

Wrap Up from 'Future of Westchester Parks, Sanctuaries, and Nature Centers'.

Co-Sponsored by: Federated Conservationists of Westchester County and Greenburgh Nature Center.

On January 23, 2015, about 50 representatives from many of Westchester's Audubon societies, friends groups, nature centers, County parks, and land trust came together to discuss the 'Future of Westchester Parks, Sanctuaries, and Nature Centers'. These conversations spurred many interesting questions/ideas/themes, and we've summarized the day's discussions and provided details of what was mentioned.

One dominant theme was that there was a lot of knowledge, skill and talent in the room, and that we need to share this so each group is not continuously re-inventing the wheel. Further on in this report, we'll mention a few ideas on how to make this happen.

Overarching Questions

- Should property managers try to serve what is here or prepare for what is coming?
- Is there educational outreach regarding these problems, and how do we share this information?
- How can groups involve the educational institutions into their practices?
- How can volunteers fit in with managing properties for today and into the future?
- How do you get more people to engage with property?

Problems on Properties

Deer populations/deer management and invasive species appear to be two of the largest concerns facing Westchester County's open spaces in 2015. Soil health, including limited depth, stability, and the presence of earthworms were mentioned as salient problems as well. In the forested regions of the county, there are concerns about clearing downed tree wood, replanting trees, and pruning trees.

There were many diverse and very compelling concerns related to climate change. Along the coastlines, we've started seeing sea level rise impacting the shores. Drought is also an issue, and many of our vernal pools are drying out.

Below is a list of problems mentioned during the discussion.

- Invasives
 - Stiltgrass
 - Winged Euonymous
 - Porcelain berry
 - Norway Maples
 - Phragmites Australis
 - Hearty kiwi (just starting out, is there a way to stop this?)
- Deer population

- Earthworms (soil problems)
- Clearing of downed tree wood
- Replanting trees
- Pruning trees
- Limited soil depth (weak stability for trees)
- Erosion

Related to Climate Change

- Desire to move away from hardened shorelines
- Need to rethink how we treat shorelines, including marshes and salt marsh restoration
- Forest replacement- what will be there to replace the current species?
- Climate refugia
 - What habitats will there be for birds?
 - What will our forests look like?
- Storm damage to trees
 - Invasives respond well to disturbances.
- Hotter summers
 - can lead to aggravated animals,
 - more users at park pools and water resources,
 - heat exhaustion in recreationists,
 - increased fire risk.
- Drought
- Vernal pools drying out
- Leaf change earlier
- Yellow jacket population increase
- Should we focus on wetland maintenance restoration for drainage?
- Where are we putting the train line if Hudson floods? Will it need to go to the trailways?
- How do we talk to adjacent landowners about climate change?
- Should we be managing for more or less grasslands, shrub swamps, etc.?
- Storms and weather related security threats:
 - campers and trees fallings,
 - heat exhaustion.
- Energy infrastructure and how this will impact the parks

Thinking About Climate Change

The next step is to determine how these issues will impact open space properties throughout Westchester, and then create a plan to address and mitigate these issues. Federated Conservationists of Westchester County (FCWC) plans on hosting a series of workshops over the next few years, several which touch on many of these topics pertaining to Westchester's parks and open spaces.

Other Common Themes

- Volunteers

- Utilize expertise of volunteers
- Train volunteers to take on specific responsibilities
 - Perhaps friends of Westchester County Parks- NY NJ trails could help train volunteers
- Ideas for other volunteers
 - Check out Bedford Audubon's volunteer form
 - White Plains Youth Bureau for "green team"
 - Volunteer New York
- Limited resources
 - Maintenance with limited resources is a problem
- Teaching the next generation
- Seeking funding should be a priority
- It is important that the person who is making decisions knows the 'why' behind land management and properly articulates it to their staff and others who are taking care of the property.

Resources

We began sharing resources to help address some of the problems and concerns. This list can continue growing, and we hope you will share any and all resources that address our current problems and future concerns.

- a. Cornell Cooperative Extension has a program that sells weevils to eat mile a minute weed.
- b. Money is available through PRISM for invasive management
- c. Native Plant Center has demonstration meadow- for examples of species that can grow and thrive in hot, dry weather.
- d. Audubon's Birds and Climate Change Report can be found at climate.audubon.org
- e. Best Management Practices for Control of Non-Native Invasives - http://www.montgomeryparks.org/PPSD/Natural_Resources_Stewardship/Veg_Management/documents/nni-best_mngmnt_practices-april09.pdf
- d. Concord's Invasive Plants Resource- http://www.concordma.gov/pages/ConcordMA_NaturalResources/invasives/invhome

Expertise Sharing Questions and Solutions

One of FCWC's tasks is to bring people and groups together to work together on common problems. Below is a list of questions and scenarios that emerged during the day. Some are specific to certain sites, and some are of more general concerns/interests. If you have first hand experience or knowledge of any of these issues, let's share information.

- How do you develop a land management plan?
- How do smaller parks and preserves identify and facilitate the changes when they might not have the staff and resources?
- Hunting program potentially introduced to Marshlands- how have others handled this?
- Should there be bans on smoking in parks for fire danger (due to drought, heat, etc.)? Do any properties have a policy in place?

- Who can help conduct a coastline engineering study?
- What is the best way to approach meadow management?
- How to use fire as a management tool?
- Can we work together to make it easier to get fire permits?
- Which is better - monitoring of invasives or removal of invasives?
- Shelldrake has a Class C dam
 - DEC requires maintenance of land which includes removal of trees and regular mowing (up to the water line).
 - All this to keep artificial lake that is no longer used.
 - Is the dam needed? Could it be decommissioned?
 - *they would need help by the Fall
- Hearty kiwi has been spotted in some areas.
 - It's just moving in to Westchester. Is there a way to stop this?

The Google Group 'Open Space Westchester', created after the roundtable discussion, is the perfect venue to share knowledge. FCWC will post questions periodically, and we hope anyone with experience will respond. There's a lot we can learn from each other.

Two other suggestions that came out of this roundtable discussion were:

1. to create a listserv on this topic, and
2. to organize an advisory group that can help identify the issues on a given property and find solutions to those problems.

Jason Klein, FCWC Co-President and Curator at Trailside Nature Museum, Anne Swaim, Executive Director of Saw Mill River Audubon and Cathy Mazzella of Hudson River Audubon have so far agreed to participate in this roving advisory group. We welcome anyone else who is interested to contact FCWC. In addition, if you have a question on a property that you would like assistance with, FCWC would be happy to make the 'match' and ask the advisory group to visit your location. To contact FCWC - email fcwc@fcwc.org or call 914-422-4053.