

Open Space Stewardship March 31, 2006 Meeting

Meeting Notes

Summary: The meeting included a discussion by each participating group about their progress in terms of initiating program activities. This was followed by three presentations from participants who already had related programs established, or have made substantial progress already. Before closing the meeting, three committees were introduced and attendees were asked to volunteer as appropriate. There will be follow up on each of these committees by a BNL Office of Educational Programs staff member. In addition, a tentative date, July 24-28, 2006, was provided for the summer teacher workshop. More details about the meeting content is provided below.

Southampton School District: Teachers, and Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Dr. Josephine DiVincenzi met with Marty Shea, Chief Environmental Analyst for the Town of Southampton, and Mel Morris to discuss program opportunities. Several properties and projects are being considered that would support the Town of Southampton.

Western Suffolk BOCES: BOCES already has involvement at several properties and resources in place to support interaction with schools. There are several existing programs that could be used to support the Open Space initiative. Examples include Connetquot River Outdoor Learning Laboratory and the Caleb Smith State Park Preserve and facilities.

Shoreham Wading River School District: Mary Loesing noted that the school is assessing options to engage in the program at all levels from elementary through high school. One option is to incorporate a Science, Math and Technology Project program. They anticipate including trees through the seasons and flora and fauna surveys, as examples. Right now they are looking at adjacent Brookhaven State Park. They would like to consider partnering with another school district that may survey similar properties. Types of habitats to consider would be pine barrens and salt marsh areas where data could be collected and compared through data entry and analysis.

William Floyd School District: LSTPD teacher Amy Meyer was present as well as Associate Principal John DeBenedetto and Assistant Superintendent Sophia Gray. Amy will be one of the teachers supporting implementation of a summer workshop. They are looking at incorporation of the Open Space Program through an AP class. Other options are being considered.

Longwood School District: Meetings have been held with teaching staff to increase the awareness of the program and to discuss ways to implement it. They have an elementary teacher ready to get started. Ivan Suarez, a LSTPD teacher in the DOE program, will be one of the teacher workshop instructors. Ivan is also working on putting together an AP class to support the program at the high school level. The district has met with John

Turner, Town of Brookhaven, to discuss possible properties for inclusion. There are several properties in close proximity to a number of the schools.

Town of Brookhaven: John Turner noted that he has worked with a number of schools already. In general, they are in the process of identifying appropriate and accessible pieces of property. John has maps available that schools can get to evaluate properties within their districts.

Suffolk County: Chief Environmental Analyst for Suffolk County George Proios noted that there are several ways for program participants to participate in other related events and activities. These include the Envirothon where the winner goes to the State and International competition, the Cornell Cooperative Extension farm, and a program where students can review ecosystems. He also noted that there is funding in the County to support an outdoor learning center of some sort: this may be applied toward the program in some way.

Riverhead School District: The administration is currently working to identify high school teachers who have an interest in participating. Consideration is being given to providing an elective course in environmental studies. Riverhead Town expects to continue to have exceptional growth. The district would like to include the students in planning for the projected growth to help understand and manage the impact, and to make suggestions.

Riverhead Town Board: George Bartunek was present at the meeting and ready to support the program.

Peconic Land Trust: Represented by Kathy Kennedy, they are interested in working with students in the program. They currently have their own organic farm in Amagansett and a stewardship center on the North Fork.

Hampton Bays School District: They currently have a seventh grade teacher interested in starting the program. They have met with Marty Shea from the Town of Southampton to begin to identify property for possible use.

Peconic Baykeeper Program: Kevin McAllister expressed an interest in supporting the program and frequently works with schools on water-related programs. The focus is the Peconic Bay area, the South Shore Estuaries, and protection of these resources.

New York State Parks: Bob Nellen noted that the park system includes 35 parks on Long Island with every type of ecosystem including the previously mentioned Connetquot State Park Outdoor Learning Laboratory with BOCES support for k-12 and teacher involvement, and Wildwood State Park with activities such as studying the bluff as a geological structure, and pine barrens. Schools are encouraged to speak to Bob about parks in their districts to discuss opportunities.

Sachem East School District: Mike Vaccariello, the high school science chair, noted this was Sachem East's first time attending, and they are considering how they can participate.

Patchogue-Medford School District: Several teachers were in attendance. They have already met with John Turner, Town of Brookhaven, and identified two pieces of property that will be appropriate for the program and accessible by the district.

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC): Wes Gehres noted that the DEC has properties in many locations with many different ecosystems. Right now they are working with Kings Park High School Environmental Program (Rob Gelling). Some of the projects being considered include monitoring a nature trail and comparing the regrowth of an area where a small brush fire occurred to other areas of growth. He has also had preliminary discussions with Deer Park.

Central Pine Barrens Commission: Ann Carter reaffirmed that the Commission is supportive of the program. They have responsibility for many properties in Southampton, Riverhead, and Brookhaven Towns for which the schools could develop activities.

