



April 1, 2026

New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

Legislation: Int. 577, Int. 740, Int. 805 & Int. 806

Testimony by: Marit Larson, Acting Deputy Commissioner for Environment and Planning, NYC Parks

Good morning, Chair Hankerson, members of the Parks Committee, and other members of the City Council. I am Marit Larson, the Acting Deputy Commissioner for Environment and Planning at NYC Parks and am pleased to be joined today by our Chief of Education and Wildlife, Sarah Aucoin, as well as our Chief of Citywide Legislative Affairs, Matt Drury.

Thank you for having us here today to discuss the legislation being considered today, four environmentally-themed bills related to nature trails, wildlife management, cool pavement and the availability of green and open space around the city. As the 56th annual celebration of Earth Day approaches later this month, we appreciate the Council's focus on sustainability and eco-friendly practices, and we're proud to be the agency tasked with planning, managing and growing our City's green spaces in a responsible and thoughtful manner. For each of the topics that the legislation touches upon, we'd like to provide some background context about the agency's approach and ongoing efforts to deliver for New Yorkers.

Starting with Introduction 577, this legislation would require NYC Parks to improve, formalize, or create 300 miles of trails within 3 years of the effective date of the bill. One-third of the acreage under our jurisdiction consists of natural areas, totaling over 12,000 acres of parkland. These unique spaces are located all across New York City and are most abundant in the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island. These parks have a legacy of protection and preservation, rather than development, and are now home to abundant plant and animal biodiversity, including many rare, threatened, and endangered species. As part of a social research study, the Natural Areas Conservancy and the US Forest Service interviewed New Yorkers that were visiting natural areas within a city park and found that almost 20% of those New Yorkers relied exclusively on that local park for that access to nature. This is one example of how we know that our local natural areas are extremely valuable for passive recreation, environmental education, and mental well-being.

Nature trails are the primary way to access these unique spaces, and our trail formalization work is an attempt to make them more inviting and welcoming to all New Yorkers. In recent years, with the help and support of our incredible park partners and volunteer stewards, NYC Parks staff mapped and assessed over 450 miles of trails running throughout our natural areas, many of which were confusing, circuitous, redundant, and in poor condition. This formalization process includes corridor pruning to maintain trail width, invasive species removal to maintain a healthy forest edge, and the building of approximately 250 trail structures each year, to help prevent erosion and increase the safety and enjoyment of trail users. Within the next year, we anticipate having delivered over 300 miles of formalized high-quality nature trails for the public—transforming the city's trail network from confusing and redundant to clearly marked and legible—and useful maps for all of these trails are available to the public on our agency website. Though this formalization effort has resulted in fewer trails, the trails that remain are now of higher quality and much more likely to be enjoyed by surrounding communities.



Given the robust trail network currently available to the public within our parks' natural areas, we believe the legislation's proposed mandate to improve or create 300 miles of additional trails within natural areas is impractical, but we would be happy to work with the Council to explore potential improvements to the information regarding our trail system that is available to the public. We appreciate the intent to offer New Yorkers more options for exploring our natural areas, and we are happy to partner with the Council to explore ways to make sure even more New Yorkers can enjoy this incredible access to our natural areas, though of course, the agency's finite resources should be primarily focused on maintaining and caring for the trail network that already exists.

Turning to Introduction 740, this bill would require NYC Parks, in consultation with other City agencies, to conduct a study to identify at least the top 10 community districts that lack the most green space, and to make recommendations to the Mayor and Council on how to increase green space, including parkland, in such areas. We're proud to be the agency tasked with planning, managing and growing our City's green and open spaces in a responsible and thoughtful manner, and ensuring that New Yorkers have access to open space is a major component of our core mission. Parks are essential urban infrastructure that provide respite for New Yorkers and protect us from the growing threats of climate disasters, and we do our best to carefully track and inventory public open space across the City, including property that is not under our direct jurisdiction. The City's "OneNYC" strategic plan released in 2015 established a target of having 85% of New York City residents living within walking distance of a park by 2030, and we are currently at 84.2% - the 0.8% difference representing roughly 63,000 people without close access to open space. This underlying data-driven goal helps guide our efforts to create and improve green and open space around the City and allows us to identify underserved areas in terms of their open space ratio, which reflects access to public open space in relation to the population within a given neighborhood or community district.

This open space ratio is the central data metric informing our recently-launched "Walk To A Park" Neighborhood ULURP effort. Historically, the agency has only been able to pursue parkland acquisition on a case-by-case basis, learning of specific opportunities with willing sellers through happenstance, which in some cases were in neighborhoods that already had significant access to open space. Through this new proactive strategic effort, we have identified Community Districts with lower open space ratios and are proactively assessing privately-owned sites for acquisition opportunities on a neighborhood-wide scale. Two Community District-based ULURP applications were approved in December 2025, in Queens CD 3 and Brooklyn CD 5, and another is undergoing the City's ULURP approval process in Queens CD 2. We are working on outreach to private owners within these districts in hopes of identifying willing sellers and are planning to submit additional ULURP applications in other high-need districts in the near future. Similarly, this data-driven approach allows us to help advise NYC Public Schools in their ongoing effort to identify schoolyards in neighborhoods with less access to open space, which can potentially be opened up to the public outside of school hours. This "Schoolyards To Playgrounds" initiative has been a great success, and we very much appreciate NYC Public Schools' partnership in this ongoing effort.

With all that in mind, NYC Parks is very much appreciative of the underlying intent of Introduction 740 and look forward to working with Council to determine how to best achieve the goals of the bill. As we've discussed today, the analysis of public access to green and open space is very much guiding our operational strategies as an agency, and we would be happy to discuss the best way to make that information available to the public in a digestible and useful



manner. We do have some technical concerns with the legislation as it is currently drafted, namely the proposed mandate to assess the capital condition of every green space in the city, including properties that are not under Parks' jurisdiction, which would be infeasible for the agency to pursue. Assessment of the capital needs of any given property is a highly complex and technical exercise, often requiring detailed analysis, including subsurface site borings, and a mandate of this sort would be a massively time-and-resource-intensive undertaking.

Introduction 805 would require NYC Parks, in consultation with the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Transportation and the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice, to conduct a pilot program concerning the installation of cool pavement materials on parks and playgrounds.

NYC Parks implements a variety of methods to mitigate heat vulnerability on our sites. Our Capital division incorporates design principles into our park renovation projects, including converting existing pavement to vegetated areas, building raingardens, using permeable pavers, applying color seal coat on large asphalt areas, using lighter colors for safety surface tiles, and of course, preserving our existing tree canopy and planting new trees. We use lighter-color reflective roofing materials whenever appropriate and our Citywide Services team oversees the largest portfolio of "green roofs" of any City agency, having installed nearly 300,000 square feet of green roof over 42 Parks facilities.

We are pleased to report that, pursuant to Local Law 152, passed by the City Council last year, DOT is actively planning a two-year pilot to install cool pavement in locations around the City, which will include pedestrian open spaces such as plazas and triangles. We look forward to working closely with DOT as they kick off their cool pavement pilot later this year, but we do not believe that a parallel Parks-specific pilot should be implemented at this time until the results of the DOT pilot can be comprehensively assessed.

Lastly, Introduction 806 would require the creation of a wildlife management advisory board to develop a citywide wildlife management plan, to analyze wildlife management issues and recommend policies to preserve and promote biological diversity and the humane treatment of wildlife. We very much appreciate the intent of this legislation and are happy to work with the Council and the Mayor's Office of Animal Welfare to discuss the best ways to achieve the goals of the bill.

As some visitors may be surprised to learn, but most New Yorkers know very well, our city's urban wildlife is actually quite abundant and diverse. Some species thrive in close proximity to New Yorkers, creating both management challenges and opportunities for education and research. At the same time, other species are negatively impacted by urbanization, including endangered species and protected migratory birds that require targeted conservation efforts. NYC Parks' Wildlife Unit was established in 2016 to address these dynamics, promote coexistence between people and urban wildlife, and serve as an informed resource for the public and as an ambassador for the city's wildlife. We'd like to briefly outline a few examples of how this work is currently being done.

The Wildlife Unit works to educate New Yorkers and support safe coexistence between people and wildlife across the city. For example, while coyotes naturally inhabit urban green spaces, this can occasionally lead to negative encounters. Game cameras are used to monitor their distribution and behavior, allowing targeted outreach to communities and staff to ensure the



safety of both people and animals. The long-term survival of species like coyotes in our city depends on public understanding and perception. In 2025, the Wildlife Unit reached over 1,000 people through educational programs promoting coexistence.

The City's non-lethal Deer Impact Management Plan was launched in 2016 to combat the negative impacts of the overabundant deer population on Staten Island. Under the direction of City Hall, the plan is a coordinated, multi-agency effort involving NYC Parks, and numerous partners. Working closely with the Mayor's Office of Animal Welfare, our Wildlife Unit manages the contract allowing for the humane sterilization of deer and oversees data collection and analysis for the program, tracking deer-vehicle collisions, tick-borne disease, and forest impacts, and sharing program results with the public each year through an interactive StoryMap report. As of Project Year 9, we're pleased to note that deer-vehicle collision reports have decreased by 83% since the program's inception, and Lyme disease cases on Staten Island have declined.

The Wildlife Unit is also leading a wildlife conservation project to monitor active nest sites of rodent-consuming raptors, such as red-tailed hawks. In 2025, a total of 68 raptor nests were monitored citywide, helping inform NYC Parks' pest management practices, with the goal of reducing secondary rodenticide poisoning in wildlife. Working in close coordination with the NYC Health Department, NYC Parks supports public safety through ongoing education, disease surveillance and interagency collaboration, including efforts to prevent rabies in wildlife populations and track emerging diseases such as avian influenza.

Those interested in learning more can visit the City's WildlifeNYC website, a valuable resource for New Yorkers to learn more about wildlife that live across the five boroughs. Visitors can also find events that celebrate wildlife and even report their sightings of healthy wildlife. New Yorkers have submitted over 4,000 sightings, documenting everything from hawks to raccoons to coyotes. These reports provide NYC Parks with important insight into wildlife activity and help identify where issues may emerge in the future. Lastly, we are always looking for opportunities to partner with the City Council and engage with your constituents, so please reach out and let us know if our Wildlife Unit can help lead an information session on a specific issue of interest.

As I hope our testimony today as demonstrated, NYC Parks is proud to be "New York's Greenest" agency. Thank you for allowing us to testify before you today and for your continued advocacy and support for our city parks. We are now happy to answer any questions that you may have.



Steve Gruber, Director of Communications

Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals

Testimony for Parks Committee hearing regarding Intro 0806 to establish an urban wildlife advisory board appointed by the Mayor and City Council Speaker

Wednesday, April 1, 2026

The Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals, a 501(c)(3) animal welfare organization and member of the NYC Lights Out Coalition, supports Intro 0806 to establish an urban wildlife advisory board, appointed by the Mayor and City Council Speaker, and to include academic and field experts.

