

Ashokan Watershed Stream Management Program
Education and Outreach Working Group Meeting Notes
May 26, 2015, 5:00pm to 6:30pm
AWSMP Office, Shokan, NY

In attendance:

Jennifer Bowman: Watershed Educator, CCEUC/AWSMP
Brent Gotsch: Watershed Youth Educator, CCEUC/AWSMP
Danyelle Davis, New York City, Department of Environmental Protection
Kerissa Battle, Head of Non-profit, Community Greenways Collaborative
Matt Savatgy: Youth Educator for CCEUC/Onteora School District Elementary
Martin Bernstein: Program Director at the Ashokan Center
Diane Galusha, Catskill Water Corporation
Beth Waterman, Retired from Hudson River Estuary Program, Currently with the Phoenicia Library

Announcements:

Jennifer Bowman, opened the meeting with a quick welcome. Jen also requested that participants share any brief announcements they had with the group.

Jen explained that AWSMP is hosting a stream walk on the Little Beaver Kill on June 6 at Kenneth Wilson State Campground, at the southeast entrance. Family Fun and Fish Day will be held on June 27 at Kenneth Wilson State Campground, in Woodstock. Volunteers from Trout Unlimited and DEC will be helping with the event. AWSMP will also be participating with the Rondout Valley Scout Camporee on June 13th to teach Stream Ecology and Macro invertebrate science for families and scouting groups

Matt shared that Bennett Elementary School is having their annual Earth Day event on June 6. They will have 17 presenters, including AWSMP, DEC, DEP, Trout Unlimited, and the Ashokan Center.

Beth shared that the Catskill Interpretive Center will have ribbon cutting the week of June 22. There will be several special events happening in connection to the Center ceremony. Diane inquired if there is any involvement from the AWSMP E&O Working Group in the creation of nature trails around the Center, which there is not. Beth, whom founded the fishing collection at the Phoenicia Library, explained that Jerry Bartlett's Angling Collection is celebrating its 20th Anniversary. The Phoenicia Library is interested in doing a summer [July] macroinvertebrate identification education program with kids on Bridge Street on the Esopus Creek.

Jen gave a brief review of the discussion from the last E&O WG meeting in February, and the follow-up work that AWSMP staff and Kerissa have been doing with the information collected at the meeting. AWSMP has been working to condense and outline major themes, common threads of interest and concerns, or needs about water and watershed education and outreach in the Ashokan Watershed.

Jen explained that this meeting would not cover all the topics discussed at the former meeting, but seek to outline major focal areas for current and future meetings, starting with more detail about the

Education and Outreach Working Group Process, and then moving on to discuss an outline of potential projects for the working group.

E and O Working Group Process:

The Education and Outreach Working Group (E&O WG) currently includes two positions of Chair, and Co-Chair, as part of the larger AWSMP Stakeholder Council. Both positions have voting rights with the Stakeholder Council to provide feedback for AWSMP's programs, and include the task of occasionally reporting Education & Outreaching Working Group information and activities of the group back to the Council. Kerissa Battle has accepted the post of Chair for the E&O WG. We are currently looking for someone to fill the vacancy of the co-chair position. AWSMP is looking for recommendations and ideas for anyone whom might be interested in the co-chair position. The co-chair position would help keep the education and outreach network active, and assist the Chair and working group to fortify and create connections with formal schools and educator networks. The co-chair would also help to develop activities that work to amplify the collaborative efforts and practices of the working group. It may be helpful for the co-chair to have training and fundamental experience with watershed and floodplain science and management practices to help inform and advise the working group.

Website:

AWSMP is looking to update the webpage for the E&O WG, and connect it to a new education focused webpage on the AWSMP website that is currently in development. The new page will provide a space for AWSMP to highlight Matt's youth education projects, programs and accomplishments with Watershed Detectives and other education events, programs, activities and opportunities. It was mentioned that the new education page may also be a good place to highlight activities of the E&O Working Group and possibly be a place to host a working, interactive calendar to post upcoming events for programs that members of the E&O WG are organizing, hosting and need volunteer help with.

