fighting brush fires for a long time, but the nature and extent of the fires last fall indicates a new level of threat. The Fire Department – working with our colleagues in government and with the support of the City Council – is up to the challenge. We will continue learning and evolving on this issue so that we can provide the best possible protection to the people of New York. I thank the Council for your partnership and your attention to this critical issue. At this time, I will turn it over to my colleagues from the Parks Department.

**Testimony of Daniel Abram, Director of Policy and Programs, New Yorkers for Parks  
Joint Oversight Hearing: Preventing Brush Fires in Parks  
Committee on Parks and Recreation & Committee on Fire and Emergency  
Management**

**January 30, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chair Krishnan, Chair Ariola, and members of the Committees.

My name is Daniel Abram, and I am the Director of Policy and Programs at New Yorkers for Parks. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today to the urgent need to prevent and mitigate brush fires in our city's parks.

The fires that swept through 41 acres of our natural areas last year exposed critical weaknesses in the City's ability to protect and manage these spaces. One of the most significant issues is the severe underfunding of NYC Parks' Natural Resources Group, which has lost 51 forest management positions due to budget cuts. As a result, we estimate that only 50% of the acreage previously managed can be cared for in FY25. This staffing loss directly impacts our ability to remove fire-prone invasive species like phragmites and mugwort, maintain safe trails, and support a rapid response when fires do occur.

The recent fires and ongoing threats to our city's natural areas underscore the urgent need for sustained investment in park management and fire prevention. To address these challenges, we urge the Mayor's office and the Council to:

1. **Restore and baseline \$5 million** to rehire 76 critical staff for the Natural Resources Group to maintain forests, reduce fire risks, and formalize trails.
2. **Invest \$20.5 million** to hire 250 additional Parks Enforcement Patrol officers and baseline 50 Urban Park Rangers. Increased enforcement and staff presence are essential to deterring unsafe activity that can lead to fires.
3. **Ensure a coordinated interagency response** by strengthening collaboration between NYC Parks, FDNY, and other agencies to improve emergency response times and long-term restoration efforts.

While we appreciate the intent of legislation such as Intro. 0800 and the Preconsidered Bill to establish a wildfire mitigation plan, we urge the Council to focus on securing stable, baselined funding for NYC Parks. Without proper resources, legislative mandates risk becoming unfunded requirements rather than actionable solutions.

New York City's parks are essential green infrastructure and frontline defenses against climate change. If we fail to invest in their care and protection, we will see more destructive fires and greater threats to public safety. We urge the Council to act now and restore the funding needed to keep our natural areas safe, resilient, and thriving.

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Thank you for your time.

Daniel Abram



## **NYC Council Joint Hearing of the Committee on Parks and Recreation and the Committee for Fire and Emergency Management**

January 30, 2024

Good afternoon. I'm Katie Swabb representing City Parks Foundation, and I'm here to sound an urgent alarm about the critical state of our urban forest and the dire need for adequate, baselined funding for our parks.

We stand at a pivotal moment. Our city is no longer immune to the devastating wildfires we've watched consume landscapes across the country. In fact, this past fall, we experienced an unprecedented uptick in brush fires, with the FDNY responding to 271 brush fires citywide in just two weeks - the highest number in a two-week period in New York City history. The largest fires affected 10 parks from mid-October through mid-November, and in total 42 acres were destroyed - that's the equivalent of 17 city blocks<sup>1</sup>.

The harsh reality is that our Parks Department is critically underfunded, leaving us dangerously vulnerable not only to more fires but to myriad other issues that plague underinvested spaces. In the FY25 budget, the Parks Department saw a staggering \$55 million cut, reducing its budget to just 0.6% of the city's total - far below the promised 1%. This cut resulted in the loss of over 600 essential parks jobs, including 51 crucial positions in the Natural Resources Group responsible for maintaining our natural areas and forests.

And, while City Parks Foundation established an emergency wildfire response grant through the NYC Green Fund to lessen the financial burden on those affected, it is imperative that the city's response shift from reactive measures to proactive strategies. Right now, our Parks Department is fighting an uphill battle with skeleton crews. With current staffing levels, we estimate the Natural Resources Group can only manage about 384 acres out of 12,000 acres of natural areas citywide in FY25, and this should be deeply concerning to our leaders. Partnerships for Parks (PfP) only has capacity to work with stewardship partners in 349 sites, out of a parks system with 2,000+ total properties. It is entirely possible to begin fire-proofing our parks and urban forests if we invest in the agency and stewardship partners that can do this work. With a robust staff force we would be able to remove fire-prone invasive species like phragmites and mugwort, restore habitats and reintroduce beneficial native species in natural areas, add PEP officers to enforce areas where human interference may be the cause of fires, add PfP staff to support stewardship groups, and ensure swift response to emergencies in coordination with FDNY.

Our trees are vital to the health of our city. They are our first line of defense against climate change impacts. They cool our communities, purify our air, and manage stormwater - and we must invest in their care. In the fall of 2023, New York City passed Local Laws 135 and 148, directing the creation of the Urban Forest Plan, which aims to expand our tree canopy from 22% to 30%. We are working with the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice and a diverse coalition of stakeholders, NYC Parks, Natural Areas Conservancy, the NYC Forest for All coalition, and many others to help develop this plan. The plan will help facilitate a consistent approach spanning government administrations, but it can only be successful if the city funds parks adequately to meet maintenance targets and to expand and sustain our tree canopy and the thousands of volunteers who give their time to help care for our parks system.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/17/nyregion/thecity/17fyi.html>

We urgently need funding for the following critical parks positions:

- \$5M to restore and baseline 76 staff lines for the Natural Resources Group, supporting forestry management and trails formalization in natural areas citywide.
- \$20.5M to support 250 additional Parks Enforcement Patrol officers citywide and baseline 50 Urban Park Ranger positions.
- Adding 15 Partnership for Parks positions to build and support 400+ new volunteer stewardship groups in underserved environmental justice neighborhoods across the city.
- Increasing to \$1M the lump sum provided to City Parks Foundation through the Parks Equity Initiative to sustain current staff and add three new positions to provide training, outreach, coaching, and grants to the increasing number of volunteer groups across NYC.
- \$5M for Parks Equity Initiative member items, to support grassroots and volunteer groups across the city that steward, program, and maintain green spaces.

