

2009 Report to the NYS Conservation Council from the Division of Public Affairs and Education

Issue Priority: Connect New Yorkers to Nature

DEC Website

The website averaged 21,659 visits a day, totaling 8,204,123 in 2008. The web team continues to improve functions and add new content to the site, including DEC TV, a new online video player with videos on outdoor recreation, nature, wildlife, and environmental issues; Watchable Wildlife, a guide to New York wildlife viewing areas; online events calendar; and an expanded section promoting accessible recreation on public lands.

Continuing web features include Outdoor Discovery, a biweekly electronic newsletter with family-friendly outdoor activities; Green Living, ideas, tips and resources for environmentally responsible choices; and webcast meetings of certain environmental boards and councils

Brochures and Publications

DEC's publication production section worked closely with other agency programs to create several hundred publications and displays on topics including the new marine fishing regulations, archery in schools, and new brochures for the environmental education centers. Several sportsman education materials were updated, including student handbooks and firearms safety posters.

Public Outreach

During 2008-2009, public outreach staff organized and facilitated public meetings on proposed DEC actions, including statewide permit hearings on Marcellus Shale gas drilling, remediation at Long Island manufactured gas plants, and unit management plans in the Adirondacks and Catskills. Regional citizen participation specialists responded to public and media inquiries about nuisance wildlife management, seasonal fishing limits, and moratoriums on fluke and other marine species. Regional outreach staff conducted public outreach for the oak wilt eradication effort in the town of Glenville, including planning a meeting and serving as a point of contact for the media. Public outreach staff also convened public meetings on New York's Open Space Plan.

Staff assisted with writing a wastewater infrastructure needs report and implementing the carbon capture and sequestration project and the "Don't Flush Your Drugs" campaign. Public outreach staff began the new Watchable Wildlife campaign which includes a new website, with a new publication and outdoor wildlife appreciation events planned for 2010. Outreach staff coordinated DEC's presence at the State Fair, which includes the popular aquarium exhibit, fishing and hunting license sales, "green home" display, and Log Cabin exhibit.

Environmental Education

DEC's four environmental education centers offer programs for the public, youth and educators, serving more than 285,000 visitors in 2008. The centers also offer naturalist training internships.

DEC hosts six AmeriCorps Program members who conduct education programs, greatly expanding services for the public at Stony Kill, Five Rivers and in New York City.

More than 4,300 teachers attended *Project WILD* (wildlife) and *Project WET* (water) workshops. Project WILD is funded through the Conservation Fund. Regional environmental educators in Long Island City and Stony Brook reached more than 38,000 people in Regions 1 and 2 with teacher workshops, in-school programs and displays. Each summer, DEC's education centers hold week-long teacher institutes introducing environmental education activities that address NYS Learning Standards.

DEC's four Environmental Education Camps had record attendance in 2008. More than 1,540 children (ages 12-17) learned about nature, conservation and ecology. About 30 percent of the 12- to 14-year old campers participated in hunter safety training. Shooting sports and bowhunter education are offered to appropriately aged campers.

Almost 300 youth, who would otherwise not have the opportunity, participated in the Diversity Campership Program in 2008, thanks to a grant from the Hudson River Foundation and in partnership with the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation's Urban Park Rangers. The program provides a week at DEC camp, including transportation and pre- and post-camp activities such as hiking and fishing.

The After School Conservation Club for elementary school students conducted 10-week programs (4 hours a week) at 20 New York City sites, reaching more than 440 inner-city children.

Conservationist Magazine

Conservationist magazine is a New York State-focused publication that serves to connect New Yorkers to nature and features articles on outdoor recreation, natural resource management, and environmental issues. In 2008-9, topics included gun dog breeds, a natural history of the mallard, DEC's K-9 unit, memories of trout fishing in the Taconics and Catskills, modern-day fishing for trout and salmon in Lake Ontario, and a discussion of winter deer feeding. A new feature, "Ask the Biologist," answers questions about nature. *Conservationist* also continued to provide a public service through its "Letters" section, encouraging responses from program staff to interested correspondents and readers.