It was mentioned that the website, www.Catskillstreams.org has an online calendar, which may be a useful resource to partner with for posting and highlighting water and watershed education events, programs and activities. This will require some investigation to determine more details, or possibly be used as a model for a community watershed calendar. It was also offered as a possibility for the E&O WG members sending news of events and programs to AWSMP staff, who could then forward it on to Dave Burns, who manages the catskillstreams.org website. This level of online collaboration will require some research into website legalities and risk management practices for AWSMP, (i.e... endorsements, political support, advocacy) as AWSMP must remain neutral, and science focused.

Volunteer Network Project Idea:

Kerissa spoke about the common concern and collective feedback from participants at the February meeting, and from experience working with groups in the region over the years, about the unanimous need and interest in finding and organizing volunteers for programs and projects for different organizations. Through the synthesis of feedback from the group, AWSMP has framed the possibility of creating a type of "Healthy Watersheds Volunteer Network." A network could be created by collating

volunteers from the working group organizations with needs and interest in an organized watershed volunteer body.

Some of the logistical questions from group discussion about the possibility of a volunteer network included: Is there an actual need for volunteers, and if so, what? What does it take to run a successful volunteer network? Which organizations are looking for volunteers? How would we conduct a skills and needs inventory for a volunteer network to be effective? What is the status of volunteer networks with each organization in the working group? Does anyone currently have a volunteer coordinator? Would each participating group be able to manage volunteers if they did participate in a network, and what skill sets would they need from volunteers?

As a part of Cornell Cooperative Extension, AWSMP may have basic volunteer management infrastructure and resources available to help oversee a watershed volunteer network, but more information on AWSMP's ability to oversee a volunteer network is needed for legal purposes with CCE and DEP. With Kerissa's help as Chair, the working group unanimously agreed that it should create a needs and skills inventory assessment for participating programs, potential projects, and interested volunteers. If a shared calendar is not possible on the future AWSMP education webpage, a shared calendar, such as a potential online Google Calendar may be useful for the E&O WG to collect volunteer network needs, information and opportunities across organizations.

Matt explained in his daily work with the schools, yearly school events are always in need of volunteer help, and it's nice to mix up the volunteer network opportunities and skill sets to keep things fresh, and effective. Schools can also use mentors for students at the middle and high school levels. Working to create a list of volunteer skill sets can be helpful in developing ideas for new programs and activities. There are teachers who greatly appreciate the help of volunteers from time to time, and working to create a network where skills and needs are matched up for activities, classroom events and programs could be tremendously useful.

Martin also shared input that the Ashokan Center can always use volunteers for activities and events such as tree plantings and other programs areas. It can be difficult for the Center to recruit new volunteers because background check logistics are time-consuming and expensive. He shared information about a proposed watershed event, tentatively scheduled in May of 2016, "Love Your Local Watershed Day" that would require a large volunteer presence, if approval is granted. They also face the challenge of being limited in their capacity to engage community members who may wish to participate more in their events and programs through volunteer opportunities. They are always looking for volunteers who care about their local community and want to be a part of something.

A broad, but important inquiry highlighted that needs further investigation was: Would it be legally possible with insurance policies to share volunteers between organizations and projects? Is there a legal and insurance approved method for an insured/background checked person be shared with another organization? Would one insurance carrier accept the background check of another affiliate organization and their insurance carrier? For organizations that require background checks for volunteers, one blanket method and policy is unlikely to be an option. AWSMP will follow up about this inquiry.

Jen explained that AWSMP is looking at the possibility of creating a “Citizen Science Stream Monitoring Corps /Group” in the future. Such a program would require a person to organize and coordinate volunteers, and would be mostly volunteer run.

The group discussed logistics of what the needs are for having a volunteer network partnership and the work involved in making that happen, and if it’s warranted. It was pointed out that a clear understanding of what is needed is as important as clarity on the volume of work and infrastructure involved in managing a volunteer network, and whether AWSMP is willing and able to do. A organizing a volunteer network can easily become a full time task. Matt suggested that the working group collect information and data from participants of the group who are willing and able to offer their skills and experience to help outline the logistics of a volunteer network partnership and what that would involve.

