

# Public Access and Stewardship

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, *and* PRIORITY ACTIONS

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## Improve public access to the waters of the Estuary and the quality of experience at public spaces along the waterfront.

Access to the waters of the NY – NJ Harbor Estuary, whether for swimming, boating, fishing, or just enjoying the spectacular views, is an amenity that improves quality of life and drives spending and investments by residents, visitors, and businesses. Park use has been positively correlated with physical activity levels and improved public health. Most critically for HEP, access is a vital strategy for fostering improved stewardship of the Estuary. For all these reasons, ensuring and improving access is an important goal shared by HEP's government, utility, and civic partners. Over the next five years, HEP will focus on nine actions designed to increase public access and stewardship and programming of public sites. To increase stakeholder and public understanding of waterfront safety issues, HEP will assess water quality for primary and secondary contact recreation and work with partners to develop effective ways of communicating that information to the public, including examining where it is feasible to create new bathing beaches. HEP will continue to improve and expand our small grants program, providing a needed source of support for local stewardship efforts and leveraging their volunteers. HEP will support direct public access to the water through public awareness efforts like updating our estuary paddling guide.

HEP's target (which it shares with the Hudson-Raritan Estuary Comprehensive Restoration Plan) is that all residents of the Harbor Estuary should be within a short walk or public transit trip from an accessible waterfront by 2050. To establish a baseline of current public access and to be able to document progress toward this goal, HEP worked with the USDA Forest Service and our Public Access Work Group, comprised of key public agencies and civic organizations, to characterize public access and its distribution around the Harbor Estuary, the relationship of these parks and public spaces to socioeconomic need, and where and how civic organizations are providing stewardship and programming at the waterfront. The 2016 report, "Connecting with Our Waterways: Public Access and its Stewardship in the New York—New Jersey Harbor Estuary" identifies 539 parks and public spaces totaling roughly 41,000 acres that are accessible to the public. The shorelines of these public spaces—ranging from the small urban street-ends and esplanades to sandy beaches and marshes—stretch for about 600 miles or 37% of the 1,600-mile waterfront. The full report is available at [www.harborestuary.org/NYNJHEP-PublicAccess.pdf](http://www.harborestuary.org/NYNJHEP-PublicAccess.pdf).

While comprehensive visitation data for the Estuary does not exist, just four major regional parks (Liberty State Park, Hudson

River Park, Brooklyn Bridge Park, and Governors Island) attract more than 26 million visitors a year to what was a railroad yard, warehouses, and a military base just a generation ago. Across the Estuary, the growing number of boathouses and other providers now bring more than 100,000 people a year on kayak and other human powered boats—more than double the number of just seven years ago. Accelerated by the recent creation of NYC Ferry, more than 38 million trips happen every day on the region's growing fleet of ferry and excursion boats.

Places where the public can enjoy swimming, boating and other programs touching the water are more limited; there are only 14 swimming beaches scattered throughout the Estuary and another six beaches on the ocean side of Sandy Hook and the Rockaways. Based on survey results, there are another 139 sites where the public can "safely touch the water" at a human powered boat launch. Creation of additional direct access areas is limited due to water quality impairments, timely knowledge of water quality conditions, and other safety and management constraints.

