



A Report on Jamaica Bay

A Special Place

On October 27, 2002, Jamaica Bay and the other sites of Gateway National Recreation Area celebrated the park's 30th anniversary. When the United States Congress created Gateway in 1972, it marked the culmination of decades of hard work by local governments, citizen groups, the National Park Service, and members of Congress to create the first urban national park in the United States. The park brings the national park experience to residents of the most densely populated city in the nation. It protects portions of the coastal ecosystem of one of the most highly developed commercial and industrial regions in the world, and it provides a model for how degraded resources can be rehabilitated.

Jamaica Bay brings the national park experience to residents of the most densely populated city in the nation.

Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge is one of the special places that make up Gateway National Recreation Area. The Jamaica Bay Report focuses on the wildlife refuge, adjacent park lands, and urban areas that surround the bay. The Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge encompasses 2500 acres within the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens in New York City. This refuge, the only one in the national park system, provides a variety of habitats for more than 300 kinds of waterfowl and shorebirds. It is a critical stop-over area along the Eastern Flyway migration route and is one of the best bird-watching locations in the western hemisphere. A diversity of species – including the glossy ibis, great blue heron, snowy egret, marsh hawk, eastern kingbird, terns, and a variety of gulls – can be found in the bay area.

However, Jamaica Bay is changing. Its salt marsh islands are disappearing at an alarming rate. If projected trends are correct, the

Dear Friends,

The National Park Service is the steward of Jamaica Bay. However, management of Jamaica Bay occurs within the larger context of New York City and of the actions of many agencies, organizations, and individuals. To be responsible and effective, we must look into this larger system.

That's why we're preparing a report on Jamaica Bay. It's a fact-finding exercise to 1.) identify everyone who has a stake in Jamaica Bay and its ecosystem, 2.) understand the missions of the agencies and organizations that are active in the bay and find commonalities of purpose, and 3.) identify complementary programs and activities, as well as potential conflicts. We will use this information to fine-tune what we are doing and maximize the benefits to the bay and the city.

We began this process by meeting with city, state, and federal agencies that have jurisdictional responsibility in the bay. Through this newsletter and upcoming public open houses, we want to learn from our partner organizations, as well as the general public, about their thoughts and concerns for the bay. The workshops will culminate in a report that we will issue this Spring.

Our hope is that this report will document why Jamaica Bay is important to the people of New York and will suggest how we might best care for this important resource by working through differences and finding ways to work together.

Billy Garrett, Jamaica Bay Unit Superintendent

islands may vanish entirely within a few decades. What does marsh disappearance indicate about the health of the ecosystem? What dynamics are causing the change? What actions should be taken?

The natural processes occurring in Jamaica Bay are complicated and not fully understood. The bay's watershed covers 142 square miles of Brooklyn, Queens, and Nassau County. Much of the Jamaica Bay shoreline is hardened with infrastructure: Kennedy International Airport flanks the bay's north shore, the Shore (Belt) Parkway follows the northwest shore, and bulkheads line many stretches of coastline. Channel dredging has altered the natural flow of water and sedimentation through the system. Over time, Breezy Point has built up and expanded to the west, constricting flow through the bay's entrance. In addition, three sewage treatment plants discharge an estimated 300 million gallons of treated waste water.

The environmental health of Jamaica Bay is not the only concern. The bay means many things to many people. What opportunities does the future hold for fishing, boating, and other recreational uses? What role will Jamaica Bay play in New York City's future?

Although the National Park Service is the federal trustee of the bay, it can not address these problems alone. The National Park Service is working closely with city, regional, state, and federal partners as well as community groups, environmental organizations, recreation groups, and the general public to understand the issues and find solutions. These entities have different views, and value the bay's resources for different reasons and from different perspectives. The goal of this project is to develop a vision for Jamaica Bay's future that is shared among these many interest groups.

What is Being Done?

More than 25 public agencies have jurisdiction or some regulatory responsibility for activities within Jamaica Bay. To better understand the activities of each agency, the National Park Service invited representatives to two workshops in the fall of 2002. City, regional, state, and federal agencies were asked to explain their mission as it relates to Jamaica Bay and to discuss ongoing projects in Jamaica Bay. The agencies involved and the draft map highlighting some of these projects, are below.

