



To: NY/NJ HEP Habitat Workgroup
Prepared by: Christina Scully, NYC Parks/NRG
Date: July 11, 2002
Subject: Minutes from the June 27, 2002
HEP Habitat Workgroup Meeting, Zoo Conference Room

Next meeting: Wednesday July 24, 2002
10 am – 2 pm
Hudson River Foundation
40 W 20th St, 9th Floor
NY, NY 10011

Present at Last Meeting: Carl Alderson (NYC Parks), Bob Alpern (NYCDEP), Susan Bauer-Maresca (NYSDEC), Betsy Blair (NYSDEC), Paul Brunn (NYCDEP), Megan Callus (Baykeeper), Kerry Dawson (HRPT), Charles deQuillfeldt (NYSDEC), Eugenia Flatow (CAC, NYCSWCD), Margaret Gargiullo (NYC Parks), Cindy Goulder (BEL), Len Houston (ACE), Steve Jandoli (NJDEP/GA), Andrew Kasius (NYNJ), Shawn Kiernan (NOAA), Reyhan Mehran (NOAA), Daniel Miller (DEC-HRNERR), Nancy Niedowski (USFWS), Joyce Novak (NYCDEP), Mario Paula (USEPA), Manuel Russ (CAC NYCDEP), Christina Scully (NYC Parks), Rosalie Siegel (PANYNJ), Frank Steimle (NOAA NMFS), Carolyn Summers (NRDC), Edward Toth (NYC/DPR NPC), Kim Tripp (GNRA), Josh Whitney (USEPA), Cathy Yuhas (NJSG/HEP)

Items requiring further action:

- Please review the revised Nomination Form (attached) and provide any final suggested revisions. Form will be finalized at the next meeting.

Minutes:

- **HRE Update, Len Houston (USACE)**

Houston (USACE) informed the HEP HWG that the HRE is proceeding in the early phases of its feasibility study. Al Appleton and the RPA are concurrently working on a needs and opportunity report directing where the HRE will go in terms of its comprehensive effort. Houston announced that a stakeholder meeting was scheduled for July 9th at Liberty State Park.

Houston asserted that the Needs and Opportunity report is not an USACE report and they are not controlling its entire production. Rather, they want a collective publication cataloguing all restoration projects across the Harbor, taking into account the needs of communities, agencies, concerned citizens, etc. A mechanism for continued feedback between the Corp and those concerned must be developed. Houston was very interested in developing a solid means of interaction between the HRE and HEP HWG and recommended a potential subset of the HWG. Nancy Niedowski (USFWS) remarked that this collaboration would constitute a great forum between two organizations with such similar missions. Eugenia Flatow (NYCSWCD) also supported this suggestion, but noted that the HWG committee has become an agency group. She stated that a letter must go out to the entire mailing list to include everyone that has participated in the HEP HWG. Since the group's inception, smaller community organizations have stopped regularly attending. Flatow added that seeing the estuary as a group of sub-estuaries leaves certain areas such as the Bronx River and certain NJ sites bereft. She wants to avoid alienating agencies working in those areas.

- **Greenbelt Native Plant Center Presentation (Ed Toth, Greenbelt Director)**

Ed Toth (GNPC) introduced the Greenbelt Native Plant Center and advertised how GNPC nursery products can meet the needs of agencies belonging to the HEP HWG. The facility was previously Mohlenhoff and Sons Growers until NYC purchased the land through a consent agreement associated with the Fresh Kills Landfill. In 1998, the Green Belt Conservancy and NYC began a joint regional project. Now, the city often uses GNPC plants for their restorations.

The GNPC works to preserve the genetic integrity of plants within the NYC area, by using local genotypes when possible. To do this, they rescue seeds and plants from development sites which they then propagate. If species are extirpated from NYC, seeds will be collected as close to the project site as possible. All collected seeds are tracked. Environmental data from the site of the seed source is recorded as well as the success of seeds given varying pretreatments and dormancies. Germination rates vary wildly with seasons and plant populations. Given the labor and time intensive process of producing plants, Toth noted that it is important restoration project managers contact him well in advance of when plants are needed. Trees and shrubs may take 3 years, while herbaceous plants may be ready within a few months.

Toth spoke of upcoming potential projects. They are hoping to play a large role in the closing of Fresh Kills Landfill. Both the closure and long-term use of the site would use a lot of local grass. They envision needing 100 tons of local seeds for closure. On-site harvesting will yield the fittest seeds. To prepare for such high yield seed production, seed cleaning equipment must be purchased while harvesting and replanting cycles begin in the near future.

