

Conservation Connects News

Spring 2013



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Dear Reader:

Our projects and programs continue to grow in unique and exciting ways allowing us to contribute toward our mission to balance economic vitality with natural resource conservation. Over the past several months we participated in the Finger Lakes Regional Sustainability Planning process and are now working closely with New York Green, Inc. to kick off a sustainable land use initiative in Genesee County! We continue our work with Genesee County Economic Development Center integrating natural resource conservation into site specific and landscape level economic development strategies and continue to serve on technical teams for stream remediation in Livingston County (NY), environmental review and land stewardship in Jefferson County (NY), coastal wetland mitigation design in Monroe County (MI) and restoration site assessments in the Tonawanda Creek Watershed (NY). We are filling a paid internship position this summer to give a college student or a recent college graduate an opportunity to gain experience in natural resource field assessments, GIS, green infrastructure and sustainability planning. Read on for an update on the proposed changes to New York's State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR), a short but lively article about dirt (yes, dirt) and more. I wish you a warm and relaxing summer with plenty of time to play in the mud!

~Sheila S. Hess
Principal Ecologist/Owner

Something to think about:

"The best way to predict the future is to invent it." —Alan Kay

Charlotte Brett - NYS Wetlands Forum Treasurer

At the NYS Wetlands Forum annual conference in Lake George this April, Conservation Connects' Charlotte Brett was elected to be the new Treasurer for the Forum. She was also re-elected to serve another 3-year term on the Board of Governors. The NYS Wetlands Forum is a non-profit, non-advocacy organization focused on improving communication among people interested in wetlands; calling attention to and objectively discussing local, statewide, regional, national and global wetland issues as they relate to New York State; improving its members' knowledge and understanding of wetlands; and making available information about wetlands to its members and the general public. More information about the New York State Wetlands Forum can be found at: <http://www.wetlandsforum.org/>

Conservation Connects helps corporations and communities balance development plans with natural resource conservation. It is possible to achieve economic vitality while preserving a healthy environment and a high quality of life.

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Staff Publication by Ecosystem Marketplace

Conservation Connects' Charlotte Brett and Sheila Hess co-authored an article about wetland mitigation banking in New York State, along with environmental attorneys T.J. Mascia and Michael Messonnier of Hunton & Williams LLP. Wetland mitigation banking, one of the most active ecosystem markets in the U.S., is a mechanism for private market investment in the restoration, creation, enhancement, and preservation of wetlands and streams on a watershed scale. It has proven to be one of the most environmentally effective and economically efficient ways of compensating for wetland and stream loss.

The article, "Banking on Change: Rethinking Wetland Mitigation in the State of New York," was published by Ecosystem Marketplace in March 2013. It garnered attention from Empire State Development and has added to the ongoing dialogue about potential revisions to state wetland mitigation regulations with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. It can be found at the link below: http://www.ecosystemmarketplace.com/pages/dynamic/article.page.php?page_id=9643§ion=home

Upcoming Changes to SEQR

The NYS DEC (Department of Environmental Conservation) has adopted revised model EAFs (Environmental Assessment Forms) and is proposing amendments to the regulations that implement SEQR (the State Environmental Quality Review Act). Revised Short and Full EAFs were adopted by the DEC in January 2012, and implementation of the new forms is scheduled for October 2013. The Full EAF has not been substantially revised since 1978, while the Short EAF last had substantial revisions in 1987. DEC describes the revisions as "a general update to the existing forms [that] incorporate consideration of areas of environmental concern that have arisen [in the past 35 years]. In addition to substantive changes, the structure of the forms has been updated, to make them easier to use."

In addition to changes to the EAFs, DEC is proposing amendments to the regulations that implement SEQR. DEC explains that the "principal purpose of the amendments is to improve and streamline the SEQR process without sacrificing meaningful environmental review."

Some of the key proposed changes include:

- **Reductions in some of the thresholds triggering Type I actions** (which are considered more likely to have a significant effect on the environment and therefore to require an EIS, or Environmental Impact Statement)
- **Additions to the list of Type II actions** (actions that would not have a significant effect on the environment and never require further SEQR review). Some of the additions to the Type II list are intended to encourage green infrastructure projects, development on previously disturbed sites in municipal centers, the installation of solar energy arrays, and the renovation/reuse of existing structures
- **Requirement to conduct public scoping for EIS's** (this is currently optional)
- **Language encouraging the electronic filing of EIS's with DEC**

The DEC is preparing a GEIS (Generic Environmental Impact Statement) to discuss the objectives and rationale for the proposed amendments, present alternative measures under consideration, and to solicit public input. No date for the GEIS has been published.

DIRT!

