

Hudson River Valley Watershed Alliance

DRAFT Strategic Plan

11/7/04

Mission

The mission of the Hudson River Valley Watershed Alliance (The Alliance) is to protect, conserve and restore the water resources of the Hudson River basin through collaborative outreach, education, networking, science, information sharing and technical assistance by and for the stakeholders of the region.

Vision (draft -- will be subject to a more extensive visioning process at November 7 Semi-Annual Gathering)

The Hudson River Watershed will become a national model for clean water, healthy habitat and environmentally sustainable economic development through the collaborative efforts of a diverse array of stakeholders.

Introduction

The Hudson River flows 315 miles from its source, Lake Tear of the Clouds in the Adirondacks to New York Harbor. Along its way, the Hudson passes through the Adirondack Park, connects with its largest tributary, the Mohawk River, flows by Albany, and winds through the Hudson Highlands. From below the Federal Dam at Troy, the Lower Hudson is an estuary flowing in both directions influenced by the ebb and flow of ocean tides. Throughout its entire course, the Hudson flows through 19 counties that are home to 8 million people, draining 13,400 square miles of land in five states (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Vermont) in the process.

The Hudson River has helped shape American culture. It has always been one of America's most important commercial, recreational, and ecological waterways. It has served as an artery of transportation, a resource for industry, a recreational corridor for boating, swimming, and fishing, and a home to hundreds of fish and wildlife species.

Toward the end of the last ice age, 6000 - 8000 years before the pyramids of Egypt, Paleo-Indians lived on the slopes of the Hudson River. The complex Native American civilization that subsequently developed continues to influence our daily lives. By approximately 1450 AD, the Iroquois had founded The Iroquois Confederation and it continues to this day. Benjamin Franklin recognized it as the oldest participatory democracy in the world and he and Jefferson used it as a model for our own government. Algonquin names continue to identify many places throughout the valley.

During the European settlement, the Hudson provided the connecting passageway between the Northern and Southern colonies. The story of the American Revolution is also the story of the British struggle to obtain control of travel on the Hudson. Science, Invention, and the Arts all have flourished here enriched by generations of immigrants who have paused long enough

in the Hudson River Watershed to leave their mark and to be influenced in turn by the valley's distinctly American culture. Many carried that culture with them on their journey westward.

The Hudson has also been one of America's great environmental success stories, leading the way for the modern environmental movement. However, the Hudson River Valley has lagged behind other US regions in developing a coalition for the protection of its watershed, in part because of the large amount of time and resources expended in resolving the PCB damage to the Hudson River.

Over the nearly three decades that New York struggled with the PCB issue, other major watersheds (e.g. Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, Delaware River, Florida Everglades, Upper Mississippi, Mississippi Bayou, Columbia River and Charles River) have developed coalitions, expertise, and funding to protect water quality and aquatic habitats.

The Alliance proposes to unify communities and prepare them to meet the challenges to water quality and habitat posed by today's escalating population growth, sprawl development and reindustrialization. Threats to water quality in tributaries, groundwater and the river abound: sewer diversion driven by sprawl development, substandard sewer treatment, MTBE and other gasoline additives, run-off from impervious surfaces, erosion, industrial and agricultural chemicals, thermal spikes from cooling tower discharge, turbidity from HudsonMax¹ shipping practices, acid rain, and algae blooms caused by phosphorus loading. Virtually everything that threatens our environment eventually ends up in our groundwater and our river.

The watershed is very large, encompassing millions of people. Because government agencies charged with environmental protection are often under-funded, understaffed and/or under political constraint, ensuring environmental quality – including clean water – has become the shared responsibility of agencies and an informed citizenry. Scores of individual groups are attempting to address local threats to surface and ground water. Learning by doing, each in their own communities, they often re-invent the wheel as they seek information, expertise and advocacy tools without the benefit of a local clearinghouse or umbrella organizing force.

Goals

The Alliance supports individuals and groups in their efforts to provide a diverse and comprehensive public education toward sustaining and enhancing water resources in the Hudson River Basin.

The Alliance can serve as a public forum for consideration of the issues underlying water resource protection, restoration and enhancements of the Hudson River Basin, including:

- Water quality and quantity
- Public health and safety
- Scientific information
- Sustainable land use practices
- Legal issues and ethical concepts
- Fish and wildlife habitat conservation

¹ HudsonMax is a term coined for the largest class of ships capable of navigating the mainstream Hudson.

The Alliance will provide a Hudson River Basin-focused clearinghouse service for:

- Human resources, technical resources, financial resources, technical expertise, strategies, and activities of member groups, agencies, institutions, municipalities and individuals.
- Developing new research initiatives, reviewing existing environmental data and analyses, and tracking current research.
- Technical guidance and outreach to municipalities, agencies, developers and contractors on Best Management Practices (BMPs) for water resource protection and restoration.

Structure and Functions

Functions: The functions of the Alliance will include education and outreach, networking and clearinghouse, research and translation, consensus building, and selected advocacy.

Education and Outreach: One of the critical functions of the Alliance is to build an educated water constituency through outreach and education programs. This will be achieved by developing conferences and seminars on various water issues, developing reference lists of best management practices, providing resources for decision makers and watershed groups to encourage informed decisions, and providing general “how-to” support to individuals and groups working in the watershed.

