

Hudson River Estuary Advisory Committee Meeting
Final Minutes - Approved March 25, 2009
Date: December 10, 2008
Norrie Point Environmental Center, Staatsburg, NY

Attendance: (total 61)

HREMAC Members:

Bicking, Andy	Scenic Hudson
Gina D'Agrosa	Westchester County
Emslie, Bill	Coastal Conservation
Findlay, Stuart	Institute of Ecosystem Studies
Griffen, Sara	OLANA Partnership
Lake, Tom,	Educator
Matthiessen, Alex	(John Lipscomb attending) Riverkeeper
Rumpf, Jeff	Clearwater
Schoeberl, Karl	Central Hudson Gas and Electric
Suszkowski, Dennis	Hudson River Foundation
VanLuven, David	The Nature Conservancy

Ex-Officios:

Baudanza, Tom	NYC DEP
Keller, Scott	Hudson River Valley Greenway
Leah Akins	NYS DOS (for Bonnie Devine)
Rukovets, Boris	Interstate Env. Commission

Guests:

Alan Bauder	NYS Office of General Services
Dave Conover	Hudson River Clearwater
Dunlap, Katy	Watershed Alliance
Henne, Sandy	-
Lewis, Roland	Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance
Meixler, Marcy	Cornell University, Riparian buffer mapping, intern
Molloy, Barney	Historic Hudson River Towns
Reed, Doug	Hudson Basin River Watch
Shaheen, Rita	Scenic Hudson
Shaw, Bill	Hudson River Environmental Society
Soltau, Carola	NYS OGS Intern
Weidman, Rebecca	NEWIPPC
Wilson, Stephen	Hudson River Environmental Society

DEC:

Abuza, Leah	Estuary Program -SCA
Beard, Nancy	Estuary Program - Citizen Participation
Blair, Betsy (Gkeeper)	Hudson River Estuarine Research Reserve (HRNERR)
Bowser, Chirs	Estuary Program/ Research Reserve
Cuppett, Scott	Estuary Program - watersheds
Dunn, Clare	Estuary Program – GIS/data management
Dunwell, Fran	Estuary Program – Coordinator
Flaherty, Mike	Region 3 Fish, Wildlife, Marine Resources - fisheries
Greiser, Kevin	Estuary Program –riparian buffers

Gumaer, Larry	Albany, Natural Resources Damages
Harrison, Ann (Gkeeper)	Public Affairs
Hattala, Kathy	Hudson River Fisheries Unit
Hauser, Emilie	HRNERR- training
Heady, Laura	Estuary Program – biodiversity
Higgs, Amanda	Hudson River Fisheries Unit
Houser, Rebecca	Estuary Program – education
Kahnle, Andy (Gkeeper)	Hudson River Fisheries Unit
Kendall, Barbara	Estuary Program – watersheds
Ladd, John	Estuary Program/ HRNERR – aquatic habitat
Litten, Simon	Division of Water
Mackey, Sherri	Estuary Program – administration
Mapes, Jeff	Lands and Forests
Marcell, Kristin	Estuary Program – climate change
Maresca, Susan	Region 2, Fish, Wildlife, Marine Resources
McAvoy, Jean	HRNERR – education
Miller, Dan	Estuary Program/ Research Reserve – aquatic habitat
Myers, Jeff (Gkeeper)	Division of Water
Roessler, Beth	Estuary Program – web support and publications
Shaw, Jill	Estuary Program – Estuary grants
Stanne, Steve	Estuary Program – education
Suozzo, Tom	Albany, Division of Water
Waterman, Beth	Estuary Program – river access
Wilson, Larry	Region 3, Fish, Wildlife, Marine Resources

The meeting opened at 9:15 am by D. Suszkowski and F. Dunwell. Introductions were made around the room. Attendees were encouraged to review the posters displayed in the front hallway (General Hudson River Estuary Program; Hudson River Estuary Access Grants; Riparian Buffer mapping project; NYSOGS underwater grants and easements.)

