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NEARLY 70% OF NEW YORK CITY'S PARKS PROJECTED TO EXPERIENCE EXTREME FLOODING

How NYC Parks Can be Transformed to Combat Flooding, Urban Heat, and Social Inequities — New Report

New York, NY – Nearly 70% of New York City's Parks will be located in or adjacent to storm surge or stormwater flood zones in the coming decades, up from the 38% of NYC parks currently in flood danger from rising sea levels and intensifying storms. But, there's time to act: If the City prioritizes climate resiliency upgrades and proper maintenance of our parks, the parks themselves can save lives and protect surrounding communities from flooding, by pumping and storing stormwater that would end up in our streets and basements underground, until the sewers can process the excess.

The new report, ***Parks Save Cities, Parks Save Lives***, calls for a complete shift—from treating parks as nice-to-have green space— to recognizing and investing in them as critical climate infrastructure that can save lives and communities from flooding and overheating. This offers immense potential to draw down federal and state funds that might not be traditionally reserved for parks. Strategically designed parks can reduce flooding for the surrounding neighborhood, become cooling hubs, and emergency response centers, reducing damage costs and protecting communities.

"Our parks can go from vulnerable public space to a powerful tool, protecting surrounding communities," said **Amy Chester, Director of Rebuild by Design**. In the report, the NYU-based organization which helps cities adapt to climate change, makes the case for urgent action in light of the data predicting 70% of the City's Parks will be in flood zones by 2100. "If we prioritize investments in NYC parks like we invest in our streets and bridges we can help communities throughout the City adapt to climate change while ensuring the parks, themselves, remain operational during the wettest days."

For proof in action, New Yorker's need only look across the Hudson River. The City of Hoboken, through its Hurricane Sandy Rebuild by Design project created a series of new and newly redesigned parks, reducing flooding by **88%** by investing in green and gray infrastructure to capture and slow stormwater before it floods. Hoboken's parks use a mix of interventions that can hold **a combined 4.2 million gallons** of heavy rain during a single event. For example, Hoboken's ResilienCity park pumps flood water from the adjacent 20 block of the neighborhood into a 1 million gallon holding tank, underneath the park, until the sewer system can catch up.

New York City's parks are not currently designed to withstand worsening climate conditions. In 2012 Hurricane Sandy damaged nearly 400 parks, some of which took years to recover. Despite managing 14% of the city's land, New York City's Department of Parks and Recreation receives only 0.6% of the city's budget, significantly lower than the 1-2% allocated in other major U.S. cities. Yet, every dollar spent on flood infrastructure generates up to $13 in economic benefits, from reduced damage to lower recovery expenses.

The report calls on New York City to: Redevelop neighborhood parks to manage flooding for the surrounding neighborhood; treat parks as critical infrastructure with a new inter-agency funding model; invest in public realm stormwater retention and detention; and equip parks to serve as community disaster response sites. [*Read the Complete Recommendations Here*]

"Investing in parks is investing in NYC's future," said **Adam Ganser, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks**, "Prioritizing parks as a path towards climate adaptation will open up critical sources of funding to renovate and maintain parks so they can play their outsized role as heavy rain and heat waves **increase."**

"I am alarmed for communities like mine when I see that 78% of Queens parks are in danger of flooding by 2100. Our parks are vital lifelines for our neighbors and essential in our fight against climate change. We must invest more in our parks so that they can play an even greater role in reducing flood risk for neighborhoods across the city, rather than being vulnerable to flooding themselves" said **Council Member Shekar Krishnan (D-25), Chair of the City Council's Committee on Parks and Recreation.**

"Nearly half of The Bronx's city-owned parks are in flood zones today, posing a huge risk to the limited green space in our neighborhoods and the few lifelines our communities have to mitigate the oppressive air quality and extreme heat," said **Arif Ullah, Executive Director of South Bronx Unite**, "New York City needs to prioritize communities who are the most vulnerable due to a long-standing history of disinvestment."

"The number of Brooklyn parks in flood zones is expected to triple in the next 75 years, but we don't have to accept that, said **Rona Taylor, Executive Director of Central and South East Brooklyn Community Development Corporation** "This report and its recommendations, show a clear path for how we can turn from dire predictions to creating climate resilient parks that will keep communities dry"

Findings:

- Nearly 70% of New York City's parks are projected to be in stormwater and storm surge flood zones by 2100, compared to 38% (916 of 2,385 parks) today.
- Over 40% of parks located in stormwater and storm surge flood zones are in neighborhoods with high social vulnerability, meeting or exceeding FEMA's high-risk thresholds.
- Approximately 33% of parks in stormwater and storm surge flood zones are also in the highest heat risk areas.

Borough-Level Impacts:

- **Bronx:** Nearly half (49%) of The Bronx's parks are in flood zones today, rising to 54% by 2100.
- **Brooklyn:** While only 21% of Brooklyn's parks are in flood zones today, expected to more than triple, placing 69% at flood risk by 2100
- **Manhattan:** 70% of Manhattan's parks in flood zones by 2100, up from 54% today
- **Queens:** Will see the biggest jump in parks vulnerability from 33% today to 78% by 2100
- **Staten Island**: Highest percentage of parks at flood risk in 2100 at 79%, up from 56% today

Our analysis identifies 177 high-priority parks across New York City, that fall within current or future floodplains, and have the highest heat and social vulnerability scores. Nearly 60% of these parks are in the Bronx, followed by Brooklyn (25%), Queens (9%), and Manhattan (6%).

Rebuild by Design *brings leaders in government, research, design, and planning, together with local leaders to develop innovative solutions to climate challenges, so they can take action to save lives and safeguard communities for generations to come.*

For more information and complete report: http://rebuildbydesign.org

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