

**Lower Hudson Coalition of Conservation Districts
Strategic Plan
2006 - 2009**

Mission:

To serve as local leaders in a National-State-Local partnership to conserve, protect and enhance the natural resources, with a focus on water quality, of the Hudson River Estuary and its watershed.

Vision:

The Hudson River Valley will once again serve as a source of inspiration on a global scale, proving to all that a clean, healthy environment can co-exist with a sustainable economy.

*Lauren Prezorski, Coordinator
NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee*

Albany Co. Soil & Water Conservation District

Orange Co. Soil & Water Conservation District

Columbia Co. Soil & Water Conservation District

Putnam Co. Soil & Water Conservation District

Dutchess Co. Soil & Water Conservation District

Rensselaer Co. Soil & Water Conservation District

Greene Co. Soil & Water Conservation District

Rockland Co. Soil & Water Conservation District

New York City Soil & Water Conservation District

Ulster Co. Soil & Water Conservation District

Westchester Co. Soil & Water Conservation District

Abstract:

The LHCCD was formed in 1998. Since its inception over \$500,000.00 of projects have been completed. As the LHCCD looks toward the future it will strive to support the local Soil and Water Conservation Districts covering the Hudson River Estuary Watershed and coordinate individual efforts. In addition, the LHCCD will continue to implement projects that benefit the entire watershed. In the upcoming years, the LHCCD has decided to focus on four major target areas: (1) small farm agriculture, (2) stormwater management, (3) farmland conversion and protection and (4) drainage issues. The LHCCD strategic plan has been developed to describe the role of the LHCCD and the future goals that will be used to implement water quality improvements in the upcoming years.

LHCCD Profile and History:

Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) are local sub-divisions of the state government created under state law to carry out a program for the conservation, use, and development of soil, water, and related natural resources. Established along county boundaries, Soil and Water Conservation Districts have received national recognition for delivering a multitude of conservation projects at the local level throughout the United States over the last 50 years.

A guiding principle of hands on implementation, and a desire to promote stewardship through education, coupled with strong field level technical capabilities and an ability to accomplish conservation projects on private lands, have all served to forge strong bonds between Districts and their local communities. Each SWCD is governed by a local board of directors, which makes program decisions based

on the needs of each County. This allows each SWCD to focus on the specific needs of their respective county and deliver services based on local priorities. Examples of the types of projects SWCD's are involved with include, but are not limited to; county-wide stormwater program coordination, agricultural assistance for water quality protection, project advisory and review, streambank stabilization, habitat restoration and mitigation, water quality monitoring and municipal, technical and classroom education. While all of these projects have a direct local benefit many of the projects have watershed scale benefits as well. The motto think globally, act locally has never been truer than in describing Soil and Water Conservation District work in the second half of the twentieth century.

While the work of individual Districts is of the utmost importance, it is a building block in the larger sense. Realizing that meaningful water quality improvements can only be achieved on a watershed wide basis, and that a coordinated local effort was needed to protect this regions most valuable natural asset, the Hudson River, the Lower Hudson Coalition of Conservation Districts (LHCCD) was formally established in 1999. Comprised of 11 Soil and Water Conservation Districts encompassing the entire Hudson River Estuary, the LHCCD uses the existing local program delivery infrastructure to facilitate cooperative, multi-county efforts in assessment, planning, and implementation of projects to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural resources of the Hudson River Estuary and Hudson Valley. Furthermore, the LHCCD actively seeks collaborative relationships with other agencies and organizations with similar goals.

Since 1998, the LHCCD has worked toward unifying efforts among its member SWCDs. The diverse scope of services provided by individual Districts has made this collaborative effort challenging. Despite this, the LHCCD has been building momentum and making valuable contributions to the Lower Hudson Watershed.

Collaborative LHCCD efforts amongst the member SWCDs over the past six years include implementation, planning and education projects. These projects include;

LHCCD Vision for the Future

Since the LHCCD was formed in 1998 a number of changes have taken place that effect how the LHCCD operates. To begin, the Hudson River Estuary Program has grown considerably, as have a number of other watershed groups, both locally and regionally. To avoid the duplication of others efforts, the LHCCD has decided to narrow its focus for new projects. This does not mean that the LHCCD will limit its involvement to specific issues; more over, the Coalition will recognize the efforts of others and lend support to further its accomplishments. At the same time, the LHCCD plans to target specific areas where SWCDs have a key role or where a need has been identified for assistance. Through this approach, the LHCCD will be able to focus on areas where Districts have the greatest experience and expertise. As one of the few groups that cover the entire Hudson Estuary Watershed the LHCCD will strive to coordinate and improve communication among the many partners in the region.

