



Hudson River Estuary Program

Summary

2015-2020

Hudson River Estuary Action Agenda



Photo Credit: Chris Bowser

The Hudson River Estuary Program helps people enjoy, protect, and revitalize the Hudson River and its valley. Created by state law in 1987, the Estuary Program focuses on the tidal Hudson and its watershed, from the head of tide at Troy to the Verrazano Narrows in New York City.

A Program of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

www.dec.ny.gov

CONNECT WITH NYSDEC



The Estuary

The Hudson River is a rich and diverse estuary, a complex ecosystem, and a source of artistic inspiration; it is also the defining feature of home for millions of people. The Hudson contributes to a sense of place that knits communities together, and it is the economic engine that drives millions of dollars in tourism, recreation, and transportation.

What is the Action Agenda?

The Hudson River Estuary Action Agenda presents a shared vision for the future of the Hudson and its watershed, as well as opportunities for action as defined by diverse groups of people who live and work along the river and in its watershed. It specifies the challenges we face and identifies practical solutions that can be carried out by 2020 through the collaboration of citizens working together.

How We Work

The Hudson River Estuary Program's role is to develop the essential actions necessary to achieve the vision expressed in the Action Agenda and to organize, support, and guide many agencies, municipalities, organizations, and other stakeholders in realizing that vision. We use an understanding of ecology as a foundation for all of our work. Our goal is to develop knowledgeable and effective stewards of the estuary and its ecosystem.

The Action Agenda charts a course to provide six key benefits:

- Clean Water
- Resilient Communities
- Vital Estuary Ecosystem
- Estuary Fish, Wildlife, and Habitats
- Natural Scenery
- Education, River Access, Recreation, and Inspiration

Benefit:

Clean Water

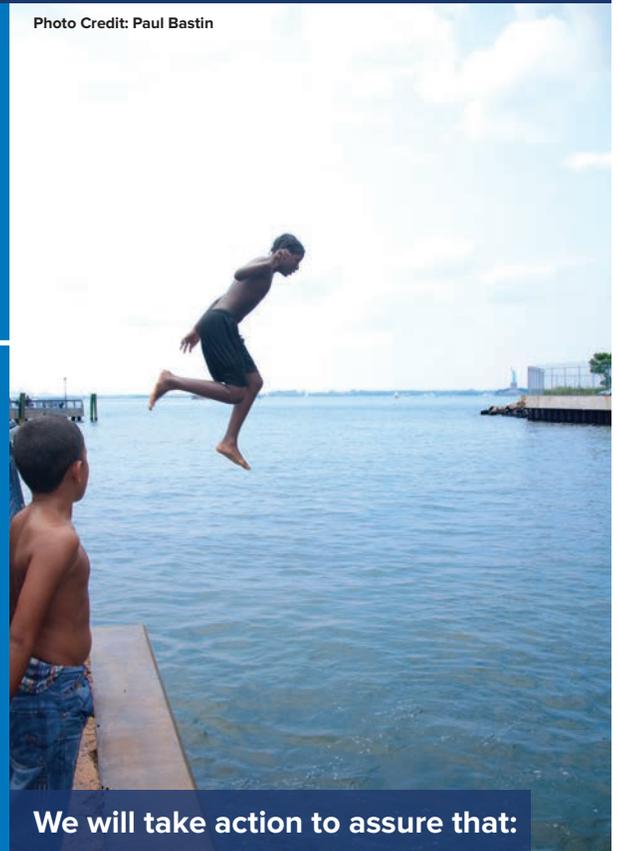
The Vision:

The Hudson River estuary is drinkable, swimmable, and fishable.

The Challenge:

Clean water is vital to all aspects of life in the Hudson Valley, from drinking water for communities, to infrastructure for economic growth, to headwater streams and estuary waters supporting robust fisheries and recreation. After decades of misuse, the Hudson River estuary is increasingly cleaner. This improvement is the result of successful state and federal laws such as: New York's Pure Waters Bond Act, the 1986 Environmental Quality Bond Act, and the Clean Water Act, plus local land-use laws and collaborations among concerned residents, interested businesses, dedicated nonprofit organizations, and government agencies at all levels. However, aging infrastructure and land-use changes are putting pressure on water resources. Communities need assistance to maintain the success achieved to date and to increase clean water benefits into the future.

