

ROV Assists Environmental Groups



A coalition of environmental groups from New York and New Jersey are using Fishers SeaOtter ROV to gather evidence on the state of the marine environment in the area's coastal waters. "One of our main concerns is the use of contaminated material to fill holes in the bottom of New York harbour that were created by previous dredging operations", says spokesman Frank Crescitelli.

Another concern is the dredging operations that remove contaminated material from the bottom of the harbour. These types of operations put contaminants back into the water which can then spread throughout the entire marine ecosystem.

Frank operates the charter fishing boat, Neptune's Champion based on Staten Island and is also the vice president of the Staten Island chapter of the Coastal Conservation Association (CCA). CCA and the Natural Resources Preservation Association (NRPA), two lay environmental groups whose members include fisherman and boat captains, are hoping to convince the Army Corps of Engineers that life abounds in the "borrow pits". The pits are underwater craters created when material was dredged from the harbor bottom for landfill projects in years past. Now the Corps, by order from the state, is investigating the environmental and technical feasibility of filling in the pits with dredged material from other areas. The environmental groups contend the dredging and filling operations will put contaminants back into a healthy marine environment that is recovering nicely after years of pollution. The position of the branch chief of environmental analysis at the Corps of Engineers is that the pits are almost completely devoid of oxygen and contain only minimal forms of life.

To prove their case, the environmental groups needed to purchase equipment that would allow them to videotape life in the borrow pits. Money came from a grant by the Norcross Wildlife Foundation with additional funds from CCA and two NY city councilmen. "We looked at several underwater cameras before deciding on Fishers SeaOtter", said Frank. "We needed a system that could maneuver around in the pits. Simple drop cameras wouldn't work here. This led us to an ROV, but we needed one powerful enough to handle the harbour currents, something the smaller ROVs couldn't do. The SeaOtter has the capabilities to do all of that, and it gives a beautiful video picture." Equipped with their high tech underwater camera system, the groups have been able to show the pits are complete marine ecosystems teeming with life. "We were amazed at the amount of life down there. The video showed the ocean bottom in these pits is blanketed with mussels, clams, and a variety of other marine creatures."