



**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING**  
**1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE NW**  
**WASHINGTON, DC 20004**

**JANESE LEWIS GEORGE**

Ward 4 Councilmember  
Chair of the Committee on  
Facilities and Family Services

**COMMITTEE MEMBER**

Committee on Transportation and the Environment  
Committee on Executive Administration and Labor  
Committee on Public Works and Operations

September 21, 2023

Nyasha Smith, Secretary  
Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Secretary Smith,

In honor of Public Lands Day this weekend, I, along with nine of my colleagues, am introducing the “Office of Natural Area Conservation Establishment Act of 2023.” Please find enclosed a signed copy of the legislation.

The **Office of Natural Area Conservation Establishment Act of 2023** establishes an office in the Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) responsible for maintaining District-owned and -managed forested natural areas and forest patches in coordination with DDOT’s Urban Forestry Division (UFD). UFD will retain its current responsibilities as the District’s arborists while this new office will focus on the invasive plant species that often surround and threaten the health of our trees and forests – a role not currently held by any specific agency or office.

Healthy forests provide unique benefits for District residents and our surrounding environment. They help improve the air we breathe, lower temperatures, reduce pollution, promote wildlife, and can serve as a respite from urban life. Casey Trees estimates that there are approximately 500 acres of District-owned forested natural areas – located primarily on DPR-managed lands. The Department of General Services (DGS) has grounds maintenance responsibilities for District-owned property and currently is responsible for these forests alongside the DDOT Urban Forestry Division (UFD). However, in practice, DGS does not have the capacity to properly manage forest patches, which requires specialized training and sustained investment, so these forest patches are often left unmanaged. This lack of attention limits the natural regeneration of the forest and often results in a “curtain” of vines and invasives which block out the public, representing a public safety threat. Forests on National Park Service (NPS) land are often no better managed, as evidenced by the recent report published by the Redstone Center at GW University.

The bill amends the DOEE Establishment Act by adding three new sections:

**Office Establishment:** The Office of Natural Area Conservation (“ONAC”) is charged with managing and promoting native plants through an integrated pest management approach. Additionally, the office will have the authority to develop memorandums of understanding with NPS to supplement management of their land, encourage activation and usage of forest patches

through trails and signage, coordinate trash removal with other agencies, monitor and report on the state of the District's forested natural areas, and develop a long-term plan for responding to invasive plants, and provide technical assistance to volunteer groups.

Long-Term Plan: The office will be charged with developing a "Forest Health and Invasive Plant Response Plan" to establish a strategic vision for its work. This plan is modeled after the NPS National Capital Region Invasive Plant Management Plan and helps fulfill the goals of DDOT's 2022 Urban Forestry Master Plan the draft DPR Ready2Play Master Plan, and the Sustainable DC 2.0 Plan. The Plan also requires DOEE to assess the use of conservation easements to establish permanent protection of these areas and will include recommendations for improving coordination with other District agencies like DPW (trash cleanup & dumping in forests) and DPR (trails and signage to improve accessibility for residents).

Volunteer Engagement: Finally, the office will also be charged with establishing an "Adopt a Patch Forest Stewardship" program to facilitate volunteer engagement in managing and promoting young trees in our District-owned forests. Many residents participate in "Weed Warrior" programs and volunteer their time in improving the District's natural areas. This office would provide technical assistance, tools and small grant-funded support for residents, non-profits and other community-based organizations interested in giving of themselves to support forest patches in the District. The Langdon Park Forest Patch in Ward 5, located on DPR land, but improved with support from DOEE, DGS, Casey Trees and lots of volunteer support, serves as a valuable proof point that the District can activate formerly unmanaged forested areas.

The bill was developed in consultation with the following organizations and enjoys their support: Anacostia Parks & Community Collaborative (APACC), Casey Trees, DC Environmental Network, Langdon Park Forest Stewards, Rock Creek Conservancy, Shepherd Park Weed Warriors, Ward 8 Woods, and Washington Parks & People.

