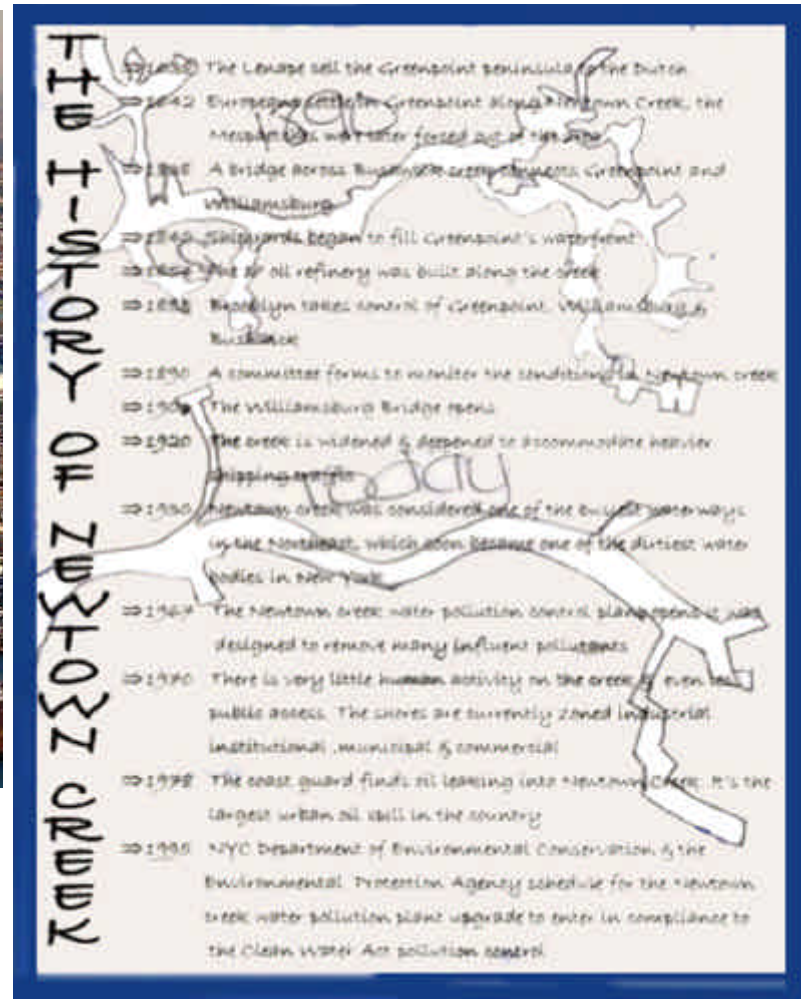


# Newtown Creek

Made by East River Apprenticeshop Maritime Explorers  
Summer 2003



## Newtown Creek Green Map

This map was created for fishermen, boaters, visitors, businesses, local policy makers and local residents to spread the word of recreation on Newtown Creek and inform them of the pollution on the creek. It was made by the Maritime Explorers of the East River Apprenticeshop. During a six-week summer program, we boated, monitored, kept track of Newtown Creek boat traffic, oil slicks, and floating pallets, and we made this map!

We never even knew about the creek, but now that we've explored the creek, we realized how fun it is to row, sail, and explore a body of water that's been forgotten for decades and holds many surprises-blue crabs, cormorants, herons, grass shrimp and more! We also realized how dirty the creek is. In the future we hope to revitalize Newtown Creek. With your help, we can make Newtown Creek more accessible to the public and clean enough for you and your children to enjoy.

The mission of the **East River Apprenticeshop** is to empower the youth of NYC-especially the disenfranchised and underserved-with the conservation ethics and community leadership skills necessary for them to participate in the physical and social reconstruction of their communities. [www.ERAshop.org](http://www.ERAshop.org)

The **Green Map System** is a globally connected, locally adaptable framework for promoting community sustainability. [www.greenmap.org](http://www.greenmap.org)

### Air and Noise Pollution

Air and noise pollution on Newtown Creek is very annoying, disturbing, and unhealthy. There are many companies and factories that pollute the creek daily. A few examples are a car shredder plant, two oil companies, a heavy machinery factory and much more. We do not know for sure that every company or factory is polluting the water. What one does hear and smell is very disturbing.

### Water Pollution on Newtown creek

On 8/6/03 the Maritime Explorers rowed to the end of Newtown Creek. On the way up we saw and smelled a lot of garbage. On the way back we saw bits of seaweed covered in oil. It came to me as a surprise was that there were swallows living in the area around the water, like in old docks and old piers. I was thinking that if the water is bad for us imagine for the birds. Toxic chemicals are stored in the flesh of the fish and other animals and are concentrated along the food chain. You see the fish eat the small organisms and the birds eat the fish that eat the small organisms so by the time the birds get to the pollution it will be much more than when it started. Because the birds have to eat a lot of fish to survive they end up digesting a lot of pollutants.

There are many kinds of different pollutants in Newtown Creek. There is flammable oil (there are signs telling people not to smoke), coming from an underground oil spill. Even though there are people that come to pump out the oil once every week, there is still oil coming under the boom that was put there to keep the oil contained. There is garbage, including wooden pallets, a toy truck, plastic bags, a purse, sneakers, candy wrappers, bottles, chairs, which comes from careless people and from street runoff during rains and high tides. There are heavy metals, including copper, mercury, cadmium and lead, which come from various industrial sites along the creek, and which settle at the bottom and are ingested by marine life. There is raw sewage entering the creek from illegally tapped pipes and companies sometimes don't know this because they don't check. Even though lots of people don't care about the creek, some people are trying to clean it, like the NYC Department of Environmental Protection, the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation, the East River Apprenticeshop, Riverkeeper and Baykeeper, and the Newtown Creek Alliance.

