ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS LEARNING ALLIANCE

# Hudson Hills and Highlands FOCUS

*ELLA's mission is to bring together town-appointed members of environmental commissions from across New York's Hudson Hills and Highlands to strengthen environmental protection at a regional level, through environmental training, sharing lessons learned, and fostering collaboration.*

Winter/Spring 2010

**Online Resources for CAC Members**
*Understanding the natural resources in your community is an integral part of serving on a CAC/CB.*
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**Winter ELLA Workshop**
*Biodiversity assessment presented by Hudsonia educators Gretchen Stevens and Andrew Meyer.*
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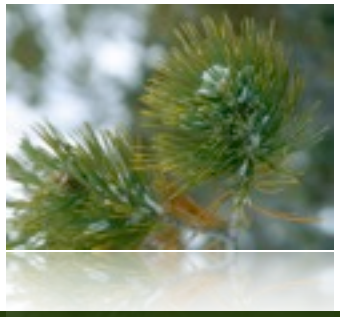


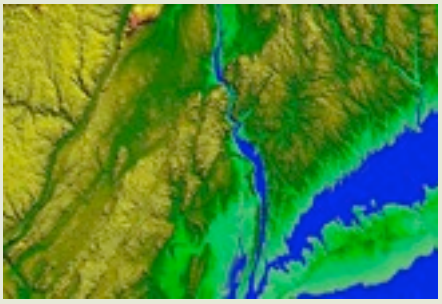
**Interested in joining ELLA? Membership is free and easy - visit ellahhh.net**

## Winter and Spring Update

Dear ELLA members,

Welcome to the Winter/Spring edition of the Focus newsletter, a forum for sharing ideas and updating the progress of ELLA. Believe it or not, ELLA has now been in existence for 3 years! During this time we have enrolled 142 member representing 34 municipalities in the Hudson Hills and Highlands, hosted 8 training workshops, and developed a website and provided a variety of educational materials for members.

We are proud of the work we have accomplished, but we are not resting on our laurels. We want to make ELLA even better! We would like to continue to grow our membership, but we would also like to increase attendance at workshops and increase the number of peer-to-peer workshops. We would especially like to hear from all of you on how we can make ELLA more relevant to you and the work you do in your community.



**The Hudson Hills and Highlands bioregion includes parts of five Hudson Valley counties: Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess, Rockland and Orange; it is defined by the hills and highlands of the Lower Hudson River Watershed between Yonkers and Beacon.**

To accomplish this, we would like to begin by visiting every CAC/CB in the ELLA region to hear directly from you. Over the next year we would like to attend one of your meetings so we can discuss firsthand your thoughts on ELLA and hear your ideas to make it better. We will be contacting you in the near future, but if you would like to schedule a meeting, please contact Mike Rubbo at (914) 762-2912 ext. 117 or mrubbo@teatown.org. We look forward to your continued participation in making ELLA a critical component of environmental conservation in the Hudson Hills and Highlands.

A special thanks to those who volunteered to help with the New York State Association of Conservation Commissions' Conference on the Environment. We will contact you in the near future; the conference details are still in the works.

If you have questions for other ELLA members or would like to share news/events please send an e-mail to ellahhh@googlegroups.com.

Best regards,

**Fred Koontz, Ph.D.**
Executive Director
Teatown Lake Reservation

**Steven Frazer**
ELLA Coordinator

**Mike Rubbo, Ph.D.**
Director of Stewardship
Teatown Lake Reservation



NYSDEC Resource Mapper


NYSDEC Nature Explorer


NYSDEC National Heritage Program

# Understanding our natural resources

**Mike Rubbo, Ph.D.**
**Director of Stewardship**
**Teatown Lake Reservation**

There's a wealth of information out there – if you know where to look. Understanding the natural resources in your community is an integral part of serving on a CAC/CB. However, this is also a most challenging task as it requires extensive training and/or experience in the field. Obtaining field guides and spending a lot of time outdoors is probably the best way to become more knowledgeable of the local environment, but if you don't have the time there are alternatives.

As all of our information becomes digital, there is becoming an ever increasing amount of natural resource information posted online. While we are all probably familiar with using aerial photos, wetland and stream maps, and soils maps, there is quite a bit of information on rare plants and animals also available to the public. These resources provide a great initial assessment of the land and can serve as a starting off point when reviewing a project. Check out the ELLA Resource Library under the heading "CAC's History and Tools" to view a number of these resources.

Three resources that we would like to bring to your attention are the DEC's Environmental Resource Mapper (ERM) and Nature Explorer, and the NY Natural Heritage webpage. The ERM (http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/38801.html) provides information on state-classified waterbodies, stream, and wetlands as well as rare plants and animals and significant natural communities. You can search by address so it is useful when reviewing projects. The ERM will also provide guidance as to whether or not a permit may be needed for activity in a specific location.

DEC's Nature Explorer (http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/57844.html) provides additional detail on birds, reptiles and amphibians, and rare species. However, the birds and reptiles and amphibians data are county lists only. Regardless, it provides a good baseline for species that can potentially be found in a given area.

