

Learning Places Fall 2017

SITE REPORT #2

The Gowanus Conservancy



This image is of the Gowanus Canal taken from where the Whole Foods is at on 3rd Street. You can clearly see all the manufacturing buildings directly adjacent to the canal.

Elmer Merejo

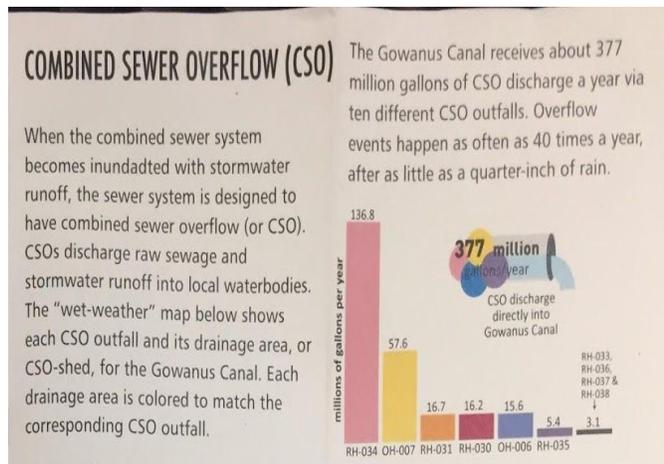
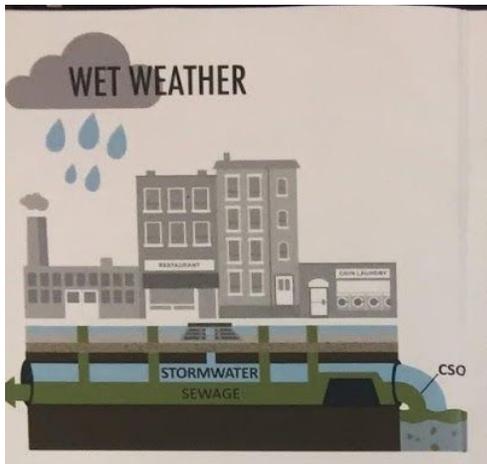
10.22.2017

INTRODUCTION

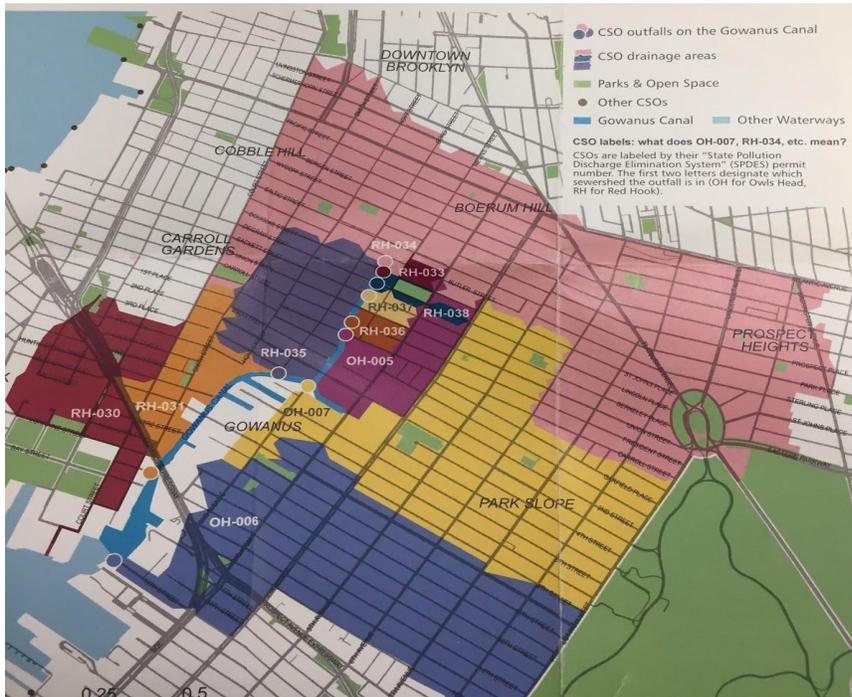
Prior to the site visit, we already knew what the area looked like because we had been there before. We talked about the demographic in the Gowanus area and what is going on in there, but mostly we talked about the history in the Gowanus Canal and not much about its future. We knew that this area of Brooklyn was once a salt marsh and that the building of the canal was to create a stronger manufacturing industry in the 1860s in Brooklyn. We knew that the Canal was made to be 100 feet wide in order to let at least 3 boats to come and go, and even then that was a little tight. We saw the oxygen coming into the canal in our first visit, and we talked a little bit about the canal's existing pollution and from where it came from (the manufacturing industry that been there for years dumping their trash and chemicals into the Canal). We talked about the sewage overflow and how it affects the canal to this day and probably even more so now. What we did not talk about that I wanted to learn about was how were they going to solve these problem, how will they make the area better.