Photo Credit: Paul Bastin



We will take action to assure that:

- Water quality in the estuary, its tributaries, and its watershed is maintained and improved to support municipal drinking water supplies, swimming, and other types of water-based recreation, as well as aquatic life.
- Communities sustainably manage water resources for drinking water and other uses in ways that also support resilient ecosystems.



Photo Credit: Riverkeeper



Photo Credit: Steve Stanne

Benefit:

Resilient Communities

The Vision:

All watershed communities plan and manage their natural resources and built environments to reduce vulnerability to climate change and to provide for human uses in ways that sustain the estuary and a healthy watershed ecosystem.

The Challenge:

Changing development patterns, types of industry, modes of transportation, and sources of energy have shaped the communities and estuary ecosystems we see today and will shape those we live in tomorrow. Our changing climate has introduced new challenges for communities. Creating resilient communities throughout the estuary's watershed will take a multi-faceted approach, including: water-quality infrastructure investment, floodplain management, watershed management, waterway access, education, and natural area protection. How our communities manage their environments will be central to their health and the health of the Hudson River estuary.

Photo Credit: Steve Stanne



We will take action to assure that:

- Waterfront communities along the Hudson are resilient to flooding, heat, and drought and will contribute to a clean estuary and a vital ecosystem.
- Tributary streams and their floodplains are conserved, re-vegetated, and restored using natural and nature-based solutions to better absorb and slow floodwaters, mitigate erosion, and support the estuary ecosystem.
- Communities along the Hudson and in the watershed use natural resource information to create land-use practices, plans, and policies that conserve priority lands and waters to benefit people and the estuary.

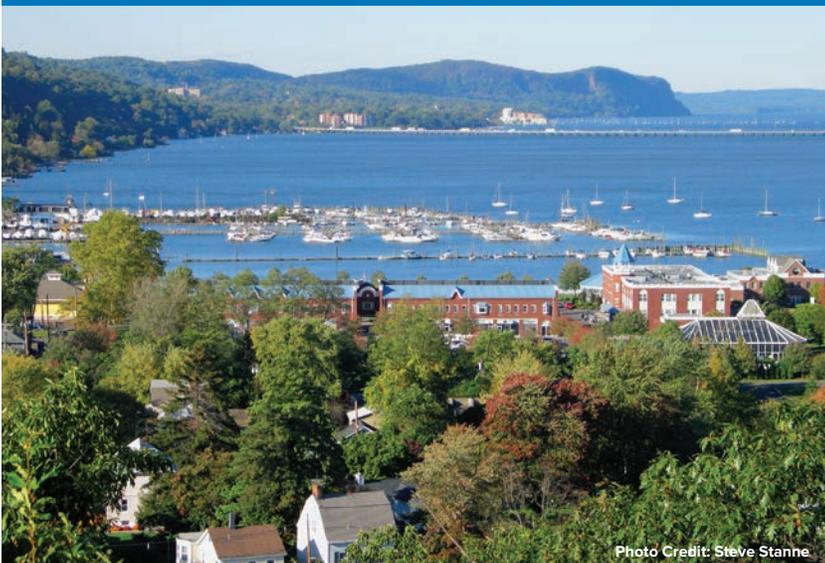


Photo Credit: Steve Stanne



Photo Credit: Beth Roessler

Benefit:

Vital Estuary Ecosystem

The Vision:

Life in the estuary thrives with support from healthy forests, wetlands, and streams throughout the watershed.

The Challenge:

The Hudson River estuary and the watershed surrounding it support extraordinary biological diversity and provide important benefits to people. It is a complex of habitats that includes shoreline wetlands, aquatic vegetation beds, and the bottom of the river itself. Supporting the estuary and communities throughout the valley are rich forests, lush wetlands, grasslands, and many other habitats. These natural systems are vital for the estuary ecosystem, and they benefit our communities by reducing flooding, purifying drinking water, and providing wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities. Yet few mechanisms are in place to guarantee that these benefits will continue. Sustaining a vital ecosystem will require that we use our scientific knowledge and apply new conservation strategies.



Photo Credit: Sarah Fernald

We will take action to assure that:

- The quantity and quality of tidal wetlands, submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) beds, and natural or nature-based shorelines are increased through conservation and restoration to foster a healthy ecosystem that is resilient to change.
- Aquatic invasive species (AIS) that could reduce ecosystem vitality are kept out of the estuary, and existing populations of AIS are contained; the potential for new invasions of invasive aquatic plants and animals has been lowered; and the spread of existing aquatic invasive species beyond the estuary has been slowed.
- Key ecological connections between the watershed and the estuary are identified to guide management actions in the watershed that support a functional, productive, and resilient estuary ecosystem.
- River impacts from water withdrawals or placement of pipes, power lines, and other in-water facilities will be avoided or mitigated.



