

Hudson Hills and Highlands FOCUS



Environmental Leaders Learning Alliance Quarterly Newsletter, Winter 2012

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.

MS4 - Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System

Mandates for Sustainability

By Rick Turner

Edited by Steven Kavee

(The complete article is available on the [ELLA website](#))

As environmentalists, the challenges of building a sustainable future are complex, but a valuable and simple starting point is your local Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Storm water permit. The MS4 permit brings Clean Water Act standards, goals and enforcement to every local municipality. In short, the MS4 permit requires that local jurisdictions take a host of affirmative actions to prevent non-point source pollutants entering surface waters and preserve existing water quality. The MS4 regulations require each "covered entity" to "develop" and "enforce" a "Storm Water Management Program" (SWMP) "*to reduce the discharge of pollutants . . . to the maximum extent practicable in order to protect water quality*". Measures identified in the MS4 permit to protect water quality include: public education and involvement in storm water management; inspection, detection and mapping of all outfalls and "illegal discharges;" monitoring storm water management improvements during both construction and post- construction phases; and implementing "good housekeeping" practices for all municipal operations.

Environmental stewards will be interested to note that MS4 municipalities must consider "principles of Low Impact Development (LID), Better Site Design (BSD), and other Green Infrastructure practices to the MEP" and "must consider smart growth principles, natural resource protection, impervious area reduction, maintaining natural hydrologic conditions in developments, riparian buffers or set back distances for protection of environmentally sensitive areas such as streams, wetlands, and erodible soils" in connection with adopting a comprehensive plan, open space preservation program, local law, ordinance or any other and land use regulation. Learn more about MS4 compliance by going to the NYS DEC web site or call your elected officials get a copy of your local Storm Water Management Plan and ask about MS4 compliance. We can stop the routine degradation of our environment by making sure we comply with MS4 requirements.

SAVE THE DATE! Saturday, April 14, ELLA to host MS4 Conference
Details available soon!

IN THE NEWS AROUND THE HUDSON HILLS AND HIGHLANDS



In early March – the greater Ossining Community will be launching “**Energize Ossining**”.....the first town to follow the successful Westchester pilot program “**Energize Bedford**”. Both are outgrowths of the “**Energize New York**” program (a program of the Northern Westchester Energy Action Consortium) whose aim is helping area homeowners reduce waste by guiding them through Comprehensive Home Energy Assessments and upgrades using a select group of state certified energy professionals. Working directly with local civic organizations and community leaders, the initiative aims to improve homes and health by actively supporting the reduction of residential energy waste – all while ultimately saving the homeowner money. A certified contractor will conduct the Assessment, provide a detailed report of how to fix your home’s energy leaks, and show you how financing and rebates (at very low rates through NYSERDA) make it affordable. The home assessment is free for most residents. *For more information:* www.EnergizeNY.org

Information contributed by Suzie Ross, Town of Ossining EAC



The Town of Bedford Conservation Board is currently running a survey of the town's lakes and ponds. Based on the Westchester County Lakes questionnaire, our conservation board is interested in creating a data baseline of surface waters within our town. While the town has a good sense of its wetlands and streams and rivers, the larger bodies of water have been little studied or quantified. For example, using GIS techniques to identify target parcels of land, we now know that there are over 400 lakes and ponds within our town, and that approximately 9% to 10% of the tax parcels by area contain a lake or pond. Each owner of property with a lake or pond besides getting a questionnaire will also get a hand-out describing how best to keep their surface waters healthy and natural. It is hoped that eventually our board will be able to access some of these bodies to do physical, chemical and biological testing to further enhance the data base for future studies.

Along with this on-going project, our board is holding monthly workshops with the intent of completing a town-wide biodiversity map identifying habitat locations at preserves and corridors. Initiated by a 2000 acre study within Bedford, facilitated by a 10 month Hudsonia program in 2005, that included members of our conservation and planning boards done in conjunction with a similar group from the Town of Somers, the Bedford Conservation Board is using this knowledge as a means of furthering our understanding of our town's biodiverse environment. Utilizing Hudsonia's technique of developing habitats through overlay mapping, our ultimate goal is to propose legislation to our town board to preserve corridors and preserves through zoning as well as regulating the current practice of fencing to one's property line.

