

Natural Resources Protective Association

Coalition Against Water Disposal of Contaminated Sediments

Post Office Box 050328 • Staten Island, NY 10305



In Memory of Edward "Kerry" Sullivan

FALL 2017/WINTER 2018

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LEMON CREEK, LOU FIGURELLI PARK - ECOLOGY LESSON WITH NYC H2O

by Jim Scarcella

In September, NRPA teamed up with NYC H2O and Councilman Borelli, St. Joseph by the Sea, Staten Island Academy and others to clean debris and remove invasive species from Lemon Creek Park Beach, Princes Bay. We had a beautiful late summer day and the kids were enthusiastic. Tony Rose, Howie Fishbein, Rob Carrano, John Mueller and I began the day by trimming the overgrown shrubs. Yes, there really is a decorative wood fence back there! The parking lot storm drain was barely functioning because it was so clogged with weeds, so we removed the wayward plants so the drain could function again.

The Seguine Point peninsula is amazing, a mix of sand, stone, with beautiful goldenrod for the Monarch Butterflies, which were enjoying delicious nectar. These beautiful insects migrate thousands of miles to winter in parts of Mexico. The debris was a mix of beverage containers, straws, tampon applicators, plastic bags, fishing line, bait

boxes, boat cushions, lawn chairs, and much more.

Further north, there was an abandoned pedal boat at Wolfes Pond tidal inlet, and hundreds of mummichog killifish in the tidal creek.

I was lucky enough to hear and see two Belted Kingfishers at the bottom of Holten Avenue, which is also a great fishing spot.

Clay Wolney and friends used the seine net to capture some of the local critters and give a brief lesson on local marine ecology. The critters were returned safely to their watery home after everyone had a chance to look at them.

The effort and event were incredible, the pizza was delicious and 107 dedicated volunteers removed about 1500 lbs. of garbage. Plus we recycled an additional 30 lbs. of plastic, aluminum and glass.

Many thanks to all who worked to make this event a success! Special thanks to Matt Malina for all his hard work!

We are very proud of our partnership with NYC H2O and NYC Parks Department and we are looking forward to working together on future cleanups.



Beach Cleanup at Lemon Creek at Seguine Avenue with NYCH2O on Saturday, September 30, 2017

OAKWOOD/FOX BEACH CLEANUP

by Jim Scarcella

In October, NRPA cleaned up Fox Beach, part of Oakwood Beach Park. This area was devastated by Hurricane Sandy five years ago. Since that time New York State has agreed that the area should, must and will be restored to a floodplain.

There are only about five houses left. All the rest have been demolished. The beach at Tarlton Avenue is an amazing site. We parked at the cul-de-sac and set up the sign in

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In this Edition

Page 1	LEMON CREEK, LOU FIGURELLI PARK - ECOLOGY LESSON WITH NYC H2O	Page 3	KUDOS TO THE BAY TERRACE BEAUTIFICATION ASSOCIATION
Page 1	OAKWOOD/FOX BEACH CLEANUP	Page 3	2017 STATEN ISLAND STUDENT SUMMIT
Page 2	UPDATE ON THE SAW MILL CREEK MITIGATION BANK	Page 4	UPCOMING EVENTS

table. Fresh coffee and munchkins were offered, and we distributed the gloves, bags and equipment to the volunteers.

Mike, Howie and Danny were joined on the beach by College of Staten Island - Verrazano nursing students and Tottenville High School students. Chuck and Maryann began cleaning the area surrounding the parking area. The Abenante family stopped by to lend a hand.

The beach had plenty of garbage: Refreshment containers, liquor bottles, a multitude of straws and bottle caps, coffee stirrers, diapers, toys, mangled ship ropes and life jackets, cigar and cigarette butts, old beach chairs, pieces of Styrofoam dock floats, fishing line, bait boxes, 42 single-use plastic bags, clothing, sports caps, tennis balls, and NYC water treatment control plant "soap" phosphorus pieces.

The Bluebelt side of Cedar Grove had plenty of illegal dumping: Sheetrock, wood slats, bundles of cut wood, a sheet, cut up children's bed framing, beverage cans and bottles, and more.

We trimmed away some of the invasive species to expose the "No Dumping" signage in case someone missed the signs. Also, we removed a rusted piece of an old insulated refrigerator that had been kicked, bulldozed and beaten on Oakwood Beach for over 30 years.

All told, we removed over 350 lbs. of debris and recycled another 15 pounds of glass and aluminum.

Many thanks to everyone who assisted in the cleanup. NRPA appreciates your support!



Beach cleanup at Oakwood Beach/
Fox Beach at Tarlton Avenue on
Saturday, October 30, 2017

UPDATE ON THE SAW MILL CREEK MITIGATION BANK

By Ida Sanoff

About four years ago, NYC started to work on the concept of wetland mitigation banking. It's a way to generate funding for large scale mitigation projects. A project is assigned a certain number of "credits" which can be "purchased" by developers whose projects will damage natural areas. That way, the developer will not have to repair or prevent any environmental damage in the area of their project, they just write a check which goes towards mitigation work in the pre-selected mitigation "bank".

