



# The Environmental Justice Report

A publication of DEC's Office of Environmental Justice – Volume 3 September 2015



Department of Environmental Conservation

## FEATURED NEWS

### DEC ENHANCES ITS OIL SPILL RESPONSE CAPABILITIES

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is developing Geographic Response Plans (GRPs) to improve the way it prepares for and responds to spills statewide. The GRPs will include specific strategies to respond to crude oil incidents in sensitive areas near rail corridors in 21 counties that county emergency planning committees will help identify.

DEC will use the plans to purchase and deploy critical spill response equipment statewide (e.g., oil absorbent booms, pumps, etc.) to aid local incident response efforts in the crude-by-rail corridors. DEC staff and contractors will train local responders, and the equipment will be maintained by DEC through a contractor.

Building on a successful pilot project in Clinton County, the expanded efforts will include significant collaboration with DEC's local, state and federal response partners, including county hazmat teams, local fire departments, the State Department of Transportation, the State Department of Health, the State Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Services, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and other organizations. DEC anticipates completing the GRPs for all 21 counties by April 2016.



## EJSCREEN NOW AVAILABLE!

Did you know the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) created a web-based tool to help residents better understand environmental impacts from industry in their neighborhoods? The tool, EJSCREEN, is a way to map and screen environmental justice areas to get demographic and environmental information for a particular community.

EJSCREEN includes 12 environmental indicators such as cancer risk from air toxics, neurological hazards, respiratory hazards, diesel particulate matter, traffic proximity and volume, lead paint indicator, proximity to major direct water dischargers, etc. There are six demographic indicators: low income, minority, education, linguistic isolation, age under five years old and age over 64 years old.

While EJSCREEN is not designed to provide residents with a risk assessment, it will give them a better understanding of issues in a selected location. The tool may help users identify areas with minority and/or low-income populations, potential environmental quality issues and a combination of environmental and demographic indicators that is greater than usual. This information may be used to support educational programs, grant writing and community awareness efforts.

To learn more about EJSCREEN, and to access this tool, visit: <http://www2.epa.gov/ejscreen/learn-use-ejscreen>.

## NEW YORK AND THE CLEAN POWER PLAN

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan (CPP), as a part of the Clean Air Act, is aimed at reducing carbon dioxide emissions from power plants. Under the CPP, New York State has a target for reducing emissions by 2030 and can propose its own path for reaching it – whether through improving existing plants or replacing them with clean energy like wind and solar. The CPP also provides specific incentives for enhancing energy efficiency in low-income communities. New York, as a part of the Regional Greenhouse Gas

Initiative (RGGI), has already been working to reduce these emissions and is well-positioned to meet the new targets. New York's progress through RGGI has reduced carbon pollution, while investing millions of dollars to help environmental justice communities save money through energy efficiency, to create jobs and job training and to provide cleaner energy choices. The new suite of energy programs underway in New York, including the Reforming the Energy Vision (REV), will also help the transition to clean energy. New York will be reaching out to environmental justice communities to ensure that the state's choices on how to continue to reduce carbon pollution take special account of the needs and opportunities in environmental justice communities. Stay tuned for specific details.

## GRANTS GATEWAY WEBINAR SLATED FOR SEPTEMBER 11: DEC TO COVER PREQUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR UPCOMING COMMUNITY IMPACT GRANTS

DEC's Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ) is hosting a webinar on the Grants Gateway, a web-based system for those applying for state grants, on Friday, September 11 at noon. Pursuant to the New York State Division of Budget Bulletin H-1032, dated June 7, 2013, New York State has instituted key reform initiatives to the grant contract process which require not-for-profits to register in Grants Gateway and complete the vendor prequalification process in order for grant applications to be evaluated. This webinar will help applicants understand the Grants Gateway process.

