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DEP Expands Eelgrass Pilot Project in Jamaica Bay

Plantings Expected to Improve Local Habitat and Help With Nitrogen Removal

Environmental Protection Commissioner Cas Holloway today launched the second phase of the Eelgrass Restoration Project to help improve Jamaica Bay's local ecosystem. The project will consist of 1,000 individual plantings and is part of the City's efforts to improve the overall water quality and ecology of Jamaica Bay. The project is being done in collaboration with Cornell Cooperative Extension and the National Park Service.

"Restoring eelgrass to Jamaica Bay is another important step in our efforts to improve this invaluable natural resource," said Commissioner Holloway. "This program, if successful, will mark the first time in nearly 100 years that eelgrass is able to survive in Jamaica Bay. This work also comes on the heels of a historic agreement that Mayor Bloomberg announced in February with the State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and other environmental stakeholders to invest \$115 million in nitrogen reduction technologies and marsh island restoration programs."

The project includes approximately 1,000 eelgrass plantings at three sites near Breezy Point, Breezy Point Yacht Club, and Dubos Point. Protective barriers including poles, sand bags, and full enclosure fencing will also be installed. The various barriers will be tested to determine their effectiveness in helping the eelgrass resist disturbances from local geese and horseshoe crabs. After today's planting, a biweekly monitoring effort will commence to follow the health of the eelgrass, the ambient water conditions, and the impact of local wildlife on the project. This upcoming fall, the pilot project will be expanded by adding 3,000 more eelgrass plants in Jamaica Bay at one or more of the three sites from the current planting. A large-scale planting is scheduled to occur in 2011 if the pilot is successful.

Last year, DEP conducted an initial preliminary planting of eelgrass to refine planting locations and the timing of when they should occur. The monitoring and analysis from that

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work helped establish a framework for the current planting in order to increase survival chances. The current work is possible due to DEP's capital investments in the area, which have improved water quality so that eelgrass can be returned to the bay.

Eelgrass is a type of submerged aquatic vegetation that grows in estuaries and shallow bays. It is important for fish and shellfish as shelter and habitat. Eelgrass plants form meadows on the bay bottom, where aquatic creatures such as shellfish take shelter among the grass-like leaves. They also stabilize sediments, reduce erosion and naturally remove nitrogen from the water.

Jamaica Bay is a 39-square-mile water body with a broader watershed of approximately 142 square miles that includes portions of Brooklyn, Queens and Nassau County. The bay is a diverse ecological resource that supports multiple habitats, including open water, salt marshes, grasslands, coastal woodlands, maritime shrublands and brackish and freshwater wetlands. These habitats support 91 fish species, 325 species of birds and many reptile, amphibian and small mammal species. The bay is a critical stop for birds along the Eastern Flyway migration route and has become an internationally renowned birding destination. Portions of the bay, most notably the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, have been designated as Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats by the federal and state governments.

The City recently announced that it would make \$115 million in new investments to improve the overall water quality and mitigate marshland loss in Jamaica Bay. The investments include \$100 million to install new nitrogen control technologies at wastewater treatment plants located on Jamaica Bay. The investments, made in concert with \$95 million the City already has committed for nitrogen control upgrades, will reduce the nitrogen loads discharged into Jamaica Bay by nearly 50 percent over the next ten years. The City also will invest \$15 million for marshland restoration projects around the bay.

Since 2002, the City has invested \$37.4 million to reclaim more than 440 acres of environmentally sensitive land adjoining Jamaica Bay and plans to remediate nearly 100 additional acres. The City will leverage its new \$15 million investment in the bay's marshlands by applying for Federal matching funds, which could net an additional \$30 million in funding for Jamaica Bay marshland preservation projects.

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, and residents of Ulster, Orange, Putnam and Westchester counties. 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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