

1. Welcome and announcements - 53 people attended (see listing below). The meeting opened at 9:00 AM.

The November 6, 2019 minutes were approved: Motion made by Lucy Johnson, seconded by Rob Pirani. The minutes were approved. Note: Minor copy edit corrections were previously submitted by L. Johnson.

2. Staff Updates:

2020 SCA members were welcomed. This year's interns are Amanda Simmonds (returning), Rianna Scanlon, Anna Palmer, Shannon Ervin, Chelsea Moore.

Long-time committee member Dave Church, Orange Co. Planning has retired. Kelly Morris will be attending HREMAC on behalf of Orange County. Dave will continue to serve as Executive Director of the County Water Authority.

Budget: Andy Bicking recapped that the Governor's budget for this fiscal year continues funding for the Estuary Program at \$5.5 million as part of the \$300 million EPF. He noted that the emerging Coronavirus situation is creating uncertainty. The proposed Restoring Mother Nature Bond Act (RMN) has the potential for significant positive impact on the state's environment.

This year's 2020 Citizen Science Opportunities handout was distributed. It contains information on the Amphibian road-crossing project, eel migration sampling, and the Cooperative Angler survey.

Fran reported that review of the Draft Action Agenda 2021-2025 is underway by DEC Executive.

3. Committee Activities that support the Action Agenda:

Peter Wepler (Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE): reported that the ACOE 20-year restoration study for the Hudson Raritan Estuary (HRE) is nearing release for state and federal review. A Chief's Report is expected by the end of April. This report includes 20 restoration actions within a 25-mile radius of the Statue of Liberty.

The 2020 work plan for the HATS (storm surge) study has not been funded at this time. The next opportunity to move this project forward will be in 2021. This is one of several coastal projects to not get funding at this time, including Baltimore and Rhode Island among others.

Dan expressed concerns over planning at the state level with the loss of Federal funds for projects such as HATS. Jim Tierney responded that it has been necessary to take a strategic pause, look at the science, and consider various approaches to storm surge, sea level rise, climate change, environmental justice (EJ) and other affected communities.

Rob Pirani reported on a conference call with AMTRAK regarding resiliency planning and the railroad tracks. This issue is complicated. CSX owns the lines and AMTRAK maintain the lines north of Poughkeepsie. While they are identifying resilient 'hot spots' and working with NYS DOT, there is no long-range planning being undertaken at this time. Additional conversations are being planned.

He added that NY/NJ HEP hosted a meeting in NYC on Community Access Planning. Local community groups throughout the metro area attended and worked on a number of shared issues

that can be included in future comprehensive waterfront planning efforts. Fran Dunwell and Nancy Beard attended from the Estuary Program.

Andy Bicking further addressed the AMTRAK/access issue. In response to the AMTRAK's 2019 proposal to erect fencing along stretches of the tracks in Rensselaer, Columbia and Dutchess counties, Scenic Hudson has held several community meetings and is developing an access plan for this stretch of the river. The plan is scheduled for release later this month. AMTRAK has withdrawn their fencing proposal for now, but it is anticipated that they will continue to pursue this proposal. Any proposed action will require coastal consistency approval by the Dept. of State.

Nikki Chung, Scenic Hudson, reported on the Eco Opportunities Forum held on 2/20/2020 in Kingston. Co-sponsored by Riverkeeper, this meeting brought together funding agencies and grantee recipients to share stories and advice on best practices when applying for grant funding for environmental projects. Agencies represented included the Estuary Program (Fran Dunwell), NYS Dept of State, NYS's DEC Division of Water and EJ Office. Grantee speakers included the Town of Esopus, Village of Wappingers, Kingston YMCA (farm market project), and the City of Kingston. The key message for the day was summed up by the importance of the "3 Ds": Details, Deadlines, Dollars.

