With almost 27% of its acreage set aside as parks, open spaces or greenways, New York City qualifies as the greenest big city in the country (Harnik, 2000). The complex system of city, state, national and private lands is woven together to form an interconnected and interdependent web that supports a population of 7.5 million permanent residents and even more visitors. The success of the system is dependent on a combination of public and private funding sources and the dedicated efforts of community volunteers and local open spaces stewards. Riding on the motto “It’s My Park”, the Partnerships for Parks Program, a joint program of the City Parks Foundation and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, speaks to the city’s awareness of the important role that individuals and their connections to small green spaces play in weaving a functional green infrastructure in dense, diverse, dynamic urban environments.

In addition to supporting a large and demanding human population, New York City’s landscape lies at a critical confluence of multiple larger environmental systems. The 500+ miles of waterfront that border New York’s terrestrial landscape connect the city and its processes to one of the country’s largest estuarine systems, as well as those marine and terrestrial landscapes lying both upstream and downstream of the city. The Waterfront Park Coalition has tackled the important role of New York’s waterfront with the creation of the Waterfront Blueprint Plan. This comprehensive approach to re-envisioning New York’s waterfront addresses the ecological, cultural and economic importance of reclaiming New York’s industrial waterfronts to form a functional, healthy bridge between New York’s vibrant public open spaces and the larger landscape within which the city resides.
Context

New York city’s park and open space system must address not only the needs of its 7.5 million permanent residents and millions of visitors but also the diverse natural systems that converge at the mouth of the Hudson River. With 500+ miles of waterfront, the landscapes of New York City’s five boroughs must play an active role in maintaining the health of the New York-New Jersey estuarine system while also contributing to the livability of one of the planet’s densest urban centers.

Committed to Greenways:
“New York City is committed to making cycling part of the City’s transportation system and encourages individuals and communities to participate in the implementation of this Plan.”
(NYC Department of Planning

Built on a Foundation of Neighborhood Parks and Active Community groups:
Active community members are “dedicated to improving New York life by expanding and enhancing its infrastructure for public health: parks, waterfronts, community gardens and open spaces, through advocacy, research, education, and planning.”
Major Components of the New York City Open Space System

Connective corridors
The New York City Open Space system is held together by a network of green corridors. Building on the first Parkway Greenway Plan (1993) and Bicycle Master Plan (1997) Bicycle Network Development: Partnership between Departments of Planning, Transportation and Parks to develop 350 miles of bicycle and pedestrian paths.

These Greenways will connect to the larger East Coast Greenway.

Manhattan Waterfront Greenway
Bronx River Greenway
Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway
Hudson River Greenway

Anchors
Central Park- Located in the heart of Manhattan, Central Park’s 840 acres are visited by over 20 million visitors per year. The park is managed and maintained by the Central Park Conservancy with an annual endowment of $65 million.

Prospect Park- Located in Brooklyn, this 585-acre Olmsted-designed park contains a zoo, the nation’s first Audubon Center and is maintained through a public-private partnership.

Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
Located on the southern edge of Long Island in Brooklyn and Queens, this unit of the Gateway National Recreation Area is home to unique marine resources as well as historic airfields and one of the nation’s first parkways, “Plumb Beach”.

Neighborhood Parks
With over 1000 neighborhood parks and community gardens, the health of New York’s park and open space system is dependent on small green spaces to provide the necessary breathing room for its 7.5 million residents. The maintenance of these sites would not be possible without active community stewardship groups.
Developing a Citywide Waterfront Open Space Plan

New York City is tackling the challenge of living with almost 600 miles of waterfront by developing an open space plan that addresses the ecological, economic and cultural advantages and requirements of a dynamic living waterfront.

Waterfront Park Coalition (from New York League of Conservation Voters website)

“The Waterfront Park Coalition is an alliance of environmental, civic and community groups that support revitalization of the New York City waterfront with public open space and restored ecological habitat. These groups have come together as a coalition to promote: (1) public access to the city’s waterfront and waterways in each of the five boroughs; (2) adequate and equitable financing for waterfront public space and access; and (3) protection and improvement of waterfront habitat.

