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Department of Environmental Protection Completes \$237 Million Upgrade to Wards Island Wastewater Treatment Plant That Will Improve East River and New York Harbor Water Quality

New York City is Regional Leader in Reducing Nitrogen Discharges and Protecting Health of Area Waterways

New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Carter Strickland today announced that the recently completed \$237 million upgrade to the Wards Island Wastewater Treatment Plant will reduce the amount of nitrogen discharged from the Plant by nearly 50 percent and thereby improve the ecological health of the East River and New York Harbor. Nitrogen is a naturally occurring element that is found in food and other organic materials and is present in wastewater when it enters treatment plants. Because nitrogen is not a pathogen and poses no threat to human health, the plants were not originally designed to remove it from the treated water before it is discharged into the receiving water body. However, high levels of nitrogen can degrade the overall ecology of a waterway by reducing levels of dissolved oxygen and promoting excessive algae growth, especially in warm weather months.

The upgrade to the Wards Island Wastewater Treatment Plant converts the organic nitrogen present in the wastewater into inert nitrogen gas that is then released harmlessly into the atmosphere before the treated water is released into the East River and Long Island Sound. This will reduce nitrogen discharges from the Plant by about 50 percent, from 33,000 pounds to 17,000 pounds per day.

More Information

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Overall, DEP is investing more than \$1 billion to reduce nitrogen discharges from the four Upper East River wastewater treatment plants - Bowery Bay, Hunts Point, Tallman Island and Wards Island - which will reduce total nitrogen discharges from the four plants by more than 52 percent. The work is being funded by DEP and is the result of an agreement between DEP, the Office of the New York State Attorney General, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

“With warmer weather around the corner New Yorkers will start thinking about getting on the water,” said Commissioner Strickland. “New York City has committed significant funding and has been a regional leader in nitrogen removal, ensuring that the East River and Long Island Sound are healthy, clean, and attractive for fishing as well as for other recreational uses.”

“Improving wastewater treatment systems can significantly help to prevent contamination from entering our waterways,” said DEC Commissioner Joe Martens. “Nitrogen discharges can cause algae blooms, low dissolved oxygen levels and impair water quality. This large scale upgrade to Wards Island Wastewater Treatment Plant will greatly benefit the area and help guard our natural resources. I commend the City of New York for making this investment in the protection of our states water quality.”

“The Office of the Attorney General has worked with the City of New York for years to achieve major reductions in the level of nitrogen discharged by the City’s wastewater treatment plants into area waterways,” New York Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman said. “The upgrade to the Wards Island Wastewater Treatment Plant announced today is a key step forward in on-going efforts to improve the quality of the waters of the East River and New York Harbor, as well as the quality of life of New Yorkers.”

“We are pleased that DEP has succeeded in cutting nitrogen discharges from its Wards Island wastewater plant nearly in half. This advance, along with those planned at other city facilities, will enhance water quality in Long Island Sound and the East River, and improve recreational opportunities for millions of New Yorkers,” said Eric A. Goldstein NYC Environment Director of the Natural Resources Defense Council. “The benefits from investing in the protection and modernization of our sewage infrastructure are often overlooked; but they are essential to providing a sustainable future for our city.”

The western end of Long Island Sound is funneled into a narrow area bounded by lower Westchester, western Nassau, the Bronx, northern Queens, and Connecticut and flows into the Upper East River. Wastewater treatment facilities that serve more than a dozen municipalities along the Connecticut and New York coasts are the primary sources of nitrogen in the Sound and the area is periodically impacted by algae blooms that reduce the amount of dissolved oxygen in the water and impair the survival of fish and other marine organisms. Algae colonies can flourish with an ample supply of sunlight and nutrients, such as nitrogen.

The \$237 million installation of Biological Nutrient Removal technology at the Wards Island Plant required significant upgrades to the plant’s electrical substation, generators, aeration and sludge pumping systems including the installation of sluice gates, mixers, diffusers, froth hoods, and surface wasting pump stations, as well as the stabilization of the aeration tanks’ four batteries. In the plant’s air process system, two new blowers were installed and the remaining four were rehabilitated. This investment will ensure that the plant remains in a state of good repair for decades to come.

DEP recently announced the completion of the \$280 million nitrogen removal project at the Hunts Point Wastewater Treatment Plant and is investing an additional \$640 million in stabilization work and nitrogen reduction measures at the Bowery Bay and Tallman Island Treatment Plants, all of which are located on the Upper East River. An additional \$460 million is being invested in similar upgrades at the Jamaica Bay and 26th Ward Treatment Plants.

The Wards Island Wastewater Treatment Plant was built in 1937 and has a design capacity of 275 million gallons per day, servicing a population of over 1 million people. The plant has a drainage area of 12,056 acres, covering the western section of the Bronx and the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

Activating these advanced treatment technologies is a key component of DEP's Strategy 2011-2014, a far-reaching strategic plan that lays out 100 distinct initiatives to help make it the safest, most efficient, cost-effective, and transparent water utility in the nation.

DEP manages New York City's water supply, providing more than one billion gallons of high quality water each day to more than nine million residents, including eight million in New York City. The water is delivered from a watershed that extends more than 125 miles from the city, comprising 19 reservoirs and three controlled lakes. Approximately 7,000 miles of water mains, tunnels and aqueducts bring water to homes and businesses throughout the five boroughs, and 7,500 miles of sewer lines and 96 pump stations take wastewater to 14 in-city treatment plants. DEP has nearly 6,000 employees, including nearly 1,000 in the upstate watershed. For more information, visit nyc.gov/dep, like us on Facebook at facebook.com/nycwater, or follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/nycwater.

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