Toth added that recent talks with Adrian Benepe, the NYC Parks and Recreation Commissioner have been very encouraging. Other than potential projects with the NYC Parks Department, they would like to develop formal relationships with other agencies such as DEP, USACE, etc.

Houston stated that Gerritson Creek and other Jamaica Bay projects can use GNPC plants as a local match. Flatow said that Rutgers and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden might be interested in related research projects.

- **Acquisition/Restoration Site Nomination Form Revisions and Discussion (Nancy Niedowski, USFWS)**

Following up on the previous meeting's nomination form discussion, Niedowski led the group to revisit the HEP HWG priority acquisition and restoration nomination forms which were not seen as adequate for nominating sites. She encouraged members to forward any comments or suggestions regarding this to her.

Flatow stated that the priorities must remain fixed. The process must be tight and as minimally political as possible. Niedowski was in favor of just requiring completion of the entire original form and indicating which questions are not applicable and why.

In terms of securing funding for the HEP HWG priorities, Bob Alpern (NYCDEP) said that we must clarify our relationship to the DEC and NYS Open Space Plan site list. Carolyn Summers (NRDC) responded that she received verbal assurance that the NY State list will incorporate all HEP HWG sites. She said that this should be followed up on because state funding for acquisition and restoration only goes to sites on the state's Open Space Plan.

Alpern said that the needs for monitoring and maintenance should be included if not on the form, than elsewhere. Summers said that by asking for species lists, and onerous details, you will dissuade smaller groups from applying to the HEP HWG. Flatow agreed that this should not be a requirement to nomination.

Steve Jandoli (NJDEP/GA) said that he is able to provide site info for NJ's Open Space Plan. The HEP is going to be represented in the State's new Open Space Plan as a focus area. They are currently refocusing Green Acres efforts on urban areas. They just approved \$4.8 million for HEP Projects and \$2.5 million for state acquisition in the HEP Programs. \$18 million is currently invested in active and recently closed projects. They will have 3 public meetings at the end of the summer to showcase their progress.

Summers said the single most important thing in nominating a site, is to nail down the identity of the site and the property owner. From there, we can progress. Flatow added that associated agencies can be utilized to fill in missing information. Site specifics should not bar individuals from submitting site nominations.

Shawn Kiernan (USFWS) said that it might be useful to have community site representatives attend HEP HWG meetings, to spark the interest of members who can help them complete the nomination forms.

He also suggested that the HEP HWG place a contact name on the nomination forms to assist community groups.

The group unanimously agreed that the Not Applicable (N.A.) must be filled in with the nomination forms. In the case of incomplete forms, Christina Scully (NYC Parks) or Niedowski can fill in blanks during site presentations. Marge Gargiullo (NYC Parks) suggested a disclaimer be added stating that the HEP HWG can elaborate the nomination form further.

- **Hudson River Estuary Program Restoration Plan (Betsy Blair and Dan Miller, NYSDEC/HRNERR)**

Betsy Blair (NYSDEC/HRNERR) and Dan Miller (NYSDEC/HRNERR) of the Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve introduced their agency as part of a national system of 25 sites from Alaska to Puerto Rico, which promote better restoration and restoration science through the associated education, training, monitoring, etc. The HRNERR plan is currently working on delivering several Hudson River habitat initiatives: habitat mapping, which will map upper tidal habitats and tidal wetlands, benthic mapping including detailed bathymetry, and its resulting habitat types, change analysis, and habitat function and enhancement. This restoration program includes the area between the Troy Dam in Albany to the River's mouth.

Miller then gave a presentation showcasing a purely ecological approach to restoration. He began by defining restoration as the re-establishment of previously existing wetland or other aquatic resource character and function(s) at a site where they have ceased to exist, or exist only in a substantially degraded state. In practice, this may be achieved by re-establishing the functions of a wetland or other aquatic resource that have been degraded or lost by such actions as filling, draining, altering hydrology or introduction of contaminants.

Miller clarified the difference between the restoration and enhancement, and said that HRNERR is trying to get away from an enhancement view, which is not based upon ecological principles. Given what restoration is, implications are that it is a positive and quantifiable environmental action. Miller stressed that this must be conducted as an experimental science and that success analysis requires ecological understanding.

Houston added that he thinks the idea of ecological value is sometimes given too much importance. It might be too complex a view. For instance, if a tidal marsh was filled and one reinstitutes the tidal marsh by removing fill, clearly there is ecological value gained. He questions the value of diverting limited resources to determine whether or not the project was ecologically successful and added that there is a point when project follow-up goes too far.