Chuck Nieder provided an update on the Hudson River PCB superfund site in the upper Hudson. NYS continues to support additional cleanup in this stretch of the river by GE and the EPA, in particular, the restoration of wetlands and SAV that were impacted during the dredging cleanup. It is anticipated this restoration will take several years and the state contends this is EPA's responsibility to make sure this work gets done. The next areas for EPA to look at are the floodplains, and to conduct both human and wildlife risk assessments. The focus should then turn to impacts on the Lower Hudson.

Chuck introduced Fabio Iwashita and John Armitage, DEC Division of Environmental Remediation in Albany, who will be working on the PCB remediation project.

Power Plants: Chuck reported that Indian Point Unit 2 is scheduled to shut down April 30, 2020, and Unit 3 on April 30, 2021. This will result in a significant reduction in fish mortality.

He added that the Bowline Power Plant has recently challenged proposed permit requirements to reduce fish mortality at this facility. This permitting process may require hearings. The Charles Point Resource Recovery facility in Peekskill, has aging screens (30 yrs+) at its water intake that need replacement. Simply replacing them will not meet current fish protection standards under SPDES.

He reported that the Utility Fish Collection, conducted by the Hudson River utilities as part of the Hudson River Settlement Agreement in the 1980's, is the largest and longest fish data set, perhaps in the world. With the closing of Indian Point, this project will end, and the utilities will no longer be collecting this data. The 40 years of samples have been warehoused in Massachusetts, and recently, SUNY Stony Brook agreed to take the samples and associated data sets. A team of interested parties, including DEC, the Hudson River Fisheries Unit, Hudson River Foundation, and others are looking into how to continue this data set into the future.

Nicolette Witcher, HRPT, provided an update on the Pier 26 Tide Deck 'Get Down', an Estuary Grant funded project. Scheduled for opening in the Fall 2020, this site will provide people with an ADA accessible experience of the river and an 8,000 sq/ft constructed wetland/intertidal zone at the end of the pier.

#### 4. Hudson River Fisheries Striped Bass Updates:

Regulation Changes: Gregg Kenney, HRFU, reported that since the last HREMAC meeting, the ASMFC passed regulatory changes aimed at reducing the mortality rate by 18% coast wide. In the upper Hudson, this has resulted in the elimination of the trophy fish (larger than 40"). The slot limit will remain as 18"-28", and the season will continue to be April 1 – Nov 30. The use of circle hooks (with bait) will be required starting in 2021.

Audrey Ven Genechten, NYS DOH distributed the report, "Can you Eat That Striped Bass from the Hudson?" this report includes the most up to date information on PCBs in Hudson River fish by season and local. The report is available on-line: [www.health.ny.gov/hudsonriverfish](http://www.health.ny.gov/hudsonriverfish) .

5. 2019 Annual Hudson River Coordinator's Report: Fran Dunwell presented a power point highlighting the accomplishments of the Estuary Program during 2019. The report was distributed to members as well as the 2019 Metrics reports (sent electronically). The report is available on line: [https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/remediation\\_hudson\\_pdf/hrep2019report.pdf](https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/remediation_hudson_pdf/hrep2019report.pdf) Fran acknowledged the importance of the Program's many partners in achieving these accomplishments during this past year as well as over the span of the Program's 32 years of success. She thanked Jim Tierney for his commitment and support.

6. 2019 HREMAC Committee Annual Report to DEC; Andy Bicking, Dan Shapley and Stuart Findlay are working on this report. A draft was circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting. Committee members were asked to review the draft and comment on any additional issues that should be included. An email with a summary of today's comments will be sent to Committee Members with a deadline for comments.

7. HREMAC Committee conversation with Jim Tierney: Members' comments and Jim's responses are summarized below:

Stuart Findlay addressed the Reimagine the Canal planning process and recommended that, in addition to looking at ecological functions, restoration opportunities, and ecosystem benefits, planners should take a hard look at the canal's role in the spread of invasive species between watersheds and seriously consider the idea of hydraulic separation. Jim Tierney asked the committee for a letter, by this spring, identifying a list of ordered priorities to focus on when looking at the future of the canal.

