

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.

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

Fall/Winter 2010

2010 Conference on the Environment

\$75.00 Discount to first 100 registrants!



The Hudson Hills and Highlands Leaders Learning Alliance along with the NYS Association of Conservation Commissions and the NYS Association of Environmental Councils will come together the weekend of November 19-21, at the notable Thayer Hotel at West Point to explore this year's theme, "Regional Approaches to Conservation".

Guest speakers highlighting this year's multi-faceted program include Edwin McGowan of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission who will speak about "*The Ecology of the Hudson Highlands*;" Frances Dunwell, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, who will discuss "*The Hudson River Estuary as a Regional Approach to Conservation*;" and Paul Gallay of RiverKeeper who will focus on "*Non-profit Advocacy Groups in Regional Partnerships*."

Participants will have a variety of engaging workshops to select from that will showcase case studies from many regions around the Hudson Valley. Informative presentations will offer strategies for building regional partnerships and information on how to secure the right components in creating a "*regional identity*" that is unique to the specific needs of their community.

Special activity offerings to include walking tours of West Point on Friday, November 19 and a historically guided excursion to Storm King Mountain on Sunday, November 21 will also be available.

For more information about the Conference and to *sign-up*, please visit www.ellahhh.net/conference here you can get updates to our Program Highlights and Schedule and download a registration form. *Be one of the 1st 100 Attendees to register and receive a \$75.00 Discount towards the conference rate.*

We hope you will join us in November!

The Stream Conservation and Restoration Initiative



Photo: John McShane

ELLA is excited to announce a new region-wide conservation initiative aimed at protecting our local waterways. This project is a collaborative effort with the Watershed Agricultural Council. The goal of this project is to get environmental commissions/boards throughout the Hudson Hills and Highlands to participate in a coordinated regional effort that will bring attention to the importance of protecting our watersheds while providing a service to your community. To accomplish this, Teatown and WAC will be providing technical support and guidance to groups interested in initiating a project as well as funding. Example projects include: restoring riparian buffers (see the next article for an excellent example), stream clean-ups, stream bank stabilization, storm drain labeling, and the development of educational materials. We anticipate that projects will be conducted over the course of the year. Preference will be given to projects in highly visible locations (e.g., public parks) and projects where other community groups will be assisting. WAC's focus will be on assisting communities in the Croton watershed, while ELLA will work with all the municipalities in the Hudson Hills and Highlands.

There is one catch though! We really want you to be the conservation star in your community, so to become eligible for funding your group must be willing to give one public presentation on the importance of protecting watersheds. ELLA and WAC will develop a generic presentation and your group can modify it to reflect the issues your community is dealing with.

If you are interested in submitting a proposal, start by talking with your group to see if they are interested. Groups may then contact Mike Rubbo at mrubbo@teatown.org to let me know that you would like to submit a proposal. Please contact me no later than October 29. Once we determine how many groups are interested in this program we will let you know how to develop a proposal. If you have any questions in the meantime, please feel free to contact me.

This program is a unique conservation effort as we are aware of no other programs that have attempted to coordinate this many different municipalities over such a large area all working on a similar issue. This can really put us on the forefront of community-based conservation, we hope you will join us!

Hudson Hills and Highlands and Croton Watershed Boundaries





Planting “Trees for Tribs” in Pleasantville By Lisa Brown – Pleasantville CAC

The Pleasantville CAC has been working to build a trail on village property in an undeveloped section of Nannahagen Park. The park is on Lake Street and is bordered on its eastern edge by the NY City aqueduct and the Con Edison right-of-way along which its transmission lines run. Our goal in the park is to preserve the land and provide the public with a pleasant sanctuary. In time, we hope to reduce the number of invasive plant species that have become common over the last decade, improve biodiversity by planting native species and attracting wildlife (starting out by erecting some birdhouses), and ultimately, provide educational opportunities for park visitors.

One aspect of the park project that arose somewhat by chance has just been completed. In speaking with representatives of the NY/NJ trail conference and the Sawmill River Coalition we were told of an interesting program run by the NY State Dept of Conservation (DEC) called “Trees for Tribs”. This program runs every spring and fall, and provides free trees & shrubs for public lands which are adjacent to tributaries of the Hudson River. The goal of the program is to build riparian buffers to reduce pollution entering waterways by slowing down and filtering runoff while reducing flooding and erosion. Because Nannahagen Park has a creek that runs into the Saw Mill River which, in turn, runs into the Hudson River, the creek qualifies as a tributary (the “trib” part of “Trees for Tribs”) of the Hudson. We applied to this program and worked with them to find a suitable site for a large-scale tree/shrub planting.

The site selected was an embankment along the Con-Ed right-of-way which had recently been denuded of trees during the utility company’s recent trimming campaign. Because of its proximity to the power lines, we could not plant trees. So the “Trees for Tribs” program agreed to provide us with shrubs, instead. The minimum planting was 100 shrubs for an area of 12,000 sq. ft. We settled on a date in early May to have the planting and began looking for 10-20 volunteers (a minimum of 1 volunteer per 10 plants) to dig holes and clear the area. The “Trees for Tribs” program came through again, putting us in touch with a Cub Scout den in New Rochelle whose members were trying to earn their Forester badges.

Thanks to these Scouts, their parents, volunteers from Green P’ville (a local grassroots environmental group), and members of the village CAC, we planted 100 shrubs of red osier, gray dogwood, pussy willow, bayberry, and swamp rose. The timing couldn’t have been better – in just a short time after the tree cutting by Con Ed, the embankment had been almost entirely covered by multiflora rose, the ubiquitous invasive that every community in the region is contending with. The newly-planted shrubs are all native to this area, will help to decrease erosion, & provide habitat for local critters. All in all, the program was a big success; checking on the shrubs a few weeks after the planting, we saw a beautiful prehistoric-looking snapper slowly, oh so slowly, laying her eggs in the mud. As we move on with the trail-building project, we will monitor the shrubs and look forward to the view provided by a once-ugly strip of land that has been reclaimed.



We Need Your Membership!

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

Membership is the driving force behind ELLA. It's what allows us to learn from one another, to address complex, regional issues, and to have our voices heard. As membership is free to all members of environmental commissions and boards in the Hudson Hills and Highlands, we hope that you and everyone in your group is a member. However, we know that's not true! When ELLA started in 2008 we had over 140 members. However, since that time, we have had a reduction in membership. To figure out why we have had a drop in membership, we began visiting with CACs and CBs in ELLA and have found that this drop is primarily due to turnover as well as individuals simply forgetting to return their membership renewals. If you haven't yet filled out your renewal form (you should have received it last month) please try and get it in. Even if you receive emails from ELLA you may not be registered as a member. Please contact Yvonne Beldotti (ybeldotti@teatown.org) if you are not sure if you are a current member.

Also, please consider asking your fellow commission/board members to join ELLA as well!

Membership in ELLA provides access to free seminars and workshops as well as a means to keep tabs on what other communities in the Hudson Hills and Highlands are up to. As you may have read in this issue, ELLA is beginning to offer conservation grants to members as well.

We hope that you will consider joining ELLA as your membership helps us to obtain the funding necessary to keep the program running. Thank you for the work you do in your communities and throughout the Hudson Hills and Highlands!

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 Yvonne Beldotti ybeldotti@teatown.org or (914)-762-2912 ext. 123.