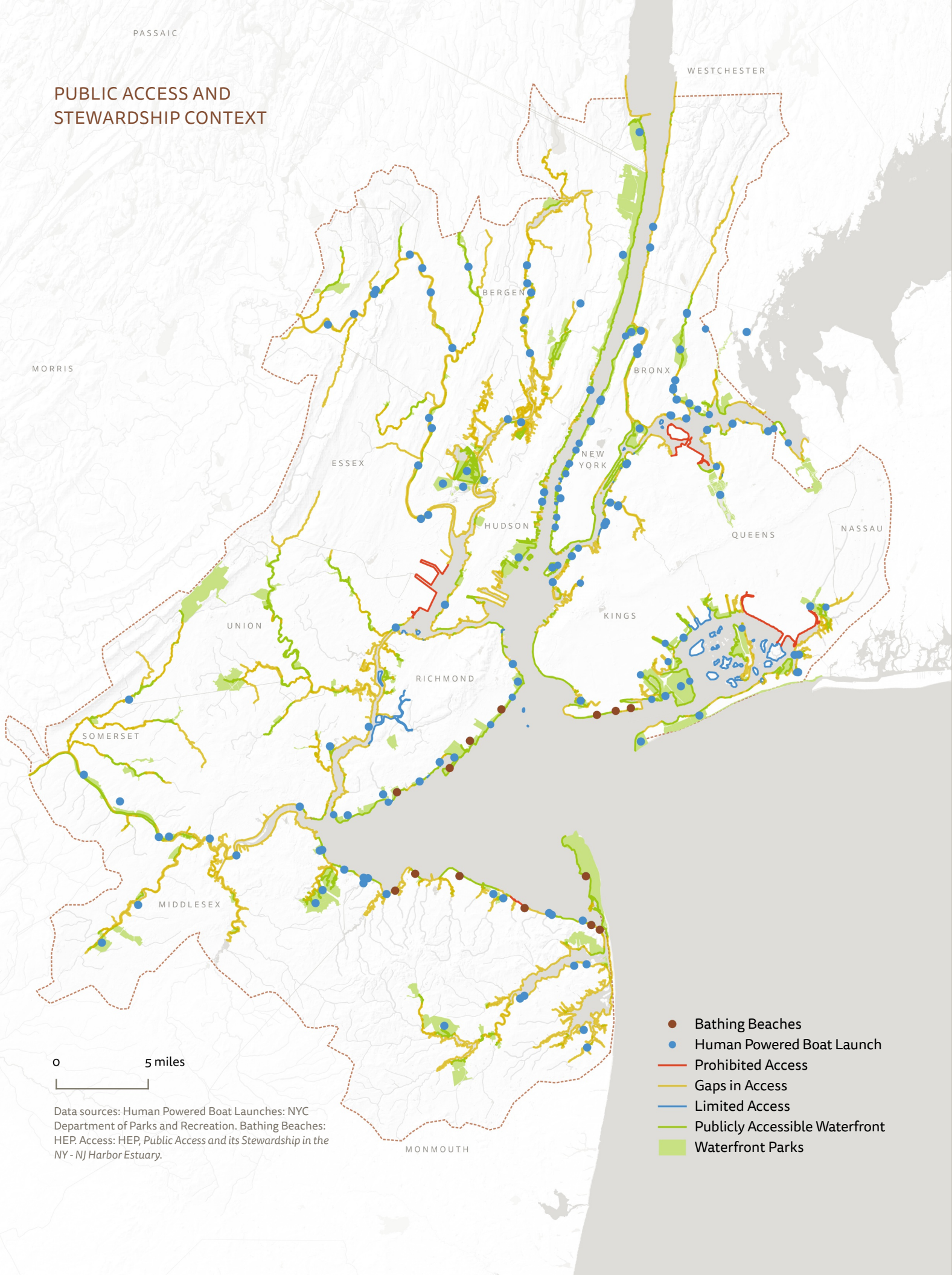
These parks, public spaces and access sites are not evenly distributed across the Estuary, especially when considered in the context of differing socioeconomic characteristics of the Estuary's waterfront populations. Only about nine percent of the waterfront is accessible for the more than 500,000 residents in 12 higher need areas around the bi-state estuary. These 12 waterfront areas are defined by HEP as being those waterfront reaches having a limited number of parks, densely developed housing, and/or an otherwise disadvantaged population. In the Passaic River between Newark and Paterson, for example, over 96% of the waterfront is inaccessible. As detailed in HEP's Public Access Report, the 12 areas include sections of the Bronx; Passaic River; Jamaica Bay; Brooklyn; Elizabeth River; Green Brook; Staten Island's North Shore; Raritan River/Arthur Kill; Hackensack River; Yonkers; North Manhattan/Harlem River; and Flushing Bay.

Meeting public access goals does not mean providing access to one hundred percent of the waterfront. In particular, vital maritime and other water-dependent uses require that some portions of the waterfront not be accessible to the public for national security, safety and practical business considerations. Respect for these concerns makes providing access to other waterfront areas even more important. This is particularly true in those communities impacted by essential water dependent uses.

Improving access is not only about creating public spaces, but also about improving the quality of the visitor experience at those parks. This is particularly important for residents living in and around some of the higher need areas.



