

Riverside Park Conservancy



YEAR IN REVIEW

2024



Who We Are

Riverside Park Conservancy works in partnership with NYC Parks to restore, maintain and improve Riverside Park – across six miles, and five parks – running along the Hudson River in Manhattan from West 59th Street to West 181st Street.

A Message from our President & CEO

Dear Friends,



As I reflect on 2024, I feel tremendous momentum and am filled with pride and gratitude. Our team's work goes far beyond caring for the landscapes of Riverside Park – we're cultivating a stronger, more connected community, creating a space for core memories, and providing the natural refuge people need in the heart of our city.

This year, we planted trees in empty beds, we built new playing courts and fitness areas, we repaired broken staircases, we expanded free programming to new neighborhoods – and we continued to deliver the daily care that keeps Riverside thriving. These achievements are the direct result of the generosity and shared commitment of our community.

We also made bold strides toward a more sustainable future – we cut our carbon footprint by electrifying 70% of our fleet, we expanded the city's first park-based compost program, and we secured millions of dollars in public funding for critical repairs and improvements.

The pages that follow celebrate a vibrant year in Riverside Park, shaped by the dedication, creativity, and care of our staff, volunteers and partners. Thank you for being an essential part of this fabric. I'm excited for all that we will accomplish together in the years ahead.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Merritt".

Merritt Birnbaum

A Welcome from our New Chair

Dear Friends,

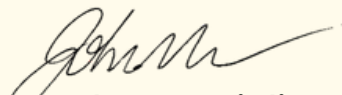
Having served on the Board since 2016, I was thrilled to become Chair in October 2024, and I thank my fellow trustees for this vote of confidence. I share a deep commitment to the Conservancy's mission and vision for the future of our beloved park. It has been a personal joy to bring my experience in leadership and governance to the organization.



As a Shareholder at the global law firm of Greenberg Traurig, LLP, I head the firm's New York City Government Law & Policy Practice. My professional experience counseling private and publicly owned companies and many not-for-profit entities in all aspects of the government contracting and city budget and legislative processes has served my time on the Conservancy's Board well and will continue to guide the expertise I can offer in my new role as Board Chair.

As longtime Upper West Siders, my wife and I raised our two daughters in the Park (as children, they particularly loved Hippo Playground and bike riding on the promenade). Today, my wife and I continue our love of the Park with walks along the Hudson River Greenway and I still enjoy tennis on the beautiful clay courts at 96th Street.

With great reverence to all the Chairs before me, I look forward to working with my fellow board members, the amazing and committed staff and volunteers of the Conservancy, as well as with our partners in government to continue to make improvements in the Park not just for our enjoyment, but for the enjoyment of generations to come.



John Mascialino



Growing a Greener Park

A Strong Horticulture Team

In 2024, 31 Conservancy gardeners and other field operations staff cared for Riverside Park's diverse landscapes—from ornamental garden beds and lawns to meadows, forests and shorelines.

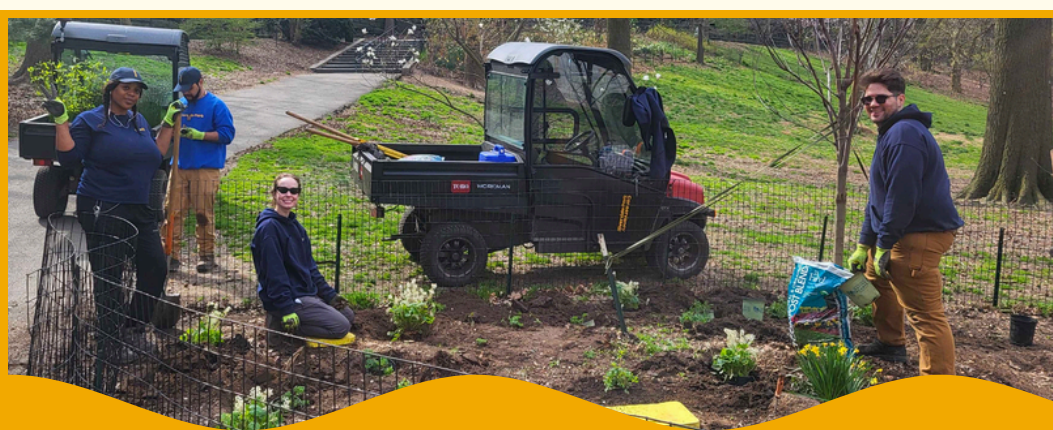
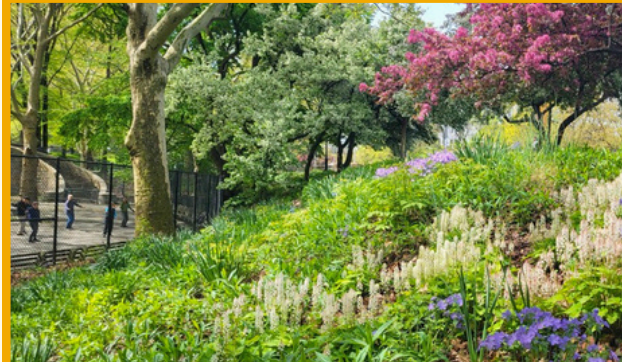
This professional team's year-round work included planting, pruning, invasive species management, landscape restoration, and the daily care that keeps six miles of parkland healthy and welcoming.