Finally, the Natural Heritage Program's (http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/29338.html) Conservation Guides provide detailed information on the identification, habitat requirements, and geographic ranges of specific plants, animals and natural communities. These guides are an excellent resource that not only provide very specific natural history information, but also conservation recommendations that can be referenced during the review of various projects.

The information contained on these websites is very useful and can help your CAC/CB better understand the ecological attributes of your municipality. However, as discussed during our biodiversity assessment workshop, these resources are not site-specific and are no substitute for field work. Online resources are a great first step in understanding biodiversity, but getting out there and getting muddy is the best way to understand our local ecosystems.

# Winter ELLA Workshop

*Biodiversity Assessment presented by Hudsonia*

On February 13th, 2010, biodiversity educators from Hudsonia Ltd., Gretchen Stevens and Andrew Meyer, led hands-on exercises analyzing topographic maps, geology maps, soil surveys, and aerial photos to predict the occurrence of ecologically significant habitats in the landscape. They discussed principles of biodiversity conservation that can be applied to town-wide planning and to site-specific environmental reviews relevant to our members' work in their CACs and other environmental commissions.

In addition to providing practical experience for our participants, they provided excellent resources and tips for conservation in our area:

**Protect large, contiguous, unaltered tracts of land wherever possible.**

Priorities include, but are not limited to a large forest, large meadow and shrubland complexes (larger than 100 acres best for high diversity of grassland breeding birds; smaller meadows, i.e. 25+ acres, adequate for certain grassland-breeding bird species) areas containing a high diversity of habitats, rare or unusual habitats (e.g., cool ravine, fen, kettle shrub pool), areas containing habitat types known to support species of conservation concern (e.g., bog turtle in a fen or calcareous wet meadow) or areas containing complexes of habitat types known to support species of conservation concern (e.g., forest and intermittent woodland pools).

**When considering protection for a particular species or group of species, adapt priorities according to the particular needs of the species of concern.**

**Protect contiguous "patches" of undeveloped land in large, circular or broadly-shaped configurations (instead of narrow configurations) to reduce contact between protected habitat and the adjacent environment or human pressures.**

By having a lower edge-to-interior ratio, circular "patches" minimize edge effects such as invasive species and concentrated mammalian predators, and are generally more favorable for native biodiversity than small or linear patches.

**Wherever possible, preserve links between natural habitats on adjacent properties via broad connections, not narrow corridors.**

Many animal species need to move between habitats to fulfill their life history needs, and need safe travelways between habitats. Connected habitats also foster genetic exchange, species dispersal, and recolonization, and allow populations to persist in the landscape.

**Consider over-all distribution of habitats on the landscape and avoid isolation of habitats by sprawling development, road networks, clearing, and other disturbances.**

When considering protection for particular species or group of species, design the connections according to the particular needs of the species of concern.

**Restore and maintain broad buffer zones of natural vegetation along streams, along shores of other water bodies and wetlands, and at the perimeter of other sensitive habitats.**

For example:
- At least a 100m (~300ft) buffer on each side of perennial streams is recommended for maintaining minimum wildlife habitat function, and will also accomplish significant nutrient and pollutant removal, temperature and microclimate regulation, sediment removal, detrital input, and bank stabilization.
- At least 100m (~300ft) and preferably 300m (~900 ft) radius of buffer around wetland habitats is recommended, and possibly much larger if the wetland is providing habitat for a species of conservation concern with particular large-area habitat needs.
- A 225m (~750ft) radius of buffer around intermittent woodland pools is recommended to protect critical non-breeding habitat and dispersal routes of pool-breeding amphibians.

**Maintain buffer zones between development and land intended for habitat.**

Many species are sensitive to disturbance associated with human activities. A buffer of at least 100m (~300 ft) and preferably 300m (~900 ft) from the edge of development, roads, trails, or other disturbance helps to protect the quality of interior habitat areas.

*We thank Hudsonia Ltd. (hudsonia.org) for providing this information.*

# Who are ELLA members?

*The Environmental Leaders Learning Alliance consists of town-appointed members within the Hudson Hills and Highlands from the following environmental commissions:*

**Westchester County**

Ardsley Environmental Advisory Committee
Ardsley Stormwater Management
Bedford Conservation Board
Bedford Open Space Committee
Bedford Wetlands Control Commission
Briarcliff Conservation Advisory Committee
Cortlandt Citizens Advisory Committee
Cortlandt Conservation Advisory Council
Cortlandt Manor Open Space Committee
Croton-on-Hudson Conservation Advisory Council
Croton-on-Hudson Water Control Commission
Dobbs Ferry Conservation Advisory Council
Greenburgh Conservation Advisory Committee
Irvington Environmental Conservation Board
Lewisboro Conservation Advisory Council
Lewisboro Open Space Advisory Committee
Mt. Kisco Conservation Advisory Committee
Mt. Pleasant Conservation Advisory Committee
New Castle Conservation Board
North Salem Environmental Advisory Council
Ossining Environmental Advisory Council
Peekskill Conservation Advisory Board
Pleasantville Conservation Advisory Council
Pound Ridge Conservation Board
Somers Conservation Board
Tarrytown Environmental Advisory Board
Yorktown Conservation Board
Yorktown Open Space Committee
Yorktown Tree Conservation Advisory Commission

