

THE NEWTOWN CREEK ALLIANCE

WWW.NEWTOWNCREEKALLIANCE.ORG

NEWTOWNCREEK@GMAIL.COM

February 28, 2009

Phillip Musegaas
Hudson River Program Director
Riverkeeper, Inc.
828 South Broadway
Tarrytown, NY 10591

Dear Phillip,

I am writing to respond to your request for information regarding the use of Newtown Creek for kayaking and subsistence fishing. While there has not been a formal study of recreational use of Newtown Creek, many members of the Newtown Creek Alliance spend significant time near and on the Creek and have anecdotal evidence that people regularly come into contact with Creek water.

The most frequent use of the creek is by boating organizations. The Long Island City Boathouse, a kayak club in Long Island City, frequently leads guided kayak expeditions into Newtown Creek in the spring, summer, and fall months. LIC Boathouse kayakers are always accompanied by an experienced kayaker trained in urban boating safety and first aid. However, given the industrial use of Newtown Creek, the kayakers often encounter heavy wakes. Along with the LIC Boathouse, the Creek was once the home of the East River Apprentice Shop, an organization that taught children to make and navigate wooden boats. While the ERA Shop is no longer functioning, the NCA regularly discusses funding possibilities to return the institution to the Creek.

There is also frequent non-organized use of the creek by boaters. Many people launch their own kayaks at the several street ends, and the soon-to-be-finished Manhattan Avenue Park will have a kayak launch built into the bulkhead, encouraging kayaking. Further, two sailboats often tie up along the bulkhead at the Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center and at the end of Vernon Boulevard, in Queens. We also have members with their own motor boats and row boats that on occasion journey into the creek.

People come into contact with Newtown Creek in other ways. The newly-constructed Nature Walk at the Newtown Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant is regularly visited, often by children and school groups, and it has proven impossible to keep them from wanting to touch the water. One of our members has even seen men fishing off the nature walk. Indeed, I frequently see people crabbing off the end of Manhattan Avenue. Most often boys or young men who speak Spanish and limited English, we suspect that the crabs they catch are for consumption. Finally, there is video footage of children swimming in Newtown Creek that is included in a documentary entitled "Swim for the River," which we would be happy to provide to EPA.

The reference on our website to Newtown Creek being a "swimmable river" is a reference to New York State water quality standards and is aspirational, not a reality. Currently, it is unsafe for anyone to come into direct contact with the water in the creek, particularly the farther into the creek you travel. We hope someday that this will be remedied, but regardless, the pollution does not stop people from following their instincts. We have collected just a handful of photographs taken in 2007 and 2008

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documenting recreational use of the creek. If you have any further questions, I can be reached at (646) 391-6340, and I would be happy to direct you to our members who are most frequently on the creek. Laura Hoffman, of Barge Park Pals; Paul Parkhill, of Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center; Bernard Ente, of the Working Harbor Committee; Michael Heimbinder, of Habitatmap.org; Erik Beard, of the Long Island City Boathouse; and John Lipscomb, the Boat Captain at Riverkeeper all have numerous stories that I am sure they would love to share.

Sincerely

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Katie Schmid
Director, Newtown Creek Alliance

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