SITE OBSERVATIONS

We met up at the Union Street bridge near Pig Beach and our tour guide Christine started to give us background into how the Gowanus Conservancy started and why it was made. The Gowanus Conservancy is a non-profit organization and having started 11 years ago in 2006, they try to get a handle on all the environmental issues the Gowanus Canal has. She proceeded to explain to us the history of the Canal and why it got so polluted to how it is today. She told us how the entire Gowanus Area was flood prone, so the canal often flooded whenever a natural disaster happened or it rained too much. That had to do with how the area used to be a salt marsh and gradually became to how it is today. The slope of the area is still the same and the canal still also suffers from sewage overflow, a few factors that lead to the flooding of the canal.



The Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) is one of the canal's biggest problems right after the existing pollution. It lowers the water quality a lot and does not help with the clean up that SuperFund is doing on the canal right now. Currently most of New York City is run with single pipe sewer lines so when there's heavy rain, there will be even more water coming into the sewer lines. Those sewer lines can't hold all the wastewater and stormwater at the same time; thus causing an overflow. This is shown on the first image above. Since this is what the sewer system is still like, you have sewage coming in from all over the Gowanus Area and as far as Prospect Heights. Here is an image showing all the sewage that goes into the Gowanus Canal:



We then continued on to go see the Sponge Park that is located next to the new Condominium building on 365 Bond. The main purpose of the sponge park is to take in the excess water that is on the street when it rains so it doesn't get into the canal. This alleviates the sewage overflow problem a small amount. But if there were many of these sponge parks built directly adjacent to the canal then maybe we will lower the overflow greatly. Even then that is not enough to solve the issue. Therefore we need more green infrastructure like the sponge park but not just next to the canal, needs to be in the whole area. One such incident of another kind of green infrastructure that we saw were the bioswales. The basic function of a bioswale is the same as the sponge parks, to soak of the excess water so that it decreases the overflow in the sewers. These kind of green infrastructure are commonly known as rain gardens. Here is an image to



show the effects of a rain garden:

ANALYSIS/DISCOVERIES

In addition to the green infrastructure in the area right now, there are incentives to build more. For example, if new developers build sponge parks and/or green roofs or etc., they will get tax breaks from the city because they are providing a need to the environment. The SuperFund cleanup is going to take longer than expected because of the funding, it costs about \$500 million and not all the guilty parties have paid their due. During the next 10-15 years, the whole area will smell horribly and it will be incredibly loud because of the SuperFund cleanup.

KEYWORDS/ VOCABULARY

1. CSO
2. Green Infrastructure
3. Sponge Park
4. Rain Gardens
5. SuperFund

QUESTIONS for FURTHER RESEARCH

1. If all new developers agree to add new green infrastructure to the area in addition to what is already there, how will the area be affected?
2. After the SuperFund cleanup is finished, how will the Gowanus area get rezoned?
3. How can other grey infrastructure be used to help cleanup the gowanus and/or the sewer system in the gowanus?