We believe this legislation will serve to establish humane management strategies to preserve our city's wildlife while protecting public health. To this end, the Board will hold public hearings, solicit testimony, and develop a comprehensive city wildlife management plan within a year that will analyze wildlife problems, propose humane management strategies, and estimate costs for initiatives that promote biodiversity while protecting public health. The Parks Department will then submit annual reports to the Mayor and the Council Speaker to update the status of wildlife management programs and the progress of adopted proposals. We believe it is imperative that all City agencies be required to consider the impact of their policies and actions on New York City wildlife.

More...

We feel that passage of this bill will help to ensure the protection of our city's diverse and cherished wildlife without posing any risk to public health.

Additionally, we would like to see the word "management" replaced by "protection" in the wording of this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Committee on Parks and Recreation

April 1, 2026

Good morning Chair Hankerson. My name is Katie Swabb and I am here on behalf of City Parks Foundation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

We support Int. No. 740 and commend the Council's multi-agency approach to identifying neighborhoods most lacking in green space and expanding access—an important step toward a more equitable parks system.

Equity is at the core of our work, but it also depends on how easy we make it for people to engage with the system. Through Partnerships for Parks, we work with roughly 420 grassroots groups caring for parks and open spaces—from large parks to small playgrounds, medians, traffic triangles, and street trees. Doing business with the city is not always easy; we spend a lot of time helping people navigate permits, insurance requirements, and other complexities so groups can stay focused on improving the spaces they rely on.

Most New Yorkers don't know or care which city agency maintains a public space—be it a sidewalk managed by DOT, a street tree managed by NYC Parks, or a bioswale managed by DEP—they see this as infrastructure that is part of the neighborhood. When issues arise, this can create real barriers. Our goal is to make sure community members have the least amount of friction in their dealings with city government.

Through the NYC Green Fund, we also provide direct financial support to community groups to build capacity and sustain programming. This work is critical because green space inequity does not happen by accident—it reflects decades of disinvestment due to redlining and other harmful policies, and requires sustained investment in both people and places.

The city is already struggling to adequately care for its 30,000 acres of parkland. If we are serious about expanding access to green space, we must match that commitment with funding for the systems that sustain it. We need a fully funded, fully staffed Parks Department, as well as continued investment in community partners.

We urge the Council and the Mayor to commit at least 1% of the city budget to parks—so we can both sustain the system we have and responsibly grow it.

Thank you.

**Testimony for the NYC Council Committee on Parks & Recreation Hearing
Victoria Dearborn, Policy Specialist, NY Cities Program, The Nature Conservancy
April 1, 2026**

Thank you, Chair Hankerson, and members of the Parks Committee, for the opportunity to testify. My name is Victoria Dearborn and I am the Policy Specialist for The Nature Conservancy's New York Cities Program. 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. In New York City, we convene the 200+ member [Forest for All NYC](#) coalition, and we are leading practitioners on the science and policy of the NYC Urban Forest.

I am submitting testimony to support, with changes, Intro 0577-2026 on the "Improvement, formalization, or creation of trails." Access to nature and trees is critical in urban environments. In our [State of the Urban Forest](#) report, we highlight many of the benefits New Yorkers get from the NYC urban forest, including recreation and social opportunities, reduced heat and flooding, and aesthetic beauty. Trails offer residents and visitors the opportunity to connect with natural areas – forests, wetlands, and grasslands – through a range of experiences, like hiking, running, birdwatching, and biking.

Between 2015-2018, The Nature Conservancy supported park clean-up, restoration, and a 2-mile trail formalization in Marine Park, the largest City-owned park in Brooklyn. We are also proud to have worked closely with government and nonprofit partners to restore natural areas, expand public access, increase recreational and educational opportunities in Jamaica Bay. Despite long and coordinated efforts to grow and improve the trails system in NYC, the system still has resource challenges, unstructured management and programming, irregular maintenance, and limited public awareness.

We commend Councilmember Gennaro and the sponsors of Intro 0577 for the spirit of their legislation. Expanding the trails system has the potential to build on the efforts of NYC Parks and critical partners like the Natural Areas Conservancy, to realize a vision of a world-class trail system in NYC. To deepen the bill's impact, we also request that Council consider adapting the language of the bill, namely:

- Reword the legislation to describe "trails" as "nature trails," to 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 public nature trails.

- Add language requiring improved signage at trailheads to improve wayfinding and convey critical information about trail length, difficulty, and accessibility for parkgoers.
- Consider adding language that would require NYC Parks to provide details for the agency's management planning for trail improvements and formalization.
- Consider adding language that would require NYC Parks to provide a plan on public programming and activation plans for our nature trails.

Also, we urge Council and the Mayor to ensure that this effort to expand the City's trail system is not another unfunded mandate. We previously testified before this Committee in support of \$2.4M in baselined expense funding to provide one trails crew per borough for the formalization and maintenance of NYC's existing 300 miles of nature trails. This funding was previously allocated in the FY24 adopted budget to provide funding for a citywide trails team of 26 full-time staff but was shortly thereafter eliminated and has yet to be reinstated, leaving NYC Parks with just three full-time staff to manage nature trails in our city's parks. We would love to see NYC's trails network grow larger, but that must be coupled with more baselined staff to manage it.

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



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.





New York City Council

Committee on Parks and Recreation

Hearing on Int. No. 806

April 1, 2026

Written Testimony in Support of Int. No. 806

Submitted by the Urban Wildlife Alliance

The Urban Wildlife Alliance respectfully submits this written testimony in strong support of Int. No. 806 and the creation of a citywide wildlife management plan for New York City.

We commend the Council for recognizing the need for a coordinated, citywide approach to wildlife, including the consideration of biological diversity, humane treatment, and inter-agency accountability. The requirement for public input and ongoing reporting represents an important step toward transparency and long-term progress.

At the same time, we believe this legislation presents a critical opportunity to strengthen how New York City approaches wildlife. For too long, “wildlife management” has often excluded considerations of animal welfare and, in many cases, has been used to justify inhumane practices. We encourage a shift in both language and approach, from wildlife management to wildlife stewardship, where the City takes responsibility not only for managing wildlife populations, but for safeguarding the well-being of individual animals who share our urban environment.

The Urban Wildlife Alliance brings over 15 years of hands-on experience working directly with injured, orphaned, and sick wildlife across New York City. Through this work, we see every day the real-world consequences of gaps in policy, planning, and public guidance. From construction-related habitat loss to preventable injuries and human-wildlife conflicts, many of the challenges facing urban wildlife today are not inevitable but the result of systems that have not fully accounted for wildlife welfare.

In addition to direct fieldwork, we are actively engaged in research and policy-focused initiatives. We are currently partnering with New York University’s Department of Wild Animal Welfare and the Wild Animal Welfare Lab on a first-of-its-kind, data-driven research project examining the root causes of wildlife injuries, illnesses, and deaths in New York City. By analyzing large-scale datasets, this work aims to identify systemic patterns and provide a foundation for more effective, humane, and preventative policy solutions.

We have also recently taken over coordination of the Injured Bird Response program originally developed and led by NYC Bird Alliance, and are now expanding it into a broader Wildlife Emergency Response Program. This initiative supports the public with both guidance and, when necessary, trained volunteer response in wildlife emergency and conflict situations, helping to build critical infrastructure that currently does not exist at a citywide level.

To ensure that the goals of Int. No. 806 are fully realized, we respectfully recommend that the composition of the wildlife management advisory board explicitly include individuals and organizations with direct, hands-on experience in wildlife care and a demonstrated commitment to animal welfare.

Specifically, we recommend the inclusion of wildlife rehabilitators, nonprofit practitioners, and experts in humane human-wildlife conflict resolution.

While the bill includes representation from academia and individuals with general wildlife experience, it does not currently guarantee the inclusion of wildlife rehabilitators, animal welfare experts, or organizations actively working on the front lines of urban wildlife care. These perspectives are essential. Effective policy must be informed not only by research and agency priorities, but also by the lived realities of wildlife in the city and the practical challenges encountered in the field.

Including such expertise will strengthen the advisory board's ability to:

- Identify root causes of wildlife injury and mortality
- Develop humane, evidence-based conflict resolution strategies
- Improve coordination between agencies, responders, and the public
- Ensure that welfare considerations are meaningfully integrated into all aspects of the citywide plan

The Urban Wildlife Alliance would welcome the opportunity to support the Council and contribute this expertise in an advisory capacity.

We believe that New York City has the potential to become a national leader in compassionate, science-based urban wildlife stewardship. Int. No. 806 is an important step in that direction, and with the inclusion of hands-on welfare expertise, it can become a truly transformative framework for how cities coexist with wildlife.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to advancing the humane and responsible treatment of wildlife in New York City.

Sincerely,

Arina Hinzen

Founder & Executive Director
Urban Wildlife Alliance
arina@urbanwildlifeny.org



**New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
April 1, 2026 Hearing**

Good afternoon, I am Leslie Garcia, Trail Stewardship Manager for the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance and I am testifying on behalf of VCPA's board, staff, and more than 3 million annual park visitors. We thank the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation and Chair Hankerson for holding this important hearing.

Van Cortlandt Park is home to a world-renowned Cross Country Course, which hosts national and regional races and welcomes more than 50,000 permitted runners each year. The course last underwent a capital project in the 1990s, but there was no maintenance funding tied to that project. We are way overdue for another capital project, but if the course had been properly maintained over the last three decades, it would be in much better shape today. This is an ongoing issue in all of our parks. With exciting capital projects, we get beautiful new playgrounds, fields, and basketball courts, which quickly degrade because there is not enough staff or funding to care for them.

Van Cortlandt has 20 miles of trails that have suffered from years of neglect because there just isn't enough staff or vehicles to carry out trail maintenance. In the 2 years that I have been working in this capacity, I have begun to implement regular maintenance of the trails, working with a seasonal crew of 4 people and a handful of regular volunteers. VCPA has received positive feedback from the community and cross country runners on the improved condition of the trails.

Even though the city cannot keep up with the parks it has, the council continues to introduce new initiatives that will add more responsibility to a dramatically underfunded agency.

In theory, Intro 577 is a great idea but we can't help but wonder how it can possibly work when **the preliminary budget for NYC Parks is \$33 million less than last year's adopted budget.** How can NYC Parks be asked to do so much more when their budget is even lower than last year?

Along the same lines, Intro 740, T2026-1506 and -1507 are great ideas but how will they be implemented? Once again, the City is asking Parks to do more with no additional funding. **Where is the additional staff, vehicles, and equipment to implement all these shiny new initiatives?**

NYC Parks has lost 700 positions in less than 5 years. Yet, 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.

All these new requirements have merit, but the Mayor and the City Council need to work together to figure out how to properly fund NYC Parks and fulfill the most basic needs first.

Thank you and happy trails.

Leslie Garcia
Trail Stewardship Manager
Van Cortlandt Park Alliance

**Written Testimony of Leila Mougoui Bakhtiari
Director, Landscape Management, Prospect Park Alliance
New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
Wednesday, April 1, 2026**

Dear Chair and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. My name is Leila Mougoui Bakhtiari, and I am the Director of Landscape Management at the Prospect Park Alliance. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on these vital legislative efforts to protect our city's natural areas.

