

HUDSON RARITAN ESTUARY RESTORATION PROJECT PUBLIC ACCESS TARGET ECOSYSTEM CHARACTERISTIC WORKSHOP

Hudson River Foundation
December 14, 2007
11:00 AM – 2:30 PM

SUMMARY

- The Public Access workshop was held as part of a workshop series to gain support for the restoration strategy identified in the Target Ecosystem Characteristic (TEC) Report and focus discussion to guide restoration planning in the Hudson-Raritan Estuary (HRE; Bain et al. 2007). This guidance document and the workshop series, led by the Hudson River Foundation (HRF) with support from Cornell University and the Harbor Estuary Program (HEP), was contracted by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ, non-federal sponsor) to support the overall HRE Ecosystem Restoration Project.
- A group of scientists, policy makers, and members of non-government organizations met at the HRF office to discuss the Public Access TEC targets, how to identify restoration opportunities, and how to advance these restoration projects in the HRE. This workshop was held in conjunction with a HEP Habitat Workgroup and HEP Public Access Workgroup meeting.
- Dennis Suszkowski and Jim Lodge from the HRF opened the workshop with a discussion of the TEC project and how it fits into the Comprehensive Restoration Plan (CRP) for the HRE.
- The group discussed how to approach Public Access equitably. Carter Craft from the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance (MWA) displayed maps of the HRE, categorized by income, median income level, linguistically isolated populations, ethnicity, renter-occupied housing, and the population under 18 years of age. These maps revealed the following patterns:
 1. Areas with linguistically isolated populations could have fishing access as their focus.
 2. The Bronx has the longest stretches of shoreline with no public access. These areas should be targeted for new access points with amenities for the youth.
 3. In the HRE, there are 439 existing access points. Hundreds of these accesses charge a fee to enter or use, and many are privately owned.
 4. Access areas should have appropriate signage, preferably signs posted in several languages.
- The group discussed amenities that should be located near public access points, including: restrooms, restaurants, and floating docks for transient boaters, possibly with metered parking. The general consensus was that people will stay longer and visit a public access area more frequently when it offers extra amenities. Nancy Welsh from the New York State Division of Coastal Resources added that access points should be appropriate for the local community and should be designed to include complementary activities.



- The importance of identifying community-specific uses for public access areas was discussed. Communities should be contacted to determine how they may like to use the waterfront. Eight regional public involvement meetings will be held to introduce the public to the CRP. Communities may offer their opinions on specific public access amenities at that point.
- The issue of liability was discussed. Representatives from the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYCDPR) stated that boat launches require special permission, and activities such as swimming and kayaking are only to take place in open waters. Any place where there is an existing steward would be a preferable location for public access. Brownfields and parking lots were discussed as potential sites.
- It was suggested that a GIS database may be suited for conducting site selection, since databases can facilitate creating relationships among data types.
 1. C. Craft explained that the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance (MWA) has begun to function as a clearinghouse for public access data. The current challenge is to establish a programmatic way to steward data into the future and ensure data are real and viable. The USACE responded that they could support the data collection effort, and that the CRP could provide recommendations for data management and the identification of new access opportunities.
 2. The current database developed by the MWA will be a web-based database called GET WET, which will allow users to update it with their own information. It will be searchable by zip-code.
- Workshop participants suggested that the following datasets be used to identify public access opportunities:
 1. Proximity to public transit
 2. Population density
 3. Conflicting land uses such as industrial/commercial may create safety issues and could be considered exclusionary
 4. Land use and land ownership
- Sites can be prioritized based on the following:
 1. Areas with demonstrated community interest and existing stewardship components
 2. Shoreline type, particularly areas with intertidal zones.
 3. Presence of vacant areas, brownfields, and parking lots along the waterfront
- C. Craft suggested that HEP's public access workgroup play an integral part in planning the regional public involvement meetings. HEP can represent the local voice and help make these meetings galvanized and energized.

1. OPENING, TEC PROJECT OVERVIEW

Dennis Suszkowski, Hudson River Foundation (HRF)



- About two years ago, the Hudson River Foundation (HRF) wanted to help push the Hudson Raritan Estuary Ecosystem Restoration Study forward by engaging the scientific community in a discussion. In answering the question, “Is restoration a reasonable goal in the HRE?”, the following four fundamental considerations for the restoration plan were developed:
 1. The HRE is a human-dominated system
 2. The estuary has been irreversibly altered
 3. The system is dynamic
 4. Science and technology can make clear and valuable improvements to the system
- The restoration objectives for the HRE Study are Target Ecosystem Characteristics (TECs) that can be described as design criteria for the Estuary. The CRP includes 11 TECs, which is a manageable number of restoration targets.
- The TEC approach is new, in that it:
 1. Focuses on the habitats and the inter-relationship of habitats (e.g., what, where, how much, by when)
 2. Elevates the importance of the public’s connection to the HRE
 3. The approach aims to improve the dialogue on habitat restoration. It focuses on using current knowledge instead of trying to re-create the past.
- However, because the TECs are the measurement of restoration performance, there is a need for additional input before restoration is implemented in the HRE:
 1. Geographic & technical specificity in the study area
 2. Improved dialogue:
 - i. Discuss validity, challenges, opportunities of the TECs with stakeholders, experts, restoration practitioners, and regulators.
 - ii. Review targets, performance measures; develop siting criteria, site selection process.
 - iii. Regulatory/policy considerations should be laid out in CRP based on these discussions.
 3. Define next steps, which will lead to specific actions that can be initiated in the near future to move the TECs toward their short and long-term goals.
- The Comprehensive Restoration Plan (CRP) is a document currently being developed that will be a blueprint for future studies and restoration actions. The CRP will facilitate research and the development of restoration projects.

2. PUBLIC ACCESS TEC

Jim Lodge, HRF and Carter Craft, The Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance (MWA)

- Public Access targets:
 1. Initial target: one new public access and one new improvement or upgrade of an existing access site in each of the eight regions of the HRE study area by 2012.