This year, we also welcomed our **first-ever Director of Horticulture**, Jessica Kaplan, adding new expertise and capacity to the team. With Jessica's leadership, we strengthened staff collaboration, improved plant sourcing and professional practices, expanded native plant and tree succession planning, and introduced new asset-mapping tools to support more detailed planting plans. A total of 9,211 herbaceous plants and shrubs were added to the park in 2024.



"2024 was full of learning and observing. I spent much of the year seeing how the park works as an ecosystem, which was thrilling. I'm looking forward to new and exciting projects that will further contribute to the goals of the Conservancy!"

-Jessica Kaplan
Director of Horticulture



Volunteers at the Heart

Volunteerism has always been the lifeblood of Riverside Park Conservancy – it's what keeps our heart beating. In 2024, more than **4,500 volunteers**, including individuals, school groups, community organizations and corporate teams, contributed **30,150 hours of hands-on care** throughout the park.

Working alongside our professional staff, volunteers planted and maintained garden beds, removed invasive plants and litter, cared for natural areas and shorelines, and made long-term commitments to steward special places throughout Riverside. We also expanded opportunities for volunteers to work regularly alongside our gardeners through new **"Place Partner" opportunities**, building deeper group connections.

At our annual Volunteer Summer Soiree, we recognized Debbie Aronson with the Charlotte Mayerson Volunteer Spirit Award. As the longtime Community Service Coordinator at Calhoun School, Debbie helped introduce students to the kind of sustained community stewardship that has shaped Riverside Park for generations.



"I'm proud of the new volunteer opportunities we've added and the new folks we've gotten involved. It's so great when someone joins volunteering and really sticks around to see their dedication pay off over time."

–Lisa Shore
Volunteer Outreach Coordinator



Keeping the Park Ready for Play

Riverside Park's athletic fields are vital community resources, supporting youth leagues, school teams, campers and casual players from across the city. Ensuring these spaces remain safe, high-performing, and environmentally sound is a key priority for the Conservancy.

Riverside's 30 recreation fields and courts are some of the park's most popular and heavily used areas.

Our four-person ballfields crew worked seven days a week, every day of the year, to provide dedicated attention and expertise in 2024.

The Ballfields Crew's responsibilities included:

- operating specialized heavy equipment
- removing leaves and debris
- restoring fields after heavy rains
- installing signage, repairing nets
- mowing, string trimming and restoring turf
- concrete and asphalt repairs and upkeep
- pruning nearby trees and shrubs
- grooming and seeding fields and lawns
- repairing artificial turf



"I'm proud to be able to give life to the fields, such as the clay baseball fields, rejuvenating them with new material and basically making a brand new field – the satisfaction of creating something beautiful from nothing!"

