

Working
side by
Riverside

Riverside Park
Conservancy



Year in Review

Our Mission

From 59th Street to 181st Street, from riverfront to city-side, we care for and enhance six miles of parkland for present and future generations. Working together with the New York City Parks Department, we make improvements as diverse as the Park itself and the city it serves.



Photo: Julianne Schaer

A First Year Working Side by Riverside

From 59th Street to 181st Street, Riverside offers New Yorkers a place of joy and renewal — whether you're strolling beneath its tree canopy, watching the rhythm of the river, or gathering with neighbors on a playing field or over a barbecue grill, the park provides a refuge from the intensity of city life. As I reflect on my first full year as Conservancy President, I stand in awe of the deep love this community has for the park — and also of the park's sheer complexity.

A dedicated Conservancy staff cares for 400 acres of remarkably diverse landscapes, working side by side with NYC Parks and thousands of passionate volunteers. At a time when City resources for parks are increasingly strained, that partnership — and the support of our community — is more important than ever.

The accomplishments in these pages give just a glimpse of that work: restoring landscapes, caring for recreation spaces, expanding opportunities for young people, bringing thousands of New Yorkers together through free programs, and opening the first compost center in an NYC Park. Each reflects both the magnitude of the Park's needs and what is possible when public and private partners work together.

As you explore this Year in Review, I hope you'll share in our pride in what we accomplished together — and our commitment to ensuring that these six miles thrive for generations to come.

With gratitude,



Merritt Birnbaum
President & CEO



Our Gardeners at Work

Caring for 400 acres is a big job. Our professional gardeners worked in assigned areas of the Park throughout the year, building an intimate knowledge of each landscape over time. They restored gardens, managed invasive plants, cared for trees and natural areas, and worked alongside NYC Parks staff and volunteers to make sustained improvements that visitors enjoyed from season to season.

6 / 400
miles acres
cared for by
the team



25
horticulture
team
members



A new acre restored

In 2023, the Conservancy undertook the restoration of a full acre of shoreline at 165th Street, opening up spectacular views of the George Washington Bridge and adding a new pollinator meadow of native plants. This once overgrown, degraded landscape is now a beautiful scenic overlook for picnics and relaxation, fondly referred to as “Pine Bluff.” Ongoing maintenance by our North Park gardening team will ensure the new landscape continues to improve over time.



Before restoration



Let's Play Ball

Riverside Park is one of Manhattan's great outdoor recreation spaces, and keeping its heavily used fields and courts in good condition is a huge task. Our Ballfields Team worked seven days a week, using specialized equipment and heavy machinery to care for the park's 30 sports fields and playing courts, including grooming natural and artificial turf, repairing and maintaining hardscapes, and responding to the daily wear that comes with thousands of people playing, exercising, and gathering all year long.



30

sports fields &
playing courts
maintained



Volunteers

Volunteers have been central to the Conservancy since its beginnings as a collection of neighborhood stewardship groups – and 2023 was no exception. Conservancy staff turned community energy into meaningful park care — giving thousands of individuals, families, schools and community organizations the tools and guidance to plant, weed, mulch, clean shorelines and restore landscapes alongside our professional field team.



Companies Giving Back

2023 marked a new chapter for corporate engagement in Riverside Park. With our first Director of Corporate Relations in place, we began building a more intentional program that connects companies with hands-on projects matched to the Park's needs. These volunteer days bring substantial additional capacity to our field team while giving employees a tangible way to care for the public space that so many New Yorkers share.



850
corporate
volunteers

2,550
hours of
corporate
volunteer
work



Summer on the Hudson

Every year, Summer on the Hudson turns the Park into a six-month festival for outdoor arts, culture, recreation and learning, open to all New Yorkers at no cost. Produced in partnership with NYC Parks, the series ranges from major festivals and waterfront movies to intimate classes and nature programs. In 2023, expanded offerings helped us reach new audiences and activate new spaces.

306
free public
events

38,461
event attendees



New Highlights in 2023:



Uptown Yoga

Our first weekly health and wellness class in North Park on the 143rd Street lawn was a well-attended success!



Riverside Park Birding Club

Monthly birding walks with Riverside Park Conservancy Field Staff built a new community of all ages and experience levels.



Intro to Parkour Summer Series

A new partnership with the Movement Creative activated the recently built Parkour Park equipment in Riverside Park South.

Sports Camp

Since its launch in 2013, our Summer Sports Camp has used the Park itself as a campus, giving children ages 4–16 the chance to learn and play outdoors with experienced coaches. Campers can focus on individual sports or try several over the summer: soccer, tennis, basketball, baseball, flag football, volleyball and gymnastics. Just as important, our need-based scholarship program helped ensure that family income was not a barrier to participating.



