



**New York City Council  
FY25 Preliminary Budget Hearing: Parks and Recreation  
Committee on Parks and Recreation  
March 21, 2024**

**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 and the members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit comments today about the Preliminary FY25 Budget for NYC Parks.

As NYC's champion for our urban forested natural areas and wetlands, our testimony will focus on the core funding priorities for FY25 that would have the most impact on the care, management, restoration, and programming of our 20,000 acres of natural areas.

We stand in solidarity with our partners in the Play Fair and Forest for All NYC Coalitions in calling for the city to increase its investment in the workforce for NYC Parks. We believe that New Yorkers deserve a fully funded, safe, clean, green, and resilient parks system. In order to achieve those goals, we ask for the following:

- **The budget for NYC Parks must be restored, and we call for an end to the hiring freeze placed on the agency.** For too long, our Parks colleagues have been asked to do more with less. This is particularly problematic in the realm of natural areas management, which often takes many years of targeted care and restoration.
- **We ask that the Administration restore the \$2.4M in baselined Trails Formalization funding,** which was announced as a signature priority of the Administration on Earth Day 2023. This funding would establish a citywide team of 26 to improve our 300-mile network of nature trails. This work supports access to 10,000 acres of forested natural areas, and helps protect the health of these spaces by reducing forest fragmentation and ecosystem disturbance, and helping to manage invasive species.
- **We ask that the \$2.5M added by the City Council for FY24 to support the continuation of 51 critical Natural Areas management positions be renewed and baselined.** The benefits provided by our forested natural areas are many, including cleaning our air, absorbing stormwater, and storing nearly 70% of NYC's carbon. These natural areas are critical public infrastructure, and we call on the City to appropriately invest in the workforce that performs the important work of caring for these spaces.
- **We ask that the 50 Urban Park Ranger positions set to expire at the end of June be renewed and baselined.** The Rangers provide public education and interpretive programming about our local ecosystems, perform vital wildlife management, and provide enforcement services that make our natural areas safer and more accessible to more New Yorkers. Similar to recreation centers and fitness facilities, programming in our natural areas serves to activate these park spaces and welcome New Yorkers.



- **We ask the Administration and the Council to ensure that there are resources in place to support the successful creation of the NYC Urban Forest Plan as required by Local Law 148.** We believe that in order to create the most successful plan possible, the City must commit funding for a robust, multi-agency planning process, including sufficient funding for a rigorous community engagement effort that will lead to the creation of the plan by the July 31, 2025 deadline.

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

