



Testimony of Roland Lewis, President and CEO, MWA

THE METROPOLITAN WATERFRONT ALLIANCE

**On the Creation of a Comprehensive
Wetlands Protection Policy for New York City**

Thursday, January 22, 2009

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. I am Roland Lewis, president and CEO the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, a coalition of over 370 organizations working together to transform the New York Harbor and its waterways into a world class resource for work, transit, and education.

MWA's interest in a comprehensive wetlands policy for New York City is strong and deep. Wetlands are the buffers, filters, and cleansers of our waterfront. They protect property from storm surge and sea level rise, they help maintain the health and quality of water in the harbor and the harbor estuary, and they provide critical habitat for birds, fish, animals, and other marine and coastal life. The identification, protection, and restoration of wetlands is thus critical to both the urban and natural environments. A world class waterfront, a waterfront

envisioned by the coalition of over 370 organizations that MWA represents - is one that includes healthy wetlands – wetlands that function and support multiple ecological and environmental services as well as urban and infrastructure-related services.

MWA would like to express its strong support for this proposed legislation. We also take this opportunity to suggest important additions to this legislation to better address the importance of community, civic, and non-governmental involvement in the identification, evaluation, monitoring, and restoration of the City's wetlands.

According to the US EPA, Office of Water, Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds, "Government regulations and zoning restrictions are not enough to protect wetlands. Citizens must also become involved. Volunteers that demonstrate concern and devote time to protecting wetlands can make a big difference. Local citizens not only provide the extra workforce necessary to assess the health of and threats to our wetlands but also serve as some of the most powerful advocates for protecting wetland habitat. When volunteers work to protect local wetlands, they greatly improve the chances that those wetlands will be valued by the community. Volunteer monitors often make critical observations and measurements that help assess the health of a wetland. Monitoring wetland characteristics such as plants, soils, hydrology, and wildlife helps us to better understand wetland functions and track changes in

wetland ecosystems. Volunteers increase awareness of the importance of wetlands and create a foundation for active restoration of previously degraded wetlands.”

By actively involving communities, citizens, civic organizations, and non-governmental organizations, New York City can reinforce the importance of wetland restoration and ensure that restoration projects get local support and are successful for many years to come. For example, the 370 alliance partners of the MWA represent thousands of enthusiastic and ready volunteers who are able to provide services that help implement the comprehensive wetlands policy.

Specifically, MWA suggests the following changes. Under Section 2(d), MWA asks that the comprehensive wetlands protection policy include an evaluation of and recommendations for the improvement of the volunteer and third party resources available to the City for the utilization of volunteer programs to identify, evaluate, monitor, and restore the City’s wetlands. MWA asks that the policy require the City to seek input from local and regional non-governmental and civic organizations on ways to fulfill citizen involvement opportunities and how to link these opportunities to the implementation of the comprehensive wetlands protection policy.

MWA asks under Section 2(d)7, (which describes how the commissioner assesses the feasibility of including measures to improve implementation through

reporting, monitoring, and enforcement) that the assessment includes opportunities to employ comprehensive citizen volunteer programs to improve implementation.

Lastly, the MWA asks that this legislation incorporate the need for the City's active involvement in connecting potential volunteers to volunteer wetlands opportunities and projects. New York City has a wealth of willing volunteers ready to do natural resource projects. However there is a lack of hands-on, outdoor, natural resources volunteer opportunities available to and known to large pools of potential volunteers at all levels – nonprofit, corporate, school, and civic organization-based volunteers. This legislation can help bring about a greater interest, awareness, and participation in the critical and effective work that can be accomplished by matching goodwill with opportunities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.