# PUBLIC ACCESS AND STEWARDSHIP CONTEXT



Data sources: Human Powered Boat Launches: NYC Department of Parks and Recreation. Bathing Beaches: HEP. Access: HEP, *Public Access and its Stewardship in the NY - NJ Harbor Estuary*.

- Bathing Beaches
- Human Powered Boat Launch
- Prohibited Access
- Gaps in Access
- Limited Access
- Publicly Accessible Waterfront
- Waterfront Parks



# Public Access and Stewardship



*Improve public access to the waters of the Estuary and the quality of experience at public spaces along the waterfront.*

<p><b>OBJECTIVE A</b> <i>Increase public access and new possibilities for contact recreation, particularly in areas of higher need.</i></p> <p><b>PA-A-1 INCREASE ACCESS</b> <i>Advance opportunities for increasing public access.</i></p> <p><b>PA-A-2 CONTACT RECREATION</b> <i>Assess prospects and refine goals for increasing direct access for boating, swimming, and wading, incorporating associated water quality considerations.</i></p>	<p><b>OBJECTIVE C</b> <i>Promote and expand awareness of public access opportunities and issues.</i></p> <p><b>PA-C-1 SAFETY</b> <i>Increase public understanding of the safety and risks associated with direct contact with the water.</i></p> <p><b>PA-C-2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION</b> <i>Encourage and support public participation in water-based activities.</i></p>
<p><b>OBJECTIVE B</b> <i>Improve stewardship and programming at existing public access sites, particularly in areas of highest need.</i></p> <p><b>PA-B-1 STEWARDSHIP</b> <i>Identify and support strategies for increasing public stewardship in higher need areas.</i></p> <p><b>PA-B-2 SMALL GRANTS</b> <i>Support stewardship activities and public programming through small grants.</i></p>	

CHALLENGES	INDICATORS
<p>● <b>NOT ENOUGH PUBLIC ACCESS</b> OBJECTIVES A, C</p>	<p><b>NOT ENOUGH PUBLIC ACCESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publicly Accessible Waterfront (including in higher need communities)</li> <li>• On-water access (bathing beaches, boat launches, marinas, and ferry landings).</li> <li>• On-water programs (number of human-powered boaters on the water over time)</li> <li>• Visitors to Waterfront Parks</li> </ul>
<p>● <b>LIMITED STEWARDSHIP CAPACITY</b> OBJECTIVE B</p>	<p><b>LIMITED STEWARDSHIP CAPACITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity of stewardship organizations (number of organizations/staff/members/volunteers)</li> <li>• Participation in Stewardship Events</li> <li>• Participation in Citizen Science</li> </ul>



## PUBLIC ACCESS AND STEWARDSHIP

### OBJECTIVE A

*Increase public access and new possibilities for contact recreation, particularly in areas of higher need.*

#### PA-A-1

### INCREASE ACCESS

*Advance opportunities for increasing public access, particularly in areas of higher need.*

#### NEED

Access to the public waters of the Harbor Estuary is limited, especially for waterfront communities with few public parks, dense residential development, and a disadvantaged population.

#### DESCRIPTION

HEP will identify access opportunities, pursue creation of community supported plans and implementation of capital projects and other improvements. This work will focus on the 12 waterfront communities of higher need identified in HEP's 2016 Public Access Report and addressed by HEP's staffing of Partnership Ambassadors at the Urban Waters Federal Partnerships in the Passaic and Bronx & Harlem Rivers. On the Bronx & Harlem Rivers, the Partnership will initially focus on advancing improvements along the Harlem River waterfront and its watershed in the Bronx through a community planning effort being led by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. On the Passaic River, the Partnership will identify public access and stewardship opportunities.

HEP will also work with the Hudson River Estuary Program and with coastal zone management programs in both states on advancing their public access goals in all of these higher need areas. This includes helping integrate access requirements with coastal adaptation projects, meeting principles of universal access and/or storm resiliency identified by the Hudson River Estuary Program, working with NJDEP and local municipalities in creating municipal public access plans or otherwise complying with state requirements and working with the New York City Department of City Planning as they revise their Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan.

**KEY PARTNERS:** Lower Passaic and Bronx & Harlem River Urban Water Partnerships, NJDEP, NYCDP, NYCDPR, Partnerships for Parks, local municipalities and community-based organizations

**RESOURCES:** Staff and Leveraging; Grant Projects ><\$200,000; Capital Funding

**TIMELINE:** 2017-2022

#### OUTCOMES

Short term:

- Additional public access opportunities and other improvements will be identified for higher need waterways.