Lucy Johnson has been promoting Hudson River education through the Vassar Lifelong Learning Institute. Several committee members and program staff have volunteered as speakers. The Program has recently been cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Peter Wepler reported that through partnerships with the state, and other parties, ACOE has been able to advance several projects in the region. He is committed to keeping HREMAC activities on the agenda of his commander, working to keep restoration of the Hudson a high priority for his agency. He encouraged Jim to support this at his level, as well, when meeting with the Corps.

Rob Pirani reported that the *State of the Hudson 2020* report is progressing. This is a collaborative effort between the NY/NJ HEP and the Estuary Program. The two programs

have been working on mutual metrics and building on collective mechanisms for scientific monitoring. The 2020 report will cover the entire estuary from the Troy dam to the harbor. In addition, he wants to ensure that shoreline adaptation strategies include access and habitat protection components throughout the system.

Diana Carter provided an overview of the proposed Hudson Eagles Recreation Area project. This project, if funded, would cover an area in the upper Hudson estuary from Albany to Hudson, and would include, in phase I, the upgrade of 4 existing access sites (Coxsackie, Athens, Schodack, City of Hudson) and the development of a new access site at the Crailo State Historic site, in Rensselaer. Phase II would create a recreation area bringing together state agencies (OPRHP, DEC, OGS), local governments and NGOs that own and manage lands and access sites along both sides of the river to improve the management of and increase access opportunities along this largely undeveloped stretch of the estuary.

She mentioned several grant opportunities now available through the grants gateway; grants.gov for LWRPs. She further acknowledged the AMTRAK fencing issue as a problem along the east shore on the river in this area.

Audrey VanGenechten spoke in support for the work that DEC and Chuck Nieder's group undertakes to provide fish data to the DOH, and for their environmental remediation work. Data is needed for many projects including in the NYC-harbor area, the reevaluation of blue crabs in Foundry Cove, and for the Marine District Stiped Bass study planned for 2021-2022. She also spoke in support of the Hudson River Fisheries Unit and the work they do on fish movement and angler education.

Suzette Lopane outlined several projects underway in Westchester County including; the restoration and upgrade at George's Island County Park which will include improved interpretive signage, replacement of the boat launch, improved septic systems and the addition of new playgrounds, all opening for the summer 2020 season.

She added that, in collaboration with the Estuary Program and Riverkeeper, the County has been working on several dam removal projects on Furnace Brook, that will improve habitat for migratory fish. Dam removal studies also include a tributary to Long Island Sound which will include a pre and post dam removal sediment study as well as changes in fish habitat regimes. The county supports the use of sustainable shoreline practices to address eroding shorelines in parks.

She restated the need for state guidance for these projects that could be applied by local governments and other groups when implementing dam removal projects at the local level.

She had the following suggestions:

1. Education at the local level is still needed (communities are still building in and filling in floodplains).
2. FEMA maps are old and need to be updated to incorporate climate change data. Jim Tierney referred to the Local Flood Plain Management Program as a tool to address these needs.

3. Westchester County has more than 20 dams that have been identified for removal. She called for the state to develop a stream-lined process for dam removal including clear guidance for local governments to follow. Dan Shapley referred to guidance developed in Pennsylvania that could be used as a model for this. This could be paired with the RMN Bond Act to help streamline the process. Charles Gruetzner reported that through the Hudson Valley Marine Trades Assoc., personal floatation devices (PFDs) were purchased last season and distributed to boaters on the river to help improve water safety. Surprisingly, recipients returned the PFDs at the end of the season. This is helping to change attitudes and improve recreational safety on the river.

Erik Fyfe, Clearwater, recognize both the technical assistance and grant support that Clearwater has received from the Estuary Program. He supports including partner numbers in the Program's annual reporting to better reflect the collective impact of the program and its partners. For example, 13,000 people connected to the river via Clearwater programs alone.