### Webinar Information:

**Topic:** NYS DEC Environmental Justice Community Impact Grants

**Date:** Friday, September 11, 2015

**Time:** Noon

1. Go to <https://meetny.webex.com/meetny/>
2. Meeting Number: 647 699 544
3. Meeting Password: EJ2015
4. Click "Join".

O EJ will offer Community Impact Grants this fall to community-based organizations for implementing projects that address various environmental and public health concerns. Interested applicants should register and prequalify in the Grants Gateway as soon as possible, as this process may take time.

Community Impact Grant proposals received from not-for-profit applicants that have not registered and are not prequalified in the Grants Gateway will be disqualified from further consideration. In addition to the upcoming webinar, a Vendor Prequalification Manual on the Grants Reform website details the requirements, and an online tutorial is available to walk users through the process. Information on these initiatives can be found on the Grants Reform website: ([www.grantsreform.ny.gov](http://www.grantsreform.ny.gov)). As always, the Office of Environmental Justice is available to assist anyone with questions. For more information, call the toll-free EJ hotline: 866.229.0497.

## BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY GARDENING

Veggie lovers in urban communities across the country are turning to grow your own as an alternative to buying produce from the market. Urban gardening, whether outside in a community garden or indoors, is a rewarding activity with many benefits, especially for low-income and minority communities.

### Food Benefits

For some, growing your own vegetables solves a problem known as food deserts. Food deserts are low-income neighborhoods where a substantial number of residents have limited access to a grocery

store. These nutrition-deprived neighborhoods also tend to have greater access to fast food restaurants and expensive convenience stores. According to a Huffington Post article citing a 2009 report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as many as 23.5 million Americans live more than a mile from a supermarket and have limited access to a vehicle or public transit.<sup>1</sup> By growing your own edibles, families can easily obtain the vegetables and fruits needed for a healthier diet, save money and have more control over what they eat.

### Health Benefits

Fruits and vegetables give the body many nutrients, improve digestive issues, lower the risk for certain diseases, improve cardiovascular health and help control body weight. These health benefits alone should be enough to make anyone want to grab some kale seeds and start sowing! But gardening also is an activity that improves mood, eases stress, keeps blood flowing, lowers the risk for dementia and is great exercise, according to [gardeningknowhow.com](http://gardeningknowhow.com). Getting started is not difficult, especially if there are existing community gardens in an area.

Being a part of a community garden is a good way to grow your own produce, when residents do not have their own land or enough space to grow in their own yards. A group of interested growers within a community care for and maintain community gardens. They then reap the benefit of their labor by enjoying the produce they grow while sharing with others in the community. There are over 1,000 registered or permitted community gardens in cities around New York State, according to the state Department of Agriculture & Markets.<sup>2</sup>

## Environmental Benefits

Benefits to the environment are additional incentives to community gardens. Community gardens beautify city blocks. They provide needed green space in areas where public parks are scarce. These green spaces result in reduced city heat, decreased storm water run-off, safer soil and natural habitat for birds.

Sharon DiLorenzo is a program manager at Capital Roots, a non-profit in Troy that organizes community gardens throughout the Capital Region. Sharon, who has been a part of Capital Roots for 23 years, offers this advice on community gardens:

- Practice patience. Community gardens require time and effort.
- Be committed to gardening and enjoy learning about soil and planting.
- Maintain the soil so it doesn't lose its nutrients. You can use organic fertilizer, compost or manure to maintain the soil.
- Use a soil pH test. The US Department of Agriculture has a step-by-step guide on what residents should look for when sampling the site (pH levels, soil composition, nutrients and nitrogen). [[http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/health/assessment/?cid=nrcs142p2\\_053873](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/health/assessment/?cid=nrcs142p2_053873)]
- Keep your garden simple. Do not grow big vegetables immediately. Start with smaller ones like green beans, lettuce, tomatoes and squash.
- Mulch your garden plot. A good way to do this is by laying newspaper on the soil surrounding the plant, then place straw on top of the newspaper. This cuts back on 90 percent of the weeds you would normally get.
- Obtain enough necessary items needed to maintain the garden – lawnmower, gardening tools, water hose, etc.