3,200+
campers



229
schools
represented

\$236,000
scholarship
dollars provided

Tennis in the Park

Riverside Park's tennis tradition grew from a grassroots effort in the early 1980s to protect the ten public red-clay courts at 96th Street. In 2023, through the Conservancy's affiliate Riverside Tennis Association, a dedicated staff maintained the courts and offered affordable lessons, camps and organized play for adults and children. Program fees helped support court care and programming, while the free Summer Sunset Concert Series made the tennis area a gathering place even for people who never picked up a racquet.



10
tournaments



Photos by Meg Goldman

10
summer
sunset
concerts

Plus **thousands** of players
and **hundreds** of classes all season long!

Sustainability

In 2023, sustainability became physical infrastructure in Riverside Park. The Conservancy transformed a formerly abandoned service area at 95th Street into the first facility of its kind in a New York City public park for processing horticultural waste at scale. Instead of trucking leaves, branches, weeds and other plant material out of the Park, we are now processing it on site and returning it to the park's landscape as nutrient-rich compost and wood chips — reducing waste, truck trips and the need to import new material.



We also launched our first free indoor lecture series, held at the 102nd Street Field House. The series explored the intersection of composting, soil health, and environmental justice in a participatory and informal setting.

Green Infrastructure

Severe stormwater flooding is a persistent challenge throughout Riverside Park, and the Vale above Hippo Playground has been one of the areas most affected. To help the landscape better absorb and manage heavy rainfall, the Conservancy undertook a major restoration designed to help reduce erosion and help protect the playground from flooding. In addition to new drainage infrastructure, the project added engineered soil, river birch trees, shrubs, grasses and a pollinator-friendly meadow along the toe of the slope. As this new landscape grows and evolves, we anticipate more phases of restoration and experimentation.



Teen Corps

During eight weeks in 2023, local teens from West Harlem and Washington Heights worked alongside Conservancy gardeners on horticulture and restoration projects while learning about plant identification, invasive species, tool use, stewardship and environmental justice. The paid summer program introduces young people to green careers while giving them responsibility for improving the parks in their own community.

8

weeks of
restoration
projects



17

youth
participants



Pickleball in the Park

In 2023, working in partnership with NYC Parks and a private donor, the Conservancy opened Riverside Park's first-ever pickleball courts at 110th Street. This project did more than paint lines on an existing court: it reclaimed an unused area at 110th Street and created five dedicated courts that are always free for public play. Supporting improvements included new fencing, a drinking fountain and picnic tables, turning the site into a welcoming new recreation hub for players and spectators alike.

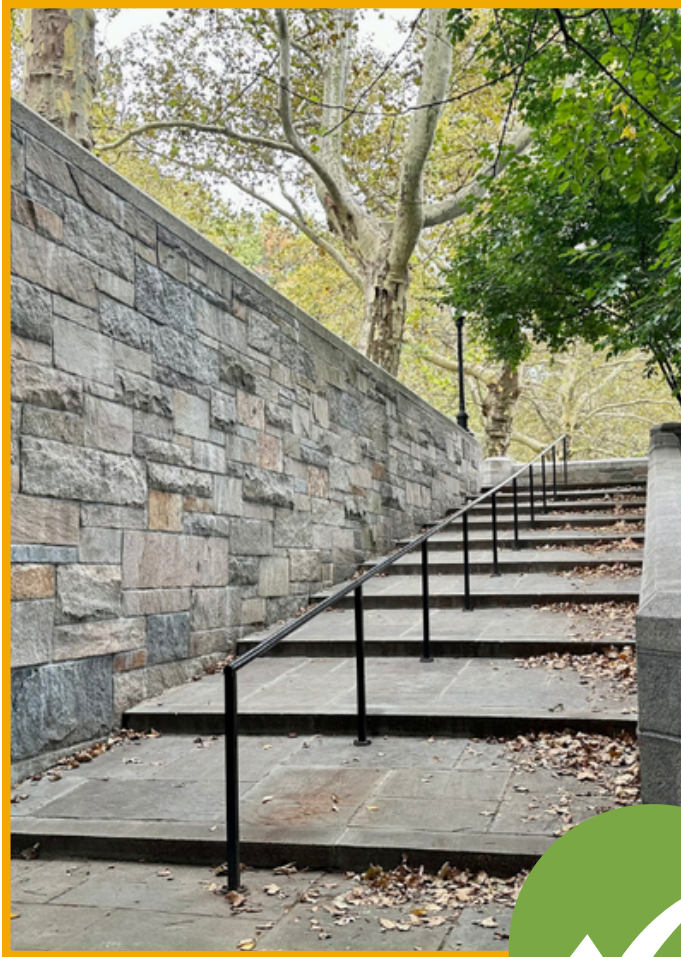


Goatham

The goats may be Riverside Park's most well-known celebrities, but they are here to work! Steep woodland slopes are some of the hardest places for gardeners to control aggressive invasive plants such as porcelain berry, mugwort and poison ivy. Goats can safely reach this difficult terrain and repeatedly graze the plants back, weakening their growth without chemical herbicides and preparing degraded areas for future restoration and native planting. In 2023, the goats took on another role as sustainability ambassadors, helping us celebrate the new Compost Compound with the world's most Riverside Park-style ribbon cutting: a ceremonial "ribbon chewing."