The idea of mitigation banking is not new. It is currently practiced in 28 states, including New Jersey.

Sometimes a large mitigation "bank" area isn't even required. Environmental damage resulting from a project in one borough can be offset by doing mitigation work in another borough. But there is no guarantee that this exchange will go forward. This happened recently when environmental damage resulting from construction of the Southwest Brooklyn Marine Transfer Station on the shoreline of Brooklyn's Gravesend Bay was "transferred" to a project called Sunset Cove on the shoreline of Jamaica Bay in Queens. But bid estimates for construction of Sunset Cove were much higher than expected and the project never got anywhere. The bidding process has supposedly been reopened but it is anyone's guess as to when, if ever, Sunset Cove will move forward. Meanwhile, damage was done to the Gravesend Bay site and no remediation will be required there.

One of the leading proponents of wetland mitigation banking was the Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY). Founded in 1896, REBNY is the chief lobbying group for the real estate industry and has been known to provide substantial support to some local politicians and candidates. The REBNY website describes itself as, "The state's first real estate trade association. It works on behalf of the mutual interests of its members by promoting public and industry policies. The organization frequently speaks before government

bodies with the primary goals of expanding New York's economy, encouraging the development and renovation of commercial and residential property, enhancing the city's appeal to investors and residents and facilitating property management."

This brings us back to Staten Island's Saw Mill Creek. Located in western Staten Island, it is a large salt marsh, where a long, long, time ago, water moved freely in and out with the tides. Today we know that tidal marshland not only plays a critical role in controlling urban flooding, but it is also one of the most productive habitats on Earth. But many years ago, there were plans to fill in the marsh and develop it. It was partially filled, a channel was dug and two large berms were constructed. Also, in the 1940's, straight, narrow, mosquito ditches were dug to drain the upper areas of the marshes. In those days, they thought that this practice would reduce breeding areas for mosquitoes, but these narrow ditches really mess up the normal tidal flow. Saw Mill Creek was also battered by illegal dumping – including the dumping of PCB laden electrical transformers, among other insults. As a result, today there are high levels of industrial pollutants throughout the Creek. The end result is that this large marsh is only a shadow of what it once was or what it should be.

In 2015, the NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC) hired consultants, who thought that approximately 68 acres of Saw Mill Creek could be restored, at a cost of \$14.4 million. They then decided that the cost of restoration would provide 18 "credits" that would be made available for purchase by developers. But there were huge differences in both the amount of restoration work each "credit" would require, as well as the size of each parcel. There was also tremendous variation in the amounts and types of environmental damage resulting from developer's projects. So it was decided that each would be

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See page 4**

assessed individually and a ratio would somehow be figured out.

It was decided that the “mitigation” of Saw Mill Creek would involve removing fill from seven acres of wetland which hopefully would restore tidal flow. An additional 17 acres would be “rehabilitated and enhanced”, which sounds good, but basically means nothing. Then to stack the deck even further, EDC’s consultants assume that a developer who destroys an acre of marshland by building on it would require one to three credits to take care of their mitigation obligations. So when you look at the big picture, it is possible that 18 acres of wetlands around NYC could be developed and lost forever, while a only a mere 7 acres in Saw Mill Creek would actually be brought back to life as productive tidal marsh.

There are other concerns too. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service believes that even if Saw Mill Creek is remediated to the point where proper tidal flushing can resume, it will be quickly re-contaminated by all of the industrial pollutants in the nearby Arthur Kill. Even worse, all of the fish and wildlife that would be attracted to a restored Saw Mill Creek would be bathed in the toxins, which would then travel right up the food chain.

Unfortunately, much to the glee of developers, the Saw Mill Creek Mitigation Bank is up and running. NYC EDC recently announced that Saw Mill Creek mitigation “credits” are “for sale”: <https://www.nycedc.com/project/marshes-initiative>

The bottom line is that natural areas are not interchangeable. Each forms an ecological niche. Even more important, each tiny little piece of wetland absorbs vast amounts of



Beach Cleanup at Lemon Creek Park at Sharrott Avenue Fishing Pier on Saturday, September 16, 2017

storm water. Our city talks endlessly about “resiliency” and there are endless meetings, symposia, reports and seminars. But the most effective method of flood control – preservation of wetlands, is ignored.

KUDOS TO THE BAY TERRACE BEAUTIFICATION ASSOCIATION

By Jim Scarcella

The Bay Terrace Beautification Association is a force of civic good for Staten Island, especially the Mid Island and South Shore communities.

Formed in 2012 under the leadership of Ron Abenante and family, the Bay Terrace Beautification Association “adopted” the Staten Island Railroad’s Bay Terrace Train station, cleaning and planting the underpass and the wings leading to the entrance.