Baseline funding for NYC Parks is crucial. We can't rely on year-to-year uncertainty or temporary fixes. Our parks need consistent, reliable funding to support long-term planning and maintenance. Without this funding, we face dire consequences: overflowing trash, dirty facilities, unmaintained landscapes, and increased safety risks. We've already seen the impact of understaffing, with delays in fire response and increased damage during recent wildfires.

Investing in our parks is investing in our city's resilience. With proper funding, we can transform our urban forest and our parks system from a potential hazard into a powerful defense against climate change impacts. But we can't do any of this without adequate, baselined funding for our parks workers.

We demand that the city takes action before it's too late.



**New York City Council**

**Oversight: Preventing Brush Fires in Parks**

**Committee on Parks and Recreation jointly with the Committee on Fire and Emergency Management**

**January 30, 2025**

**Testimony By: Emily Walker, Natural Areas Conservancy, Senior Manager of External Affairs**

My name is Emily Walker, and I am the Senior Manager of External Affairs at the Natural Areas Conservancy (NAC). Thank you to Chair Krishnan, Chair Ariola, and the members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation and the Committee on Fire and Emergency Management for the opportunity to speak today.

As champions for NYC's natural areas, we care deeply about the care and condition of our forests, and were alarmed and disheartened to see the devastating impacts of drought conditions last fall, which led to the spate of brush fires in parks and natural areas across the five boroughs.

The timing of the drought and brush fires happened to coincide with the elimination of 51 forest management positions for the Natural Resources Group in the FY25 Adopted Budget for NYC Parks. These positions constituted approximately 80% of the agency's workforce that care for the 12,000 acres of natural areas and forests in our city's parks. The NRG division also lost funding for 26 staff lines in the FY24 November Budget Modification that had been allocated to create the first-ever citywide trails team to care for our 300-mile network of nature trails.

As a stopgap measure to keep critical staff in place in the wake of the FY25 budget cuts, 22 of the eliminated staff lines had been shifted onto Federal grant funding via the Inflation Reduction Act. With this week's freeze on Federal grants, these positions are once again in peril. This precarious staffing for the division of Parks that plays such a critical role in contributing to the climate health of our city reflects a shameful lack of urgency from our decisionmakers at every level of representation, and we are here today to ask that the Council take the strongest stand possible to ensure that this funding is made whole in the FY26 budget.

The brush fires we experienced last fall are a stark reminder of the city's vulnerability to climate change, and of the city's ongoing failure to invest critical funding for natural areas management. We strongly believe that better staffed and maintained natural areas are safer for public access and more ecologically resilient. For these reasons, it is urgent and necessary that more be done to ensure that critical funding is restored for staff lines eliminated in the FY24 and FY25 budgets to both to proactively care for, program, and manage our natural areas and forests for the future.

While improved staffing wouldn't have prevented the drought itself, Parks has for too long been operating with minimal resources to do critical management, restoration, and monitoring in our natural areas during this era of climate instability. With increased staffing, NRG would be able to do more work to control and suppress the spread of invasive species that leave our forests more vulnerable to fire, such as phragmites and mugwort. Both of these plants have a tendency to grow in abundance in our more neglected natural areas, outcompeting native understory plants



for space, and increasing the fuel load in our forests, particularly in times of drought. These plants require a high-level of specialized maintenance to keep in check, and with the current level of staff in NRG, that work has been not able to keep pace with the need.

As our colleagues at NYC Parks assess the damage from these fires, adequate staff will be critically needed to ensure that the spaces that experienced fires last fall can be restored and monitored appropriately, with considerations of soil stabilization and erosion control, and climate-adapted replanting plans. With the current level of funding for the NRG, that work will not be able to take place without significantly offsetting other planned work for the division.

These fires have made clear that it is more urgent than ever that NYC and its elected officials take meaningful action by adequately funding the care of our forests and natural areas, which provide a high level of benefits relative to their investment. Our natural areas are home to 5 million of NYC's 7 million trees, they absorb 22% of its stormwater and 70% of its carbon, and can also be up to 13 degrees cooler than nearby street trees during extreme heat events. We know that healthier forests help create a healthier climate, and that failing to invest in our natural areas will leave NYC more vulnerable to flooding, extreme heat, and now fire.

Thank you again for your leadership and for the opportunity to express our support for increased investment in NYC Parks and their natural areas.



**Testimony for the NYC Council Committees on Parks & Recreation and Fire & Emergency Management  
Victoria Dearborn, Program Specialist, The Nature Conservancy, New York  
January 30, 2025**

My name is Victoria Dearborn, and I am The Nature Conservancy's Program Specialist with the Cities Program in New York. The Nature Conservancy is the world's largest conservation organization, and our diverse staff and more than 400 scientists conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. We impact conservation in 76 countries and territories, directly and with partners. We have 90,000 members across New York, with 35,000 living in New York City. We advance strategies that create a healthy, resilient, and sustainable urban environment and are committed to improving New York City's air, land, and water to sustain and support the people and nature of this great city.

In New York City, we convene the [Forest for All NYC](#) coalition and we are leading practitioners on the science and policy of the NYC urban forest. In 2021, we published the [State of the Urban Forest in NYC](#) (SUFNYC) a comprehensive assessment of the local urban forest, and with Forest for All NYC, released the [NYC Urban Forest Agenda](#), a collaborative roadmap that provides detailed recommendations to meaningfully protect, maintain, expand, research, and promote the NYC urban forest to benefit all New Yorkers justly and equitably. We also conducted an analysis of local [tree canopy potential](#) that shows the feasibility of expanding canopy cover in every neighborhood across the city.

I am writing on behalf of The Nature Conservancy and as a proud member of Forest for All NYC and the Play Fair Coalition to testify regarding the devastating drought that contributed to an unprecedented number of brush fires in parks across NYC this fall, and the related need for sustained funding to maintain and protect trees across the city. Thank you to Parks Committee Chair Krishnan and our allies in City Council for their continued commitment to parks and to growing the NYC urban forest to at least 30 percent by 2035. The persistent drought, in combination with chronic and current disinvestment in parks and trees in NYC, has created risks to public safety in parks, and led to damage in natural areas and of mature trees that will take decades to restore. The introductions under review today, which ensure the safety of New Yorkers by mitigating fire risk and protecting the health of mature trees, address important elements of caring for the urban forest, but funding for maintenance and consistent care, in particular, is rarely prioritized. Baseline and sustained funding, that spans administrations, is critical to support the longevity and safety of trees as living infrastructure in NYC.