Creating a Waterfront Blueprint for New York City

-WPC has published a comprehensive inventory of opportunities for waterfront open space and habitat protection in each borough. This inventory outlines nearly 150 opportunities for open space and habitat conservation on the City waterfront, and is backed up by a database of factual information about each project. It includes plans for greenways, public piers, open meadows, boat launches, waterfront promenades, and green open spaces, and would offer waterfront access and open space to city residents. The Blueprint provides a practical guide for the future of the City waterfront, with the information required to guide decision-making and investment.”
Lessons Learned

Community Involvement is Key-
Personal ownership of parks in New York City depends on its community members to maintain and enhance its expansive system of neighborhood parks.

Partnerships for Parks is a joint program between the New York City Parks Department and City Parks Foundation that assists and builds connections between over 250 “Friends of” groups throughout the five boroughs.

The Neighborhood Open Space Coalition is a community-led, city-wide organization committed to improving the livability of New York City. Through advocacy, education, research and planning, the Coalition works to preserve, enhance and increase the city’s “infrastructure for public health”, its parks, open spaces, greenways and community gardens (www.treebranch.com).

Public-Private Partnerships Expand Opportunities for Park Support
Private resources contribute significantly to the support, maintenance and programming of New York’s open spaces.

City Parks Foundation
Partnerships for Parks
Bryant Park Restoration Corporation
Adopt-the-River Program
Greenbelt Conservancy
Central Park Conservancy
Prospect Park Alliance
Bronx River Alliance . . .

The Metropolitan Greensward: Planning within a Larger Open Space System
Regional Plan Association
from RPA web:
“The Metropolitan Greensward is RPA’s vision of a system of protected landscape and water bodies that distinguish the cities and suburbs of the New York/New Jersey/Connecticut metropolitan region. These region shaping open spaces harbor the Region’s most critical natural resource systems, its recreational opportunities and its working landscapes of farms and forests. Together, these protected open lands will help shape future patterns of growth in the Tri-State Region by limiting development at its periphery and enhancing the quality of life in its cities and suburbs.

To realize the Greensward vision, Regional Plan Association is now working with a variety of public and private partners to conserve three critical region-shaping landscapes: New York - New Jersey Harbor, Long Island Sound, and the Appalachian Highlands in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut.”

Governor’s Island - historic preservation and public access
Riis Park (Queens) – historic preservation and waterfront access
New York-New Jersey Harbor Estuary – wildlands preservation
Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway - reclaiming industrial landscapes for diverse uses & needs

Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway

(images: Regional Plan Association)
Issues and Initiatives
New York City programs its parks, open spaces and greenways to accommodate the needs of diverse user groups.

Balancing User Groups with Flexible Access Hours:

Vehicles:
- no vehicular access:
  - Forest Park Drive, Queens (isolated segments)
  - Rockaway Beach, Queens
- vehicular access during rush hour only:
  - Prospect Park, Brooklyn
  - Central Park, Manhattan
- vehicular access on weekends only:
  - Silver Lake, Staten Island

Bicycles:
- bicycle access limited to rush hour and recreational hours:
  - Coney Island Boardwalk, Brooklyn

Dogs:
In many city parks, dog owners are given priority and allowed to walk their dogs off-leash during hours when green spaces traditionally see a reduced volume of visitors - early in the morning and late in the evening.

Resources

Inside City Parks. Peter Harnik (2000). The Urban Land Institute and Trust for Public Land, Washington, D.C.

Central Park Conservancy
http://www.centralparknyc.org/

City Parks Alliance
http://www.cityparksalliance.org/

Neighborhood Open Space Coalition
www.treebranch.com

Partnerships for Parks
http://itsmypark.org/

Project for Public Spaces – Urban Parks
http://www.pps.org/upo/?referrer=pps_navba

Prospect Park Alliance
http://www.prospectpark.org/

Regional Plan Association
http://www.rpa.org/aboutrpa/welcome.html

Waterfront Park Coalition
http://www.nylcv.org/Programs/WPC/Waterfront_Park_Coalition.htm