



Bathers and sailors alike enjoy Kingston Point. Photo by Barbara A. Branca

It's a warm sparkling Saturday in the Hudson Valley. Residents and tourists alike are out kayaking, windsurfing, motor boating, fishing and even swimming along New York's most famous river. People are launching kayaks in Kingston or antiquing in Cold Spring, or gallery hopping in Beacon. Or is it hiking in Constitution Marsh near Cold Spring, shopping for antiques on Beacon's Main Street or enjoying a Riverfront festival in Kingston? The choices are many and these three Hudson Valley communities are interested in finding out just what it is that gives each its unique character that residents and visitors find so appealing.

This summer, these communities got some help. At each tourist destination there's a good chance that a friendly graduate student like **Jennifer Baker** or **Laura Sullivan** might have approached a group of summer

visitors and asked them to fill out a survey to identify what makes each tourist destination so attractive. That's the way researchers **Drs. Rudy Schuster** and **Diane Kuehn** of the State University of New York's College of Environmental Science and Forestry are helping to find the best ways to promote river related tourism in the Hudson River Valley. In their New York Sea Grant funded project, this team, assisted by Penn State University's **Duarte Morais**, is analyzing the attributes that residents and visitors have identified as characterizing each community.

"With nature-based and heritage tourism both increasing in popularity in the Hudson Valley, many coastal communities face challenges in retaining stable local economies," says Schuster. "Our aim with this research is to help characterize for these communities the distinct image that represents their



A welcoming Jen Baker at the Kingston Visitor's center (above).

Photo by Barbara A. Branca

Visitors fill out the survey along Beacon's Main Street (bottom left).

Photo by Barbara A. Branca

Others enjoy the paddle to Bannerman's Island, accessible from both Beacon and Cold Spring (bottom right).

Photo by Rudy Schuster



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unique social, cultural and environmental qualities in sustainable tourism development.”

This ‘destination image’ will provide usable information about the attributes of the natural environment and tourism opportunities that identify the destination as similar or unique in relation to other Hudson destinations—and that tourists find attractive.

“Understanding which attributes of the nature and heritage tourism experience are attractive and valued by tourists will facilitate marketing efforts, increase visitation and enable market positioning among these communities,” says Morais. “I think the most exciting thing about this project is that we’re going from social science theory all the way down to application in one project,” adds Schuster.

And most importantly, this project will help identify what characteristics support sustainability of the local character in the eyes of local residents. “The level of excitement of the local communities about getting this information really makes this a meaningful project to us in science as well as on the ground,” says Schuster.

Schuster, Kuehn and Morais will be listening to the voice of the local communities as they generate a report that takes into consideration and serves the interests of host populations. Perhaps the engagement of the three host communities of Kingston, Beacon and Cold Spring may act as a catalyst for fur-

ther image branding in other nearby communities.

“As Hudson River communities are revitalized through increased public access and recreation opportunities,” says NYSG’s Hudson Estuary Specialist **Nordica Holochuck**, “these cities, towns and villages need information that can guide tourism planning and also preserve the scenic beauty, open spaces and relative tranquility valued by residents and visitors alike. This research project can help.”

Once the survey data are analyzed over the coming months, the researchers will present their findings to the communities.

— **Barbara A. Branca and Paul C. Focazio**

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... for a photo gallery of Hudson River tourism sites used in this study

Cold Spring offers visitors good spots for dining, shopping and fishing.

Three photos below right by Barbara A. Branca



NYSG’s Nordica Holochuck explores the variety of shops on Beacon’s Main Street (bottom left).

Photo by Barbara A. Branca

Visitors have many choices for lunch in Kingston (bottom right).

Photo by Rudy Schuster

