



NEW YORK CITY AUDUBON

New York City Council Committees on Environmental Protection and Parks and Recreation

Hearing on

Intro 565 – Developing a watershed protection plan for Jamaica Bay

Intro 566 – Creating task force to study feasibility of transferring city-owned wetlands

Res. 830 – Develop a limit for nitrogen pollution in Jamaica Bay

New York City Audubon Testimony

March 31, 2005

Introduction

Good morning, my name is E.J. McAdams and I am the Executive Director of New York City Audubon – a grassroots organization that protects and conserves wild birds and habitat in the five boroughs, improving the quality of life for all New Yorkers. On behalf of our 10,000 members, I urge these Committees and the entire Council to protect the city's rich natural areas by passing Intro 565, Intro 566, and Resolution 830.

Protecting City-owned Wetlands – Intro 566

Wetlands have economic value for the city. Wetlands improve air and water quality, protect against shoreline erosion, absorb flooding, and provide opportunities for education and recreation, including birding, one of the fastest growing sports in the country.

Wetlands provide ecological benefits. They provide habitat for hundreds of species of plants, insects, reptiles and amphibians, fish, mammals, and especially birds. Because of the high abundance of food, wetlands are excellent stopover habitat for migrating birds, wintering grounds for ducks and other waterfowl, and breeding grounds for threatened species like the Piping Plover and Least Tern. The city's wetlands have also become a refuge for the Harbor Herons who now breed in New York Harbor after losing coastal breeding sites to development.

In fact, because of the initial letter asking for the transfer of city-owned wetlands by the Committees with support from New Yorkers for Parks, Wild Metro, Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental Defense, The Trust for Public Land, Regional Plan Association, and NYC Audubon, Goose Island was turned over to Parks from the Department of City Administrative Services. Only an acre,

Goose Island has a colony of over 100 nesting pairs of great and snowy egrets and black- and yellow-crowned night-herons. It is clear that this initiative is already making a difference.

That is why it is imperative that **Intro 566** be passed so the over 2,000 acres owned by the city will be in the hands of the department that can best manage them for wildlife and people.

Protecting Jamaica Bay

There is probably no greater habitat priority in the city than protecting Jamaica Bay. NYC Audubon strongly supports the passage of **Intro 565 and Resolution 830**.

For twenty-five years, NYC Audubon has advocated for the protection of Jamaica Bay. With The Trust for Public Land, NYC Audubon has produced two reports: *Buffer the Bay* and *Buffer the Bay Revisited*, which provide recommendations for prioritizing and protecting habitat in the Bay. Last year, NYC Audubon and New Yorkers for Parks launched the Natural Areas Initiative. (The Natural Areas Initiative Report is attached.) Of the 173 natural areas in the database, over 30 are located in Jamaica Bay. Jamaica Bay is an Important Bird Area, a designation by Audubon and Bird Life International acknowledging its importance to bird populations on a global scale. It is also an international birding hotspot where birder-tourists visit to add species to their life lists. For the future of Jamaica Bay it is critical that a scientifically sound, but expedient, watershed plan be developed.

Integral to the watershed plan is the implementation of a maximum daily load to protect the Bay against nitrogen pollution. Nitrogen pollution is major cause of poor water quality and algal blooms that negatively impact marine wildlife. It is also suspected that nitrogen may be a major cause of marsh loss and the deterioration of the islands in Jamaica Bay.

Conclusion

NYC Audubon applauds these Committees for their leadership and urges the whole Council to pass Intros 565 and 566 and Resolution 830 to protect and conserve these wetland habitats for the wild birds that frequent the city and for the quality of life of all New Yorkers.