



City of New York Parks & Recreation

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To: NY/NJ HEP Habitat Workgroup
From: Marc A. Matsil, Chair, HEP Habitat Workgroup
Date: 9/17/2001
Subject: Minutes from the August 23, 2001 meeting

Next Meeting: TBA

Present at last meeting: Melissa Alvarez (NYSDEC), Robert Alpern (NYCDEP), Karen Chytalo (NYSDEC), Paul Mankiewicz (NYCSWD, Gaia Inst.), Susan Bauer-Maresca (NYSDEC), Marc Matsil (NYC Parks), Eugene Peck (URS), Manuel Russ (CAC to NYCDEP), Christina Scully (NYC Parks), Don Smith (HMDC), Frank Steimle (NOAA, NMFS)

Items requiring further action:

- **Update on ACE plans to develop harbor wide system (Len Houston, ACE)**
- **Blue Ribbon Panel Discussion (Bob Alpern, NYS DEC)**

Announcements:

- Marc Matsil (NYC Parks) noted that NYC Parks recently acquired nearly 500 acres including North and part of South Brother Islands (nearly 20 acres at South Brother Island including salt marsh and lands under water). Although the remaining land is privately owned, Parks has the potential to discourage development by establishing a toll booth at MHW.
- Merrill's Creek transfer is in negotiation with EDC. It will be used as a match for the GATX oak and salt marsh acquisition Bond Act application proposal.
- DEC and NYC signed an agreement with the Army Corps to initiate an 1135 program for Gerritson Creek salt marsh and grassland restoration, totaling \$6.3 million, and Spring Creek salt marsh restoration, totaling nearly \$8 million.

- Matsil announced that the Society for Ecological Restoration and ESA will host its 2002 international conference next summer in Tuscon, AZ. He would like to secure funding from the EPA/HEP to assemble several workgroup members to present papers on restoration activities at high priority HEP projects, monitoring and collaborations.

❑ **Review of the HEP Acquisition and Restoration map (Marc Matsil, NYC Parks)**

Matsil asked for comments on the latest draft of the HEP priority acquisition and restoration map. The EPA will soon be printing and distributing the map to elected public officials, community organizations, and environmental organizations. The map will also be available through the NYC Parks and HEP websites.

Melissa Alvarez (NYS DEC) suggested including funding source information on the map, and attaching dollar amounts in another document as they often change. Chytalo (NYS DEC) suggested keeping records of wetlands acreages, so quantifiable goals are more easily seen. She also expressed interest in including information stating whether or not a site had been restored or if restoration was likely. Alpern (NYS DEC) suggested circulating an accompanying fact sheet for extra data. Alpern, Alvarez and Chytalo wanted watershed lines marked on the map. Alpern mentioned that HydroQual might have this information available.

Alvarez and Susan Bauer-Maresca (NYS DEC) did not want to include the ratifying dates. In its place they suggested including funded acreages. Paul Mankiewicz (Gaia Inst., NYCSWD) suggested that the map might include a GIS layer for the sewer sheds. Alpern suggested that further intricacies of GIS layers be included on the internet and noted that the hard-copy of the map need not show all of the information at once.

❑ **Prioritized lists of potential HEP acquisition/restoration sites (Marc Matsil, NYC Parks)**

Matsil stated that with the proposed \$60 million available through the Port Authority and other imminent monies, it is important to prioritize acquisition lists. This enables HEP to guide funding entities, while promoting HEP's goals. Alpern inquired whether ACE had concretely addressed the group about their goals. He suggested that we call a special HWG meeting to speak to Leonard Houston (ACE) about their proposed program. Alpern stressed the importance of jump-starting this issue as Regional Planning Association (RPA) deadlines approach. Matsil stated that ACE has not yet developed concrete plans, and that the RPA is serving as the agent for the Corp's planning exercise.

Matsil, Alvarez and Bauer-Maresca discussed prioritizing a list for NY. From NYC Parks's perspective, North Mount Loretto Woods, Hybrid Oak/Pawpaw Woods, Graniteville swamp forest, Cable Avenue woods, and Camp Pouch are all priorities. Alvarez and Bauer-Maresca planned to compile the NYS DEC list. They noted that \$30 million, due to the costly price of land acquisition, will not go far in acquiring lands.

Mankiewicz suggested prioritizing a Bronx River fish passage and will write a proposal for it. Bauer-Maresca will propose Sutton Woods and talk to Dr. Marge Garguillo (NYC Parks/NRG) about flora at the site. It was also suggested that completing the acquisition of Seagirt become a priority.

Alpern wanted to increase the geographical diversity noting that Staten Island has most of the sites. Alvarez agreed that habitat and geographical area diversity are important. Matsil

responded that he chose the Staten Island sites because they are imminently threatened with development and supported the most ecologically diverse, plant and avifaunal communities.

❑ **Seamless Habitat Map**

Frank Steimle of the National Marine Fisheries Sandy Hook Lab introduced himself as a restored member of the HEP HWG. He currently works to enhance and restore fishery habitats. He is replacing Hal Sanford on the management committee. Steimle stated that one of his goals in rejoining HEP HWG is to give estuarine aquatic habitats more recognition.

