



# S.W.I.M. Coalition

Stormwater Infrastructure Matters: utilizing stormwater as a resource, not a waste!

## Gowanus Canal Raw Sewage Overflows

### **ACTION ALERT!**

**Recently approved water quality plans do not address ongoing water pollution to the Gowanus Canal.**

The Gowanus Canal, once a salt marsh and creek, is an industrialized channel recovering from decades of pollution. The Canal was declared a federal Superfund site in 2010, deeming it a highly toxic site requiring federal support for remediation. The Superfund remediation process will be to dredge the toxic sludge at the bottom of Canal and cap it so more contaminated groundwater does not seep into the Canal.

However the Gowanus Canal will still be polluted by ongoing water pollution. Nearly every time it rains, raw sewage and polluted stormwater overflow from New York City's antiquated sewers. In a typical year, 263 million gallons of this "combined sewer overflow" (CSO) are dumped into the Gowanus Canal.



After years of planning, the City has been revealing long term plans for waterbodies throughout the City to reduce CSOs (called Long Term Control Plans, or LTCPs). In 2015, the City submitted the Gowanus Canal LTCP to the State, claiming that the waterbody met federal water quality standards as is and no new infrastructure would be needed in the Canal. The State quietly approved the plan in March 2017.

Due to the Superfund remediation, overseen by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the City will be required to install two CSO holding tanks, which will capture a portion of overflows for treatment after a rainstorm ends. This is projected to reduce CSO in the Gowanus Canal by 40%.

Waterbody	Annual CSO Volume (in millions of gallons per year)				Number of overflows/year (after LTCP)	Cost
	Baseline*	Reduced in the LTCP	Reduced from CSO tanks	Remaining CSO Volume		
<b>Gowanus Canal</b>	263	0	153	110	35	\$801 M

\*The baseline does not necessarily reflect present-day conditions. It assumes implementation of grey infrastructure from previous plans as well as green infrastructure that will manage stormwater from 10% of the impervious surfaces of the combined sewer area.

To see official documents about the LTCPs, visit the State Department of Environmental Conservation's website: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/77733.html>.



***Here are some of the reasons you should be concerned about the approval of these plans:***

- **Public health not protected:** The plans fail to meet federal health standards for safe contact with the water.
- **False claims:** The LTCP claims that the Gowanus Canal meets federal water quality standards even with 263 million gallons of CSO discharge a year, and the State accepted the City's claim. Do you think the Canal today is swimmable and fishable?
- **Decades of pollution:** After the CSO tanks are installed, there will still be over 100 million gallons a year of CSO entering the Canal. CSOs will continue to happen with as little as a half inch of rain, or about 35 times a year. This will continue for decades under the current plan.
- **Short-changing green infrastructure:** The plan ignores cost-effective opportunities to reduce CSOs with green infrastructure on public and private property.
- **Flawed public process:** The public process is not reaching much of the community or allowing for meaningful input.
  - o Both the City and the State have failed to communicate ongoing pollution to the community. (How did you hear about CSOs and the development of LTCPs?)
  - o The State neglected comment letters written by environmental advocates questioning the public process.
  - o The approval of these plans was not publicly announced, but rather quietly posted on the City and State's websites.



## Help Protect this Waterway!

### **GET INVOLVED!**

- **Contact your local elected officials,** starting with your City Council Member:

#### **Councilman Brad Lander**

*(Cobble Hill, Carroll Gardens, Columbia Waterfront, Gowanus, Park Slope, Windsor Terrace, Borough Park, Kensington)*  
718-499-1090  
lander@council.nyc.gov  
456 5th Ave  
Brooklyn, NY 11215

#### **Councilman Stephen T. Levin**

*(Boerum Hill, Brooklyn Heights, Brooklyn Navy Yard, Downtown Brooklyn, Dumbo, Fulton Ferry, Greenpoint, Vinegar Hill, Williamsburg)*  
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Brooklyn, NY 11217

Visit [www.mygovnyc.org](http://www.mygovnyc.org) for a list of all your elected officials and their contact information.

- **Keep up to date!**

- o Join the [SWIM email list](#) for citywide updates
- o Check with the **Gowanus Canal Conservancy** for local activities and actions:  
[www.gowanuscanalconservancy.org](http://www.gowanuscanalconservancy.org)

Stay updated on this issue! SWIM will send alerts and updates on actions you can take. Join our [email list](#), follow us on Twitter [@SWIMcoalition](#) and on the web at [www.swimmablenyc.info](http://www.swimmablenyc.info) regularly. For more information contact us at [swimmablenyc@gmail.com](mailto:swimmablenyc@gmail.com).



Stormwater Infrastructure Matters (SWIM) is a coalition of 70 member organizations dedicated to ensuring swimmable and fishable waters around New York City through natural, sustainable stormwater management practices.

