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## Community News



### Army Corps of Engineers Restores Marine Park in Southeast Brooklyn

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By JoAnne Castagna  
Army Corps of Engineers

MARINE PARK -- It was the 1970s, and I was a young girl living near Marine Park in southeastern Brooklyn.

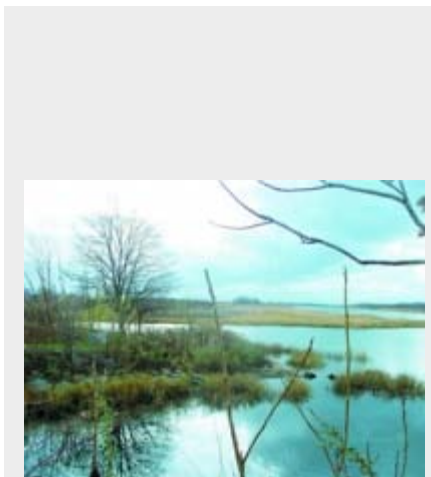
I have fond memories of the park that include walking with my dad along the tree lines and playing with my brother on the open fields.

I also distinctly recall smelling strange odors from nearby landfills and seeing abandoned cars along the waters, a distance from where I played. At the time, I didn't think of these things as bad, but merely as the character of my neighborhood.

Little did I know that decades later I would become a writer for the U.S.

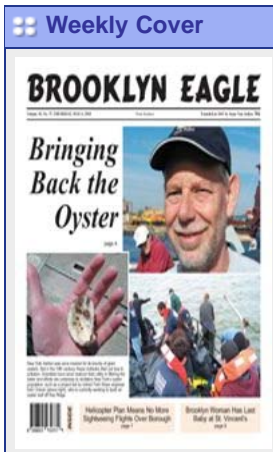
Army Corps of Engineers, a federal agency that's restoring the park's natural habitat for today's children. This generation will have their own memories of wildlife, nature trails and the scent of freshly grown plants.

In December 2009, the Army Corps' New York District in partnership with



A scenic view of the affected area of Marine Park before construction began on the Gerritsen Creek Marine Park Ecosystem Restoration Project.

Photo by Diane Castagna



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the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and the New York state Department of Environmental Conservation began work on the Gerritsen Creek Marine Park Ecosystem Restoration Project.

Dan Falt, a project manager with the Army Corps' civil works branch, explained, "Our hope with this habitat restoration project is to not only have an excellent habitat, but to also create a beautiful place for visitors to get close to natural wetland habitats."

"The Army Corps is often required to perform ecosystem restoration work as part of all of its construction projects. However, the environmental work being performed on this project is not a result of construction work. It is a pure environmental project from beginning to end."

The project will restore 32 acres of marsh and around 20 acres of coastal grassland in portions of Marine Park.

The 798-acre public park is primarily a marsh that is adjacent to Jamaica Bay. In the mid-20th century, developers took dredged sand from the nearby Rockaway Inlet and filled in most of the marshland to create the residential community of Marine Park.

Over the years, the remaining marsh degraded, due to the land filling, dumping and the overgrowing of plant life.

Restoring the marshland has many benefits, including improved water quality, increased fish and wildlife habitats, and providing the public a pleasing place for recreation and fishing.

**Restoring the Marshland**

To restore the marshland, the team will be removing invasive plants, replanting native plants and removing dredged material from the marsh, so that the marsh can receive the tide water it needs from Gerritsen Creek.

First, the invasive phragmites -- or reed grass -- were removed. Phragmites were overgrowing in the area and inhibiting the growth of other plant life because they were crowding the soil and blocking sunlight.

"There was a forest of phragmites 12 feet high!" said Falt. "After we removed them, we were astonished to see how much land we had."

Hearing this from Falt made me laugh. As a young child I thought this very tall vegetation was wheat.

Presently, the team is removing sand and soil from the marsh areas and placing it in different locations in the park. The sand is being graded and contoured to levels that are suitable for a marsh and coastal grassland habitat.

The team is grading and contouring the sand so that the salt water tide from Gerritsen Creek can wash over the land and create the growth of spartina marsh and not phragmites. Phragmites don't like salt water and will die off. The grading and contouring will continue until later this spring.

In late spring 2010, planting will begin. The team is planting a variety of native coastal grasses. This vegetation will act as filters for the area's water, lessening the negative impact caused by runoff and other contaminants.

**Helping Fish, Birds**

Besides providing the vegetation the wildlife needs to survive, the team will be taking other measures to encourage wildlife to thrive in the area. There are over 80 species of fish and 330 species of birds, some threatened and endangered, in



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the area.

For example, osprey nesting poles will be placed in the park to encourage the native bird to breed and live in the area and a 2-acre bird sanctuary is being created.

Features will be added to the park to entice the public there as well. Wildlife observation points and new nature trails will be created. Old trails will be restored. Educational signs will be posted along these paths to inform the public about the park's different species and plant life.

The project will be completed this summer, and the land will be open to the public next summer after the newly planted vegetation has grown.

I plan on visiting my old park when the project is completed. I will always fondly remember being there as a child, but I will also look at the present as the time the Army Corps improved the park for the youth of today and tomorrow.

To learn more about the Hudson Raritan Estuary Comprehensive Restoration Plan and the Gerritsen Creek Marine Park Ecosystem Restoration Project, please visit [www.TheWatersWeShare.org](http://www.TheWatersWeShare.org). Dr. JoAnne Castagna is a technical writer-editor for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District. She can be reached at [joanne.castagna@usace.army.mil](mailto:joanne.castagna@usace.army.mil)

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