

**American Littoral Society – Northeast Chapter • Aquatic Research and Environmental Assessment Center • Bay Improvement Group • Broad Channel Civic Association • Brooklyn Bird Club • Brooklyn Greens/Green Party • Clean Ocean Action • Great South Bay Audubon Society • Jamaica Bay Ecowatchers • National Parks Conservation Association • Natural Resources Defense Council • Natural Resources Protective Association • New York City Audubon • NYC Park Advocates • No Spray Coalition • NY/NJ Baykeeper • Riverkeeper • Rockaway Waterfront Alliance • Sebago Canoe Club • Sheepshead Bay/Plumb Beach Civic Association**

March 17, 2011

Mr. Christopher O. Ward  
Executive Director  
Port Authority of New York and New Jersey  
225 Park Avenue South  
New York, NY 10003

By Fax (212-435-6670) and U.S. Mail

Dear Mr. Ward:

The undersigned organizations write to express our strong opposition to recent proposals to expand John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) into Jamaica Bay. Such an expansion would irreversibly harm what is not simply New York City's ecological crown jewel but a wetlands and estuarine area of national importance. We ask that the Port Authority consider other available alternatives for meeting the region's airport capacity needs.

Jamaica Bay encompasses more than 25,000 acres of water, marsh, meadowland, beaches, dunes and forests in Brooklyn and Queens, all accessible by subway. It contains a federal wildlife refuge the size of 10 Central Parks, a portion of Gateway National Recreation Area, Bayswater State Park and nearly a dozen city parks. It provides nursery and foraging habitat for the region's fisheries and other marine life – indeed, Bay waters adjacent to JFK are renowned for some of the region's best fishing for bluefish and striped bass -- and is a critical bird habitat area that is visited annually by what is estimated to be nearly 20 percent of North America's bird species. It is also home to various endangered and threatened species – from sea turtles to peregrine falcons. Jamaica Bay provides visitors with opportunities to enjoy nature and all its bounty, and to find relative quietude and respite in the middle of a noisy and frenetic metropolis. In announcing last year that New York City was committing more than \$100 million to reduce water pollution in the Bay and to restore its marsh islands, Mayor Bloomberg described Jamaica Bay as “without question one of the most bountiful wildlife habitats in the entire Northeast. It is important to the people who live in the area for its rich biodiversity, the recreation it offers, and the protection the marshlands provide from flooding.” U.S. Department of Interior Secretary Salazar has described it as one of America's “great urban parks” and just last month outlined ambitious plans to further enhance Jamaica Bay's natural resource and recreational value to surrounding communities.

A study released in January by the Regional Planning Association (RPA) and funded by the Port Authority surveyed a range of alternatives for meeting projected future aviation demand

in the region.<sup>1</sup> The analysis encompassed a variety of expansion projects and operational improvements at the region's major and regional airports. The array of alternatives included certain alternatives for JFK that would extend existing runways into Jamaica Bay, build new runways in the Bay, and/or significantly increase Bay overflights.

Such an expansion of JFK would have unacceptable adverse impacts on Jamaica Bay. Hundreds of acres of the Bay would need to be permanently filled in, something currently prohibited by federal law. Intrusive commercial jet noise would increase, potentially dramatically. Wildlife conflicts with aviation safety would escalate. Finally, water pollution from the airport, which currently discharges the run-off from the millions of gallons of toxic de-icing fluids used each winter directly into the Bay, would likely increase.

Our groups do not oppose efforts to increase the region's aviation capacity. The RPA report identifies a number of alternatives that would satisfy the authors' most optimistic projections of long-term aviation demand growth, including an additional runway at JFK that does not require filling or additional overflights of Jamaica Bay, expansion of Newark Airport (which can be done within the existing footprint), build-out of the regional airports, and technological improvements in air traffic control. We strongly recommend that the Port Authority consider such alternatives in lieu of further consideration of expanding JFK's runways into Jamaica Bay.

We are confident that you share our view that Jamaica Bay is a natural treasure of singular value. We look forward to continuing to work with you to protect and restore it as a cornerstone of New York City's and the region's environmental legacy for generations to come.

Respectfully yours,

Brad Sewell, Senior Attorney  
Natural Resources Defense  
Council

Mitchel Cohen  
Brooklyn Greens/Green Party  
No Spray Coalition

Jeanne DuPont, Director  
Rockaway Waterfront Alliance

Steve Barrison, President  
Bay Improvement Group

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<sup>1</sup> Zuban, *et al.*, Upgrading to World Class –The Future of the New York Region's Airports, Regional Planning Association (January 2011).

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***Signatures waived to expedite delivery.***

cc:

Senator Charles E. Schumer

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

Representative Anthony D. Weiner

Representative Gregory W. Meeks

National Park Service Director Jonathan B. Jarvis

Gateway National Recreation Area Superintendent Linda Canzanelli

Federal Aviation Administration Administrator J. Randolph Babbitt

Representative Audrey I. Pheffer

New York State Dep't of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Joe Martens

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg

New York City Dep't of Environmental Protection Commissioner Caswell F. Holloway

New York City Council Member James F. Gennaro

New York City Council Member Eric Ulrich

Rob Pirani, Regional Planning Association