This past October was the driest on record for NYC, resulting in hundreds of brush fires in parks – more than the New York City Fire Department (FDNY) has recorded at any other time in City history. In stark contrast, the previous fall was one of the wettest on record in NYC, with intense flooding shutting down public transit and leading to a state of emergency. The effects of climate change in NYC, including flooding, extreme heat, and drought and fire conditions, are dangerous and pose a critical threat to the health and safety of every New Yorker. As our city continues to face [significant increases in the number and intensity of heat waves](#) and extreme precipitation events in the coming decade, trees, parks, and bioswales, when adequately maintained, offer critical nature-based solutions to mitigate the impacts of droughts, floods, heatwaves, and other extreme weather events. Trees canopy, vegetation cover, and green space are crucial for the health, safety, and livability of NYC.

The urban forest includes not just the trees and their canopy, but also their physical infrastructure, such as tree beds and soil, the accompanying biodiversity, and a rich social infrastructure, such as the people who dedicate their careers and free time to it. The urban forest includes over 7 million trees, with their canopy covering 22

percent of the city as of 2017. It spans the whole of the city, crossing jurisdictions and owners, and can be found on our streets, private backyards, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) campuses, City parks, schools, institutions, and other sites.

The urban forest provides substantial and meaningful benefits including for mental and physical health, educational outcomes, job creation, community cohesion, energy burden reduction, climate resilience, carbon storage, and as monuments or cultural symbols. Achieving Forest for All NYC's visionary goal of 30 percent canopy by 2035 (30x35) will increase these benefits and distribute them in a more equitable way. (See Ch. 4 of SUFNYC). [Research published in 2018 by the US Department of Agriculture \(USDA\) Forest Service](#) for the urban forest as a whole indicates that its benefits and services of carbon sequestration and mitigation, air pollution removal, avoided stormwater runoff, and reduced energy costs to be worth well over \$260 million per year, and the cost to replace this resource if lost would be about \$5.7 billion for the urban forest as a whole indicates that its benefits and services of carbon sequestration and mitigation, air pollution removal, avoided stormwater runoff, and reduced energy costs to be worth well over \$260 million per year, and the cost to replace this resource if lost would be about \$5.7 billion.

There are severe inequities in the spatial distribution of the NYC urban forest, and thus meaningful disparities in terms of where benefits and services are provisioned and to whom. In general, areas with lower income residents and higher proportions of people of color, and ultimately more socially and heat-vulnerable communities, tend to have less canopy than other areas, and should be prioritized for potential expansion for the urban forest (see Ch. 4 of SUFNYC). These areas also frequently are the subject of environmental hazards, such as high air pollution, and the disparities are a meaningful environmental justice concern. To achieve long-term growth and canopy increases, trees require ongoing care and protection alongside additional plantings. Further, it is critical that investments in greening the landscape be carried out in ways that align with community visions, elevate community leadership, and work to avoid potential adverse impacts on the existing residents, such as economic displacement or gentrification.

Public funding dedicated to the NYC urban forest is insufficient and has been heavily variable. While drought was the primary driver of the brush fires across NYC parks this past fall, chronic disinvestment in the workforce which maintains, cleans, and protects parks has unequivocally contributed to their scale and severity. Despite the urban forest's essential role in the health and resilience of our city, it continues to be underfunded and has been vulnerable to disproportionate cuts. The NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) is responsible for 53.5% of tree canopy in NYC, but only received an annual average of 0.34 percent of the total City Other than Personal Services (OTPS) expense budget from FY18 to FY22. The portion allocated to urban forestry work was only 0.04 percent of the total City OTPS expense budget (or an average of \$23 million per year, adjusted for inflation to 2021 dollars). This funding limits critical maintenance activities necessary to keep trees healthy, like pruning, stump removal, and pest and disease management. It also constrains the number of new tree plantings each year despite a large potential for this activity, as demonstrated in our [tree canopy factsheets](#) for every Council and Community District.

In addition to limited funding, the urban forest also suffers from *inconsistent* funding, and is vulnerable to recurrent drastic cuts, and these funding fluctuations interrupt cycles of regular tree maintenance and long-term

planning that are essential to a long-lasting, healthy urban forest. The NYC Parks budget was cut by \$25M for FY24 and the FY25 Executive Budget was nearly \$55M less than the adopted FY24 Budget. In the November Plan, released amidst ongoing news coverage of brushfires destroying acres of parkland, the Administration identified \$200M in additional revenue for FY25, as well as reduced migrant-related spending, and yet there was no new funding directed to filling in the gaps in Parks department staffing.

The Preliminary FY26 Budget released this month mirrored the same pattern we have seen in budget cycle after budget cycle for Parks. We are always grateful to see any new or restored investments in Parks and we were glad to see funding for Second Shift maintenance services and swim and recreation programs in the Preliminary Budget. But once again, the Budget does not restore meaningful investments to Parks and does not include any restorations to the previously slashed forestry and natural areas workforce that protect and maintain trees to ensure they do not create risk through fire or falling limbs. The Administration has said that it values the expansion of the urban forest and has made commitments to environmental justice and equity in climate resilience. Despite these verbal commitments, the Administration's budgets continue to demonstrate that parks and the urban forest are not a priority.

This year, the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice will complete the City's first ever citywide Urban Forest Plan. This Plan will demonstrate a unifying, ambitious, and lasting vision and roadmap for the longevity of the NYC urban forest, ensuring and expanding its benefits to New Yorkers. This Plan presents an opportunity for this Administration to be proactive in caring for the urban forest to help its economic, social, and environmental value is sustained, including the multitude of ways it improves the safety and wellbeing of New Yorkers. The Urban Forest Plan has the potential to position NYC as a standout leader in forestry and environmental justice. But the Plan will not achieve that vision or status unless it is coupled with long-term, sustained funding. Investing in the urban forest and NYC Parks is critical to realize the vision of an equitable and healthy NYC and to reduce the impacts of future droughts, future floods, future heatwaves, and other extreme weather events driven by climate change.

