

Increasing Public Awareness Protects Freshwater Resources

The media projects of the Eastern Lake Ontario Dune/Salmon River Steward Program are effectively educating the public about New York's natural resources, helping to train future environmental sciences leaders, and providing program partners with a valuable resource.

The Steward program is managed by New York Sea Grant (NYSG) in partnership with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation, and The Nature Conservancy. The Stewards promote ecologically responsible use of publicly-accessible waterfront properties that boast rare and unique habitats in Oswego and Jefferson counties. In addition to daily monitoring at these areas, the college and graduate students working as stewards are communicating the message of the proper recreational use of the resources through media projects.

Each steward develops 3 project components: a newspaper/media use article, a public education program, and a project benefits summary.

"As they interact with our professional program partners, NYSG resource specialists, the public, and each other, the student-stewards develop strong verbal and written research, communication and presentation skills," says Mary Penney, Steward Coordinator for NYSG.

NYSDEC Wildlife Manager Bill Gordon says, "The dune stewards have been a great asset to the protection of our fragile dune areas. The stewards' interaction with the public increases awareness and incentive to comply with rules that protect the dunes."

NYSDEC Special Assistant for the Salmon River Watershed Fran Verdoliva says, "The Salmon River Stewards provide crucial grassroots education to the public about the proper use and stewardship of this vitally important New York



Look! Eastern Lake Ontario Dune Stewards spot waterfowl for a public education program group tour. Photo: Mary Penney, NYSG

State resource. Their presence fills a void that can't be filled with current staff within DEC."

Local environmental, Americans with Disabilities and natural resource "Friends" groups, youth, seniors, and shoreline property owners have attended steward programs. Greater Pulaski-Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce President Margaret Clerkin says, "We are thrilled to have the Stewards provide information on the diversity of natural resources found in the Salmon River corridor."

The stewards select topics related to lake and river resources (invasive species: round goby, water chestnut, emerald ash borer; water flow and "critters" of the Salmon River corridor, etc.). Local, regional and state print, tv and radio media have used the articles and program notices or featured articles on the selected topics.

Partnerships with the Oswego County Weeklies and Jefferson County Journal have placed the articles in local media. Oswego County Weeklies Managing Editor RoseAnn Parsons says, "The stewards provide valuable information for our readers. The articles they submit are well written about a variety of subjects that are important to the community and the quality of life in and around the Salmon River and Lake Ontario."

New York Sea Grant is a cooperative program of the State University of New York and Cornell University. Sea Grant Extension administration is located at 112 Rice Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853. This project summary was written by Mary Penney, Eastern Lake Ontario Dune/Salmon River Steward