-Cesar Monterrosa
Ballfields Supervisor



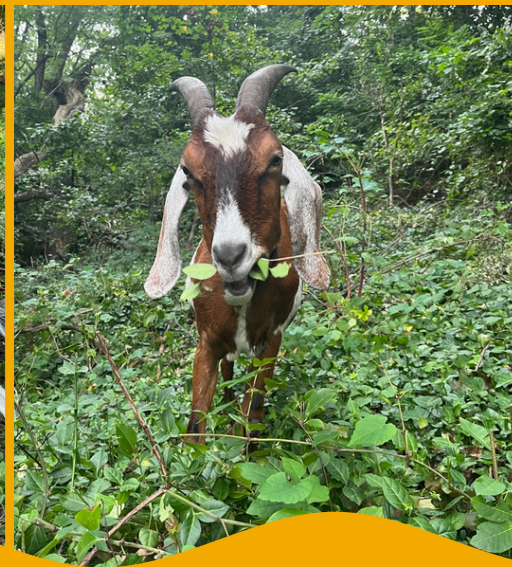
The team plants and maintains horticulture around the ballfields, like these daffodil plantings at the 101st Street Soccer Field.

The Goats Move Uptown

Riverside Park's famous landscaping goats returned for their fifth summer in 2024—and moved uptown to a new job site at West 143rd Street. Seven goats from Green Goats in Rhinebeck took on poison ivy and other invasive plants across steep terrain that is difficult for human gardeners to access. Their work offered a **pesticide-free way to suppress invasive growth** while preparing the slope for future ecological restoration and native plantings.

The move supported our North Park Initiative, which directs more restoration, maintenance, and programming to the park's northern sections. We welcomed the herd with the free Gotham Festival at the 151st Street lawn, complete with a "ribbon-chewing" ceremony, music, refreshments, vendors, and educational activities. Volunteers also joined Goat Patrol events during the summer to help keep the goats' new home clean and safe.

**"It's a great day for West Harlem – and a baaaaaaaad day to be an invasive plant in Riverside Park."
– Council Member Shaun Abreu**



SUSTAINABILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Responding to Drought Conditions

Like all the parks and green spaces in the region, Riverside Park faced big challenges related to extended drought conditions and shifting climate patterns in fall 2024.

In response, the Conservancy employed several adaptive strategies, such as prioritizing **native and drought-tolerant plant species** in new installations, increasing mulch coverage to **retain soil moisture**, and reducing non-essential irrigation.

Compost from our upgraded Compost Compound further improved soil health and water retention across park landscapes. These efforts exemplify the park's **proactive approach to ecological resilience** in the face of climate stress.





Improving All Six Miles

More Trees. Less Trash.



The Conservancy launched its “More Trees, Less Trash” initiative in June 2024 with a simple premise, and we delivered. In November, we planted 54 new trees in empty beds on Riverside Drive and installed 21 new solar-powered trash compactors in place of rusty barrels in North Park. These simple but powerful achievements were possible thanks to more than 500 individual donors. This dual focus—expanding the urban tree canopy while improving waste infrastructure—is a tangible win-win for our Park, creating a cleaner, greener Riverside experience.



**CAPITAL
IMPROVEMENTS**

New Outdoor Fitness Equipment at 151st Street

In a major addition to Riverside Park's fitness offerings, the Conservancy partnered with the Swiss brand Outletics to install state-of-the-art outdoor fitness equipment at 151st Street.

Designed and engineered in Switzerland, the new outdoor gym was unveiled in May 2024 and includes durable, ergonomically designed features like pull-down stations, air walkers, parallel bars, and abdominal benches. These upgrades provide free and inclusive workout opportunities for people of all fitness levels.

The initiative not only supports physical wellness but also reinvigorates underutilized northern sections of the park, making them more active and vibrant.



CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

New Multi-Sport Courts at Hudson Beach

In summer 2024, the Conservancy transformed a deteriorated concrete area at Hudson Beach into two new multi-sport courts, creating a flexible new recreation space along the waterfront at 105th Street.

Designed to accommodate volleyball, pickleball, badminton, youth tennis, and other activities, the courts give park visitors of different ages and interests more ways to play in one of Riverside Park's busiest recreation areas. We celebrated their opening with the community at a ribbon cutting in August.

The project demonstrates how targeted investment can reclaim an underused park space and quickly return it to active public use.



