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CONTACT:

Farrell Sklerov / Mercedes Padilla (718) 595-6600

DEP Completes Environmental Restoration at Alley Creek

16-Acre Project Will Improve Harbor Water Quality and Eventually Become Public Space

Environmental Protection Commissioner Cas Holloway today announced the completion of a \$20 million environmental restoration of the northern portion of Alley Pond Park in Bayside, Queens. The project, which restored wetlands and reintroduced local plant life to a 16-acre section of the park, is part of an overall effort to reduce combined sewer overflows (CSO) into Alley Creek and Little Neck Bay. The new plantings and remediated wetlands will help absorb stormwater runoff, reducing the amount of water that can enter and overwhelm the sewer system during heavy rain. In addition to the environmental restoration, a CSO-retention facility in Alley Creek that can hold up to five million gallons of stormwater and wastewater is currently under construction and is scheduled to be operational by the end of the year. The restoration project, started in spring 2009, will also improve the overall ecology and water quality of Alley Creek as the restored wetlands will oxygenate the water and attract new animal species.

"The completion of this restoration is an important milestone in Mayor Bloomberg's commitment to improving water quality in Bayside and throughout New York Harbor" said Commissioner Holloway. "Not only will this environmental restoration help reduce combined sewer overflows in the area, but it is well on the way to becoming a beautiful open space for the community to enjoy in the future. Once the CSO tank comes online later this year, we will see even more significant improvements to the health of Alley Creek and Little Neck Bay. Since 2002, the City has invested more than one billion dollars to reduce combined sewer overflows citywide, and projects like this mean that New York City's harbor – already the cleanest it's been in 100 years – will get even better."

The restoration project included the construction of eight acres of tidal wetlands, and eight acres of adjacent coastal grassland and shrubland habitat. Prior to the restoration, the area was dominated by invasive plants that prevented native plants and animals from growing and reproducing.

MORE INFORMATION

NYC Department of
Environmental Protection
Communications &
Intergovernmental Affairs

59-17 Junction Boulevard
19th Floor
Flushing, NY 11373

(718) 595 - 6600

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The restoration required the removal of approximately 7,500 cubic yards of construction debris which was excavated to restore historic tidal flow conditions to a former tributary of Alley Creek. In order to achieve the proper elevation to support tidal marsh, 8,200 cubic yards of sand were placed to restore the wetland and 320,000 two-inch smooth cordgrass plugs were planted. An additional 7,100 cubic yards of topsoil was placed and then seeded with a combination of meadow grasses and wildflowers. After the seeding was completed, nearly 2,000 trees and shrubs were planted.

Visitors will have a stunning view because of the restoration. While not part of the original design, a small freshwater spring was uncovered during the restoration and a freshwater planting mix was incorporated into the design to further increase the biodiversity of native plant and animal habitat. The restored parkland also supports habitat for horseshoe crabs, wading shorebirds, egrets fishing in the marsh grasses, and ospreys.

The southern portion of the project took into account the community's request to re-plant trees because residents wanted to block the view of the expressway. Over 450 trees made up of fifteen different native species were planted by this past spring. The restoration is in a maintenance phase and it will take about two years to be open to the public.

In conjunction with this project, DEP is removing and replacing a boardwalk located along an existing trail within the Alley Park Environmental Center. This work will be completed by next summer. DEP also reconstructed the observation deck and walkway located along the west bank of Alley Creek, approximately 500 feet south of Northern Boulevard. The work provides for a view of an inter-tidal wetland setting and an opportunity to observe wildlife.

The Alley Creek CSO-retention facility is being constructed by DEP to improve water quality in Bayside and will be completed this year. The five million gallon CSO-retention facility will store and capture combined stormwater and wastewater that previously was discharged into Alley Creek and Little Neck Bay during heavy rainfall. This will lead to increased dissolved oxygen concentrations, decreased contaminant levels, and fewer plastic bottles and other litter discharged into the creek and bay. The CSO-retention facility will reduce the overall volume of CSOs discharged to Alley Creek from approximately 246 million gallons per year to 112 million gallons per year.

New Yorkers produce, and DEP treats, more than 1.3 billion gallons of wastewater every day. The wastewater is collected through 7,400 miles of lateral sewers that flow downhill into large interceptor sewers, which lead directly to the City's 14 wastewater treatment plants. These plants have plenty of capacity to handle New York City's wastewater on a "dry weather" day, and are designed with a capacity of double dry weather flows. Two-thirds of New York City's sewered areas have a combined sewer system that collects wastewater and stormwater runoff together in the same pipe from properties and streets. This often presents an issue during rainstorms when treatment plants can reach their capacity. To relieve the sewage system during these high-flow periods, the interceptor sewers have "regulators" equipped with overflows weirs that divert combined stormwater and wastewater into New York City's surrounding waterways. This is known as a combined sewer overflow. Upgrades to DEP's wastewater treatment plants and sewers have allowed DEP to capture a greater amount of overall flow, from about 30% in the 1980s to over 72%

today, and overflows are more dilute, with the percentage of sanitary waste decreasing from 30% to about 12% today.

DEP manages the City's water supply, providing more than 1 billion gallons of water each day to more than 9 million residents, including 8 million in New York City. New York City's water is delivered from a watershed that extends more than 125 miles from the City, and comprises 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 7,400 miles of sewer lines take wastewater to 14 in-City treatment plants.

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