Networking and Clearinghouse: One of the key roles of the Alliance is to inform participants of who’s doing what, who has what information, and what resources each group can offer the Alliance, or its members.

In its role as a **clearinghouse** the Alliance will:

- Inventory information
- Identify gaps in data
- Promote standardization of data, including GIS protocols
- Make information available in format that is useful
- Develop multi-metric indices of watershed health

The **networking** function allows individual groups, agencies, and other partners to get to know each other. This function is supported by an email database, which can be supplemented by postal mail to those not having emails. Any group can send an email request that will be forwarded to the entire Alliance. A voluntary listserve and a website have also been proposed.

As a network the Alliance will also:

- Identify skills, services, and other contributions that each organization, agency, or individual can offer to the Alliance.
- Identify needs that Alliance members, or the Alliance as a whole, may be able to address.

Research and Translation: Alliance work is science-based. This may or may not include original research, but will include translation of current research under the Alliance’s educational and clearinghouse roles.

Advocacy: Any advocacy done by the Alliance will be in accord with commonly shared goals as stated in the Alliance platform and will only be undertaken by the Alliance as a whole if there is unanimous support. Any proposal regarding an advocacy position will follow the consensus process described in the section on Decision-Making.

Alternately, any participating group may utilize the networking function of the Alliance to seek support for a given advocacy position by submitting a request to the group and having them reply directly to the proposer.

Advocacy training also may be a function of the Alliance or its participating organizations, without directly advocating for or against specific projects or issues.

(The Organizing Committee is recommending deferring any specific advocacy for a year.)

Structure: Initially the Alliance is a network of groups and individuals working on water issues in the Hudson River Watershed, and those interested in helping with the protection of these resources, including ground water, lakes, ponds, wetlands, reservoirs, tributaries, and the mainstem Hudson, including New York Harbor.

The Alliance is composed of organizations and individuals that have signed on to an agreed upon platform. In addition, other interested parties who request to be kept informed of Alliance business will be included in regular updates whether or not they have signed the platform.

An Organizing Committee will meet at least bimonthly to develop recommendations for the entire membership to consider for ratification at the following semi-annual meeting. This committee will be comprised of subcommittees including but not limited to:

- Mission and Goals
- Alliance Models
- Education and Outreach
- Data and Technical
- List Serve/Website
- Survey Development
- Organizational Structure
- Advocacy and Ethics

Subcommittees with a temporary purpose will disband or transition to another focus once their task is complete, and will reconvene only if the focus of that committee needs to be revisited.

Geographic Scope: The Alliance is open to groups and individuals throughout the Hudson River Watershed from Lake Tear of the Clouds in the Adirondacks to and including New York Harbor. The geographic definition is based on the Rockefeller Commission report (citation please) and will additionally include any areas of adjacent watersheds that are hydrologically connected to the Hudson watershed via groundwater or by other means.

The Alliance will be as inclusive as possible, and will coordinate its efforts with the work of agencies such as: US EPA, NYS DEC, NYC DEP, Soil and Water Conservation Districts,

Rivers and Estuaries Center. A purpose of the Alliance is to create common ground among diverse groups and to avoid polarization (see section above regarding advocacy).

Related alliances, coalitions and partnerships in Hudson River Valley include:

- Environmental Consortium of Hudson Valley Colleges and Universities (ECHVCU), sponsored by Rivers & Estuaries Center (John Cronin)
- Hudson Valley Smart Growth Alliance (initiated by Scenic Hudson)
- Lower Hudson Coalition of Conservation Districts (LHCCD, Lauren Miller)
- NYS DEC meeting of watershed groups coordinated by Scott Cuppett
- Builders for the Bay (initiated by NYSDEC, coordinated by Barbara Kendall)
- Mid-Hudson Patterns for Progress
- Hudson Basin Riverwatch
- Others?

Decision Making Process

Alliance decisions will be made by consensus. If a proposal is made to the Alliance, the proposal must be made with enough lead-time to be considered by all participants. It will be the responsibility of the proposing subcommittee, organization, or individual to notify those not available by email. The proposer may submit a single request to the group, which can then be followed up with clarifying information.

The proposal will only be adopted if there are no blocking objections. In the interim, parties with suggestions or non-blocking objections can request modifications. Only if a proposal is unanimously agreed upon, will it be adopted (sponsored, implemented, whatever action needs to be taken) in the name of the Alliance. If there is not consensus, the initiating party can utilize the networking function of the Alliance to notify other organizations to seek their individual support, but it will not be done in the name of the Alliance.

Use of Database: A database of HRVWA participants will initially be housed at Clearwater, but will be the property of the Alliance as a whole. If agreeable to all, this list will be posted on a website available to Alliance participants. (Ground rules for its use will first need to be developed.)

Funding: Initially, the Alliance will be funded by grants or contributions to member organizations, who agree to implement a defined role or to perform a service that is in keeping with the Alliance mission and goals. The Alliance may decide to incorporate as a 501c3 at sometime in the future, but the Organizing Committee is recommending that incorporation be deferred for at least one year. If it chooses to incorporate, funding arrangements will need to be more carefully articulated.²

² Note: The Alliance currently has about \$400 in an account held by Mohonk Consultations from donations made at the March 2004 event, which will be used for the November 7 semi-annual meeting.