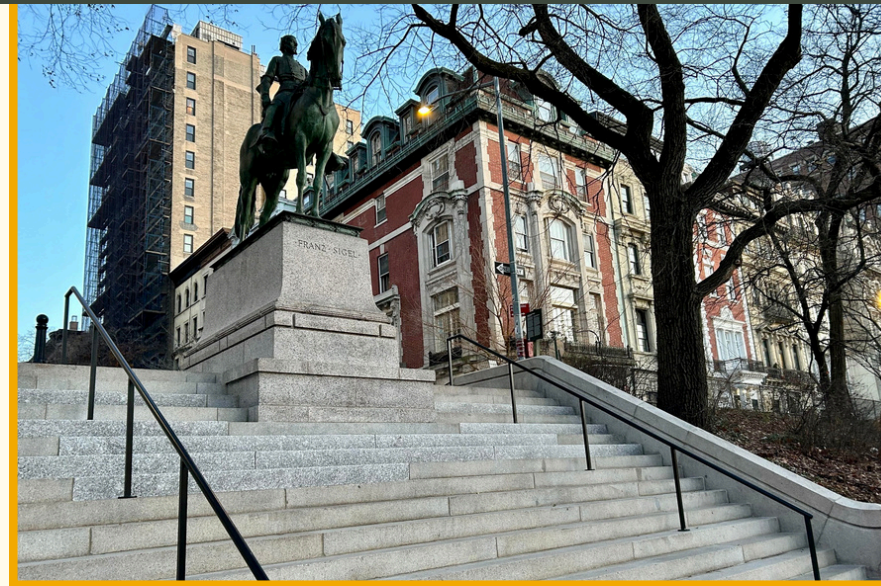
The new, state-of-the-art courts replaced old, cracked concrete.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Restoring the 106th Street Stairs

After a vehicular accident severely damaged the 106th Street stairs at the end of 2023, the Conservancy undertook a **full restoration of this vital pedestrian entrance**. Originally constructed from Maine granite in the 1930s, the staircase's foundation had significantly deteriorated and required substantial repairs to ensure continued safe use.

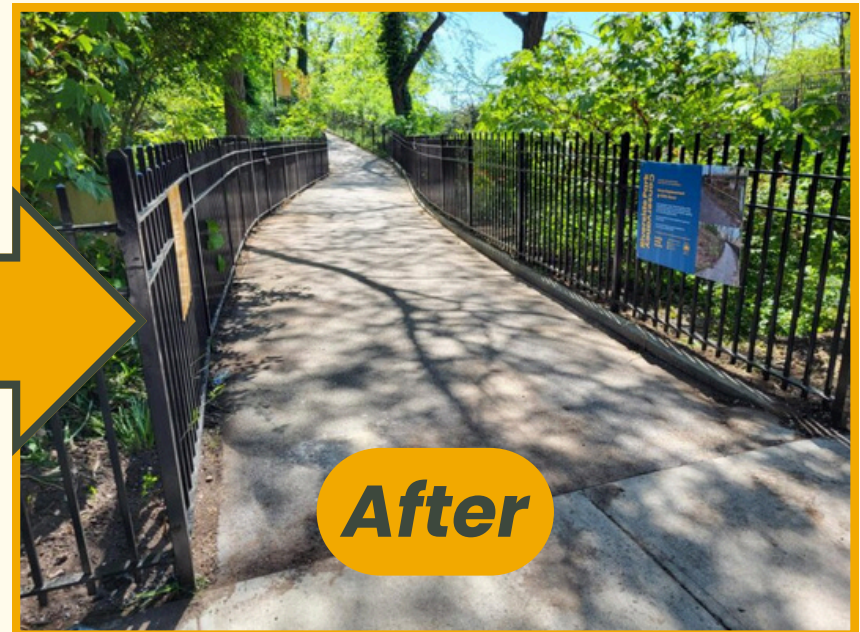
With support from a generous anonymous donor, contractors spent several months carefully restoring the staircase, completing work in December 2024. The project reconstructed the granite cheek walls, replaced rusted railings, and reinforced foundations to meet accessibility standards. The restoration preserves an important piece of the park's architectural legacy while ensuring a **safe and welcoming passage** for thousands of park visitors.



Replacing Vandalized Fence at the Community Garden

Riverside Valley Community Garden, known locally as “Jenny’s Garden,” a cherished community-maintained space in Riverside Park, received a much-needed security and aesthetic upgrade with the replacement of a heavily vandalized adjacent fence. The previous fencing had not only become an eyesore but also raised safety concerns for gardeners, visitors, and nearby pedestrians.

