



## Stormwater and Green Infrastructure Program

### GI Bus Tour to Staten Island

The Green Infrastructure Bus Tour took participants

to three Bluebelt sites on Staten Island. The three sites represented different “ages” of the Bluebelt projects. The oldest, Conference House Park, was constructed in 2005 and features extended detention wetlands. One of them connects to a stream through a wooded area with a footpath along the stream. Although it is an engineered stormwater

management feature, it is an incredible community asset. The most recent site at New Creek was constructed in 2025 also featuring an extended detention wetland. The site is a park with natural features. After the construction and restoration of the site, a fox has been spotted in the park demonstrating a co-benefit of the Bluebelt project. The “middle-aged” site constructed in 2015 was Sweet Brook Bluebelt, also an extended detention wetland in a park. As the NYC Department of Environmental Protection progressed through the series of Bluebelt projects, lessons learned from previous sites led to design improvements. For instance, the maintenance staff could not remove graffiti from the headwall. In a subsequent project, a graffiti resistant material was used for subsequent projects.

We were lucky to have incredible weather, which enable tour participants to not only learn about the Bluebelt but also enjoy being outdoors for the day.

### Coalitions and Partnerships

The District continued its participation in the Stormwater Infrastructure Matters Coalition, Forest for All NYC Coalition, NY/NJ Harbor & Estuary Program’s Citizens Advisory Committee, Water

Quality Working Group and Public Access Working Group and the NYS Adaptation Practitioners



*Tour participant at Sweet Brook Bluebelt constructed in 2015.*

Network. Through these coalitions and networks, the District was able to learn up to date information on natural resources and climate resilience related initiatives both at the city and state levels. The District also contributes to the coalitions and networks through actively participating in reviewing and providing feedback on policies and plans.

### Urban Agriculture

The District is the agency responsible for implementing the NYS Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program in New York City. As part of the program the District began developing an AEM Strategic Plan and convened an advisory committee. The plan identifies resource concerns, proposes ways to address the resource concerns, and prioritizes resource management. The Advisory Committee consists of representatives from our federal partners (Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service), Cornell Cooperative Extension NYC, NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets, NYC Departments of Environmental Protection and Parks & Recreation, institutions of higher education, non-profit organizations, urban farmers and community gardeners.

A survey of urban growers was also conducted, asking for information on natural resources issues and growers’ needs. The plan will be completed in 2026 and will be submitted to the State Soil & Water Conservation Committee.

## 10th Annual Urban Soils Symposium

The NYC Soil & Water Conservation District, through the NYC Urban Soils Institute (USI), held the 10th Annual Urban Soils Symposium in NYC on Friday, November 21st and Saturday, November 22nd at 4 W 43rd St. This two-day event advancing conversations around urban soils and the worlds they intersect with, titled *wastED opportunities: Recycling, Remediation, Reclamation*, featured the work of 54 diverse contributors representing scientific research, the arts, community engagement, and public service. There were 157 guests in attendance, most of whom stayed for both days. The event was managed by a team of 10 SWCD/USI team members and collaborators, for a total headcount of 221 people over two days.



*Artists, scientists, farmers, composters, natural resources managers, students were among the attendees of the symposium.*

A survey was distributed to all participants (excluding USI staff) after the event. Out of 21 respondents (71.4% attendees, 9.5% presenters, 19.1% art exhibitors), 61.9% have never been to a USI symposium previously, and 100% would recommend the symposium to others. 19 out of 21 respondents provided optional feedback.

One of the primary purposes of this interdisciplinary symposium series is to facilitate collaboration among various stakeholders within the local, national and international environmental space around the shared resource of urban soils. The symposium is intended as a platform and catalyst for future work. Each of the 221 participants represents an individual who is not a mere spectator, but

someone who is highly passionate about advancing urban soils work within research, art, policy, practice and community.

Attendee profiles range from students looking for guidance on how to turn their passion into impact, to highly accomplished practitioners near the end of their careers who are happy to provide guidance and share hard-earned insights, and everyone in between. In its 10<sup>th</sup> year, we are fortunate to have seen collaborations that formed in previous symposia turn into incredible projects and initiatives that were shared at this event.

For more information and photos from the symposium, go to:

<https://urbansoils.org/symposium-2025>

## Medgar Evers College Soils Laboratory Internship

The District continued the urban soils laboratory internship with Medgar Evers College in 2025, offering valuable hands-on experiences for four interns and free soil testing for our community garden partners. Interns engaged in their own research projects as well as process samples submitted by gardeners.

Medgar Evers College is a predominantly Black institution serving students whose access to opportunities in the environmental field has historically been limited.