For further information, contact us at conservation@bedfordny.info

Information contributed by Simon Skolnik, Chair, Town of Bedford Conservation Board

Stream Planting Brings Exposure to Peekskill's New CAC

By Carol Capobianco and Pat Reber
City of Peekskill Conservation Advisory Council

The offer of free native trees and shrubs through ELLA's Stream Conservation and Restoration Project was so enticing that the Peekskill CAC decided to do a cleanup and planting project along MacGregory Brook, a Hudson River tributary, even though as a new CAC we were still getting our bearings. As it turned out, the project gained us—and the issue of watershed protection—exposure in the community and enabled us to forge working relationships with various staff members and departments within the City.

MacGregory Brook starts in Cortlandt and runs mostly underground through the center of Peekskill. It flows above ground as it gets closer to the Hudson River, and once it crosses the railroad tracks becomes the dividing line between two parks: Riverfront Green to the south and Peekskill Landing to the north. We chose this highly visible spot for our project.

From concept to planting took a year. We learned of the grant opportunity in November 2010 and completed planting in October 2011. Among the steps in between was identifying an accessible, appropriate location; getting City approvals; planning and implementing trash cleanups along the banks and within the streambed; removing tree-choking invasive vines, weeds, and dead and dying trees; and ultimately, the fun part—planting 120 native trees and shrubs.

Over 70 volunteers assisted in all phases of the project: several youth from the Peekskill Youth Bureau, Americorps volunteers from the Hudson River Health Center, a contingent of volunteers from Pepsico organized by Clearwater, and numerous citizens of Peekskill and from elsewhere in the county who came to help.

The CAC had assistance as well from many groups: Peekskill's departments of Public Works, Planning, and Parks were extremely supportive, providing gloves and tools, guidance and approvals, removal of dead trees, and protective temporary fencing for the new plants. Other tools used in the cleanup and replanting phases were loaned to us by Clearwater, Groundwork Hudson Valley, Bronx River Parkway Reservation Conservancy's Vinecutter.com program, and the Westchester County Department of Parks. ELLA, through funding from the Westchester Community Foundation, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, offered the primary support, the latter through the Trees for Tribs program, which provided the plant material, a bobcat with auger that dug the holes for the new plants, and staff assistance on site.

The resulting benefits of the project included the creation of a riparian buffer that will protect the bank from erosion and that filters storm runoff before it enters the Hudson; beautification of the area now free of litter and unsightly invasive vegetation and filled with lovely new plants; the enhancement of habitat for wildlife; and public education through the signage provided by ELLA and Trees for Tribs.

CAC members and volunteers will monitor the restoration site, weeding and watering as necessary, especially in the first year. Due to the success of the project, the CAC is considering other locations for streamside plantings.

Scenes from the Stream Conservation and Restoration Project, City of Peekskill – Fall 2011





Photographs courtesy of Joseph Squillante, 2011

EVENTS & LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES In & Around the ELLA Community

- ❖ **Monday, March 12th, DESIGNING FOR STORMWATER MANAGEMENT & EROSION CONTROL** at Westchester Community College (*Sponsored by the Native Plant Center of WCC*) – **See the Lectures section** at www.nativeplantcenter.org
- ❖ **Saturday, May 19th, WATER WORDS THAT WORK!** *A nationally-renowned training program led by Eric Eckl.* Program will take place at Teatown Lake Reservation. Admission is **FREE** but a suggested donation of \$10.00 per person is requested to cover lunch and refreshments. Pre-registration is required, e-mail ybeldotti@teatown.org – **See the Flyer for details at** www.ellahhh.net

INTERESTED IN HOSTING AN ELLA PROGRAM?

Does your municipality have an ideal meeting space where ELLA members can gather together? Has your CAC recently completed a project that you would like to share with the group? We are encouraging members to consider hosting an ELLA event in their local community. This is a great way to cultivate relationships across municipalities and to motivate your local Town and Planning Board members to join.

If you have an idea for an interesting and engaging topic and would like to host an event, please contact Mike Rubbo, Director of Conservation Science, at mrubbo@teatown.org

ELLA is a program of

