CONSERVATION & LAND-USE

NEW YORK STATE | Department of Environmental Conservation | Hudson River Estuary Program

Advancing biodiversity conservation in the Hudson River estuary watershed

DEC's **Hudson River Estuary Program Conservation and Land Use Team** builds the capacity of local government and nonprofit partners to conserve priority habitats and water resources in the Hudson River estuary watershed. We collaborate with researchers to understand regional biodiversity conservation priorities and use social science to inform our work. By sharing new data, tools, training, and technical assistance, we promote science-based planning and achieve conservation outcomes that benefit people, the watershed, and the estuary.

Conservation and Land Use Team Impact, 2015–2024

9,949

Participants educated through webinars and workshops

81

Municipalities, counties, and land trusts received in-depth **technical assistance**

51

Municipalities completed **natural resource inventories**

11

Municipalities created **conservation plans** and two land trusts created **regional habitat connectivity plans**

$3.2m

Raised 2021-2024 by four newly established **Community Preservation Funds** to protect open space

How we work

We help municipalities and land trusts apply a conservation planning approach that incorporates data, conservation principles, and local input to achieve meaningful outcomes. We've educated hundreds of leaders and helped communities and land trusts to pursue plans and policies that incorporate regional priorities, like significant biodiversity, large forests, water resources, and habitat connectivity, while also addressing local concerns and considering municipal land-use authority. Our success relies on building long-term relationships with communities and partners.

Support for communities and partners

Outreach and Training

To raise awareness about watershed biodiversity, relevant threats, model planning and conservation approaches, and funding opportunities, we engage and train municipal volunteers and staff and other conservation partners. Examples include:

- **Conservation and Land Use webinar series and newsletter**
- In-person **habitat workshops, short courses, and roundtables**

Town of Blooming Grove open space inventory planning session. Photo: L. Heady

Local Conservation in Action: Wawarsing, Ulster County

2014: An Estuary Grant supported the town's ***open space inventory***, incorporating scientific data to identify conservation priorities.

2018: An Estuary Grant and technical assistance supported an inter-municipal ***open space plan*** by the towns of Wawarsing and Rochester, which collaborated to develop conservation recommendations and strategies. The Wawarsing town board adopted the open space plan as an appendix to the comprehensive plan.

2019: Wawarsing implemented an open space plan recommendation, adopting two ***critical environmental areas (CEAs)*** to add protection to an 8,000-acre wetland complex and a 3,000-acre landscape connection between the Catskill Mountains and Shawangunk Ridge.

2022: Open Space Institute purchased 1,000 acres that contributes to the permanent protection of the landscape connection included in the Wawarsing CEA, which is also a state priority.

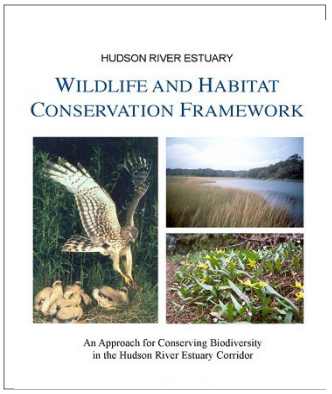
Town of Wawarsing officials and volunteers met with landowners while developing the CEAs. Photo: L. Heady

Technical Assistance

Staff and partners provide in-depth technical assistance to municipalities and land trusts to advance conservation planning and policy, including natural resource inventories, open space plans, conservation financing, and more.

Biodiversity Data and Planning Guidance

We collaborate with scientific organizations like the New York Natural Heritage Program to increase understanding of conservation priorities in the estuary watershed and make the data available and accessible to decision-makers. We also partner with land-use experts to develop model planning guidance to achieve conservation through municipal home rule.



Amphibian Migrations and Road Crossings Project

The Amphibian Migrations and Road Crossings (AM&RC) community science project enlists volunteers to assist migrating amphibians across roads during spring breeding season. Since the project started in 2009, more than 1,000 volunteers have assisted more than 40,000 frogs and salamanders across roads. The project educates volunteers about the significance of watershed forest and wetland habitats and the importance of habitat connectivity.

AM&RC volunteers in Westchester County. Photo: E. Schilmeister

Funding assistance

The Hudson River Estuary Program's Local Stewardship Planning grants provide funding for conservation inventories and planning with funding from the NYS Environmental Protection Fund.

For more information

- ✓ **DEC's Hudson River Estuary Conservation and Land Use** webpages
- ✓ **Conservation Planning in the Hudson River Estuary Watershed** website
- ✓ **Hudson Valley Natural Resource Mapper**

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Cornell University

The Conservation and Land Use Team works through a partnership with Cornell University