

# Stewards Lead the Way



Whether along the Great Lakes, an ocean beach, a city park, or a tranquil stream leading into a mighty river, New Yorkers are participating as never before in stewardship programs.

What exactly is stewardship? According to a February 2003 report of the US Environmental Protection Agency's Environmental Financial Advisory Board, "Stewardship calls upon everyone in society to assume responsibility for protecting the integrity of natural resources and ecosystems, and in doing so, to safeguard the interests of future generations."

Protecting our marine and Great Lakes ecosystems for the future is very much in the mission of New York Sea Grant in both the research and outreach programs. "Stewardship is the responsibility we have as citizens of this earth to protect, preserve and

gain knowledge about invaluable natural resources such as the oceans and the Great Lakes," says NYSG coastal educator **Helen Domske**. "Stewardship involves empowering local residents and visitors with the ability and desire to protect and take care of a natural area," says **Diane Kuehn**, NYSG Coastal Tourism Specialist and an instructor at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. She speaks specifically of the case of eastern Lake Ontario's dune area, where this empowerment came from a grass roots organization called the Dune Coalition.

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Diane Kuehn and **Dave White**, NYSG Great Lakes extension coordinator helped to facilitate the progress of this organization. Today, **Molly Thompson** (pictured on cover with “Dune Stewards”) leads a dedicated group of students in the protection of this fragile ecosystem. These stewards spent the summer showing people how to enjoy this resource while making minimal impacts to the environment.

In another part of the state, NYSG’s **Laura Bartovics** is the outreach coordinator for the New York/New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program. “In an urban setting, the concept of stewardship is very similar, and New York City residents take action every day in a variety of ways, large and small, to protect and restore the natural resources of one of the most visible places on earth—New York Harbor.” One of Bartovics’s missions is to support small groups in their efforts to engage the public and

connect them with the estuary that surrounds the densely populated city.

Stewardship also has a “trickle down” effect. The majestic Hudson River starts in the Adirondack Mountains and flows south all the way to New York Harbor. Its estuary is one of NY’s greatest natural resources. And along the way, dozens of small tributaries add to its might. The State’s Hudson River Estuary Action Plan has recently made a priority the “enhanced protection over the tributary streams of the estuary watershed.”

In a recent NYSG-project, **Nordica Holochuck** and her partners have developed and distributed a tributary stewardship guide specifically tailored to meet the needs of the Hudson Valley watershed. The guide details best management practices such as pollution prevention and stream bank stabilization for Hudson River tributary stewardship. It emphasizes to would-be stewards the protection and conservation of fish habitat and explains the linkages between streams, estuarine ecology, and aquatic habitats.

Many Hudson Valley watershed groups are currently developing or conducting stream stewardship education programs. This helpful booklet is for them and other non-governmental education organizations, municipalities, and private landowners throughout the Hudson River Valley.

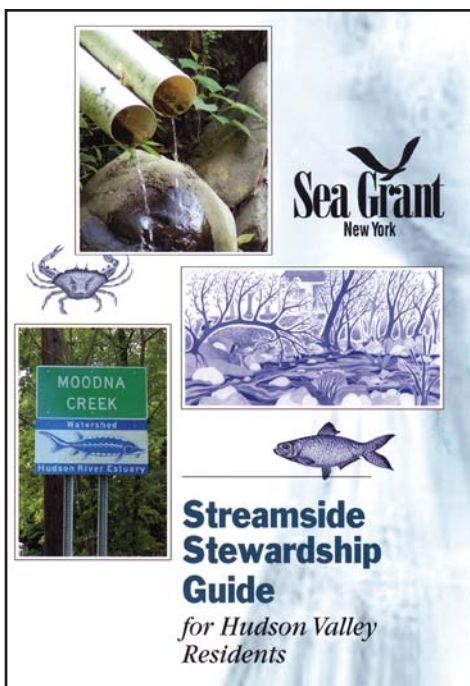
— **Barbara A. Branca**



~~**Attention Boaters!**~~

~~Keep your eye out for a NYSG sponsored survey on recreational boating that will be mailed in January. Please be sure to respond.~~

~~Your answers are important to us.~~



“ *Stewardship involves empowering local residents and visitors with the ability to protect and take care of a natural area.* ”

— *Diane Kuehn*

*NYSG Coastal Tourism Specialist & Instructor at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry*

"These dunes are nearly as high as those in Cape Cod, where the tallest ones in the entire northeast exist. Dunes develop over the years thanks to plant growth cycles that make it possible for trees to root themselves."

Teachers and students later traveled to the nearby Salmon River Fish Hatchery, where they saw first hand how the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation raises trout and salmon to stock Lake Ontario.

The take home message in all of this? "We're trying to help people who do outreach to better understand the Great Lakes ecosystem so they can spread the word," says Edwards. Last year, while teaching at Ohio State University, Edwards led a class on a similar one week trip on Lake Erie. He says this year's focus was on Lake Ontario because "it doesn't get the public awareness that the other lakes get." Domske adds, "Being that Lake Ontario provides so much of the New York shoreline, we felt it was important for New York teachers to know more about it."

## Surveying with Summer Stewards



Five college students from SUNY-CESF and SUNY College at Oswego spent this past summer educating visitors about the value of the beaches, dunes, and wetlands at several public areas along an

18-mile stretch of Lake Ontario's eastern shoreline. "For the third year now, the dune stewards have played an integral role in informing beach-goers on how they can help protect the shoreline dunes," says

**Molly Thompson**, NYSG's dune and habitat educator. "Their patrolling of the beach and interaction with its visitors has been important in minimizing activities that cause negative impacts on the area."

On a given day, **Willow Eyres** picked up trash or offered a nature walk at the Deer Creek Wildlife Preserve, while **Charlie Hawkins** cut vegetation to open trails at Southwick Beach. **Jeffrey Nassimos** and **Evan Proulx** (pictured l - r) added and repaired string and snow fencing at locales such as the Black Pond Wildlife Management Preserve. "This fencing will allow for blowing sand to accumulate on the dune while discouraging foot traffic," says Thompson, who supervised the students. The students also distributed brochures to help bolster stewardship and posted signs to illustrate how the actions of visitors and residents affect the ecosystem.

**Rachel Habig**, a PhD candidate at CESF, worked through the season with NYSG's Coastal

Tourism Specialist **Diane Kuehn** to compile data on visitor use since 1985. With the exception of the last three years, data was not collected in a consistent manner. So, Kuehn and Habig are now analyzing data to identify population trends for each of the public areas. They are also pinpointing sections of high use and environmental impacts, such as the loss of beach grass, a plant that inhibits dune erosion. "Input from Rachel and Molly has made it possible to develop a data collection protocol to be used in the future to collect more reliable data," says Kuehn. "This information will help dune managers determine if beach visitors understand how their activities impact the area."

Proulx, a recent SUNY Oswego graduate who majored in public justice and minored in biology and forensic science, has aspirations of becoming an Environmental Conservation officer. The skills he's learned as a Lake Ontario dune steward for two years support this goal. "The steward program has helped me develop leadership and people skills that an enforcement officer can use," says Evan. "I've learned a lot about how fragile our ecosystems are and how to communicate that to the public." Nassimos, an CESF student with ambitions towards consulting, adds, "I now realize the key role public outreach plays in the environmental policy and management discipline."



All photos and both articles by Paul C. Focazio

