



**New York City Council
Oversight: FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing for NYC Parks
Committee on Parks and Recreation
March 23, 2026**

Testimony By: Oded Holzinger, Natural Areas Conservancy, Executive Director

My name is Oded Holzinger, and I am the Executive Director of the Natural Areas Conservancy (NAC). Thank you to Chair Hankerson and the members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to speak today.

The NAC stands with our colleagues in the Play Fair and Forest For All NYC coalitions in asking for increased funding for NYC Parks in the Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) budget. We were particularly disappointed to see that the FY27 Preliminary Budget for NYC Parks does not include a renewal of the FY26 one-shot funding allocated by Mayor Adams, which has supported critical staff lines for natural areas forest management.

Without a renewal of funding, we will see a reduction in headcount for the Natural Resources Group (NRG) at Parks, which has been chronically under-resourced in recent years. For context, NRG is responsible for the care of over 12,000 acres of forests and wetlands, and the management of 5 million of our city's 7 million trees. Today we ask that the FY27 budget include a baselined allocation of \$16 million to finally provide the appropriate and permanent level of support needed to ensure our forests remain healthy and thriving for generations to come.

In 2018, the NAC and NYC Parks released the *Forest Management Framework for NYC*, providing a roadmap and long-term funding plan to ensure that our public forests would receive the level of care and investment needed to keep them healthy. Since the release of the framework, however, the funding allocated for this work has been inconsistent and unstable, leading to the loss of staff, in-house expertise, and a sharp decrease in the amount of acres cared for, with just 569 acres out of over 12,000 receiving care in FY25. Our 2024 Ecological Assessment found indicators of declining health in over 90% of the forest plots we surveyed, indicating that our tree canopy is suffering and that long-term forest regeneration is at risk.

As the city stands on the precipice of releasing its first-ever comprehensive Urban Forest Plan, we urge the city to ensure that the FY27 budget reflects the importance of this moment for our city's trees. Over 75% of the city's canopy is located within our forested natural areas, but we have yet to see the city meaningfully fund the care of this important segment of our urban canopy. Additionally, as with other divisions at Parks, there is \$75 million in baselined capital funding for forest and wetland restoration work that is unable to proceed due to a lack of sufficient staff to oversee the work. Investing in proper staffing and care now will be more cost effective for the city, and a proactive approach is urgently needed to prevent further degradation of these spaces, and to help ensure they can retain their ample benefits for all New Yorkers.

For the past decade, the NAC has partnered with the City University of New York (CUNY) to provide workforce development in natural areas management and restoration for New Yorkers with aspirations to do environmental work in the five boroughs. This program has trained over



130 CUNY students, and represents our organization's promise to ensure our homegrown natural areas workforce reflects the population of this city. But without meaningful investments in the budget for natural areas staffing at Parks, we are unable to fully ensure that there are stable jobs waiting for these talented and hard-working students.

Our natural areas aren't a luxury - they are a thriving component of our natural green infrastructure, they provide invaluable habitat, they provide free and accessible places for New Yorkers to connect with nature in meaningful ways that strengthen communities and public health.

We believe funding parks and natural areas is a critical strategy for advancing the Mayor's affordability agenda, and we look forward to working closely with the City Council to help ensure that our forests and wetlands receive the level of care they need in the FY27 budget, and beyond.

Thank you.

