

The Hudson Hills & Highlands Focus

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Environmental Leaders Learning Alliance

Winter 2009

Dear ELLA Members,

This winter, we were delighted to launch the ELLA website, www.ellahh.net. Members of ELLA can access resources to enhance learning and communication, including the ELLA Blog, a library of resources, and a calendar of events in our region. **Please remember to subscribe to the blog to be notified of new posts.** The public side of the website allows visitors to learn what ELLA members are doing in our towns and villages. One of our aims is to generate greater public awareness about your work.

In March, ELLA member John Ladd of the Town of Ossining EAC will be giving our first "Peer to Peer Training", about on-line GIS resources (see the events Calendar for details). Aiming for ELLA members to be both students and teachers, we encourage you to share your expertise with your colleagues in one of these smaller, focused sessions. You provide the teaching, and we'll take care of the logistics. Thank you, John!

Fred & Linsay



The Environmental Protection Fund: A Critical New York State Resource for Today and Tomorrow

Fred W. Koontz, Ph.D.

Executive Director, Teatown Lake Reservation

New York State's environmental resources are critical for the health and prosperity of its residents. Protecting our natural heritage also is essential for ensuring a sustainable future. With this in mind, the New York State Legislature created the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) in 1993. Today, the Environmental Protection Fund is the most significant source of funding for environmental projects in communities across New York. The Fund supports both government agencies (e.g. Department of Environmental Conservation and Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation) and more than 75 non-profit organizations and universities working on behalf of the environment.

The EPF's FY 2008/2009 budget is \$205 million (reduced from \$255 million in February 2009 as part of the State's Deficit Reduction Plan). The Fund invests in three broad programs: 1) Open Space; 2) Parks and Recreation; and 3) Solid Waste. The Open Space Program (63% of the budget) supports land acquisition of environmentally important areas; biodiversity stewardship and research; invasive species management and research; agricultural and farmland protection; and non-point source abatement and control. The Parks and Recreation Program (30% of the budget) supports State and local municipal parks; historic preservation; urban cultural parks; support to zoos, botanical gardens, aquariums and nature centers; waterfront revitalization; and coastal rehabilitation. The Solid Waste Program (7% of the budget) supports non-hazardous municipal landfill closure;

municipal waste reduction and recycling; and developing, updating or revising local solid waste management plans; and the development of the pesticide sales and use database.

The Environmental Protection Fund is financed through a dedicated source, "Real Estate Transfer Tax (REET)," and is allocated to specific budget lines (sub-programs) by the New York State Legislature and the Governor through annual appropriations. The original idea was that because of its dedicated revenue stream, the EPF could support projects in both good and bad fiscal times. Since its inception in 1993, the EPF has gradually grown from its original appropriation of \$31 million to \$205 million. It is especially important to know that in 2007, the State Legislature overwhelmingly passed a law (Chapter 258 of the Laws of 2007) to provide nearly \$300 million to the Fund in FY 2009/2010, and each year thereafter.

As a result of the recent economic crisis, the EPF as a whole has already been reduced by 20%, with some sub-programs facing much larger reductions or elimination. Governor Patterson has proposed in FY 2009/2010 that EPF be funded at \$205 million, a 30% reduction from the promised \$300 million made by the Legislature in 2007. The Governor also has proposed that the bulk of EPF funding come from revenues generated from an improved ("bigger, better") bottle bill, rather than the REET. This alarms environmentalists, because the details of the revenue stream from the bottle bill is uncertain. Also, the Governor's proposed FY 2009/2010 budget makes draconian cuts on many important efforts, like the Hudson River Estuary Program, invasive species control, and the support to zoos, botanical gardens, aquariums and nature centers.

To learn more about the EPF and to see the Governor's line item budget details, download the following two items from the ELLA Resource Library: 1) The Environmental Protection Fund: Preserving New York's Natural Heritage & Quality of Life; and 2) EPF FY 2008/2009 and FY 2009/2010 Budgets.

ELLA Fall 2008 Workshop, with Randall Arendt: Conservation Subdivision Design as a Tool for Building Community-wide Open Space Networks

The third ELLA workshop took place at Teatown Lake Reservation on Monday, October 6 from 4pm-9pm, with 26 ELLA members from 17 Hudson Hills and Highlands towns and villages, as well as 14 observers.

Randall Arendt is a landscape planner, site designer, author, lecturer, and an advocate of "conservation planning". He is an internationally known speaker on the topic of creative development design as a conservation tool, and is the author of *Conservation Design for Subdivisions: A Practical Guide to Creating Open Space Networks* and *Growing Greener: Putting Conservation into Local Plans and Ordinances*.

www.greenerprospects.com

Randall Arendt's slide lecture introduced the concept and process of designing conservation subdivisions, with a practical, easy-to-use technique that enables developers and local officials to work together to accomplish their different objectives, namely the construction of full-density residential subdivisions (developers' goal) in such a way that helps to build a community-wide network of permanent conservation land (officials' goal). Mr. Arendt provided many examples of conservation subdivisions from around the country, illustrating how it is feasible to develop a site in keeping with its unique landscape features, and be economically viable at the same time. Randall described how this design process can fit into the local regulatory framework through specific provisions in comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, and subdivision regulations.