The group also conducts regular clean ups and plantings at the Admunsen Trailway at Hylan Boulevard near Buffalo Street as well as beach clean ups at Great Kills Park. In addition, the Bay Terrace Beautification team holds an annual celebration at the Great Kills Park Bathhouse, with delicious treats from all over the world and musical performances.

The Natural Resources Protective Association is honored to have a great partnership with the Bay Terrace Beautification Association.

2017 STATEN ISLAND STUDENT SUMMIT

By Tony Rose

The sun was bright and the sky was clear as volunteers from many different backgrounds converged on the bathing pavilion at Great Kills Park, part of the National Parks Service’s Gateway National Park. The day was Wednesday, October 25th and the weather had cooperated on a day planned months and months in advance. Busloads of middle-schoolers were on their way to the first ever Staten Island Student Summit.

Amanda Wheeler and Cindy Zipf had contacted the NRPA over the



summer to see if there might be any interest in running an environmental exposition for students; copying a program Clean Ocean Action has run for many years on the shore in New Jersey. This program was planned as a pilot to see if it was feasible to work with the NYC schools and public parks in New York.

A number of schools had been selected and asked to apply for participation to avoid being overrun by an open call. Most of the schools contacted either declined or simply never responded. Administrations from The School for Civic Leadership and Staten Island Academy joined enthusiastically and proved to be willing partners. The students and teachers were all given logo drawstring backpacks and reusable stainless steel water bottles. “We do beachfront clean-ups and pick up hundreds of plastic bottles,” said Tony Rose, NRPA board member and the Co-coordinator of the program. “Then we bring the volunteers back and hand them plastic bottles. We want to introduce the kids to ‘Reduce, Re-use, Recycle.’”

The plan, copied from COA’s Staten Island Student Summit, was to break the



participants into a dozen groups. Half would attend field trips along the beach and the others would take part in six, 10-minute flash-learning sessions. After regrouping and a brief break, the students flip flop and the early sessions are repeated. Numerous volunteers were needed.

Calls went out to all sorts of mailing lists; the Staten Island Sport Divers, Kayak Staten Island, The Coalition for Wetlands and Forests, the Staten Island Ballroom Dance Association. The last group turned us on to Staten Island's AARP members. A large group of senior volunteers with a diverse skill set joined the day and helped chaperone the groups, took video and still photography as well as enjoyed the day and all the activities.

Amanda started the program and introduced the director of Gateway Park. Tony Rose cited Jacques Cousteau and challenged the students to create their own reality. Ed Burke, Staten Island's Deputy Borough President opened with a wildlife joke and asked the students

to become citizens of the world

Field trips included soil composition and the make-up of salt water marshes, a beach clean-up, surf-casting, scuba diving, the animals of the shore and others. The round robin teaching stations included critters from the Staten Island Zoo, horseshoe crabs, watershed runoff activity, an oyster gardening presentation from the Harbor School and a resiliency station presented by SCAPE, the organization in charge of the Living Breakwaters being built off the Tottenville shore. The star of the flash-learning stations was Carl Alderson of NOAA. He brought an electrically-powered ramp with running water that allowed a demonstration of live eels swimming upstream. The eels were later released in a scene that can be viewed on YouTube.

Charlie Olson, a cinematographer and director of the Web TV channel EnvironmentTV filmed the day. He was ably assisted by a number of volunteers who helped him run a total of six cameras documenting the

day. It is hoped that at least one cable show and a number of shorts can be produced from the footage.

Every person involved, presenters and participants alike, thoroughly enjoyed the day. Ed Burke stayed after his remarks and went station-to-station taking in the show. He stayed until noon and then asked to be involved with planning future programs. We will take him up on his offer.



Edward Burke, Deputy Borough President

Upcoming Events:

- **Tuesday, December 5, 2017** NRPA Holiday Gathering at the Blue Heron Nature Center, 7:30 PM.
- **Tuesday, January 2, 2018** NRPA monthly meeting at the Blue Heron Nature Center, 7:30 PM.
- **Tuesday, February 6, 2018** NRPA monthly meeting at the Blue Heron Nature Center, 7:30 PM.
- **Tuesday, March 6, 2018** NRPA monthly meeting at the Blue Heron Nature Center, 7:30 PM.

Dedicated to preserving the marine environment, the Natural Resources Protective Association is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. All contributions are tax deductible.

All memberships expire on December 31, so please renew NOW!

(All memberships paid after October 1 will also receive credit for the upcoming year)

Are You A Member? Have You Renewed? Please Join Us NOW!

- \$15.00 Individual**
- \$25.00 Organization**
- \$500.00 Lifetime Member**

- \$20.00 Family**
- \$100.00 Sponsor** (after 5 payments you become Lifetime member)

YES! I/We want to join the fight!

Name: _____

Address: _____

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Mail to: Natural Resources Protective Association
C/O Richard Chan, Treasurer
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Staten Island, NY 10305

Join NRPA today