

THE HUDSON REPORTER

More than a typical cleanup

PVSC cleans up after Hurricane Sandy

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CLEANING UP – Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission’s River Restoration Unit came to Bayonne to help clear the waterways of large debris left by Hurricane Sandy.

A few times a year, the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission (PVSC) helps clean up local waterways, teaming up usually with local schools or environmental groups.

This year, as the area braces for yet another hurricane season, PVSC’s River Restoration unit recently completed the removal of large debris—including creosote docks and piers that dislodged from neighboring properties—and washed ashore in Bayonne during Hurricane Sandy.

Since 1998, the River Restoration Unit has sponsored local cleanup programs covering the 100 miles of waterways within its service area. During that time, the project has removed more than 10,000 tons of debris from Newark Bay, the Passaic River and its tributaries, and has sponsored more than 850 individual cleanups.

The most recent effort was a special case, officials said, citing hazards that had to be remedied immediately.

PVSC found a number of navigational hazards along the shoreline in Bayonne, including Robbins Reef and other sites that abut the shipping channel near the Bayonne Bridge.

“PVSC is pleased to help the City of Bayonne. Once again we are mindful of the pollution and flooding issues associated with the storm debris, as well as the navigational and safety hazards they pose,” said PVSC Executive Director Michael DeFrancisci, who has previously been involved in a number of local efforts for shore cleanup. The removal of this large debris is a significant undertaking. We’re glad that PVSC was able to lend assistance to our neighboring towns and businesses.”

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Earlier this year, DeFrancisci helped students from Bayonne schools clean up large stretches of Newark Bay from 16th Street Park to Rutkowski Park near 63 rd Street, donating gloves, plastic bags, and other items as well as helping to dispose of the debris the environmentally-conscious students picked up.

Those living alongside Newark Bay have always suffered from waste washing up on the shore. If it falls off a boat or a dock, or flows down from a street or a yard, it eventually makes its way into Newark Bay.

And as often as people go to the shores to clear away the debris, within a few days, the tides fill up the western shores of Bayonne with junk again.

Riverkeeper Bill Sheehan, an environmental activist, has long been involved with the Hackensack Watershed. As late as the mid-1990s, Newark Bay was almost impassable to many recreational boaters because of the massive amount of debris that floated in the water.

“The water was so full of junk we would have had to keep constant watch,” he said during a visit to Bayonne earlier this year.

Although the Bay and other waterways around Bayonne have become much better as a result of changes of land use up the Passaic and Hackensack rivers over the last two decades, Hurricane Sandy cast into the water and carried off pieces of debris far beyond what local cleanup efforts could handle. These floating obstacles, according the PVSC officials, can prove problematic to shipping, recreational boaters, harbormasters, and river keepers when found in or along the waterways.

Because of the size and weight of the materials washed up in Bayonne, PVSC removed the debris with specialized equipment, including PVSC’s 30-ton crane, and then placed it on transport trailers for return and or disposal. PVSC also enlisted the help of the Clean Shores program, which uses Department of Correction inmates and Department of Environmental Protection and PVSC staff to clear the shoreline of floatables and other litter.

The PVSC has embarked on an intensive, strategic post-hurricane cleanup campaign to free the Passaic River and related tributaries of blockages, help with flood control, and maintain the quality of the river and waterways.

In the decades since World War II, the City of Bayonne has developed a significant service sector and port operations.

“Bayonne is an important commerce hub for the State of New Jersey and the metropolitan region,” said PVSC Commissioner Kenneth J. Lucianin. “We’re glad that PVSC was able to assist in providing cleaner and safer waterways for both the citizens and commercial traffic.”

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