FEDERAL

- Army Corps of Engineers (USCOE)
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
- National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
- National Park Service (NPS)
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- U.S. Coast Guard
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

STATE

- Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)
- Department of State

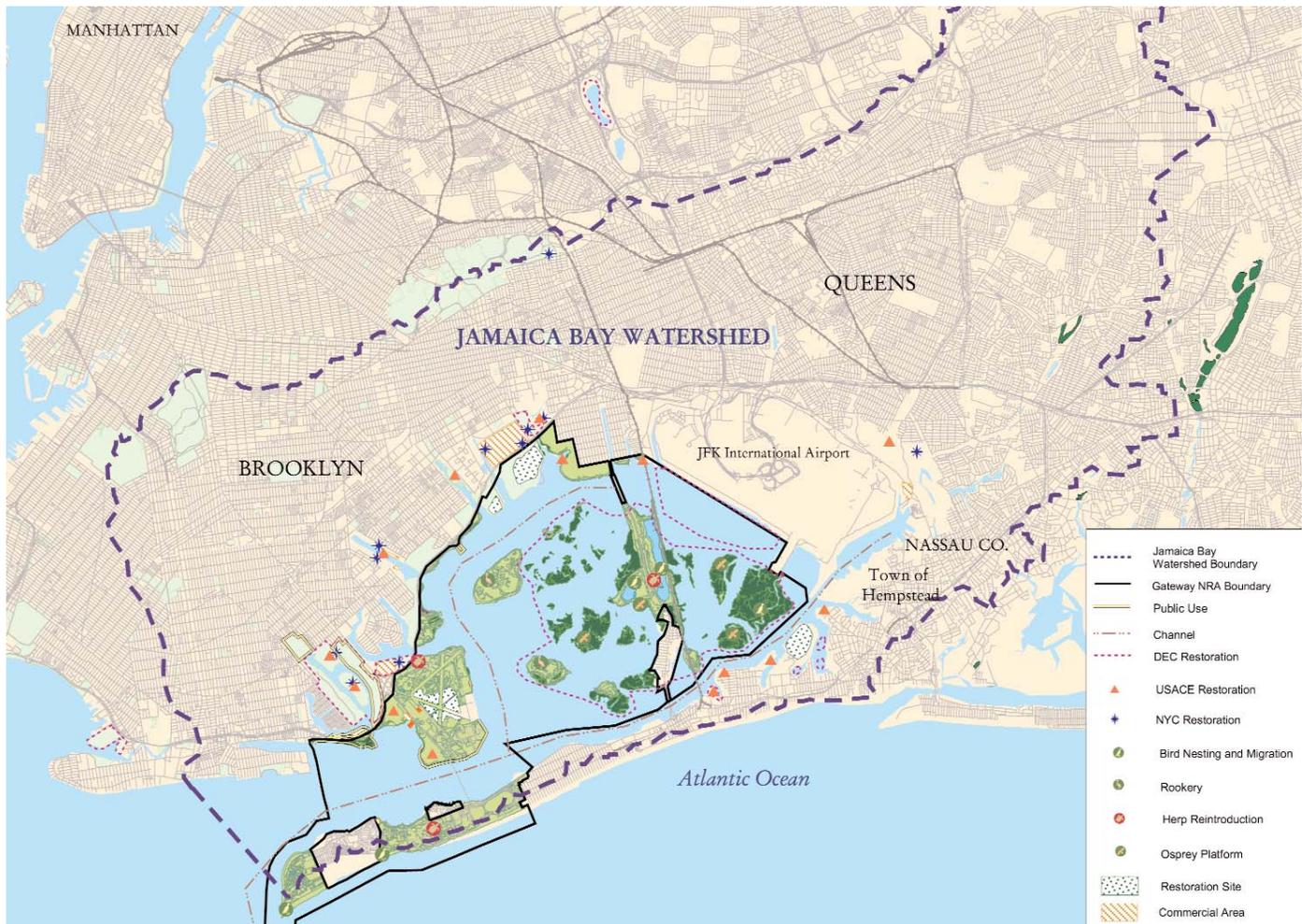
- Empire State Development Corp.
- Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (SHPO)

REGIONAL

- Interstate Environmental Commission
- NY/NJ Port Authority (NYNJPA)

CITY / BOROUGH / COUNTY

- NYC Department of City Planning
- NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)
- NYC Department of Health (DOH)
- NYC Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR)
- NYC Department of Sanitation
- NYC Department of Transportation
- NYC Economic Development Corporation
- Office of the Mayor
- Borough of Brooklyn
- Borough of Queens
- Nassau County
- Town of Hempstead



What Does the Future Hold?

There is a lot of activity in Jamaica Bay, but are the projects and management decisions leading to a common future for the bay? As part of the agency workshops last fall, the National Park Service asked the participating public agencies to try to describe the desired future conditions they envision for the bay. These desired future conditions describe what resource and use conditions the agencies would like to see in the future, but do not prescribe how to achieve these conditions. We hope that the agencies, in partnership with groups and individuals that use and care about the Jamaica Bay, will work collectively and individually to achieve these conditions.

