



To: NY/NJ HEP Habitat Workgroup
From: Nancy Welsh
Date: March 22, 2004
Subject: Minutes from the January 27, 2004 HEP Habitat Workgroup Meeting

Location:

Hudson River Foundation
17 Battery Place, Suite 915

Present at Meeting:

Carl Alderson (NOAA), Robert Alpern (NYCDEP), Mary Arnold (TCC), Betty Beaumont (ARC), Alice Belling (NYCDEP), Alexander Brash (NYCDPR), David Burg (WM), Charles deQuillfeldt (NYSDEC), Jared Eldell (HR), Mike Feller (NYCDPR/NRG), Eugenia Flatow (HEPCACCB), Roselle Henn (USACE), Steve Jandoli (NJDEP), Andrew Kasius (NYNJ), Paul Mankiewicz (Gaia, NYCSWCD), E.J. McAdams (NYCAS), Kevin O'Brien (HS), Kamaile Nichols (EWA), Bob Nyman (USEPA), Kevin O'Brien (HS), Beth Ravit (Rutgers), Greg Remaud (NYNJB), Katie Schmid (NYCC), Christina Scully (NYC Parks), Basil Seggos (Riverkeeper), Rosalie Siegel (PANYNJ), Robert Spiegel (EWA), Christina Spielman (CMAP), Bill Tai (NYCDPR), Chris Villari (NYCDEP), Eric Vowinkle (USGS), Nancy Welsh (NYSDOS), David Wheeler (EWA), Cathy Yuhas (EPA)

Announcements:

The USFWS fish and game program is accepting proposals for the restoration of privately owned sites with endangered and threatened species which are not already under conservation management. They encouraged group members to brainstorm site ideas. Proposals are due March 8, 2004. The maximum reward is \$150,000 with \$7 million being distributed nationwide. An announcement will be broadcast on the listserv.

Restore America's Estuaries 2nd annual conference is accepting papers and posters with a February 2nd deadline for papers and March 2nd for the posters. The conference will be held September 2004 in Seattle. EPA travel money is available. This conference is a good opportunity to showcase urban restoration and it's unique challenges. estuaries.org has more information.

The "Tidal Exchange" HEP newsletter has allocated space for an ongoing habitat column. It will be published on a quarterly basis. A variety of members of the group should be authors of the column. The first deadline has already passed but Caroline Summers and NYCDPR/NRG submitted an article about Graniteville Swamp. The next deadline is 4/16. Nancy Welsh (NYSDOS) has article information on length and guidelines. There is also an ongoing species profile in the newsletter for which member submittals are welcome. Marielle Anzelone (NYCDPR) is submitting an article on the Canada mayflower this month.

Minutes:

[Presentation of HEP sites on the Open Accessible Space Information System \(OASIS\) web site \(Christy Spielman, NYPIRG/CMAP\)](#)

Welsh announced that the HEP HWG sites are now live on the web through the OASIS program. Christy Spielman (NYPIRG/CMAP) demonstrated how the HEP sites are merged into the OASIS program.

The OASIS program began in 2000 as a product of combining the U.S. Forest Service with mapping and advocacy groups in NYC. The goals were to bring together mapping resources and entities, identify information gaps and provide communities access to GIS information to use for planning and advocacy efforts. The prototype OASIS site was available in March 2001. The site currently receives about 1000 hits a week with a stable following. There hasn't been much marketing, but OASIS has an education committee which shows OASIS to be an online resource for teachers and students, particularly within the Open Road program.

There are currently several natural themes, which can be searched and mapped by specific natural resources, zip codes, boroughs, political districts, counties, etc. The natural area layers have been largely derived from NYCAS, NY4P and the national wetlands database. All of the layers are referenced with their source, date of origin, contact, description, etc. Spielman reminded the group that the layers are only as accurate as its data sources. She suggested contacting those who generate and provide the data in order to discuss its accuracy. An upcoming layer they expect to include soon has 2002 infrared and classified landcover data.

Using the 'identify tool', one can access specific HEP site information including project summaries, links to the HEP website, national wetland inventory information and site contacts. Generalized land use information including NYC Department of Finance land use, zoning, and owner data is also available if you zoom in close enough for those data layers to be turned on. Spielman said it is possible to include a 'more information' link to additional text, photographs hosted by member servers. Welsh said they are looking towards Phase II of the HEP sites to give more information including photos, restoration opportunities and external links to such information. The HRE/USACE web capabilities might be able to help towards implementing this.

Bob Nyman (USEPA) said that NYCDPR/Natural Resources Group will have an intern this summer who can gather site information and make polygons for the sites. Additional geographic data will likely also be coming from the USACE as part of the HRE study and can be coordinated through the Habitat Workgroup/OASIS database..

