



OUR P.A.P.E.R

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Introduction

As the field season ends, or slows down, it is time to take a look at some of the accomplishments of the Natural Resource Stewards and the rest of the team from the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) in the past few months. This issue of *Our Paper* will share the various habitat protection projects, natural resource surveys, invasive species public outreach programs, and other work completed by EMB in collaboration with many different partners.

Japanese Knotweed Removal—Amherst State Park



Japanese knotweed along trails at Amherst State Park

Amherst State Park is operated by the Town of Amherst, located in Erie County. Over the past year planning meetings have occurred to address the management of invasive plants within this state park. In order to restore streambank habitat and diversity, a planning team made up of members from the Town of Amherst, Amherst Conservation

Council, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, WNY PRISM, and OPRHP, selected one of two large stands of Japanese knotweed to start the invasive species management process. On July 17th, Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper's RestoreCorps, joined the planning team and a large stand of Japanese knot-

weed was removed from the trail network and streambank along Ellicott Creek. After this warm day of work, two large dumpsters were filled with plant material and the stream bank was visible again! A follow-up removal is planned for next year and additional native plantings will be restored to this area.

- Meg Janis, NRS
Western District Regions



Volunteer crew working diligently cutting down and carrying the large stalks of Japanese knotweed. Ellicott Creek is visible in the background.

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Master Planning and Ecosystem-based Management (EBM): Applying EBM to make a Difference

Since the 2009 NY Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Council Report to the Governor, OPRHP has been working to implement and integrate EBM into its various programs and activities. Several of these are within the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB). For example, EMB's Natural Resource project proposals now have a section on EBM elements in each project. Also, EBM is regularly included in discussions, inquired about, and referenced within the bureau.

In addition to trying to integrate EBM into EMB's own programs and activities, we have also been working with other bureaus within OPRHP to integrate EBM into their programs and activities; one of these bureaus is Resource Management's Planning Bureau.

It was recognized at the start of the EBM program that master plans were incorporating EBM principles (i.e. public outreach, continual reassessment, a comprehensive information base) so the collaboration between the EBM staff and Planning Bureau was a natural development. We saw an opportunity to work together with respect to EBM and

master planning, so that the master planning process more formally incorporates the principles of EBM.

EMB worked with the Planning Bureau to develop EBM descriptions, as well as guidance language for the Master Plan Template. This language has been included in Caumsett, Jamesport (Hallock), Green Lakes, and Robert G. Wehle Master Plans thus far. This language has now been finalized into the template and all plans moving forward will include certain specific EBM elements and principles. Future plans (including those coming up this year (Grafton Lakes, Alfred E. Smith/Sunken Meadows and Sampson) will also represent EBM principles.

We have also worked together during the early developmental stages of specific plans to make a difference. Reviewing plans and applying EBM principles has helped guide the discussion of alternatives and analysis of various park development and resource protection opportunities. For example, applying science-based knowledge, interconnections of sys-

tems, considering stakeholders, as well as sustainability goals during the assessment of the Jamesport (Hallock) Master Plan, the location of the nature/visitor center was reevaluated and eventually moved to further avoid sensitive resources.

The integration of EBM principles in master plans introduces the concept to more people, as it is read by park and facility managers, the public, and other agencies. This furthers the goals of our Agency, and the work of EMB, to be responsible environmental stewards while providing recreational opportunities.

We are continuing the work with other bureaus to integrate EBM into programs and will continue to work with the Planning Bureau, Environmental Analysts and the regions on applying EBM in master planning.

*- Kristen Cady-Sawyer & Lynn Bogan,
EBM Program Specialist and Ecologist*



Hallock Pond at Hallock State Park Preserve. A kettle hole pond, this significant resource (now a designated a Natural Heritage Area) will be protected from impacts.

New location of nature center and maintenance facilities, which minimize impacts to significant natural areas while still allowing access to pond for education and viewing. Modified version of map originally produced by NYSOPRHP GIS Unit, October 28, 2009

Rare Orchid Discoveries

In New York, we often think of orchids as big, showy flowers that grow in tropical forests, but there are actually a number of spectacular orchids that grow right here in our own backyard. This summer, Natural Heritage Scientist Kim Smith conducted a number of surveys for orchids in state parks and made some surprising discoveries. In late May, the Small Whorled Pogonia (*Isotria medeoloides*) was discovered at Schunnemunk State Park. The Small Whorled Pogonia is a globally-rare orchid that had not been seen in New York State since 1976. This discovery is especially exciting because this orchid has only been recorded five other times in New York's history, from 1887 to 1923. Now that it's confirmed to still occur in New York, Kim and other botanists from the Heritage Program have a

renewed interest in the Small Whorled Pogonia and are conducting surveys in similar habitat in the hopes of locating new populations.

