

Executive Summary

A. How is the Hudson doing? The State of the Hudson 2009

The Hudson River and its watershed form a dynamic ecosystem that supports a variety of human needs and sustains a rich natural environment. It has dramatically changed over time. Studying its past and present condition helps us chart a direction for the future. For over a century, the Hudson has benefited from an active conservation movement that has protected scenic landscapes, historic sites, forests, wildlife and water resources. In many ways the river is much better than it was one hundred years ago. In other ways, things have gotten worse. Some changes are permanent and can never be reversed. Revitalizing and sustaining the river valley for the benefit of all its residents is the task at hand and requires an understanding of both the rhythms of the natural world and the needs of our people. Here's where we stand today:

Water quality:

The Hudson has become cleaner over the last forty years. To continue progress we need to clean up toxic leftovers from the past, upgrade sewage treatment, control polluted runoff, and prevent new contaminants from entering the ecosystem.

River Habitats:

Dredging, filling, and shoreline development caused massive loss and alteration of river habitats into the 1970s. We must protect remaining habitats to nurture the fish and wildlife that depend on them and to sustain benefits they provide to human communities.

River Fish & Wildlife:

Eagles and egrets are up, shad and sturgeon are down, and alien invaders are here to stay. We must protect habitat, adopt stringent fisheries conservation measures, and prevent the establishment of other invasive species.

Tributary Streams that Flow to the Hudson:

Since 1972 we have cleaned up the most degraded tributaries, but now healthy streams are stressed by runoff and the pollutants it carries, while floodplain development and dams compromise stream habitat. Further improvements will depend on decisions made by hundreds of communities and thousands of landowners.

Landscape and Land Use:

One hundred years of conservation have preserved world famous scenic landscapes and significant natural resources such as water supplies. The population and economic growth attracted to this landscape must be guided by the need to conserve these natural assets.

The Living Landscape—Biological Diversity and Ecosystems:

Ongoing threats to the Hudson Valley's biological diversity include climate change and sprawl that fragments habitat, promotes the spread of pests, and disrupts natural processes sustaining people and wildlife. It is crucial that more municipalities and landowners adopt new patterns of development.

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The People of the River Valley:

Growing numbers of citizens, organizations, and institutions are taking action to improve the health of the Hudson. The river shaped our past; we now shape its future. Our power to alter the Hudson must be informed by striving to understand the vital role the river plays in our lives.

B. What needs to be done now? The Hudson River Estuary Action Agenda

In 2005, the state's Hudson River Estuary Action Agenda established 12 long-range goals for revitalizing and sustaining the river valley for the benefit of all its residents and set targets and action steps to achieve them. The Action Agenda is not a state agency "plan" in the formal sense of the word but a statement of where the state and its citizens want to be. The June 2009 *Discussion Draft Hudson River Estuary Action Agenda 2010-2014* identifies the following priority actions for the next four years:

The River

Goals 1, 2, 10 & 11 addresses the need to restore our signature species of fish, conserve the aquatic habitats which sustain them, remove toxic contaminants from the water and sediments, and improve water quality for swimming, fishing, drinking water and other benefits. Needed actions include:

- implement fish recovery plans for shad, herring, sturgeon and striped bass
- address the impacts of water withdrawing facilities, such as power plants
- complete the mapping of key habitats and begin habitat restoration projects
- improve guidance on shoreline erosion control options to make them more ecological
- detect, monitor and where possible control new harmful aquatic invasive species
- prepare for sea level rise and its consequences on human communities and natural systems
- update water and sewer infrastructure and disinfect wastewater where needed
- adopt new "green" approaches to reducing the impacts of run-off
- manage sediments coming into the river from streams
- reduce the inputs of contaminants such as metals, pesticides, PAHs, dioxin and PCBs

The Valley

Goals 3, 4, 5, and 6 address the need to conserve the rich diversity of plants animals and habitats of the valley, restore our streams, protect our famed landscape and scenery and address the changing climate of the valley. Needed actions include:

- Conserve habitat connections that make our ecosystem resilient in the face of change
- Increase groundwater infiltration to protect stream flows and conserve water supplies
- Manage stream corridors and floodplains so that people and ecosystems are safe
- Increase the amount of conserved land for scenic vistas, habitats and recreation
- Help communities become "Climate Smart"
- Improve land use decision-making to reduce the sprawling patterns of development and strengthen our cities, hamlets and community centers

The People

Goals 7, 8, 9 and 12 address the need to provide access to the Hudson for recreational uses enjoyment, enhance public understanding of the river and enjoyment of it, revitalize the waterfront communities of its

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shoreline and celebrate our successes. Needed actions include:

- Complete the Greenway Trail
- Upgrade our deteriorated docks and build new ones
- Provide river access for people whose needs have not been adequately served
- Build connections for richer and more diverse river experiences
- Serve the needs of educators and students by creating curriculum, training programs and facilities
- Continue to revitalize waterfront communities and support enhanced planning
- Track our progress and celebrate our accomplishments