Partners:

Since its inception, the Lower Hudson Coalition of Conservation Districts has been successful in bringing together a diverse group of Soil and Water Conservation Districts to address the natural resource and water quality issues on a regional scale. The LHCCD recognizes that much of this work could not have been accomplished without the help of others. Over the course of the next several years the LHCCD will work on enhancing and expanding partnerships; lending support and assistance where needed. Existing and potential partners that have been identified include:

Existing and Future Partners

Local	State	Federal	Regional
SWCD Boards	Soil & Water Conservation Committee	Natural Resource Conservation Service	Hudson River Watershed Alliance
County Legislators	Dept. of Agriculture & Markets	Federal Emergency Management Agency	Resource Conservation & Development Council
County Executives	Dept. of Environmental Conservation (DEC)	USDA –Rural Resources	Hudson Valley Agricultural Partnership
Town Supervisors	DEC – Hudson River Estuary Program	Hudson River Navigator	NY/NJ Harbor Estuary Program
Mayors	Greenway	Environmental Protection Agency	
Highway Departments	Dept. of Health	US Fish & Wildlife Service	
Planning Departments	Dept. of State	Army Corps of Engineers	
Regional Council	New York Association of Conservation Districts	US Geological Survey	
Cornell Cooperative Extension	New York Conservation District Employees Association		
Environmental Management Councils	State Emergency Management Office		
Non-Governmental Organizations			
Watershed Groups			
Farmland Protection Boards			
Farm Bureau/Grange			
Water Quality Coordinating Committees			
Health Departments			
Environmental Health Departments			
Colleges and Universities			
Utilities			

A key partner listed above is the Hudson River Watershed Alliance (HRWA). The HRWA is a regionally active group, which aims to coordinate the efforts of all local groups working in the Hudson River Watershed. The LHCCD is a member on the steering committee and is fully committed to supporting all efforts to create a coordinated approach to natural resource protection throughout the region.

LHCCD Focus Areas:

While it is important that each District focus on the needs of their county, collectively the LHCCD can enhance individual efforts to achieve regional goals. To be most effective in upcoming years, the LHCCD will focus efforts on water resources and land use issues. Under these two areas, the LHCCD will continue to provide both education and implementation services.

Water Resources:

Historically SWCDs have focused strongly on surface water protection. While this is still a critical component to improving the health of the Hudson River, the rapidly growing population in the Hudson Valley has created a need for groundwater protection and conservation. In the upcoming years, the LHCCD will continue to provide technical assistance and education on surface water protection. In addition, the LHCCD will begin to take a larger role in the protection of groundwater resources. Through education and implementation projects, the LHCCD will strive to ensure groundwater and surface water resources are plentiful and healthy.

Land Use:

As important as protecting our water quality is protecting and conserving our land resource base. In fact, land use decisions often have an impact on water quality. Communities in the Hudson Valley continuously make decisions that alter how land is being used. Accommodating housing needs, economic growth, and open space preservation and rural character preservation is a difficult balance, but the wrong decisions can over tax natural resources; depleting groundwater resources; degrading water quality and causing increased flooding. Through education and technical assistance, the LHCCD will work with local decision makers to ensure that natural resources are considered before land use change occurs and to protect resources during new construction.

It is important to note that there is a great amount of overlap in these two focus areas. The quality of our water resources is directly affected by the land use of its surrounding watershed. Likewise, poor land use decisions often have a direct impact on water quantity and quality within the area of development. Even small changes can have a noticeable effect. For this reason, the LHCCD has selected four (4) target areas on which to concentrate. These goals can only be met by addressing both land use and water quality objectives.

Target Area 1: Agriculture

Small farms and horse farms continue to increase in the Hudson Valley making up a large portion of the agricultural community. In order to protect agriculture in the region, it is critical that financial and technical assistance, as well as, recognition be provided to the small farm sector to ensure sustainability of agriculture and agricultural landscapes in the Hudson Valley. In order to maintain the pastoral landscape of the Hudson Valley, all farms must be protected.

Typically, small farms and horse farms do not compete well in Federal and State cost-share conservation programs. Environmental issues on small farms usually pose a smaller threat to water quality than those of large farms. Yet, as small farm numbers continue to increase, their cumulative effect poses an increased threat to natural resources.

GOAL: The LHCCD will seek funding to pilot a small farms grant program, which will offer implementation funding for water quality Best Management Practices (BMP). These grants will follow current State grant guidelines for cost-share rates and need determination based on assessment and planning under the New York State Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Program. It is the intention that an individual grant will not exceed \$10,000 per farm. Informal proposals will be presented by the respective Soil and Water Conservation District to the LHCCD and the appropriate District will administer funded projects. Since the new AEM Base Program provides technical assistance funding, only the cost of BMPs will be eligible.

Target Area 2: Farmland Conversion and Protection

The high demand for new housing and business is putting a strain on many of the Hudson Valley's natural resources, including farmland, forestland, and both surface and groundwater quality and quantity. Farms and large tracts of forests are impacted by suburban sprawl as these lands are being whittled away in the conversion to low density residential and small business land uses. Agriculture is vitally important to the Hudson Valley, both as a land use and an economic resource. As farmers face the pressures of low market values for their products and new regulatory requirements, they are too often forced to sell off portions of

their land resources in order to meet the economic demands on their businesses. While prime agricultural soils are also the most ideal soils for new development, the loss of these soils puts added strain on the productivity of farms. It is no doubt a dilemma when it comes to keeping farms viable and encouraging environmentally smart development.