The Conservancy’s capital work to install a new wrought iron fence **enhanced the garden's sense of sanctuary while preserving its beauty and accessibility.** This upgrade reflects a broader initiative to support the health and safety of park spaces stewarded by local volunteers.



SUSTAINABILITY IMPROVEMENTS

A Bird-Safe Retrofit of Our Volunteer House

In March 2024, we successfully completed a bird-friendly retrofit of the second-floor windows at the Peter Jay Sharp Volunteer House. While the structure's beautiful, tall windows provide delightful views for humans, they proved to be a terrible problem for the many species of birds that visit the surrounding tree canopy.

After consulting with experts at NYC Audubon, we installed "Feather Friendly" window film, which uses white dots spaced 2 inches apart to make the glass visible to birds while remaining minimally obstructive for human viewing. Staff and volunteers advocated for this project, with the understanding that protecting the park's wildlife is integral to achieving a healthy and sustainable park ecosystem.



SUSTAINABILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Upgrading the Compost Compound

In its first 17 months of operation, the Conservancy's 95th Street Compost Compound transformed 1,537 cubic yards—more than 2,150 tons—of organic material into high-quality compost for use throughout the park. That represents roughly **75 garbage trucks of organic material** generated by Conservancy operations alone.

In summer 2024, we significantly expanded our capacity with the purchase of a professional-grade woodchipper. Staff can now process fallen limbs, pruning debris, and other woody material and turn it into woodchips for use in garden beds, tree care, and landscape restoration. The new equipment allows us to keep **even more park material on site and return it directly to the landscape**.

Our work at the Compound also helped advance a larger goal: changing how New York City manages plant waste in public parks. In October, the City Council passed legislation introduced by Council Member Gale Brewer to **expand plant-waste composting across the five boroughs**, requiring NYC Parks to establish composting facilities in at least five parks per borough over the following three fiscal years. As the City's first large-scale composting site within a public park, our Compound demonstrated what this approach could achieve—and helped provide a model for bringing it citywide.

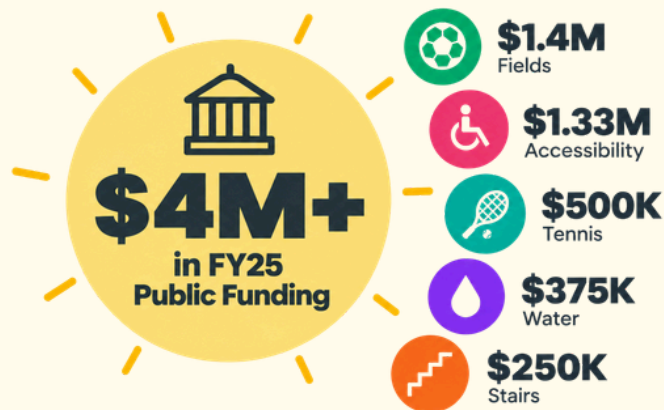


Advocating for Public Investment in Riverside and Parks City-wide

In 2024, our advocacy and partnerships with elected officials helped secure more than \$4 million in new City capital funding for Riverside and Fort Washington Parks. These investments will include replacement turf for the 103rd Street ballfields, a new accessible ramp in Riverside Park South, resurfacing the Fort Washington tennis courts, new drinking fountains, and staircase repairs.

As a member of the Play Fair Coalition and Forest For All NYC, the Conservancy also joined numerous rallies and hearings in support of more City funding for all parks.

We are grateful to Council Members Brewer, Abreu and De La Rosa, City Council leadership, and the thousands of New Yorkers whose advocacy and participatory-budgeting votes helped make these investments possible.





A Place to Play, Learn, & Grow

Our Largest-Ever Summer on the Hudson

Summer on the Hudson, a joint program of Riverside Park Conservancy and NYC Parks, returned for its 22nd year in 2024. The outdoor arts and culture festival featured **340 free events and programs** from 59th Street to 181st Street, May through October, attended by over 40,000 people.

Since its founding more than two decades ago, Summer on the Hudson has grown from a handful of small events to a major season-long affair that draws thousands of New Yorkers into the park to see local artists, dance, play, learn and get in shape.

