



**Greene County Industrial Development Agency**  
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## PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Greene IDA Environmental Protection Programs

Featured at Hudson Valley Biodiversity Conference

After decades of uncontrolled or poorly controlled growth, many communities in the Hudson Valley are placing an increasing emphasis on the protection of critical natural resources. While there is a growing awareness of the impact of development on natural resources, many communities also better understand the fact that development seldom results in only positive impacts. Added strain on community infrastructure such as water and sewer, impacts to local school systems and the overall cost of the additional municipal services necessary to support development have all contributed to planners and municipal leaders taking a hard look at development patterns in their community. On April 29<sup>th</sup>, over seventy people representing local municipalities, developers and natural resource organizations attended a conference at Marist Collage organized by the Hudson Valley Smart Growth Alliance (HVSMA).

Titled *Planning for Biodiversity: Strategies for Developers and Municipalities*, the conference was designed to provide communities and developers with a better understanding of the importance of biodiversity and how to integrate natural resource protection both at the community as well as development level. When communities understand their biological resources and natural systems they are better equipped to achieve smart, sustainable growth. When the environmental community, developers and local municipalities work cooperatively on these issues, it is possible to achieve balanced growth that brings benefits to the community as well as protects their resources. "New development is an asset to every community when planned for efficiently and sensitively. The conference provided an excellent opportunity for developers and municipal leaders to better understand our surrounding habitats. If some of these strategies are incorporated into 'best practices' then everybody comes out a winner," stated Rachel Neuhaus from the Builders Association of the Hudson Valley.

As one of the conferences featured speakers, René VanSchaack, Director of Community and Environmental Programs for the Greene County Industrial Development Agency (GCIDA) presented the aggressive natural resource protection programs that the GCIDA has implemented on its first two shovel ready business parks in Coxsackie and New Baltimore. VanSchaack gave a presentation that highlighted the IDA's efforts associated with habitat conservation, wetland mitigation and protection, stormwater management and community planning. "While it is often said that development and natural resource protection can occur hand in hand, this is much simpler in theory than practice," stated VanSchaack. "In our case, developers, municipal leaders and more importantly environmental groups have a real life model to demonstrate how these principals can be effectively applied resulting in high quality projects that meet the goal of providing community as well as environmental benefits," said René.

"The work of the Greene County IDA is truly a groundbreaking model of sound, resource-based planning, which protects critical habitat for wildlife, assures that open space is managed well, addresses stormwater with foresight, and will promote sustainable development in a county which needs it. Workshop participants, including developers and municipal officials, are already calling to find out how they can get their counties to implement these practices," commented Manna Jo Greene, Environmental Director of Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, who helped to organize and moderated the *Planning for Biodiversity* workshop.

"Large grasslands are critical habitat for a number of declining bird species in the region, and are a conservation priority for the NYS DEC Hudson River Estuary Program. The IDA's success in grassland protection demonstrates the benefits of establishing conservation priorities early in the planning process. I'm glad the HVSGA conference showcased what the Greene County IDA is doing to achieve habitat conservation while still accommodating economic growth," stated Laura Heady, Biodiversity Outreach Coordinator, NYS DEC Hudson River Estuary Program.

According to the American Planning Association, human activity is creating a 'biodiversity deficit' by destroying ecosystems faster than nature can create new ones. Rates of species extinction are currently estimated at one hundred to one thousand times higher than pre-human levels. By employing techniques that identify particularly sensitive resources, planning for development that may be compatible with the need to protect these resources, and being innovative and flexible in accepting new ideas, habitat protection can be achieved without prohibiting growth. In Greene County, the Industrial Development Agency has built a strong reputation at the regional level and is often cited as one of the more exciting examples of reaching a balance between development and conservation. To date, the GCIDA has protected over 350 acres of critical habitat for endangered and threatened grassland species such as the Northern harrier and Short eared Owl. Under the leadership of Community and Environmental Programs Director René VanSchaack, the GCIDA has successfully worked with a number of partnering agencies such as the Greene County Soil & Water Conservation District and NYSDEC as

well as a local Habitat Advisory Committee and Greene Land Trust. In addition to the acquisition of habitat conservation lands, the GCIDA has undertaken progressive stormwater management which provided additional habitat value as well as helps address local flooding issues. Currently, the GCIDA is working with its partners to further advance natural resource protection associated with the agency's plans for a destination retail park at Exit 21B of the Thruway.

"The IDA is very pleased that the Hudson Valley environmental community recognizes the importance of our mission to bring sound economic growth to Greene County," stated Paul Slutzky Chairman of the GCIDA. "While our primary mission is to bring jobs and economic growth to the county, the IDA is also a local agency and is very sensitive to the communities within which we work as well as live. Our commitment to quality development, that balances growth with protection, has been proven to be a winning formula," said Slutzky.