The urban forest is a critical part of the fabric of our city, as well as a vital solution to mitigating climate change and advancing environmental justice. We urge this Council and the Administration to acknowledge its value as a critical element of public safety, resilience, and well-being, by properly resourcing regular tree and parks maintenance and care.

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony. The Nature Conservancy is pleased to make ourselves available for discussion.

Thank you,



Victoria Dearborn  
Program Specialist, NY Cities  
The Nature Conservancy  
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## Parks and Environment

The Parks and Environment Committee normally meets on the third Tuesday of the month at 7:00 pm.

Fay Hill, Chair  
Maximus Barton, Vice Chair

City Council Parks and Wildlife Hearing

Thursday, January 30th, 2025

Testimony for Parks Committee Vice Chair, Queens Community Board 13, Max Barton

Thank you, members of this committee, and members of City Council. My name is Max Barton, and I serve as the Vice Chair of the Parks Committee on Queens Community Board 13. On behalf of the Parks loving members of our community I thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in full support of Intro 0800-2024.

This Legislation addresses two persistent problems that plague our neighborhoods. Timelines for tree maintenance in locations that pose a threat to our community and transparency to give our residents some peace of mind that their voices are being heard. Many Parks Committee meetings that I have attended for Queens Community Board 13 include residents pleading their safety related tree issues. This intro will aid us significantly in our continued efforts to provide relief to our community.

Tree maintenance is critical for healthy New York City Parks where millions of people rely on these green spaces. Without regular care the Trees in our City Parks can become hazardous, causing unnecessary risks to our Parks visitors. Routine inspections and maintenance can easily mitigate these risks by helping prevent accidents before they become a possibility.



The long-term health of our green spaces and overall beautification of our Parks system is something that goes hand in hand with proper tree care. Healthy trees support biodiversity by providing habitats for wildlife and contribute to the overall beauty of the space, making it more enjoyable for New Yorkers.

As a member of Queens Community Board 13, Parks Committee, it is getting a little repetitive watching events such as getting the grass mowed being considered victories. Timeliness for maintenance and transparency for our residents would be a win for our community with the passing of Intro 0800-2024.

Well maintained trees play a key role in how our parks remain vibrant and resilient. Investing in maintenance for these trees helps preserve these green spaces for both present and future generations. I am in favor of both ecological health and community well-being; therefore I am in support of Intro 0800-2024.

Thank you for your time and commitment to improving our city.



***NYC Council Hearing  
Committee on Parks and Recreation  
Committee on Fire and Emergency Management  
January 30, 2025***

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Scott Middleton and I am the Executive Director of Marine Park Alliance, the friends group for Brooklyn's biggest park.

Hundreds of acres of Marine Park wetlands were used to dispose of non-hazardous solid waste from 1934 to 1964. Since that time, most of Marine Park's landfilled uplands have become colonized by monocultures of mugwort and Phragmites, which become highly flammable when dry. Any spark can set it off.

Last fall, NYC's severe drought caused an unprecedented number of wildfires. The most frequent citywide were in Marine Park. *Phragmites australis* ignited in the park's salt marsh and winds carried the flames to transitional native plantings and coastal forests, leading to individual burns of up to 6 acres. Up to 20 acres burn here annually, a great concern to adjacent homeowners and park visitors alike. This year, fires occurred nearly daily from October 1st to Thanksgiving.

Marine park Alliance leads a committee of concerned nonprofits that use and care about the 530-acres Forever Wild Preserve here. One committee member responds to each and every fire reported, the Gerritsen Beach Volunteer Fire Department. The "Vollies," as they are affectionately called, are outfitted with equipment and vehicles specifically to handle these frequent brush fires. We also work with NYC Parks Natural Resources Group (NRG), which has captured city, state, and federal funding over the past 40 years to perform salt marsh restorations, including regrading, planting, and transforming uplands dominated by non-native invasive species into native coastal grassland, shrubland, and forest. Sustaining these native habitats requires active management and with each round of budget cuts maintenance of natural areas is unfortunately an early victim.

Marine Park Alliance and its supporters are committed to the preservation and resilience of Gerritsen Creek's unique habitats. Our efforts aim to curb future fires and vandalism by demonstrating positive, community stewardship of natural areas in response to a high-profile crisis for NYC Parks, and we are strongly supportive of efforts to restore the budget so Natural Areas expert technicians can return to Brooklyn's largest park.

**3000 Fillmore Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11234**  
[reachus@marineparkalliance.org](mailto:reachus@marineparkalliance.org) | [marineparkalliance.org](http://marineparkalliance.org)



**Testimony of Deaunte Johnson, Policy Fellow  
New York League of Conservation Voters  
City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation  
Jointly with the Committee on Fire and Emergency Management  
Oversight Hearing on Preventing Brush Fires in Parks  
January 30, 2025**

My name is Deaunte Johnson and I am the Policy Fellow at the New York League of Conservation Voters. NYLCV is a statewide environmental advocacy organization representing over 30,000 members in New York City. Thank you, Chairs Krishnan and Ariola, and members of the Committees on Parks and Fire and Emergency Management for the opportunity to comment.

As the effects of climate change continue to be felt all across America, we must actively fight for our environment and the people most vulnerable. Last year, between October 29th and November 14th, FDNY responded to at least 229 brush fires. These fires occurred in all 5 boroughs in our beloved parks as temperatures soared above 70 degrees in the early days of November.

Well-managed parks, trees, and green spaces are critical to combat the risk of brushfires and other climate related problems in our city. A lack of robust, long-term funding for our parks system threatens NYC Parks and its strained workforce. To thrive, we must invest in parks and parks workers. Because when our parks flourish, so does our city.

The parks budget is essential for making sure our parks work for all New Yorkers. NYC Parks was the only city agency to not receive budget restorations, impacting safety and accessibility, especially in vulnerable environmental justice communities. Last year's parks budget cuts, particularly in the Parks Department's Natural Resources Group, increased the likelihood of fires in our city's parks since there was an overall lack of park maintenance with fewer trails and less debris being cleared. As a result, there weren't enough maintenance workers for sufficient debris removal allowing the perfect conditions for fires that were preventable.