In connection to such an effort, Kerissa stressed the importance of the group having a clear idea of the categories of volunteers and skills. What skill sets do we want, or need to have with volunteers and projects? What communities and audiences are we not reaching? It may prove to be helpful and efficient to have a volunteer network skills inventory that we can refer to, and important for creating a solid and reliable volunteer network.

Some useful skills pointed out for Volunteers to have included, but are not limited to:

- Lecture skills
- Invasive species knowledge
- Plantings/physical labor, heavy duty gardening tasks
- Plant knowledge/phenology
- Basic understanding of Geology

Project Ideas:

Jen explained a visual Kanban style chart she created of synthesized notes and highlights of important work the WG expressed interest in from the first meeting. The chart is visual outline of potential projects, common concerns, needs and strengths of the Working group to help prioritize goals and information into actionable tasks and actions. Leslie also created an electronic matrix (that we will share with the WG) of important highlights from the working group to help outline and delineate potential action items and projects.

In looking at the outline of ideas the WG has expressed common need and interest in, we are clearly working to fill niches and gaps of common concern. These areas of mutual concern include the need to reach out to landowners/business owners in the region to strengthen local involvement and community participation in the watershed, improve diversity attendance and participation, and the desire to help teachers and schools facing challenges [with science curriculum] due to state testing.

The chart outlines possibilities and tasks that are actually in process, as a visual.

Kerissa offered to create an informational outline of each working group member’s feedback about creating a collaborative volunteer network. She will email a list of questions to the Working Group

members. The questions will include things like what are your [organization, group, school's] specific needs for volunteers, what skill sets are sought after for volunteers, if existing volunteer networks exist with each organization, what community resources do you have that are influenced by volunteer assistance or lack thereof, etc... She also clarified that through the meeting discussion, it became clear that a skills inventory for volunteers would be more useful for the group, than a formal volunteer registry.

Beth explained that the library has a wide variety of programs and that each program area has different objectives, so it is helpful to have a clear idea of what each group requires to be effective, what they can realistically accomplish, and help they may require along the way.

Since there are many important topics outlined by the Working Group that need additional detailed discussion, and most of which are related, that the Working Group focus on one highlighted topic at a time in each meeting. Kerissa will work with AWSMP to create such a list for the WG.

In discussion about a potential collaborative volunteer network, Danyelle highlighted a number of preliminary questions that may help the working group develop clear list of measurable objectives for such a project, in relation to the mission of AWSMP.

In connection to AWSMP's work, Danyelle inquired if the Ulster County Soil and Water Conservation District team at AWSMP have need of volunteer assistance for projects and programs, and if so, what are those needs? For example, photo monitoring is an excellent way to engage volunteers who may have limited technical skills, but may still assist the program. There may also be opportunities for Soil and Water to provide basic training for volunteers to provide assistance with stream management and assessment programs, with the hope that such volunteer activities may become autonomous.

Jen offered feedback that many of these discussion points connect with interest that AWSMP has in creating a citizen science program in the future, in connection to its focus, main programs and partnerships. Collaborative work on clarifying volunteer opportunities, skills, needs and a network outline could easily connect to such a potential program in the future. Jen also re-stated the focus of the Education and Outreach Working Group: To promote stream stewardship and the enjoyment of streams. The detailed objectives of the group are being re-evaluated and delineated through this new working group, and its progression of ideas in connection to the overall focus.

Another question raised was if the E&O WG currently includes anyone, or is connecting with anyone from the arts community? It was noted that Michelle Sparks was the driving force behind the very popular "Paint the Stream" project a number of years ago, and that there might be potential opportunities for artistic engagement in the future.

Danyelle explained that Cornell University Human Resources office helped create a needs assessment of the perception of people's needs around stream management back in 2004, and that we might find that survey design as a potential model to help with our current endeavors in collecting information about a volunteer network and citizen science program.

