



### Staten Island Bluebelt

I would like to thank each of the authors in this winter issue of *Clear Waters* for their articles on the Staten Island Bluebelt. Originally, Marcellus Shale drilling in New York State was our scheduled topic; however, timing for development of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) required rescheduling the topic for Summer 2010. This will allow preparation of the Final GEIS and the development of NYSDEC Regulations

for drilling activities to be covered. Our Staten Island Bluebelt authors graciously moved up their scheduled Spring 2010 submissions to this Winter 2009 issue. I must admit that prior to reading the articles in this edition, I was not familiar with the Staten Island Bluebelt. After reading these articles, I see why this program is very much considered a model of current day "Green and Sustainable Infrastructure."

Dana F. Gumb, Jr., New York City Department of Environmental Protection (NYCDEP) Director of the Staten Island Bluebelt Program, provides a very interesting review of the program. The Bluebelt program was developed as a means of creating an effective stormwater management approach while also protecting and enhancing the natural freshwater wetlands of the Island. The program developed best management practices (BMPs) for stormwater control that included constructed wetlands, meandering streams and outlet stilling basins. These BMPs were located where storm sewers discharged to natural wetland areas. Besides improving stormwater runoff control and water quality, an important benefit was improved habitat for native wildlife. Through the program's development, the NYCDEP has been able to preserve natural wetlands while implementing an effective stormwater management program – all accomplished at a significant cost savings over traditional storm sewer construction.

In many ways, this is similar to combined sewer issues facing many of the larger cities in the eastern United States. The primary difference is that the Bluebelt program was developed prior to the construction of a proposed combined sewer system. The NYCDEP had to demonstrate that it was more cost effective to acquire property to maintain wetlands for storm drainage than to construct conventional combined sewers. The other key difference is that NYCDEP wanted to preserve one of the largest and last remaining freshwater wetlands in the City.

Although many cities do not have the natural resources of Staten Island, there are opportunities to incorporate similar approaches in combined sewer and storm sewer programs. Most cities in New York State were developed long before the concept of green infrastructure was even considered. These cities have old infrastructure with outdated combined sewer systems and ineffective stormwater management systems. It is much more difficult and costly to retrofit these old systems. Nevertheless, as these old systems are updated, we must use such opportunities to incorporate green technology to not only protect our water resources but also enhance the areas in which we live. Through the success of the Bluebelt program, New York City has adopted this approach in their PlaNYC 2030 as a means of

improving climactic, infrastructural and demographic challenges in the future. I'm sure that you will find each of these Staten Island Bluebelt articles to be very interesting and informative.

### Update on NYWEA Activities

**WWTP Operator Recertification Training:** Our Task Force for WWTP Operator Recertification Training is developing its plan for expanding New York Water Environment Association (NYWEA) training programs. In the past, the NYSDEC has provided a significant amount of the recertification training to WWTP operators but because of recent staff retirees and budget cutbacks, the NYSDEC will not provide the same level of training as in the past. NYWEA has been working with NYSDEC over the last year to develop a program to maintain the same valuable recertification training required by licensed WWTP operators. We are also working together to develop new training programs. The Task Force recently completed a survey of NYWEA members and licensed WWTP operators across New York and obtained important information on training topics. This survey will be used to determine training priorities on a regional basis.

**Webcasting Task Force:** The Webcasting Task Force was formed early in 2009 to identify how the NYWEA may utilize webcasting to support current member education/training programs. Such "long distance learning" is becoming more important due to increased restrictions on meeting/travel costs, and improved technology and attendee acceptance. I believe that the NYWEA should be a leader in this area, not a follower. The Water Environment Federation (WEF) has recently begun producing a series of webcast technical seminars. I would like to see NYWEA chapters throughout the state host meetings where members can view these WEF webcast seminars. These seminars provide an easy way to transfer valuable education/training information to our members with minimal effort.

**Scholarship Program:** Ten years ago, the NYWEA developed a scholarship program to support students entering environmentally related college programs. The program's goal is to accrue a \$1 million endowment by 2010 to create a self-sustaining scholarship award fund. Our last fundraising event was September 24th at the Boathouse Restaurant in Central Park. The event was a great success with a sellout crowd, raising more than \$70,000. With these contributions, our total scholarship fund has topped \$800,000. To date, we have given out \$158,000 in 73 individual scholarships! Recently, I had the personal honor of representing NYWEA to award a \$1,500 scholarship to Colby Fisher, a student at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

The majority of our donations have come from fundraising events such as the Central Park event and from corporate sponsors. Increasing the number of individual contributions is important for two reasons: it increases our fund balance, but more importantly, it increases our membership's percent contribution. Large corporations ask for this information before they will contribute, and are much more likely to give support if the membership also demonstrates its support. Contributions can be as small as \$25 a year for four years. ***With your help we will meet our goal by 2010!***

Bruce G. Munn, PE