Photo Credit: Terry Hardy



Photo Credit: Steve Stanne

Benefit:

Estuary Fish, Wildlife, and Habitats

The Vision:

The estuary supports robust populations of fish and wildlife that are popular for fishing and wildlife-related recreation.

The Challenge:

The fish, wildlife, and habitats of the estuary that are important for wildlife-related recreation depend upon a healthy environment as well as effective management strategies to ensure their continued role in a balanced and sustainable ecosystem. Today, blue crabs and river herring support the only remaining active in-river commercial fisheries, and the status of the Hudson's more popular recreational fisheries is mixed. In addition to important fisheries, the Hudson is an important migration corridor for many birds. Wildlife-related recreation in New York generates billions of dollars spent by anglers, sportsmen and women, and wildlife watchers.

Photo Credit: Rebecca Hoise



We will take action to assure that:

- Populations of striped bass, American shad, river herring, Atlantic sturgeon, blue crab, American eel, and the near-shore fish community that make up the base of the food chain are robust and sustained at levels that support both a resilient ecosystem and a sustainable commercial and/or recreational harvest.
- Habitats needed to support American shad, river herring, striped bass, black bass, American eel, blue crab, and sturgeon populations during critical life stages and seasons are identified, sustained and, where possible, restored.
- Hudson River estuary habitats and floodplains can sustain healthy and diverse populations of wildlife that are important for wildlife-related recreation as sea level rises and coastal habitats change over time.
- Contaminant levels in Hudson River fish and crabs are reduced so that they meet federal standards for commercial sale and most species become a healthy source of food for everyone who wants to eat them.



Benefit:

Natural Scenery

The Vision:

Natural scenery is preserved and enjoyed by the public.

The Challenge:

The natural scenery of the Hudson River Valley has long been recognized as an important aspect of the region's sense of place and has attracted artists and visitors from around the world. Our natural scenery has inspired national art and architecture movements and innovations in landscape design, and has drawn leading entrepreneurs to the region to establish homes and businesses. Our scenery inspires people to care about the environment, creating a unique culture of conservation that also sets this region apart. Private land owners, municipal planners, and those responsible for historic sites along the shore need additional training and resources to conserve important land and vistas.

Photo Credit: Steve Stanne



We will take action to assure that:

- Natural scenery along the estuary shoreline is conserved in ways that sustain a healthy estuary and enable both residents and visitors to enjoy its vistas and views.
- Conservation of natural scenery, which is valued by communities in the watershed, is integrated into local planning for recreation, economic development, tourism, and land use consistent with local home rule.
- River shoreline property owners manage their lands to conserve natural scenery and river vistas in environmentally sound ways.