Long-term:

- Improved access to waterways in higher need area, in particular the Lower Passaic and Bronx & Harlem Rivers.

#### PA-A-2

### ACCESS GOALS

*Assess prospects and refine goals for increasing direct access for boating, swimming, and wading, incorporating associated water quality considerations.*

#### NEED

Direct access to and from the public waters of the Harbor Estuary is limited due to water quality impairments, timely knowledge of water quality conditions, and other safety and management constraints.

#### DESCRIPTION

HEP will inventory opportunities for primary and secondary contact with the water; places where one can touch the water whether by swimming, wading or boating. HEP will work with the Public Access Work Group and other partners to assess how best to incorporate this information and associated water quality considerations into its goals for public access and the tracking of success. The information will also be used to create an updated version of HEP's Paddling Guide (see Action PA-C-2).

HEP will also examine the water quality, management, and regulatory issues of enabling the public to access the water for swimming and/or wading at select pilot sites in both New York and New Jersey. One or more feasibility studies, conducted through a workshop, university studio or contractor will serve to identify possibilities and challenges. A latter phase could include efforts to work with partners to secure specific capital investments and operating funding.

**KEY PARTNERS:** Public Access Work Group; NYCDPR; NJDEP; Waterfront Alliance; NYC Water Trails Association; and other state and local park agencies in both states

**RESOURCES:** Staff and Leveraging; Grant Projects ><\$200,000. Assessing the possibilities for increasing access at pilot sites will require new grant funding and/or a university partnership.

**TIMELINE:** 2018-2019. The initial investigation of enabling the public to access the water for swimming and/or wading at pilot areas will commence in 2018.

#### OUTCOMES

Short term

- Inventory of existing direct access sites.
- Improved understanding of the feasibility of additional direct access opportunities given water quality and management.

Long-term:

- Creation of additional opportunities for the public to enjoy the Estuary through swimming, wading, paddling, and boating.