The bill is co-introduced by Chairman Phil Mendelson and Councilmembers Brianne Nadeau, Brooke Pinto, Matthew Frumin, Zachary Parker, Robert C. White, Jr., Christina Henderson, Anita Bonds, and Kenyan R. McDuffie.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janeese Lewis George". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Janeese Lewis George  
Ward 4 Councilmember  
Chair, Committee on Facilities and Family Services

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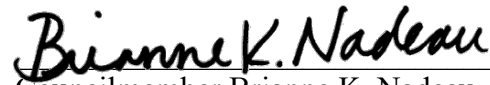
4 Chairman Phil Mendelson



Councilmember Janeese Lewis George

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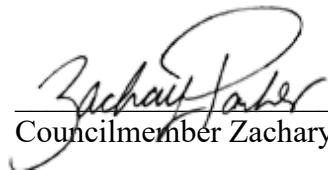
7 Councilmember Robert C. White, Jr.



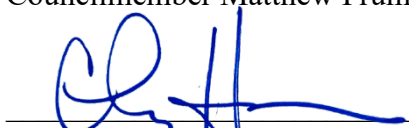
Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau

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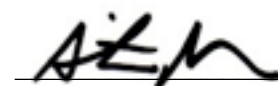
11 Councilmember Matthew Frumin



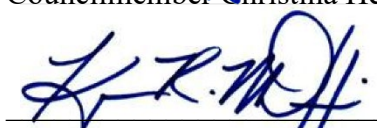
Councilmember Zachary Parker

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14 Councilmember Christina Henderson



Councilmember Anita Bonds

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18 Councilmember Kenyan R. McDuffie



19 Chairman Brooke Pinto

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24 A BILL

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27 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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30 To amend the Department of Energy and Environment Establishment Act of 2005 to establish the  
31 Office of Natural Area Conservation within the Department of Energy and Environment to  
32 manage, conserve, and activate District-owned or -managed forested natural areas and  
33 forest patches, develop a forest health and invasive plant response plan, and establish an  
34 Adopt a Patch Forest Stewardship program.

35 BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this  
36 act may be cited as the “Office of Natural Area Conservation Establishment Act of 2023”.

37 Sec. 2. The Department of Energy and Environment Establishment Act of 2005, effective  
38 February 15, 2006 (D.C. Law 16-51; D.C. Official Code § 8-151.01 *et seq.*), is amended as follows:

39 (a) Section 101 (D.C. Official Code § 8-151.01) is amended as follows:

40 (1) A new paragraph (1A) is added to read as follows:

41                   “(1A) “Conservation easement” means a nonpossessory interest of a holder in real  
42 property imposing limitations or affirmative obligations the purposes of which include retaining  
43 or protecting natural, scenic, or open-space values of real property, ensuring its availability for  
44 agricultural, forestal, recreational, or open-space use, protecting natural resources, maintaining or  
45 enhancing air or water quality, or preserving the historical, architectural, archaeological, or cultural  
46 aspects of real property.”.

47                   (2) New paragraphs (5B-i) and (5B-ii) are added to read as follows:

48                   “(5B-i) “Forested natural area” means a forest patch that has a core thickness radius  
49 greater than 5.5 meters or 11 meters in diameter, and a buffer zone surrounding the core that is  
50 greater than 15 meters deep.

51                   “(5B-ii) “Forest patch” means an area that has continuous tree canopy coverage  
52 over an area greater than 700 square meters.”.

53                   (3) A new paragraph (6A) is added to read as follows:

54                   “(6A) “Integrated pest management” means a sustainable approach to managing  
55 pests by combining biological, cultural, physical, and chemical tools in a way that minimizes  
56 economic, health, and environmental risks.”.

57                   (4) A new paragraph (8A) is added to read as follows:

58                   “(8A) “Maintenance” means activities undertaken to prevent the deterioration,  
59 impairment, or need for repair of a forest patch, structure, right-of-way, or land use, including  
60 management of vegetation and replacement of structural components.”.

61                   (5) The existing paragraph (10A) is redesignated as paragraph (10B).

62                   (6) A new paragraph (10A) is added to read as follows:

63                   “(10A) “ONAC” means the Office of Natural Area Conservation established by  
64 section 109f.”.

65                   (b) New sections 109f, 109g, and 109h are added to read as follows:

66                   “Sec. 109f. Office of Natural Area Conservation establishment.

67                   “(a) There is established the Office of Natural Area Conservation within the DOEE. The  
68 purpose of the ONAC is to maintain forested natural areas and forest patches owned or managed  
69 by the District.

