

THE LINNAEAN
NEWS



LETTER

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MORE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Gateway Loses Ground for Wildlife

Sherry Felix

A large amount of vegetation and land has been eliminated for use by wildlife at



and storage areas will be open for private enterprise and sports facilities because there will not be any wildlife left to protect.

I was unable to survey properly the parts of FBF that are now fenced off. There are areas set aside for New York City police helicopter training and the city sanitation department. I saw some sanitation trucks using the runways for training on skidding out on ice patches. The area set aside for the pipeline installation and other Transco facilities has led to a number of test drills on some of the public trails. The sanitation department is also using FBF for the post-Sandy air curtain burn of debris from the storm. The noxious smoke smell lingers and is possibly carcinogenic.

Floyd Bennett Field (FBF). The amount of Superstorm Sandy relief operations, natural gas pipeline construction, and subsequent vegetation removal being done there will make the area inhospitable for wildlife and permanently alter FBF as we know it. The exception is the grassy sides of the runways; these areas need to be cut back at appropriate times to provide habitat for grassland species. A very large area of FBF is now taken over for construction sheds for the pipeline. When the construction of the pipeline is over it is not probable that these areas will be restored for wildlife use. Most likely the construction





[All photos © Sherry Felix.]



At the Jamaica Bay Task Force meeting on January 29, 2013, I asked Gateway NRA Superintendent Linda Canzanelli, “Are there any plans to replace the missing vegetation in Gateway post-Sandy with new, or better, salt-tolerant plants to withstand flooding?” Her answer was that the immediate focus is on replacing the vegetation for recreational areas. Superintendent Canzanelli shows little interest in wildlife, evident in the current and planned uses and projects for Gateway NRA. The focus seems not to be on maintaining or expanding areas for wildlife. Instead it is on revenue generating recreational facilities, campgrounds, and private enterprise.

A few links on the subject:

Federal contract for the Army Corps of Engineers to remove vegetation at FBF:

<http://www.fbodaily.com/archive/2013/01-January/14-Jan-2013/FBO-02964482.htm>

New York Times article about the gas pipeline:

<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/08/29/proposed-gas-pipeline-endorsed-by-the-city-drawscriticism/>

President Obama approves the pipeline:

<http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20121127/new-york-city/president-obama-approves-new-naturalgas-pipeline-brooklyn-queens>

Air curtain burn:

http://www.fema.gov/photolibrary/photo_details.do?id=61701

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## **Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge post-Sandy**

Andrew Rubenfeld

A meeting of the Jamaica Bay Task Force, sponsored by the American Littoral Society and Jamaica Bay EcoWatchers, was held at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge visitor center on January 29, 2013. About 150 people were in attendance, including a good number of Linnaean Society members. It was the Task

Force’s first meeting since the October 2012 storm. The agenda included: Commissioner Carter Strickland of New York City’s Department of Environmental Protection; Superintendent Linda Canzanelli of Gateway National Recreation Area; Project Managers Dan Falt and Lenny Houston of the Army Corps of Engineers; and Region 2 Director Venetia Lannon of New York State’s Department of Environmental Conservation.

It was a carefully packaged meeting covering wide-ranging aspects of the impact of and the recovery from Sandy. The extensive damage to the wildlife refuge was also addressed mostly in response to questions from concerned people in attendance. The breach of the West Pond is no doubt the most significant conservation issue at the refuge. Repairing it will require significant use of the funds provided by the hurricane recovery act passed by Congress. But repair is a complex issue. Another area of the perimeter of the West Pond is in danger of being eroded and breached. A plan for the comprehensive rehabilitation of the pond – and its drainage system – needs to be established and coordinated with other post-hurricane restoration projects. The East Pond, similarly affected by the damage to the adjacent subway tracks, has been stabilized. But it too needs to have the pipeline regulating pond water levels overhauled. Further, many of the conifers in the refuge may die because of the salt spray from the storm. There is also a huge amount wind and tidal debris, some not easily removable, throughout the refuge.

Add to this that the refuge still does not have a manager.

Superintendent Canzanelli was proud and eager to inform those present that trees were being replanted at a Gateway NRA ball field on Staten Island because doing so was good for the local community. What about those who make use of the refuge? Unfortunately the community of birdwatchers is scattered around the metropolitan area, lacks focused political clout, and does not bring in much revenue other than the occasional purchase at the refuge gift shop. And the bird community

is a downright revenue drain on resources unless someone can figure out how to get sandpipers to pay user fees.



The breach at the West Pond of Jamaica Bay.

Nevertheless a viable wildlife refuge in the middle of Jamaica Bay is good for the health of the bay – and the health of the bay and its wetlands is good for the survival of the surrounding human communities. The damage to Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge is dramatic and will create a furor if not dealt with sooner rather than later. It’s our job – all of us, not just Linnaean Society members – to keep fueling that furor until something constructive is done. Now that the federal money is in, there will be turf battles among the previously buddy-buddy agencies. We need to monitor real progress as well as delaying promises.

There will be future Jamaica Bay Task Force meetings, and Linnaean members will be receiving e-mail alerts and *News-Letter* follow-ups. Gateway National Recreation Area updates its information at: [www.nps.gov/gate/parknews/sandy-recovery](http://www.nps.gov/gate/parknews/sandy-recovery)

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The Conservation Committee will continue to send out e-mail alerts to give members urgent information, but the *News-Letter* is the best venue to present conservation concerns and to provide a forum for members to discuss them. To those ends, members wishing to contribute to either aspect are urged to send their material by e-mail to:

conservation@linnaeannewyork.org

Andrew Rubenfeld
Conservation Committee, chair

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### ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Field Trip Cancelled:** Because of a severe injury from a recent fall, Sarah Elliott has cancelled the Central Park Nature Walk scheduled for 6/15 (rain date 6/16). We wish Sarah a full and speedy recovery.

**New Website:** Our new website was launched April 10<sup>th</sup> by its designer, Webmaster Sherry Felix. It contains many new features: photos, videos, many additional links to other bird-related websites and a guide to Manhattan birding hotspots (not covered in New York City Audubon’s online birding guide), the brainchild of, and edited by, Linnaean treasurer Stephen Chang. We welcome suggestions for additional features. The website is at [www.linnaeannewyork.com](http://www.linnaeannewyork.com).

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