The minutes from the June 4, 2008 were approved, unchanged. (Sara Griffen motioned, John Lipscomb seconded)

1) Update Reports

Executive Subcommittee Report: D. Suszkowski reported that the group met on September 3, 2008 to discuss a request from Jim Tierney, NYS DEC Division of Water, to provide feedback on 3 topics:

- Areas of emphasis where change is needed
- Any actions that should be added or subtracted
- How can additional needs be addressed to make the Estuary Program a model watershed program?

The committee's response was distributed to members (attached). The subcommittee is planned to meet with Jim Tierney following the HREMAC meeting to continue this discussion.

HREMAC on the Web: Beth Roessler presented an update report on the Estuary Program webpage and the Committee's new page. Highlights of her talk included:

- * The main Estuary program pages received over 70,000 'hits' during the past 6 months:
<http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4920.html>
- * The front page has a 'What's New' feature to alert viewers to changes and recent program activities
- * The committee now has its own page where meeting minutes, power point presentations and related committee information will be posted: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/about/46924.html>
- * The revised Hudson River Events Calendar now posts all upcoming program-related activities:
<http://www.dec.ny.gov/public/33037.html>

F. Dunwell asked the committee to review these sites and provide feedback to the program.

State of the Hudson: (S. Stanne) This project will generate a 16 page overview of the state of the estuary. Work is underway and the publication will be posted on the web and may be provided to newspapers. While there is no set schedule for future revisions, the program seeks to report on trends in the ecosystem every 5 years.

Committee comments:

A. Bicking suggested targeting local decision-makers as a major audience for this information.

D. VanLuven asked about how far back the report will go. Answer is as far back as we have records. Some information dates back 400 years, some records are much more recent.

S. Findlay suggested a "State of the Hudson Lite" could be done every year for those factors that change every year and are feasible to report on.

Estuary Grants: (F. Dunwell): The 10th cycle of estuary grants was received in June 2008. A new approval process put in place in early November has delayed the announcement of the grants.

Staff Updates:

Jill Shaw, the program's new Grants Coordinator, was introduced to the Committee.

Beth Waterman will retire in February, 2009.

Scott Cuppett was congratulated on his recent award, the Hudson River Watershed Alliance's Individual Watershed Stewardship Award.

HRECOS staff position: Plans are moving forward to fill a new coordinator's position for this cooperative project between DEC, HRNERR, and other partners to coordinate real-time monitoring data at 6 sites along the estuary.

Simon Litton and Jeff Myers will serve as project managers.

The dolphin in the river: (handout on file) T. Lake presented a brief history of marine mammal visitations to the estuary which have included; harbor seals, hooded seals, and gray seals. In November, 2008 a dolphin was spotted and photographed in Peekskill Bay, and later in Ulster County. On 11/10/08, two dolphins were reported near Kingston and on 11/24 a dead dolphin was reported on a beach in Rhinecliff. Currently there appears to be one dead and one live dolphin in the river but neither have been seen recently. If anyone sees these animals, report the sighting and do not disturb them.

2. Hudson River Coordinator's Report (Report on file)

F. Dunwell reported on the program's annual progress. When the Action Agenda for 2005-2009 was revised, it purposefully aimed high in its goals and targets for this time period, relying on partnerships to move the agenda forward. In most areas, the program is meeting its targets, except where factors beyond the program's control have limited progress.

Highlights of this report are summarized below. The committee is encouraged to read the entire report.

* Nutrient loading and turbidity continue to affect swimming in the River, especially in the Albany Pool area.

CSO discharges in this area and in Yonkers continue to be a challenge.

* Legacy pollutants, such as PCBs, persist. However, the upriver PCB remediation project is slated to begin in the near future.

* Living Resources: The Hudson River Fisheries Unit continues to manage and monitor the signature migratory fisheries in the estuary, striped bass, American shad, Atlantic sturgeon, river herring, blue crab, in the larger context of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

The biodiversity goal has expanded its program's to begin to address vernal pool habitats.