In early June, another rare orchid, Dragon's Mouth Orchid (*Arethusa bulbosa*) was found at Montauk Point State Park. This beautiful pink orchid had not been observed anywhere on Long Island in over 25 years! Also on Long Island, a known population of the Yellow Crested Orchis (*Platanthera cristata*), was monitored this year at Hither Hills State Park. This park provides habitat for the largest and most vigorous population of Yellow Crested Orchis known in the state.

Continued monitoring of these rare plant populations and new discoveries is important for a number of reasons.

First, it reminds us of the importance of state parks for preserving biodiversity in New York. Secondly, it can help inform us of the types of resources we have in our parks and if we need to develop or adjust our management strategies to help protect them.

New York's orchids may be rare, but thanks to state parks, many are still there for us to enjoy!

- Kimberly Smith, *Natural Heritage Program Botanist*



Yellow Crested Orchis (*Platanthera cristata*) at Hither Hills State Park



Small Whorled Pogonia (*Isotria medeoloides*) at Schunnemunk State Park



Dragon's Mouth Orchid (*Arethusa bulbosa*) at Montauk Point State Park

New England Cottontail Sampling

During the winter months of 2009 and 2010, Biologist Jesse Jaycox (Taconic/Palisades) sampled state parks in Columbia (Taconic, Lake Taghkanic), Dutchess (Hudson Highlands, James Baird), and Putnam Counties (Clarence Fahnestock) for the presence of New England Cottontail (*Sylvilagus transitionalis*), a New York State Species of Special Concern and a candidate for Federal listing. The samples were collected in collaboration with NYS DEC as part of a survey effort to determine the distribution of this species in eastern New York, as well as contributing to a study that is looking at the detectability of this species, which is the native cottontail east of the Hudson River. The samples, rabbit pellets, were collected from multiple locations and the DNA was analyzed by Dr. Adrienne Kovach at the University of New Hampshire to determine the species. The OPRHP sampling effort re-verified New England Cottontail in three locations in Hudson Highlands (1) and Clarence Fahnestock (2) State Parks, and confirmed five new sites, including one in Taconic and five in Clarence Fah-

nestock. These new locations increase our understanding of the overall distribution of this species in the park and the state, as well as types of habitat used. Based on results to date, it appears that Clarence Fahnestock is one park that provides very important habitat for this species. The introduced Eastern Cottontail (*S. floridanus*) was also identified from many of the areas sampled, including parks where New England Cottontail was not found, such as Grafton Lakes State Park in Rensselaer County (sample by Biologist Casey Holzworth). Future sampling efforts by OPRHP and DEC are being planned to better understand the distribution of the species in New York and further define the importance of state parks for providing critical habitat for this species, which will enable us to maintain adequate habitat for this species.

- Jesse Jaycox, NRS
Taconic and Palisades Regions



Cottontail pellets collected for fecal DNA analysis



Two types of New England Cottontail habitat confirmed in Clarence Fahnestock State Park

ESF F.O.R.C.E.S. at work in Central and Finger Lakes Regions

Since the spring of 2008 and the launch of OPRHP's Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Interpretation Initiative, nearly 300 State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF) students have participated in Volunteer **F.O.R.C.E.S.** (Friends Of Recreation, Conservation and Environmental Stewardship).

Through this model volunteer pro-

gram, OPRHP has significantly enhanced its partnership with SUNY-ESF faculty, staff and students for natural resource and park improvement projects.

In February of 2009, OPRHP held a recognition event at ESF's campus to thank the 200 SUNY-ESF students, staff and faculty who had contributed to projects at several

state parks in the Central and Finger Lakes regions. This event, co-sponsored by the Council of Park Friends, also featured opening remarks by SUNY-ESF President Dr. Cornelius Murphy and a presentation by Wint Aldrich, OPRHP Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation.

Projects students have contributed to include the removal of Japanese stilt grass and pale swallow-wort from Selkirk Shores; fish surveys at Clark Reservation and Two Rivers; environmental education at Environmental Field Days at Green Lakes; and three successive years of ESF *Saturday of Service* that featured removals of invasive plants from Green Lakes, Clark Reservation and Chittenango Falls.

The overall goal of ESF F.O.R.C.E.S. is to enhance regional OPRHP's involvement with SUNY-ESF and other interested partners. The program intends to inspire students to explore careers in environmental science and public service.

- Tom Hughes, NRS
Central and Finger Lakes Regions



In April 2010, the ESF Woodsmen's Team spent a day out at Beechwood State Park assisting Finger Lakes region with the removal of over 100 apple trees from an orchard targeted for natural habitat restoration.