New events in 2024 included movies on the Hudson River waterfront at 145th Street, Sunset Yoga, and a Black Birders Week birding walk hosted in partnership with NYC Bird Alliance. The array of newly added uptown events is part of our increased focus on volunteer stewardship, park equity and community partnerships.

Featured local performers included the world-renowned Limón Dance Company, a modern dance institution headquartered in Sugar Hill; the Harlem-based rock band Granite Garden; The Hot Toddies, a fun-loving hot jazz and swing band hailing from the Upper West Side; “Lady” Cantrese Alloway, a Harlem-grown jazz vocalist; and Washington Heights-based performance storyteller, Rachael Harrington.



“We’re thrilled to continue offering perennial favorites while expanding the variety of our uptown programs in order to provide high-quality arts and culture experiences to all New Yorkers.”

–Whitney Dearden
Director of Public Programming



Riverside Park's First-Ever Halloween Pup Parade

Riverside Park is home to six popular dog runs, which the Conservancy's team maintains and cares for throughout the year. In October 2024, we brought together the dog-loving community for our first-ever Halloween Pup Parade, a festive new event that also raised awareness and support for the ongoing care of these spaces.

Costumed pups and their people paraded along the park's promenade before gathering at Ellington in the Park, where a panel of local celebrities judged the day's costume contest. With support from an array of local businesses, the celebration offered a fun new way for neighbors to come together while helping sustain the dog runs that serve the community year-round.

Photos by Sean Jamar



Fun, Teamwork, & Play All Summer Long at our Multi-Sport Camp

Youth sports bring children together across backgrounds, languages, and neighborhoods.

In 2024, our Multi-Sport Summer Camp gave over 1,000 young athletes a summer of exercise, teamwork, and fun with professional coaches in an idyllic outdoor setting.

Our 11th camp season continued at two locations: our longtime Riverside Park program and the Fort Washington Park program we launched in 2022 to bring more affordable, high-quality summer sports options to Northern Manhattan. Need-based financial aid helped make camp accessible to more local families, with support ranging from partial scholarships to full tuition. We awarded more than \$250,000 in camp scholarships in 2024 alone.

Expanding Access for Newly Arrived Families

A new partnership with NewYork-Presbyterian provided full scholarships for children from newly arrived asylum-seeking families to attend five weeks of Sports Camp. Conservancy staff worked with local schools and nonprofit partners to reach families and help them navigate enrollment, giving more children the chance to spend their summer playing, learning, and building connections in the park.



"I'm excited to continue to spark excitement and curiosity from youth and their families at our Sports Camp in Riverside and Fort Washington Parks. We're always focused on sportsmanship, healthy living, leadership and community values."

-Ahmed Cohen
Sports Camp Manager



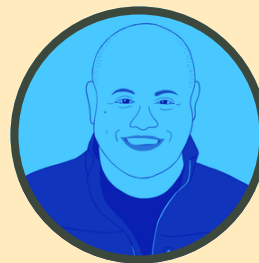
Tennis in the Park

From the red clay courts at 96th Street to the hard courts at 119th Street and 172nd Street in Fort Washington Park, 2024 brought a full season of tennis across Riverside. Through our subsidiary organization, Riverside Tennis Association, we offered programming for all ages, including lessons, competitions, summer camp, and community events, along with picnics, parties, and free Saturday evening concerts. In September, we hosted a screening of the US Open Men's Semifinals at the 96th Street Clay Courts.

Investing in Uptown Tennis

In 2024, NYC Council Member Carmen De La Rosa secured **\$500,000 in FY25 capital funding** for NYC Parks to restore the ten public tennis courts at 172nd Street in Fort Washington Park and replace the broken drinking fountain. Years of deferred maintenance had left the courts cracked and difficult to play on. The investment will allow NYC Parks to restore this vital Northern Manhattan recreation resource to good condition.

We celebrated the funding with a free tennis clinic for local children and adults in November.



"The tennis season in the park was a big success this year! Our friendly gate staff and well-attended adult and junior programming all contributed to a positive recreation experience in the park."

-JT Silberstein
Executive Director of
Riverside Tennis Association



Local Teens Interning in Their Park

Our paid Teen Corps summer internship connects high school students from West Harlem and Washington Heights with hands-on environmental stewardship while introducing them to potential careers in parks, horticulture, and the environment.