Prospect Park Alliance works in partnership with the City to care for 350 acres of natural areas, including Brooklyn's last remaining upland forest. Our team of ecologists and gardeners works to keep these spaces resilient, and it is from this perspective of hands-on stewardship that I offer our testimony.

Regarding Int. 577, we want to begin by celebrating the Council's interest in expanding nature trail formalization to parks across the five boroughs. Since we launched Prospect Park's first formal nature trail system in August 2025, the response from the public has been overwhelmingly positive. New Yorkers are clearly eager to explore these scenic routes, which is why we are so encouraged to see the Council moving to bring this model to more neighborhoods. To ensure the success of this expansion, we believe the bill's language must be more precise. We ask the Council to reword "trails" to "nature trails" to distinguish these fragile ecosystems from hardscape greenways. Furthermore, based on the success we've seen, we ask for a firm commitment to activating these spaces through public programming. Formalization is a critical first step, but it is through guided tours and nature education that we truly invite the community to connect with these spaces responsibly.

However, formalization and programming require consistent personnel and resources. We urge the City to reinstate the \$2.4 million baselined allocation for a citywide trails team of 26 staff. Currently, NYC Parks is operating with only three full-time staff to manage 300 miles of trails. Without this funding, we cannot provide the necessary wayfinding signage or the management needed to protect these areas. We saw the stakes of this work firsthand in November 2024, when a fire in our woodlands burned two acres of forest—a vivid reminder that our natural areas are as vulnerable as they are beautiful.

This leads me to Int. 806 and the creation of a citywide wildlife management plan. As a habitat for hundreds of wildlife species, Prospect Park relies on management strategies that prioritize biodiversity as a guiding principle. To support this, we ask the City to baseline funding for the 50 Urban Park Ranger staff lines that were previously funded through a one-shot allocation. These Rangers, along with the NYC Parks Wildlife Unit, provide the monitoring and frontline management necessary to keep our urban wildlife populations healthy and safe.

Our forests are places of relaxation and contemplation, and as we celebrated Prospect Park's designation as Brooklyn's official Old Growth Forest last year, we were reminded of the decades of restoration work required to maintain them. We look forward to working with the Council to ensure these bills provide the specific language, programming, and funding needed to keep our parks vibrant for generations to come.



NYC Council Parks and Recreation Committee Hearing, April 1, 2026
Testimony in support of Intro 806, Edita Birnkrant, Executive Director, NYCLASS

Good morning, Chair Hankerson, and thank you to the Parks Committee for hearing these important bills today, and for the opportunity to speak.

My name is Edita Birnkrant. I am the Executive Director of NYCLASS, a 501 (c)(4) nonprofit animal protection organization, and a member of the Lights Out Coalition. I am here in strong support of Intro 806, and I thank Council Member Phil Wong for introducing this much needed legislation to create a citywide wildlife management plan and advisory board. I also support all the bills on the agenda today.

I am a proud Queens resident, an avid parkgoer, and a birder. One of the things I love most about living in Queens is our incredible parks, and Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge is truly the crown jewel of birding in our city. These spaces should be a haven for both people and wildlife.

But too often, my visits turn into emergency situations. Instead of enjoying these spaces, I encounter animals in distress. Birds entangled in fishing line. Birds that have swallowed hooks. Swans with hooks lodged in their bodies. Turtles whose mouths are impaled with barbed hooks. These are gruesome and preventable injuries that are often fatal. I also regularly see domestic birds dumped in parks, left to suffer and unable to survive.

This is happening across Queens and throughout the city. The root problem is lack of enforcement. People fish without licenses, and hooks and line are left behind, turning our parks into dangerous traps. These hazards also put dogs and children at risk.

Citizen rescuers are overwhelmed, responding to these situations every day, often with limited resources, and trying to save animals in ponds and lakes where rescues can be extremely difficult. We need a more hands on approach with Park Rangers and real enforcement of existing laws. Fishing licenses are required, but rarely checked, and rules around gear and disposal are not enforced.

We also need stronger public education and signage. Too often, well-meaning people harm wildlife by feeding waterfowl junk food, removing, and handling wildlife, or abandoning domestic birds or other animals that cannot survive on their own. It does not have to be this way.

This bill gives us the structure to do better. And it is critical that the wildlife advisory board includes people and organizations who are already doing hands on wildlife rescue work, not just government agencies.

Our parks should be true oases for both residents and wildlife. Families come to experience nature, not to witness suffering.

I strongly urge the Committee to pass Intro 806. Thank you.



NYU

ARTS &
SCIENCE

Center for Environmental
and Animal Protection



NYU

ARTS &
SCIENCE

Wild Animal
Welfare Program

April 4, 2026

Committee on Parks and Recreation
New York City Council
250 Broadway, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: Support for Int. 0806 – The creation of a citywide wildlife management plan

Dear Chair Hankerson and Members of the Committee:

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this written testimony¹ in support of Int. 0806, which would establish a wildlife management advisory board to develop a citywide wildlife management plan. We commend Council Member Wong and the co-sponsors for introducing this legislation, which would represent an important step toward a more coordinated, evidence-based, and humane approach to wildlife management in the city.

We write in our capacity as researchers at New York University whose work focuses on urban wild animal welfare science, local environmental law and policy, and the ethical dimensions of human-wildlife interactions. Through the Department of Environmental Studies,² the Center for Environmental and Animal Protection (CEAP),³ the NYU Wild Animal Welfare Program (WAWP),⁴ and the NYU Wildlife Inclusive Local Development Lab (WILD Lab),⁵ we conduct research on the welfare of free-living animals in urban environments and on the role of local government in addressing these issues; this includes ongoing research focused specifically on wildlife and environmental policy in New York City.⁶

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not purport to represent the views, if any, of their respective institutions. Institutional affiliations are provided solely for identification purposes.

² Department of Environmental Studies, New York University, <https://as.nyu.edu/departments/environment.html>.

³ Center for Environmental and Animal Protection, New York University, <https://enviroanimal.org/>.

⁴ Wild Animal Welfare Program, New York University, <https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/wildanimalwelfare>.

⁵ Wildlife Inclusive Local Development (WILD) Lab, Wild Animal Welfare Program, New York University, <https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/wildanimalwelfare/wild-lab>.

⁶ Our ongoing projects include: the development of a public-facing mapping application documenting urban wildlife and environmental conditions across NYC; the creation of scientific and technical guidance for assessing wild animal welfare in urban environments; a policy analysis of evidence-based options for managing human-wildlife

New York City is home to a remarkable diversity of wildlife. As the city continues to grow, and as it continues to focus efforts on promoting local biodiversity, natural resources, and green spaces, the need for a comprehensive wildlife plan has become increasingly urgent. Currently, there is no unified framework for managing or studying the city’s wildlife populations across agency jurisdictions. Int. 0806 would address this gap by establishing a structured process for developing a citywide plan that accounts for public health and safety, promotes biological diversity, and requires the use of the most humane treatment of wild animals feasible. This legislation is well-conceived and we support its core objectives.

We are particularly pleased to see the bill’s inclusion of “the most humane treatment of wildlife feasible”⁷ as a guiding principle for the development of the citywide plan. This language recognizes that how individual animals are treated in the course of wildlife management matters, not only as a matter of public values, but also as a matter of science. Research in animal welfare science has demonstrated that a large number of urban wild animals are sentient beings capable of experiencing pain, stress, and fear, and that management interventions can have significant effects on individual animal well-being.⁸ These findings are consistent with a recent declaration by more than 500 experts across the world that there is “strong scientific support for attributions of conscious experience to other mammals and to birds,” and that “the empirical evidence indicates at least a realistic possibility of conscious experience in all vertebrates.”⁹ The bill’s recognition of this dimension distinguishes it from approaches that are purely conservation- or population-focused, and reflects a more comprehensive understanding of what responsible urban wildlife management entails.

Based on our expertise in this area, we respectfully offer the following recommendations to strengthen the bill’s welfare provisions and ensure the advisory board is well-equipped to fulfill its mandate.

First, we recommend that the bill require at least one member of the advisory board to have expertise in wild animal welfare science. As currently drafted, the bill requires at least one academic member with “advanced specialized training in the management of wildlife in an

conflict in cities; the development of policy guidance for integrating wild animal welfare considerations into local government decisionmaking processes (focusing on NYC); and empirical studies focused on the welfare impacts of bird-window collisions in NYC.

⁷ Int. No. 806, N.Y.C. Council, § 18-169(f)(4), (7) (2026).

⁸ Heather Browning & Walter Veit, [The Sentience Shift in Animal Research](#), 28 *New Bioethics* 299 (2022); Andrew Crump et al., [Sentience in Decapod Crustaceans: A General Framework and Review of the Evidence](#), 32 *Animal Sentience* 1 (2022); David Baracchi and Luigi Baciadonna, [Insect Sentience and the Rise of a New Inclusive Ethics](#), 29 *Animal Sentience* 1 (2020); Jonathan Birch et al., LSE Consulting, [Review of the Evidence of Sentience in Cephalopod Molluscs and Decapod Crustaceans](#) (2021); Jonathan Birch, [Animal Sentience and the Precautionary Principle](#), 16 *Animal Sentience* 1 (2017).

⁹ THE NEW YORK DECLARATION ON ANIMAL CONSCIOUSNESS, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY (Apr. 19, 2024), <https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/nydeclaration/declaration>.

urban setting” and one member with five or more years of experience “working with wildlife in urban settings.” These are important qualifications, but neither requires specific training in animal welfare science. Wild animal welfare is a distinct discipline from wildlife management or conservation biology, one that focuses on evaluating and improving the conditions experienced by individual animals.¹⁰ Given that the bill expressly calls for strategies that use the most humane treatment of wildlife feasible, the advisory board would benefit from including someone trained to assess what “humane treatment” means in practice. Without this expertise, there is a risk that the plan’s welfare provisions remain aspirational rather than operational. Notably, researchers and institutions in New York City are actively conducting welfare-focused research on urban wildlife, and qualified experts are readily available to serve in such a capacity.

Second, we recommend that the bill provide additional guidance on the meaning of “the most humane treatment of wildlife feasible.” While this standard is a welcome inclusion, it is not defined in the bill, and its interpretation could vary significantly depending on who is applying it. An agency could, for example, determine that only lethal control methods are “feasible” even when effective non-lethal alternatives exist but are more costly or logistically complex. To strengthen this provision, the bill could direct the advisory board to evaluate management interventions in light of current scientific understanding of animal welfare and to consider a hierarchy of methods that prioritizes non-lethal and non-invasive approaches where effective alternatives are available. This would provide a more meaningful standard without being overly prescriptive.

Third, we recommend broadening the plan’s scope beyond “wildlife management problems” to consider conditions affecting the well-being of wild animals. The bill’s current framing centers on identifying and addressing “significant wildlife management problems,” which risks channeling the plan toward a reactive, conflict-driven approach. While addressing human-wildlife conflicts is without a doubt important, a comprehensive citywide plan for managing wildlife should also consider the conditions experienced by wildlife in the city more broadly; this includes the effects of urbanization, habitat fragmentation, pollution, and climate change on individual animals. This approach would be consistent with the bill’s own provisions on humane treatment and with emerging frameworks in urban ecology and conservation biology that recognize the importance of holistic and proactive approaches in managing wildlife.