**For FY26, the Play Fair for Parks Coalition requests a total of \$95 million for NYC Parks including \$36.2 million for Resilient Parks. This means 148 forestry staff for tree care on streets and in parks and 76 natural areas staff to manage, and maintain, 12,000 acres of natural areas, 300 miles of trails, and increasing access and protection against fires in our city parks.**

**Testimony of Leila Mougoui Bakhtiari, Director of Landscape Management, Prospect Park Alliance  
Committee on Parks and Recreation Jointly with the Committee on Fire and Emergency Management  
Oversight Hearing: Preventing Brush Fires in Parks  
January 30, 2025**

My name is Leila Mougoui Bakhtiari, and I serve as the Director of Landscape Management for the Prospect Park Alliance, the non-profit organization that manages Prospect Park, Brooklyn's flagship park, in partnership with the City. On behalf of the Alliance, I thank the Parks Committee and Fire and Emergency Management Committee for holding this important hearing.

Prospect Park is home to 350 acres of natural areas, including Brooklyn's last remaining upland forest, and caring for this precious resource and making sure that it remains for the future generations is central to the Alliance's mission. I oversee Prospect Park's dedicated team of gardeners, ecologists, forestry technicians, and arborists who preserve and restore the park's natural areas. The importance of proactive and strategic natural area management was made painfully clear on Friday, November 8th, 2024, when a two-alarm fire devastated two acres of the park's woodland Ravine.

Our parks need dedicated City funding for natural area management and ongoing maintenance to keep our forests healthy and resilient to the risks of climate change. October was New York City's driest month on record, the type of drought and extreme conditions that are becoming increasingly common. New York City has 12,000 acres of natural areas and 6,800 acres of that are forests on NYC Parks property. Prospect Park might be a small portion of that but it has more than 10 million annual visits, and 370,000 Brooklynites live in the immediate vicinity of Prospect Park and they rely on the park for their health and well being. We are lucky a visitor spotted and reported this fire so quickly, or the devastation could have been much more significant.

Thanks to the swift response of 106 Fire and EMS personnel, the fire was contained and extinguished. However, the damage to this critical habitat left us with significant restoration challenges. Our team is stabilizing the steep slopes in the affected area to prevent erosion, but full restoration will require years of intensive work and long term monitoring.

The fire was a stark reminder of the vulnerability of our urban forested natural areas and the urgent need for comprehensive maintenance practices to mitigate risks to public safety and environmental health. Without sufficient funding to prioritize the care and maintenance of our cherished parks, our ability to prevent such disasters is significantly impaired. Underfunded parks face delayed maintenance, making them more susceptible to hazards such as tree failures, erosion, and, as we've experienced, devastating fires. This jeopardizes not only the environment but also the safety of park visitors and nearby communities. Parks are essential infrastructure, and without proper investment, their capacity to foster climate resilience, biodiversity, and public well-being is deeply compromised.

For decades, organizations like the Prospect Park Alliance, alongside community groups and NYC Parks staff, have stewarded our city's green spaces, ensuring they remain safe, accessible, and vibrant for all New Yorkers. However, we cannot do this alone. Adequate investment in natural area maintenance and restoration efforts is essential to safeguarding these vital spaces for future generations.

*Committee on Parks and Recreation and Committee on Fire and Emergency  
Management Oversight Hearing on Preventing Brush Fires in Parks*

As stewards of Riverside Park in Manhattan, which contains 27 acres of natural forest, we appreciate the NYC City Council's concern for New York City's forested parkland impacted by fires in 2024. The two bills being discussed, T2025-3015, and Int 0800-2024, represent a positive step in framing this critical issue.

Forests are the lungs of our City, and legislation to protect them can be vital to their survival and to the health and safety of our residents. The reality, however, is that any legislation on forest management MUST also be tied to an increase in funding for the NYC Parks Department – an agency whose budget is already woefully underfunded and was cut deeply in the most recent budget cycle. As a matter of principle, the urban forest located on City land has never received adequate or reliable funding – and it continues to face cut after cut as the years go on.

The public relies on Riverside Park's forests for natural respite, cooler temperatures, storm mitigation, air quality, and many other public health essentials. The Riverside Park Conservancy team is on the ground every day working to help care for these precious natural areas, but we are unable to wholly fill the maintenance gaps caused by inadequate funding for the NYC Parks Department.

To put the problem into scale: in the FY25 Adopted Budget, the Natural Resources Group (NRG) of NYC Parks sustained a cut of \$2.5M, or a net loss of 51 positions. This means that the few remaining NRG staff are only able to provide coverage for about 380 acres – a tiny fraction of the 12,000 acres of natural areas that need care. If the City continues to allow the condition of its forested areas to deteriorate unchecked, the damage caused by fires – and the lack of ability to recover from them – will only worsen.

The Parks Department's operating budget is inadequate to meet the needs of a 21<sup>st</sup> century city, and it shows when tragic, climate-driven events such as fires rage through our beloved Parks. As extreme weather events and disasters continue to increase in frequency and severity, the city must take proactive action to bolster the climate resiliency of our green spaces and waterfronts. Not only is maintaining healthy forests at the core of preventing fires from happening at all, but it is also essential to enacting intensive restoration when they do occur.

The solution is simple: we need baselined, consistent funding for trained and qualified professionals to oversee tree maintenance and forest restoration work on the ground.

For a paltry \$5 million annual cost, 76 staff members of the Natural Resources Group would be able to work on the ground throughout the five boroughs to support healthier forests.

Ultimately, the City has a choice to start taking care of the land or to continue neglecting it. The decision to continue disinvesting from the land will lead us down a frightening path of more fires, flooding, extreme heat, economic decline, and air pollution. The decision to adequately fund parks – an investment that simultaneously supports the growth of the green workforce – should be common sense, and will have a positive impact on resilience, livability, and public health outcomes for generations.



**New York City Council Committee on Parks  
Thursday, January 30, 2025  
Committees on Fire & Emergency and Parks and Recreation  
Testimony on behalf of Van Cortlandt Park Alliance**

Good afternoon, I am Christina Taylor, Deputy Director of Van Cortlandt Park Alliance. We are a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition. Thank you for allowing me to testify virtually. Once again, I was down at City Hall last week for the Parks Rally on the steps - I would rather not add up the number of hours that I have spent advocating for Parks funding over the last two decades. It is extremely frustrating that we have to continue doing this dance every year.

