



RESTORATION WORK GROUP

Co-Chairs: Lisa Baron (Army Corps of Engineers),
Marit Larson (NYC Parks)

www.hudsonriver.org/estuary-program

February 20, 2020

Hudson River Foundation
17 Battery Place, Suite 915

9:30 - 1:00

I. Welcome/introductions

- The group remarked on the sad passing of one of our members, James MacDonald. Money is being collected to dedicate a tree in Prospect Park in his name; contact Susan Maresca for more information.
- The group welcomed its newest member Katie Mosher from the Billion Oyster Project.
- Dan Montella, a long time member of this group from EPA has retired.
- Attendance is at the end of this document.

II. Minutes

Approved minutes from the last meeting in September 2019.

III. Eelgrass Restoration in the Harbor

Bart Chezar updated the group on his small but sustaining eelgrass restoration project in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. He started this project in 2012 with a planting, weaving the plants into burlap sacks, and has monitored around four times a year since then. He has recently employed a new seeding strategy where plants that are about to seed are fixed to a floating buoy. This strategy works better for establishment. He collaborates with Cornell Cooperative Extension on Long Island for the materials. More recently, he has also restored sargassam, a SAV species extirpated from the harbor, affixed to rocks. Though the plants have challenges including light limitation and mud snails, Bart suspects that the resident Canada geese also eat the eelgrass. Bart puts out an annual report and anyone interested in this or more information can contact him at bchezar@nyc.rr.com.

Questions Comments from the group included

- Can you cage the eelgrass to protect it from predation from the waterfowl? That could tell you if that is the issue.
- In the NYCDEP planting in Jamaica Bay, Brant were immediately seen following the restoration. Also problematic were horseshoe crabs and blue mussel. Mute swans also rip up SAV.
- Do you need more help? Maybe the group could help Bart find students or other citizen scientists.

- Bart says he does not need help at this site but would like to expand the project to another site, potentially in Conference House Park on Staten Island. He will need help with that.
- Eelgrass restoration is thought of as having a scale problem; you need to do a large restoration in order to make it stable. The sustainability of Bart's project may show that this is not necessarily always the case.

IV. NYC Parks Stream Analysis Project

Rebecca Swadek presented to the group on their stream analysis and resulting management recommendations, funded by a U.S. EPA Wetlands Program Development Grant. There was a desktop analysis of all of the streams in the city, which showed that we have 112 miles of streams, about half of which are located in parklands. This was followed up with an intensive rapid field assessment, in 2016 and 2017. Field metrics assessed included benthic invertebrates, stream bank vegetation cover, and pipe out falls. Desktop metric included buffer width and the percent of impervious area in the surrounding watershed. These metrics were used to develop stream health and vulnerability scores. Generally the healthiest streams were in the Staten Island Greenbelt, in the least developed watersheds. They divided the scores into 4 different management buckets: Protection, stormwater management, buffer management (restoration), and rehabilitation (a more involved restoration project including construction). Rebecca's PDF is available upon request, and the stream report will be completed and on line in June.

V. Harbor Herons Meeting Summary

Susan Elbin gave us an update from the 2019 Harbor Herons Conference. The conference occurred on December 10-11 this past year at Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island. The conference attracted about 75 scientists, land managers, and bird experts from all over NY-NJ and beyond, to present over 30 short presentations about their research and monitoring. All presentations are available on the HEP websites under the Harbor Herons subcommittee. Susan also gave a brief summary highlighting their continued work on the annual Harbor Herons nesting survey. Susan has retired in her position of Director of Conservation and Science for NYC Audubon but continues to represent at this group.

VI. Action Agenda Prioritization Discussion

Isabelle Stinnette and Marit Larson led the group through a discussion on the Action Agenda including:

- Reminding everyone of what our habitat Action Agenda items are
- Capturing what the group's individual organizations are doing that support these actions
- Prioritizing some things that the group can work for the upcoming year

The group listed on post-its many activities that they are pursuing that dovetail with our actions that HEP will capture towards our goal tracking. A few group actions discussed were:

- Prioritizing sites for NYC Bond Act funding. More info needed on the timing of this. The NYC Mayor's office is coordinating recommendations from City Agencies to help ensure that funding is also directed to city projects if the Bond Act passes.
- Participation in an Urban Wetlands Workshop?
- Recontamination issues perhaps better addressed in 2020 after we have NYC Wetlands Mitigation Bank data.

- Involvement in exploring Blue Carbon potential for influencing regulations and conservation?
- Involvement in expanding implementation of NNBF informally?
- Following up on some of the recommendations found in the Wetlands Migration study.

VII. USACE Feasibility Report Final Updates

This topic postponed to a later meeting.

VIII. Should HEP Staff Submit CRP Information?

Rob Pirani brought up the idea of HEP staff contributing CRP site information when a property is under review or development threat. The idea is that we would send a letter, not advocating but merely alerting them that this site has been identified for its restoration potential under the Comprehensive Restoration Plan. This would be a way to add value to these while also maintaining some neutrality encouraged by HEP's Management Committee.

