**GREEN Institute: Open Space Stewardship Program Workshop 1-27-2006 Notes:**

**Opening Session Notes:** The presentations to the full group introduced the questions noted below. These were considered in the breakout sessions.

- What is "stewardship"? research? management? preservation?
- What do property managers get out of this? cleanup? increased numbers? how help?
- What about "non-fun" sites? (litter-filled soccer fields)
- Can privately owned properties be incorporated?
- How can students be eyes-and-ears for enforcement?
- How can we include the larger community?

**Notes from the sessions:**

The notes provided below are from each of the breakout sessions. They reflect issues and concerns as well as ideas for improving and advancing the program. The conclusion reached in each of these sessions, and at the final group discussion, was that no insurmountable barriers to implementing the program existed. There was enthusiastic support from participants to move forward. Most participants noted in the survey that they would be willing to serve on a committee or send someone who was appropriate.

**Breakout Session Room A:**

- Land managers need proof of insurance from schools, which they stated schools generally have readily available.
- For NYS properties, groups of ten or more unrelated children need a permit – this is not an issue, and permits can be issued on a yearly basis.
- How to integrate state standards? Align practice and standards, and consider accountability to testing objectives when designing protocols.
- Consider a means of cross-pollination between teachers
- Either class or club – or both – would work.
- If transportation costs aren't an issue for school districts currently, they may well be an issue in a couple of years.
- Schools could consider partnering with agencies to reduce the need for transportation (properties close to schools, for example).
- Perhaps a grand-writing sub-committee could be formed. Monies could be used for transportation, or to purchase equipment.
- One potential issue was how to determine who owns prospective properties. Hagstrom maps were suggested as being pretty accurate. It was noted that realtors usually have good information. Open-space plans and County Planning agencies are also good sources.
- Town of Brookhaven has a recently completed GIS map layer. Finding who owns a property is fast and straight-forward.

- John Turner suggests the moraine behind Brookhaven Town Hall as a possible site.
- Rights-of-way beside parkways are publicly owned.
- Land managers suggest that care be taking that new programs complement existing programs so as to not duplicate work already being done.
- It's entirely possible that schools will not be allowed access to fragile sites. Where use is restricted, projects will have to be suitable to ages allowed.
- It's important to define – and teach – environmental ethics. Along with defining habitats, students need to understand that there's more to their project than just data collection. What do the data mean?
- It's important to increase awareness of the environment – and it's important that students understand how their behavior in the environment matters.
- Try to sequence involvement through the years, so that older students build on work they did when they were younger.
- Find ways to involve the larger community.
- When asked what kinds of information might be useful to land managers, the following were suggested:
  - for newly acquired properties: community and species characterization
  - for newly acquired properties: layout of trails, and what access points exist
  - ideas for stewardship and use
  - rare species sightings
  - how land managers might standardize programs across sites
  - stormwater run-off, kinds of contamination
  - erosion, wetlands, setbacks
  - environmental indicators, diversity over time
  - prescribed burning, succession monitoring
  - monitoring recreational use – impacts (train erosion, trash, types of use)
  - field recovery as populations recapture habitats
  - open space types have different management needs
  - work with NYS to supplement parks programs

**Breakout Session Room B:**

**What is stewardship?**  Caring for the land:

- Protect against species loss / maintain diversity
- Maintenance / preservation
- Enforcement or requirements pertaining to property
- Promote appropriate outdoor recreation
- Observation of change – preferably from a baseline understanding
- Educational opportunities, experience, advocacy of use
- Transfer knowledge of environmental value and significance, expanding circle of knowledge about the property  (educational component for others)
- Developing a Long-term vision for property and managing it accordingly

- Must understand the differences in what is valued and support expanding the diversity of uses as appropriate
- Consequences of decisions about long-term uses -> understanding, observing, adjusting
- Impacts of use – noting and assessing if within the vision for the property use