2. Long-term target: All waters of the HRE and tributaries are accessible within a short walk or public transit trip by 2050.
 3. Types of public access are described as direct, indirect, vista, and upland access routes.
- This TEC is different than other restoration plans that do not typically address the human-component of the estuary. Making public access a TEC puts it on par with other habitats.
 - J. Lodge announced that the purpose of this workshop is to refine this TEC chapter, and to define how we will identify these sites and how we will define upgrades. C. Craft added that we need to develop a baseline for identifying the most fair and equitable way to identify restoration opportunities for public access and to make sure improvements are happening the way they should. We need to identify: 1. what populations have been served, 2. what are the biggest gaps, and 3. where and can access points physically be improved.
 - C. Craft noted that one new access and one upgraded access per region means that eight will be created and eight improved by 2012. Bill Slezak of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) briefly discussed the regions of the HRE. The HRE is a large area of land, and was divided loosely on sub-watershed boundaries. The TECs were developed to be estuary-wide, but each has region-specific targets to facilitate implementation. The HRE's division into regions brings local interests to the forefront.
 - C. Craft investigated socioeconomic information in the HRE (see slides in presentation for more detail). The following characteristics were mapped for the estuary: income, median income level, linguistically isolated populations (nobody over age of 12 fluent in English), ethnicity, renter-occupied housing, population under 18 years. These maps revealed interesting patterns.
 1. Immigrant populations will likely be the focus of fishing access. Therefore, postings and signage should be installed in different languages.
 2. The Bronx has limited public access opportunities and possibly the longest stretch in HRE, where no public access exists. The focus should be on providing access to and engaging young people.
 3. In the HRE, there are 439 existing public access points ranging from commercial marinas, public parks, waterfront landmarks, ferry landing, and boat launches. This represents about 90% of the public access points in the HRE. The MWA would like to send this dataset to park agencies for their input. Hundreds of these accesses charge a fee to enter or use.
 - C. Craft asked the panel what access points should look like, and more specifically what criteria make for healthy, functional, multi-use access points.
 1. C. Craft suggested:
 - i. Some type of gentle slope for direct access areas
 - ii. Bottom condition that is sandy or cobble over fine-silt
 - iii. Upland space above/below mean high water line to stage people.
 - iv. 80% of new accesses should be direct access points.



2. Rob Freudenberg of the Regional Plan Association suggested that accesses should be near restrooms, cafés, parking, and transit. He added that the more amenities offered by a public area, the longer people will stay and the more they will use it.
 3. Harvey Morginstin of the Passaic River Boat Club responded that municipal, floating docks should be constructed so that transient boaters can tie up, explore the city, and go back to their boat. These are different than marinas, and are simply floating public docks on a street corner where time could be paid for using meter ‘parking’. Restaurants on the waterfront do not have public access for customers to tie up boats. This group should encourage waterfront business owners to build access points. C. Craft replied that this concept will be added to the TEC.
 4. Nancy Welsh of the New York State Department of State (NYS DOS), Division of Coastal Resources commented that access points should be designed with activities in which underserved, urban community populations will take part. Accesses should keep in mind what will be appropriate for the people in the community. Infrastructure of the access point should be determined by what activities are complementary. For instance, motorized and non-motorized boating cannot occur together.
- J. Lodge asked workshop participants to define potential uses of and needs for access points.
 1. Dave Cunningham of the Harbor Estuary’s Public Access Workgroup (PAWG) commented that with almost every foot of shoreline along the five boroughs being man-made, we should construct biological and habitat enhancements along with access points. Europeans have length criteria for shorelines, which specify the distance shorelines should slope into the water. Along access points, we can create habitat for mussels or fish. J. Lodge responded that this concept is addressed in the Shorelines and Shallows TEC, and added that public access improvements can be part of many TEC projects.
 2. Lodger Balan of Urban Divers expanded on this concept. He suggested that access points should be designed so that the public is a participant in the natural aspect of the area. By creating an environmental aspect for these access points, it lessens the feeling of urbanization. Accesses should also be designed for other uses besides just athletic.
 3. H. Morginstin commented that fishing piers could be added in many places as indirect access points. Associated signage should be posted in several languages.
 4. C. Craft agreed that signage should be incorporated into these projects. Offering seasonal/year-round public programs are important to incorporate into facility designs to attract people to educational opportunities.
 5. N. Welsh raised a concern that programming, signage, and preserving the ecological aspect of access can be somewhat in conflict. We need to be practical, balancing the scheduling/management of both uses.
 - J. Lodge asked how access quality should be defined. He proposed adding a field to the database of access points that would describe access quality.
 1. Lisa Baron of the USACE pointed out the importance of identifying the quality for use of accesses in the HRE. We need to know whether these areas are dilapidated, what they are used for, how those uses could be enhanced by upgrades, and what the barriers are for improvement.
 2. Jeff Cusano of the USACE asked if a group could be formed to create a database or function as a clearinghouse for these data. C. Craft replied that the MWA has filled this



niche. Our current challenge is to establish a programmatic way to steward data into the future and ensure data are real and viable. As a reality check, we are posting maps at a boat show and asking visitors to comment.

3. J. Lodge added that it may be helpful to bring USACE and MWA together to determine the direction to aim towards and bring the focus towards something more manageable. J. Cusano agreed that the USACE can participate in the data gathering effort, but there needs to be long-term management of these data. L. Baron suggested that the CRP could provide recommendations for maintenance and identification of new opportunities. C. Craft replied that the database is currently in beta form by county and activity associated with each public access site. This will be a web-based database called GET WET, which will allow users to update it with their own information. It is searchable by zip-code. The MWA would like to review the database and associated shapefile one more time before it is released to the public.

- A discussion about shapefiles and downloadable programs to view these was led by J. Cusano, C. Craft, and J. Lodge. Jane Gostal explained that there may be benefits to having a database of the data in addition to a shapefile. A database also allows you to create relationships between different data types.
- D. Cunningham asked whether there was a way to determine what percentage of the population uses the access points. He added that access quality could have several meanings, such as green space that is used by local communities for recreation and green space that can provide habitat for organisms.
- C. Craft closed the discussion by showing a map with proposed public access creation sites. There are a limited number of sites on the map because these will be focused on to make certain they are implemented. This TEC will be a vehicle to creating more public access opportunities.

3. SITE SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCESS

- L. Baron initiated the discussion on identifying restoration opportunities by drawing from lessons learned about the Passaic River study. Maps were developed based on outreach meetings in the watershed and interviews with 19 municipalities. The municipalities responded with regional master plans for waterfront development. Collectively, these techniques were used to identify restoration opportunities. The next phase for this TEC leans towards finding out what waterfront development programs exist around the HRE, with particular attention to region/area-specific plans. The USACE wants to be informed and have a comprehensive idea of what communities want out of their waterfront so that complimentary access points and amenities can be incorporated into existing plans. Brownfields/parking lots offer access opportunities.
 1. For example in Harrison, New Jersey, the USACE is working on a flood control project, which may be able to consider public access. This would be an opportunity to find compatibilities and synergies.
 2. Hudson County is working on a greenway
<http://www.hudsoncountynj.org/downloads/pdf/grmap.pdf>.