In 2024, 17 teens spent eight weeks working alongside Conservancy staff on restoration projects throughout the park. Field work was paired with lessons, journal exercises, and discussions on species identification, invasive species management, and environmental justice. By the end of the summer, these young people had built practical skills, deepened their understanding of the natural environment, and strengthened their connection to the park and their community.



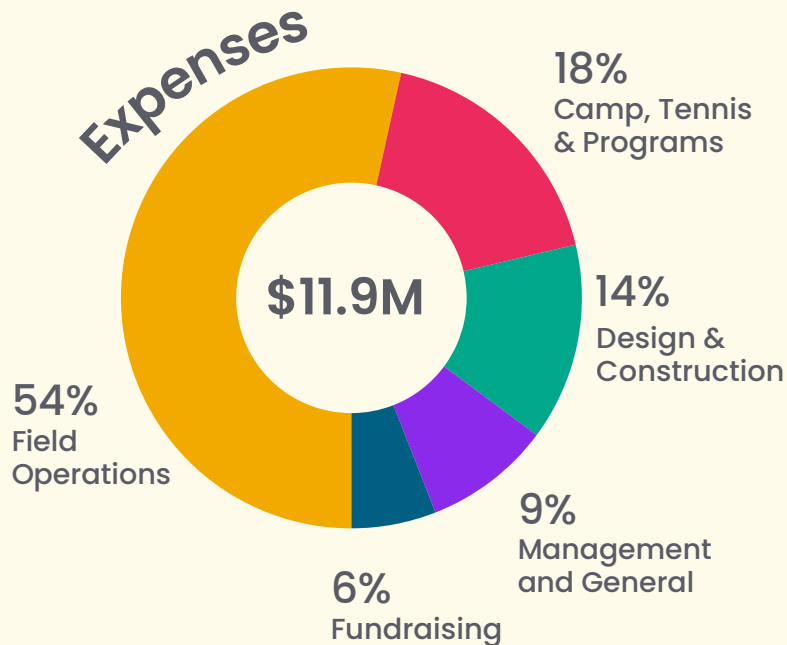
"I'm proud to share knowledge in horticulture that the teens can use for the rest of their lives. I can't wait to meet our next group and see how the returning teens' skills have developed."

-Elias Gomez

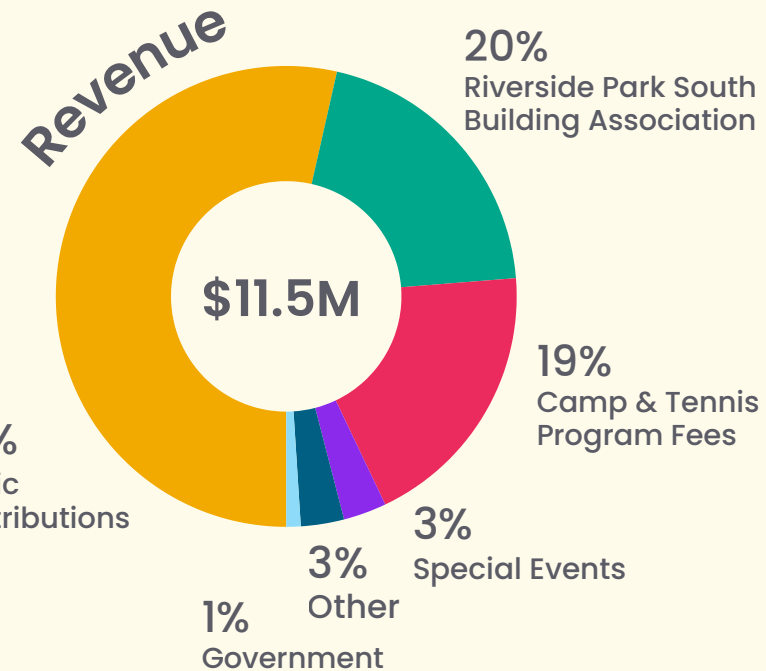
Gardener & Teen Corps Lead



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.



The full independently audited financial statements can be found on the Conservancy's website.