- The group would like to see an example of the kind of communication that HEP would produce before they make a decision. Rob will work on this and circulate to the group by email.

IX. HEP Aquatic Connectivity Project Results

Isabelle Stinnette briefly outlined the process and results for HEP's Aquatic Connectivity Through Climate-Ready Infrastructure project. HEP assessed all the road stream crossings in two subwatersheds in New Jersey, one on the lower Passaic River and one on the lower Raritan River. HEP used dendritic connectivity, a hydraulic capacity model and infrastructure condition to make several restoration recommendations in both subwatershed. Fact-sheets with the restoration opportunities are available and HEP is looking for partnerships for this coming year to conduct assessments in new watersheds.

X. Updates (by email following the meeting)

NJDEP

John King provided an update on the Liberty State Park restoration project:

- The LOI application for this site has been completed and should be submitted within the next couple of weeks.
- Phase 2 of the geotechnical investigation will begin next month. Additional borings will be located in the soil stockpile area as well as in the area of proposed parking lots and restrooms.
- Groundwater monitoring has been ongoing and will continue through the spring (growing season).
- We have been evaluating sea level rise (SLR) and how it will impact the project. Design of the project will take SLR into consideration.
- 30% design plans should be completed May 2020.

USEPA

EPA has an update on the WOTUS rule. On January 23, 2020, EPA and the Department of Army finalized the new definition of waters of the United States officially titled the navigable Waters Protection Rule. The final rule will become effective 60 days after publication in the Federal Register. Right now we are anticipating sometime in May as that effective date. The recording of

the February 13th webcast discussing the new rule can be found under Public Outreach Opportunities at the link below: <https://www.epa.gov/nwpr/navigable-waters-protection-rule-step-two-revise>

NOAA

The Cornell Dubilier Electronics Superfund NRDAR Trustees are in the process of reviewing habitat restoration projects in the Raritan watershed for inclusion of a draft restoration plan - a federal requirement that will be publicly noticed when ready to go. We are aiming for June.

STAC

Judith Weis reports: I visited Sherman Creek in upper Manhattan, Harlem River where N.Y. Restoration Project (Bette Midler's group) is doing their first salt marshes restoration. The person in charge is Jason Smith (another person from the one ay NYDEC!) I suggest that we invite him to come to our work group meetings - they would benefit from the collective wisdom of the group.

USACE

The HRE Final Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment was submitted to HQ and NAD for review and approval to release on February 11, 2020. HQ plans to approve release of the Final Report/Draft Chief's Report for State and Agency (S&A) Review first week in March for a hopeful signed Chief's Report last week in April. A signed Chief's Report will ensure eligibility of the 20 recommended restoration projects in 5 Planning Regions to be authorized in WRDA 2020. Recommendation includes 413 acres of wetlands; 52 acres of oysters, 19 acres of coastal maritime forest, 88 acres/38,150 linear feet of channel/bed restoration, 39 acres of shallow water habitat and 2 fish ladders opening up 24 miles of Bronx River for fish passage.

- Hudson River Habitat Restoration: Advancing hydrologic assessment to determine impacts from dam removals on Moodna Creek and final designs/costs of restoration at Schodack Island Park, Henry Hudson Park, and 3 dam/barrier removals on Moodna Creek. Final Feasibility Report/EA to be completed in June 2020.
- Spring Creek North Restoration: Completed field work on site (including bathymetry, topography, biobenchmarks, utility surveys, tree surveys, hydrodynamics) towards advancement of engineering designs during Preconstruction and Design Phase.

NYC Parks

- Initiated contract to evaluate alternatives for fish passage at the Double Bronx Zoo Dams on the Bronx River. Parks has a design for an engineered fishway, but is evaluating the feasibility and alternative of dam removal before proceeding with the engineered fishway construction.
- Currently half-way through the one-time funding allocation for Forest Restoration that has kicked off the implementation of the NYC Parks Forest Management Framework. Milestones included caring for close to 1000 acres of forest, improving 17 miles of nature trails, planting over 21,000 trees and shrubs, and engaging 1,700 volunteers.
- Gearing up for a third winter of volunteer beach grass planting at Coney Island Creek on March 14. Check out the Parks' website to join the fun.

Attendance:

Marit Larson, (chair) NYC Parks
Carl Alderson (phone)
Elizabeth Butler, USEPA (phone)
Bart Chezar, citizen (guest)
Terry Doss, NJSEA (phone)
Susan Elbin, NYC Audubon
Marco Finocchiaro, USEPA (phone)
John King, NJDEP (phone)
Jim Lodge, HRF
Susan Maresca, NYSDEC
John McLaughlin, NYCDEP
Katie Mosher, BOP
Kaitlyn Parkins, NYC Audubon
Robert Pirani, NY-NJ HEP
Daisy Rivera, NYSDEC (guest)
Anne Rosenblatt, USEPA
Ken Scarlatelli, NYSDEC
Clay Sherman, NJDEP
Isabelle Stinnette, NY-NJ HEP
Rebecca Swadek, NYC Parks (guest)
Judith Weis, STAC