

Bronx River Alliance Eco Team meeting – April 11th, 2019 6-8pm

Ranaqua Conference Room

- **Attendance:**

Angela Tovar – THE POINT (outgoing Eco Team co-chair)
Danica Warns – NYC Parks (NRG)
Debbie Forester – Rocking the Boat
Helen Forgione – Natural Areas Conservancy
Jennifer Epstein – Riverkeeper
Julio Figueroa – Drew Gardens
Louis Kleinman – Waterfront Alliance
Maggie Greenfield – Bronx River Alliance/NYC Parks
Miguel Martinez – Drew Gardens
Omar Fajardo – Drew Gardens
Rebecca Swadek – NYC Parks (NRG)
Toby Sheppard Bloch – Hope Program/Sustainable South Bronx
Michelle Luebke – Bronx River Alliance (Eco Team staff lead)

- **Bronx River Island project**

Rebecca Swadek from the Natural Resources Group in NYC Parks presented on the updated design plans for the restoration project at the island in the Bronx Forest. Currently the west branch of the Bronx River channel holds between 60-80% of the flow, with 20-40% flowing down the eastern branch around the island. The plan is for the eastern branch to be blocked off entirely using engineered log jams to create a freshwater wetland habitat and divert ~90-95% down the west branch. This will better support a deeper channel and mobilization of sediment from the channel bottom, which in turn should allow the Alliance to run upper river paddles through this area longer into the summer.

Questions from attendees (responses):

- Will the design be able to weather storms? (yes, will be anchored)
- Any upland disturbance? (minor for construction access, will avoid breeding bird/fish season)
- When will construction take place? (to begin winter 2021)
- Recommendation to use a pre-qualification list of approved vendors to complete parts of construction one at a time

- **Group Discussion and 2019 Priority-Setting**

We discussed projects and priorities for the future, including who else should be at the table in our discussions. One major suggestion that was brought up is that there should be an option for virtual participation in meetings for those who cannot make it in person.

Other groups to be included were:

- [US Forest Service NYC Urban Field Station](#)

- [Lehman College's Environmental Science group](#)
- Oshun Egbe, a faith-based group with a strong connection to rivers [more info](#)

Other 2019 Projects:

- Fish stocking/ monitoring
- Forest Management Framework/Conservatories coordination in natural areas management – will be happening in Bronx Park this year with NYBG, Zoo, Alliance, Parks, and Natural Areas Conservancy (NAC)

- **Climate Change Survey & Community Engagement**

The Alliance will be conducting surveys of residents around climate change as part of the update to the 2010 [Intermunicipal Watershed Management Plan](#) that will update watershed-wide priority projects, involve more community groups (from Westchester County through the South Bronx), and include climate resiliency. The Alliance is working with Westchester County and the Bronx Borough President's office along with a few other community organizations, so the group discussed what that would look like, who has already been reached, who should administer the surveys, and what the public should know about what will happen with the information.

- Issuing survey throughout watershed: What do people know? Are they concerned? Is it affecting lives?
 - Will use info to tailor outreach efforts
 - Hope to have youth lead surveys within their own communities since people are more likely to feel comfortable talking to someone from their own community
 - Door-to-door canvassing, in person in multiple languages (if possible)
 - Helen recommended reaching out to/teaming up with Urban Field Station for guidance
- THE POINT and other groups within the South Bronx have tried to engage people about climate resiliency and climate change planning with community with no results
 - Hunts Point Climate Resiliency study already completed by city, no action taken

Angela noted concerns that this feedback will go nowhere and the community might have survey fatigue and not want to participate in yet another study without seeing results. For example, there are at least 27 different plans for the South Bronx with residents being surveyed multiple times and the residents seeing very few results. We want to make sure that we capture all the information that has already been gathered in a way that people feel like they are contributing, without promising outcomes that we cannot guarantee. If these surveys are communicated as research and potential projects to be included in the final plan, already-surveyed communities may be more willing to participate in the process.

- **Advocacy**

- **Creating Advocacy Sub-List**
 - There was interest in creating a sub list of the Ecology Team distribution list for when to take action on issues that arise for the Ecology Team to sign onto campaigns, submit a comment letter, etc.

- Maybe form committee of people dedicated to responding to advocacy issues/write letters through an **opt-in**
- **Clean Water Act**
 - The EPA and Army Corps of Engineers have proposed a change to the definition of the waterways, which would weaken the protection of our critical natural resources. Find out more from our partners at [Waterkeeper Alliance](#) and [Riverkeeper](#).
- **USACE Storm Surge Barriers**
 - 4/20 happy hour at Patagonia to learn about plan
 - More information available [here](#)
- **NYS Plastic Bag Legislation**
 - Cuomo's bill only bans certain weight plastic bags → leads to stores relying more on different weight plastic bags and paper bags (a full bag ban would be better, with reusable bag giveaways)
- **DEC Water Quality Standards**

Announcements/upcoming events

- Bronx River Alliance is updating their 5 year education plan – goal to work on reaching and informing students and parents simultaneously

Eco Team co-chair nominations

- Accepting Eco Team co-chair nominations for 2019 to vote on at next meeting on June 25th
 - The Ecology Team, a committee of scientists, city, state, and federal agency representatives, and local community representatives, serves as a forum to discuss, evaluate, and prioritize environmental studies and on-the-ground projects that promote ecological health of the river and its watershed. The team ensures that all projects, both large and small, are in accordance with the ecological principles set by the team and that these principles guide the Alliance's Watershed Policy and Planning and Conservation Crew work. Every year, the Ecology Team members elect two co-chairs to represent them; if a co-chair is interested, there may be an opportunity also to serve on the Bronx River Alliance Board of Directors.
 - The Ecology Team meets quarterly, with the co-chairs advising on agenda topics and leading discussions. There may be additional meetings to advise on comment letters in between meetings or as other issues arise, but it is not a huge time commitment.
 - If you are interested in being considered, please [email Michelle](#) with your name and a short blurb about why you would like to serve as a co-chair.

Next Eco Team meeting on June 25th from 6-8p