Matsil noted that Robert Nyman (EPA) had specifically contacted Steimle with regard to incorporating benthic marine invertebrates into HWG inventories. There was additional discussion on how well benthic habitats are known. Mankiewicz requested that the fluid models from NOAA begin to look at geochemistry along with hydrodynamics. Then, the Gaia Institute could increase collaboration with them.

Chytalo questioned Steimle about current deepening projects and plans for the resulting 10 million cubic yards of rock. Steimle spoke of the potential to introduce new artificial reef habitats. Several sites within NY and NJ have been assessed as being able to accept a lot of rock. Steve Heins (NYSDEC) may introduce a new artificial fishing reef outside of Old Orchard Shoal. ACE is receiving other proposals for bank restoration. A small amount will be available to mitigate habitat loss.

According to Steimle, habitat with positive effects on target fisheries will be taken into consideration when planning. The target fisheries are tautog, lobster, juvenile black sea bass, striped bass, and eel. Steimle noted that individual benthic communities, especially hard-bottom, are not yet understood beyond their general characteristics due to the difficulty involved with benthic assessment,. Before beginning habitat characterization, HEP HWG needs to find out what data is of importance, how it should be accumulated (maps, atlas, descriptive text, models, etc.) and by whom. He suggested a future meeting to address the specifics of benthic characterization.

Bearing in mind that a time series of habitat maps may help understand and monitor land erosion, Matsil pointed out that there are trends of losing marsh acreage in the South Western Long Island Sound, Jamaica Bay, Northeast Queens (Little Neck Bay), and Arthur Kill watersheds. Eroding marshes are greatly exacerbated by dredging, channelization and boat wakes.

❑ **Habitat Loss Strategy (Karen Chytalo, NYS DEC)**

Chytalo warned that numeric targets put into the CCMP do not give us a habitat plan or allow us to assess potential impact from other projects. She stressed the importance of the committee to start spending time documenting what habitats there are, especially those from upland near and off-shore areas, and what species are utilizing those areas. In addition, she spoke of a need for a requisite monitoring program to assess trends over time. From a resulting blueprint/baseline of the various habitat types, HEP HWG can begin to think about needs and site placement. From previously made NRG draft maps, a high-detailed layered map with benthos can be produced. Steimle suggested that historical sites be researched also. They can become goals with opportunities for future restoration.

Alpern wanted to address climate change and its implications for water temperature and chemistry. According to Alpern, the Blue Ribbon Panel Reports (5/3) suggested that the

potential water-level rise in Jamaica Bay indicates that there has been rapid change in the last decade. He wants to brainstorm climate and habitat change possibilities dealing with warming in order to prioritize research. Steimle said that this is confounded with the Harbor deepening and potential additional increases in the amplitude and range of estuary tidal flux. Mankiewicz agreed that we need to be proactive in addressing impacts to come in this millennium. Chytalo noted that Columbia University has begun research associated with climate change effects. Matsil said that we can project climate change scenarios without models, but rather with more simple trend analyses. Steimle noted that the harbor's delta-like system makes things quite complicated. Alpern said that money is constantly being poured into global warming impact and that HEP HWG should take advantage of those funds to build a data base. We need to do the mapping, and we also have to address how to map the benthic habitat. Matsil noted that Fran Dunwell is working on mapping the benthic habitat. Matsil suggested beginning mapping with the Arthur Kill, as dredging pressures make it timely. Mankiewicz recommended being hypothesis driven in identifying potential habitats for mapping. Steimle said that anecdotal information can provide clues when hard data is missing. HEP HWG's city base map will serve as the scale from which other maps will be created.

Keeping the Habitat Comprehensive Strategy in mind, Chytalo suggested developing habitat and resource maps for strategizing habitat protection. Given the dredging timetable, Matsil found the Arthur Kill habitat to have the most imminent threats. In addition to current plans to blast certain areas of the harbor, there are also many terrestrial lands with high risk of development.

Steimle envisioned an overall mapping plan initiated with specific areas already containing habitat information to which additional regions will be accrued. McGrath, Cerrato and Wilbur can serve as references as they have established maps with decadal trends of sediment and contaminant levels. Steimle noted that data for shallow water is largely incomplete because vessels need water at least 3m deep and recommended that the HEP habitat committee look into this zone.

Matsil suggested first identifying reliable data sources that pass the QAQC test. He then expressed interest in focusing on forested and riparian headwaters, marshes, benthos, and fisheries habitats. Matsil, Chytalo, and Steimle agreed to meet before the next workgroup meeting to work on an outline and contacting potential data sources. In partitioning up their work, Steimle will focus on the subtidal zone, Chytalo-the intertidal marsh, and Matsil-the marsh, buffer, forest (upland) interface areas. Several workgroup members volunteered to contact environmental groups and educational organizations that might have ecological data available.

Alpern pointed out that the aerial base maps of NY and NJ may be potential data sources. He recommended interaction as new base maps are made. Habitat characterization needs can be relevant if the aerial photos are taken at the right time of day and year. Chytalo commented that quantifiable goals, and trend analysis can be produced from such maps. Matsil noted that it will fit into HEP's goals by providing regulators with a database.