Natural & Cultural Resources

- Negative environmental effects of toxic materials in the bay are mitigated and water quality supports a variety of biological resources.
- Important natural and cultural bay resources that are not currently protected are identified and preserved.
- The bay ecosystem is protected through identification, protection, and restoration of valuable habitat and open space, and is able to support a diversity of native living resources.
- The bay is managed to maintain and enhance internationally significant resources, including migratory and resident bird populations.
- The effects of noise, air, water, and light pollution within the bay ecosystem are reduced.

Use & Enjoyment

- Opportunities exist for the public to experience and enjoy the bay's natural, cultural, and recreational resources without adversely impacting the ecosystem.
- Management of bay resources is flexible enough to allow for adaptation to the public's needs and desires that may arise in the future.
- Jamaica Bay visitors are active stewards of ecosystem resources as volunteers, educators, students, land managers, and citizen experts.

Urban Environment

- Existing commercial, industrial, and residential landowners and users are stewards of the bay.
- Future growth and development within the watershed improves the vitality and aesthetics of the bay ecosystem.
- Waste management does not impair the health of the bay ecosystem, but contributes positively to the bay's economic and environmental health.
- Management of the bay allows for sustainable, efficient transportation that contributes positively to the ecosystem and environment.
- Communities and the public in and around the bay are an integral part of the ongoing dialogue about the bay, its resources, and its future.

Research Projects

The stresses of human activity are having a great impact on Jamaica Bay's natural processes. This combination of ecological vitality and urban impacts provided the impetus for the creation of the Jamaica Bay Learning Center for Applied Research on Urban Ecology (the Learning Center). This new institution will study the bay with the objective of applying research findings to sound management practices, and demonstrating to the general public how their actions and choices are major influences on their local, national, and global ecological community. As an initial step in tracking research projects in the bay, and keeping the public informed, the National Park Service is creating an online database of research projects. For more information, contact Kim Tripp, Research Coordinator for the Jamaica Bay Learning Center, at 718-338-3688 or kim_tripp@nps.gov.





National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Gateway National Recreation Area
Jamaica Bay Institute
HQ Building 69
Floyd Bennett Field
Brooklyn, New York 11234

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What's Next?



Many people and groups care deeply about Jamaica Bay. The National Park Service and partner agencies would like to hear from you about why the bay is important to you and how it should be managed in the future. You have several opportunities to provide your ideas and input. You can complete the enclosed comment form and mail it to us or complete the online version (www.nps.gov/gate) and e-mail it to us. You can also attend one of the open houses that the National Park Service and its partner agencies will be hosting. The open houses will be held at the Salt Marsh Nature Center on:

Friday, February 28, 2003
2:00 PM 7:00 PM

Saturday, March 1, 2003
Noon 5:00 PM

The open houses will be an informal opportunity for you to share your ideas about the bay. The content of each open house will be the same. Staff will be available for the entire time and no formal presentations will be made – so come and go as you please. Please bring photos, books, letters, or anything that conveys why Jamaica Bay is a special place to you and how you'd like to see it managed in the future. For more information on the open houses, please contact Carole Silano at 718-354-4606.

Directions

By Car: Take the Belt Parkway to Kings Plaza exit, then north on Flatbush Avenue to Avenue U. Turn left on Avenue U and continue west for 10 blocks. Pass 33rd Street and look for a parking lot on right.

By Public Transportation: Take the B46, B2, or B41 to Kings Plaza, transfer for the westbound B3 bus to East 33rd Street and Avenue U.

Take train 2 or 5 to Norstrand Avenue, then take the B41 to Kings plaza or B3 west to East 33rd and Avenue U.

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Gateway National Recreation Area

Although public agencies have legal responsibilities for Jamaica Bay, they are only some of the many players in the bay. Researchers, environmental organizations, recreationalists, and area residents are all important users of the bay and partners in its future management. The Park Service would like to hear from you or your organization about the questions public agencies recently discussed. Please give us your ideas by completing this comment form and sending it back to us by **March 15, 2003**. Fold this form so that the mailing address is on the outside, apply adequate postage, and tape closed. Feel free to attach additional sheets of paper or access the comment form online at www.nps.gov/gate. Also, please plan to attend one of the public open houses planned for **February 28th** and **March 1, 2003**. More information on the open houses can be found on page 4 of this newsletter.

Why is Jamaica Bay important to you? What do you value about the bay and want to see protected or enhanced?

Are you part of a group that uses the bay? If so, please list your group's name, briefly explain your mission, and describe the kinds of activities you participate in?

Do the desired future conditions described on page 3 match your goals for the bay's future management? Is there anything about the statements you would change or are there new statements you would offer?

Are there steps you believe the public agencies and private organizations should take to achieve these conditions?



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JAMAICA BAY INSTITUTE
HQ BUILDING 69
FLOYD BENNETT FIELD
BROOKLYN NEW YORK 11234



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