- Chris Zeppie of the Port Authority of NY/NJ (PANYNJ) asked for clarification about inviting the public to go to the waterfront. Many portions of the HRE consist of port facilities that would be a prime example of areas where public access and safety issues are of concern. He voiced concerns about public safety and identifying the responsible entity for people who are injured in these areas.
 1. C. Craft explained that the public access nomination process (used by the Public Access Workgroup) requests that a stewardship organization be identified. Those sites with a steward are considered reasonable access point or just a good idea.
 2. Minona Heaviland of New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYCDPR) explained that public agencies like NYCDPR have safety standards and stringent safety rules because they are liable for visitors. NYCDPR is changing some water access rules as parks within its jurisdiction improve design aesthetics and improve access to the water.
 3. John Mattera from NYCDPR explained the existing rules. Currently, it is illegal to go into the water for swimming and launching/landing a boat at city parks. To use new boat launches, individuals must have special permission. Swimming and kayaking/boating is illegal on non-open waters because NYCDPR can be cited by the Department of Health for exposing the public to an unsafe situation.

- J. Cusano elaborated on the mapping component being developed for each TEC, which will be used to identify areas of opportunity and not specific restoration sites. The Public Access TEC will be more difficult to map because the mapping exercise should consider the type of access, the need for this type, and site size, which are all somewhat discrete parameters. He posed the question to the group: How would you begin to map areas of opportunity for public access?
 1. L. Balan and C. Craft commented that areas with demonstrated community interest and existing stewardship components should be targeted first. L. Balan added that these groups can also be a center or tool for habitat restoration. Many of these organizations may also have data and photographs documenting the quality of sites. C. Craft stated that vacant areas, brownfields, and parking lots along the waterfront should also be identified as opportunities. Orthophotography may be used to identify large intertidal areas that would be more amenable to creating a public access site than bulkheaded or ripped shorelines.
 2. Joanne Dupont of the Rockaway Waterfront Alliance said maps showing intertidal areas exist and that design criteria could be based on these maps.
 3. J. Lodge mentioned that this TEC may not be conducive to GIS analysis due to issues with scale. The Harbor Estuary Program's (HEP) public access workgroup can assist with site identification by conducting a large mailing soliciting people to identify sites.

- J. Cusano responded that the public outreach technique is good when working on a smaller scale, such as identifying master plans, regional needs, and project-specifics. However, what datasets can be used to answer larger-scale questions. The group brainstormed possible datasets:
 1. M. Heaviland said that public transit should be nearby.
 2. C. Craft responded that population density should be a parameter. Population density should drive the decision on where to focus efforts.



3. C. Craft also added that an analysis of edge conditions throughout the HRE would be useful. L. Baron said that aerial photographs of the HRE could be used, but current aerial images may be out of date. She suggested investigating the availability of recent data (e.g., Lower Passaic River Study Area recently conducted aerial photographs as part of the study and similar activities may have been conducted in other areas of the HRE).
 4. J. Cusano commented that areas of automatic and absolute exclusion could be identified to narrow the possibility of sites. Exclusion could be driven by security issues and habitat protection/preservation. C. Craft added that combined sewer overflows (CSOs) could be inclusion criteria. Partners could be identified and the public access site could provide an incentive to address the CSO issue in that waterbody.
 5. Rob Freudenberg of the Regional Planning Association added landowner maps, specifically of parks and publicly-owned property.
- C. Craft commented that potential partnerships should be identified: CSO mitigation, DEP brownfield sites. Street ends that touch water may have pockets of public land that can be transformed.
 - L. Balan commented that we should consider the needs of immigrant populations, and make public access areas more inclusive of these populations.
 1. N. Welsch agreed saying that we should identify what uses these populations would want out of a waterfront, then make people interested in going to the water. Some populations use water for religious ceremonies or swimming, while other populations have a fear of water. Public access areas could also be for cultural outreach.
 2. C. Craft said that there are many audiences that could benefit from public access. Communities could express their desires at local community meetings. By asking them how they would like to use the waterfront, we may identify important uses we had not previously considered.
 3. L. Baron added that the Public Involvement Plan calls for eight meetings, one in each region, where the CRP would be presented to the public. We would also find out what additional elements the public would like included in the CRP.
 4. M. Heaviland suggested that the same process NYCDPR uses to involve the community with cultural, historic, and religious programs can be extrapolated to the HRE. The existing programs provide examples of what works and does not. She reminded everyone that park and upland access is a big issue. Many parks separated by freeways, making it difficult for the public to locate and use.

4. MAKING IT HAPPEN – IMPEDIMENTS, STEPS, FIRST NEEDS

Bill Slezak, USACE

- C. Craft introduced Bill Slezak and briefly explained that the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) has recently been reauthorized.
- B. Slezak spoke briefly of the appropriations process. Roundtable discussions in the past have advocated for environmental improvement projects with the goal of developing a cohesive program to serve everyone's needs. In February 2008, the budget for FY2009 will



be released, and there will be an opportunity for public input into the budget. There will be an opportunity to meet with congressmen to advocate Federal funding for specific projects within HRE.

- B. Slezak explained that the eight regional public meetings will introduce the CRP. These meetings will focus on the entire group of TECs and the mosaic of habitats that will be restored through their implementation. The TECs will not be ranked. We want to paint the picture of what the estuary should be.
- C. Craft closed the workshop by reminding everyone to provide feedback for the TEC chapter. It will be great to have stakeholder meetings in each region, and HEP's public access workgroup can provide recommendations to the HRF and USACE for these meetings. HEP can play an important role at these meetings by representing the local voice and not burdening the public with jargon. HEP can help make these meetings galvanized and energized.



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REFERENCES

Bain, M., J. Lodge, D.J. Suszkowski, D. Botkin, A. Brash, C. Craft, R. Diaz, K. Farley, Y. Gelb, J.S. Levinton, W. Matuszeski, F. Steimle and P. Wilber. 2007. Target Ecosystem Characteristics for the Hudson Raritan Estuary: Technical Guidance for Developing a Comprehensive Ecosystem Restoration Plan. A report to the Port Authority of NY/NJ. Hudson River Foundation, New York, NY. 106 pp.



