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# LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE MAGAZINE

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## SPEAK OUT

Queer designers step forward  
in challenging times

### CASCADE PARK

CCxA and Confluence make  
a tough connection look easy

### RETHINKING WILDFIRE

Time for a collaborative approach

### #WLAM CHALLENGE

Behind the scenes with the winning post



# WE ARE HERE



## SEEING THE DAYLIGHT

**AFTER 25 YEARS OF ADVOCACY, NEW YORK CITY WILL UNCOVER A BURIED STREAM IN THE BRONX.**

BY STEPHEN ZACKS

**ABOVE**  
Mary Miss's nonprofit, City as Living Laboratory, rendered the daylighting of Tibbetts Brook as part of a series of community-engagement art initiatives starting in 2016.

The daylighting of Tibbetts Brook in the Bronx will restore natural habitats and wetlands across more than 1,000 acres in Van Cortlandt Park, the third-largest park in New York City. In what Karen Argenti, a board member of the Bronx Council for Environmental Quality, calls the largest green infrastructure project in the history of the city, the effort will uncover a stream that has been diverted for more than a century into the Broadway sewer system.

Approved this January to begin construction in 2025 at a cost of \$133 million, the project will also extend a spur of the 750-mile Empire State Trail from Upstate New York and divert seven million gallons of fresh-

water that currently flows daily from Westchester County into the sewer system, rerouting it into the Harlem River. "It represents discharge to the Harlem River that's kind of as clean as you can get in New York City," says Marit Larson, the assistant commissioner for natural resources and planning in the city's Department of Parks and Recreation.

The Bronx Council for Environmental Quality, an environmental nonprofit, has advocated for the stream's daylighting since at least 1997. Drawings by then student Gail Wittwer-Laird, ASLA, now a principal at Starr Whitehouse Landscape Architects and Planners, envisioned a meandering pathway to recover the natural stream,

directing it through a disused stretch of former train line owned by the CSX freight railroad company. Starr Whitehouse is now leading the design effort for the city, in partnership with the water engineering company Hazen and Sawyer.

Argenti attributes the city's investment to the current political moment. "We're in this phase where everyone's measuring greenhouse gas, and climate change is an issue, and flooding is a big problem. It all came together as one," she says.

The parks department has been conscious of the detrimental effects of the buried stream, including flooding in Van Cortlandt Park, for decades.

**PUBLIC ART INITIATIVES BY MARY MISS AND CITY AS LIVING LABORATORY HELPED BRING ATTENTION TO THE SITE'S POTENTIAL.**

**RIGHT**  
A pedestrian walkway over a portion of the restored Tibbetts Brook will run alongside the Major Deegan Expressway.



In 2008, it applied for a land-use change along the rail route, which the New York City planning commission approved in 2011. The approval coincided with a 2012 consent decree between the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the state's Department of Environmental Conservation that required the city to reduce combined sewer overflows through green infrastructure to comply with the Clean Water Act.

In the years following, a series of studies and installations helped the project gain momentum. Public art initiatives by the artist Mary Miss and her nonprofit City as Living Laboratory (CALL) helped bring attention

to the site's potential. A multifaceted project, *Rescuing Tibbetts Brook: One Stitch at a Time*, organized a series of participatory walks with designers, scientists, and residents, as well as temporary installations by artists along the rail line. CALL produced a compelling visualization imagining Tibbetts Brook as a natural stream with a pedestrian walkway and proposed a series of billboards on the Major Deegan Expressway to promote its daylighting.

A 2018 study by Susannah Drake, FASLA, of DLANDstudio (now part of Sasaki), in partnership with Biohabitats and the engineering firm HDR, concentrated on the drainage of Van Cortlandt Lake into a pipe routed to

the Wards Island Wastewater Treatment Plant. That project's mandate was limited to working within the existing parkland, conceptualizing how adapting six acres of the park into wetlands planted with native species and designed with nature walks would provide ecosystem services, retaining water and nurturing biodiversity.

"The exciting piece about this project was that it was very different from what the parks department and DEP normally do in creating this dynamic wetland environment," says Joshua Price, a former DLANDstudio associate and now a senior associate at Sasaki. "There's often not the space to do that in New York City, and this was an exception to that." ●