The introduction and spread of invasive and exotic species in the valley continues to be a concern.

* Governor Paterson, earlier in the year, supported American shad recovery and the establishment of HRECOS as priority projects.

* The Estuary Program has been recommended as a model watershed program for the Ocean Great Lakes Council.

* B. Kendall reported on performance measure tracking and stated that overall, the program is doing well and that

the work plan, performance measure tracking system is helping the program document and track progress. D. Suszkowski and other committee members praised the report, noting its concise explanation of the issues, and program successes.

3. Celebrating a Decade of Hudson River Estuary Grants

B. Waterman presented an overview of the Estuary Grants program stating that the grants program was started in 1999, as a way to promote local implementation of projects that would advance the estuary program's goals. Comments highlighted include:

- * Estuary grants make funds available to smaller non-profit organizations and municipalities at an affordable reimbursement rate of 75-25%
- * Grants can be used for planning, a necessary step often overlooked by other grant programs
- * The program promotes unique and creative projects, i.e. Manahatta Project and rewards networking and inter-municipal cooperation
- * The program promotes capacity building and growth of the new organizations; i.e. Watershed alliance and provides for steady 'brick' building, creating a sizable program and legacy of successes over the years
- * The program has promoted outreach, allowing municipalities to incorporate environmental factors into local government affairs
- * The program coordinates with other agencies during the grants review process and includes DOS, OPRHP, and Greenway in the review and scoring meetings.
- * Summary: Over the past 9 years, \$11.5 million has been awarded in 342 grants. We now have a full time grants administrator, Jill Shaw, and a full time GIS coordinator, Clare Dunn.
- * Weaknesses observed over the years include: increased work load for staff and applicants, bureaucratic contracting procedures, and periodic personnel changes at municipalities that can disrupt project continuity.

Examples of successful projects in the 5 project categories were high-lighted as follows:

Education: Manahatta project, Heron Eco-tours in NY/NJ harbor area

Open Space/Scenic: Olana viewshed protection, Wilderstein, Open Space Planning at municipal level

Community Habitat: outreach to NYC Parks, High Bridge Park revealed long-ago abandoned stairways and structures after invasive species were cleared away.

Watershed: creation of Watershed Alliance, numerous community led watershed groups working throughout the Valley on watershed conservation strategies.

Access: significant increase in canoe and kayak access sites, floating docks, hand launches. Example is Downtown boathouse, NYC, used all volunteers and a \$62,000 grant to create a facility that served 28,000 people in its first year. This category is now looking to improve deep water docks and piers for education and research vessels. Two successful Access grant projects were then presented by guest speakers.

Rita Shaheen, Scenic Hudson, presented an overview of Foundry Cove Park, a Scenic Hudson project located in Putnam County. (Power point presentation on file) This .6 acre site was purchase by Scenic Hudson in 1996. Putnam county received an Estuary Grant for \$60,000 to improve access to the river. Challenges faced in bringing this project to fruition included: managing historic motorboat usage, managing parking needs, lighting, trash management, contaminated soil remediation, long-term maintenance and upkeep. This has become one of Scenic Hudson's most popular park sites and received Hudson Valley Magazine's "Best Pocket Park" award.

Roland Lewis, Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, presented an overview (Power Point presentation on file) of the many floating docks that have been installed in many locations around the NYC area, providing access opportunities for many New Yorkers. MWA is promoting a Town Dock idea where water access links to upland destinations to improve local community connections to the river.