He added that a serious stressor for the Clearwater boat is the increasing loss of adequate deep-water docks where the boat can safely dock to provide programs to the estuary's many river towns. Docks are falling into disrepair or being repurposed. Local governments could utilize their LWRPs to develop more docking sites for larger vessels.

Andy Bicking thanked Jim, the DEC and state leaders for their support through the EPF and the proposed 2020 RMN Bond Act. He raised 5 issues for Jim's consideration:

1. The AMTRAK proposed fencing project threatens public access along the eastern shore of the river.
2. The Reimagine the Canal planning process should take into consideration the Champlain Canal which is contaminated with PCBs. New York needs to take the lead here, as EPA and GE will not.
3. The rebuild of the Danskammer Power Plant in Newburgh as a fossil fuel burning plant running 24/7 will increase air pollution.
4. It will be important to include the state's smaller, urban communities in climate change planning. Demographics are changing in the Valley. These smaller urban centers need smart urban streets, clean transportation, and options for cooling.
5. "Blue Carbon", managing water for carbon sequestration, especially on our agricultural lands is a next issue to address. Scenic Hudson and HRNERR are involved in this. Rob Pirani outlined work that is being done in partnership with the Estuary Program (Kristin Marcell) and IES (Stuart Findlay) on restoring wetlands and carbon capture, the idea being that we need to preserve our existing wetlands as intact and stable resources to prevent carbon loss.

Dan Shapley thanked DEC and Jim for work being done on the Drinking Water Source Protection Program. He made the following suggestions:

1. There is a need to update the state's EJ maps. Changes in the Hudson Valley's demographics need updating. Communities that are identified as potential EJ areas should have their source waters included in maps, so that projects affecting water quality for these drinking water supplies are considered through the lens of environmental justice. Jim requested that this idea be framed out and provided to him and Rosa Mendez.

2. He requested and Jim agreed to provide an updated organization chart for DEC Division of Water.
3. Will the Water Management Advisory Committee (WMAC) be reinstated? Jim noted that DOW lacks the resources, and staff to do this.

Nicolette Witcher supports the growing presence of the Estuary Program in the NYC area, especially the collaboration with the Hudson River Park Trust. She noted the continuing challenge along the Park with CSOs and water quality issues. There are 30+ CSOs in areas where large concentrations (thousands) of people access the river. The variations in water quality are not well understood in these nodes.

Jim responded that in New York, nine of eleven Long Term Control Plans have been completed. He requested more information, specifically the relationship of these nodes, to the ability of people to engage with the river, and to identify other specific problems associated with this issue. This information should go to: Linda Allen, Ed Hampston, Ryan Waldron.

Kelly Morris thanked DEC and the Estuary Program for the work being done on the Moodna, the Monhagen and the Walkkill Rivers, noting that 2020 is the year of the Moodna. The Moodna Intermunicipal Council is working on projects that include additional stream gauges with education kiosks, and a flood mitigation study (maps and strategies) for the lower Moodna. Work is continuing on several dam removal projects at Brown's Pond, and the Quassaick Creek (with Riverkeeper) and source water protection for the City of Newburgh on Washington Lake. She noted it is hard to map watersheds that have been hydro manipulated. She made the following suggestions:

1. The Watershed Rules and Regulations are antiquated and need to be resumed and updated to address cross-jurisdictional source water protection issues.
2. Stream Water management: Counties need an updated design manual, known as the "Blue Book", that reflects current precipitation patterns. For example, the Lego Land project involves more than 100 acres, and is impacting the OtterKill.
3. Erosion and Sediment Control: Retention basins need regular maintenance. Privately owned businesses need additional support to maintain these structures once they have been installed.

Jim Tierney thanked the Committee for their input and continued hard work. He spoke to the proposed Restore Mother Nature Bond Act, a \$3 billion proposal that will help provide significant resources to help upgrade and protect the states environment if approved. As a Bond Act, this proposal requires approval by the Legislature, and then placement on the ballot for a vote in November. Another \$500 million is targeted for Water Quality Improvement Programs. He encouraged groups and communities to get ready now to take advantage of leveraging a combination of funding sources. As an example, he encouraged the group to prepare stream management plans, containing specific actions that can then be linked to available funding sources. (He noted these plans cost approx. \$40,000 each and take 3 months to develop.)