Last fall, we had a new obstacle to overcome - we added drought and brushfires to the list of climate change impacts on our parks. Throughout November of 2024, New York City experienced a record-level drought. Lack of water, combined with high winds, resulted in Van Cortlandt Park experiencing numerous fires in a concentrated period of time. We had three locations in our park's forests severely impacted by these brushfires.

We believe inconsistent and insufficient funding for our natural areas and forest management staff directly increased the risk of brush and natural area forest fires, and will lead to an insufficient response and recovery plan. We are supportive of the Play Fair Coalition's request for funding in the FY26 budget that would restore staffing for the Natural Resources Group, Parks Enforcement Patrol, and Urban Park Rangers.

Luckily for Van Cortlandt Park, we have a small but dedicated Parks staff, small but dedicated Alliance staff and small but dedicated vital volunteers who worked together prior to, during, and after the brushfires to reduce the impact.

As we all look to combat the ill effects of global climate change, the essential role of a park as large as Van Cortlandt Park, cannot be overstated. The park's overall health supports the health and well-being of our Bronx community, while also providing respite from the stresses of urban living.

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance understands the desire for bills such as **Intro 0800-2024** and the Preconsidered Bill but believe that more consistent, baselined funding for Parks is what is ultimately needed to advance the intent of these bills. There is concern that further legislating these processes will amount to an unfunded mandate for the agency.

It is not fair, to once again, ask NYC Parks to do more but with less funding. The only way to make this bill impactful is if Parks has staff that can be dedicated to implementing it.

New Yorkers deserve a fully funded, safe, clean, green and resilient parks system. The ongoing budget cuts to NYC Parks and the proposed budget for next fiscal year jeopardize the very heart of our communities. These cuts will make it even more difficult for the already understaffed,

under-resourced Parks Department to carry out the basic work needed to ensure parks are equitable and accessible for all New Yorkers.

**Year after year, NYC Parks staff does more with less. The staff is already stretched too thin. They are tired and frustrated, and so are we.**

What is going to happen next year when there are additional cuts? It is not a pretty picture currently in our parks. There are not enough staff and working vehicles to pick up the garbage and clean the restrooms. How are they supposed to properly maintain our forests when there is not enough funding for the basics?

We demand 1% of the city budget for NYC Parks. Mayor Adams repeatedly committed to this investment but has not followed through. Parks are critical infrastructure, providing equitable and accessible public health, mental wellbeing, and much-needed social interaction. Parks need to be clean and safe in order to serve our great city. They should be funded accordingly.

Thank you.

Alexis K Foote

[REDACTED]  
Far Rockaway, NY 11692  
[REDACTED]

Dear Committee Members on Parks and Recreation and Fire and Emergency Management,

My name is Mrs. Alexis K Smallwood-Foote, and I am proud to stand here with the Play Fair for Parks Coalition to fight for the future of our city's parks. Today, we are united in our call for a \$95 million investment to restore NYC Parks' workforce and improve Fire and Emergency Management Safety for all National Parks in New York City.

As someone who grew up in New York City in NYCHA ( New York City Housing Authority) I've had the great pleasure of enjoying all of our national parks as a child, teenager and young adult (**Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Hamilton Grange National Memorial at St. Nicholas Park, General Grant's National Memorial at Riverside Park, Fort Washington, ParkFort and Tryon Park**) just to name a few. That's why it is so important that the Mayor and the City Council need to invest \$5M which would restore and baseline 76 staff lines for the Natural Resources Group to support forestry management and trails formalization in natural areas citywide.

The forest management positions were eliminated in the FY25 budget (\$2.5M for 51 staff), and the planned Citywide Trails Team funding was cut from the FY24 budget during the FY24 Budget Modification (\$2.4M for 26 f/t positions). We also need to make sure that everyone can feel safe and protected; which means we need \$20.5M to support 250 additional Parks Enforcement Patrol officers citywide, and would baseline 50 Urban Park Ranger positions.

In my district, we have **Arverne East Nature Preserve Edgemere Ave. bet. B. 56 Pl. and B. 44 St. and Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge** we need to make sure that these precious gems could be destroyed due to climate change and other natural disasters like fires. As we saw forest fires can kill and destroy lives; it does about the deconstruction fires can cause like they California Wildfires. Climate change continues to bring a variety of risks to the city and our natural areas, and having unpredictable staffing and resources to manage and care for these spaces has made it challenging to ensure that the city is proactively managing these spaces for climate resilience.

We are demanding that The Mayor and the City Council with regards to the proposed legislation (Intro. 0800 and PreConsidered Bill to establish a wildfire mitigation plan) - we appreciate the intent of the legislation, but believe that more consistent, baselined funding for Parks is what is ultimately needed to advance the intent of these bills. There is concern that further legislating these processes will amount to an unfunded mandate for the agency.



I would love for future generations to be able to enjoy all of the national parks in New York City; without fear of dying in the park because of a fire or other natural disaster because Parks and Recreations weren't prepared. Future generations are counting on all of us to do the right things regardless of income. Thank you for time and your cooperation.

Good afternoon esteemed City Council Members, representatives of environmental, sustainability, climate change and social-justice-focused non-profits, other stakeholders and fellow NYC community gardeners and other concerned citizens:

I am here to request that the City Council's Parks and Recreation and Fire and Emergency Management Committees address the risks facing NYC's natural areas and Parks.

The FY25 budget eliminated 51 forestry positions and the Citywide Trails Team, leaving our parks vulnerable to brush fires and slowing response times.

I ask members of both committees to encourage their cohorts in the City Council to:

1. **Restore Essential Parks Staff:** Restoring these positions (\$4.9M total) is vital to managing overgrowth, invasive species, and recovery efforts.
2. **Recovery Efforts Require Resources:** Stabilizing erosion, replanting climate-adapted species, and monitoring long-term health are critical after fires.
3. **Interagency Coordination Matters:** A stronger plan is needed to improve emergency response and prevent future fires.