Ironically, some of the most important things in life are dull, obscure or can be downright unpleasant. If you can't relate to this statement consider flossing, purchasing underwear and exercise. Or, if you are still enjoying your childhood (at whatever age) consider homework, chores and vegetables. Are you with me? I hope so, because for the next 3-9 minutes depending on how fast you read we'll be exploring the seemingly dull, obscure and, for some of us, unpleasant topic of dirt. And not just dirt by itself but dirt as it relates to the dull brown foundation of any earnest sustainability effort. Here we go...



A few interesting facts about dirt (note: now that I have your attention “dirt” has been replaced with “soil”):

1. Soil is made up of organic matter (living and dead organisms), minerals, and nutrients.
2. Soil is the foundation of natural ecosystems providing habitat for billions of organisms, a growing medium, water storage and filtration – all these services support biodiversity.
3. Soil must be “alive” to sustain agriculture and the food, fiber and fuel that we rely on.
4. The agricultural community continues to discover ways to sustainably produce high yields without the use of conventional practices that erode, deplete or sterilize (kill) soils.
5. It takes more than 500 years for one inch of topsoil to develop (naturally).
6. Earthworms are almost as important as the soil – a story unto itself, look it up!
7. Over 5,000 different kinds of bacteria can be found in one gram of soil.
8. Most of the antibiotics that we use are made from microorganisms that occur naturally in soil. So much for the saying “Eat dirt and die...”
9. Soil is the ecological foundation for any individual, community, region, state or nation with a goal to provide a functional environment for their children and beyond.

My aunt scrubbed the rocks and other Lysol-based land use practices

I don't think my aunt is an avid reader of “Conservation Connects News” but just in case, let it be known that her love for her son is most admirable and she is not the first, nor will she be the last mother to disinfect the earth before allowing the children to play. Lysol (for those unfamiliar with the product) guarantees complete annihilation of 99.9% of bacteria. This is a most attractive claim to parents of small children everywhere. However, disinfecting the natural environment - be it in the name of health or profit - has unfortunate, if unintended, consequences (thus the growing trend in prescribing probiotics after antibiotics and marketing yogurt as a way to restore our intestinal environment). Opportunistic land use decisions and conventional land use practices when applied without careful planning such as clear cutting, paving, disconnecting, ditching, and heavy use of herbicides and pesticides are much like using Lysol and lead to the eventual loss of soils and/or the properties of soil that we need to live. The good news - science and technology have kept pace. There are many alternatives to conventional land use practices (and to Lysol it turns out). Sustainable land use planning begins with an understanding of soils, soil properties, and the relationship between soil, water and land use trends. Working together as a community to optimize land use and make decisions based on real data, sound ecological principles and the needs and interests of the people in the region promises a better chance for a healthy environment, vital economy and a sustainable quality of life. While this is truly the message of this article, I also recommend a related quick read at <http://www.takepart.com/article/2012/03/26/5-reasons-let-your-kids-play-dirt> about why it's okay to play in the dirt!

The Greener Scheme of Things

Wetlands mar the map of future business parks and threaten their good intent
 A landscape pocked by a mosaic of deep green money pits
 Across the lake plains abandoned fields give way to wet meadows and dark, leafy swamps
 Wetlands slyly spread across the landscape, unmapped, tricky
 You can't take your eye off them for a minute!
 And, look at the time and unemployment lines
 Tick tocks on foreign clocks stop for no man...or wetland
 The earth is tilting, drainage patterns shift
 growth is critical and the sky is falling
 Meanwhile an elderly farmer reminds me in a cantankerous, scratchy voice,
 "Honey, they ain't makin' more land, this is what we got"
 Agriculture, wetland, or business park?
 Who shall decide? How? Eeny, meeny, miny, moe...
 I peer harder into the void of my computer screen, seeking balance
 Tension mounts, my neck and shoulders begin to ache
 But then, the buzzwords, all the beautiful buzzwords, wash over me
 I take momentary refuge in their hypnotic mantras
 How can there be any real crisis when we have all these
 Beautiful, proactive, confident words and phrases
Sustainable development, smart growth, green technology
Eco-friendly, organic, local, green, Go Green!
Environmentally-conscious consumers, green infrastructure
 It's all so dreamy and so...so...well, so very green
 Green is the color of money,
 Green is the color of trees,
 Green is the color of peace...
 You can't go wrong with green
 Green was unanimously voted the official color of 2012
 Business owners and city planners splash green energetically across billboards, websites sidewalks
 And we float about in a green glow
 Feet barely touching the impervious surface beneath
 I hear green, I see green, I am getting sleepy, I am getting sleepy
 But wait! I shake my head to clear the dreamy green fog and suddenly,
 I wonder...
 Where are we?
 Where are we in the greener scheme of things?