Workshop attendees had an opportunity to talk with each other during dinner, and then participated in a hands-on design exercise. They applied the straight-forward four-step design process to a real parcel of land, selecting house sites in relation to the pre-identified conservation areas, aligning streets and trails, and finally drawing in the lot lines.

Lessons Learned:

- There are many examples of housing developments designed with conservation areas included, for us to learn from. Conservation design is not just theoretical, but has been shown to be possible.
- The design process as demonstrated by Mr. Arendt is straight-forward and relatively easy to implement by informed citizens (without expensive consultants).
- While these examples exist, we still have much to learn; how successful are these designs at conserving natural areas and biodiversity in the long term?

Conservation Design for Subdivisions

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO CREATING OPEN SPACE NETWORKS



Randall G. Arendt

Natural Lands Trust, American Planning Association, and American Society of Landscape Architects

Each conservation commission represented at the workshop received a copy of Mr. Arendt's Conservation Design for Subdivisions. Check with your colleagues if you have not had a chance to look over the book.

Success from the Field: Philipstown Adopts Natural Resource Plan

On January 8, 2009, Philipstown adopted a Natural Resource Plan and an Open Space Index as part of their Town Comprehensive Plan. The plan aims to "insure that our natural resources continue to be viable and sustainable, serving as the foundation for a healthy and thriving Philipstown" and is "intended for use by residents, local boards, project applicants, non-profit land conservation organizations and state agencies."

The plan focuses on identifying and protecting ground and surface water, biodiversity, community character, and outdoor recreation, through recognizing high priority natural resource areas for conservation. Of special significance to ELLA members was that the Natural Resource plan recommended producing an Open Space Index and moving toward the CAC becoming a Conservation Board. **View the Philipstown Natural Resource Plan and Open Space Index on the ELLA website, in the member's Resource Library.**

**Please share your town's conservation successes with your colleagues!
Submit stories for a future issue of The Focus to lcochran@teatown.org.**

Guest Feature: Bedford Conservation Board's Rain Garden Project

Simon Skolnik, Bedford Conservation Board

Increased build up of our towns and villages with buildings, driveways, roads, parking lots and other hard, impervious surfaces, alters the local water cycles and inundates local streams and rivers with enormous quantities of water and contaminants. Rain gardens mimic the natural absorption and pollutant-removal abilities of a forest, meadow or prairie. They absorb runoff more efficiently - as much as 30% to 40% more than a standard lawn. By capturing rainwater in a rain garden, holding it for a relatively short time (no more than 18 hours), and then releasing it into the soil, the rush of a large storm can be slowed and cleaned - quickly, neatly and naturally. Rain gardens are low-tech, inexpensive, sustainable and beautiful.



In the fall of 2006, the Bedford Conservation Board built a rain garden in front of our town hall as a way of providing our residents and visitors with an example that would educate and inspire them to construct one in

their own yard. Local garden clubs, landscape contractors, and residents, along with our board members, donated their time and effort to make this project a great success. As one town employee said, "Every time I walk past the rain garden, I smile." Since the garden was built, our various town boards and commissions are recommending it to applicants as a means of dealing with stormwater run-off from their own projects. We have also seen an increase in rain gardens being built by residents just for the fun of it.

Web resources for general information about rain gardens, helpful for planning:

www.raingardens.org

www.raingardennetwork.com

www.uri.edu/ce/healthylandscapes/raingarden.htm

www.co.rockland.ny.us/enviro/water/RainGarden.pdf

Native plant lists:

www.bbg.org/gar2/topics/design/2004sp_raingardens.html



Resources for Our Region

- **The ELLA website** has communication and learning tools for ELLA members--- a Blog, Resource Library, and Calendar. **Please remember to subscribe to the blog to be notified of new posts.** Potential members can learn about ELLA and fill out the short contact form to join.
www.ellahhh.net
- **Conserving Natural Areas and Wildlife in Your Community:** A new guide to protecting nature for local governments, from the DEC's Hudson River Estuary Biodiversity Outreach Program, is now available for free download on the DEC website. It encourages municipalities to develop strategies for protecting nature by stressing the importance of nature conservation to human communities, identifying sources of information about natural areas and wildlife, outlining the smart growth strategies that can be used to conserve natural assets, and providing examples of how Hudson Valley municipalities are conserving their resources.
<http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/50083.html>
- **NYS DEC 2009 Draft Open Space Conservation Plan:** Citizens of NY are encouraged to review this draft Plan and provide comments, so that the final Plan submitted to Governor Paterson later this year represents the best strategy for how our State, our partners and we, as citizens, should move forward to conserve our common outdoor heritage. **View the plan on the DEC website:**
<http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/47990.html>
- **Teatown Thoughts Blog:** a forum for news about Teatown Lake Reservation and nature and sustainable living in the Hudson Hills and Highlands. A special focus is on Hudson Valley biodiversity and on the ecological services that flora and fauna provide to us. The blog, launched in January 2009, is authored and moderated by Fred Koontz.
<http://teatownblog.wordpress.com/>

HELP US GROW: ELLA has 100 members from 31 towns, villages and cities in the Hudson Hill and Highlands; please let your colleagues know about us!