70                   “(b) The ONAC shall:

71                   “(1) Maintain and promote native plants, other than trees managed by the  
72 Department of Transportation, in District-owned and -managed forested natural areas and forest  
73 patches;

74                   “(2) Develop expertise in integrated pest management, invasive plants, and the  
75 promotion of native plants;

76                   “(3) Have the authority to develop Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with  
77 the National Park Service (“NPS”) to supplement maintenance of NPS-managed forested natural  
78 areas and forest patches;

79                   “(4) Encourage usage and activation of forested natural areas and forest patches  
80 with trails and signage;

81                   “(5) Coordinate efforts to remove trash and combat illegal dumping in forested  
82 natural areas and forest patches in consultation with the Department of Public Works,  
83 Metropolitan Police Department, United States Park Police and non-profit partners;

84                   “(6) Monitor, track, and report on the state of the District’s Forested Natural  
85 Areas;

86                   “(7) Develop the Forest Health and Invasive Plant Response Plan required by  
87 section 109g; and

88                   “(8) Provide technical assistance to residents and grantees through the Adopt a  
89 Patch Forest Stewardship Program (“Program”) established under section 109h.”.

90                   “(c) The ONAC, pursuant to Title I of the District of Columbia Administrative Procedure  
91 Act, approved October 21, 1968 (82 Stat. 1204; D.C. Official Code § 2-501 et seq.), shall have  
92 the authority to issue rules to implement the provisions of sections 109f, 109g, and 109h.

93                   “(d) The ONAC may issue grants in furtherance of its duties identified in subsection (b)  
94 of this section, including to support the Program established under section 109h.”.

95                   “Sec. 109g. Forest Health and Invasive Plant Response Plan.

96                   “(a) Within 24 months of the applicability date of this section, the ONAC shall develop a  
97 Forest Health and Invasive Plant Response Plan (“Plan”) to establish a strategic vision for the  
98 management, conservation and activation of the District’s forested natural areas and forest  
99 patches, and the Plan shall:

100                   “(1) Identify and map all forested natural areas and forest patches in the District,  
101 including those owned by the District and those owned by the National Park Service (“NPS”);

102                   “(2) Identify strategies for promoting the growth of native plants and managing  
103 the removal of invasive plant species in District-owned and -managed forested natural areas and  
104 forest patches;

105                   “(3) Assess the use of conservation easements to establish permanent protection  
106 for District-owned and -managed forested natural areas and forest patches and, if appropriate,  
107 provide recommendations for specific natural areas and patches that should receive an easement;

108                   “(4) Assess, in coordination with the Department of Public Works, how to reduce  
109 litter and illegal dumping in District-owned forested natural areas and forest patches; and

110                   “(5) Assess, in coordination with the Department of Parks and Recreation, how to  
111 promote usage and activation of District-owned forested natural areas and forest patches with  
112 trails and signage.

113                   “(b) The Plan shall include cost estimates for fulfilling each goal identified in subsection  
114 (a) of this section.

115                   “(c) At least 60 days prior to the adoption of the Plan, the ONAC shall:

116                   “(1) Publish a draft Plan for a public comment period of no less than 30 days; and

117                   “(2) Convene at least 2 public meetings, including one for residents east of the  
118 Anacostia River, to solicit public testimony and written comments on the draft Plan.

119                   “Sec. 109h. Adopt a Patch Forest Stewardship Program.

120                   “(a) There is established an Adopt a Patch Forest Stewardship Program (“Program”),  
121 which shall be administered by the ONAC, to provide technical assistance and training to  
122 volunteers interested in supplementing the ONAC’s maintenance of forested natural areas and  
123 forest patches in the District.

124                   “(b) The Program shall:

125                   “(1) Provide technical assistance and training to volunteers on the promotion of  
126 native plants and the removal of invasive plant species ;

127                   “(2) Provide tools and equipment to support volunteer groups in invasive plant  
128 management and trash removal; and

129                   “(3) Partner with non-profit organizations, community-based groups, and  
130 individuals to help manage forested natural areas and forest patches.”.

131           Sec. 3. Fiscal impact statement.

132           The Council adopts the fiscal impact statement in the committee report as the fiscal  
133 impact statement required by section 4a of the General Legislative Procedures Act of 1975,  
134 approved October 16, 2006 (120 Stat. 2038; D.C. Official Code § 1-301.47a).

135           Sec. 4. Effective date.

136           This act shall take effect following approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by the  
137 Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), a 30-day period of congressional review as  
138 provided in section 602(c)(1) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December  
139 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 813; D.C. Official Code § 1-206.02(c)(1)), and publication in the District of  
140 Columbia Register.