To achieve this, the bill could include an additional element under subdivision (f) requiring an assessment of the conditions affecting the well-being of wild animals in the city, drawing on

¹⁰ Animal welfare science is a multidisciplinary field that draws on ethology, veterinary science, neuroscience, and applied biology to evaluate the physical and psychological states experienced by individual animals. It is distinct from wildlife management, which focuses primarily on population-level objectives, and conservation biology, which focuses on species and ecosystem preservation, though all three fields can inform one another. For further discussion on the distinction between welfare-focused approaches and traditional conservation and management approaches, see Alisa White et al., [Wild Animal Welfare in Local Policies on Land Use and the Built Environment](#), Guarini Ctr. on Env’t, Energy & Land Use Law (Mar. 12, 2024).

best-available methods for evaluating animal well-being in urban environments. Alternatively, it could broaden existing elements under subdivision (f) to better consider animal well-being. For example:¹¹

1. An analysis of significant wildlife management problems, **including consideration of how ongoing and anticipated changes to conditions in the urban environment may affect the welfare of wildlife.**

2. Strategies to promote biological diversity, ~~and~~ healthy wildlife distribution, **and the welfare of wildlife;** ...

4. A description of proposed strategies to address wildlife management problems that use the most humane treatment of wildlife feasible, **informed by current scientific understanding of animal welfare;** ...

7. A description of particular actions proposed to be undertaken by each agency in furtherance of the wildlife management plan that use the most humane treatment of wildlife feasible, **informed by current scientific understanding of animal welfare;**

Fourth, we recommend strengthening the cross-agency consideration mandate in subdivision (i). The bill’s requirement that all agencies “consider the effect that their initiatives, actions, policies and programs have on wildlife” is a commendable provision with potentially far-reaching implications. However, without an accompanying documentation or reporting requirement, it may be difficult to determine whether agencies are meaningfully complying with this mandate. We would suggest requiring agencies to prepare brief documentation assessing impacts on wild animal well-being in connection with major projects or policy changes. This would give the mandate practical effect, as well as provide useful data for the City—including facilitating the Department of Parks and Recreation’s annual reporting requirement—and promote greater public transparency.

Finally, we wish to note that our team at NYU would be glad to serve as a resource to the Committee and to the future advisory board as this legislation moves forward. As mentioned above, we have ongoing scientific and policy research efforts focused specifically on New York City, including applied research on wildlife welfare assessment methods and the development of a public-facing mapping tool for NYC wildlife and environmental data. We would also welcome the opportunity to provide additional testimony to the Committee about this work, if desired.

We thank you again for your leadership and for considering our comments in your deliberations.

¹¹ Suggested revisions are shown in **bold**.

Sincerely,

Jeff Sebo

Associate Professor of Environmental Studies
Affiliated Professor of Bioethics, Medical Ethics, Philosophy, and Law
Director, Center for Environmental and Animal Protection
Director, Center for Mind, Ethics, and Policy
Co-Director, Wild Animal Welfare Program
Principal Investigator, WILD Lab
New York University
jeffsebo@nyu.edu

Becca Franks

Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies
Director, WATR-lab
Co-Director, Wild Animal Welfare Program
New York University
beccafranks@nyu.edu

Adalene Minelli

Senior Fellow, Center for Environmental and Animal Protection
Policy Coordinator, WILD Lab
Department of Environmental Studies
New York University
adalene.minelli@nyu.edu

Hello Chair and members of the Committee, and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Ashley Roelofs and I am representing Trust for Public Land.

Trust for Public Land's mission is to connect people to nature, ensuring that everyone, regardless of zip code, has access to the outdoors. Across New York City, we work to expand access to parks, trails, and green space, particularly in neighborhoods that have historically lacked this critical infrastructure.

We are here today to express our strong support for the proposed bill number 0577-2026 to create 300 miles of trails across New York City. This bill represents a significant opportunity to create a more connected, equitable, and resilient city. Expanding the city's trail network will improve access to open space, create safer options for walking and biking, and strengthen connections between neighborhoods, transit, parks, and local businesses.

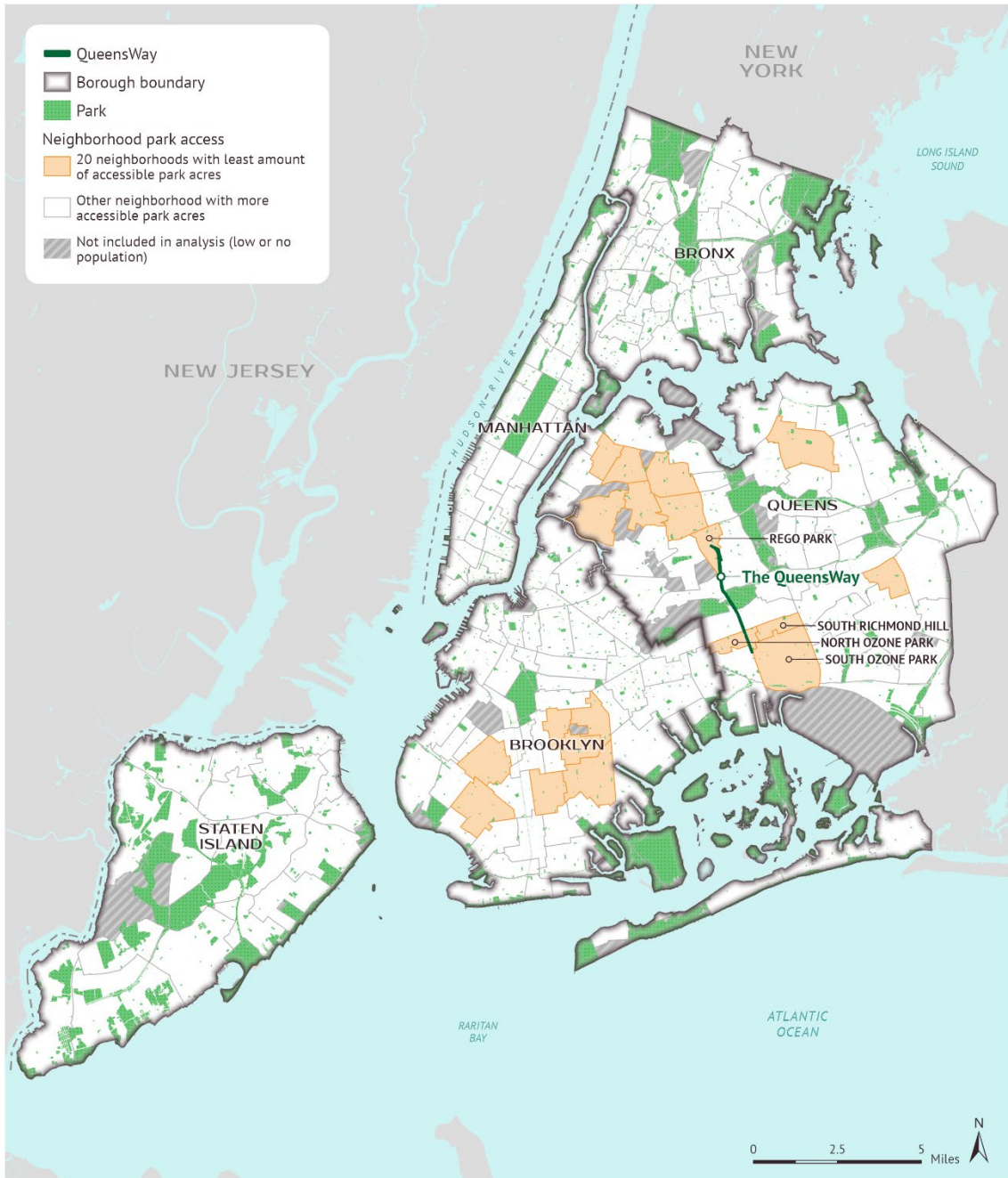
We also strongly support bill number 0740-2026 requiring the Department of Parks and Recreation to identify the community districts with the least access to green space and recommend strategies to address these gaps. This type of data-driven approach is critical to ensuring that future investments are directed to the communities that need them most.

The need is especially clear in Queens. Thirteen of the twenty least park-rich neighborhoods are in Queens, including communities like Ozone Park and Rego Park. Even where large parks exist, such as Forest Park, safe access can be difficult for those walking or bicycling.

This is why projects like the QueensWay are so important. The QueensWay will transform a 3.5-mile abandoned rail corridor into a trail, bringing green space within walking distance of nearly 245,000 residents and creating safer, more direct access into Forest Park and other neighborhood destinations. The City's investment in the first section, the Metropolitan Hub, is an important step forward and reflects a strong commitment to addressing these disparities.

The QueensWay demonstrates how strategic investments in trails can help close park access gaps while also improving mobility, public health, and neighborhood connectivity.

Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to expanding access to green space for all New Yorkers.



Neighborhood Park Access

NEW YORK CITY

February 23, 2026. Copyright © Trust for Public Land. Trust for Public Land and Trust for Public Land logo are federally registered marks of Trust for Public Land. Information on this map is provided for purposes of discussion and visualization only. www.tpl.org





NYC Council Parks & Recreation Committee Hearing, April 1, 2026 - Intro 0806
{Edited version for hearing}

Good morning Parks Chair Hankerson, committee members, and Council Member Wong. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of Intro 806.

I'm Kathy Nizzari, Founder and Chair of Lights Out Coalition, representing 60 organizations and experts united to protect the hundreds of species who call New York City home—or rely on it as a critical stopover. Urban wildlife plays an essential role in our ecosystem, and their survival is directly tied to our own.

Yet wildlife in our city faces constant, human-driven threats: artificial light disorientation, building collisions, rodenticide poisoning, illegal fishing practices, bicycle and vehicle strikes, and too often outright cruelty. Our rescuers witness the grisly consequences every day.

To be clear: this is *not* a wildlife problem—it is a *human* problem, *and it is solvable*.

Right now, responsibility is fragmented across agencies, and approaches are inconsistent, outdated, non-existent or unenforced. Intro 806 is a turning point. It establishes a board of experts to guide humane, science-based practices and brings coordination, accountability, and compassion into how New York City supports wildlife.

We know humane solutions work. While traditional methods have failed for decades, a rat contraception pilot led by Council Member Shaun Abreu and Lights Out achieved a 60% reduction in *just weeks*—without killing a single animal. *This* is the kind of progress we should be scaling.

Intro 806 creates a framework for long-term protection of biodiversity, public health, and the values of our city.

It is our sincere desire that implementation will lead to the eventual creation of a department of wildlife protection to ensure ongoing and future success. And we respectfully ask the word “management” be replaced by “support.”

We support all today's bills and urge the Council to move 806 forward without delay. Thank you for your time, and we are happy to be a resource as this is implemented. I'm submitting a more detailed testimony electronically.