December 14, 2007
Workshop at HRF

Ecosystem Restoration: Public Access

Dennis Suszkowski
James Lodge
Hudson River Foundation



HUDSON RIVER FOUNDATION
for Science & Environmental Research

Cornell University
Center for the Environment

THE PORT AUTHORITY OF NY&NJ
Welcome to the US Army Corps of Engineers
New York District

New York-New Jersey
Harbor Estuary Program

Existing Ecosystem Restoration Planning

- Some observations
 - Broad stakeholder support for restoration exists
 - Federal authorization for restoration is in place, yet efforts are under-funded and moving slowly
- Why?
 - Comprehensive plan lacking (What is overall restoration goal and how does each project contribute to the goal?)
 - Planning process needs transparency - more effective stakeholder involvement
 - Many habitat types not considered for restoration
 - Scientific basis for restoration was lacking
 - Plan needs seamless integration with other programs, particularly the NY/NJ Harbor Estuary Program



HRF-Cornell Initiative

- October, 2005 HRF-Sponsored Workshop
 - 40 scientists and agency representatives
 - Target Ecosystem Characteristics "Brainstorming"
 - Produced 23 candidate TECs
 - Identified need for more focused effort

- PANY/NJ USACE-supported TEC project
 - Began Jan 2006
 - Develop manageable number of TECs for use in the CRP
 - **HEP Policy Committee endorsed CRP planning process**
 - Final report issued early in 2007

The image shows the cover of a report titled "Setting Targets for Restoration of the Hudson-Raritan Estuary". It is a report of an interdisciplinary workshop held in October 2005. The cover features a photograph of the Hudson River estuary with a city skyline in the background.

The image shows the cover of a report titled "Target Ecosystem Characteristics for the Hudson-Raritan Estuary". It is a technical conference report for developing a comprehensive ecosystem restoration plan, issued in 2007. The cover features a map of the Hudson-Raritan Estuary area.

Developing a Restoration Plan for HRE, HEP and others

Four Fundamental Considerations

- The ecosystem is *human dominated* and will remain a human shaped landscape
- The ecosystem has been *irreversibly changed* in almost all its properties
- The ecosystem is *dynamic*
- Science and technology can make *clear and valuable* enhancements

Restoration goal is to create:
a mosaic of habitats that provide society with new and increased benefits from the estuary environment.

The image contains two photographs. The top one shows a lush green landscape with a body of water and several birds flying in the sky. The bottom one shows a dense urban city skyline with many skyscrapers, likely New York City.

What are TEC's ?

- Design criteria for the estuary

[What] [Where] [How Much] [By When]

Each TEC Specifies:

- Target Justification
 - Technical Merit
 - Policy and Management Relevance
- Necessary Implementation Information
- Measures of Performance



Target Ecosystem Characteristics

- Coastal Wetlands
- Oysters & Oyster Reefs
- Shorelines and Shallows
- Tributary Connections
- Islands for Waterbirds
- Habitat for Fish, Crabs and Lobsters
- Enclosed Confined Waters
- Reduction in Toxic Sediment Contaminants
- Eelgrass Beds
- Public Access
- Maritime Forests



Workshops



Workshops



**Comprehensive
Restoration
Plan**

Hudson-Raritan
Ecosystem
Restoration







Implementation

- Need additional input and dialogue with stakeholders
 - Scientists and Technical Experts
 - Restoration Practitioners/Sponsors/Champions
 - Policy Makers and Regulators
- Identify challenges and opportunities
- Review the targets, performance measures, siting criteria and other details of the TECs
- Define next steps

Summary

- TECs generally have widespread support
- Scientist-manager-stakeholder dialogue is extremely productive
- Specific actions have been identified that can be implemented NOW to move the TECs toward their short and long-term goals
- Likely that the rest of TEC workshops will produce positive results with specific actions

Public Access

Initial Target: One new public access site and one access improvement or upgrade of an existing access site in each of the eight study areas.

Long-Term Target: Waters of the Hudson-Raritan Estuary and Tributary rivers are accessible to all residents within a short (approximately twenty minute) walk or public transportation trip.

