

The Hudson Hills & Highlands Focus

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Environmental Leaders Learning Alliance

Fall 2008

Dear ELLA Members,

We're looking forward to launching the ELLA website at the beginning of the new year. The website will have both public and members-only sections. The public side will give us the opportunity to highlight the work of ELLA and what we are collectively doing to enhance conservation in the region. The members-only side will have a blog feature to enhance communication; a calendar to share upcoming events; and a library of resources (PDF's of relevant documents, web links, sample ordinances, town codes, etc.)

In the final stages of building www.ellahhh.net, we need your help to supply photos of your commission in action and recommended documents. Please send these materials to Linsay today!

We believe that the communication features of this website will strengthen our ability to work together on behalf of regional conservation.

Fred & Linsay



Conservation Commissions Celebrate 30 Years of Service

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

Conservation Advisory Councils (CACs) in New York State are celebrating 30 years of service to their local communities and to the environments that they aim to protect. In 1968, several towns in Long Island and Westchester County established the first CACs under home rule. Home rule allows local governments to pass laws, create commissions, and make policy in areas not pre-empted by the State. These early CACs were in 1970 strengthened and specific responsibilities were assigned to the CACs of cities, towns and villages with the passage of Section 239-X of Article 12-F of the General Municipal Law. This 1970 law also assigned the State's Department of Environmental Conservation with the responsibility of servicing the CACs. In 1971 the law was amended to authorize CACs that met certain requirements to become "Conservation Boards" with the authority to review development applications.

Today, our CACs' purpose, structure, function and responsibilities remain based on the 1970 enabling legislation. Future CACs, however, undoubtedly will need to build on this historic foundation by evolving to meet tomorrow's difficult environmental challenges. On January 24, our next ELLA Workshop will focus on the past, present, and future of CACs in New York State. We will review their history, share current CAC projects from ELLA members, and discuss future roles and needs of CACs --- as our local towns and villages respond to increased development, climate change, loss of biodiversity, and other issues facing residents of the Hudson Hills and Highlands.

Reference: 1997. *A Guide to the Organization and Operation of Local Environmental Advisory Councils*. Westchester County Environmental Management Council, White Plains, NY.

ELLA Summer Workshop

Invasive Plants: Considerations for Conservation Planning

The 2nd ELLA workshop took place at Teatown Lake Reservation on Saturday, July 19 from 8:30am-1pm, with 30 ELLA members attending from 17 Hudson Hills and Highlands towns and villages.

Troy Weldy, Director of Ecological Management, The Nature Conservancy Eastern New York Chapter, presented a review of invasive plants in our region and their consequences to biodiversity preservation, as well as the current efforts and available tools to address the issue. Workshop participants then broke into four groups for a facilitated discussion with Emilie Hauser of The Hudson River Estuary Training Program to suggest improvements to town ordinances, site reviews, education, and other town opportunities in relation to control of invasive species.

*For a bulleted list of these recommendations, please contact Linsay.

A field session (in near-100 degree heat!) taught participants identification of several local invasive plant species and the most effective current control methods.



Lessons Learned:

- About 25% of the 2000+ plant species in our region are non-native, and many are becoming invasive, causing ecological and economic harm.
- The scope of the problem necessitates prioritizing which species to focus our management actions on:
 - The 1st priority is to prevent new invasive species from entering our region.
 - The 2nd priority is to prevent local invasives from entering new sites due to poor land use and development practices.
- Because of the growing seriousness of invasive species, there is a corresponding growth of resources available to help communities address them. For example:
 - www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov
 - The New York Flora Atlas: www.newyork.plantatlas.usf.edu/
 - Lower Hudson Valley Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/prismmap08.pdf



Feedback from workshop participants:

"I was able to contact Troy Weldy the following week and put him in touch with a local volunteer working on a black locust eradication program; Troy has provided useful information for everyone involved."

"I appreciate these ELLA workshops very much and I think they are very appropriate for my work with the town."

Participants in the workshop received a folder of resources for invasive species. Some folders are still available: if you were not able to attend the workshop but would like one, please contact Linsay at lcochran@teatown.org or (914) 762-2912 x123

Member's Successes in the Field: *Restoring Trout to the Kisco River*

Jim Gmelin, ELLA member from Mt. Kisco CAC

ELLA member Jim Gmelin, a Mt. Kisco native, grew up catching brook trout in the Kisco River well over fifty years ago, and this past summer he volunteered with the Westchester County Stream Monitoring program to investigate the present health of his home stream. He and a partner tested the Kisco River for water quality, employing about eight chemical tests, along with stream bottom and bank analysis, and macro-invertebrate identification. Much to his surprise, the readings showed fairly good numbers, and he was able to find good samples of non-tolerant bugs (stoneflies, mayflies and caddis flies).