<u>Municipality (Town unless otherwise noted)</u>	<u>Board/Council/Committee</u>	<u>Members</u>
<u>DUTCHESS COUNTY</u>		
Beacon, City of	Conservation Advisory Commission	1
Beekman	Conservation Advisory Council	1
"	Open Space Committee	0
East Fishkill	Conservation Advisory Council	0
Fishkill	Environmental Board	3
Pawling	Conservation Advisory Board	6
<u>ORANGE COUNTY</u>		
Cornwall	Conservation Advisory Council	5
<u>PUTNAM COUNTY</u>		
Carmel	Environmental Conservation Board	2
Kent	Conservation Advisory Committee	5
Philipstown	Conservation Advisory Council	2
Putnam Valley	Commission for the Conservation of the Environment	3
Southeast	Open Space Advisory Committee	1
<u>ROCKLAND COUNTY</u>		
Clarkstown & Haverstraw, EMC representatives from	Rockland County Environmental Management Committee	2
Orangetown	Open Space Committee	0
<u>WESTCHESTER COUNTY</u>		
Ardsley, Village of	Conservation Advisory Committee	2
Bedford	Conservation Board	5
"	Open Space Acquisition Committee	0
"	Wetlands Control Commission	1
Briarcliff Manor, Village of	Conservation Advisory Council	4
Cortlandt	Conservation Advisory Council	3
"	Open Space Committee	1
Croton, Village of	Conservation Advisory Council	1
Dobbs Ferry, Village of	Conservation Advisory Board	0
Greenburgh	Conservation Advisory Council	5
Hastings-on-Hudson, Village of	Conservation Commission	0
Irvington, Village of	Environmental Conservation Board	2
Lewisboro	Conservation Advisory Council	3
"	Open Space Advisory Committee	3
Mount Kisco	Conservation Advisory Council	1
Mount Pleasant	Conservation Advisory Committee	2
New Castle	Conservation Board	1
"	Open Space Advisory Committee	0
North Salem	Conservation Advisory Committee	2
Ossining	Environmental Advisory Committee	4
Ossining, Village of	Environmental Advisory Council	11
Peekskill, City of	Conservation & Parks Advisory Board	1
Pleasantville, Village of	Conservation Advisory Council	3
Pound Ridge	Conservation Board	1
"	Open Space Acquisitions Committee	0
Somers	Conservation Board	2
"	Open Space Committee	3
Tarrytown	Environmental Advisory Council	1
Yorktown	Conservation Board	4
"	Advisory Committee on Open Space	3

Calendar of Upcoming ELLA Events: **SAVE THE DATE!**

~Quarterly ELLA workshops are held once per season, in April, July, October & January~

MARCH

Resolving Canada Geese Conflicts, Thursday March 19, 2009, 1:00 to 4:30 pm at Teatown Lake Reservation.

Workshop with NYSDEC HRNERR Estuary Training Program & collaborators (including ELLA), for property, school grounds, recreational facility and park managers, golf courses, college and corporate campuses, lake associations, homeowner associations, cemeteries, public health managers, and the interested public; will cover Canada Geese behavior, effective geese management techniques, case studies from other communities, federal and state regulations, and where to find additional resources.



Speakers include: David Feld, GeesePeace, Inc., Bryan Swift, Game Bird Unit NYSDEC Bureau of Wildlife, Stacy Pecor Preusser, USDA Wildlife Services

The workshop is free but registration is required, by March 16. For more information and registration: 845-889-4745 x 109, e-mail sastancz@gw.dec.state.ny.us, or visit the ELLA website for a link.

APRIL

Spring ELLA Workshop: Tree Preservation and Forest Health Saturday, April 25th, 9am-1pm at GE's John F. Welch Leadership Development Center, near Teatown in Crotonville.

Learn from guest speakers about the current status of our regional forests, discuss tree preservation laws on the books, and share experiences with creating or revising tree preservation laws. ***Please join us! Stay tuned for information about registering for this free workshop in early April. ELLA membership is required to register for the workshop.***



OTHER UPCOMING SPRING EVENTS: Date to be announced

Peer to Peer Training: On-line GIS Resources for Mapping, with John Ladd, ELLA member from the Town of Ossining EAC and NYSDEC. Learn the basics of using Google Earth and other free on-line resources to create maps to aid your site visits.

ELLA is a program of



For more information, please contact Lindsay Cochran at lcochran@teatown.org or (914) 762-2912 x123
www.ellahh.net