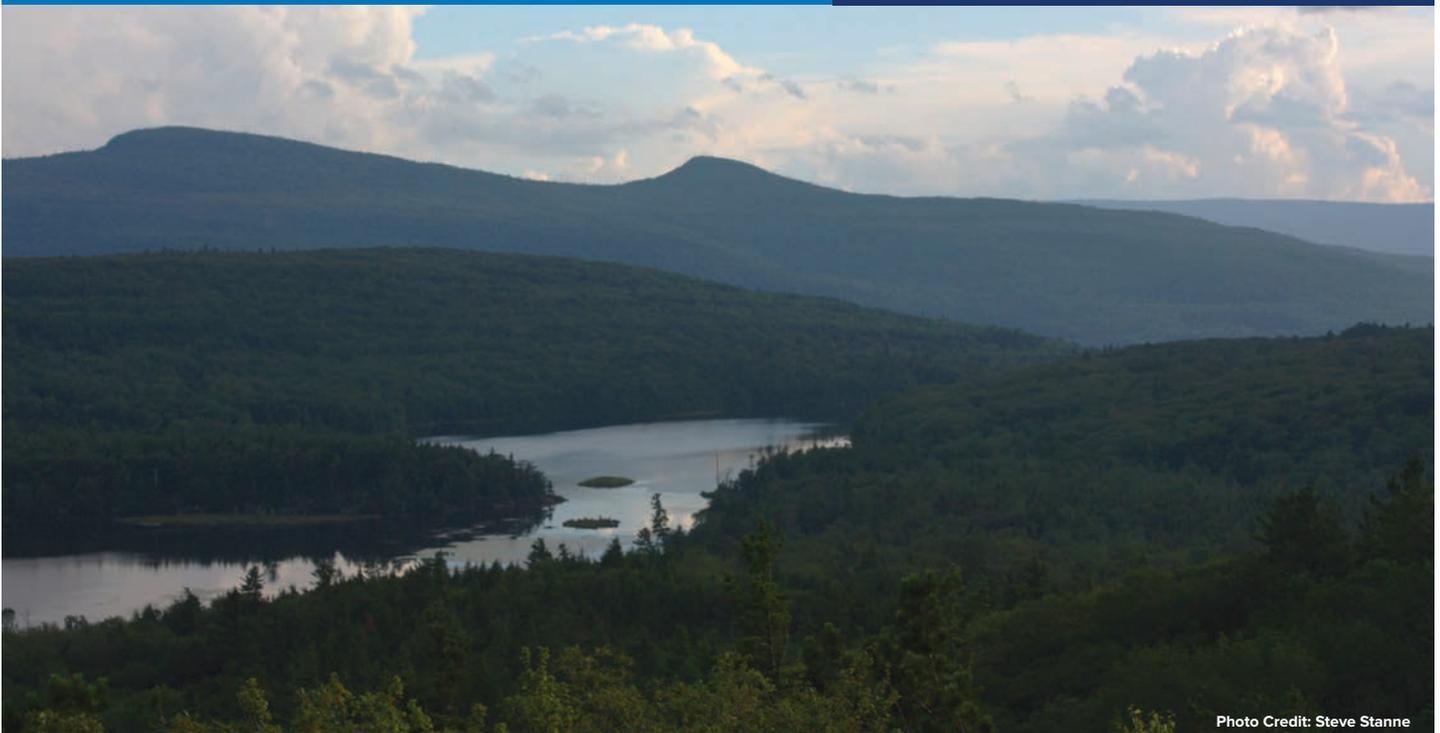


Photo Credit: Steve Stanne

Benefit:

Education, River Access, Recreation, and Inspiration

The Vision:

The estuary, as an integral part of our river communities, is valued by Hudson Valley residents, and its many natural resources are available and accessible, providing high-quality, place-based educational, recreational, and inspirational experiences.

The Challenge:

The Hudson River estuary and its shores offer exceptional opportunities for education and outdoor recreation, including swimming, fishing, boating, hiking, and river watching. Place-based education about the river promotes knowledge of the ecosystem, mastery of skills required by learning standards, and participation in stewardship activities. As water quality has improved over the last 40 years, the demand for river access by residents and visitors has risen accordingly, as has the pace of riverfront development. In addition, emerging issues are now affecting our approach to providing river access; the population in the Hudson Valley is more diverse and is growing older, requiring a fresh look at the location and accessibility of sites for people with a wide range of abilities. It is also critical to provide technical assistance and funding for upgrades to docks, boat launches, and other facilities to make them more resilient to storm surge and flooding.



We will take action to assure that:

- Residents of the Hudson Valley understand and appreciate the contribution of the estuary, its watershed, and its fish and wildlife to their lives, and conserve the estuary and its resources.
- Students who graduate from high school and colleges in the Hudson River Valley have a fundamental understanding of the estuary and its connected local waterways, appreciate the river's value to natural and human communities, and have participated in stewardship activities along the estuary or in its watershed.
- Access is improved for fishing, swimming, boating, and wildlife-dependent recreation on tidal waters for all, using principles of universal design and storm resilience, especially in underserved communities.
- River maintenance dredging and the dredged material itself are managed to sustain ecosystems and help boat launches, yacht clubs, marinas, and ports remain viable sites for enjoyment of the river and maritime trade.
- Progress in conserving the estuary is recognized through reports, regional celebrations, and events



Photo Credit: Chris Bowser



Photo Credit: Chris Bowser



Partnerships

The participation of government and non-government partners to help implement the Action Agenda is central to the Estuary Program's approach. No single organization or agency can fund all the science, education, and conservation initiatives needed to protect and restore the Hudson and its watershed. The Hudson River Estuary Management Advisory Committee (HREMAC) guides development and implementation of the Action Agenda and provides a bridge to a wider group of partners and stakeholders. Educators, businesses, researchers, anglers, scientists, and others serve on the committee and collaborate with the Estuary Program on projects and programs.