4. 2009 Quadricentennial

Tara Sullivan, Executive Director, presented an overview of the many planned events set for next year in

celebration of the Hudson-Champlain Quadricentennial. June 5 will mark the opening day of the Hudson River Flotilla, a 6 day migration of boats, including 5 NY Heritage ships, from NYC to Albany. Other Quad venues include the National Boat show at the Javits Center, NYC, Hudson Valley Annual Food Show, American Museum of Natural History 2009 Climate change expo, the International Stamp Expo in the Albany Plaza. Many state agencies will have featured projects during the year including school curriculum, park renovations, the Action Agenda. By February 2009, plans have every school and library in the area flying the Quad flag to inspire communities to celebrate the Quad. In addition, 325 mini-grants have been awarded to communities to help bring Quad project to fruition in the coming year.

The Hudson River Environmental Society will hold a conference on Nov. 5 & 6 in Poughkeepsie, high-lighting historians and environmentalists over the past 400 years.

More information is available on the website: www.hres.org , updated on Fridays.

5. Action Agenda 2010-2014

F. Dunwell reviewed the projected timeline for the development of the next Action Agenda. Kathy Hattala, DEC Hudson River Fisheries Unit presented Goal 1, Signature Fisheries (Power Point presentation on file) as an example of how the internal revision process has been progressing to date. Significant changes expected for this goal include a stronger statement of uncertainty that will affect outcomes in the future, i.e. food web dynamics, zebra mussels and other invasive species, as well as allowing for more adaptive management in the future. F. Dunwell explained that each goal area has been asked to apply a 'template' to the goal and targets where each set of targets will assess and inventory the resource, clearly identify to needs and actions to be taken, implement the actions, assess the results and then modify the next steps based on results.

Committee comments:

A. Bicking recommended that the goals be as specific as possible, identifying what can be accomplished in clear terms

HRES commented on the reduction in commercial and recreational taking of fish. Kathy Hattala acknowledged that this is happening and that more reductions will have to be implemented in the future.

6. Wastewater Infrastructure

Tom Suozzo, NYC DEC Division of Water, (Power Point presentation and brochure on file), presented "Wastewater Infrastructure in Crisis" and outlined for the committee history and current status of the state's wastewater infrastructure needs. Many if not all of the state's facilities that were built in the 1970's will soon meet or have exceeded their life expectancy and are in desperate need of upgrades. Water quality is already declining and if no improvements are made to these facilities, engineering projections take water quality in our rivers and stream back to levels seen the 1960's, before these facilities were built. Over the next 20 years, NYS will need an estimated \$36.2 billion for wastewater and \$38 billion for drinking water infrastructure to address this problem. Many considerations contribute to this problem and many models and strategies are being proposed to help address the issue using innovative partnerships, and smart growth approaches. A challenge for the State and for the Hudson River will be to position projects that are ready to go, "shovel ready," to be able to take advantage of the Federal economic stimulus package being proposed by the new administration.

The committee was referred to the report "Waste Water Infrastructure Needs of NYS" for more detailed information.

Committee comments:

K Shoelberl: consider looking at possible synergies for public private partnerships with other utilities, right-of-ways, access.

J. Rumpf: need more sustainable models for river issues, environmental justice communities, cities, green infrastructure, smaller projects that are "people ready"

G. D'Agrosa: I&I (infiltration and inflow) is a major problem and will become even more problematic with climate change. She added that new infrastructure is needed in areas of development that have no WWT at present. It was noted that we are starting to see a back slide in water quality in places, i.e. City of Hudson. I&I is

a major problem that overwhelms many WWT plants.

J. Lipscomb noted that Riverkeeper measure water quality parameters at 80 locations in the river. During fair weather, most areas report acceptable numbers. However, after rain events, many parts of the river are impacted.

8. Old Business/New Business:

Marci Meixler, Cornell University, announced the completion of her Riparian Buffer mapping project that she worked on under the guidance of Scott Cuppett. A poster was available at the meeting.

Al Bauder, NYS Office of General Services and intern Carola Slotau announced completion of Ms. Slotau's work on developing GIS maps of water grants and easements. These databases and maps will be used to identify and then transfer these sensitive areas to DEC for protection and natural resource management. A poster was available for review at the meeting.

The meeting adjourned 12:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Nancy Beard, recorder.