**Institutional Issues**
- Continuity of / sustainable funding, transportation, materials – consideration of what would have to be sacrificed to deploy this program within any organization?
- Equipment availability
- Buy-in from assistant superintendent of business within school districts
- In general, properties will need to be within close proximity to school – issues are transportation/bus cost – maybe corporate support can help defray if properties are remote from schools
- Video conferencing can increase communication capabilities
- Next step: matching – need to move forward in the matching process to see how many/if any of these issues are real – will vary between partnerships
  - time sufficient to do research / observation options after school, consider clubs, AP classes and Saturday or vacation programs. In particular, vacation programs or Saturday programs could be used as data collection exercises and normal classroom work used to assess data, develop conclusions, etc.
- Must integrate with existing programs / curriculum
- Incorporate non-research disciplines, English, social studies, community service, etc.
- Accessibility to all student populations
- Start slow with self-selected teachers, then embed into other curriculum
- In-service credits, SCOPE, science interest
- Develop awareness sessions
- Data collection by one group -> analysis by others – see above
- Centralize property between multiple schools/districts to enable better coverage of high priority properties or commonality between groups to facilitate discussion and other types of interaction
- Student safety: TICKS! – establish and develop precautions
- Access / liability are not expected to be obstacles – treat each property individually
- Permitting may be required for some properties
- Land steward resources – gaining ground in getting the necessary support staff that could become involved in the program-> integrate other established environmental groups that traditionally have provided outstanding support in open space preservation, counsel to land stewards, etc.
- EPA can provide resource through proposals and other venues as they have an education mission and processes in place to support them
- Proposal cycles match school budget cycles – it would be useful if EPA cycles matched up with the school cycles to improve opportunities for consideration/matching/etc.

- Baseline inventories -> will help define appropriate parameters to study and improve ability to develop a long term vision for the properties under consideration
- Incorporate existing data into a format that is accessible to all
- Develop ongoing relationships that increase visibility and generate durable support for the related activities:
  - public relations
  - ongoing support
- Elected official support:
  - policy instruction that mandate the program as a sanctioned activity
  - memorialize through policies and legislation such as Town Board Decisions, NYS level, etc.

**Other supportive activities/notes:**
- Rewards – establish a rewards system for participation that will help sustain excitement and increase durability of the program
- Sustainability will be very important to long-term success – see above suggested solutions
- Other projects / outcomes – consider other related activities such as art, literature, etc.

## Breakout Session Room C:

**Institutional Issues**

- Time spent in management not enough:  Many of the managers felt that a lot of their time was taken up with park issues such as trespassers, repair, cleanup meetings and so the time to devote to working with students would be at a premium
- Resources for stewardship:  Most of the owners of the public land were stretched for resources just to maintain their parks so that trying to find dollars to use for stewardship would be almost impossible to find
- School:  time and assessments a challenge:  The perennial problem of how to findthe time in the day/month/year to fit in a new program and not leave the students in a position that would compromise their test scores
- School: time from classes
- Develop trust between schools and property owner:  This will develop as the relationships mature
- Identify specific site per school:  This may take an interagency search to find suitable spaces
- Identify specific needs of property:  This will be true of all properties and is a challenge for us to deal with.
- Limited resources
- Community service programs in schools many schools have community service requirements and this could fulfill some of that

- Connect property needs to the curriculum
- Lack of time in science curriculum to do independent research
- Develop town website information:  Some towns have websites and this program could be put on the town site and highlight what the students are doing photos and general PR stuff.

**End-of-Day notes:**

- Work needs to be recognized and rewarded
- Have a reward ceremony at end of season
- Build an ongoing catalog of work:
    - baseline inventory
    - ongoing monitoring
    - publication
    - history and natural history
- Nature Conservancy as possible year-end model

## Workshop Summary:

As noted above, there is considerable excitement about the program and no insurmountable barriers exist. In addition, several schools have programs in place that can easily transition into this initiative while maintaining their own identity, and several school to steward matches were made during the session.  The program should move forward with full support.