

ARMY CORPS & NYC RESTORE SOUNDVIEW PARK

Friday, January 4, 2013 – 9:28pm



Thirty years ago, Elbin Mena was repairing a hole on his father's roof in the Bronx. "I looked out at Soundview Park. It was filled with abandoned cars and burnt out shacks and I said to myself, 'Boy, this park could look beautiful if given some money and attention,'" said Mena.

It was at that time that Mena decided to make the Bronx his home and Soundview Park the place he envisioned. He used his own jeep to pull out debris from the park including abandoned cars and boats and beautified the grounds by planting seeds and painting benches.

Mena also became a park warden, president of the community's homeowners association and friends

with local officials – basically the face and voice of his community. “When I start something I don't leave it until I'm finished!” said Mena, today a retired New York City Police Detective.

This past fall, Mena saw his vision begin to become reality. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District, in partnership with the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation, is completing the Soundview Park Ecosystem Restoration Project.

The project is returning some of the park's lost marshland and creating an upland meadow and forest. This will provide a healthy ecosystem for wildlife to flourish and an aesthetically pleasing and safe place for residents.

The 205-acre Soundview Park is located in the South Central section of the Borough of the Bronx in New York City. The park lines one and a half miles of the Bronx River and visitors have a clear view of the nearby New York City skyline.

The park was built on a former landfill. Before it became a landfill it was a network of 80-acres of salt marsh, 40-acres of open water, upland meadows and oak-hickory forests.

In the early 20th century, it was a common practice to fill in marshland with soil and man-made debris. This destroyed most of the park's marsh and open water areas and degraded and hardened the shoreline.

In the second half of the 20th century the park basically turned into a public dumping ground. “Every day I would go out on my back deck, which by the way I built with debris that washed up to my home, and see smoke in the sky. People were

bringing their cars to the park to burn and abandoned them. One day a dead body was even found on the shore here. It was real bad,” said Mena.

In the fall of 2011, the Army Corps began construction on the Soundview Park Ecosystem Restoration Project in collaboration with the NYC Parks Department. Additional agencies providing support include the NY State Department of State with funds from the Clean Water – Clean Air Bond Act, the NYC Department of Sanitation, which provided mitigation funding and the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation.

The project is taking place on a 15-acre portion of the southern end of the park that sits next to Mena's property.

The Army Corps excavated approximately 52,000 cubic yards of soil and fill material from one area of the site to create a 3-acre marsh where there hadn't been one before. This material was placed northwest of the marsh area to create an upland meadow and forest. The material was placed on 6 acres of what will be a 12-acre upland meadow and forest.

The soil in both areas was graded to proper elevations, invasive plant species, including the Common Reed and Knotweed, were cleared and then a bed of clean compost, soil and sand was placed. The remaining six acres was cleared and provided a bed of clean compost, soil, and sand.

The marsh area was planted with six species of grasses as well as several species of upland shrubs, trees and an herbaceous mix. The grass species

included Saltmarsh Cordgrass, Saltgrass, Saltmeadow Cordgrass, Big Cordgrass, Chairmaker's Bulrush and Saltmeadow Rush. The upland meadow and forest will be planted with 1,000 upland shrubs and 5,000 upland trees.

Additional features were constructed on the site to make the park welcoming to area residents. An overlook area was created by the marsh that has an educational sign that informs residents about the marsh, its habitat, and animal residents.

Project Manager Ronald Pinzon, US Army Corps of Engineers, New York District said, "It's rewarding to perform an ecosystem restoration project in a densely populated urban area because there are few opportunities to perform this type of work where millions can benefit."

Improving the ecosystem will provide a habitat for birds and marine life and improve the water quality.

Wildlife has already been spotted. "We regularly observe the site and we've already spotted Mud Snails, Fiddler Crabs, Horseshoe Crabs, Great Blue Heron and Egrets," said Catherine Alcoba, project biologist, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District.

The portion of the park where the project is taking place is expected to be open to the public within two years after all of the plant's roots have taken hold.

Though the region was severely impacted by Hurricane Sandy, the project area survived the storm well. "We were pleased that the new marsh at Soundview, which had just been planted in July, was completely intact aside from some debris that had washed up. Damage only occurred on the upland

slope, planted a bit later, and it was far less than I feared for such a recent planting. When the team met on site after the storm, we all breathed a big sigh of relief,” said Kathleen McCarthy, wetland and riparian project manager, Natural Resources Group, New York Department of Parks and Recreation. “It’s these types of projects that are what builds resilience into our coastal areas.”

Today when Mena looks out at Soundview Park he has a much better view. “This is a beautiful sight now for everybody. I spend hours in my backyard just looking at the egrets. I’ve also watched osprey diving down into the water. I can just imagine when the plants are fully grown. It’s going to be a haven for wildlife,” he said.

By Dr. JoAnne Castagna, Public Affairs Specialist and Writer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District. She can be reached at joanne.castagna@usace.army.mil. Follow her on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/writer4usacenyc>