



**New York City Council
Preliminary Budget Hearing - Parks and Recreation
March 13, 2020**

Testimony By: Sarah Charlop-Powers, Natural Areas Conservancy, Executive Director

My name is Sarah Charlop-Powers and I am the Executive Director of the Natural Areas Conservancy. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony about the proposed FY21 budget. The Natural Areas Conservancy is a nonprofit organization that was formed in 2012 with the goal of increasing the capacity of NYC Parks and its partners to restore and manage the 10,000 acres of forests and wetlands under the agency's jurisdiction. A signature project of our organization was the development of the "Forest Management Framework for New York City", which we released in partnership with NYC Parks in Spring 2018. This plan takes a comprehensive look at the condition of our city's natural forests and outlines the investment needed to manage them over the next 25 years.

I want to commend the leadership of Speaker Johnson, NYC Council and Mayor DeBlasio in 2019 resulting in the addition of \$43 million of expense funding for NYC Parks, including \$4 million to support the management of 7,300 acres of forested natural areas. This funding has been used to implement the first year of recommendations from the Forest Management Framework. Already in fiscal year 2020, these funds have supported the planting of more than 20,000 new trees and shrubs, the engagement of over 2,000 volunteers, improvements to nearly 40 miles of trails, and restoration efforts that have impacted over 900 acres of parkland.

I am here today to express the Natural Areas Conservancy's strong support for the 2nd year of Play Fair, specifically the allocation of \$100 million in expense funding and \$100 million in capital investments for NYC Parks. These funds represent a crucial investment in one of New York City's most important pieces of public infrastructure. The \$100 million request includes support for maintenance and operations, expanded recreation and public programming, increased public safety, and continued investment in nature and resiliency.

It is imperative that the \$4 million investment to manage forests made in FY20 be repeated in FY21. This continued investment in New York City's natural forests is an investment in our city's future. Caring for our forests makes NYC more resilient, including cooling our city during extreme heat events and buffering our coastal areas. These funds support improvements to trails in parks across the city, making nature more accessible to New Yorkers. And, this funding is needed to extend the employment of the 47 new Natural Resource Group staff who were hired to care for forests in FY20.

It is also critical that the Parks Department receive a new 10 year capital allocation of \$3.8 million per year to support forest restoration. Since 2007, the City has invested \$3.5 million per year in natural areas forest restoration. Current funding runs out at the end of FY20, and allocating new funds is essential to continue this work.

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