Report Card on the First Five Years

George E. Pataki, Governor

Erin M. Crotty, Commissioner
Dear Fellow New Yorkers,

Five years ago, New York State set out a specific blueprint for revitalizing the Hudson River. The Hudson River Estuary Action Plan, first published in 1996, proposed strategies to protect the river’s natural resources, clean up contaminants, and promote the use and enjoyment of the river.

Since then, New York State has committed more than $173 million to nearly 200 individual projects and initiatives needed to implement this plan. These efforts have included enhanced scientific research, improved Hudson River access, development of partnerships to preserve biodiversity, state-of-the-art mapping of critical natural resources, and acquisition of open space.

The results of this investment have been dramatic. Today the Hudson River is teeming with life, reborn after decades of abuse and neglect. Fishermen, birders, and children find renewed fascination with the river’s mysteries and majesty. River cities, towns and villages are once again embracing the Hudson as the heart, and the front door, of their communities.

Much remains to be done, of course. But this publication, a “report card” on the first five years of the Hudson River Estuary Action Plan, demonstrates how much has already been accomplished. This remarkable progress would have been impossible without the support of communities, organizations and individuals throughout the Hudson River Valley and beyond, all of whom understand that restoring and preserving this remarkable river must be our legacy to future New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

George E. Pataki
Governor
To the Citizens of the Hudson River Valley,

The Hudson River Estuary Action Plan has sparked an unprecedented interest and investment in this remarkable river, just as Governor Pataki envisioned in 1996.

With Governor Pataki’s leadership, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has overseen an impressive array of studies and projects developed under the Action Plan, all meant to help us better understand this complex ecosystem, repair past environmental damage, and return the river to the communities that line both its shores.

Now in its sixth year, the Hudson River Estuary Action Plan has measurable results, which are reported here in detail. I invite you to review this record, and I congratulate all those involved in these impressive accomplishments. I also look forward to the continuing effort to implement the Hudson River Estuary Action Plan in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Erin M. Crotty
Commissioner,
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Department of Environmental Conservation
Copies of this report are available from:

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Hudson River, view from Rockwood Hall, Mt. Pleasant, Westchester County. The property was acquired in 1998 as part of Governor George E. Pataki’s Open Space Protection Program.
Introduction

The Hudson River rises in the Adirondacks and flows into the sea at lower New York Harbor, a journey of about 320 miles. For the latter half of this distance, the river becomes an estuary where fresh water from upstream joins with tidal water from the ocean. Below the dam in Troy, the river is influenced by the rise and fall of ocean tides and the mixture of salt and fresh water. The tidal Hudson begins as fresh water in Troy, gradually turns brackish near the Hudson Highlands, and becomes noticeably salty at the Tappan Zee Bridge. This portion of the Hudson, from the Troy Dam to the Verrazano Narrows below Manhattan Island, is the focus of New York State’s Hudson River Estuary Program.

The estuary is a rich ecosystem that supports spawning and nursery grounds for migratory fish of the Atlantic Ocean, as well as habitat for bald eagles, peregrine falcons, black ducks, mallards and a host of other species. It is a source of municipal drinking water and a playground for river recreation among boaters, anglers and swimmers.

The Hudson River Estuary Action Plan was adopted by Governor George Pataki in 1996 to guide state actions to conserve river habitats, clean up pollution and promote public enjoyment of the Hudson Estuary. The plan is updated every two years with the establishment of 20 measurable objectives. Implementation of the plan is the responsibility of the Hudson River Estuary program of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). The plan is funded by annual appropriations from the state Environmental Protection Fund as well as other sources. The plan coordinates the work of many different agencies and groups, all of which are striving to improve the Hudson. Commercial and recreational anglers, researchers, conservationists, educators, and industries all participate. Participants also include the United States Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Department of the Interior, the New York State Department of State Coastal Program, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the American Heritage Rivers Initiative and the Hudson River Valley Greenway.

Under Governor Pataki’s leadership, more than $173 million has been accrued for the Hudson River Estuary including:

• $30 million from the New York State Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), an average of $6 million annually since 1996 for implementation of the Estuary Action Plan;
• $50 million of New York State Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act funds earmarked for water quality and habitat restoration projects from New York Harbor to Troy. Of this amount, $39.2 million has been approved in grants to date;
• $19.6 million as New York’s share of a river-wide monitoring and trackdown of contaminant sources and pollution cleanup funded through the New York-New Jersey Port Restoration Agreement;
• $22 million in additional New York State funds has been approved from the 1996 Bond Act for open space, state and municipal park improvements and brownfield cleanups; and
• $51.7 million in other state and federal funds for waterfront revitalization, habitat restoration, public access, and nonpoint source pollution control.

This report describes accomplishments under the Estuary Action Plan since it was first adopted.