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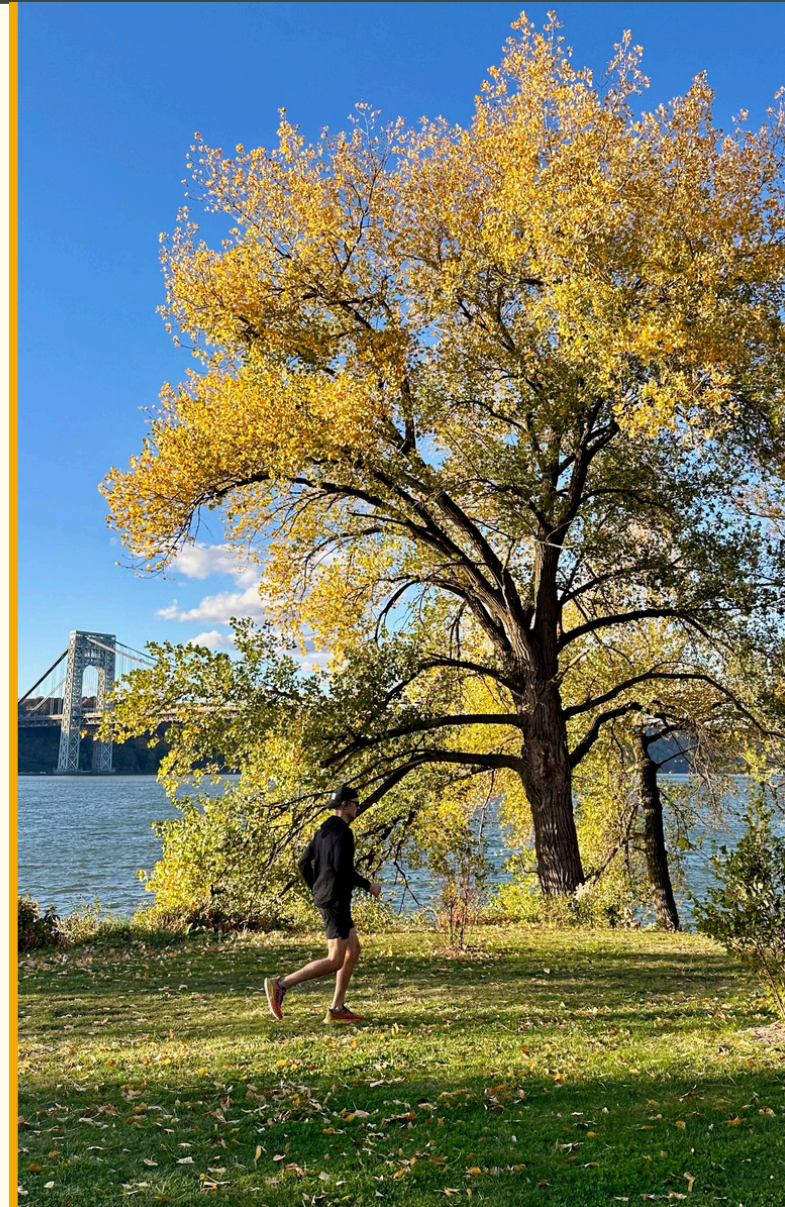
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"It's been awesome to see how much love North Park has gotten this year. The outdoor fitness equipment, the renovations at the Tennis Courts, the new dog run under construction, movies on the waterfront. I'm excited to see more good change happening north of 120th Street, because more definitely needs to be done. It makes me hopeful that Harlem and Washington Heights will get everything they deserve and more – justice for decades of under-investment and more community collaboration. It's only just the start."

–Stephanie Caban

North Park Outreach
Coordinator



2024 Donors *continued*

\$10,000 – \$24,999 *continued*

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"My favorite part of my work is meeting new and fun people – and what we have in common is loving the park and keeping it clean. The most exciting thing is seeing growth each season and all the different colors that pop out!"

–Shearrie Eure
Gardener



2024 Donors *continued*

\$5,000 – \$9,999 *continued*

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"The northern end of our park has the best river views in Manhattan! I invite everyone to visit next year. Come for the vistas, stay for a picnic!"

-Robert Leaver
Gardener



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"My favorite part of this year was making new human friends on the slope in West Harlem. I can't wait to get back to my job munching on poison ivy and mugwort in 2025!"

-Romeo

2024 "G.O.A.T."
Award Winner



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