Miller responded that because an area looks like a wetland, it is not necessarily a wetland. He said that knowledge must guide decision making in these types of scenarios. Sustainability needs to be a consideration in determining project success.

Flatow said that Marc Matsil (NJDEP) developed a good way of following up on project success with long term monitoring. Gargiullo said that education is needed to prevent destructive restoration projects, an example being dredging a marsh to create open water to satisfy a community's desire for open space and sight lines. These types of "restorations" are not driven by the best ecological needs, but public sentiment. Miller responded that the HEP and HRNERR should be more involved in planning to prevent these types of scenarios.

Miller went on to describe other challenges to the Hudson River Ecosystem Restoration. They include regional bio-geographic variability, multiple regional and site-specific reasons for environmental degradation, the region's long and varied history, the current lack of collaboration amongst the many site-specific restoration projects, and task-specific funding for project implementation but not pre-restoration research. He said the ideal restoration process includes identifying site historic and reference conditions, data collection to set measurable ecological goals reflecting environmental integrity, design and determination of project feasibility, construction, monitoring and accountability. Miller proposed improved regional science coordination, a widely available database detailing historic habitat function, and that appropriate agencies offer technical support for establishing goals, feasibility studies and demo projects.

Gargiullo said that the historic conditions might not represent conditions that are currently achievable. For instance, the surrounding land-use of the NYC area has promoted the success of *Phragmites*. She said aiming for the historic conditions can be wasteful, since the *Phragmites* dominated landscape is a function of the region's urbanization, which cannot be reversed.

Blair responded that historic reference conditions should be based on a regional basis, in the context of the area's development. She added that just as we have to look back to historical data, we need to urgently consider and prepare for predicted future scenarios. The value of restoring areas, should be thought of in terms of future sediment supplies, sea level rise, etc. Kerry Dawson (HRPT) said that human use is often as cyclical as natural events. Social issues affecting land use must also be considered.

- **NEP Habitat Conference (Nancy Niedowski, USFWS)**

Niedowski told the workgroup that there is \$15K in the HEP HWG budget to host a conference. She said that decisions as to what size the conference should be, when and where it should be held, and whether it should be local or national need to be made. Options of places to host the conference are American Museum of Natural History, Columbia University, The NY Aquarium, and The Ryan Center at Floyd Bennett Field.

In terms of when the conference should be held, Niedowski noted that a large estuarine conference is being held in April. The itinerary is very different, so no workgroup members objected to scheduling a Spring conference. Pending budget consideration of rolling funds over into the new fiscal year, the group suggested May 2003 balanced most of the critical factors.

Flatow said that many of the issues we deal with have national importance and that Congress is currently interested in coastal water issues. She recommended getting input from NEP participants on what topics interest them and if they are willing to attend. She noted that a national conference must take housing into consideration.

Dawson suggested inviting Urban Estuary Programs from across the country focusing on state, regional and local restoration projects in local jurisdictions. He added that we might also invite representatives from national reserves and having people talk about them. He said this might be a good opportunity to learn about monitoring programs across the country. Flatow recommended having the issue of a "green port" raised. Niedowski agreed that it is especially important given the juxtaposition of the urban environment and port needs in the NYC area.

Other possible topics for the conference included:

1. Unique habitat issues in Urban estuary
2. Sea level rise and wetland loss issues
3. Integrating CAC into habitat issues
4. Coordinating with other workgroups (toxics, pathogens with habitat)
5. Workshop on improving mitigation
6. Acquisition topics and issues
7. Coordinating regulatory agencies inter- and intra- state
8. Technology and living resource initiatives
9. Handling watercraft issues and other recreational conflicts.

Niedowski said that the ideas and planning must work concurrently with the logistical issues. Both must be started immediately. Shino Tanikawa (NYCSWCD) will contact the AMNH as a potential venue. Kiernan will begin to solicit interest in specific topics regionally. Flatow will send potential topics out to NEP contacts she has.

- **Targets and Goals Discussion (Nancy Niedowski, USFWS)**

The Management Committee requested that the HEP HWG review two items on the latest draft of the Targets and Goals Document. The first, under Acquisition and Restoration of Habitat, "By 2006, preserve, protect, and restore any remaining natural stream corridors (as opposed to bulkheaded, channelized or riprapped streams) throughout the estuary," was approved by the workgroup. The second, "By 2009, assure a net increase of 5 miles of natural *and softened non-stream* shoreline through restoration and mitigation," was changed, which the Italics indicate.

The workgroup had issues with other areas of the document, which will be dealt with at a later meeting. In the meantime, Niedowski will submit the one edit.