

Environmental Enhancement

Since the Greenway Compact Program integrates environmental awareness with community connections and economic development, we can begin to see the environment, and nature in general, in a more interdependent light.

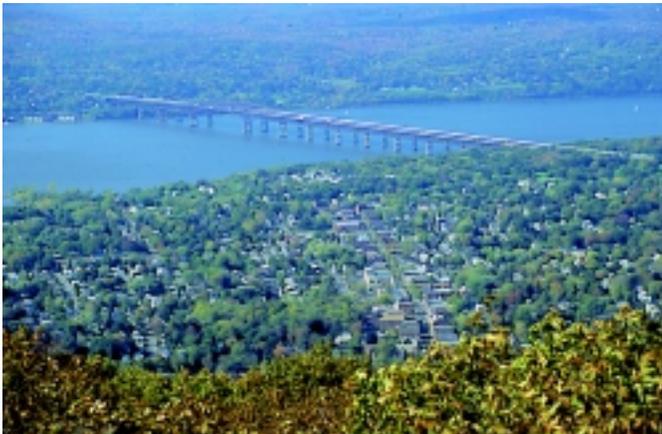
Nature is too often categorized:

- as somehow outside, even the opposite of the human community and the places we live and work;
- as separated resources (wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes, prime aquifers...); and
- as focused on natural constraints, negative impacts, and protective regulations.

As a beginning Greenway step, appreciate nature as:

- an essential part of our everyday environment in both cities and the countryside;
- integrated systems that flow through landscapes like river valleys or mountain ranges, creating continuous wildlife corridors and potential trail connections; and
- positive features and surrounding greenbelts that enhance and help shape the places we build.

Look at environmental protection as more than the preservation of open spaces and untouched outlying areas; Greenways create a conscious intermingling of the natural and human landscapes.



Contrasting bird's-eye views demonstrate how development can mix with natural features, as in the City of Beacon, or largely displace nature, as in many development sites along Route 9.

The environment and our relations to the land can be improved - designed with nature. The *Natural Resources* inventory, prepared by the Dutchess County Department of Planning and the Environmental Management Council, provides a primer with extensive mapping on the identification of important natural elements and the benefits of protective measures. The Greenway Guides will offer additional techniques for environmental sensitivity and successful integration with development. Every human action need not be seen as displacing or degrading the environment. Environmental benefits and economic development can work well together.

"Building with the environment means seeing planned development and natural systems as intricately linked and viewing natural resources as an opportunity rather than a constraint."

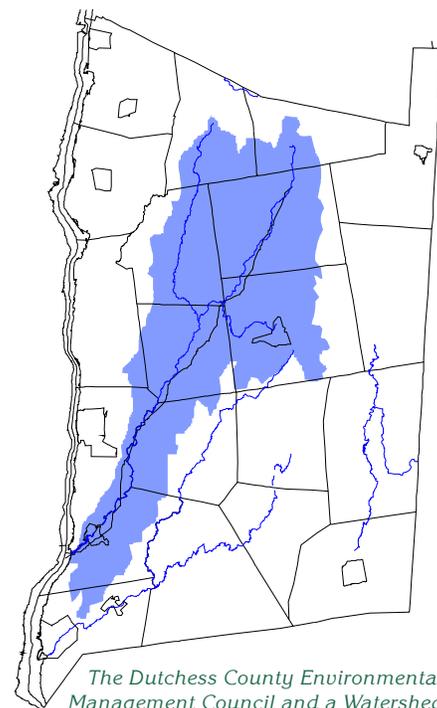
National Association of Home Builders and AMERICAN FORESTS, *Building Greener Neighborhoods*, 1995

Sustainability plus... We have said that the pattern of sprawl is not sustainable, that it consumes far too much land, wastes energy and tax dollars, and is economically inefficient over the long term. Sustainability is an important objective, but protecting existing natural areas and sustaining current conditions may not always be enough. Some deteriorated environments, like the water in the Hudson, abandoned industrial sites, certain dilapidated blocks, or many current commercial strips, need to be restored or reclaimed. **The Greenway promotes natural and cultural resource protection as a primary goal, but the Compact Program also encourages a more comprehensive approach to environmental enhancement - to repair and connect the natural and built environments.**

The carrying capacity of the land is a critical concept linked to sustainability. This includes the availability of clean water, which for many communities depends on our ability to protect underground aquifers and their recharge areas. Natural constraint mapping of wetlands, steep slopes, or floodplains for protection is a valuable tool. But natural features can be considered constraints to be avoided - places to say no - or positive opportunities and unique qualities that make the area distinctive, improve the value of nearby development, and connect to larger open space systems. Identifying important natural features is most useful when coupled with mapping that shows broader natural patterns and areas where development can go. Finding ways to combine environmental enhancement with economic development can reduce conflicts in the environmental review process by focusing on positive alternatives and improvements, rather than merely minimizing negative impacts.