Working together to rebuild the Park

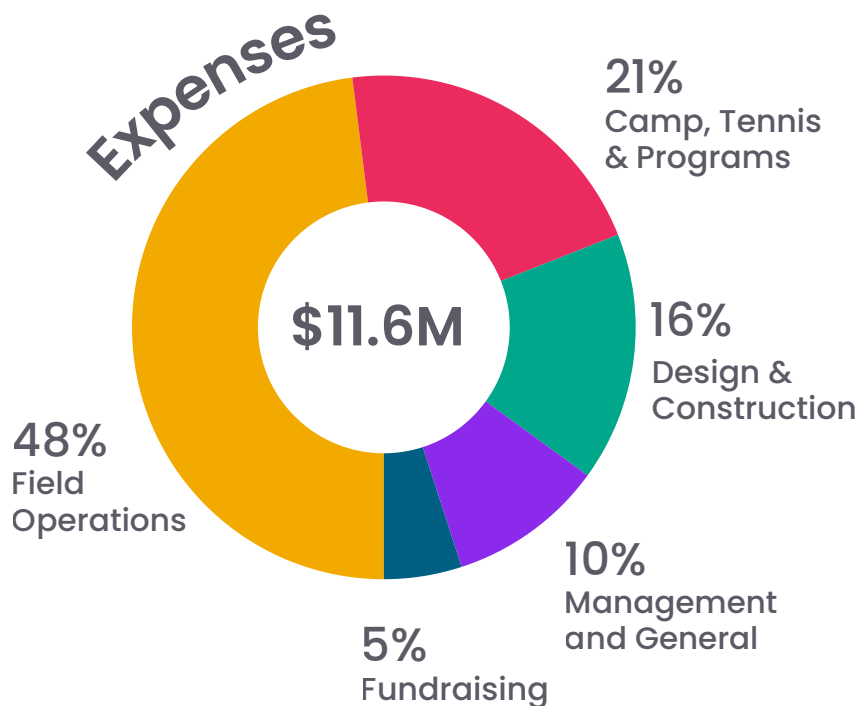


Riverside Park's historic stairs, paths and access points require substantial ongoing investment. In 2023, NYC Parks and the Conservancy together completed a series of long-needed infrastructure improvements, using both public capital dollars and privately raised funds. NYC Parks completed major repairs to aging stairs and pathways, while the Conservancy specifically funded and delivered the reconstruction of the 112th and 116th Street step ramps — an example of how our public-private partnership can address needs at different scales.

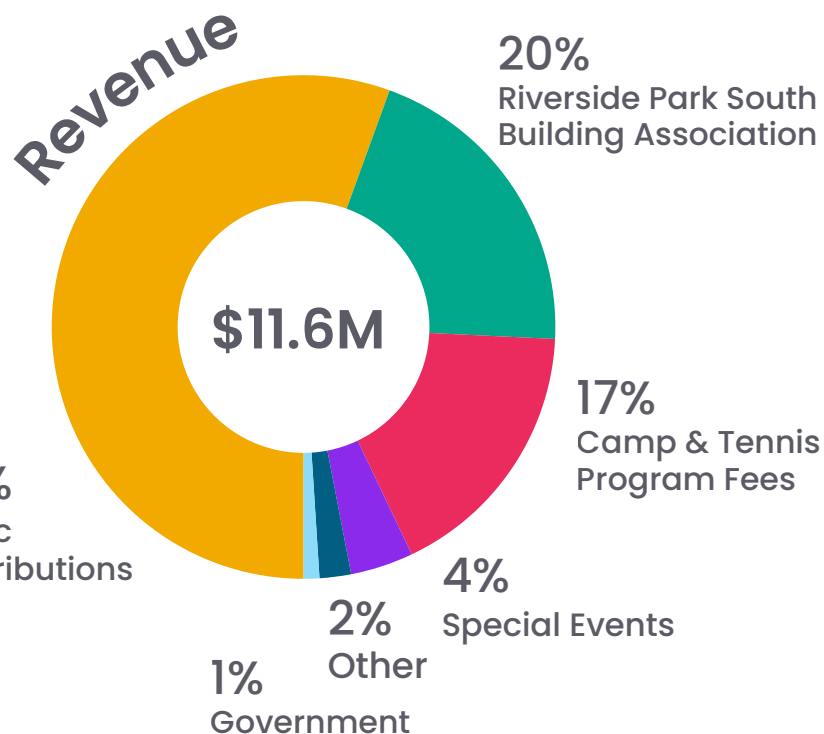
- 112th Street step ramp
- 116th Street step ramp
- 102nd Street staircase
- 102nd–105th Street paths



2023 Finances



Note: These figures represent only the Conservancy's finances — not the full cost of caring for Riverside Park. NYC Parks separately provides essential public investment through City-employed staff, sanitation and operations, infrastructure maintenance and capital construction.





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