Kathy Nizzari
Lights Out Coalition
kathy.nizzari.nam@gmail.com



**NYC Council Parks & Recreation Committee Hearing, April 1, 2026 - [Intro 0806](#)
{Full version}**

Good morning Parks Chair Hankerson, committee members, and Council Member Wong. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of Intro 0806.

I'm Kathy Nizzari, Founder and Chair of Lights Out Coalition which represents 60 member organizations and distinguished professionals across various disciplines including avian, animal, medical and scientific experts, environmentalists, economists, attorneys, urban designers, and a VP in the United Nations system, all united by the goal of protecting the [hundreds of species](#) who call New York City home, or rely on it as a critical stopover.

As you may know, this city is home to many native species—including red-tailed hawks, falcons, wild turkeys, deer, coyotes, raccoons, opossums, skunks, foxes, turtles and various fish—alongside species introduced over time, like sparrows and pigeons {brought over from England and the Netherlands}, rats {from Norway}, and squirrels {from Germany}, to name but a few. Recently, climate change resulting in habitat and food loss, have driven even more species, such as [dolphins](#), otters, and beavers, into our local rivers {ie East and Harlem Rivers} and green spaces.

Whether native to the area, introduced by humans, or displaced by climate change, urban wildlife enriches our local environment and connects us to the natural world. They play a vital role in our ecosystem and their survival is directly tied to our own—consider that the collapse of pollinators alone would devastate our food system. We have a responsibility to act as stewards. Simply put, all animals have a right to life.

Yet wildlife in our city faces constant, predictable, human-driven threats: disorientation from artificial light, fatal building collisions, rodenticide poisoning, illegal fishing practices

and derelict fishing gear, vehicle and bicycle strikes, human hostility, and, too often, outright cruelty. Our rescuers continuously witness grisly and harrowing scenes.

Further, human hostility often leads to animals being viewed as “pests” or easy victims. Current "management" practices frequently rely on lethal methods that not only target these animals but also pose significant risks to unintended victims, including family pets and children.

This mindset must change. We need to transform public perception and take active steps to protect our wildlife.

To be clear: this is *not* a wildlife problem. It is a *human* problem that is solvable, *if* we treat it that way. Lights Out addresses these anthropogenic problems through proactive legislative advocacy, creative strategies, and innovative partnerships.

Right now, responsibility is fragmented across agencies, approaches are inconsistent if at all, and in many cases, outdated tools and end-goals {death} are still the default.

Intro 0806 is a turning point of essential reform, bringing New York City’s wildlife policy into the 21st century. It creates a mechanism to move away from reactive, siloed decision-making by establishing a board of experts to guide humane, science-based, protective practices across agencies, and acknowledges what has been missing and long overdue in how we protect wildlife: coordination, accountability, and compassion. It creates a framework for responsibility, monitoring, and long-term progress in protecting biodiversity, public health and safety, and the moral integrity of our city.

Intro 0806 is a crucial step in this direction because it emphasizes the **humane** treatment of animals and a shift in how we coexist with the diverse wildlife in our urban areas. It will create a sustainable future for all residents of our city.

We’re seeing that humane solutions work. While traditional methods have failed for 8 decades, Council Member Shaun Abreu and Lights Out’s rat contraception pilot achieved a 60% reduction in just its initial weeks—without killing a single animal.

On one night in October 2023, Chicago’s McCormick Place was the brutal site of [1,000 dead birds](#) due to collisions. That’s more than 1,000 deaths at one location in one night. After installing bird-friendly window films, [The New York Times](#) reported a 95% decrease in fatalities, reducing the number from thousands to a handful annually. Currently, New York City buildings are responsible for over 250,000 bird deaths each year—a number that continues to grow with new construction. Pending Council legislation to require that

same bird-friendly treatment for the first 75 feet of glass death traps would save the lives of millions of birds while simultaneously creating good-paying union jobs for our community.

This is what progress looks like and it's the kind of outcome we should be scaling. Lights Out is eager to do so and it is our sincere desire that implementation will lead to the eventual creation of a department of wildlife protection to ensure ongoing and future success.

From a governance standpoint, it's practical. From a policy standpoint, it's necessary. And from a values standpoint, it reflects where New Yorkers already are. Intro 0806 can serve as a central umbrella point for these critical issues. Consistency and compassion will lead to meaningful change. And, as Lights Out always says, if it's good for animals, it's good for people and the planet.

We urge the Council to move Intro 0806 forward without delay. We are happy to be a resource as this gets implemented and respectfully ask the word "management" be replaced by "protection" for the reasons stated. Again, thank you for the time to speak today.

Kathy Nizzari
Lights Out Coalition
kathy.nizzari.nam@gmail.com

April 2, 2026

New York City Council
Committee on Parks and Recreation
City Hall
New York, NY

Re: Written Testimony in Support of Intro 0806-2026

Dear Members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation:

My name is Andrew Farnsworth. I am the Science Advisor to the Lights Out Coalition, a Visiting Scientist at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, a long-time birder, and a New York City resident. I write in strong support of Intro 0806, which would create a wildlife management advisory board to develop a citywide wildlife management plan, analyze wildlife management issues, and recommend policies to preserve and promote biological diversity and the humane treatment of wildlife.

This bill is thoughtful, practical, and overdue. A living regional ecosystem that includes migratory birds, resident wildlife, shorelines, forests, wetlands, waterways, parks, and the many human-built spaces that species now navigate every day underlie the very fabric of this city. Yet our wildlife-related decisions are often fragmented across agencies, issue areas, and moments of crisis. Intro 0806 offers a better approach and a new model: coordinated planning, expert input, public accountability, and a framework that treats wildlife management and the preservation and promotion of biological diversity as a citywide responsibility rather than a piecemeal reaction.

I especially support the bill because it would create a formal structure for bringing together agencies, outside experts, and the public. Wildlife management in a city as large and complex as New York requires exactly that kind of coordination. It requires a place where ecology, public health, infrastructure, parks management, animal welfare, and community concerns can all be considered together. The requirement that agencies consider the effects of their actions on wildlife is particularly important. That principle can help prevent avoidable harm, improve project design, and encourage better long-term outcomes across transportation, buildings, open space management, lighting, water infrastructure, and public education.

I also strongly support the bill's emphasis on a citywide wildlife management plan and annual reporting. Plans matter, but only if they are living documents informed by evidence and updated through transparent reporting. An annual report from the Department of Parks and Recreation would create an important public record of ongoing wildlife management problems, progress made, and remaining gaps. That kind of accountability is essential in a dynamic city where ecological conditions, development pressures, climate risks, and species distributions can change quickly.

As someone who has spent many years studying birds and migration, I also want to emphasize that New York City has a special responsibility. [Nearly three million birds pass over and through Manhattan every spring, and nearly four times greater a number pass over and through every autumn.](#) The quality of urban habitat, building design, lighting practices, vegetation

management, and shoreline stewardship all affect their ability to survive. Moreover, it is our responsibility to shepherd these birds, and other wildlife, that are integral components of much larger regional, continental, hemispheric, and planetary systems. City wildlife policy focus on coexistence, habitat quality, ecological function, and humane treatment. Intro 0806 does this. It recognizes that wildlife management should be proactive, science-based, and rooted in both biodiversity conservation and humane values.

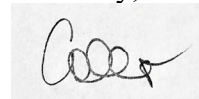
A substantial peer-reviewed scientific literature supports exactly this kind of approach. Urban ecosystems provide meaningful services when biodiversity is maintained, including air filtration, stormwater moderation, microclimate regulation, recreation, and other contributions to quality of life (Bolund and Hunhammar, 1999; Elmqvist et al., 2015). Reviews of biodiversity planning in cities show that successful urban conservation depends on explicit goals, ecological knowledge, connectivity, and measurable targets rather than vague aspirations alone (Nilon et al., 2017). Broader syntheses of urban ecology likewise conclude that cities need integrated, multidisciplinary, data-informed approaches that can better inform decision-makers, conserve biodiversity, and promote human well-being (McPhearson et al., 2016). More recent reviews further show the importance of systematic monitoring, including citizen science and other scalable tools, to understand how biodiversity responds to urban pressures and management over time (Rega-Brodsky et al., 2022). In other words, science-based advocacy for urban ecology is not abstract; it is a practical foundation for healthier, more resilient, and more humane cities.

This bill does not solve every wildlife issue on its own, but it creates the governance structure needed to make real progress. It would help New York City move from fragmented responses toward a coherent vision. It would promote better planning, better coordination, better science, and better public accountability. It would also help ensure that humane treatment and biological diversity are not sidelined, but instead built into the way the city evaluates and carries out its actions.

For all of these reasons, I respectfully urge the Council to pass Intro 0806.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Andrew Farnsworth, Ph.D.

Science Advisor, Lights Out Coalition

Visiting Scientist, Center for Avian Population Studies, Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Long-time birder and New York City resident

Selected references cited

- Bolund, P. and Hunhammar, S. (1999). Ecosystem services in urban areas. *Ecological Economics*, 29(2), 293-301.
- Elmqvist, T. et al. (2015). Benefits of restoring ecosystem services in urban areas. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 14, 101-108.
- McPhearson, T. et al. (2016). Advancing urban ecology toward a science of cities. *BioScience*, 66(3), 198-212.
- Nilon, C.H. et al. (2017). Planning for the future of urban biodiversity: A global review of city-scale initiatives. *BioScience*, 67(4), 332-342.
- Rega-Brodsky, C.C. et al. (2022). Urban biodiversity: State of the science and future directions. *Urban Ecosystems*, 25, 1083-1096.



**Testimony of Alia Soomro, Deputy Director for New York City Policy
New York League of Conservation Voters
City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
April 1, 2026**

My name is Alia Soomro and I am the Deputy Director for New York City Policy at the New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV). NYLCV is a statewide environmental advocacy organization representing over 30,000 members in New York City. Thank you, Chair Hankerson, and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to comment.

The city's parks system, tree canopy, and urban forest helps cool the city, reduces stormwater runoff, reduces energy bills, and decreases heat-related public health risks. Nature is a cost-effective long-term strategy for improving quality of life and making NYC livable. NYLCV is a member of Forest for All NYC (FFANYC), a diverse coalition of over 200 organizations collaborating to support the City's urban forest and equitably achieve 30% tree canopy cover by 2035. We are a member of FFANYC not only because trees and vegetation help mitigate a variety of environmental and public health challenges but because FFANYC centers equity and environmental justice in its advocacy. Recognizing that parks, green spaces, and trees are not equitably distributed due to structural racism and historic disinvestment, FFANYC's advocacy promotes New York City's urban forest so that it benefits all New Yorkers in a way that is just and equitable.

Intro 577

NYLCV supports the passage of Intro 577 of 2026, sponsored by Council Member Gennaro, which would require the Commissioner of the Department of Parks and Recreation to improve, formalize, or create 300 miles of trails within 3 years of the effective date of the bill. The placement of such trails should be prioritized to connect the maximum number of natural areas as well as to improve access by low and moderate income communities to natural areas.

New York City's urban forests and natural areas provide countless environmental and social benefits to city residents, including reducing urban flooding, managing stormwater runoff (which keeps pollutants out of waterways), and mitigating extreme heat since trees play a critical role in reducing outdoor temperatures. Urban trees can cool city streets up to 2°F, while forested natural areas are on average 6°F cooler than surrounding neighborhoods.

