

PROTECTION AND CARE OF OUR EXISTING NATURAL AREAS OFFER A RESILIENT SOLUTION



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Many people - even long-time New Yorkers - are surprised to learn that 10% of New York City is natural areas. These large forests and wetlands are frequently located on parkland in the outer boroughs. In addition to providing New Yorkers with the opportunity to explore the stunning natural beauty of our City, understanding and investing in our natural areas should be an important part of our response to climate change, including flash flooding.

While they do not offer a complete solution, natural areas are often the unsung heroes of extreme weather events. During SuperStorm Sandy, neighborhoods that were buffered by coastal wetlands and salt marshes experienced less damage and devastation. Last week, SuperStorm Ida reminded us that our freshwater natural areas, like rivers, streams, and ponds, are just as important. There is real urgency to investing in natural areas. NYC's forests and wetlands provide huge benefits to New York City, including regional cooling, carbon capture, coastal flood mitigation, and absorbing stormwater. While we often think of nature as self-sustaining, these areas require investment to ensure that they continue to serve our city.

Targeted solutions for protecting New York City's natural resources already exist - they just need to be adopted and prioritized.

Since 2012, the Natural Areas Conservancy has partnered with NYC Parks to release two robust plans - the Wetlands Management Framework for New York City and the Forest Management Framework for New York City - that would significantly increase resources and funding to forests and wetlands, and reinvigorate the city's commitment to caring for natural areas. Building on more than thirty years of restoration and management, the frameworks use extensive data to make recommendations to manage New York City's hydrological infrastructure for the future. These plans call for the protection and care of our existing natural areas, acquisition of properties of high conservation value, and watershed management to increase the capture of stormwater at its source to decrease the volume and frequency of contaminated water flowing into our city's waterways.

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As we continue to experience more and more extreme weather events like SuperStorm Ida, it's time for the City to utilize existing solutions, like these natural area frameworks, in their planning and current mitigation efforts. With 520 miles of shoreline and retaining over 100 miles of streams, our city is a city of water. The Wetlands Management Framework for New York City comes at just the right time – and the Natural Areas Conservancy and its parks partners will continue to advocate for its adoption and funding at the City level.