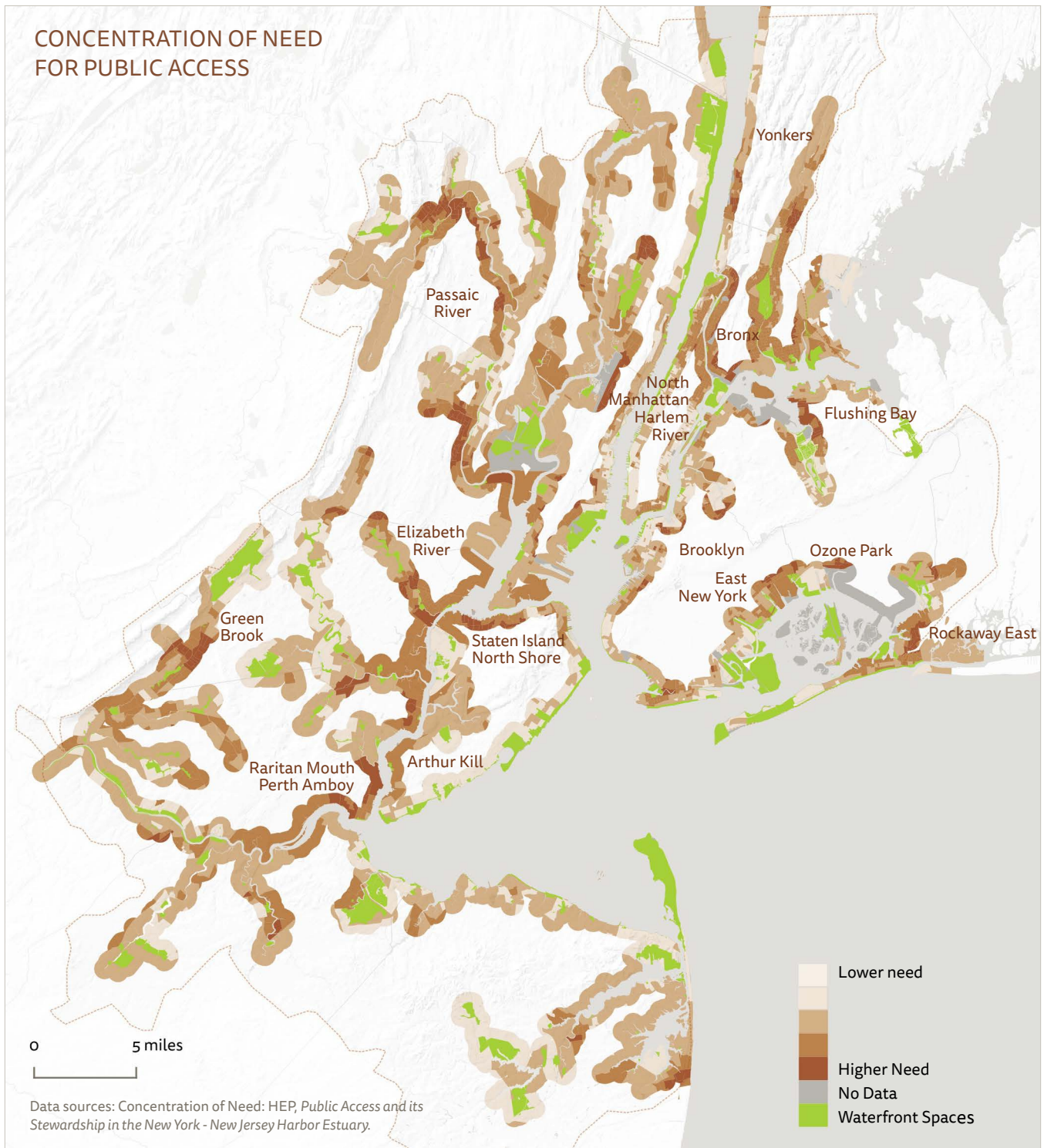


## PUBLIC ACCESS AND STEWARDSHIP

### OBJECTIVE A

*Increase public access and new possibilities for contact recreation, particularly in areas of higher need.*

#### CONCENTRATION OF NEED FOR PUBLIC ACCESS





## PUBLIC ACCESS AND STEWARDSHIP ACTIONS

### OBJECTIVE B

*Improve stewardship and programming at existing public access sites, particularly in areas of highest need.*

#### PA-B-1

### STEWARDSHIP

*Identify and support strategies for increasing public stewardship in higher need areas.*

#### NEED

Engaging and strengthening connections to local residents is the key to the success of local stewardship organizations.

#### DESCRIPTION

HEP and the Public Access Work Group and the Citizens Advisory Committee will conduct a survey and possibly convene a workshop to identify and pursue strategies for increasing public engagement and stewardship activities in higher need areas.

Participants will include civic and community-based organizations; funders like City Parks Foundation, Urban Waters Federal Partnership and others; and local and state park agencies. This work will build on the HEP's on-going collaboration with the US Forest Service NYC Urban Field Station Stewardship Mapping and Assessment Project (STEW-MAP).

The results of the survey and possible workshop will assist the more than 146 civic organizations that help engage people with the Harbor Estuary through a broad array of public programs and stewardship activities. Possible directions will include identifying how waterfront programming could help address broader issues/interests within the community including recreation/public health, employment and job training, and youth programs; creation of a peer exchange or other learning opportunities; and/or other ongoing networking opportunities.

**KEY PARTNERS:** Public Access Work Group, Citizens Advisory Committee, USDA Forest Service NYC Urban Field Station, NGO Partners, NYC Parks, Partnerships for Parks, Urban Federal Waters Partnership, Philanthropy

**RESOURCES:** Staff and Leveraging

**TIMELINE:** 2018-2021. This project will start following collection and analysis of the 2017 STEW-MAP survey anticipated in 2018.

#### OUTCOMES

Short term:

- Greater understanding of the needs and potential of local stewardship organizations.

Long-term:

- Increased capacity of stewardship organizations, in particular in high need areas.

#### PA-B-2

### SMALL GRANTS

*Support stewardship activities and public programming in higher need areas through small grants.*

#### NEED

Improving access requires improving the quality of the visitor experience at existing parks through enhanced programming and management.