## CAREERS AT DEC IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

Did you ever wonder who the police in the green uniforms are? They are New York State Environmental Conservation Officers, or ECOs. In 1880, the first conservation officers in New York State “hit the woods,” 27 years before there were New York State police. The primary focus of those officers was protecting wildlife. Back then, often the only “law” encountered in the most rural areas of New York was the game protector, as they were called.

In modern times, ECOs are sworn police officers authorized to enforce all state laws, with emphasis on enforcing New York's Environmental Conservation Laws, including laws relating to environmental



<sup>1</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-blumenthal/food-deserts\\_b\\_3822428.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-blumenthal/food-deserts_b_3822428.html)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.agriculture.ny.gov/CG/CGGardens.html>



quality, hunting, fishing and trapping and protecting natural resources. Environmental quality enforcement includes investigating timber thefts, improper use of pesticides, and large vehicles producing excessive exhaust emissions. Fish and wildlife enforcement includes addressing complaints of poaching, the illegal sale of endangered species and checking hunters, anglers, trappers and commercial fishermen for compliance.

Below are the current education and work experience requirements for a career as an ECO. Qualifications may change, and anyone interested should check the NYS Department of Civil Service website regularly for any updates and civil service exam notices (<http://www.cs.ny.gov/>). Candidates who are successful on the exam must pass a 26-week residential training academy to become officers.

### Job Qualifications:

1. A bachelor's or higher level degree including or supplemented by 18 semester credit hours in any combination of courses indicated below as qualifying course work;

OR 2. An associate's degree including or supplemented by 18 semester credit hours in any combination of courses indicated below as qualifying course work; AND one of the following:

1. One year of experience in the areas of freshwater or marine sciences, wildlife sciences, forestry, environmental engineering, or environmental technology; OR

2. One year of experience as a police officer with municipal police training course certification (or equivalent course approved by the New York State Municipal Police Training Council) or as a certified federal law enforcement officer. A certified Peace Officer Training Course does not satisfy this requirement; OR

3. Two years of active United States military service with an honorable discharge

**Qualifying coursework:** natural resource conservation, environmental science, environmental studies or a similar environmental program, natural science, physical science or criminal justice. Substitution: Up to 6 semester credit hours in computer science may be used to meet the 18 semester credit hour requirement.

## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

### HOW DEC'S COMMUNITY IMPACT GRANT HELPED GROUNDWORK HUDSON VALLEY TEACH AT-RISK TEENS ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS IN THEIR COMMUNITY

DEC's Office of Environmental Justice awarded Groundwork Hudson Valley a \$10,000 grant in its last grant round to teach teens in Southwest Yonkers alternative methods of sustainable technology.

During the program, high school students ages 16 to 18 learned the natural processes/cycles that occur in the environment and compared them to the hazards that occur in their neighborhoods. To do this, the students were split into three groups: water, soil and air.



The water group focused on water quality by performing multiple tests; sampling and analyzing water from the Hudson River and other locations. This group built a bioremediation marsh, which is a method where organisms break down toxins into less toxic or nontoxic chemicals. The students in the soil group learned about soil and dirt and performed soil testing experiments. They made a soil Integrated Pest Management (IPM) brochure, as well as a composting brochure, to teach community members how to decrease pesticide use. The air group drafted and modeled a green roof for a miniature house and placed green roof panels on top of it. Once the roofs were complete, the students created signs for the community to educate them on the benefits of green roofs. The three groups created a long-term method that would contribute to preserving the environment and presented it to their fellow teammates.

The Community Impact Grant helped Groundwork Hudson Valley teach young adults the importance of renewable energy and how to implement hands-on projects that would improve the quality of the environment where they live. DEC will offer grants again this fall for community organizations that want to help neighborhoods address multiple environmental harms and risks. To receive updates on when the request for applications will open, sign up on DEC's homepage under DEC Delivers at [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov). After you enter your e-mail address, select environmental justice to receive updates.