NYLCV supports Intro 577 because it will help the city improve and formalize existing trails throughout the Parks network, as well as improve access to trails for low income communities who disproportionately have less access to parks and open spaces due to reasons such as environmental racism.

This bill will also help the City meet the goals of Local Law 148 of 2023, which requires the City to create an Urban Forest Plan that aims to help the City expand the tree canopy from the current 23% coverage to 30% coverage.

In order to make this bill more effective, NYLCV recommends the following:

- This bill 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 public nature trails.
- Consider adding language around improved signage at trailheads to improve wayfinding and convey critical information about trail length, difficulty, and accessibility for park goers.
- 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.

Lastly, if Intro 577 is approved by the City Council, it will not be implemented effectively if the Parks Department funding cuts over the past few years are not restored. As a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, NYLCV underscores the importance of restoring and increasing the Parks Department budget in order to effectively carry out its mission, which includes investing in Parks staff and programs that are critical to the protection, maintenance, and planting efforts that will enable the City to reach its 30% tree canopy goal. This includes:

- Reinstate a \$2.4 million baselined allocation made in the FY24 adopted budget to provide funding for a citywide trails team of 26 full-time staff. This funding was eliminated in the FY24 November plan and has yet to be reinstated, leaving NYC Parks with just three full-time staff to manage 300 miles of nature trails in our city’s parks.
- Allocate \$1 million for the Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to publicize and begin implementing Local Law 148 of 2023. Funding should also be allocated to protect, maintain, and expand the NYC urban forest in a way that is just and equitable, including to NYC Parks, NYCHA, public schools, and many other city agencies with trees in their care.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

From: [Humane Westchester](#)
To: [Testimony](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Testimony re: Intro 0806
Date: Monday, April 6, 2026 6:16:06 PM

Hon. Speaker and Council Members,
NYC COUNCIL

I support Intro 0806, the Wildlife Protection Plan. Seeing wildlife is a proven benefit to people; in fact one of the reasons citizens move upstate etc is to be removed from the dense, brick-and-mortar reality of city living. Children especially enjoy seeing our splendid wildlife: In fact a deer that wandered a Harlem park delighted residents - till this animal was needlessly killed while in city custody, to the immense dismay of the public:

<https://www.cnn.com/2016/12/16/us/new-york-harlem-deer-dies>

Such incidents must be avoided: NYC can create a healthy, safe haven and green space for our wildlife residents which will enhance NYC living conditions, along with nurturing green spaces and trees, which are the 'lungs' of the earth.

My organization, Animal Defenders of Westchester, has been actively seeking urgently-needed enhanced protection of wildlife both in my community and in NYC; we have also been working directly with the NYSDEC to that end as well; in 2026 enlightened people understand the importance of the human-animal bond. We strongly urge NYC to enact Intro 0806.

Kiley Blackman,
Founder

ANIMAL DEFENDERS OF WESTCHESTER

www.ADOW.org

Like us on Facebook:

www.Facebook.com/westchester4geese

***ADOW was established 25 years ago and is the
Premier Animal Advocacy group in Westchester***

"The awful wrongs and sufferings forced upon the innocent, helpless, faithful animal race, form the blackest chapter in the whole world's history" ~Edward Freeman

ANIMAL DEFENDERS OF WESTCHESTER

www.ADOW..org

Like us on Facebook:

www.Facebook.com/westchester4geese

***ADOW was established 25 years ago and is the
Premier Animal Advocacy group in Westchester***



Animal Welfare.
Worldwide.

April 6, 2026

Dear Members of the Committee on Environmental Protection and Waterfronts,

As a member of the Lights Out Coalition and on behalf of our supporters in New York City, FOUR PAWS USA would like to submit its support for Intro 0804.

We support this reasonable bill that will reduce light pollution by requiring outdoor lighting in residential areas 3,000 lumens or higher to be shielded. To be “shielded” means that a device, even something as simple as tape, should be used to direct the light downward, rather than upward or horizontally. This easy action reduces glare and light pollution, which in turn will reduce deadly bird collisions.

Measures like this are necessary because each year 15 to 25 million migratory birds fly over New York City. Tragically, an estimated 250,000 of them die every year from building collisions caused by unnecessary lights at night or reflective glass. However, by taking mindful steps like this simple and effective bill, our collective actions can save thousands of birds each year from becoming disoriented by the artificial lights and deadly collisions at night.

For these reasons and more, FOUR PAWS USA supports this bill and urges the Committee members to please do the same.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Melanie Lary

Research and Campaigns Manager

FOUR PAWS USA
36 Bromfield Street Suite 410
Boston, MA 02108 | USA

+1-617-942-1233
info@fourpawsusa.org
fourpawsusa.org


@fourpaws.usa



tax ID: 27-4352918



Animal Welfare.
Worldwide.

April 1, 2026

Dear Members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation,

As a member of the Lights Out Coalition and on behalf of our supporters in New York City, FOUR PAWS USA would like to submit its support for Intro 0806.

We support this commonsense bill because it will establish an urban wildlife advisory board appointed by the Mayor and City Council Speaker that will include academic and field experts. These experts are necessary to assist the Board with developing a comprehensive city wildlife management plan that promotes biodiversity while also protecting public health.

A science-based and transparent plan is needed to properly analyze the city's wildlife problems, propose humane management strategies, and estimate costs for initiatives. We support the fact that the Board will hold public hearings and solicit testimony, and that the Parks Department will submit annual reports to the Mayor and the Council Speaker to update the status of wildlife management programs and the progress of adopted proposals. It is also important that all city agencies are required to consider the impact of their policies and actions on New York City wildlife.

For these reasons and more, FOUR PAWS USA supports this bill and urges the Committee members to please do the same.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Melanie Lary

Research and Campaigns Manager

FOUR PAWS USA
36 Bromfield Street Suite 410
Boston, MA 02108 | USA

+1-617-942-1233
info@fourpawsusa.org
fourpawsusa.org


@fourpaws.usa



tax ID: 27-4352918

5/31/26

Testimony for bill 806 from (born and raised New Yorker) Jason Paul Harman Byrne, Brooklyn, NY, [REDACTED]

The fourth bill, Intro 806, establishes a Wildlife Management Advisory Board to create a citywide plan that protects wildlife while preserving public safety. Along with a management plan, the advisory board would analyze related issues and recommend policies that advance humane animal treatment.

NYC is tough, for everyone, especially our wildlife. We are fortunate to live in an area visited by over 400 species of birds. One can see white-tailed deer in the Bronx, coyotes in Central Park, Eagles soaring over Bay Ridge, Mergansers in the Narrows, and many others. We are the winter feeding grounds for the magnificent Brants who visit us each year from the Artic circle. I think we can all agree that as New Yorkers, we live side by side with wildlife, and share our great city with a vast array of amazing birds and animals. But they face numerous challenges, such as habitat loss, window strikes, pollution, rodenticide poisoning, unhealthy human interactions (mainly people feeding them) and more. We can make New York a more habitable place for our wildlife with the proper help and guidance.

Therefore, it is essential that New York City has a Wildlife Management Advisory Board. This board can make important decisions based on science and facts, with empathy and compassionate stewardship of our city's parks, trails and waterways, making New York City a leader in smart wildlife management.

New York City Council
Legislative Oversight Hearing: Intro. 0577 - Trails Formalization
Committee on Parks and Recreation
April 1, 2026

Good afternoon, my name is Katie Smalheer, and I am a volunteer Pathkeeper Super Steward in Marine Park Park, located in Marine Park, Brooklyn. I am also a resident of Council District 35, represented by Councilmember Crystal Hudson. Thank you to Chair Hankerson and the Committee for the chance to submit public comment for today's hearing.

As a Pathkeeper, my work involves weekly volunteering to care for segments of our 300-mile network of nature trails. This work involves pruning out invasive species, clearing corridors, picking up trash and helping revegetate with native species.

Regarding Intro. 0577, I support the Natural Areas Conservancy in asking the Council to consider the following changes to the proposed legislation that would strengthen its intent and impact:

- 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.
- I 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.

While the proposed legislation does not come with funding attached, I also support the NAC's call to restore \$2.4 million in baselined funding that was allocated by Mayor Adams in Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24), which 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 mean improved trails in every borough, improving public safety, accessibility to our natural areas, and would help protect our city's forests and wetlands.

Thank you.

Testimony
Marion Hoffman Koenig
Bill Number: **Intro 0806**

Thank you, Speaker Menin for your support in helping wildlife stuck in our New York City.

I have personally witnessed, in my community, healthy birds consistently hitting the glass of local buildings and falling to the ground.

One of the buildings, 3260 Henry Hudson Pkwy, Bronx, NY 10463, is a Residence for students at Columbia University, where 14 birds were found dead below this glass building.

- A. The kind Superintendent asked students to pull their drapes, he installed a mesh over the lower windows, but it didn't last, as the building was not properly constructed to allow it to stick. We are friendly now:

Good day, Dragos,

Please put out a flat dish on the side of your entrance (so no one sees) and maintain 1 inch of water for birds, especially during a heat wave, but all year round. Most birds in the Johnson Avenue shopping area die from dehydration.

Thank you for caring. And thank you for teaching your children about animals and nature.

Best regards,

Marion

- B. Columbia University would not help.

I sent this information to NYC Audubon Society, but nothing has improved.

2. The three new glass residences here are not helping.

I do my best to tell my NYC Council Member, Eric Dinowitz and our Bx08 Community Board, including the Environment and Sanitation Committee (in person), that no one is educating developers and residents and we need to.

Key Details of Lights Out Philly:

- **Purpose:** To prevent bird collisions caused by attraction to bright artificial lights, which can reduce bird fatalities by up to 80%.
- **Participants:** Major buildings like the Comcast Technology Center, Liberty One, and Liberty Two participate, along with residential and commercial properties.
- **Guidelines:** Turn off decorative lighting, dim lobby lights, and close blinds on high-rise windows.
-

We must also remove the December holiday lights from all trees and shrubs (Not just turn off!) so birds can safely return to their homes in the trees and shrubs.

Thank you for this important, kind opportunity to give voice to the voiceless wildlife in New York City.

Marion Hoffman Koenig

Mental Health Advocate, Author

Don't Say Crazy To Me

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Dont-Say-Crazy-Me-Sinatra-ebook/dp/B0FVGF7Z75?>

Barnes & Noble: <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/dont-say-crazy-to-me-marion-hoffman-koenig/1148689899>

Goodreads Page: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/242577401-don-t-say-crazy-to-me>

<https://www.instagram.com/?hl=en>

<https://www.facebook.com/MarionKoenigAuthor>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/marion-koenig/>

Greetings Chair Hankerson, Council Member Wong, and all members of the Committee and co-sponsors of Int. No. 806-2026.

I am a resident of District 39 in Brooklyn, NY, and an avid parkgoer—particularly of Prospect Park. As such, I have tremendous appreciation for these important places and the animals that live in them. Please consider my written testimony, below, in relation to Int. No. 806-2026, which was heard in a public hearing before the Committee on Parks on April 1, 2026.

