



## **Natural Resource Management Plan**



### Policy

#### Natural Resource Management Programs

The following is a list of many of the Natural Resource Management Programs that have occurred or are ongoing in PRC facilities. This list will be reviewed annually and updated as necessary.

##### Adaptive Deer Management Program

Following a 2008 Final Report from the Citizens Task Force on White-tailed Deer and Forest Regeneration, Westchester County began an Adaptive Deer Management Program. Beginning with hunting at four (4) County-owned parks, the program has expanded to six facilities, and assists other outside agencies and municipalities in the form of providing advice.

##### Beech Leaf Disease

The introduction of Beech Leaf Disease (BLD) to Westchester County has had a profound impact on the forested areas within the department and beyond. The Conservation Division trained an employee from each PRC facility to identify beech trees and BLD in 2022, and each facility submitted a report stating the presence or absence of each. Working with the Westchester County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Conservation Division has led a program of replanting native trees in the most affected areas.

##### Biodiversity Research Program and Biodiversity Reserve Areas

The Conservation Division of PRC continually expands upon its Biodiversity Research Program. The intent of this program is to assess the flora and fauna of PRC-owned lands and to recognize and mitigate emerging threats. This has been ongoing since the 1930s but more formalized in the 1980s. Further established by the Westchester County Parks Board is the creation of Biodiversity Reserve Areas. These are areas within the PRC-owned lands that meet certain criteria for further protection due to either the habitat type or the presence of certain plants or animals within the habitat. These are set for further protection.

##### Natural Resource Management Plans

Over the course of the past 20 years, the Conservation Division has created a number of Natural Resource Management Plans for PRC facilities, across divisions. These begin with biological assessments of the areas, partly from some of the efforts described above. General conditions of the natural resources are described in the reports, including habitat types, rare species presence, and areas for concern. Recommendations are given for the care of these natural areas, with specific guidelines set out.

##### Native Plant Program

Officially begun in 2022 at Hilltop Hanover Farm, the Native Plant Program is also present at Lasdon Park and Arboretum. These two facilities, working with other Conservation Division staff, have begun collecting native seed with the goal of propagating native plant stock. Seeds are collected from PRC facilities and other areas of Westchester County, and are cleaned and prepared for planting. This provides local ecotypes for native plants, as opposed to seeds obtained through purchase, that are often general northeast ecotypes from areas farther away (i.e. Pennsylvania). These have in

turn been planted in PRC facilities and are used for capital project plantings. For example, in October of 2023, over 200 plants were planted in vernal pool areas where BLD was present at Cranberry Lake Preserve. This effort will allow plants and genotypes local to Westchester County to be planted back in PRC facilities, preserving and enhancing the native flora of Westchester.

#### Spotted Lanternfly

Westchester County had previously been working with New York State DEC and the USDA to determine the presence of SLF in Westchester County parks. Traps had been placed during the summers of 2020-2022 at multiple facilities, and trainings have been conducted to allow staff at all facilities to be able to report the presence of SLF to Conservation division staff and to NYS. Beginning in 2023, training was given to PRC staff from all facilities on how to identify SLF presence, and how to report this to Conservation Staff. Additionally, over 20 backpack vacuums were purchased for SLF removal. Many of these were used in PRC facilities with data being collected on the use of the vacuums and amount of SLF collected. Westchester County also put out press releases detailing the use of these vacuums and the ability of these to be loaned to local municipalities for SLF remediation. Conservation staff delivered eight (8) vacuums to Westchester municipalities and to NYSDOT for use along Interstate 287. Trainings were performed for use of the vacuums, and data was collected on the use of such. Additionally, Conservation division staff was interviewed multiple times on the use of the vacuums in PRC facilities, and these efforts were aired on all of the major channels as well as local channels and other media sources. Educational pamphlets were created and distributed with assistance from the Marketing Division.

#### Flora of Ward Pound Ridge Reservation

The Friends of Trailside Nature Museum and Ward Pound Ridge Reservation have hired local ecologist Patricia Butter, along with her colleagues Daniel Atha and Devon Cummings, to perform an allinclusive botanical survey of Ward Pound Ridge Reservation, a 4,315-acre Westchester County park. Plants will be catalogued with the New York State Museum and some preserved at Trailside Nature Museum. New species records have been found for the Reservation, as well as for Westchester County. Part of the research is to provide management recommendations for the park. Some recommendations that have already been implemented include re-routing an annual trail race to avoid sensitive habitat.

#### Other research initiatives

There are numerous ongoing research initiatives in Westchester County PRC facilities, including but not limited to: ongoing vernal pool monitoring efforts; deer impact research including point quarter transects and browse impact surveys; American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project; Turtles of Westchester County; Tibbetts Pond Restoration and Management Plan; and Potential Alternative *Tsuga spp.* as Landscape Replacements for *T. Canadensis*.

#### Outside research initiatives

There are a number of outside institutions and organizations that conduct research in Westchester County facilities. In the past five (5) years, there have been over 30 such studies, with research topics including but not limited to; river ecology, bats, bears, otters, coyotes, ticks, squirrels, mosquitoes, cottontails, general wildlife study, and many more. Reports from these studies are shared with the Department, and information obtained from these help guide natural resource management decisions. Organizations studying this information include local colleges and universities, New York State, local non-profits, and local schools. Other efforts include a Salt Marsh Conservation Plan.

The Department has prohibited firewood from being brought into any of our parks as a proactive, preventative measure against the spread of invasive pests such as the Emerald Ash Borer and the Asian Long-horned Beetle and we have been communicating and working closely with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) to help monitor our forests and provide workshops to PRC staff. An invasive pests' policy encompasses insect pests and invasive plants and methods of controlling and/or eradicating. County ordinances, such as idling laws, tree removal laws and pesticide reduction laws, along with the statement that all plants, animals and minerals are protected within County parkland, demonstrate the critical importance of our natural resource and environmental stewardship best management practices.