

## Paterson's Great Falls comes to a stop for annual Earth Day cleanup

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PATERSON - The Great Falls – a 77-foot-high, 260-foot wide breathtaking phenomenon of power and raw energy - spills up to two billion gallons of water a day.



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*Student volunteers from New Jersey Youth Corps at Earth Day, (left to right) Jose Brito, Phillip Taylor, Shayla Arias, Kalimah Harris, Qunece Harris, and Kiante Covington.*

But on Monday, the fierce torrent was reduced to a trickle, with one flick of a switch by Erik Lowe, chairman of the Paterson Municipal Utilities Authority. Lowe's action marked the start of the annual Earth Day clean-Up at The Great Falls, an event sponsored by the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission (PVSC) in conjunction with the Paterson Department of Public Works.

Once the river stopped, a small army of young people, ready with gloves and garbage bags, descended to the banks of the Passaic River and The Great Falls' reservoir. The group included youths from School 7, the Great Falls Youth Corps, International High School, Garret Morgan Academy, New Jersey Youth Corps and

AmeriCorps. Also participating were elementary school students from the Prime Time Learning Centers in East Rutherford and Paramus.

“We really want to clean up the environment,” said Philip Taylor, a New Jersey Youth Corps member. “We also worked here at the Great Falls a couple of weeks ago. We found a lot of stuff, old TVs, old bicycles, and even some jewelry.”

Shayla Arias, a life-long Paterson resident, first remembered seeing the Great Falls at the age of 12. “I really love the Falls,” she said.

The national park’s superintendent, Darren Boch, explained the purpose of the event. “Earth Day is part of National Park Week,” Boch said. “It is held annually and proclaimed by President Obama. People are asked to do service projects. Today we are launching the first Paterson Great Falls Jr. Ranger Program.”

Paterson’s first park ranger, Ilyese Goldman, presented Junior Park Ranger badges to the many students who had come to the event.

“The Youth Corps does a fantastic job here all year,” said Rep. Bill Pascrell, in a speech addressed to the teenagers working on the cleanup. “You are the centerpiece. We must keep the beauty of the falls clean.”

The congressman then spoke of the rich history of Paterson. “Many years ago folks worked in the factories that surrounded the Falls,” Pascrell said. “This is sacred ground. Locomotives were made from the hydroelectric power. Paterson is the third largest city in New Jersey. History was made here. This is our Grand Canyon. This is our Yellowstone. Everybody is responsible.”

Mayor Jeffrey Jones challenged the young people to action. “You matter so much,” the mayor stated. “I know I can count on you to make a difference.”