New York State Municipalities in the Hudson River Estuary Watershed
Creating a Natural Resources Inventory

A Guide for Communities in the Hudson River Estuary Watershed

2014

Ingrid Haeckel and Laura Heady
Cornell University Department of Natural Resources
for New York State Department of Environmental Conservation’s
Hudson River Estuary Program
About the Hudson River Estuary Program
The Hudson River Estuary Program uses the science of ecology to help people enjoy, protect, and revitalize the Hudson River estuary. Created in 1987 through the Hudson River Estuary Management Act (ECL 11-0306), the program focuses on the tidal Hudson and its adjacent watershed from the dam at Troy to the Verrazano Narrows in New York City.

The core mission of the Estuary Program is built around six key benefits:
• Clean Water
• Resilient Communities
• Vital Estuary Ecosystem
• Estuary Fish, Wildlife, & Habitats
• Scenic River Landscape
• Education, River Access, Recreation, & Inspiration.

The Estuary Program works in close collaboration with many partners – from nonprofit organizations to businesses, local governments to state and federal agencies, interested residents, and many others. For more information, visit www.dec.ny.gov.

About Cornell University’s Department of Natural Resources
The Department of Natural Resources at Cornell University creates knowledge and facilitates learning to improve society’s stewardship of the environment and promote a conservation ethos for a sustainable planet. For more information, visit http://dnr.cals.cornell.edu/.

For additional copies, contact:
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Hudson River Estuary Program
21 South Putt Corners Road
New Paltz, NY 12561-1696
hrep@dec.ny.gov

Recommended Citation:

Cover photography by Ingrid Haeckel, Laura Heady, and Steve Stanne
Map by Clare Dunn
Cover page illustration of Karner blue butterfly by Patricia Kernan,
preface illustration of pine tree by B. Starcke King
Preface and Acknowledgments

Shoreline cities, quaint villages, expanding suburbs, and pastoral towns—the communities of the Hudson River Valley are as diverse as its natural areas and habitats, but they all share two key characteristics. First, they are all connected to the estuary, either directly on its shorelines or tributaries, or by the living landscape of forests, fields, wetlands, and streams that comprises its watershed. Second, they all rely on local decision-makers—town boards, planning and zoning boards, conservation advisory councils, and open space commissions—to grapple with the many challenges facing Hudson Valley communities, including economic growth, development, aging infrastructure, climate change, historic preservation, and protection of farmland, source water, scenery, and wildlife habitat.

To build community capacity for sound decision-making that balances future growth with protection of the Hudson River estuary and the rich natural resources in its watershed, Cornell University’s Department of Natural Resources and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation’s (DEC) Hudson River Estuary Program initiated an outreach and technical assistance program in 2001. The program emphasizes voluntary approaches, offering technical assistance, data sharing, training, and grants to support community planning and conservation initiatives at the local level. With assistance from the Estuary Program, many municipalities have developed plans and practices that address regional habitat priorities and local community values, and will ultimately help to sustain the health and resiliency of the estuary ecosystem.

Despite this progress, many municipalities are still in need of a foundation of natural resource information to guide their planning decisions. This guidebook was developed to address that need by assisting communities with learning how to inventory their natural and cultural resources. By having information about features such as aquifers, floodplains, shoreline habitat, and farmland, communities can begin to identify priorities and local officials can incorporate protection of important resources into land-use planning to ensure they remain available to future generations.

The concept of the guidebook came from Natural Resources Inventories: A Guide for New Hampshire Communities and Conservation Groups (2001), originally written by Phil Auger and Jeanie McIntyre and revised and updated by Amanda Lindley Stone of University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension (UNHCE). It also serves to provide an update to the 1997 document, Natural Resource Inventory: A Guide to the Process, which was written by the Dutchess County Environmental Management Council (EMC) in partnership with the Ulster County EMC. In the spirit of conservation, the authors, UNHCE, and the Dutchess EMC graciously gave us permission to use the text of their handbooks, for which we sincerely thank them. Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and Appendix D are based on the New Hampshire document and borrow language from that text; Chapter 4 and other appendices were extensively rewritten.

This guidebook helps to implement the Hudson River Estuary Action Agenda, which provides a vision and plan to help people enjoy, protect, and revitalize the Hudson River estuary and its valley. Although the focus of the guidebook is on the Hudson Valley region, it describes a process that can be used by any municipality in New York State and in other states where communities are engaged in local planning and conservation initiatives. The guide also complements the program’s Conserving Natural Areas and Wildlife in Your Community: Smart Growth Strategies for Protecting the Biological Diversity of New York's Hudson River Valley (Strong 2008), which provides a broad overview of strategies that can be used locally to conserve natural assets.

We greatly appreciate the program leadership, guidance, and support of Ted Kerpez, Region 3 Wildlife Manager for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation; Frances Dunwell, Coordinator of the Hudson River Estuary Program for DEC; and Patrick Sullivan, Cornell University Professor of Natural Resources.

Special thanks go to Hudson River Estuary Program and New York State Water Resources Institute colleagues Emily Vail, Andrew Meyer, Elizabeth Murphy, who contributed to the content of the water resources, climate, and scenic resources component sections in Chapter 4 and related appendices; to Ted Fink, AICP of GREENPLAN Inc. for his review of the guidebook and development of Appendices G and H; to the New York State Museum for providing illustrations and to Patricia Kernan for her assistance with selecting and preparing images; and to Peter Karis, RLA of Taconic Site Design & Landscape Architecture for assistance with maps included in Appendix I. We’re also grateful to colleagues from the Hudson River Estuary Program, DEC, Cornell University, and other organizations and agencies who reviewed earlier drafts and provided valuable comments and suggestions, including: Nancy Beard, Karl Berger, Mark Castiglione, Neil Curri, Laura DeGaetano, Kelly Dobbins, Halina Duda, Ellen Jouret-Epstein, Amanda LaValle, Jeff Mapes, Jennifer Minner, Maude Salinger, Kate Schmidt, Karen Strong, Nava Tabak, Erin Tobin, Russell Urban-Meade, and Stephanie Wojtowicz. Finally, we thank Jim Prysiak, graphic designer, for his important contribution to the layout and design of this book.
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