I support legislation that if implemented holds the potential to reduce or eliminate the harm people inflict on animals. Toward that end, legislation intended to prevent harm to City wildlife strikes me as a good thing. I applaud the Council for adopting legislation in the past to do just that: from criminalizing wild bird harassment, capture and trafficking; to prohibiting the sale of pet guinea pigs, which significantly reduces the number of these rodents dumped in City parks and streets; to requiring the City to trial humane methods for curbing rat populations, which in turn reduces the impact of poisons on other wildlife, humans and the environment. These efforts and more are an important demonstration of the collective sentiment of New Yorkers who care about fostering a positive relationship with animals and setting a moral example of nonviolence that is desperately needed.

As an extension of those sentiments, I would like to see this legislation amended to reorient the required plan from a management approach to an approach grounded on principles of animal autonomy, protection and support. I do not support legislation that perpetuates the concept of wild animals as things to be managed. In this context, management is code for killing—deer culls; rat poisoning and drowning; so-called “pest” control. Thus, I cannot support the bill in its current version, but I would if the following amendments were made.

First, I ask that the membership of the board be premised on individuals with an orientation toward protecting and supporting wildlife, and not on managing wildlife. The first appointment in paragraph 1 of subdivision b of the proposed code section should be amended to require the appointment of a wildlife protection expert. Further, appointments of the Commissioners of Environmental Protection and Health and Mental Hygiene should be omitted. These Commissioners have no place on this board, as their respective agencies—sadly—do not include animals among their priorities; rather, they see them as pests to be controlled and eradicated, usually by cruel means. Their input, if any, can be received through testimony at public hearings of the board. Finally, the director of the Mayor’s Office of Animal Welfare seems an appropriate candidate for this board, and perhaps even to Chair this board. I recommend including this Mayoral position, which was created upon the Council’s codification of the Office.

Second, and fundamentally, the required plan should be recharacterized as a wildlife protection, support and respect plan. I ask that the bill be amended to omit any reference to wildlife “management” or the concept thereof.

Third, the legislation should be amended to prescribe specific policy guideposts or principles to the board as it exercises its assigned powers and duties. The bill should explicitly direct the

board to develop a plan based upon a policy of respect, support and protection of New York City wildlife. Without clearly assigned legislative goals and policy direction, the board could go whichever direction it wishes in development of a plan for “management” of wildlife. I do not believe that is the intent of the sponsors, nor should it be.

Fourth, the items to be included in the plan should be reworked to reflect these principles. Framing wildlife as the issue, as opposed to our interference in places inhabited by wild animals, will lead us nowhere helpful or productive. The board should be required to consider legal and policy recommendations that include: prohibition of fishing in parks; prohibition of commercial release of domestic birds; and other animal protection policies designed to prevent the degradation of wild animal habitats by humans, which includes the dumping of domesticated animals in wild places. The board should be required to investigate how the inadequacy of the City to manage human-created waste in City parks and a lack of enforcement against littering by parkgoers affects wild animals. The board should be required to investigate how noise pollution, including fireworks displays, disrupts wild animals, and whether the City should do anything about this issue. The board should be required to consider whether local wildlife rehabilitators have the support they need to do their important work, and whether even modest City funding of wildlife rehabilitation should be included among budget priorities. These and many other animal-focused inquiries are appropriate and long overdue for public consideration and policy response. I urge a reworking of the required content of the plan that is focused not on animals as the problem to be fixed, but on animals *whose interests should be considered in making policy*.

There are no legal barriers to these proposed amendments, and I urge the Council to reject any assertion by the Administration that these amendments cannot be implemented as this bill moves toward aging and a vote.

The Council has long led the charge on animal protection while Mayoral Administrations disgracefully lag behind. Unfortunately, under the current Administration, things in this regard do not appear to be turning the corner. With a Mayor demonstrably willing to waffle on positions and make and break campaign promises—including on issues of animal protection—I call on the Council to continue to lead the way forward on these issues, which are important to me and many other New Yorkers, and rightfully deserve the attention of our local legislature. I am thankful for the steps this Council is taking to address them.

I am grateful for your consideration of this testimony and hopeful that my recommendations will be reflected in further versions of this legislation.

Sincerely,

Nick Connell

My name is Pranoti Waghmare, and I support Intro 804 as a practical step to reduce excessive outdoor lighting in residential areas. By requiring shielded fixtures for lights over 3,000 lumens, it ensures light is directed where it's needed without spilling into neighbors' homes.

- This improves quality of life by reducing glare, protecting sleep, and minimizing neighborhood disturbances.
- It also cuts energy waste and light pollution, supporting a more sustainable environment.
- Reducing excessive lighting can also help limit disorientation for birds and other wildlife that rely on natural darkness.
- While the \$50 penalty encourages compliance, it may not be sufficient on its own to deter repeated violations and could be revisited over time.

Overall, Intro 804 promotes more responsible lighting and more peaceful, community-friendly neighborhoods.

New York City Council
Legislative Oversight Hearing: Intro. 0577 - Trails Formalization
Committee on Parks and Recreation
April 1, 2026

Written Testimony of Rajeev Cherukupalli

My name is Rajeev Cherukupalli. I am a volunteer Pathkeeper Super Steward, and have worked in Raoul Wallenberg Forest, located in Riverdale, Bronx in the past. I am a resident of Council District 10.

I work as an economist in public health including urban health and policy at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. The opinions expressed herein are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Johns Hopkins University.

Thank you to Chair Hankerson and the Committee for the chance to submit public comments for today's hearing.

As an economist, I can offer three insights as to why nature trails formalization is critically important. First, nature trails, urban parks and natural areas not only have intrinsic and ecological value, they also offer undervalued health and *economic benefits*. Second, formalizing and maintaining nature trails is a *time-critical infrastructure investment* to reverse the degradation and to improve the health of our natural areas. Third, *guaranteed funding* will vastly improve the pace and impact of ongoing efforts to protect and improve New York City's trails.

Nature trails have major economic benefits

Nature *trails* are the arteries and capillaries that help harness the benefits of our natural areas. Natural *areas* in turn provide quantifiable health and economic benefitsⁱ.

Research has shown access to walking and hiking areas improves population health through increased physical activity and reduced healthcare costs. Some of the economic value or natural areas is captured and reflected in the private market—property values nearer well-maintained natural areas are higher. Some of that value is reflected in our collective checkbook. Trees in natural area forests, particular mature oak-hickory stands, account for the majority of carbon stores in NYC.ⁱⁱ Well-preserved wetlands actively reduce flooding risks. A systematic review found studies that look at benefits as diverse as health outcomes, property value increase, carbon sequestration, biodiversity, recreation and reduced runoff and flooding, collectively reporting a median benefit to cost ratio of 3 to 1.ⁱⁱⁱ

Nature trails are critical to securing the benefits of natural areas. Expanding trail access ensures that young people can experience their first hikes in the city, taking just a few steps or a subway or bike ride from their homes. Well-designed and delineated trails ensure casual users do not tread over sensitive forest areas. Restored walkways and trails ensure improved access to monitor our wetlands and shorelines.

Formalizing and maintaining nature trails is a critical public infrastructure investment.

Nature trails in the city are linked to, but distinct from greenways and park pathways, just as natural areas are linked to, but distinct from our landscaped vegetation. Like our roads and bridges, trails have a finite working lifespan. They *depreciate* with regular use; they *deteriorate* with neglect and abuse. This pattern accelerates with extreme weather – unseasonable flash floods wash away soil that is trod upon and fells large trees, blocking trails and damaging.

Recent strategic efforts have updated our understanding of the city’s trails network,^{iv} identified critical areas and trails needing maintenance, and restored the work of past generations of trail keepers and Parks staff. Trail formalization will recognize the distinctness of nature trails and the specialized resources needed for their restoration and upkeep.

Guaranteed funding is essential to the health of our nature trails

A natural outcome of our aging infrastructure is that, even as public infrastructure spending grows, operations and maintenance spending occupy a larger share.^v Both the volume of funding and their variability matter. Shortfalls reduce what forest and trail infrastructure we can protect. Variability in funding introduces uncertainty into project management and reduces the ability to hire dedicated, specialized staff. With investments, these gaps only amplify over time. A trail corridor may go a season or two without pruning, and soon enough the entire trail is inaccessible.

All three of these insights have been borne out in my experience, both as a runner and as a Pathkeeper.¹ I have seen firsthand how fallen trees and inaccessible and degraded trails after several large storms reduced runners’ and hikers’ access to safe routes in Riverdale Park. I have joined volunteers in blazing trails in two boroughs to improve delineation and safety. And I have seen that volunteering, even under the supervision of dedicated Parks and Natural Areas Conservancy staff, is no substitute for the specialized skills and continuous attention that more full-time positions would bring.

¹ Pathkeepers assist with corridor pruning to keep pathways clear and accessible, closing desire lines to discourage the public from accessing parts of our natural areas that are ecologically fragile or unsafe for public use, and helping to maintain and build structures that allow for greater public access on our trails.

Regarding Intro. 0577, I support the Natural Areas Conservancy in asking the Council to consider the following changes to the proposed legislation that would strengthen its intent and impact:

- Reword the legislation 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.
- Consider adding language around improved signage at trailheads to improve wayfinding and convey critical information about trail length, difficulty, and accessibility for park goers.
- 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.
- To help increase access to our natural areas, 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.

In this connection, while the proposed legislation does not come with funding attached, I also support the NAC’s call to restore \$2.4 million in baselined funding that was allocated in Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24), which 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 mean improved trails in every borough, improving public safety and accessibility to our natural areas, and would help protect our city’s forests and wetlands.

As spring returns to New York City, many more walkers, hikers and runners will learn the delight of discovering a chipmunk hopping across a quiet and shaded Riverdale trail. Your work to protect our nature trails is vital to enabling that delight.

Thank you.

Rajeev Cherukupalli, PhD
Assistant Scientist (Economist)
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

References

ⁱ Cohen M, Burrowes K, Gwam P. (2021) The Health Benefits of Parks and their Economic Impacts. Research Report, The Urban Institute

ⁱⁱ Pregitzer C, Hanna C, Charlop-Powers S, Bradford, M (2021). Estimating Carbon Storage in Urban Forests of New York City. 10.21203/rs.3.rs-178961/v1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jacob V, Reynolds JA, Chattopadhyay SK, Hopkins DP, Brown DR, Devlin HM, Barrett A, Berrigan D, Crespo CJ, Heath GW, Brownson RC, Cuellar AE, Clymer JM, Chriqui JF. Parks, Trails, and Greenways for Physical Activity: A Community Guide Systematic Economic Review. *Am J Prev Med.* 2024 Jun;66(6):1089-1099. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2024.01.021. Epub 2024 Feb 6. PMID: 38331114; PMCID: PMC11102847.

^{iv} Natural Areas Conservancy, 2024. New York City Strategic Trails Plan

^v Kane JW, Tomer, A and Swedberg, B. Four recent trends in US public infrastructure spending. March 27, 2025. Brookings Institution.