Several government partners have *ex-officio* members on the committee:

Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Hudson River
Valley Greenway

Hudson River
National Estuarine
Research Reserve

Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

Department
of Health

Department
of State



New York - New Jersey
Harbor Estuary Program

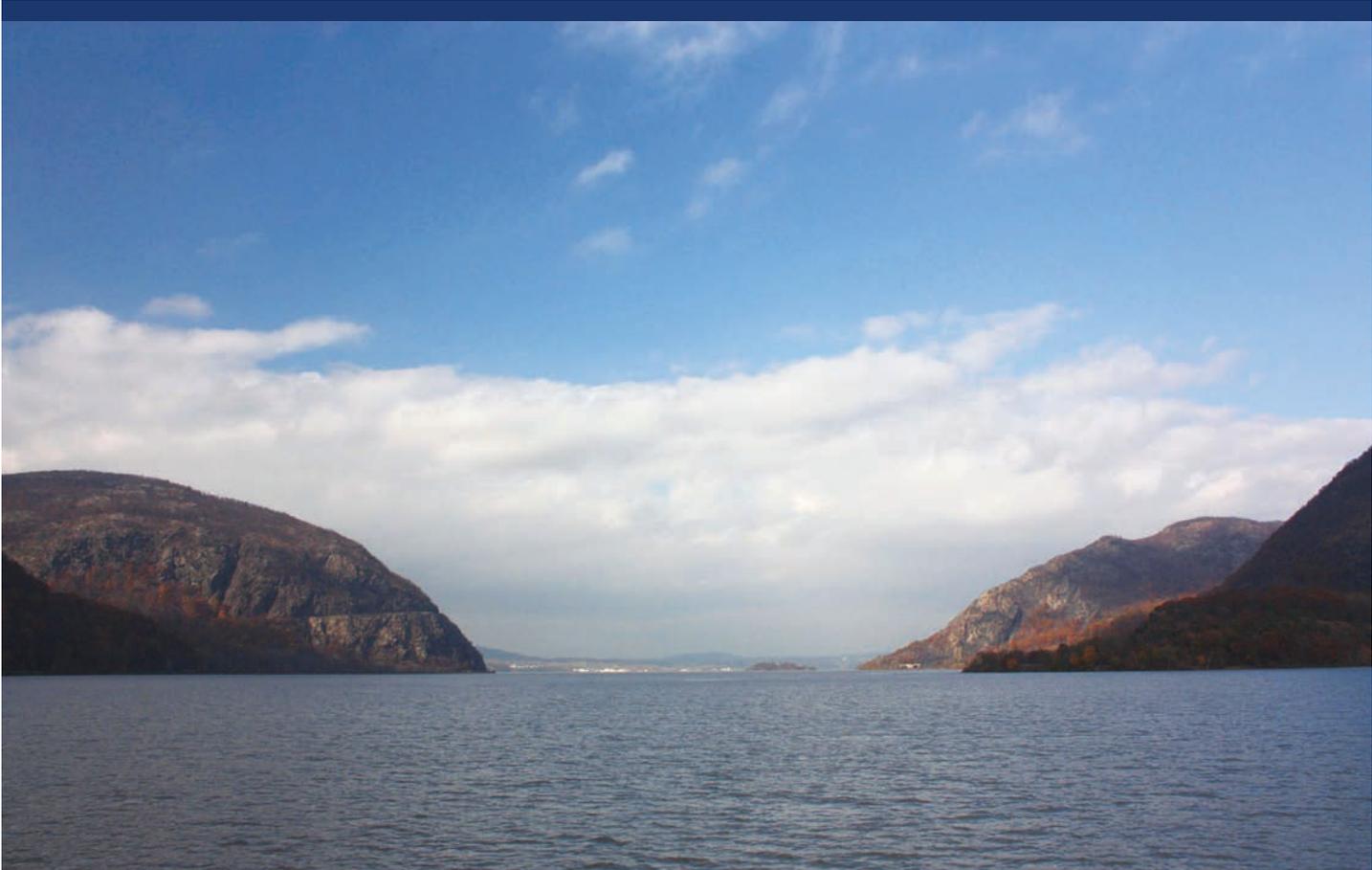


Hudson River Park





Hudson River Estuary Program



The full text of the Hudson River Estuary Action Agenda
2015-2020 is available at

www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4920.html

Hudson River Estuary Program
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

21 South Putt Corners Road
New Paltz, NY 12561

845-256-3016

hrep@dec.ny.gov

www.dec.ny.gov