

2007 Report to NYS Conservation Council from Division of Public Affairs and Education

Oversees the Department's communication materials and efforts for use with the public, including citizen participation, printed materials, audio-visual communications, and DEC's website. Operates four environmental education centers and four summer youth environmental camps.

Goal: Build partnerships to foster an understanding of how to use and protect the environment.

Ultimately, stewardship of New York State's environment depends on the actions of the 18 million people who live in the state and the thousands who visit each year. DEC plays a key role by helping people understand the fragility of resources and to make decisions that will protect air, land, water, open space and our wild animals and plants. At the same time, DEC seeks to improve its decisions by considering public knowledge and opinions. Vigorous development of partnerships between the Department and national and state governments, local entities and other public and private groups will promote the environmental ethic and advance state environmental policies.

Objective: Ensure that there is an effective and efficient plan within DEC to plan and implement a coordinated education and outreach strategy that will build awareness, foster understanding and encourage action of how to use and protect the environment. Establish an internal coordinated information system to support this objective.

- *DEC Website* - DEC maintains an informative and extensive website featuring all of the department's divisions, programs, and regions as an important outreach tool. The Division of Public Affairs and Education manages the website on behalf of the department. About one-fifth of the site contains information dealing directly with fish and wildlife, lands and forests, recreation and enforcement. The website received over 9.2 million visitors in 2006. DFWMR pages are consistently among the most popular on the site.

A significantly improved website went live on May 4, 2007, complete with a new address, <http://www.dec.ny.gov/>. DEC's website now provides features that make it easier for users to find the information they need. The site also uses automated content management to handle an already large and growing amount of data with speed and reliability. DEC's old website was organized by a bureaucratic navigation structure, which meant users needed to know which division conducted the program which they were interested in. The new navigation structure is based on the major topics on the website.

The website redesign project was accomplished in consultation with site users and DEC staff, incorporating ideas from a focus group, site-use records and suggestions received via website feedback. Some of the improved tools available on the new site include the Subject Index which has been revised and expanded to help users find information by an alphabetical listing of many topics. There is a link to the Subject Index near the top right corner of every page. The Search Engine has also been improved to exclude certain areas of the website (such as press releases) so that you are searching program content; you can select additional content areas at anytime when

you get to the search results page. There are more specific links on the homepage to help people find their information more quickly when they first get to the site. There is also contact information specific to the content; it is located in the right column and includes an address, phone number and an email address where users can ask specific questions about the information they need.

- The Division of Public Affairs and Education maintains and constantly updates the Publications Locator, a website section that lists available DEC publications and where they can be obtained, either electronically from the website or by ordering printed copies from existing stock.
- DEC's publication production section works closely with other department programs on such projects as chronic wasting disease (CWD), black bears, fishing guides, brochures describing specific hunting and fishing opportunities, trail guides, large-format display graphics, new fish and wildlife-related centerfolds for the *Conservationist*, and hundreds of award certificates.
- *Brochures and Publications* - Several new outreach programs were created, including information about Firewood and Invasive Insects (posters, brochures and website); Firewise (brochures, PSA's for television, webpage and posters); Trail Supporter Program (patch and *Conservationist* article) Climate Change (stickers and tip strips); and a large poster for the 25th Anniversary of the Bottle Bill to display at events throughout the state.
- Staff in the Bureau of Publications and Internet wrote and edited several articles and other materials on fish and wildlife programs and environmental topics. A new interactive CD and webpage is being developed with maps and information about fishing and boating access on the Hudson River.

Many brochures and other publications were revised and updated, including: technical and resource reports; information on invasive species throughout the state; Forest Ranger Procedures Manual; Annual Reports for the Divisions of Law Enforcement and Forest Rangers; the Living with Bears brochure and many publications with maps and information about hunting regulations for hunting areas particularly in the Hudson Valley and Long Island areas.