Carl Alderson (NOAA) advocated eventually merging benthic data into this too. He also urged city government members to push for access to basic layers such as roads, land use, and the bottom structural information. He suggested a link with information on obtaining these basic layers.

Paul Mankiewicz (Gaia) recommended including restoration complexes—something that the USACE has been talking about including.

Raritan River Projects-Passive Recreational Areas (Bob Spiegel, Edison Wetlands Association)

Bob Spiegel (EWA) spoke of the Edison Wetlands Association's efforts to convert land along Raritan River waterfront to recreational area. The area, formerly known as 'valley of the dumps' has required significant work including drum removal and lead paint pigment cleanup along Mill Brook. EWA aims to continue this effort with creation of a public park and walkway around the Kin Buc Mound B area, rehabilitation of the Edison Landfill and remediation of Edmonds Creek.

At Edison Landfill, leachate and trash continue to flow into the Raritan River because the closure plan was never implemented. Spiegel insisted that a proper closure plan must include a landfill cap, leachate and gas collection systems. Encompassing all of the landfill with a collection of ponds rather than storm water systems would be highly beneficial.

EWA is working with the Edison Township and the USEPA to convert the landfill into a recreational use area including trail systems, wetland enhancement, hiking, biking, bird watching areas, kayaking, and a boat launch. This will be linked to larger Greenways areas and increase access to the Raritan waterfront. This should be implemented within the next 2-3 years.

Another current project is the remediation and restoration of Edmonds Creek. There, PCB levels have been increasing although restoration has been completed. Discrete pockets of PCBs had been missed during the restoration and have since been redistributed throughout the site. The EWA are pushing to have EPA require Kin Buc Landfills to complete a successful restoration. In the meantime, people are using the site for boating, water-skiing, swimming, and fishing (recreational and commercial). Commercial harvesting of blue claw crabs occurs in the Kin Buc area. The state has done work studying the migratory patterns of the crabs pertinent to the PCB levels and fisheries use. In the meantime, people are continuing to harvest and consume the crabs.

EWA's next steps include developing project plans for Edison Township, identifying funding sources, creating realistic goals, and continuing with the long-term vision for project completion. This will be accomplished with the help of partners, particularly the NYNJ Baykeeper and Edison Township and the formation of a waterfront citizens advisory committee including stakeholders from HEP, NYNJ Baykeeper, Edison Township, NJDEP, business leaders, Raritan River Boat Club, Raritan Riverkeeper and elected officials.

More information can be found at edisonwetlands.org.

Greg Remaud (NY/NJ Baykeeper) commended Bob Spiegel for being one of the nation's best 'toxic leaders'. He was recently featured in Molly Ivins's Bushwacked. Spiegel helped NY/NJ Baykeeper rethink acquisition and restoration on the Raritan River, to focus on cleaning up sites as acquisition sites would otherwise be damaged in the meantime without proper remediation.

[Teaneck Creek research update \(Mary Arnold, Teaneck Creek Conservancy, Beth Ravit, Rutgers University, Eric Vowinkle, USGS\)](#)

Mary Arnold (TCC) updated the group on the Teaneck Creek wetland mitigation project. They recently submitted environmental permitting applications to NJDEP. They detail the proposed trail system, boardwalk and bridge crossings and work on reconnecting wetlands to Teaneck Creek, connection to Overpeck Creek and then, the Hackensack River. Over three years, they will assess hydrology, sediment, pollutants, and the potential to bring back about 20 acres of urban freshwater wetlands. The project is unique in that it is pulling scientists with very different research interests together to study this restoration before and after.

Eric Vowinkle (USGS, Rutgers Adjunct Professor) is examining groundwater's susceptibility to nitrate contamination by evaluating nutrient dynamics between the atmosphere, soil, ground and surface water in urban wetlands. Pesticides, volatiles and other contaminants will be considered as Nitrogen point sources. He has already done work studying the effects of hydrologic land use on nitrate concentrations throughout NJ wells. This work will help estimate potential nitrate levels in Teaneck Creek. Another resource for this project is the national database of streamflow. Real time gauging stations downstream and upstream of Teaneck Creek will be installed for this project, reporting on 4 hour intervals. They will measure stream flow, temperature and dissolved oxygen. They will be found on the <http://www.nj.usgs.org/> website.

Beth Ravit (Rutgers University) introduced her graduate research which focuses on brackish wetlands and microbial sediment processes. This particular wetland is unique in that it is urban freshwater wetland. One

can examine both the effects of urbanization on the wetland and its responses.

She is experimenting with the wetland's functional capacity to enhance the loss of nitrogen/production of inert N₂ from the ecosystem by way of vegetative changes and microbial processes in the water column and sediment, not export from the system.

This project team would like the Wetlands Mitigation Council to focus on Teaneck Creek as a model for regional urban freshwater wetlands.

