

City Comptroller Bill Thompson supports the [position](#) of Queens Civic Congress and Queens Coalition for Parks and Green Spaces. We welcome his support. Thank you Mr. Comptroller and RFK Jr.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/29/opinion/29kennedy.html?scp=1&sq=wilderness%2C+lost+in+the+city&st=nyt>

The New York Times
nytimes.com

May 29, 2008
Op-Ed Contributors

A Wilderness, Lost in the City

By WILLIAM C. THOMPSON Jr. and ROBERT F. KENNEDY Jr.

MANY people are astounded to learn that there is a teeming wildlife preserve in New York City. Ridgewood Reservoir on the Brooklyn-Queens border is an oasis where an amazing range of plant and animal species thrive in a verdant landscape of steep hills and narrow valleys amid the city's paved sidewalks.

But what's more astounding, the city's Parks Department could wind up destroying it.

Ridgewood is an accidental wilderness, tucked alongside the Jackie Robinson Parkway. Built in 1858 to provide drinking water to Brooklyn, the reservoir was abandoned in 1989.

As the 50 acres reverted to wetlands, meadows and forests, tens of thousands of plants and trees took root and flourished. Turtles, fish, frogs and millions of insects moved in. Songbirds nested in the glades, transforming the area into a migratory rest stop. According to the National Audubon Society, 137 species of birds use the reservoir, including eight rare species. It is a place as close to unspoiled nature as you're likely to find anywhere within city limits.

Yet, the New York City Parks Department is considering a \$50 million "renovation" project that would cover more than 20 acres of the reservoir with athletic fields and facilities.

This plan flies in the face of Mayor Michael Bloomberg's widely hailed environmental blueprint, which bemoans the loss of the city's natural areas. The Parks Department's own scientific consultants have warned against disturbing the reservoir, an area they call "highly significant for the biodiversity of New York City and the region."

The parks commissioner has said the city needs the athletic fields to combat childhood obesity. This is an important objective, but the money that would be used to destroy this extraordinary natural habitat could be better spent improving Highland Park, next to Ridgewood Reservoir. Highland Park has plenty of ball fields to serve its neighborhood, but they are in such deplorable condition that few people use them.

Ridgewood's natural preserve is a great place for people of all ages to walk and hike. Its trails should be upgraded with benches and rest areas as well as markers pointing out unique flora and fauna. The Parks Department should also open areas of the reservoir for guided nature walks, a great educational tool.

Ridgewood Reservoir offers visitors a rare chance to lose themselves in a forest, to hear bird song, to touch wilderness and to sense the divine. The city shouldn't let that slip away.

William C. Thompson Jr. is the comptroller of the City of New York. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is a lawyer for Riverkeeper, an environmental group.