## Urban Soils Art Extension

SWALE house on Governors Island continued to host USI's artist in residence program and soils library. This is where soils science and art meet to push the envelope and explore the multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary nature of soils, our intrinsic connection with them and our interaction with them as a means of survival, as a common thread between us all, our problems, and solutions. The soils room was booked for the whole season. We had nine artists collaborate and produce works in the space and host public events. Many of these artists also exhibited and presented their work at the symposium as a way to provoke feedback and constructive input from various disciplines.

The reputation of this residency has continued to grow over the past 9 years and so has the demand. We hope to be able to continue to provide this opportunity for interdisciplinary exploration and as another platform for voice in the coming years.

To learn more about the artists who participated, go to: <https://urbansoils.org/aes-residencies>

### Soil Testing Events

The Urban Soils Institute of the District continued its free soil testing events once a month between May and October at the SWALE House on Governors Island. The USI team also offered soil testing and soil science activities at public events, including:

- Newburgh Urban Farm Fair (Newburgh)
- Kingsland Wildflowers Festival (Brooklyn)
- SUBMERGE Marine Science Festival (Manhattan)
- Super Science Saturday at PS29 (Brooklyn)
- Sandy Soils and Soundwaves Festival (Rockaway)

### Urban Soils Workshops

The USI continued our partnership with Newburgh Urban Farm and Food Initiative to provide community support in soils testing, site assessment and soils remediation strategies, USI provided workshops, trainings, and site research reconnaissance. We responded to ~50 inquiries, tested over 30 soils samples and interpreted the test results for visitors. Local farmers, residents, and community members came with soil samples, and to learn about how to build healthy soils for a vibrant ecosystem and how to incorporate best management practices when dealing with soils contaminated with heavy metals.

We also continued our partnership with EarthMatter in its compost soil testing apprenticeship program to provide soil basics, contamination and microscope workshops. The microscope workshop demonstrated how to use microscopes and prepare samples of compost materials. George facilitated the discussion on the form, function and

identification of microbes and materials discovered in slide samples.

Finally we continued our partnership with the Brooklyn Queens Land Trust. George facilitated workshops for high school students from Brooklyn Technical High School as part of BQLT internship program in sustainable use of soil and other natural resources for food, energy, and urban development. George provided hands-on soil science activities (e.g. microscopes, texture, organic matter, clay, and soil organisms) with a focus on soil formation, soil health and quality, and sustainable use of soil resource in urban areas.

We also worked with the Nassau County Soil & Water Conservation District. We offered train-the-



*USI exhibit at the Sandy Soils and Soundwaves: A Rockaway Soils Festival*

trainer in soil science. Training workshops focus on soil health/quality, soil testing for nutrients, texture, pH, salinity and elemental contaminants using a portable x-ray fluorescence spectrometer. In addition, USI is assisting staff with developing community composting programs and providing educational materials and resources to the public to actively engage in best management practices towards sustainable use of soil and water resources in urban horticulture practices including agriculture, landscaping and restoration ecology.

### NYC Envirothon

The District held the 2025 NYC Envirothon in Wagner Park in Battery Park City (Manhattan). Twenty six teams (up from eighteen in 2024) representing all five boroughs competed. Unlike the previous year, we had a warm and dry day which made for a pleasant competition. We were able to have all five borough winners participate in the State Envirothon.

### A Day in the Life of the Hudson River

The District participated in A Day in the Life of the Hudson River with PS3 at the Christopher Street Pier. This was the 20<sup>th</sup> year

anniversary of the District’s participation in this program (we went virtual in 2020 and skipped 2021 because field trips were still not happening). The District was fortunate to have 3 college students from NYU to help (the college students learned a great deal as well). We hosted 4 classes of 2<sup>nd</sup> graders who had a great time outside testing the water.

### NYC Outdoors Environmental Education Expo

The District continued its partnership with Hudson River Park’s River Project and the Wallerstein Collaborative to host the expo. We shifted our event to February from December to take advantage of the

slower period and facilitate teachers plan for spring field trips.

We had more than 30 organizations participate. In addition to exposing teachers to opportunities, the expo provides great networking for environmental educators themselves. We end the expo with a

networking event for exhibitors that facilitates sharing of best practices and building the environmental education community.

### Other Educational Activities

The District was invited to present to management level employees from Barclays Bank again. Shino presented the

work of the District to a small group of program participants, who then researched and brainstormed partnership opportunities for the District. The group suggested partnering with the Building Energy Exchange because of the intersection of our work in promoting green infrastructure on private properties and energy efficient buildings.

The District also worked with the Greenpoint Public Library’s after school program for teenagers, taught 4 classes of third graders about stormwater pollution at PS121 Throop School in the Bronx, and visited City Growers after school program for high school students.

PS3 students at the Christopher Street Pier testing the water