#### DESCRIPTION

HEP and the Hudson River Foundation will continue their public access and stewardship grants programs. They will seek support and/or leverage additional sources of funding to grow the grant program in order to ensure a grant cycle every year. The RFP and applications will be reviewed by a special committee of the Public Access Work Group. HEP will also continue to provide funding for the *In Your Neighborhood Program* at the Waterfront Alliance's City of Water Day each July. HEP will coordinate with and otherwise support the Hudson River Estuary Program on their stewardship and education grant programs in the lower Hudson Estuary. This will include helping identify and support applications from civic groups in New York City.

This funding provides an important source of support for small civic organizations that have direct knowledge of the interest of local communities and the opportunities afforded by existing parks and estuarine resources. Supporting civic stewardship complements and extends governments' ability to manage these public spaces. Funds at the Hudson River Foundation that have supported similar activities include the Hudson River Improvement Fund and the New York City Environmental Fund. Growing the grants program will require working with other sources of philanthropy: state and local actors involved in environmental benefit agreements; state or city funding programs; and the advocates on the CAC to leverage or secure on-going funding.

**KEY PARTNERS:** Hudson River Foundation, Public Access Work Group, Hudson River Estuary Program

**RESOURCES:** Staff and Leveraging; Grant Projects > <\$200,000

**TIMELINE:** 2017-2022

#### OUTCOMES

Short term:

- Direct support for local civic stewardship and programs, especially in high need areas.
- Securing sustainable non-federal sources of funding.

Long-term:

- Increased capacity of stewardship organizations, in particular in high need areas.



## PUBLIC ACCESS AND STEWARDSHIP ACTIONS

### OBJECTIVE C

*Promote and expand awareness of public access opportunities and issues.*

#### PA-C-1

### SAFETY

*Increase understanding of the safety and risks associated with direct contact with the water.*

#### NEED

There is limited awareness and common understanding of the risks associated with poor water quality among the public and civic organizations that help support and manage the public's contact with the water. While bathing beach standards are well known and understood by managers and communicated to the public, standards for secondary contact are not as well defined and/or understood by stakeholders.

#### DESCRIPTION

HEP will undertake an analysis of the actual and the perceived safety of water quality for primary and secondary contact recreation, including car top boating and wading. The analysis will include the public health risk associated with pathogens associated with CSO events and stormwater runoff, and anticipated results from efforts to manage them via Long Term Control Plans and MS4 permits as well as the risks associated with exposure to contaminated floodwaters from storm events.

Based on analysis of perceived and actual risks, HEP will work with the Public Access Work Group and in particular the two states and EPA to develop consistent messaging for the public. This information will be displayed on the HEP website and other venues.

**KEY PARTNERS:** EPA, NYSDEC, NJDEP, Health Departments, Public Access Work Group, CAC

**RESOURCES:** Staff and Leveraging; Grant Projects <\$200,000

**TIMELINE:** 2019-2021. This action will require new grant funding.

#### OUTCOMES

Short term:

- Greater understanding and a unified message from managers, regulators, and key stakeholders as to the safety of the Estuary's waters.

Long-term:

- Improved management of direct access to the water.

#### PA-C-2

### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

*Encourage and support public participation in water-based activities.*

#### NEED

Public materials describing paddling opportunities for the entire Harbor Estuary are limited.

#### DESCRIPTION

Getting out on the water in a human powered boat is an important means for the public to enjoy the Harbor Estuary and better understand management issues. HEP will work with partners to revise and update the 2011 harbor-wide paddling guide. The new version will incorporate the inventory of opportunities for direct contact with the water created under Action A-2 as well as safety information and common messaging developed under C-1.

As with the 2011 edition, this update will feature public access sites, associated facilities, safety considerations, and launch site conditions. This will be a general brochure aimed to inform the general public and novice paddler about estuary resources and paddling opportunities. It will complement the more detailed and up-to-date information about the launch sites available online by park managers and paddling organizations.

**KEY PARTNERS:** Public Access Work Group; NYC Parks; NJDEP; Waterfront Alliance; NYC Water Trail Association; Other paddling organizations.

**RESOURCES:** Staff and Leveraging; Grant Projects <\$200,000. HEP will seek a sponsor and partners for creation and distribution of the harbor- wide water trail map.

#### TIMELINE:

2017-2019

#### OUTCOMES

Short term:

- Greater awareness of paddling opportunities.

Long-term:

- Improved public access and enjoyment of the Estuary for paddling activities.