As a result of his findings, he decided to contact John Genovesi, who sponsors the Trout in the Classroom (TIC) program through Trout Unlimited. Then, through another contact, he located life science teacher Christine Marsh at Fox Lane Middle School, who was excited about starting TIC at her school. This fall, a tank, heater, chiller and other apparatus were delivered to Fox Lane by John Genovesi and Gmelin, and trout eggs supplied by New York State DEC will be delivered in soon. Once the eggs hatch, the students will feed them until they become fingerlings and then release them into the stream. Jim has been speaking with the chief fish biologist at DEC in New Paltz who assured him that, based on his monitoring results and a history of the state previously stocking the Kisco River, the town should be issued a permit to release them at the site of his testing sometime in the Spring. Jim hopes that this project with Fox Lane Middle School students will be the first step in restoring a trout stream in his home town. Congratulations, Jim!

Regional Report: *Hudsonia Training Puts Biodiversity on the Map*

Mike Rubbo, Director of Environmental Stewardship at Teatown & CAC member, Town of Hyde Park, Dutchess Co.

Recently, my CAC completed a 10-month Biodiversity Assessment Training (BAT) program led by Hudsonia, Ltd., a non-profit environmental research organization located in Dutchess County. Hudsonia has been running this program since 2001 and has worked with CAC's from Westchester County all the way up to Albany County.

This program was of interest to our group because it provides hands-on training with both identifying habitats remotely and in the field. The remote aspect consists of learning to use topographic, soils, geology, and wetlands maps to predict habitats. We were also trained on using stereoscopes to interpret specialty aerial photographs. This was a bit like looking at those 3-D pictures that were popular a while back. What's amazing is how topographic features literally jump out at you under the scopes. These data are then used to prepare habitat maps that we then took out in the field to verify.



CAC members conducting a field verification of a wet meadow

The field work was a tremendous learning experience as the Hudsonia biologists provided valuable guidance on identifying various flora and fauna indicative of specific habitat types. Once the field work was completed we prepared a large format map and report that we will present to the Town Board. The report also includes conservation recommendations that we hope to implement in our comprehensive plan.

We mapped a total of approximately 2,500 acres and plan to continue mapping the remainder of Town. Speaking as a CAC member, I was very excited that three members of our Planning Board, including the Chair and Vice-chair, took part in this program. Participating in the course gave us all a deeper sense of pride in our Town and the feeling that we were contributing to the conservation of its natural resources.

10-month Biodiversity Assessment Training sessions start in January each year, and applications are accepted from September-December 1.

For information, contact Hudsonia at <http://hudsonia.org/> or (845) 758-0600

HELP US GROW! 94 individuals from 31 towns, villages and cities are currently members of ELLA; please encourage your colleagues to join!

<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	5
<u>ORANGE COUNTY</u>		
Cornwall	Conservation Advisory Council	4
<u>PUTNAM COUNTY</u>		
Carmel	Environmental Conservation Board	2
Kent	Conservation Advisory Committee	4
Phillipstown	Conservation Advisory Council	1
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	2
"	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	4
"	Open Space Advisory Committee	2
Mount Kisco	Conservation Advisory Council	1
Mount Pleasant	Conservation Advisory Committee	2
New Castle	Conservation Board	0
"	Open Space Advisory Committee	0
North Salem	Conservation Advisory Committee	2
Ossining	Environmental Advisory Committee	4
Ossining, Village of	Environmental Advisory Council	10
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

Resources for Our Region

A Citizen's Guide to the NEPA: Having Your Voice Heard NEPA is our most important FEDERAL environmental legislation. An excellent new citizen's guide for NEPA is now available at: http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/nepa/Citizens_Guide_Dec07.pdf

The SEQR Cookbook: A Step-by-Step Discussion of the Basic SEQR Process An excellent guide to NY's SEQR--- probably the most important STATE environmental legislation for ELLA members, can be found at: http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/permits_ej_operations_pdf/cookbook1.pdf

Hudson Hills and Highlands Community Trails Program Launched, through partnership with NY/NJ Trail Conference and Teatown Lake Reservation



Teatown and the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference (www.nynjtc.org) are partnering on a new effort to provide assistance to local trail programs in Putnam and Westchester Counties. For nearly 100 years, New York-New Jersey Trail Conference volunteers have helped public agencies provide safe and responsible access to open space from New York City west to the Delaware Water Gap and north to the Catskills.

For ELLA members, this means that there is a new program available to help communities design, build and manage local trails with the assistance of volunteers. For example, if you are reviewing a subdivision site plan that calls for a trail, the developer could hire the Community Trails Program staff to design and build it.

For more information, contact the Trail Conference East Hudson Regional Representative, Christie Ferguson: ferguson@nynjtc.org

Calendar of Upcoming ELLA Events: SAVE THE DATE!

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

DECEMBER

-We need your help! We will soon be asking you to complete an on-line survey in preparation for the winter ELLA workshop, to learn more about your environmental commission's activities, recent accomplishments, and model projects. *Also, please e-mail any photos and documents for the website by December 10.*

JANUARY

-Launch of the ELLA website, www.ellahh.net

-Winter ELLA Workshop January 24th: "CAC's: Past, Present & Future", 8:30am-1pm at Teatown
Learn from a panel of experts about the 30-year history of CACs in NY State; share model projects currently being conducted by our local CACs; and participate in a discussion about the future role and needs of CACs in the Hudson Hills and Highlands.



Please join us: registration for the workshop will be open to ELLA members in early January.

ELLA is a program of



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