

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

NYDIA M. VELAZQUEZ

7TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

July 11, 2017

Eileen Murphy,
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
625 Broadway
Albany, New York 12233-0001

Dear Ms. Murphy,

We write to urge you to designate the Ridgewood Reservoir as a wetland- thereby granting the reservoir protection from development as provided by the Freshwater Wetlands Act. This environmental landmark, which straddles parts of Brooklyn and Queens, is not only an important example of 19th century urban infrastructure, but a unique ecological environment that deserves the protections afforded by wetland designation.

The Ridgewood Reservoir, built between 1856 and 1858, is the last remaining piece of the water supply system of the City of Brooklyn. It was an engineering marvel at the time, and continues to be an asset to Highland Park - it helps provides flood protection by temporarily holding water and slowing storm water runoff. The reservoir also offers invaluable insight into the environmental history of Brooklyn, Queens and Nassau County.

Since being decommissioned in 1989, the site has become a historical and environmental landmark and has been described as, "a beautiful fairytale forest in the middle of the city" by ecological professionals¹. The three reservoir basins have evolved into distinct ecological environments, from woodlands to wetlands. The special wetland conditions provide unique habitat for species that cannot survive elsewhere. Migratory birds depend on wetlands, and many endangered and threatened animal species require wetlands during part of their life cycle. It is home to a broad diversity of plants, over 180 species of insects, reptiles, and animals including 148 species of birds. Other mammals and reptiles found in the reservoir include opossum, raccoon, squirrels, voles, snapping turtles, garter snakes, and frogs. The reservoir's abundance of plant life includes Grey Birch trees, mosses, sedges and grasses as well as Poplar and Willow trees. Also, pools of standing water have resulted in the growth of wetland plants- some of which are listed on the Threatened and Endangered lists.

This evolution is unique in the city and affords an unequalled opportunity to study nature. Today, local schools organize trail walk educational tours of the reservoir, teaching students about the rare flora and fauna the wetland supports. With a new-found appreciation for this unique habitat, students have become some of the most vocal advocates for its protection.

¹ <https://www.villagevoice.com/2017/06/27/saving-queens-secret-wetlands/>

Additionally, the 160-year-old, 50 acre reservoir is the last vestige of Brooklyn's historic waterworks. It is imperative to retain Brooklyn's natural beauty, which is why wetland designation for the Ridgewood Reservoir is a prudent decision. In short, this unique part of our city must be preserved and ensuring the sanctity of beautiful ecological marvels must be a top priority given the Trump Administrations' lack of concern for environmental safety

As you know, community leaders, environmental organizations, and elected officials have worked together since 2009 in an effort to preserve the reservoir by attaining wetland designation. Residents and local environmental activists filed an application for wetlands designation with your organization in 2010- yet only in the last two weeks has the regional supervisor finally conducted a field survey at the reservoir; then stating the reservoir will be revisited in July before releasing findings in the fall. While we are happy to see progress is being made, the wetlands designation for the Ridgewood Reservoir has spanned over 7 years. We hope that this lengthy ordeal can be expedited, and that your organization recognizes the distinct and unique value of the Ridgewood Reservoir.

We strongly believe the Ridgewood Reservoir merits said wetland designation with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation for its urban, engineering and environmental significance. We respectfully urge you to exercise your authority and render this designation.

Sincerely,



Nydia M. Velazquez
Member of Congress

Cc: NYC H2O
Queens Borough Parks Commissioner Dotty Lewandowski
Liam Kavanagh, Deputy Parks Commissioner
Steve Zahn, Acting Director NY State DEC Region 2
Ken Scarlatelli, Natural Resource Manager for NY State DEC Region 2;
Salema Davis, CB5 Brooklyn Parks Committee Chairwoman