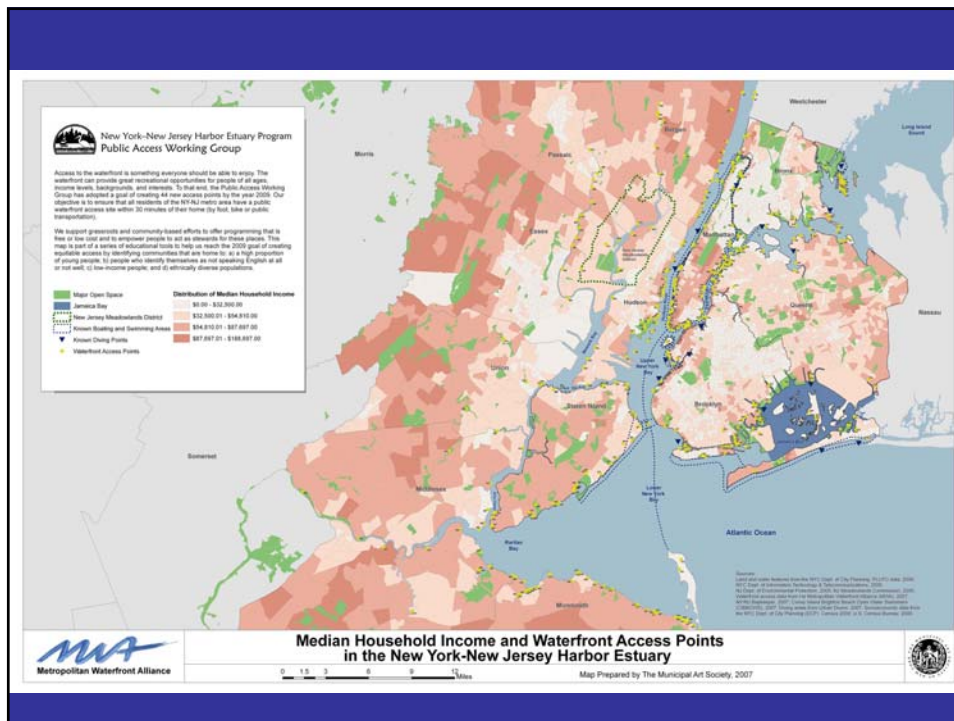
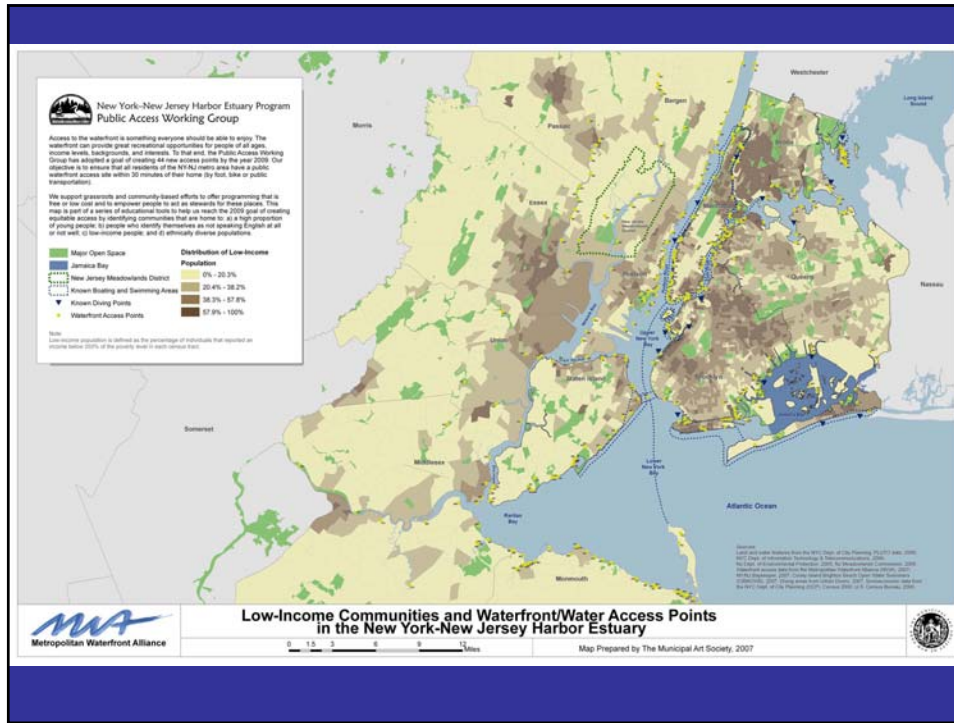


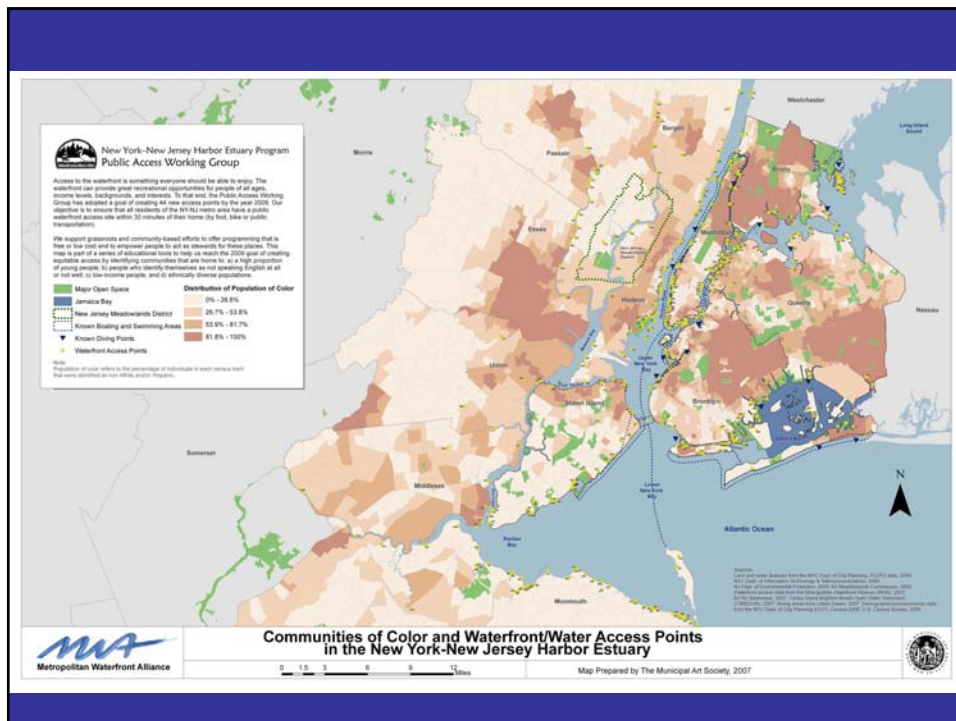
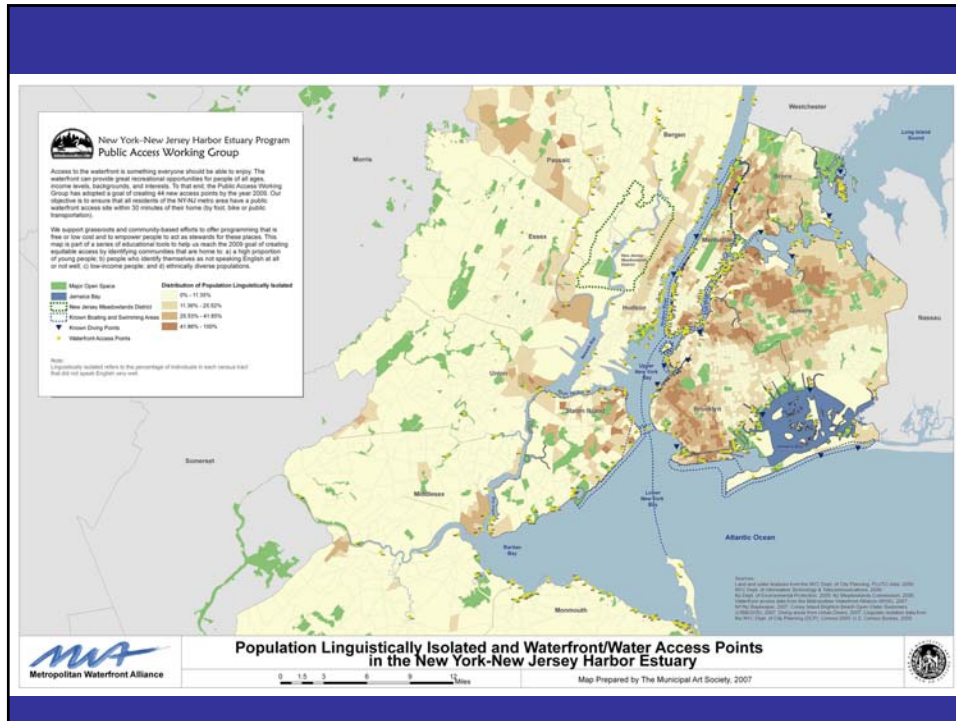
The TECs elevate the importance of the public's connection to the estuary, as compared to most restoration discussions

