

CAMPAIGN FOR NEW YORK'S FUTURE

Water Quality

Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC initiative proposes that New York open 90 percent of our waterways for recreation by reducing water pollution and preserving our natural areas. To achieve this goal, the plan calls for completing necessary capital improvements as well as creating more natural solutions. This fact sheet has been prepared by the Campaign for New York's Future—a coalition of civic, business, environmental, labor, community and public health organizations—to answer some common questions about how the plan would improve water quality for all New Yorkers.

What is the current quality of the water in and around New York City?

Although NYC's water quality has improved over the past few decades, we still do not comply with Federal Clean Water Act standards due primarily to the discharge of sewage into our waterways when our combined sewer infrastructure is overwhelmed with storm water.

Why does PlaNYC focus on tributaries?

Actually, PlaNYC will lead to improvements in both larger water bodies and the smaller tributaries. NYC's large bodies of water, like the Hudson River, the East River, etc., periodically do not meet recreational standards due to sewage that flows into our waterways from Combined Sewer Overflows events after rainy days. Many of our tributaries, however, are never clean. Most have large amounts of sewage solids settled at the bottom. In addition to CSO and excess nitrogen levels, some have high toxic levels or contain industrial toxins or spills.

How will PlaNYC improve New York City's water quality?

To improve our water quality of all of our waterways, PlaNYC proposes:

Infrastructure solutions. By law, the City must create a capital plan based on hard infrastructure solutions to improve water quality.

Best Management Practices (BMPs). Cost-effective and innovative methods to mitigate storm water runoff, often called Best Management Practices (BMPs), will be tested and eventually implemented on a larger scale.

How will PlaNYC BMPs be used on a broader scale?

New York City cannot rely solely on centralized infrastructure upgrades to improve the quality of our waterways. The city must pursue a range of proven and emerging strategies to keep storm water from entering our combined sewer system at all. These include natural strategies, such as planting trees and green roofs, to retain, detain or cleanse the water. PlaNYC proposes:

- Increasing use of High Level Storm Sewers (HLSS), which are designed to capture 50 percent of rainfall before it enters our pipes, and divert it directly into the waterways;
- Implementing PlaNYC's open space plan, including planting street trees and landscaping public plazas;

The unclean facts:

27 billion gallons of combined sewage overflow (CSO) enter the City's waterways each year.

As little as 0.1"/hour of rain can cause overflow.

450 CSO outlets exist around the City.

52% of NYC tributaries do not meet standards for recreational use.

- Expanding the Bluebelt program, which is designed to use streams, ponds, and wetland areas to convey, treat, and detain storm water before its release into the harbor;
- Forming an interagency BMP task force to implement BMPs citywide through revised construction specifications, better building practices, and new regulations and incentives;
- Piloting promising BMPs including vegetated ditches along highways, new tree pit designs, and reintroduction of mollusks to filter and clean water;
- Requiring trees and landscaping for commercial and community parking lots;
- Providing incentives for green roof installations; and
- Protecting wetlands by evaluating current protections and creating a wetland policy.

For more information, visit www.CampaignForNewYork.org.

The Campaign for New York's Future is a coalition of civic, business, environmental, labor, community and public health organizations that support the goals and strategic direction of PlaNYC. Our goal is to make every neighborhood in NYC a great place to live and work, as well as make a significant contribution to fighting climate change. The coalition aims to encourage public debate — as well as fair and effective action — now and in the years to come. We recognize the need to both seize the opportunity for immediate action and to insure that this long-term plan evolves with continued dialogue and changing conditions.