



**GOWANUS CANAL**  
**COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP (CAG)**  
*your local voice for Superfund*

For more information: [www.GowanusCAG.org](http://www.GowanusCAG.org)

**Title:** Upholding Previous Standards for Dissolved Oxygen Levels in the Gowanus Canal

**To:** New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

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**From:** Gowanus Canal Community Advisory Group (CAG)

**Date:** January 29, 2026

**Resolved:** The Gowanus CAG (the CAG) resolves that the attached letter encouraging an expedited proposed amendment to the regulations regarding standards for dissolved oxygen (DO) levels will be submitted as set forth below.

**Summary:** Effective on October 15, 2025, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) amended key water quality classifications, including reclassifying the Gowanus Canal (the Canal) to Class SC (swimmable and fishable). This reclassification inadvertently lowered the standards for DO levels in the Canal. The CAG submits the attached resolution via email to NYSDEC.



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## ***Background***

On October 15, 2025, the NYSDEC issued a Notice of Adoption (NOA) in the State Register, adopting updates to water quality classifications, including amendments to the classification of the Gowanus Canal. Please consider this resolution in response to the reclassification of the Gowanus Canal to Class SC (swimmable and fishable).

## ***Petition & Comments***

Effective October 15, 2025, NYSDEC amended key water quality classifications, including reclassifying the Canal to Class SC (swimmable and fishable). Previously, [the Gowanus Canal had been classified](#) as Class SD (fishable only) in the upper section, upstream of the Gowanus Expressway, and Class I (fishable only) in the lower section, downstream of the Gowanus Expressway. The CAG submits this resolution in response to DEC's decision to reclassify the Gowanus Canal and encourages DEC to expedite an amendment to the SC regulations to require the higher DO levels that were previously required in the Canal.

The CAG has long advocated for reclassification of the Canal to better reflect the area's current conditions and anticipated future uses. The CAG appreciates DEC's decision to reclassify the Canal to Class SC, as the CAG previously petitioned. This designation represents an important and meaningful step forward and reflects a history of persistent community advocacy for improved water quality in the Canal.

However, the CAG is concerned that this reclassification inadvertently lowered the standards for dissolved oxygen (DO) levels in parts of the canal, an apparent unintended consequence of the reclassification. Under [6 CRR-NY 703.3 Water quality standards for pH, dissolved oxygen, dissolved solids, odor, color and turbidity](#), the DO concentration is not permitted to fall below 4.0 mg/L at any time for Class I waterbodies. In contrast, the DO concentration is not allowed to be less than 3.0 mg/L at any time for Class SC waterbodies.



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As a result, under the Class SC designation, parts of the Canal are now subject to a less protective DO standard than was previously required.

Adequate DO levels are essential to sustain aquatic life, including plants, animals, and fish. The importance of maintaining sufficient DO levels in the Canal is underscored by recent events. In July 2023, the Canal experienced a large-scale fish kill, with thousands of dead fish observed floating on the surface. This mass fish die-off was the [result of dangerously low levels of DO](#) that caused widespread asphyxiation of the fish in the Canal. Allowing lower DO standards increases the risk of similar events and threatens the progress that has been made toward supporting aquatic life in the Canal.

*Because the reclassification of the Canal to Class SC carries lower requirements for the DO concentration than the previous classification, the CAG strongly urges DEC to amend the Class SC rule to maintain the previous DO standard of no less than 4.0 mg/L that had been in place under the Class I designation.*

Given the CAG's current understanding of these requirements under the waterbody classifications, the CAG contends that it is essential that DO standards in the Canal *not be weakened* as a result of the otherwise welcome reclassification to SC. Protective water quality standards, once established, should not be reduced through changes in classification. Maintaining the higher DO requirement is critical to supporting aquatic life and safeguarding existing water quality standards. The CAG remains committed to the restoration and long-term protection of the Canal in accordance with federal and state law, and looks forward to continued collaboration with DEC to ensure that water quality standards reflect the priorities and needs of the community and Canal.



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**Cc:**

Hon. Charles Schumer, US Senator  
Hon. Kirsten Gillibrand, US Senator  
Hon. Dan Goldman, US Congressperson  
John Blasco, Deputy Chief of Staff for Congressman Daniel Goldman  
Carlos Rondon, Director of Community and External Affairs for Congressman Daniel Goldman  
Kashmir Flood, Field Representative for Congressman Daniel Goldman  
Matt Pastore, Legislative Director for Congressman Daniel Goldman  
Hon. Nydia Velázquez, US Congressperson  
Dan Wiley, District Director for Nydia Velázquez  
Hon. Andrew Gounardes, NYS Senator  
Hon. Jo Ann Simon, NYS Assembly Member  
Susannah Pasquantonio, Chief of Staff for Assembly Member Simon  
Talia Hoch, Community Advocate for Assembly Member Simon  
Zohran Mamdani, NYC Mayor  
Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate  
Antonio Reynoso, Brooklyn Borough President  
Shahana Hanif, Councilmember, District 39  
Alexa Aviles, Councilmember, District 38  
Lincoln Restler, Councilmember, District 33  
Brooklyn Community Board 6  
Brooklyn Community Board 2

**NYS DEC:**

Amanda Lefton, Commissioner of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

**NYC DEP:**

Lisa Garcia, Commissioner of the NYC Department of Environmental Protection

**USEPA:**

Michael Martucci, Region 2 Regional Administrator  
Alyssa Arcaya, Region 2 Deputy Regional Administrator  
Ariel Iglesias, Region 2 Director, Land, Chemicals & Redevelopment Division  
Pat Evangelista, Region 2 Director, Superfund & Emergency Mgmt. Division  
John Prince, Region 2 Dep. Director, Superfund & Emergency Management Division  
Kate Anderson, Director, Enforcement & Compliance Assurance Division  
Javier Laureano, Director - Water Division  
Natalie Loney, USEPA Community Involvement Coordinator, Region 2  
Brian Carr, Esq., USEPA Regional Counsel, Region 2