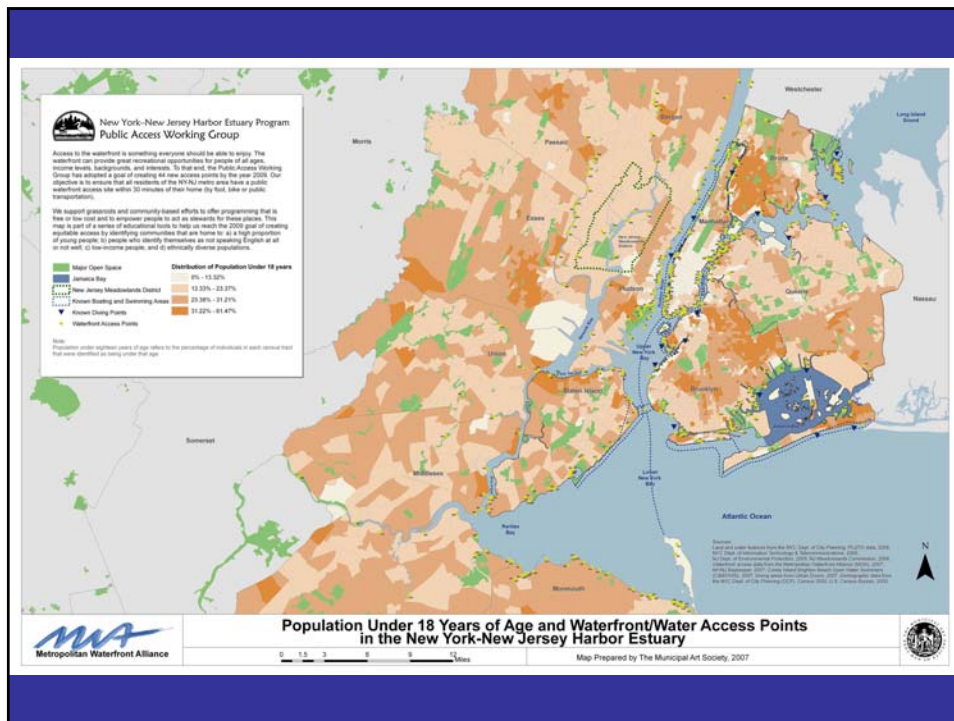
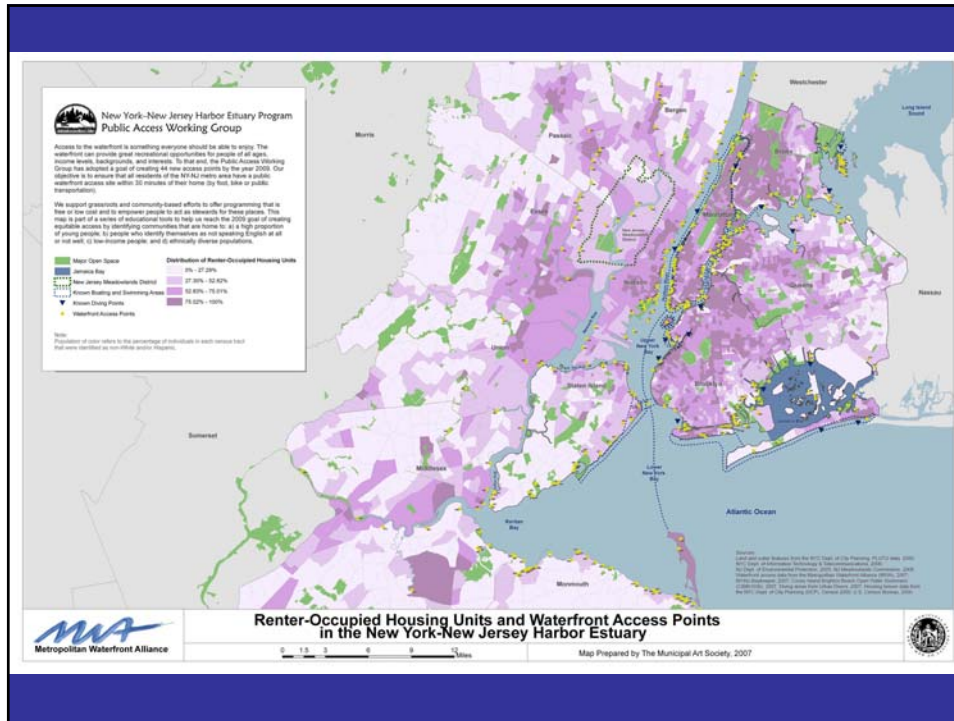
- All advocates for the environment appreciate the importance of public involvement and public support but in most cases, public support is limited to constituency building. The TECs go further by making safe, abundant public access a target characteristic of the ecosystem
- The Harbor Estuary ecosystem will not flourish if the people that live here do not benefit from the proposed ecosystem enhancements, or do not perceive these benefits as worthwhile and important
- Reestablishing access to the Harbor Estuary will lead to a stronger sense of place and ownership in the estuary's resources, leading to stronger advocates for land and other resource use that is compatible with the ecosystem services wanted by the community

