

Ecosystem restoration promotes understanding

By Josephine Axt, Ph.D.

Environmental Analysis Branch, Planning Division

As part of the Corps' commitment to public involvement, Chris Ricciardi, a District archaeologist, recently made a presentation to students at Curtis Junior High School in Brooklyn. The presentation focused on the cultural history and the Corps' proposed restoration project at Gerritsen Creek, N.Y.

Ricciardi's one-hour presentation included slides of visual images dating to the turn of the twentieth century and previous archaeological excavations. The more recent research showed the various stages of the modern history of Gerritsen's Creek, including how it used to extend approximately eight blocks further north than its current ending point at Avenue U in Brooklyn, N.Y.

"Students were particularly interested in the life of the Native Americans, the Canarsee," said Ricciardi. "Most students knew the name from the area of Kings County that is named Canarsee, but few realized it came from the local group living in Gerritsen's Creek."

The students were also interested to know that Marine Park Junior High School, which although situated in Marine Park is outside the project area, was constructed on top of the largest Native American village in Kings County.

Due to the enthusiasm with which the presentation was received, the assistant vice principal for the school asked Ricciardi if he would make a presentation to the local school district about the District's restoration project and how the schools could tie the restoration into the schools' curriculum. Ricciardi has been in touch with several history teachers and is coordinating to arrange more discussions and cultural-history walking tours through the area.

Within the past century, the salt marsh community at Gerritsen Creek was altered by dredging and filling activities associated with the construction and maintenance of the Jamaica Bay federal navigation channel.

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The Gerritsen's Creek ecosystem restoration project is conducted under Section 1135 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986, as amended. Under Section 1135, the Corps is authorized to review the need for modifications to existing projects for the purpose of providing measures to improve environmental quality.

All Section 1135 projects require a non-Federal sponsor to provide 25 percent of the cost of any modification and 100 percent of the cost associated with operation and maintenance.

In its report entitled *Significant Habitats and Habitat Complexes of the New York Bight Region* (1999), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified Jamaica Bay in general and Gerritsen Creek in particular as coastal habitats warranting special protection in the form of preservation and restoration of habitats conducive to sustaining and expanding the region's native living resources.

The NYCDEP Jamaica Bay Watershed Management Plan recommended that existing wetland and grassland areas in Jamaica Bay be restored and protected, and invasive species (e.g., *Phragmites australis*) be controlled. The Trust for Public Land and the New York City Audubon Society also recognized the existing undeveloped wetland and upland habitats within Jamaica Bay as vital to the area's continued use by important fish and wildlife species.



Ecosystem restoration (cont'd)

New York District is completing an environmental assessment and ecosystem restoration report for restoring over 35 acres of tidal salt marsh, tidal creeks and ponds, and maritime grassland along Gerritsen Creek.

Historical records indicate that the Gerritsen Creek area suffered approximately the same 75 percent wetland loss that Jamaica Bay, Queens has been reported to have experienced. In the early 1900's, the salt marshes were part of extensive coastal wetlands of Jamaica Bay, renowned for an abundance and diversity of shellfish. Rivaling its ecological importance for shellfish, was its role as a nursery and feeding grounds for countless species of birds and fish.

"While investigating the past and current ecological functions of the area, the District also studied the cultural resources. The Gerritsen Creek area has a rich cultural history dating back to the year 1000. The Canarsee Native American tribe and Dutch and English settlers used the area as a food source. Native Ameri-

cans also produced "wampum," which is currency made from oyster shells," said Ricciardi.

The existing Gerritsen's Creek site is an approximately 67-acre site located within a highly urban area. Although habitat alteration and fragmentation have reduced the ecological value of the remaining tracts of wetland acreage, the site has great potential for ecological restoration. The selected restoration design restores tidal flow in several areas around the site, creates a native grassland meadow in adjacent upland areas, and promotes overall ecological diversity while preserving the desirable natural areas and passive recreation uses that currently exist on site.

Project Biologist Melissa Alvarez and Project Manager Dan Falt conducted a public meeting and walking tour of the site in December 2002, along with the project's non-Federal sponsor the Natural Resources Group of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. Public input and response to the project was positive. Construction is currently estimated for Spring 2004.

30 second commercial



Rifat Salim

Rifat Salim, is an intern in Engineering. Salim graduated from the City College of New York in 2000 with a masters degree in electrical engineering. Recently she visited CCNY and spoke to students about her experiences as an intern with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Federal Career Intern Program, one of several employment programs the Corps offers to college graduates and students majoring in engineering and the sciences.

CCNY's School of Engineering has approximately 2,500 students majoring in engineering each year. In 2002, 22.8 percent of the college's master's graduates were engineering majors.

The Corps offers graduates security that private industry can't offer and an opportunity to use their engineering degree and apply what they went to school for.

"I love my job with the Corps of Engineers. As an intern I am given challenging, real-life projects that really help people and I get paid for it too!" said Rifat Salim, Corps intern and electrical engineering graduate of the City College of New York.



New York City establishes city services 311 help line



A new phone number was established at New York City Hall for citizens seeking non-emergency information. The number is 311. Within the five boroughs of New York City, the 311 service center phone number was created for residents to get non-emergency services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The 311 number can also be accessed outside of New York City by dialing (212) NEW YORK. Some examples of non-emergency services: noise complaints; obstructed driveways; library operating hours; reporting street potholes, street lights needing repair; garbage collection.