



To: NY/NJ HEP Habitat Workgroup
From: Christina Scully, NYC Parks/NRG
Date: August 21, 2002
Subject: Minutes from the July 24, 2002
HEP Habitat Workgroup Meeting

Next Meeting: September 12, 2002
10 am – 2 pm
Hudson River Foundation
40 W 20th St, 9th Floor
NY, NY 10011

Present at Meeting: Gisele Colbert (EE), Charles de Quillfeldt (NYSDEC), Eugenia Flatow (CAC, NYCSWCD), Margaret Gargiullo (NYC Parks), Steve Jandoli (NJDEP/GA), Mark Jaworski (WS), Shawn Kiernan (NOAA), Andrew Maclachlan (USFWS), Lynn Mandarano (UPenn), Nancy Niedowski (NYSDOS), Joyce Novak (NYCDEP), Mario Paula (USEPA), Christina Scully (NYC Parks), Donald Smith (HMC), Kyle Spendiff (NJMC), Carolyn Summers (NRDC), Kim Tripp (GNRA), Josh Whitney (USEPA), Cathy Yuhás (NJSG/HEP)

Minutes:

□ **Final Revised Nomination Form**

The updated version of the nomination form was e-mailed electronically to HEP HWG members. Anyone wishing to receive a copy, e-mail or call Christina Scully (christina.scully@parks.nyc.gov, (212) 360-1463).

□ **Regional Planning Association Needs and Opportunities Report**

The meeting began with a review of the *Needs and Opportunities Report* that the Regional Planning Association is currently working on. Niedowski (NYSDOS) began by highlighting the major goals of the draft document. According to it, collaboration between the Corps and stakeholders will yield the following:

- “The establishment of comprehensive plans for the environmental restoration of the five core ecosystems of the Hudson-Raritan Estuary and for other individually valuable sites of natural habitat
- The creation of a restoration program that works in partnership with and is supportive of plans for the acquisition of sites in those ecosystems whose preservation as natural habitat is necessary and desirable for their ecosystem health;
- The creation of a restoration program for the Hudson-Raritan estuary that embodies a philosophy of ecosystem management and whose ultimate standard of success is the re-establishment of environmental resources in the estuary that are self-sustaining and require a minimum of human intervention to maintain themselves;

- The maximum utilization of the Corps environmental and infrastructure expertise in the collaborative framework outlined above to expedite environmental restoration in the estuary to the greatest extent feasible;
- The establishment of environmental restoration as a priority activity of all resource agencies and environmental and civic organizations concerned with the estuary;
- The creation of a broader base of local partners to support Corps estuary activity and a smoother and more collaborative process for pursuing estuary restoration in local partnership, beginning with a task force approach to planning scopes or work for the HRE study;
- The better integration of Corps civil works projects, both environmental restoration and public works, with the environmental restoration and environmental protection initiatives of other public agencies and private stakeholders;
- The development of a staged and priority approach to environmental restoration that looks forward and builds toward the future creation of comprehensive marine fisheries and sediment restoration programs;
- Identification of potential restoration costs and funding sources so that government agencies and stakeholders can work to secure the necessary restoration funds.”

Niedowski then reminded the HEP HWG of the five core habitat clusters:

1. Raritan Bay
2. The Arthur Kill
3. Jamaica Bay
4. East River/Western Long Island Sound
5. Hackensack Meadows

and the 13 specific fast track sites around the estuary:

1. Alley Pond Park Queens, NY
2. Leonardo Monmouth, NJ
3. Old Place Creek Staten Island, NY
4. Newtown Creek Brooklyn, NY
5. Brookville Creek Queens, NY
6. Rahway River Union, NJ
7. Drier Offerman Park Brooklyn, NY
8. Marquis Creek Middlesex, NJ
9. Liberty State Park Hudson, NJ
10. Sherman Creek Manhattan, NY
11. Pelham Lagoon Bronx, NY
12. Tallapoosa Point Bronx, NY
13. Kearney Marsh Hackensack, NJ

In response to the general overview of the Needs and Opportunities Report given by Niedowski, several workgroup members had comments.

Shawn Kiernan (NOAA) questioned what the HEP HWG’s role would be in developing a scope of work for the consultants associated with the *Needs and Opportunities Report*. Niedowski said that the HEP HWG will be a repository of this and other habitat information, giving HEP more influence over priority sites and the fate of associated issues. She added that this will undoubtedly add to the HEP HWG’s workload, to which no one objected. Niedowski said that this is a great opportunity for the HEP HWG to harness additional resources in the form of consultation and data collection.