Lastly, as a long-time community gardener, community leader, and cultural anthropologist with decorative arts history and design training, I ask the Mayor's Office, the City Council and the Governor of NYC to come up with a five-year plan to document NYC's Park assets (both physical and cultural) to protect the green spaces and infrastructure that centuries of New Yorkers have worked to protect and preserve.

Thank you.

With regards,

Catherine Lafferty  
Hell's Kitchen resident for 25.5 years

January 30, 2025

Good day Legislative Committee and City Council members:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of Intro: 0800-2024

My name is Fay D. Hill, a resident of Springfield Gardens for over 48 years. I am the chair of Community Board 13 Parks & Environment Committee for several years and an advocate for our New York City Parks and green spaces where I have testified on behalf of NY4Parks, rallied on the steps of City Hall and testified before various New York City council's administrations.

I am here to testify once more on this critical city issue on why low tree maintenance is critical and unsafe for my community and other areas of the city.

On several occasions when have hosted our Parks & Environment Committee CB13 meetings there are many concerns from the community in reference to low maintenance of trees that are a major problem and are a danger to people and their properties. This has been a long occurring problem at our committee meetings with no end in sight.

***I am here today to personally testifying on my behalf.***

On January 9, 2025 at approximately 2:30 pm one of the city street trees fell down because of low maintenance. Luckily this tree did not damage the roof of my home but I had to replace the electrical pole adjoining my home and the wires of Con Edison. This tree had been reported several times for over six years by my neighbor because of low maintenance when fallen branches were reported breaking from the tree but the New York Parks Department forestry department when they eventually inspected that tree, they reported that the tree was in good condition and had placed a "pink tag" on its bark. There is another tree directly in front of my home which has the same condition but forestry said the tree in perfect condition.

There are several trees in our parks in Rosedale and Springfield Gardens that needs total maintenance. When a tree falls within the parks, broken limbs that

can be hazardous to people lives they are left there for several months before they are either removed or cut down.

We do need trees to help us breathe in oxygen, clean the environment as well as beautification of our communities but proper care and maintenance is also vital.

When trees are not properly maintained they poses a threat to harm people or property that resulted on January 9, 2025 as stated above. When trees are not maintained they can be a threat from fallen limbs on people, property and buildings (I should also mention that this fallen tree damaged my neighbor's car that was parked in front of her home when the neighbor had just returned minutes from shopping and could have been injured or killed) her car was totaled.

I am pleading to the legislative committee and our city council members to vote on Intro 0080-2024 into legislation.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully submitted,

Fay D. Hill  
Concerned Citizen  
State Assembly District Leader  
Assembly District 31B  
Chairperson  
Community Board 13  
Parks & Environment Committee

**From:** [JK \(Lilith\) Canepa](#)  
**To:** [dabram@ny4p.org](mailto:dabram@ny4p.org); [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Preventing brush fires in NYC - my testimony  
**Date:** Friday, January 31, 2025 3:35:45 PM

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Dear Councilmembers,

Thank you and also a special thanks to the Committees (Parks and Recreation and Fire and Emergency Management) for creating this opportunity for the public to testify on our concern, during this time of extreme climate instability, about the potential for more intense and frequent fires from which we must protect ourselves and our city.

I am on the Steering Committee of El Jardin del Paraiso, a community garden in the East Village. We host schoolchildren daily during the school year (and are open to children visiting during summer vacation; in fact we donated a plot so they can learn to grow food). In addition we are a haven for the elderly people in the community. But during last year's dry summer, we lost many of our plants and some of our trees withered alarmingly. A fugitive cigarette tossed carelessly could have caused a tragedy, given all those who were in the garden every day. Then came this fall, when the city went 40 days without rain.

We've seen the limitations on our reliance on fire hydrants. Of course we don't expect to see anything like an Eaton fire in a community garden, but we're a city of monumentally-sized parks: Van Cortlandt, Prospect, Park, Central Park, Flushing Meadows, Pelham Bay, Forest, Clove Lake .... and if such a tragedy were to befall one of them, there could be significant harm to the people visiting or living nearby, perhaps worse than injuries: we could see fatalities.

I've spoken to some of our Parks representatives. I was told that there are no new hirings in their departments and that they are working doubly hard to fulfill the tasks. I'd called about a tree that had concrete poured into it. Parks took a long time to respond and then issued a warning to the proprietor of the store who was likely the responsible party. Our own willow tree, named one of the five new "Great Trees of NYC", is in serious need of pruning and Parks was unable to help. It's leaning far to the west and we could lose it in a storm or significant snowfall. This is all part of a starvation budget that is not only hurting the trees and parks as we speak but imply significant dangerous possibilities if a fire were to happen anywhere in or near these trees or bushes and other plantings. I ask that you do all in your power to restore the \$4.9 million needed to protect our parks and gardens and open spaces, to recover what's been damaged, to be responsive to calls of distress or simple ongoing good practices in management of these areas, to do necessary pruning, to protect our trees from the gypsy moth and other predators, etc. I also ask that you go further and encourage, support and fund (or donate) native plants that feed beneficial wildlife (birds, insects etc) so that our trees and plants can flourish and be resilient to diseases and fires.

It's wonderful that these two committees are working together. Let's also bring in the other agencies where needed, like DEP, so that all can coordinate your efforts.

Thank you.

Judith K. Canepa

Events Coordinator, Steering Committee of El Jardin del Paraiso community garden



**From:** [Melinda McCulloch](#)  
**To:** [Testimony; dabram@ny4p.org](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Int 0800-2024 hearing testimony  
**Date:** Monday, January 27, 2025 3:55:25 PM

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[REDACTED]

Hello,

My name is Melinda McCulloch and I live in the Bronx with my two kids. We've played in parks and playgrounds throughout the city-held birthday parties there, met up with friends, killed time, had picnics, etc. What all New Yorkers do. My kids really enjoy the trees in particular. There's one tree in Prospect Park near our old apartment that is my daughter's "favorite." When we go to visit friends in Brooklyn, she asks to go visit this tree and we have pictures of her over the years standing in front of it, growing with her. In our neighborhood of Spuyten Duyvil, we've organically built a community at a playground at Henry Hudson Park—my kids made their best friends at this playground and on many Friday nights when the weather is nice, you'll see a bunch of families at what my kids call "the party." A few people order pizza to share and we talk and hang out. Last year, when we were at the playground on a sunny, calm day, we heard a huge crack and a giant branch, the size of a medium sized tree, fell on the playground. One person's shoulder was hurt but thankfully, no one else was injured. It was shocking to witness and my 3 year old regularly brought up the "tree falling" whenever we would pass by the park. He would also talk fearfully about other trees falling down. I don't know for sure, but I wonder if there would have been a way to save that tree or cut it back so it wouldn't have fallen like it did, scaring a bunch of kids and removing the shade that made it such a pleasant place to hang out. Without that tree shade, I've noticed that people don't hang out there as often and when they do, don't interact as much. It's fascinating, and in this case sad, how much of a social impact one tree can have on a community, but it has! This is part of the reason why I support this bill. Our trees are a wonderful natural resource that we need to care for and maintain, in order to preserve the beauty of our city and the safety of our neighbors.

