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**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION CONDUCTS SECOND  
ANNUAL EEL COUNT AT STATEN ISLAND'S RICHMOND CREEK BLUEBELT  
WITH LOCAL STUDENTS AND CUB SCOUTS**

*Continuing Build-out of City Sewer System and Wetland Areas has Improved Water Quality and  
Led to an Increase in Habitat for Eels and other Species*

New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Carter Strickland today joined officials from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) as well as students from the Saint Clare School and New York Harbor School, and Cub Scouts from Pack 25, in conducting the second annual count of juvenile eels at Staten Island's Richmond Creek Bluebelt. In March, a cone shaped net was installed in the Creek to collect juvenile eels that measure approximately two to three inches in length and are also known as glass eels. Daily counts are taken of the glass eels caught in the net and they are then released back into the Creek. In addition, water temperature and tides are recorded. Thus far, thousands of glass eels have been counted in Richmond Creek and the monitoring will continue until the end of the month, coinciding with the end of the eels' migratory period. The survey on 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 2012, more than 12,000 glass eels were counted in Richmond Creek and nearly 85,000 were counted among the 10 Hudson River Estuary monitoring sites. Eels are sensitive to changes in water quality and are an indicator species for the health of a waterway.

"Preserving and building out wetlands and connecting homes to the sewer system has helped to reduce flooding, raise property values, and improve the health of local waterways on Staten Island," said Commissioner Strickland. "By engaging the next generation of New Yorkers in this important program we hope to learn more about the eels and the health of our waterways while also instilling an appreciation for our environment."

"Researching eels is a great way to involve citizens in the recovery of their local ecosystems," said DEC Commissioner Joe Martens. "Since 2008, hundreds of volunteers with DEC's Hudson River Estuary Eel Project have caught and released more than 100,000 juvenile eels above dams and other barriers to migration. DEC works closely with dozens of partners, including NYCDEP and Cornell's Water Resource Institute, to improve eel access to habitat and to enhance public participation in conservation action. Like other long-lived migratory species, eels are important indicators of the health of the ocean, river, and watershed."

Eel populations had been declining 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. In New York City, DEP has invested over \$10 billion since 2002 to upgrade wastewater treatment plants and improve the health of New York Harbor and other local

waterways. In addition, on Staten Island DEP has been building out the sewer system to connect more homes to the treatment plants and preserving and optimizing wetlands to reduce localized flooding through the Bluebelt program. Last month, DEP completed a two year, \$15.6 million project that extended the city's sewer system to 136 homes in the Annadale area and continued the build-out of the Bluebelt system. Over the last ten years DEP has built Bluebelts for approximately one third of Staten Island's land area and in the South Richmond and mid-Island areas, DEP has purchased approximately 400 acres of wetland property for Bluebelts that provide drainage for 19 watersheds, covering about 14,000 acres. DEP will invest an additional \$848 million over the next 10 years on similar projects in Staten Island. Water quality testing shows that these investments have helped New York Harbor water reach levels of health and cleanliness that it has not seen in generations.

It is believed that juvenile eels hatch in the Sargasso Sea and migrate to healthy streams and rivers where they can live for up to 20 years. The wetlands that have been preserved and expanded by DEP on Staten Island are a natural place for the glass eels to shelter until they have reached maturity. DEP has also taken steps to ensure that its work does not impede the free movement of migratory species. In Richmond Creek, where a small weir was installed to slow the stormwater to allow it to be naturally filtered before it empties into the Arthur Kill and New York Harbor, a fish ladder was also included so that fish, eels, and other species can bypass the weir.

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](http://nyc.gov/dep), like us on Facebook at [facebook.com/nycwater](https://facebook.com/nycwater), or follow us on Twitter at [twitter.com/nycwater](https://twitter.com/nycwater).

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