This summer we tested the water of Newtown Creek for temperature, salinity, pH and dissolved oxygen (DO). At the Manhattan Avenue landing, dissolved oxygen ranged from 3 parts per million to 7.5. Levels of DO below 3 are stressful to most marine organisms and levels of 5 to 6 are usually required for growth and activity. On one day we measured DO at 5 at the landing, 3.8 across from Exxon-Mobil and 0 in English Kills. This means all the oxygen is being used by organisms in

the breakdown of organic matter, here raw sewage, making it impossible for fish to live. The water temperature in English Kills was almost 10 degrees Celsius warmer.

### Boat Traffic

The Boat traffic at Newtown Creek has been recorded for 4 weeks. It is not only used by boats, barges, but also by NYPD, DEP, and FDNY. There is a car shredder up the creek as well as a soil recycling business. That causes a lot of boat traffic. Boats and barges come through the creek a lot when East river Apprenticeshop go out boating. Over period of 4 weeks we have seen over 20 boats. There is a small kayak club that we see on Newtown Creek other than that we don't see any other boats on the creek.

### Rules of the Waterways

Just like cars on land, there are rules that dictate how all boats should maneuver in response to each other to avoid collisions. These rules are called the Navigation Rules of the Road. Everyone that operates a vessel in any waterway should be aware of these rules, which are especially important in narrow bodies of water such as Newtown Creek.

#### The rules in brief

The most important rule is to avoid collision by looking out for other boats at all times. Don't forget to look behind you, as well as to both sides of you. Most large vessels traveling in narrow waterways are severely limited in their ability to maneuver and thus should be given the right of way. Even if you think you have right of way over another boat, stay alert. Having the right of way is one thing, avoiding a collision is another.

How this relates to recreational boaters on Newtown Creek

Since Newtown Creek is such a narrow waterway with regular usage by working vessels, especially fuel-laden barges, you should always cede right of way to those working vessels. Most professional captains want to be sure that they are seen and will be taken seriously. (If you were carrying a few million gallons of fuel oil, you would too.) Consider that boats do not have brakes so when faced with the risk of collision in a narrow waterway, it usually comes down to choosing between several difficult choices-hitting the other boat, running aground, or running into the seawall. None of these are good choices.

Whenever there is a barge and tug coming toward you from any direction, maneuver your craft in such a way as to indicate that you see the barge and you are doing your best to stay out of the way. This means pulling over to the side of the channel or stopping until it passes. Pay attention also to where it may be docking, if you are next to a fuel depot and there is a fuel barge coming, move to the other side of the creek. In light of heightened national security concerns you should keep a wide berth around these fuel depots anyway. Remember that these people are at work and may perceive you as "playing" in the way. As recreational boaters, we need to give them every courtesy to allow them to do their jobs. Maintaining good relations with all vessels on the creek will help ensure continued use of the creek recreationally.

#### Other potential hazards

Seaplanes regularly land on the East River and sometimes come in from the east to land on Newtown Creek at the confluence with the East River. One can only assume that the pilot does a flyby to scan the creek before landing, but be alert to the possibility that it might come in while you are in this area.

#### Where to learn more

The rules are widely available on the Internet and in various publications. A good place to start learning more is on the Coast Guard Navigation Center website: <http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/mwv/navrules/download.htm>

### Fish and Crabs

Fish from Newtown Creek can contain harmful chemicals even if they look healthy and the water looks clean. Consumption of fish, eels, crabs and shrimp can result in cancer for adults and below-normal IQ scores and slower learning for children.\* For more information on contaminant levels in NYC fish, contact DEC's Bureau of Habitat at (518) 457-6178.

"Should You Eat Fish Caught in the Waters Around New York City?" Pamphlet published by the Office of New York State Attorney General, in cooperation with Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

### Birds, Plants and Aquatic Life of Newtown Creek

Birds	Aquatic Life*	
Heron	Bass (Striped)	Mussels
Egrets	Flounder	Barnacles
Laughing Gulls	Sculpin	
Cormorants	Snapper	
Swallows	Pipefish	
	Grass Shrimp	
	Blue Crabs	
	Jellyfish	

#### Plants

Algae

\*Fish were caught in unbaited minnow traps set from the seawall on the mud bottom.



### Approximate Bridge Heights at High Water

Pulaski Bridge	45 feet
Railroad bridge (on Dutch Kills)	2
J.J. Byrne Memorial Bridge	26
Kosciuszko Bridge	100
Grand St. Bridge (on East Branch)	7
Grand St. Bridge (on English Kills)	10

### How You Can Help

#### 1. 9 Tools of the Environmental Advocate from Basil Seggos, Riverkeeper, Inc.

1. Educate the public
2. Conduct research
3. Organize
4. Use the Media
5. Protest
6. Enforce against polluters
7. Encourage responsible business
8. Fight for your laws
9. Pressure your elected officials



2. Come to the end of Manhattan Avenue, at Commercial Street, to see our public landing and the new city park (coming in September)!
3. If we keep the streets clean, the water will be cleaner. Trash on the ground, oil from cars and toxic chemicals all end up in the creek from run off water when it rains.

### For More Information, Contact:

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If you see someone polluting,  
report it to Basil!

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### Map Makers

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### Our Thanks

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The information on this map comes from Riverkeeper's Newtown Creek, A Grassroots Call to Action (2003), DEC's Contaminant Assessment and Reduction Project Report (2003), OASIS Mapping Service and first-hand research. This map is not intended for navigational use and some locations may be approximate.