Melinda

**From:** [Imani Cenac](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Green Spaces are Crucial for Survival  
**Date:** Monday, January 27, 2025 10:37:57 AM

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[REDACTED]

Green spaces are essential to human well-being. They support our mental health, help mitigate the effects of pollution, and provide places for exercise and community connection. The value of these spaces became especially clear during the 2020 lockdown, when they offered people a refuge from the challenges of isolation and a chance to reconnect with nature. At a time when many were drawn to tech jobs, parks became a reminder of the importance of physical spaces that promote health and social connection.

In addition to the emotional and environmental benefits, well-maintained trees in these green spaces play a crucial role in keeping parks safe and healthy. Regular tree maintenance reduces the risk of falling branches, prevents disease spread, and ensures the overall vitality of the park ecosystem. We sometimes forget how essential these simple elements of nature are to our daily lives, but they are both practical and rewarding when cared for properly.

--

Imani Cenac  
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*Sara Roosevelt Park Community Coalition*

**Re: T2025-2950 Int 0800-2024 T2025-3015 Oversight Hearing**

My name is K Webster, the current President of the decades old Sara Roosevelt Park Community Coalition. Thank you for this chance to speak about the importance of these issues for our city.

I've been a resident, gardener and community organizer around Sara Roosevelt Park for since 1978. Our communities and the Parks Department work hard here, despite serious problems.

We are writing in support of Intro 0800-2024, for Parks Department to: Develop criteria for prioritizing tree maintenance, the likelihood of harm to people or property, fallen trees or limbs that may pose a threat, proximity to buildings, etc. with these criteria posted on Parks website.

We are in support of T2025-3015 to amend the administrative code in relation to a plan to mitigate wildfires in parks under the jurisdiction of the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Recovery and response and prevention of wildfires needs to include staff to stabilize erosion, replant and monitor the long-term health of fire locations.

The Play Fair Coalition's request for funding in the FY26 budget would restore staffing for the Natural Resources Group [NRG], Parks Enforcement Patrol, and Urban Park Rangers.

The baselining staffing positions means that Parks and NYC commits to Park workers allowing them to commit to NYC and its Parks. Workers need predictability and consistency in their lives, and we need predictability consistency in an increasingly unpredictable climate to ensure our Parks are safe and remain the oasis that this complex and hard working city requires.

As the PlayFair Coalition outlines, inconsistent and insufficient funding for staffing means: less use of parks, less safety in parks, and an erosion of public confidence in our city as a whole.

PlayFair has outlined commonsense needs and the results that flow from adequately providing the resources required to support ALL public parks regardless of the communities surrounding them.

Climate change continues to bring a dangerous reality and risk to our city, to our natural areas and especially to poorer communities. Unpredictable staffing and resources to manage and care for these (and all park) spaces makes this more challenging for climate resilience. And abandons our working class park workers, their families and their communities. No one wants to see that.

Thank you,

K Webster

President, Sara Roosevelt Park Community Coalition

Website <http://sdrpc.mkgarden.org/> Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/StantonBldg>,

Twitter @SaraRPCC BlueSky <https://sararpcc.bsky.social/>

Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/sararooseveltparkcc/>

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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**From:** Wendy Brawer <web@greenmap.org>  
**Sent:** Friday, January 31, 2025 2:19:45 PM  
**To:** Daniel Abram <dabram@ny4p.org>  
**Subject:** testimony on Intro 0800-2024

Let's not have things spiral out of control like Los Angeles is experiencing!

I believe inconsistent and insufficient funding for our natural areas and forest management staff directly increased the risk of brush and natural area forest fires, and will lead to an insufficient response and recovery plan.

We are supportive of the Play Fair Coalition's request for funding in the FY26 budget that would restore staffing for the Natural Resources Group, Parks Enforcement Patrol, and Urban Park Rangers.

The eco benefits are meaningful for all of us, too!

Thank you

Wendy Brawer, director

Green Map System  
[GreenMap.org](https://www.GreenMap.org)

web@greenmap.org  
+1 212-674-1631

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/30/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Matt Dossy, Chief of Leg Affairs

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/30/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Norman Chan, Dir. of Emergency Mgmt.

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/30/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kristy King, Chief of Natural Resources

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/30/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Benjamin Osborne, AC of Forestry + Hort

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/30/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Marcia Larson, AC of Natural Resources + Planning

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0800 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Scott Middleton

Address: 2000 FILLMORE AVE, BROOKLYN

I represent: MARINE PARK ALLIANCE

Address: SAME AS ABOVE

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor     in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Araki Spillone Battalion Chief

Address: 127 E 10th St. Fire Officer Assn

I represent: Fire Officer Assn

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0800 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor     in opposition

Date: 1/30/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Daniel Abram

Address: 111 John St.

I represent: New Yorkers for Parks

Address: 111 John St.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor     in opposition

Date: 1/30/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Leila Mongou Bahkhtian

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn NY

I represent: Prospect Park Alliance

Address: 95 Prospect Park West

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0080 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deante Johnson

Address: 314 W 142nd St

I represent: New York League of Conservation Voters

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chief John Esposito

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Chief of Department I - FDNY

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chief Kevin Woods

Address: John Esposito

I represent: Chief of Fire Operations - FPNY

Address: 1 of Department

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 1.30.25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Emily Walker

Address: [Redacted] BK 11207

I represent: Natural Areas Conservancy

Address: 1234 5th Ave, NY, NY 10029

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms