In preparation for COP27 at Sharm El-Sheikh

**Promoting the Urban Nature Policies in Cities** – sharing the knowledge gained after promoting Urban Nature for over 20 years – policies, tools and actions

Natural infrastructures are the front line in dealing with the climate crisis and urban environmental challenges

**Natural Infrastructures in the Cities of Israel – A Review of the Existing Situation**

Over the past decade, a national database was created of natural infrastructures in local authorities throughout the country. The process was done with an understanding of the great importance of the natural systems in connection with urban climate issues, the preservation of biodiversity and as a significant factor in urban socio-economic matters. The national database constitutes a first step for the optimal integration of these infrastructures in the accelerated development processes taking place in the country as well as a tool for supervising them. As a result, more than 70% of the cities in Israel have been mapped, about 10% of which have policies regarding the preservation, cultivation and establishment of urban community nature sites. In the last decade, a number of different urban nature sites have been created in both the central and peripheral cities and their establishment is a direct result of the conducting of surveys, the formulation of municipal policy and the training of officials in various municipalities.

Urban nature surveys are conducted for the most part following calls from the Ministry of Environmental Protection; in them, a great deal of information is collected on the natural infrastructures that exist in each local authority, including information on flora and fauna values, environmental hazards and the planning status of the natural areas.

Natural areas within cities are of great importance. The benefits of an urban nature site are enormous from a social-community, public and educational point of view as well as ecologically. These benefits are intensified in an era of climate change – when the need to manage urban runoff water increases due to population growth and a boom in development, as, over time, natural areas diminish in proportion to the growing population.

Biodiversity is preserved in these areas, and they provide ecosystem services alongside content for educational, research, leisure and recreation activities for the residents of a city and its visitors. These are sites that help to maintain the unique character of the city, are an anchor for internal tourism and, with proper administration, they contribute to the management of runoff, the mitigation of environmental hazards such as flooding and landslides and have a positive effect on the urban climate by mitigating temperatures. In addition, they make a large contribution to the quality of urban life and the physical and mental health of the city’s residents; moreover, their maintenance costs are significantly lower than other protected areas in the city.

**Urban Nature Sites and their Central Function in Urban Environmental Management – Gazelle Valley as a Case Study**

The accessibility of environmental information in the local authorities allows municipalities to formulate policies and promote planning that integrates the natural systems that are within their domain in a way that improves density and the creation of sustainable urban textures in urban renewal processes as well as the development of new urban areas. A key part of this process is the integration of natural areas into the array of existing and future open spaces in the city.

In Jerusalem, one of the first cities to conduct a nature survey funded by the Ministry (in 2010), a statutory, city-wide policy was approved which implements an urban ecology. The process causes and accelerates the actual establishment of a significant urban network of large-scale nature sites. Gazelle Valley, the largest and oldest communal urban nature site in Israel (inaugurated in 2015), is a successful model and a living laboratory for the many benefits of these sites with regard to moderating and managing the urban climate and sustainable runoff management using nature-based solutions (NBS), maintaining the diversity of species and ongoing engagement in social and community activities in a diverse cultural space. Gazelle Valley is managed by the Society for the Protection of Nature for the Jerusalem Municipality, and there is an ecological management interface alongside significant educational-community management. The site is an attraction for travelers and architects from all over the country who come to be impressed by the site itself as well as its unique planning and management, with the hope that more sites will be planned and built employing a similar model elsewhere in Israel. Other sites are being promoted in the capital, such as Nahal Zimari Park and Har Homa Park.

**The Establishment of Urban-Community Nature Sites in Israel**

In light of the importance of the urban nature sites and the formation of a national database on nature values inside the cities of Israel, we at the Society for the Protection of Nature together with the Ministry of Environmental Protection have been promoting the planning, establishment and management of a network of urban-community nature sites in all Israeli cities.

Alongside the planning and establishment of urban nature sites, it is equally important to promote their management by professional manpower in the local authorities by means of **urban ecologists**. At present, about 7 permanent ecologists are active in urban teams in Israel.

In addition, in order to raise awareness of the importance of the planning, establishment and management of urban-community nature sites in Israel, in recent years the Society for the Protection of Nature has been holding an **Urban Nature Week** annually each spring. During this week, dozens of community events are held all over the country, as well as tours and a variety of lectures on the urban nature sites and the importance of the wonders of nature to be found in them. In recent years, tens of thousands of participants have taken part in these activities.

**Urban Nature Sites Are a Part of the Nature-Based Solutions to the Effects of the Climate Crisis**

An inter-ministerial team led by the Office of the Prime Minister is promoting a plan to deal with floods and surface runoff as a part of handling the climate crisis and the extreme flooding events that we have been witnessing in recent years in Israel, which are expected to multiply and worsen. The team has examined a number of solutions, and, together with the fast “engineering” solutions – pipes, huge concrete drainage channels, etc., known all over the world as well as in Israel – it understand that the drainage solutions need to be built on nature-based solutions such as those that exist in Gazelle Valley in Jerusalem, which are better solutions in terms both of surface runoff management and in their multiple benefits, since as a result of them, urban nature sites will be planned and established that maintain natural values ​​in the areas that retard the runoff. In an era of the climate crisis, one cannot be satisfied with one-off solutions; instead it is important to examine and adopt solutions that have many additional significant benefits from environmental, social and economic aspects. Nature-based solutions are the most immediate, available and cheapest of all the technological or engineering solutions being proposed to address the challenges of the climate crisis and the environmental challenges within the city and in the open spaces outside it.