- Division of Public Affairs and Education coordinated the Department's activities at the New York State Fair. Displays at the New York State Fair featured interpretive panels on state land acquisitions, invasive species, and the Venison Donation Program.
- For another year, the DEC exhibit at the NY National Boat Show was a great success. Along with the full 40-foot-long Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources display of state record fish mounts, the exhibit included a SAFE Boat provided by the Division of Law Enforcement, a large aquarium with native marine species, and display by the Hudson River Estuary Program with a six-foot-long sturgeon. The divisions of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources; Public Affairs and Education; Water and Environmental Permits provided tables full of literature. Children learned environmental messages in games that offered the opportunity to win many fun fishing prizes.

DEC Environmental Education Centers

- Each of DEC's four environmental education centers-Rogers in Sherburne, Five Rivers in Delmar, Reinstein Woods in Cheektowaga and Stony Kill Farm in Wappingers Falls-offers year-round programs and services for school and youth groups, teachers and youth leaders, community groups and the public. An estimated 250,000 visitors use the facilities and services of the four centers annually.
- Both the new Reinstein Woods Environmental Education Center and the classroom building at Stony Kill Environmental Education Center were opened to the public in the spring of 2007. Besides interpreting New York's natural resources and environmental topics, staff at the centers show the many "green" designs that are featured in both buildings as part of their education programs.

DEC Environmental Education Camps

- DEC operates three summer camps for children 12-14 years old and one for teenagers 15-17 years old. The camp program, which started 60 years ago, is an enjoyable blend of learning and recreation that heightens campers' environmental awareness. Activities, such as sampling streams for aquatic life, netting butterflies, watching birds and hiking through forests, bring conservation concepts to life. The three camps for younger children are Camp Colby near Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks, Camp DeBruce in Sullivan County and Camp Rushford in Allegany County. Older teenagers attend Pack Forest in the Adirondack Park near Warrensburg. In 2006, 1,287 children attended DEC camps.
- Urban Youth Attend DEC Summer Camps in 2006 - The campership program for DEC's four residential summer environmental education camps has greatly exceeded expectations for 2006, with 230 children participating in the program. The initiative to recruit youth from urban areas across the state was greatly strengthened this year, with help from DEC camps staff and from partner organizations. Similar to scholarships, camperships were made available each year to a variety of community-based agencies and non-profit organizations in metropolitan areas. These partners agree to recruit campers, help parents with paperwork and assist in transporting the children to and from camp.

Besides offering a one-week camp experience, DEC and its partners arranged for pre- and post-camp programs to help children learn about New York State's natural resources through outdoor recreation and hands-on experiences. Typical activities include hikes, canoeing, overnight camping and field trips to nature centers. During the fall, several partners conducted service projects, such as park and beach cleanups, and helped youth explore environmental careers. One major partner in this effort is the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). Under a grant from the New York City Environmental Fund of the Hudson River Foundation, DPR's Urban Park Rangers sent 89 youngsters to DEC camps.

- Hunter training and shooting sports programs were popular at DEC youth camps again this summer. These programs are optional for campers; in 2006, 31 percent of the youngsters took hunter safety education while at camp, including many of the students attending through the

Diversity Program. In the spring of 2006, DEC environmental educators partnered with the New York Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation to offer a "turkey talks" workshop for 20 Diversity Program campers who passed their hunter safety training course at camp. They learned about the natural history of wild turkeys, turkey calling, and habitat needs. Seven participants honed their shooting skills at a Columbia County shooting range, and two went hunting with an experienced mentor. One participant decided to "shoot" her turkey with a camera.

