



PRESS RELEASE

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service establishes partnership in Yonkers to engage youth and city residents

August 29, 2014

Contact(s):

Michael Horne, 973-702-7266, Michael_Horne@fws.gov

Tylar Greene, 413-658-8139, Tylar_Greene@fws.gov



USFWS chief Cynthia Martinez addresses press and crowd in Yonkers, NY

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is expanding its urban conservation initiative through a collaborative partnership in Yonkers, New York. The partnership between Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey and the Yonkers-based Groundwork Hudson Valley will engage residents from the southwest area of Yonkers in restoring land near public housing along the Saw Mill River.

"I'm excited to build on our existing partnership with Groundwork, as we begin restoration along the Saw Mill and Wallkill rivers, both unique and important places for wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation opportunities," said Michael Horne, refuge manager of the Wallkill River Refuge. "This is a two-way transfer of ideas. Many issues facing habitat restoration along the Saw Mill River are similar to what we face along the Wallkill River in New Jersey. We can provide our science and work with the students and residents from nearby communities."

The partnership, called Wallkill Connection: Fostering Urban River Stewards, aims to build on and support numerous existing efforts to clean up and revitalize the Saw Mill River to establish it as a valued resource and attraction for residents and visitors. Participants will visit Wallkill River Refuge to learn about riverside restoration and refuge staff will make return visits to Yonkers to lend their expertise about restoration along the Saw Mill River. Additionally, the partnership will support youth employment for students that attend public high schools in Yonkers including Riverside, Saunders and Gorton.

"The purpose of our work at Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge is to expose our youth to careers and opportunities they would never otherwise know about," said Curt Collier of Groundwork USA. "It also is a way to connect the work the youth are doing in Yonkers, such as removing invasives and restoring riparian habitats, with the goals of the Refuge. This helps the youth to see their work as an extension of the larger environmental work going on across our nation."

Groundwork and Wallkill River Refuge have been working together since 2011, and have brought dozens of Yonkers students to the refuge over a series of visits. In 2012, the refuge hosted Groundwork's national conference, giving delegates from across the country the opportunity to see this partnership in action.

The project is now one of 14 urban wildlife refuge partnerships in the country that have been designated by the Service since September 2013. The partnership competed nationally and will receive \$35,410 of initial funding, which is provided through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's (NFWF) Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Program. The program focuses on the stewardship and restoration of coastal, wetland and riparian ecosystems across the country.

The Service's urban wildlife refuge partnerships raise awareness and capacity to engage a new and more diverse constituency in meaningful, collaborative ways to nurture an appreciation of wildlife conservation.

The mission of the Groundwork USA network is to bring about the sustained regeneration, improvement and management of the physical environment by developing community-based partnerships which empower people, businesses and organizations to promote environmental, economic and social well-being.

AddThis Sharing Buttons