

# FOCUS

## Environmental Leaders Learning Alliance Newsletter-Summer 2012

The Environmental Leaders Learning Alliance is a cooperative of local leaders whose goal is to help municipalities make more informed land use decisions.

### The Language of Conservation

By Mike Rubbo, Ph.D.

Daniel Kampel Director of Conservation Science

Have you ever had a difficult time conveying the importance of the work you are doing to the public, town officials, or even friends and family? I certainly have. For example, after many years of trying, I still can't get my father to understand the importance of maintaining a buffer of vegetation along the stream in his yard. No matter how hard I have tried or what tactic I have used (facts, guilt, begging), he still keeps mowing right up to the edge. I was also involved in the very controversial adoption of a wetlands law in my town. While we tried to focus our message on the need for the law, a small, but very vocal group of people, came out in strong opposition. Ultimately, the town board that adopted the law was not re-elected the following fall and the new administration promptly repealed it.

These experiences have taught me the importance of communication in conservation. Scientists and conservationists are not typically taught how to communicate with the general public. They like to use technical jargon and big words. This leads to them being viewed as elitist and not relatable to the "common man or woman". This also leads to the mistrust of the findings of science (see the climate change debate). Given the environmental threats we are currently facing, it is critically important for conservationists to convey their messages in a clear and concise manner that is not only understood by the public, but appreciated.

To address this important issue of communication, ELLA recently hosted a workshop by the group Water Words that Work ([www.waterwordsthatwork.com](http://www.waterwordsthatwork.com)). This group specializes in designing effective strategies to convey complex environmental topics. The workshop was well-attended and very informative. In my opinion it was the best ELLA workshop to date. If we had the funds, we would offer it annually.

Many strategies were discussed, but something that resonated with me was the importance of specific words. Here is a small sample of the "words that work", see [www.waterwordsthatwork.com/the-method/words/](http://www.waterwordsthatwork.com/the-method/words/) for more.

***When explaining an environmental issue, use the following words:***

- Nature protection
- Pollution control
- Enough clean water
- Wildlife conservation

(Notice the terms biodiversity, non-point source pollution, green infrastructure, sustainability, and watersheds, are not used, these are considered "jargon")

***When addressing the “so what” question:***

- Future generations
- Healthy
- Family and children

***When encouraging someone to act:***

- Make a difference
- Doing your part
- It affects you
- Save money

***When asking someone to take your side:***

- Choice
- Fair
- Freedom
- Accountability
- Planning ahead
- Responsible

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## **Site Plan Training Program Update!**

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The ELLA Site Plan Training Program has now been running for 4 months and things are going great! We have 25 participants representing 10 municipalities and have completed workshops on: the basics of site plans, wetlands, biodiversity, and stormwater. The program focuses on a fictional site proposed for development. Participants are identifying the environmental constraints of the site and then will compare this to a proposed development. They will then develop alternative designs that will minimize or eliminate the environmental impacts of the project while maintaining a reasonable level of development. This is an important training program as interpreting site plans is a primary responsibility of Conservation Boards and Planning Boards. After this pilot phase of the program, we hope to begin to offer it on an annual basis.



Scenes from the Site Plan Training Workshops at Cliffdale, Teatown Lake Reservation

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR OUR SEPTEMBER WORKSHOP!**  
*Details available in August...*

The Westchester County GIS Department will be offering a workshop on GIS basics to ELLA members. Participants in the workshop will receive a **FREE** Geo-pdf of their community. This file is a standard pdf file that will contain all of the important natural resource data for their town and will allow users to explore these data without the need for expensive GIS software. *We will begin accepting registrations in August, as the GIS folks will need time to prepare these files, you will need to register early.*

**IN THE NEWS AROUND THE HUDSON HILLS AND HIGHLANDS**

**Energize NY Program Update!**

*Article provided by Patrice Hauptman, Energize NY - Community Outreach and Development & Suzie Ross, Energize Ossining, Town of Ossining Liaison*



With the advent of the Energize NY program, homeowners are starting to make a difference in energy efficiency and utilization of the state's Green Jobs Green New York program. Sadly, due to the unusual warmth of last winter, homeowners pursuing energy efficiency statewide dropped. However, homeowners from Northern Westchester ignored this trend and increased their participation by over 100%. Education is the key to reducing residential energy use. In the past, thoughtful people have endeavored to make a difference by driving hybrids and throwing on extra sweaters in the winter. However, with Energize we hope that they are learning that reducing their home energy waste is the largest single thing an individual can do, and that it doesn't have to be painful.

97% of all New Yorkers will qualify for a free/reduced cost comprehensive home assessment – this is the key first step in your own home energy efficiency journey. With the comprehensive home assessment, homeowners get a road map to saving energy, lowering bills and becoming more comfortable. Since Ossining first launched its Energize program, in the last two month 116 residents have signed up to learn more about getting an energy assessment, and many of those are in various stages of having their assessments done and proceeding with the work needed to make their homes more energy efficient (among other health and financial benefits).

Within Northern Westchester, 911 people have signed up to start the energy efficiency journey, 427 have gotten assessments and 176 have gotten upgrades. Again, while these numbers may feel small, we believe they are the seeds of real change. They are building important momentum in our communities and the end goal is “market transformation.” In other words, some day we hope we won't have to explain the benefits of energy efficiency – hopefully in a few years most people will know and have taken some action. ***For more information, [www.energizeny.org](http://www.energizeny.org)***

**Forest Management Plans for the Town of Yorktown's Parks**

*Article provided by William Kellner, Tree Conservation Advisory Commission, Town of Yorktown*

Under Yorktown's tree-preservation ordinance, the town's Tree Conservation Advisory Commission is tasked with preparing a town-wide forest management plan to set priorities for forest protection and maintenance. The plan will cover both public and privately owned lands.

Last year Yorktown received a grant from the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) to conduct a pilot Watershed Forest Management Plan (WFMP) for Yorktown's Turkey Mountain Park. The plan was prepared by a certified watershed forester who conducted an in-depth evaluation of the various habitats in this 127 acre park. The final report recommended actions that ranged from deer control to invasive species removal. The town is in the process of seeking funding to implement some of those recommendations for Turkey Mountain and is working with the WAC to conduct a second WFMP at Yorktown's Sylvan Glen Park. Information on the WAC's forestry program, which covers lands in the New York City watershed. Information is available at [www.nycwatershed.org/for\\_planning.html](http://www.nycwatershed.org/for_planning.html)



## ELLA MEMBERS,

Do you have a colleague that serves on your Town, Planning, Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Commission/Board or Open Space Commission that is not a participating member of ELLA? Our current membership of **100** represents municipalities throughout Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess, Rockland and Orange counties.

### ***THE BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP INCLUDE:***

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- ✓ Training credits for Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeal members
- ✓ Knowledge of environmental regulations to ensure compliance
- ✓ The training necessary to evaluate proposed developments resulting in a streamlined review process
- ✓ An understanding of the economics of land use decisions
- ✓ Enhances local “good will” through community-based environmental projects

❖ **To join:** Visit [www.ellahhh.net/join](http://www.ellahhh.net/join) to complete an on-line application

❖ **For additional information contact:**

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*Streamside tree planting in Bedford*



*Workshops on a variety of topics*

ELLA IS A PROGRAM OF:



**TEATOWN**  
LAKE RESERVATION  
A Nature Preserve & Education Center