Eugenia Flatow (CAC, NYCSWCD) said that there had recently been concern that the RPA is creating a whole new systematic view of the estuary rather than using work that has already been established. She continued, saying that we as the habitat committee should have representatives from each associated task force attending the HEP HWG meetings. She also suggested that related programs such as those upstream of the HRE programs also start attending. This collaboration would be especially helpful in integrating water quality and habitat issues. Finally, Flatow expressed concern that key ecosystems are being left out of the five core habitat cluster view of the Estuary, and said that the Bronx River, Harlem River, East River and Hudson River should not be left out of a regional comprehensive plan. Carolyn Summers (NRDC) concurred with this and restated that the HEP HWG regional focus and consistency should remain. She expressed trepidation that the Corp may co-op projects that should be implemented at a grassroots level. She said that the USACE is best equipped to handle large-scale projects.

Kiernan said that the RPA was already talking about the second phase of an HRE study in which fisheries would be included. He considers it useful to include fisheries earlier on, especially alongside salt marsh restoration discussion, given how the two are so closely linked. Summers responded that the five areas were the HEP HWG's invention coupled with the USFWS *Significant Habitats and Habitat Complexes of the New York Bight Watershed (1996)*. The problem with the resultant core habitat view is that the waterways and rivers connecting the land regions, the means by which DNA and species migrate throughout the region is lost. She added that more attention must be cast upon fisheries because land connections between natural areas have been severed by urbanization.

With regard to the large regional view, Mark Jaworski (WS) commented that it renders goals and initiatives too vague. He continued, saying that the goals need to be clearly stated and designed to measure project successes. He said that the Corps will want to see the most ecological output per dollar invested. In addition, subsequent congressional appropriations will be more easily attained if successes are explicitly stated.

Niedowski pointed out the obvious conflict between simultaneously maintaining a wholesome, large-scale, inclusive view of the entire estuary, with clear, explicit and measurable goals. She along with Flatow added that the HEP HWG's goal has been to emphasize the totality of the region. Flatow said that the current governmental representatives for the region do see and understand the need for this view, but was not sure how others in government would respond to it.

Summers and Niedowski both encouraged members to learn the relationships between HEP HWG sites and the 13 specific "fast-track" sites, including the boundaries and progress of projects within these sites with respect to each other

Flatow and Margaret Gargiullo (NYC Parks) commented on the need to coordinate with other ongoing efforts on the Bronx River and Long Island Sound for example, which are currently disconnected from the HEP HWG.

No workgroup members objected to having the workgroup serve as a repository to which other task forces report to, as the project moves forward. Niedowski said that additional resources are not needed just yet because initial stages will simply consist of assessing information gaps and developing the scope of work. Current work on improving the acquisition and restoration database has already begun.

□ **Targets and Goals**

Niedowski presented the workgroup with a few sections of the *Targets and Goals* to be reworked and edited by the HEP HWG.

The conversation centered on the use of shellfish as an indicator of water quality under **Goal 1-Fishing and Swimming** in the *Draft Targets and Goals (July 15, 2002)*. Charles de Quillfeldt (NYSDEC) argued that shellfish harvesting is not the best measurement of water quality. He contended that shellfish cannot be harvested at all because periodic CSO's and sewage plant breakdowns prevent any harvesting at all. He added that factors other than water quality contribute to whether an area is conducive to harvesting. de Quillfeldt also said that the shellfish industry is currently taking in a sufficient harvest elsewhere, so that the NY Harbor is not a central issue for them. Niedowski said that this is a valuable point, and perhaps something other than shellfish harvesting would be a better indicator of water quality as surely there is a need to improve water quality.

Gargiullo suggested putting water quality in terms of limiting SOS, since that seems to be the biggest contributor to the Harbor's degraded water quality. Niedowski said the only problem with that is that we cannot offer a purely habitat or resource based indicator. Rather, it must be in terms of Fishable and Swimmable as outlined in the *Targets and Goals* document. She suggested categorizing shellfish differently, by having it listed separately as an ecological indicator and then as a water activity (in terms of harvesting), both of which have disparate harbor issues affecting them. She also questioned whether we want shellfish listed as a living resource rather than a water quality indicator.

The workgroup parted ways with the opinion that water quality is a two-fold issue and should be put in terms of both resource and ecological indicators. Several volunteered to work this over themselves or pass it on to the appropriate people in their agency or organization to bring new ideas to the next HEP HWG meeting.