

Central Park low on cash, high on trash

EXCLUSIVE

By JEREMY OLSHAN

Central Park officials are bracing for the picnic panic of 2009.

With record crowds anticipated this summer as many New Yorkers stay home to save money, the Central Park Conservancy had to devise an emergency plan to ensure the grass stays green and clean.

For the first time, park volunteers — who traditionally help with less menial tasks — will be given trash grabbers and garbage bags, conservancy President Doug Blonsky said yesterday.

As a result of budget cuts, the conservancy — which manages the park for the city — has already laid off some employees and cannot afford to hire the extra 50 seasonal workers normally depended on to pick up the trash, he said.

“That’s forced us to be creative in how we use our work force,” he said. “We’re asking our staff to change their schedules to come in later and work more on the weekends.”

But forcing weekday workers to come in on the

weekends will not be enough, he said. Despite changing the schedules of 18 employees, only 47 workers will be on hand each weekend day, compared to 90 in prior years.

“The bottom line is we’re asking New Yorkers to pitch in and pick up the litter for us,” Blonsky told The Post. “In the past, our volunteers have focused on horticulture and planning, but now we need help with the litter.”

At several locations throughout the park, volunteers can sign up to help with the upkeep.

“You’ll get a bag and a grabber, and a little vest to wear,” Blonsky said.

The volunteer push kicks off Sunday as part of Earth Week, and is in keeping with Mayor Bloomberg’s recent call to volunteerism, he said.

“We expect monumental crowds this summer and need your help,” Blonsky said.

“It’s an investment, and by enjoying the park, you get your money back with dividends.”

To find out more or to sign up as a volunteer, visit: centralparknyc.org/volunteer.

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