Miller Place School District: Laura Opitz, a LSTPD participant, will be an instructor for the summer teacher program. Laura has implemented some of the field methods learned at BNL last summer with her middle school students this academic year. Debbie Lovrich, from the High School, is working to evaluate options.

Town of Southampton: Laura Miller was in attendance to represent Marty Shea. Marty has several projects outlined that can incorporate student support. He has worked with Hampton Bays and Southampton School Districts to identify opportunities for both properties and projects. One option is to include students in drafting Management Plans for properties that have been acquired.

Deer Park School District: Open Space Stewardship has fit perfectly with their school needs. They were looking for an appropriate double period program – this will serve well. They are also considering programs such as a kindergarten adopt-a-property and literature related activities.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife: Debbie Long noted that the USFW has several properties in the local area with good opportunities for schools to interact. They are also hiring a new visitor services staff person with a strong environmental education background. This person will be available to help support open space related activities on USFW properties.

BNL/Foundation for Environmental Research in the Northeast (FERN): Tim Green, BNL Natural Resource Manager and FERN representative, noted that FERN has established forest health monitoring protocols that can be immediately deployed by those interested. FERN will assist in developing/reviewing other protocols as we progress.

Jeremy Feinberg: A graduate student that was with USFW and worked at BNL is conducting a island-wide frog survey and would like to have schools/students participate.

Sayville School District: Several teachers are engaged in environment related programs including monitoring of Greens Creek and the Stony Brook University/BNL Center for Environmental Molecular Sciences research program. This is done through an AP environmental program and a National Science Foundation Research Experience for Teachers grant. They also have an Earth Science Honors program for 50-60 students. They are looking at “push in” programs that will enable implementation of open space stewardship activities in existing programs/courses. Adriana Adler, currently working with CEMS, will run soil and sediment samples collected from Greens Creek by students at BNL’s National Synchrotron Light Source (NSLS) to evaluate them for sulfites. The excitement of the teacher in participating in this level of research has led to an increased level of student excitement about the project and results of the analysis. Adriana will be analyzing the samples in late April and will communicate with the students real time in a videoconference via the internet from the NSLS while running her samples.

Sachem School District: Rich Lemke noted that they conducted a program with Dowling College where high school honors students helped take measurements in the field. As a result of this single day event, 15 of the students pursued science-related academics. Sachem is looking forward to getting involved in the program.

Presentations:

Three presentations were given: Adriana Adler, high school teacher, Sayville School District; Michelle Miller, 5th grade teacher, Middle Country School District; and Rick Nydegger, middle school teacher, Hampton Bays.

Sayville School District:

It was evident that the Greens Creek program with teacher Maria Brown can serve as a model for schools engaging in open space stewardship activities. Sampling and analysis is conducted by students, data is collected and saved, and reports are made to those overseeing the properties. They have involved the school district, the Audubon Society, local legislators, the Town of Islip and the Suffolk County Parks as well as several other groups to make the program possible and to maintain support. The program has included integration of activities between grade levels, student presentations at Town Hall and Rotary meetings, news coverage, student participation in fund raising and student application of techniques and methodologies to participate in rain forest studies including trips to the rain forest.

Numerous additional projects and research by students have come as off shoots of the Greens Creek activities.

Middle Country School District:

Michelle Miller, a 5th grade teacher presented. Michelle is GLOBE Program certified and has been trained in the use of global information systems and use of the program Arc-view. She has taught 5th grade students how to take GPS readings at various sites and input the data to document locations of historic sites in downtown Stony Brook as one example. They have documented issues such as loss of backyards, erosion, vegetation cover in the school-yard and other related activities. The idea that young students can participate in substantive way using modern technology to collect and analyze data was demonstrated by the activities Michelle has been conducting. Michelle was also able to obtain support for her activities through a Newsday grant.

Hampton Bays School District:

Rick noted that they have undertaken activities at the elementary and middle school level to monitor Cormorant Point. They have received help and support from Kevin McAllister and Marty Shea. Some of the issues that need to be understood include the impact to various stakeholders. What seems good for one may not be appreciated by another such as environmentalist versus those who own beach front property and may have their activities restricted as a result of some observations. Another important consideration was to ensure that the student participation did not create more harm than good by assessing the size, frequency and location of visits by the students and teachers. There is an impact that has to be considered when entering some areas, particularly those with sensitive ecosystems.

The school is finding ways to involve all grade levels. As examples, the Middle School Science Club will do a beach clean up in April. They are meeting with Middle and High School teachers to discuss open space stewardship program opportunities for fall of 2006. They are also working on a web site that will be available to document their work, acknowledge funding support and contain related information. Programs will focus on things such as animals and plant inventories, erosion, invasive species, patterns in the data, etc.

As noted in the summary above, three committees were initiated – volunteer lists are included with this email. More will follow in each of these areas.