## TIPS TO ELIMINATE WILDLIFE CONFLICTS AROUND YOUR HOME AND IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Parks, undeveloped wooded areas and landscaped developments in urban settings provide a home for wildlife. Wild animals can be alluring to some, but can be a nuisance to others, especially around residences. With some common sense precautions and knowledge of wildlife habits, city dwellers can continue to enjoy wildlife and avoid the occasional conflicts that certain animals may cause.

It starts with a basic understanding of wildlife habitat. Habitat is where animals live. Habitat can be wooded areas, marshes, shrubs or old, hollowed out trees. To be good habitat, animals need food, water and shelter.

Our urban areas in New York are home to deer, rodents, opossums, birds, raccoons, skunks, several species of snakes and squirrels, just to name a few. They typically keep to themselves, but sometimes they use the habitat people provide, and that may cause damage to homes or gardens. In nearly all cases, there are one or more attractions that bring animals close to humans. The best way to reduce common wildlife issues is eliminating access to food, water and shelter, which is what all animals need to survive. Below are general tips intended to help you repel, prevent and control problems with urban wildlife.

### Remove food sources

- Clean up food around bird feeders and remove them when not in use.
- Secure or remove garbage immediately and wait until the day of trash pick-up to take outside.
- Feed pets indoors.
- Use fencing to cover gardens and plants.
- Pick up dropped fruit that may be on the ground.



injured wildlife with the goal of releasing them back to the wild if possible.

Likewise, if residents see wildlife that appear to be sick with such viral diseases as distemper or rabies, contact the local animal control officer or police department. For more information on what residents should do when encountering wild animals (alive, sick or dead), visit: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/261.html>.

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### Eliminate cover and shelter

- Get rid of piles of brush, logs, junk, etc., and stash firewood away from your house or other buildings.

### Put up barriers

- Fence in areas such as gardens and underneath decks.
- Seal entry holes that lead into the house. Ensure there are no animals inside as this can lead to worse problems.

### Excite or agitate

- Use visual repellents such as scarecrows or lights.
- Create noise (i.e. yelling, noisemakers) - be sure to check noise ordinances in your area.
- Haze (i.e. chase away with dogs, etc.). Do not haze a migratory bird that is nesting, as this is a violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

### Legally remove or “take”

- Contact a professional nuisance wildlife control operator to remove problem wildlife from your property (search DEC’s website for an operator near you: [http://www.dec.ny.gov/cfm/xtapps/sls\\_searches/index.cfm?p=live\\_nwco](http://www.dec.ny.gov/cfm/xtapps/sls_searches/index.cfm?p=live_nwco)).
- Remove or “take” nuisance animals on your own in accordance with New York State laws and regulations. <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/81531.html>.

While enjoying the view of wildlife in urban areas, residents should take a “hands-off” approach to avoid conflict with animals. People should not handle or feed animals, as this may encourage unwanted consequences. If residents see injured wildlife, the best approach is to contact a wildlife rehabilitator (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/83977.html>). These individuals are licensed by DEC to handle and care for

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## Tales from a DEC Wildlife Biologist—

A homeowner called DEC to ask for help in removing some snakes from a small tool shed. Most snakes in New York are not venomous, and many provide important ecological benefits, including eating insects and slugs that may damage gardens. Nevertheless, it certainly can be disturbing to face a snake every time you reach for a garden tool! Upon inspection of the site, it was clear that the solution was simple—by removing all available “snake habitat,” the homeowner could render the tool shed unattractive to unwanted visitors. In this case, all that was needed was to remove the tools, toys and other items off the floor of the shed by hanging them on hooks. In this manner, there were no obvious hiding spots on the floor behind shovels, paddles and storage bins. Just like with raccoons and squirrels, solving this snake problem was simply a matter of recognizing habitat and removing those attractive items, while keeping the functionality of the storage shed intact. When we think about the habitat needs of wildlife—food, shelter, water—we can analyze what is attracting animals, and take measures to reduce or eliminate those factors.

– Gordon Batcheller, retired wildlife biologist