DEC Environmental Education Programs

- A review of programs at DEC education centers and camps revealed that more than 65 percent of program effort is devoted to fish and wildlife education. The cost of this effort goes far beyond the support received from the Conservation Fund.
- Regional environmental educators are based in Long Island City and Stony Brook, serving the New York City and Long Island areas. They provide teacher workshops, in-school education programs and staff DEC displays at special events, such as Earth Day celebrations and the New York City Boat Show. More than 23,300 people in Regions 1 and 2 participated in programs offered by the DEC educators in 2006.
- After School Conservation Club: The After School Conservation Club engages elementary school students in environmental education activities and stewardship projects at 10 sites throughout New York City. This 10-week program runs for four hours a week and involves more than 350 children each session. The goals are to encourage a connection to nature and the urban environment for inner-city students, develop hands-on stewardship projects for students to help them understand natural processes, and to train staff from participating sites to conduct environmental education programs. It is a collaborative effort among the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, United Neighborhood Houses and The After-School Corporation, with initial funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the New York City Environmental Fund of the Hudson River Foundation.
- Project WILD and project WET (Water Education for Teachers) Workshops were conducted for about 4,600 educators, providing them with teaching materials and methods that focus on wildlife and water. Project WILD is now in its 21th year in New York State and is funded through the Conservation Fund. This environmental education curriculum continues to be DEC's premier educational program for teachers. Workshops have been conducted for more than 45,000 educators. Project WET was initiated in New York State during the 1996-97 fiscal year. It features a wide range of cultural, social and scientific issues relating to water, including fish and wildlife-related activities.
- Three Water Education Specialists, based at the three larger education centers (Rogers, Five Rivers and Stony Kill) conduct Project WET (Water Education for Teachers) workshops for educators. They hold week-long teacher training institutes at each of these centers during the summer, giving educators a solid background in water issues. These programs are conducted in cooperation with DEC's Division of Water and the Hudson River Estuary Program, as well as the Cornell University Water Resources Institute.

- DEC education programs continue to host the Student Conservation Association's Hudson River Valley AmeriCorps Program. AmeriCorps members conduct education programs at DEC education centers and other program units throughout the valley, greatly expanding the number of programs and services offered to the public.
- Nature Recreation Program - DEC conducts programs of many types for the overnight campers and day use visitors at DEC campgrounds in the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves. These programs include walks, talks, games, crafts, music, paddle trips, mountain hikes, and more. In 2006, over 28,000 campers attended these programs at the campgrounds where the program was offered.
- Junior Naturalist Program - This program is designed for children campers, ages 5- to 12-years old, who must complete several modules in a journal of environmental activities in order to earn a patch. The journals and patches change each year and the 2006 patch was a black bear. Over 10,000 journals are distributed annually and over 6,000 patches issued at the more than 20 campgrounds that offer the program.
- The Division of Public Affairs and Education continues to process many digital images in support of the Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources. Specific topics covered this year include CWD, eagle banding and pheasant stocking.

In 2006-2007, the *Conservationist* featured articles about public and private lands and access sites across the state, including Stewart State Forest (February 2006) and Land for the Future (October 2006). The magazine also shed light on recreational and tourism opportunities at Letchworth State Park (August 2007), the Carmen's River (April 2007), Ice Fishing (February 2007), Trout Fishing (April 2007), Belleayre Mountain (December 2006), Rogers Center (February 2007), and the Adirondack Wild Center (June 2007).

During 2006-2007, the *Conservationist* dedicated significant editorial space to building awareness and understanding of the natural world. The magazine continued with its feature Outdoor Discovery, covering such topics as why leaves change color, making maple syrup, how to use the sun to tell time, and animals that sleep during the winter.

Special pullout sections published during this time period included The Woodcock (October 2006), Feeder Birds (December 2006), Nearshore Saltwater Sportfish (April 2007), and Common Spiders of New York (June 2007). Magazine staff also reprinted nearly a dozen previous centerfolds as stand-alone brochures for public distribution.

The magazine continued its popular "ECO on Patrol," a feature that documents the real-life field experiences of environmental conservation officers, as well as Rangers to the Rescue. The *Conservationist* also continued to promote citizen participation through its popular Letters section, encouraging interaction between magazine staff and other departmental experts. Questions regarding a variety of environmental topics-initiated by letters submitted by the public-were answered in a timely and efficient manner over the course of the year.

The *Conservationist* also ran articles inviting public involvement, including pieces on Deer

Management, Earth Day, Free Fishing Days and the Bottle Bill.

The magazine was represented at the 2006 State Fair. Reprints of pullouts on NYS wildlife were made available to school teachers on demand.