Newtown Creek (Katie Schmid, NYC Council/Basil Seggos, Riverkeeper)

Katie Schmid (NYCC) and Basil Seggos (Riverkeeper) have been coordinating with elected officials, community and advocacy groups about the Newtown Creek restoration and are now bringing the issue to a larger audience. Their interest in Newtown grew out of an earlier project identifying sites to post fish advisories in Fall 2002, and garnered attention with community meetings advocating for remediation efforts. They received a technical assistance grant to pursue this project.

Schmid described the Newtown site as bulkheaded and lacking traditional habitat opportunities. The intended work would increase habitat on-site and bring environmental education to Newtown Creek, extending outreach to local groups and schools this summer.

The Newtown Creek Alliance (NCA) helped with community outreach, support and enforcement in identifying pollution sources. Together, the NCA and Riverkeeper started a citizen-led enforcement commission that filed complaints under the Clean Water Act submitting letters to five polluters. The second initiative contains a lawsuit relevant to an on-site underground oil spill.

There are 20 different known CSO outfalls in the area with large sections of Bushwick and industrial Queens discharging into the creek. One of the fundamental concerns of the Newtown Creek cleanup is to clean the creek without driving business and affordable housing away from the Bushwick area. They aim to build a responsible core of businesses that care about the waterway.

Riverkeeper is continuing with efforts including identifying potential parkland including the creek itself, possible bike paths, signage and cultural outreach, and environmental education opportunities. They are also thinking about a fund for the creek, linking groups that have been working with Newtown already, and keeping an eye on potential wetland mitigation related to the 2012 Olympic games.

Riverkeeper.org has information about their ongoing clean water cases including online downloadable reports. See newtowncreek.org for additional information.

Update on NJ Green Acres sites (Steve Jandoli, GA)

Steve Jandoli (NJDEP/GA) gave an update on HEP acquisition sites. Between 2000-2003, 13 sites were preserved consisting of 915 acres for \$23 million. 326 acres are active projects in some phase of negotiation and completion and there is \$18.3 million available for funding NJ HEP sites. Jandoli said that NJ was awarded about \$17 million for natural resource damages claims on the lower Passaic River.

Jandoli updated the group that former HEP HWG chair, Marc Matsil, has changed positions to become Senior Natural Resource Policy Advisor pursuing natural resource damages. Jay Watson, the administrator of Green Acres, will be taking Matsil's old position.

Remaud commended the success of medium to small sized site acquisitions and restorations in NJ, and attributed it to a strong network of committed partners. The detailed project work is successfully carried out by local agencies that know their local sites better than everyone else. The Teaneck Creek project is a great model to set the standards for receiving mitigation council funding. He said the HEP HWG should make sure projects like this, which are ready to go into the ground should receive funding over research and planning grants. Mankiewicz agreed and added that academic projects should not be funded for their own sake. The point is to get projects completed.

Jandoli mentioned the recently formed Rahway River Association composed of participants from Essex, Union and Middlesex counties and the Arthur Kill Association which he and Dennis Miranda formed to lobby for funding and enforcement actions would be good resources for guidance. He also recommended writing a letter about this to Commissioner Campbell establishing some recommended guidelines.

Eugenia Flatow (HEPCACCB) said that it is often more difficult to get projects funded in NYC, since it isn't as small and interconnected as NJ. NYC lacks the same level of connectivity with local political leaders and central government.

Potential Habitat Workgroup budget items (Nancy Welsh/Bob Nyman, HEP)

Welsh began by detailing potential budget items. Overall, the HEP will be receiving about the same level of funding as last year. There is not enough funding to cover all of the proposed budget items from the various workgroups and many will not be provided with funding. The priority HWG item would be implementing Phase II of the HEP sites on OASIS, to improve the site data and details, add photographs, and other functionality. She encouraged the workgroup to submit ideas to her. The management committee requests that the projects should be geared toward implementing Targets and Goals. Last year's funded items included: setting up the HEP sites on OASIS; harbor herons research; and an intern to assist with site updating.

The funded intern will be housed at NYC Parks/NRG. The intern will turn project site points into polygons for display on OASIS, and update the database information. Flatow recommended giving a presentation to funders to get additional help for Welsh. She also recommended making a presentation to showcase HEP's progress and results for elected officials. Welsh said it is important to utilize the cheap and easy methods to advertise what the HEP HWG work. The listserv and OASIS project can quickly and easily share information around the estuary.

Related to past budget items, Welsh would like to evolve the proposed "national habitat conference" into a workshop to create a scientific framework for the HRE study, inviting scientific expertise of different areas. Dennis Suzskowski (HRF) has been in touch with Dr. Marc Bain, Cornell University and Len Houston (USACE). The money would go to bringing in the invited experts. This would occur in the spring to provide immediate and needed information for the USACE HRE study.