In August / September 2010, 29 undergraduates, graduate students and recent grads participated in a Natural Resource Stewardship display and activities at the NYS Park at the Fair. Youth and family activities included firewood outreach, creating invasive insect masks and building bluebird houses.



At the February 2009 recognition event—Erica Brown, (center right) was named the Outstanding Undergraduate Volunteer and Matt Brincka (center left) was named the Outstanding Graduate Student Volunteer. Also shown—ESF Service Learning Coordinator Liz Mix (far left) and Tom Hughes (far right).



In Spring of 2010, ESF FORCES volunteers coordinated a series of Stewardship Days at Green Lakes for students from Manlius Pebble Hill School. Grades K-2 created a native plant garden (pictured above).

Enthusiasm and grasses continue to grow at Ganondagan SHS

Thanks to a seemingly ideal growing season in 2010, the fields at Ganondagan SHS are boasting exciting results from the May 2009 planting (see article in *Our Paper*—Volume 2, Issue 2).

NRS Biologist Tom Hughes recently conducted vegetative assessment surveys at 9 random monitoring plots located within the 27 and 34-acre parcels. While competing exotics and some native plant species were present within the sampled areas, planted warm season grasses and wildflowers still represented 40-80% of the vegetation.



A site visit on September 13, 2010 revealed Niagara big blue-stem and Indian grasses growing 4-6 feet tall throughout the restored parcels. On this day, Tom Hughes observed two bedded whitetail fawns and an eastern meadowlark in the fields.



Fields of warm season grasses and wildflowers, most prominently Rudbeckia hirta (black eyed Susan) provide an attractive scene at Ganondagan SHS on August 03, 2010.

These observations are very encouraging and suggest that the restoration of the fields to an historical 'oak opening' community type is progressing well.

While these grasses continue to grow, EMB, regional and Ganondagan staff are working collectively with partners (DEC, USDA, NY NHP, Genesee Valley Pheasants Forever and local municipalities) to develop a long-term burn management plan.

- Tom Hughes, NRS
Central and Finger Lakes Regions

Meet the Biologist —Melissa Plemons (NRS Biologist, Invasive Species, Albany)



Melissa hard at work on the 17th floor in Albany.

I grew up in rural upstate New York, on the edge of the Helderberg Mountains in Altamont. I relocated to San Francisco, California just out of high school and began working for Greenpeace on fundraising and environmental campaigns. I lived in the San Francisco Bay Area for many years, attending City College of San Francisco and graduating from UC Berkeley with a BA, and then earning a teaching credential from San Francisco State University. In 2003 I earned a Bachelors of Science degree in Biology, with a concentration in Ecology, from San Francisco State University. While attending SFSU, I focused on studying animal ecology and conducting field research and quantitative data analysis of ecosystem dynamics in the numerous terrestrial and marine habitats of Northern California.

After graduating I worked as a biological field research technician studying the population of harbor seals that inhabit the San Francisco Bay, collecting population and human disturbance data at harbor seal haul out sites adjacent to bridges undergoing earthquake retrofitting construction, as part of a federally mandated study. As an added bonus, I got to witness the birth, rearing, and development of many harbor seal pups in the wild. I then worked as a vegetation monitoring intern for invasive plants with the National Park Service in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area at Fort Cronkhite. (I can report that John Muir's grave was covered with invasive plants at that time, as public access to the property was still being secured by the Park Service, but an adjacent stream restoration was in the works to prevent the grave site from floating downstream.) I've also had the opportunity to work for the USDA-ARS Western Regional Research Center in the Exotic and Invasive Weeds Research Unit in Albany, CA. As a research technician I worked on testing exotic insects and invasive plants in a quarantine

lab setting, and developed methods for rearing insect bio-control agents for controlling exotic thistles (Yellow Starthistle, Scotch Thistle, and Russian Thistle – aka tumbleweed) that are invading millions of acres of land in the western United States.

I returned to upstate New York in 2008 for my current position as a Natural Resource Steward Biologist working on invasive species issues for OPRHP. I've had the opportunity to work on writing OPRHP's Native Plant Policy in collaboration with Parks Botanist Kim Smith, participate in grant writing and policy review, work on coordinating the early detection of invasive insects, and collaborate with other state and federal agencies on firewood issues and invasive insect detection and response, and I occasionally get out to State Parks to do early detection surveys and removals of invasive plants.



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EMB Mission Statement

The mission of the Environmental Management Bureau is to assist OPRHP in the responsible stewardship of its valuable natural, historic and cultural resources, as well as in providing safe and enjoyable recreational and interpretive opportunities for all New York State residents and visitors.