**Rockland County**

Orangetown Environmental Committee
Rockland Environmental Management Council
Rockland Country Legislature Environmental Committee

**Putnam County**

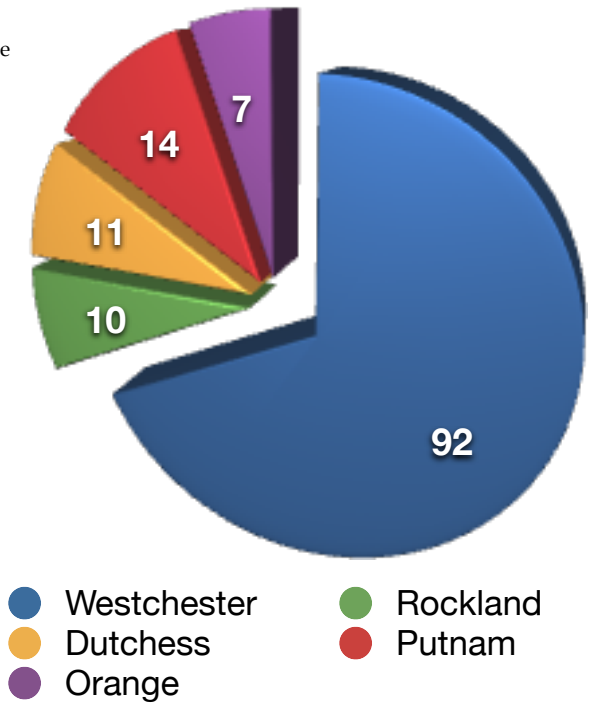
Carmel Environmental Conservation Board
Kent Conservation Advisory Committee
Philipstown Conservation Advisory Council
Putnam Commission for the Conservation of the Environment
Southeast Open Space Committee
Kent Lake Committee

**Dutchess County**

Beacon Conservation Advisory Committee
Beekman Conservation Advisory Committee
Fishkill Environmental Board
Pawling Conservation Advisory Board

**Orange County**

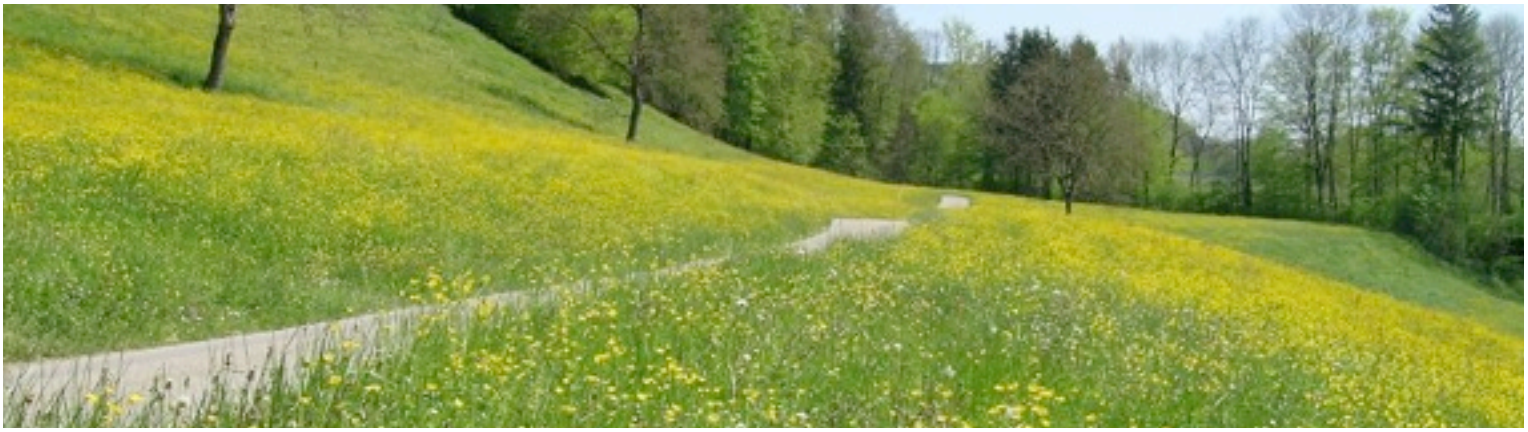
Cornwall Conservation Advisory Council



# *For more information about ELLA, please visit ellahhh.net.*

***The Environmental Leaders Learning Alliance network consists of experienced town-appointed members of environmental commissions in the HHH. If you would like to submit news or pose a question to ELLA members, send an e-mail to ellahhh@googlegroups.com***

***If you are interested in leading a "peer-to-peer" workshop in your area of expertise, please contact Steven Frazer at sfrazer@teatown.org or (914)-762-2912 ext. 123.***





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