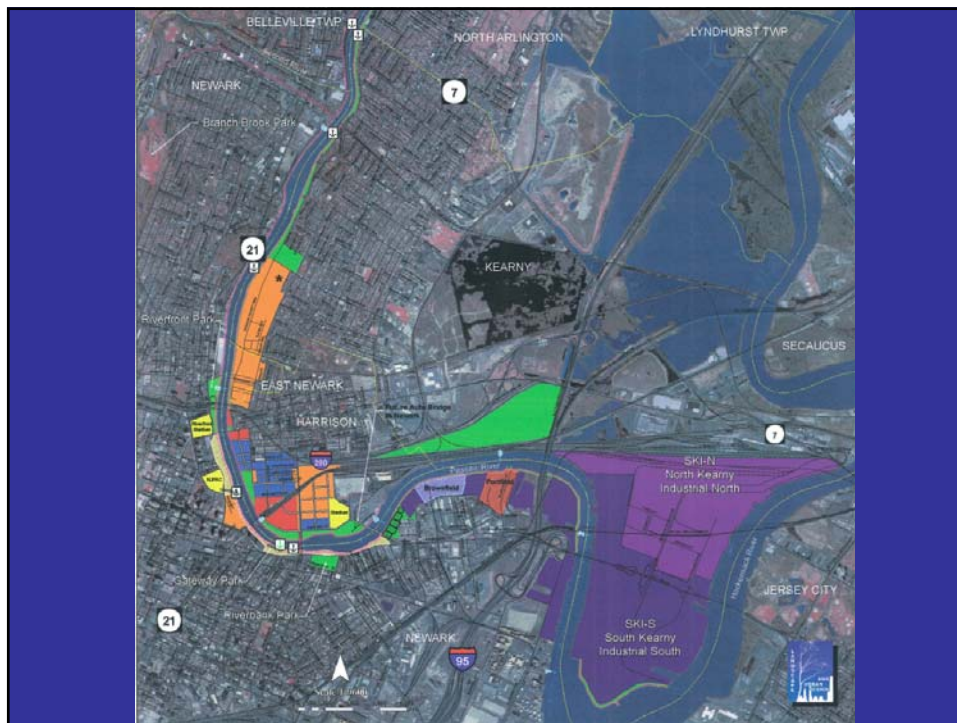
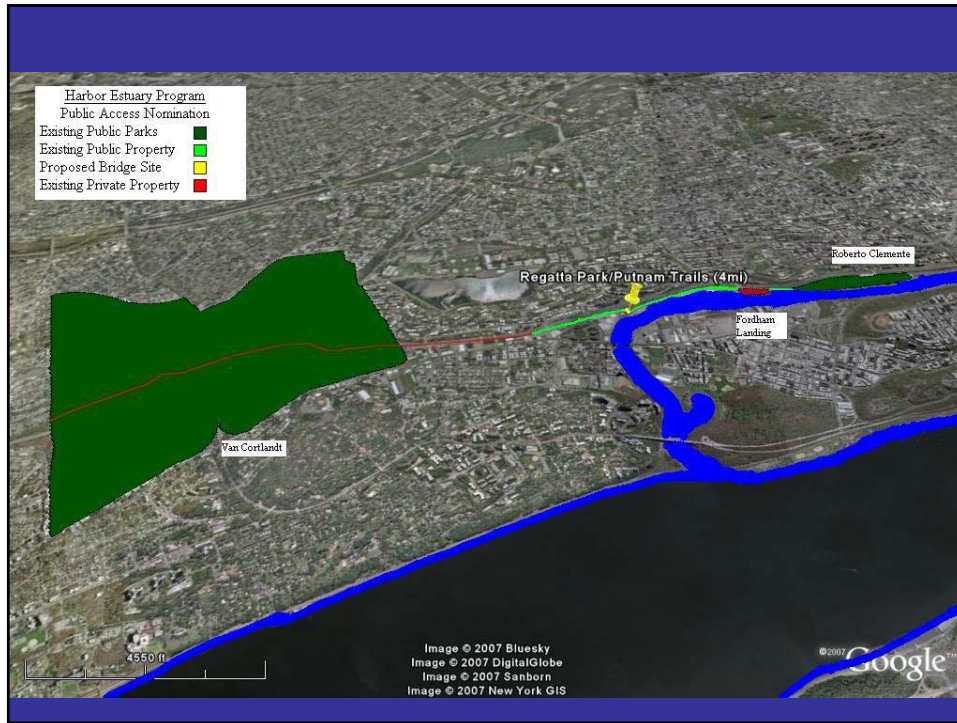
Types of Public Access

Type*	Description	Example
Direct access	Direct water contact possible; site can be used for accessing estuary waters	Boat launching or swimming area
Indirect access	Open space on the shore but not configured to allow water contact	Waterfront promenade
Vista	View of shoreline and water from a distance	Scenic overlook
Upland access routes	Public space for reaching coastal sites and other access types	Pedestrian route, transit connection, or bike path that leads to the waterfront









HUDSON RARITAN ESTUARY RESTORATION PROJECT

PUBLIC ACCESS TARGET ECOSYSTEM CHARACTERISTIC WORKSHOP

Technical Memorandum
5 February 2008

The Hudson River Foundation (HRF) sponsored a workshop series after the release of the Target Ecosystem Characteristic (TEC) Report in 2007, which served to gain further support for this restoration strategy and focus discussion to guide the planning of restoration in the Hudson-Raritan Estuary (HRE; Bain et al. 2007). On 14 December 2007, a group of scientists, regulators, and representatives from several non-government organizations met at the HRF office at 17 Battery Place in New York, NY to discuss the Public Access TEC for the HRE Ecosystem Restoration Study. The workshop was scheduled in conjunction with a Harbor Estuary Program (HEP) Habitat Workgroup Meeting, therefore many meeting attendees were also members of HEP. The group discussed a number of topics including: 1. options for equitably distributing public access sites in the HRE; 2. identifying community-specific uses of and amenities for access areas; and 3. proposing a site selection process to identify public access opportunities.

The Public Access TEC is distinctive as a restoration objective of the HRE because it addresses the human component and importance of incorporating active and passive recreation along the waterfront. Access points may fall under the following categories: direct access (e.g., boat launch), indirect access (e.g., promenades), vistas, and upland access routes that are pathways connecting the community to the access area. Improved public access in the HRE will foster stewardship and a greater understanding of the natural environment.

The Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance (MWA) and the newly created HEP Public Access Workgroup have championed the Public Access TEC. They have compiled important data layers and coordinated with local stakeholder groups, laying the framework for this TEC. Many of these efforts were presented at the workshop. Through ensuing discussions, workshop participants provided valuable insight and expertise that can be used to identify potential access creation and improvement opportunities and to describe additional information that will be required to meet the targets established in the TEC Report. The purpose of this memorandum is to describe how the concepts and issues discussed during the Public Access Workshop could be incorporated into the Comprehensive Restoration Plan (CRP) Report. The memorandum will also propose a methodology for identifying restoration opportunities in the HRE and discuss how these will be displayed in the CRP.