Project Updates

Matt explained that the Watershed Detectives Program received grant funding from CWC to expand the work from Onteora school district at Bennett to the other two primary schools with Phoenicia and Woodstock. He's looking forward to the work of expanding the program over the next year and seeing how that impact unfolds. Matt is also currently working with Town of Olive Recreation Program to establish a pilot environmental and watershed education program with their existing recreation programs this summer. With the resources available, they hope the project will help to connect participants with watershed education and bridge the learning gap for students over their summer break. They hope that the feedback helps to create a space for a regular summer water education program.

The group reiterated the importance of evaluating educational initiatives, programs and projects to have a clear idea of how we can help support each other in this work.

Martin gave a brief overview of the Ashokan Center's current week long summer camp program working with DEP in Queens, titled "H to Go". This is the first summer camp they've conducted in many years, and they are excited. The camp is designed for youth age 12 to 16 years old from the NYC area, and focuses on streams and watershed topics, with many off-site visits to various locations in the watershed.

Martin explained that The Ashokan Center is seeking grant funding for two new projects. "Riparian Rangers" is a program for youth who have graduated from Matt Savatgy's Watershed Detectives Program. Students will participate after school, mostly on the Ashokan Center campus, and continue learning about water science from where they left off with Matt's program. The Center will be keeping track of metrics, and evaluating how students benefit from the continuation of academic and social learning from Matt's program into their middle school years in this new program that seeks to reinforce the importance of water quality and environmental stewardship.

"Love your Local Watershed Day" (which may be re-named) is a proposed community event that brings people and local organizations from upstate and NYC together in a fun environment to learn. The Center recognizes that locally, many people have long-time, very strong personal objections and issues with DEP, and are sensitive to sharing space with them. The Center seeks to invite DEP Commissioner, Emily Lloyd to speak at the event, and possible local politicians to participate in the event to help bridge the gap between upstate and downstate residents who share a watershed and create a space for communal enjoyment of the watershed. The event will include artistic components with an art show for youth. The Center may also host a cleanup day along Route 28A, at which, volunteers will select safe, interesting pieces of garbage to be recycled and upcycled into art projects by the Riparian Rangers group, and put on display at the Watershed Day event, proposed for 2016.

Kerissa shared a project she's working on at CGC about monitoring sites, and network building for phenology (study of life cycle monitoring with a climate change focus). The phenology project is a part of the New York Phenology Project, a regional network, which is currently active from NYC to the Hudson Valley, with a few sites north, in the Adirondacks, and south, on Long Island. There is one current monitoring site in the Catskills on private property, and will soon be adding the Olive Library. She would

like to expand monitoring sites to include more riparian areas, and is willing to offer training workshops to help teach volunteers about phenology monitoring methods and activities, if there's enough interest in people participating. Monitoring activities can be very low key for people with limited physical ability, or time. There are active monitoring sites in the phenology network along the Hudson River valley, and Long Island that are doing well, and she would like to see more network expansion in the Catskills since so many great organizations and individuals are doing similar science and educational work. Diane mentioned that the Catskill Center has three site locations that may be good options for phenology monitoring sites, working with the Catskill Center network. The Catskill Recreation Center in Arkville (outside the Ashokan Watershed), under the direction of Becky Manning, may also have potential for expanding phenology projects in the region.

Project Priorities and Action Items:

Kerissa highlighted actionable items for her to work on, with AWSMP for the working group discussion follow up. This includes emailing the working group members to collate feedback of a skills inventory for a potential volunteer network, as well as looking into the legalities of background check logistics, and the technicalities of posting information for the working group on the AWSMP website, which will be reported back to the working group.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be in September, followed by meetings in December and February. Dates will be sent out. Jen is still collecting feedback from the Doodle poll she sent out in spring. The time for the Working Group to meet was discussed as the meeting time is challenging for all parties involved. The two possible meeting times proposed are: 4:30 to 6pm or 5pm to 6:30pm, which the group has used for the last two meetings. Jen still welcomes feedback about meeting times and dates by email:

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