In his closing remarks, Jim remembered former Committee Chair Dr. Dennis Suszkowski, appreciating the man, and his many contributions throughout the years to the work of the committee and to the Hudson River ecosystem.

Fran and Stuart thanked Jim for his continued support.

Old business, new business

Rob Pirani noted draft legislation is being developed to get funding for planning through the US Fish and Wildlife Service for the Mohawk, Hudson, Raritan watershed.

The meeting adjourned 12:08 PM.

Respectfully submitted: Nancy Beard, recorder

Attendance:   53  

HREMAC Members:

Andy Bicking	Scenic Hudson
Kelly Morris	Orange County Planning (for Dave Church, retired)
Stuart Findlay	Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies
Erik Fyfe	Clearwater
Dan Shapley	Riverkeeper, Inc. (for Paul Gallay)
Charlie Gruetzner	Hudson Valley Marine Trades Assoc.
Lucy Johnson	Vassar College Lifetime Learning, HV Consortium, HRES
Suzette Lopane	Westchester County Water Agency

Ex-OFFICIOS:

Diana Carter	NYS OPRHP
Nicolette Witcher	Hudson River Park Trust (for Noreen Doyle)
Rob Pirani	NYNJ - HEP
Audrey Van Genechten	NYS Dept. of Health
Peter Weppler	US Army Corps Engineers
Jessica Kounen	New York Sea Grant

Guests:

Nikki Chung	Scenic Hudson
Alana Gerus	NYS DOH
Molly Jones	Poughkeepsie Environmental Education Programs
Brian Gramlich Rahm	HR Watershed Alliance
Capt. Aram Setian	HR Fisherman's Assoc.
Pat Sullivan	Cornell University
Emily Vail	HR Watershed Alliance
Riley Johndonnell	Scenic Hudson
Clay Hiles	Hudson River Foundation

DEC, Estuary Program staff and SCA interns:

John Armitage	DEC Albany, Div. Environmental Remediation
Nancy Beard	Estuary Program, administration and access
Jessica Best	Hudson River Fisheries Unit
Chris Bowser	Estuary Program, Research Reserve, education
Ann Marie Capprioli	HRNERR, grants administration
Scott Cuppett	Estuary Program, watersheds
Brian DeGasperis	Estuary Program, HRNERR
Fran Dunwell	Estuary Program, Hudson River Coordinator
Shannon Ervin	Estuary Program, SCA intern
Sarah Fernald	HRNERR, research
Heather Gierloff	HRNERR, Research Reserve Manager
Emily Hauser	HRNERR, coastal training
Fabio Iwashita	DEC Albany, Div Environmental Remediation (PCBs)
Gregg Kenney	DEC, Hudson River Fisheries Unit
Megan Lung	Estuary Program, SCA intern
Sherri Mackey	Estuary Program, administration
Jeff Mapes	DEC, Lands and Forests
Kristin Marcell	Estuary Program, resilient waterfront communities
Susan Maresca	DEC, Region 2, permits
Dan Miller	Estuary Program, habitat restoration
Chelsea Moore	Estuary Program, SCA intern
Nate Nardi-Cyrus	Estuary program, land use conservation, scenery
Chuck Nieder	DEC, DEC Bureau Fish and Wildlife
Maija Niemisto	Estuary Program, HRNERR
Anna Palmer	Estuary Program, SCA intern
Beth Roessler	Estuary Program, Trees for Tribes
Maude Salinger	Estuary Program, communications
Rianna Scanlon	Estuary Program, SCA intern
Jim Tierney	DEC Albany, Deputy Commissioner for Water Resources
Libby Zemaitis	Estuary Program, resilient waterfront communities