CRITICAL NEEDS



The CRP Report focuses on the program objectives (i.e., the TECs) and information that will be necessary to move toward meeting and/or redefining these targets. The Public Access TEC Workshop participants discussed a variety of issues that should be elaborated upon in the CRP Report. These issues related to identifying community-specific uses for access areas, coupling access creation with habitat restoration, and promoting human interaction with the environment.

Understanding how residents of the HRE are served at existing recreational areas is vital to satisfying the public's desires for green spaces and waterfront access. The number of visitors, number of amenities, or the quality of surrounding habitat can be used to measure access quality, but this information may not be available for many areas of the HRE. A data set that includes known public access points was developed by the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, and will be helpful in identifying restoration opportunities. Because municipalities and local non-government entities may be the most in-tune to local needs and desires for public access, these entities may be the well-positioned to assist in the inventorying of these sites, the identification of these needs, and in undertaking many of the access creation and upgrade projects.

Accesses should be appropriate for the local community and designed to include complementary activities and signage in multiple languages. People stay longer and visit a public area more frequently when it offers multiple amenities. To promote the use of access points, it would be appropriate to include design elements such as seasonal programming, restrooms, restaurants, fishing piers, and floating docks for transient boaters. Businesses along the waterfront or adjacent to a habitat complex should be encouraged to participate in the creation or enhancement of accesses, and can benefit by offering seasonal outdoor services.

Community access to waterways in the HRE is improving despite the isolation of many areas from the shoreline by highways and industrial infrastructure. Through this TEC, sites should be equitably distributed, ideally providing all communities in the HRE access within 30 minutes from home along safe walking or biking paths, or either a short drive or short public transit route.

Wherever possible, public access targets should be coupled with habitat restoration activities, incorporating accesses and the public into each project's design. Habitat restoration and enhancement is dependent upon its perceived benefit (i.e., value) to constituents. Therefore, projects that engage the public and areas that provide recreational opportunities in the HRE will likely gain greater political and economic support.

The public can be actively engaged in many facets of environmental restoration projects. Communities and environmental organizations can often be involved the planning, design, and post-construction phases of restoration projects. Monitoring programs can be supported by volunteer organizations, providing public outreach and educational opportunities. Interpretive signage can call out important habitats and inhabitants of an eco-region along a trail or waterway. More formal environmental education programming



can be incorporated into restoration projects, though these are typically seasonal and require staffing. Although access to environmentally sensitive areas (e.g., nesting grounds) should be restricted, providing access to other habitats creates scenic destinations and peaceful retreats from urban life.

The creation of direct accesses should be encouraged, so that at least 80 % of public access sites contain a direct access component (e.g., boat launch, public bathing area). Direct accesses may be more challenging to construct and potentially have more public resistance in an urbanized setting. However, promoting a direct connection between communities and the water engages the public in the surrounding environment, strengthening the sense of stewardship and ownership in an area. These accesses will also afford more opportunities for active recreation in the HRE.

Many TECs have addressed habitat trade-off issues, but the Public Access TEC will more often encounter land use trade-offs. Industrial or commercial land uses can be considered conflicting if they create safety issues for direct access or lack aesthetic quality for other access types. Access will be limited around airports and other secure areas. Although industrial activity and public access co-exist in the Hackensack Meadowlands, Newtown Creek, and the Bronx River, active ports and maritime industries may take precedence over creating new public accesses. Through strategic partnerships, parking/vacant lots, brownfields, and sewage outfalls could be restored to offer access opportunities and should not be viewed as competing land uses. Similarly, all natural areas, except for environmentally sensitive areas, should be viewed as complementary to creating public access.

RESTORATION OPPORTUNITIES

The broad identification and characterization of opportunities for the CRP Report could be based upon the public access features presented in the TEC Report and discussed at the TEC workshop. Several parameters were discussed that could be used to identify potential access creation and access upgrade opportunities, including:

1. Population Density – Access points can be located in areas of high density and can be within a specified distance from communities.
2. Land use – Identify vacant or public lands along the waterfront without existing access areas.
3. Existing Waterfront Access Points – The dataset compiled by the MWA and the HEP will display potential opportunities for upgrading existing access points. The existing dataset does not have information on access quality, so it cannot be used to specify those sites in need of upgrades. This data layer can be used to identify stretches of shoreline that may represent opportunities for the creation of new public access points.

To display potential opportunities to create new public accesses on a map, it would be possible to color-code the shoreline by the distance between access points. The color-coding could call attention to opportunities where public access points could be created



along shorelines that have relatively few access points. Additional information would be useful for the coarse screening evaluation and would identify additional benefits or constraints to creating accesses in those areas. Three additional parameters that could be displayed on the map include:

1. Habitat – Placing accesses adjacent to existing habitats creates scenic destinations or retreats. Forested and wetland areas provide opportunities for environmental interpretation.
2. Secure Areas – A data set could be developed to exclude areas from being suggested within restricted security zones (e.g., ports).
3. Environmentally Sensitive Areas – This data set could be developed to exclude environmentally sensitive areas, thereby protecting them from further human disturbance (e.g., nesting grounds).
4. Shoreline Type – Identifying hardened and natural shorelines would provide information on what type of access point would be appropriate for a site. Wherever natural, sloping shorelines exist, the option of creating a direct access point should be explored.

During the TEC workshop, there were discussions of several areas where restoration opportunities should be targeted but are too difficult to be identified through a GIS mapping exercise. Areas that could benefit from new or enhanced public access points include (1) identifying areas with demonstrated community interest and existing stewardship components, (2) waterfront lands located near public transit, and (3) areas slated for habitat restoration, whether intertidal, sub-tidal, or upland.

CRP MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Tracking the performance of this TEC and maintaining an accurate, comprehensive database of public access areas should be a priority. Hundreds of municipalities exist within the HRE, most having their own master plans that already include creating or enhancing public access. Moreover, with the CRP emphasizing the coupling of public accesses with restoration efforts, many organizations and agencies will be incorporating these components in their projects. The MWA is currently functioning as a steward for public access data through their GET WET web-based program. Other data management and performance tracking avenues should be suggested in this section.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Progress on this TEC should work in concert with the HEP's Public Access workgroup and benefit from their involvement with local constituents. The HEP can represent the local voice and help make future public meetings galvanized and energized.

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