

[Home](#)
**Customer Services**

- › [Pay Online](#)
- › [Ways to Pay Your Bill](#)
- › [eBilling](#)
- › [Account Information](#)
- › [Customer Assistance](#)
- › [Service Line Protection Program](#)
- › [Water Rates](#)
- › [Property Managers & Trade Professionals](#)

**Water Utilities**

- › [Drinking Water](#)
- › [Wastewater](#)
- › [Stormwater](#)
- › [Harbor Water](#)
- › [Long Term Control Plan](#)

**The Watershed**

- › [Watershed Protection](#)
- › [Watershed Recreation](#)

**Citywide Initiatives**

- › [Environmental Education](#)
- › [Conservation Programs](#)
- › [Air Pollution Control](#)
- › [Noise Codes & Complaints](#)

**Business and Professionals**

- › [Forms & Permits](#)
- › [Support for Businesses](#)
- › [Doing Business with DEP](#)
- › [Asbestos Abatement](#)
- › [Construction, Demolition & Abatement](#)

**About DEP**

- › [Inside DEP](#)
- › [News](#)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 18-47

May 11, 2018

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## Staten Island Students Count Eels at Richmond Creek Bluebelt

**Build-out of Staten Island's Sewer System and the Inter-Connected Network of Bluebelts Have Improved Water Quality and Created Habitats for Eels and other Species**

Photos of the Event are Available on [DEP's Flickr Page](#)



The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) on Wednesday hosted two dozen students from the Saint Clare School in Great Kills for the annual count of juvenile glass eels at Staten Island's Richmond Creek Bluebelt in Richmondtown. The American eel is born at sea, floats to the coast on prevailing currents and migrates to clean, healthy waterways along the east coast where they can live for 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 the investment of more than \$10 billion over the last decade to improve harbor water quality. Thus far in 2018, more than 700 glass eels have been counted in Richmond Creek.

"The annual eel count is an opportunity for young New Yorkers to learn about the complex ecosystem that sustains many different species," said **DEP Commissioner Vincent Sapienza**. "New York City's waterways are healthier than ever thanks to investments made in wastewater infrastructure, and this eel count serves as a wonderful opportunity to instill in the students a sense of lasting environmental stewardship."

Each spring eels arrive in estuaries like the Hudson River 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 2018 eel monitoring program

**More Information**

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- › [Interagency MOUs](#)
- › [A to Z Index](#)
- › [Contact Us](#)

began in March and will continue until the end of the eels' migratory period. Staten Island is one of 12 sites, ranging from New York City to Albany, where counts are taken as part of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Hudson River Eel Project.

In 2017, almost 900 glass eels were observed in Richmond Creek and more than 88,500 were counted at the 13 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. Last August, the city completed a \$48 million infrastructure upgrade to the Woodrow area that included the largest ever [expansion of the Staten Island Bluebelt system](#). And, another \$15 million project completed last June built a [new Bluebelt in Pleasant Plains](#).

DEP manages New York City's water supply, providing approximately 1 billion gallons of high quality drinking water each day to more than 9.6 million residents, including 8.6 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 \$19.1 billion in investments over the next 10 years that will create up to 3,000 construction-related jobs per year. For more information, visit [nyc.gov/dep](http://nyc.gov/dep), like us on [Facebook](#), or follow us on [Twitter](#).

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