



Hands-on habitat restoration learning opportunities equip educators to teach others about the value of ecosystem stewardship.

New York Educators Help Restore Gulf Coast Habitats

In 2012, New York Sea Grant (NYSG) and the New York State Marine Education Association (NYSMEA) led a trip to the Gulf Coast to help educators understand the need for stewardship of New York's wetlands.

Wetlands provide crucial feeding, breeding, and nursery grounds for thousands of native animals. In New York's Jamaica Bay, a 39-square-mile estuary that includes portions of Brooklyn, Queens, and Long Island's Nassau County, wetlands are being lost at a rate of 44 acres per year.

To teach educators about wetland loss occurring in New York State, NYSG Long Island Sound Study Outreach Coordinator Larissa Graham, NYSMEA President Meghan Marrero, a faculty member at Mercy College in Dobbs Ferry, NY, led a group of 14 educators to Louisiana where wetlands are being lost at a rate of one acre an hour.

Louisiana and New York struggle with similar challenges regarding wetlands. While in Louisiana, Marrero and Graham taught the NY educators about wetland loss and current restoration projects in Jamaica Bay and Long Island Sound, and issues such as hypoxia (a low level of dissolved oxygen) that occurs in both the Gulf of Mexico and Long Island Sound. They provided science-based information, highlighting research funded by NYSG.

To learn about rebuilding wetland habitats, the group volunteered at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service Golden Meadow Plant Materials Center in Galliano where they planted more than 1,700 gulf bluestem plants, harvested seeds, and prepped



New York State Marine Education Association members assist with habitat restoration projects during a volunteer trip to coastal Louisiana. Photo: Larissa Graham, NYSG

planting materials. They worked with Louisiana Sea Grant at the Wetland Plant Center in New Orleans to pot native wetland vegetation which will be planted at various wetlands around southern Louisiana.

Working with the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, the group planted nearly 500 live oak, sand oak, and hackberry trees on a restored ridge recreated from dredged sediments from Port Fourchon. With this and future plantings, this ridge will one day become a mature maritime forest and a crucial habitat providing food and shelter for migrating birds.

Back in NY, participants spoke to students, colleagues, and friends about their experiences, and each participant led a restoration project of their own - from invasive species removal and wildlife monitoring to beach and park cleanups.

This trip allowed educators to participate in hands-on habitat restoration projects, and created new environmental stewards for New York's coastal ecosystems.

See NYSG Web Coordinator Paul Focazio's Louisiana learning blog about this educational adventure at <http://nysmea.blogspot.com>

This project meets the performance goals of Sea Grant's Healthy New York Coastal Ecosystems Focus Area.

New York Sea Grant is a joint program of Cornell University, the State University of New York, and NOAA. New York Sea Grant Extension administration is located at 112 Rice Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853.

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