

Learning Stewardship in New York by Helping with Wetland Loss in Louisiana

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Meghan Marrero,

Mercy College and New York State Marine Education Association

What started out as a volunteer effort to help Louisiana coastal managers after the 2010 oil spill from the *Deepwater Horizon*/BP oil rig turned into a stewardship program for New York educators focused on wetland loss and restoration.

“What we learned was that a far greater issue than the oil spill is wetland loss in Louisiana and that it relates to the habitat loss occurring in New York,” says Larissa Graham, the Long Island Sound outreach coordinator for New York Sea Grant.

In February, Graham and Meghan Marrero, president of the New York State Marine Education Association, led 14 New York educators to Louisiana to rebuild wetland habitats.

“The problems affecting Louisiana are also very real here at home,” Graham says. “These educators are using what they learned during this trip to become stewards of our New York coastline.”

Offshoots of the trip so far include classroom and community

presentations, and small-scale restoration projects. The educators also wrote posts on a blog created by New York Sea Grant to document the trip.

The idea for the stewardship program came out of a trip in 2011 that was organized by Graham and Marrero to take volunteers to Louisiana to help with the oil-spill cleanup. “There was the feeling that we had to do something because the situation down there was so overwhelming,” Graham says.

But 10 months after the spill, she says, “there wasn’t much that we could help with. Habitat loss was a much more significant problem.”

Louisiana is losing the equivalent of about a football field of wetlands every 38 minutes. If these rates continue, the state shoreline will advance inland as much as 33 miles in some areas by 2040.

Similar concerns over wetland loss are mirrored in areas of New York, such as Jamaica Bay, where salt marshes are being lost at a rate of about 44 acres per year.



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After observing the similarity in problems, Graham and Marrero saw an opportunity to create a stewardship program and worked with Louisiana Sea Grant and area national estuary programs to help organize the trip. Over five days, the New York educators got hands-on experience planting, harvesting seeds, and prepping planting materials.

While they worked, participants learned from experts about Louisiana’s wetlands and the processes affecting them, which are similar to those in New York.

“Our students and the public will benefit from what we’ve learned in Louisiana, and engage in stewardship projects closer to home, where the environment also needs our help,” says Marrero, who is an associate professor of secondary education at Mercy College.

Marrero adds, “I would encourage other managers to think about bringing in educators. This is an audience that really wants to make a difference and can inspire others to get involved.” ❖

For more information on the New York to Louisiana stewardship program, contact Larissa Graham at (631) 632-9216 or larissa.graham@cornell.edu, or Meghan Marrero at (914) 674-7889 or president@nysmea.org. To view the trip blog, go to <http://nysmea.blogspot.com>.