GOAL: Although it is the goal of the LHCCD to keep farms active and viable, conversion is sometimes inevitable. When these circumstances arise, the LHCCD will offer assistance to farmers in making sound decisions on the best land to preserve for his/her future farm interest. A new worksheet has been developed under the State Agriculture Environmental Management (AEM) Program for Farmland Conversion. The LHCCD seeks to test these worksheets as a pilot program. As part of this pilot, farmers that have been identified under AEM Tier 1 as having made the decision to sell a portion of their farm will be asked to complete the Farmland Conversion Tier 2 worksheet with their local Soil and Water Conservation District. After field-testing these worksheets, the LHCCD will provide the NYS AEM Technical Committee with feedback on how well they meet the needs of farms considering a partial sale of their land. A committee of the LHCCD will work with the AEM Technical Committee to make any necessary changes.

Target Area 3: Stormwater

Stormwater runoff is one of the few water quality impairments that affect all regions of the Lower Hudson Valley. High population densities and the demand for new development have resulted in an increased volume of polluted runoff entering both surface and groundwater resources. The counties covered by the Lower Hudson Coalition of Conservation Districts contain over one-fourth of the regulated communities in New York's Phase II Stormwater Program. This highly concentrated number of regulated municipalities has made stormwater management assistance to localities a primary focus of the LHCCD. However, many smaller communities, although not regulated, are also impacted by polluted runoff, particularly from new construction sites. In the upcoming years, the LHCCD will provide assistance to both regulated and non-regulated communities, as well as the development industry.

GOAL #1: Continue working with the Hudson River Estuary Program to deliver Phase II support through the Stormwater Outreach Contract. In the fourth year of funding the LHCCD has identified the need to provide assistance in developing funding mechanisms to support local stormwater programs, the need to provide additional training to highway department employees rather than just superintendents, and to address stormwater practice failure following large storm events. The LHCCD will also continue to provide general support for the MS4 program, as there is a need for ongoing education and assistance, particularly in the East of Hudson Watershed where heightened requirements are required.

GOAL #2: Although a large portion of the Lower Hudson Watershed communities are designated MS4 communities, many are not. However, stormwater runoff is a major source of water quality impairments in these areas. For this reason, the LHCCD will seek to extend stormwater management support to these areas as well. Through contractor and Code Enforcement Officer training, the LHCCD will work to ensure that stormwater management practices are implemented on all construction sites one acre or greater.

GOAL #3: There remains a great need for continued education on the impacts of polluted runoff. Research has shown that the most effective education tool is through mass media; particularly television and radio. The LHCCD will explore these avenues to increase public awareness and understanding of stormwater runoff. The LHCCD will seek funding to develop a television and/or radio public service announcement to provide public education on how individual actions effect water quality.

Target Area 4: Drainage Issues

Following a recent trend of heavy storm events, the LHCCD is concerned over the impacts these storms are having on local streams. As a result of these storms, stream channels have an increased amount of debris, which is exacerbating flooding in certain areas. In many areas, poor development has lead to an

increased frequency of flooding. Although most municipalities have ordinances in place to address floodplain development, too often variants to these local laws are granted. As a result, existing stormwater infrastructures are unable to handle the increased volume of runoff during storm events and stormwater retrofitting is required. Individual Districts will continue to address the needs of retrofitting, however, on a broader scale, the LHCCD will seek to educate local decision makers on the long-term effects of improper site development.

GOAL: The LHCCD will begin to address this issue by hosting a workshop on flooding. This workshop will focus on the changes that are occurring to local streams and what is happening to cause them, as well as, what can be done to address the issues. Planning boards will be a primary audience.

Summary of Projects Completed by LHCCD to Date

Project Name	Type of Project	Year Completed	Funding Source(s)	Costs
Non – Point Source Assessment of all Hudson River Sub-Watersheds	Planning	2001	NYSDEC	\$27,000
Streamwalk Program (7 Counties)	Planning, Education	2005	HREP	\$27,000
Stormwater Conferences	Education	2001-2006	HVRC, HREP, LHCCD	\$10,000/yr.
Printing and Distribution of stormwater posters and fact sheets	Education	2002	NYSDEC	\$6,000
Agricultural Environmental Management – Horse farm worksheet development	Education, Planning	2005	HREP	\$5,000
Agricultural Environmental Management – Horse farm fact sheet and brochure published	Education	2005	HREP	\$6,500
Certified Professional in Stormwater Quality Training	Education	2003	LHCCD	\$400
SEQRA Training	Education	2003	LHCCD	\$200
Soil Bio-engineering Training	Education	2001	LHCCD	\$300
Tributary WRAPS Summaries	Planning	2002	HRVC	\$7,000
UHC Horse Conference	Education	2005	HREP	\$6,000
Stormwater Outreach Program	Education, Planning, Implementation	2003-ongoing	HREP	\$360,000
Clean Sweep	Planning, Implementation	2004	NYSSWCC	\$4,500