3/31/26

To Whom it May Concern,

This is regarding bill Intro 806 which establishes a Wildlife Management Advisory Board to create a citywide plan that protects wildlife while preserving public safety. As a born and raised New Yorker, a NYC DOE teacher, environmentalist, and birder, I fully support this bill.

Creating a Wildlife Advisory Board is a prudent step towards protecting not only our local and visiting wildlife (migrating birds) but also protecting us and our environment.

We live in an everchanging world where climate change is at the forefront. New York City should be the front runners in looking into effective ways to create thriving ecosystems for our wildlife which then in turn benefit us.

For example, we have many raptors who reside in our city- Bald Eagles, Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrels, Peregrine Falcons, Turkey and Black Vultures, Great Horned Owls, and more. These raptors feed upon the rodents who are considered pests. Because there has been no management board, the city and private residences try to eradicate the rodents by using rodenticide. The problem is, once that poison is eaten by the rodent, it is also ingested by the raptor. This causes a multitude of problems which then lead to the death of the bird. This was wildly publicized when our resident Eurasian Eagle Owl, "Flaco" became deathly ill from rodenticide and hit a building which caused his demise.

We also have many visiting warblers, as we are on the Atlantic Flyway. We are incredibly lucky to be one of the major places that they stop to rest and refuel. If there is pesticide being used in our parks and green spaces, there will be no insects for these visiting birds to eat.

Therefore, a wildlife management advisory board would be the best way to look at the many situations where wildlife could thrive or be threatened and work towards the former.

Thank you for your time,
Samantha Fischer



Oversight Hearing TESTIMONY

The NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

[hearing about the FY27 City Budget](#)

Monday, March 23rd at 11:30am (public comment starts at 1:30pm).

ALL WRITTEN TESTIMONY DUE By THURSDAY March 26th at 10am.

Register to Testify Here: [Hearing Testimony Registration - New York City Council](#)

Dear NYC Council and Budget Planning Committee

Hi, my name is Carol A. Colone and my organization, The Earth Care Action Group at The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York is a member of Forest for All NYC, a coalition of over 200 organizations committed to helping the city reach 30% tree canopy cover citywide by 2035 in an equitable manner.

The parks and urban forest matters to my organization/community because trees are the environmental bedrock for a healthy planet. They provide shade, save energy, absorb water to help prevent flooding, pull carbon dioxide out of the air to help with air pollution, add unlimited beauty to our lives, etc. AND LACK of trees in a neighborhood is a social injustice.

The urban forest is essential to the quality of life of all New Yorkers, and NYC Parks plays an invaluable role in caring for a significant portion of our city's trees and green spaces.

NYC Parks is responsible for the care of more than half of all tree canopy in NYC, but the Parks staff and programs that support the urban forest have continued to be cut.

The FY27 Preliminary Budget allocation for the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) was slightly decreased from the adopted FY26 budget. While the overall City budget increased by approximately \$12B, the NYC Parks budget decreased by \$33M from FY26 to FY27, primarily due to a loss of Mayoral one-shot funding that was not carried over from last year. While there are reasons to be hopeful about this year's budget – despite a very tight fiscal environment, NYC Parks has not yet been hit with drastic cuts – **the Preliminary Budget does not restore NYC Parks to the level of staffing required to care for the NYC urban forest.**

The benefits of parks and trees are endless, you get so much bang for your buck when you manage and take care of trees and park property properly, and for that we need a larger budget. But just think about all of the other expenses, like energy that will go down.

We ask that Council and the Administration work together to deliver on Mayor

Mamdani's campaign commitment to double the NYC Parks budget, and ensure full funding for the staff and programs that are critical to the protection, maintenance, and planting efforts that will enable the City to reach its 30% tree canopy goal.

- My organization- The Earth Care Action Group of The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York is a member of the Forest for All NYC coalition which seeks to justly and equitably protect, maintain, expand and promote the NYC urban forest.
- The urban forest matters to my organization/community because the urban forest is essential to the quality of life of all New Yorkers. The shade, beauty, and water retention are just a few positive facts of trees and the life of Parks.
- NYC's first ever Urban Forest Plan, required by Local Law 148 of 2023, will be released this spring and chart a path for NYC to equitably expand tree canopy cover to 30% citywide. Implementing this Plan will require resources! To ensure the plan is successful, the City will need to plant additional trees, but it will also need to baseline existing staff and expand the workforce that protects and maintains trees, as well as invest in workforce development programs, tree nurseries, tree health research and monitoring, wood salvage, and more.
- **NYC Parks is responsible for the care of more than half of all tree canopy in NYC, but the Parks staff and programs that support the urban forest have continued to be cut.**
- We call on Council and the Mayor to allocate \$150M to fund the initial implementation of the 10-year Urban Forest Plan, including baselining and expanding NYC Parks forestry staff positions and funding to support other City agencies that will expand tree canopy under their jurisdiction.

We ask that the Budget include approximately \$150 million for:

- Restoration, expansion, and baselining of NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) staff and programs to support ongoing operations and to grow the urban forest:
 - Expand NYC Park's capacity for tree risk management and inspections, including increasing and baselining the number of staff (climbers and pruners, foresters, and related management) and contract funding that are critical for caring for and managing the existing tree canopy across NYC.
 - Baseline NYC Parks positions currently funded by one-year contracts (approximately 276 positions including Parks Enforcement Patrol, Urban Forest Rangers, Forestry staff, etc.) to limit turnover and sustain the operational efficiency that come from retaining a stable workforce.
 - Provide \$16M in baselined annual funding to fully implement the Forest

Management Framework for forested natural areas, including \$2.4M in annual capital funding for large scale restoration and contract work, \$11.2M in baselined expense funding for in-house staff to conduct maintenance and for materials and operating costs, and \$2.4M in baselined expense funding to provide one trails crew per borough supporting the formalization and maintenance of NYC's nature trail network.

- o Increase the number of tree planting staff (via Capital funded Interfund Agreement) to increase the number of street trees planted from just under 18,000 in FY25 to at least 25,000 per year, with the aim of shortening the 9-year Neighborhood Tree Planting Program.

- o Increase funding for the trees and sidewalks program, to increase the City's capacity to respond to damage to sidewalks caused by tree roots.

- \$1M for the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to support non-NYC Parks agencies tasked with heightened management and expansion of trees in their jurisdictions (such as NYC Housing Authority, Department of Education, the School Construction Authority, Department of Sanitation, Department of Transportation, etc.) in implementing initial actions of the forthcoming NYC Urban Forest Plan. This includes funding for an updated citywide Lidar remote sensing data capture and analysis to monitor the canopy coverage of the urban forest and measure the growth or loss of tree canopy coverage and track progress towards the 30% goal, as required by Local Law 148 of 2023 to be completed every 5 years.

In addition to these budget requests, there are several staffing-related needs that are essential in rebuilding and expanding the City's urban forest workforce, including:

- Salary increases for the advanced and technical civil service roles like Foresters and Climber & Pruners, to help attract and retain the best candidates to manage the nation's largest urban forest.

- Expansion of City-led workforce training programs, including internal programs to train existing employees and create promotional opportunities like the NYC Parks Climber & Pruner program, as well as programs that bring in new workers to expand overall workforce capacity.

- We commend the Mayor for lifting the hiring freeze and 2-1 hiring ratio, but are disappointed that 100 vacant roles will be eliminated from Parks on top of the 600 positions previously cut since 2023 - effectively resulting in 700 positions being permanently lost. We encourage the Mayor and Council to restore and fill all these positions.

Additional background:

- The City of New York is required by Local Law 148 of 2023 to equitably expand tree

canopy cover to reach 30% citywide, and the forthcoming NYC Urban Forest Plan will chart a path to reach that goal.

- To ensure the plan is successful, the City will need to plant additional trees, but it will also need to baseline existing staff and expand the workforce that protects and maintains trees, as well as invest in workforce development programs, tree nurseries, tree health research and monitoring, wood salvage, and more.

- The urban forest helps cool the city - reducing energy bills and decreasing heat-related public health risks. These investments can also help the Mayor meet his goals of improving livability and quality of life in NYC.

- In 2021, Forest for All NYC set the goal of achieving “30x35” in the NYC Urban Forest Agenda – 30% tree canopy cover equitably distributed across NYC by 2035. The NYC urban forest cools the air, offers shady respite from heat, sequesters carbon, increases energy efficiency, and contributes to New Yorkers’ health and wellbeing, and yet it does not serve New Yorkers equitably.

- Forest for All NYC has over 200 member organizations from the non-profit, government, and business sectors.

- The NYC urban forest is composed of all 7 million trees in the city, and the physical and social infrastructure that support them. It spans public and private property and every neighborhood in NYC - from street trees to private backyards to city parks.

- NYC Parks manages 53.5% of the total urban forest canopy in the city.

- Despite its laudable efforts, NYC Parks is chronically underfunded, particularly for management of the urban forest. It needs baselined and sufficient investment in the regular maintenance of the urban forest.

- Despite the importance of the urban forest and its perennial needs for stewardship, there is no dedicated, long-term funding for managing NYC’s trees in the years ahead.

Please, please, please vote for the budget required to manage half of the urban forest canopy. It has so many positive effects on our lives, on energy use, and infrastructure. AND it is SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR ALL!

Respectfully Submitted,

Carol A. Colone



Staten Island, NY 10306

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0806 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: April 1, 2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tina Pina

Address: [Redacted], Brooklyn NY

I represent: Lights Out Coalition + SECT

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: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ashley Roelofs

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn NY

I represent: Trust for Public Land

Address: 632 Broadway Ste 902 NYC NY 10012

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 710, 7226-1500 Res. No. 1507, 57

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/1/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Leslie Garcia

Address: _____

I represent: Van Cortlandt Park Alliance

Address: 20 Van Cortlandt Park South Bronx NY

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: Jordan Wong

Address: [redacted] 30th Ave

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 806 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/1/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MARGARET LEE

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 806 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/1/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: KATHY NIZZARI

Address: [redacted] W 25 Street NYC

I represent: LIGHTS OUT COALITION

Address: same

**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: 4/1/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MATT DRURY, Chief of CLA

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: 4/1/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MARIT LARSON, Acting DC of E&P

Address: _____

I represent: NYC PARKS 4/1/26 of 100

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: 4/1/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SARAH AUCCOIN, Chief of Education

Address: + Wildlife

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: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: TOMI SIMON

Address: 44 Prospect Park West

I represent: Birders of the Vale

Address: Vale of Castlereagh

**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: Patricia Tristian

Address: _____ 10009

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0577, 0206 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gabriel Cummings

Address: _____ Bk, NY 11201

I represent: Natural Areas Conservancy

Address: 1234 5th Ave NY, NY 10022

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. 740 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: KATIE SWABB

Address: 52 KERMIT PL, BROOKLYN

I represent: CITY PARKS FOUNDATION

Address: THE ARSENAL, CENTRAL PARK

**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: LISA CURTISS

Address: [REDACTED] EAST #B15

I represent: SELF BROOKLYN, NY 11238

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: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: TONI SIMON

Address: 44 Prospect Park West F2

I represent: Birders PP Vale of c.

Address: Vale of Cashmere

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