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Department of Environmental Protection Hosts Annual Eel Count at Staten Island's Richmond Creek Bluebelt

Upgrading Staten Island's Sewer System and Innovative Network of Bluebelts Have Improved Water Quality and Created Habitats for Eels and other Species

Photos of the Event can be Viewed on [DEP's Flickr Page](#)

The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation today hosted students from the Saint Clare and New York Harbor Schools, as well as Cub Scouts from Pack 25, at the annual count of juvenile glass eels on Staten Island's Richmond Creek Bluebelt. The American eel is born at sea, floats to the shore on prevailing currents, and migrates to clean, healthy waterways along the east coast where they can live up to 20 years. Eel populations are an important indicator of water quality and experts have seen a resurgence in the eel population in New York City following billions of dollars in investments to improve water quality in the city's waterways.

"The investments New York City has made in our wastewater infrastructure have helped make our waterways healthier than they have been in a century and created an environment for many species to thrive," said **DEP Commissioner Emily Lloyd**. "The annual eel count offers students an opportunity to learn about the importance of environmental stewardship and things they can do to help promote a healthy ecosystem for the wildlife that calls New York City home."

"Conserving natural resources takes partnerships," said **DEC Commissioner**

More Information

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Joe Martens. "The way that the DEP has taken on not just the science, but also the outreach to local schools is exactly what a healthy estuary needs. This annual Eel count is a great way to connect students and the community with nature while gathering information that can be valuable for the future study of this species and its role in our ecosystem."

Each spring eels arrive in estuaries like the Hudson River and urban ponds as translucent, two-inch long "glass eels." As part of ongoing research, volunteers and students use a ten-foot cone-shaped net specifically designed to catch the eels and then count and release them back into the water. The 2015 eel monitoring program began in March and will continue until the end of the eels' migratory period. So far, thousands of glass eels have been observed in Richmond Creek. Staten Island is one of ten sites, ranging from New York City to Albany, where counts are taken as part of DEC's Hudson River Eel Project.

In 2014, about 6,000 glass eels were observed in Richmond Creek and more than 85,000 were counted at the ten Hudson River Estuary monitoring sites. Eel populations had been in decline along the east coast of the United States for decades due to a combination of over fishing, water quality degradation, and man-made barriers to migration, such as dams.

Over the last decade, DEP has invested more than \$10 billion to upgrade sewers and wastewater treatment plants to improve the health of New York Harbor and local waterways. On Staten Island, DEP has connected thousands of homes to the City's wastewater treatment system, eliminating the need for septic tanks, and preserved or constructed more than 60 Bluebelt wetlands to reduce roadway flooding and improve harbor water quality.

The Bluebelt program preserves and optimizes natural drainage corridors including streams, ponds and lakes. Stormwater is directed to the wetlands where it is stored and naturally filtered. In addition, the Bluebelts provide important open spaces and diverse wildlife habitats. Over the last ten years DEP has built Bluebelts for approximately one third of Staten Island's land area.

DEP manages New York City's water supply, providing more than one billion gallons of 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 almost 1,000 in the upstate watershed. In addition, DEP has a robust capital program, with a planned \$14 billion in investments over the next 10 years that will create up to 3,000 construction-related jobs per year. This capital program is responsible for critical projects like City Water Tunnel No. 3; the Staten Island Bluebelt program, an ecologically sound and cost-effective stormwater management system; the city's Watershed Protection Program, which protects sensitive lands upstate near the city's reservoirs in order to maintain their high water quality; and the installation of more than 820,000 Automated Meter Reading devices, which will allow customers to track their daily water use, more easily manage their accounts and be alerted to potential leaks on their properties. For more information, visit nyc.gov/dep, like us on [Facebook](#), or follow us on [Twitter](#).

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