



New York City Council

Legislative Oversight Hearing: Intro. 0577 (trails formalization), Intro. 0806 (citywide wildlife management plan)

Committee on Parks and Recreation

April 1, 2026

Testimony By: Gabriel Cummings, Natural Areas Conservancy, Training Manager for the Urban PATH Program

Good afternoon, my name is Gabriel Cummings, and I am the Training Manager for the Urban PATH Program at the Natural Areas Conservancy (NAC). Thank you Chair Hankerson and the Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

The NAC is the citywide conservancy that champions our 20,000 acres of forested natural areas and wetlands through targeted research, stewardship, and advocacy. We also work closely with our colleagues at NYC Parks to help manage our citywide 300-mile network of nature trails.

The NAC appreciates the intent of Intro. 0577, and we offer the following feedback that we believe would help strengthen the impact of the legislation:

- The legislation should be reworded to describe “trails” as “nature trails”, which would help distinguish these special and unique spaces from other public paths such as greenways, which involve hardscape infrastructure and have very different maintenance and management needs than our nature trails.
- We encourage the Council to consider adding language around improved signage at trailheads to improve wayfinding and convey critical information about trail length, difficulty, and accessibility for park goers.
- The Council should also consider adding language to the bill that would require NYC Parks to provide details for the agency’s management planning for trail improvements and formalization.
- In order to help increase access to our natural areas, the Council should consider adding language to the bill that would require NYC Parks to provide a plan on public programming and activation plans for our nature trails.

As the Council considers this legislation, we firmly believe that it is also of critical importance that the city restore \$2.4 million in baselined funding that was allocated by former Mayor Eric Adams in Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24). This funding would have supported the creation of a permanent citywide Trails team of 26 full-time staff at NYC Parks. These positions were unfortunately eliminated in the FY24 November Plan, leaving NYC Parks with just three full-time staff to manage our 300 miles of nature trails citywide. Restoring this funding would be a promise fulfilled, and would mean improved trails in every borough, increased public safety and broader accessibility to our natural areas, and would help protect our city’s forests and wetlands.

With regard to Intro. 0806, which would require the city to create a Wildlife Management Plan, we appreciate the intent of the legislation, and ask that the Council ensure that strong consideration is given to prioritizing management techniques that will have a minimal



disturbance on our native flora and fauna, and will help improve and promote biodiversity. We also believe that the FY27 budget should include a baselined commitment of funding to finally make permanent 50 Urban Park Ranger staff lines at NYC Parks. Our colleagues in the Urban Park Rangers division play a critical role in providing free public programming to educate New Yorkers about the ecology that surrounds us, helping to ensure safe conditions for the public in our parks and natural areas, and managing wildlife conditions. Having a more stable corps of Urban Park Rangers would help ensure that there is sufficient staff capacity to manage this important work. We also ask that the Council work to ensure that the Wildlife Unit of NYC Parks has sufficient resources and staffing to help advance their important work in monitoring wildlife in parks and green spaces throughout the five boroughs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