*“Sustainability...can also be expressed in the simple terms of the golden rule for the restorative economy: **Leave the world better than you found it...**”*

Paul Hawken, *The Ecology of Commerce*, 1993



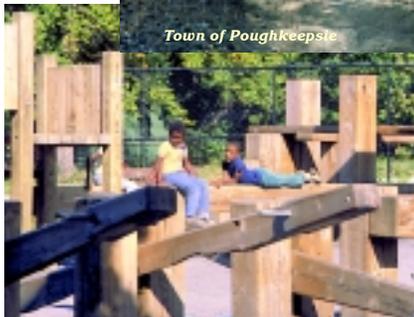
The Dutchess County Environmental Management Council and a Watershed Planning Committee have launched a model investigation of water quality issues for the entire Wappinger Creek watershed, covering 210 square miles in 13 municipalities. This promotes intermunicipal cooperation and the broader benefits of environmental systems.

Access for all... When nature is appreciated as continuous and interconnected, Greenway systems and potential linkages become more evident. The great outdoors are not just far away in large parks and forest preserves, accessible only on weekend trips or vacations, but available within easy walking distance. Nature is as close at hand as a neighborhood park, a trail that carries on where the sidewalk ends, or along locally designated scenic roads. The possibilities for increased public access, which is one of the Greenway's primary goals, become open-ended. Universal design for people of all ages, incomes, disabilities, and varied interests allows a wide range of recreational choices nearby.

Negotiating trail rights-of-way through private properties and access across the railroad tracks to the river poses difficult problems. Questions of ownership, maintenance, and liability need to be addressed in each individual case. Studies show that Greenway trails have not increased crime, lawsuits, or trespassing, but instead improve the quality of life, the local economy, and nearby property values. Existing public or private insurance policies usually cover any liability concerns and New York's General Obligations Law provides additional protection from lawsuits, if the property is open to the public at no cost for covered recreational activities. The Greenway Conservancy's "Hudson River Trails" booklet contains detailed information on these and other trail construction issues.



Town of Poughkeepsie





Land Conservation and Greenway Trails

- Strengthen connections between nearby communities and the entire Hudson Valley region;
- Preserve our natural heritage, wildlife corridors, and water quality;
- Spur economic development by attracting visitors and new businesses;
- Increase the value of adjacent properties and local tax revenues;
- Highlight historic and cultural sites, farmlands, and scenic qualities;
- Promote cost-efficient land use patterns for developers, residents, and local governments; and
- Provide places for people of all ages and disabilities to experience the outdoors close to home.



For over 30 years the sloop *Clearwater* has been celebrating the River as an environmental education experience.



Stony Kill Farm Environmental Education Center features natural history, ecology, and farming programs.



The *Village of Pawling* plan proposes a tree-lined green as a central feature in front of the historic Dutch House.

Continuous learning environments... In the Greenway legislation, heritage and environmental education were given prominence as one of the five primary goals. Understanding the surrounding natural environment, as well as the historical evolution of the area we call home, is an essential backdrop for better choices.

“Environmental Education,” according to Michael Hough in *Cities and Natural Process*, “is more than the biology lesson in the classroom, or the yearly trip to the nature center. It provides no substitute for constant and direct experience assimilated through daily exposure to, and interaction with, the places one lives in.” Children first learn to understand and appreciate nature by playing in a stream, growing a garden, or visiting a nearby farm. Outdoor activities, combined with educational programs in schools or other forums, can reinforce our awareness of the close relationships between nature and community, city and countryside. Greenway policies not only recommend preserving farmlands, wildlife habitats, and important natural features, but also allowing natural elements to flow through cities, villages, and residential districts in the form of streams, park lands, tree-lined streets, and landscaping enhanced by a greater diversity of native species.

Our place in history... The same principles apply to appreciating our historic and cultural heritage. Every town has a story to tell. Visiting the Vanderbilt Mansion or other historic site is a memorable event, but the historical context of a local main street also has meaning to our everyday existence. For better or worse, what is built now is creating history. Even if many people crave the convenience and economy of fast food and mass merchandising, do we have to settle for standard franchise architecture that diminishes the distinctiveness and long-term value of our communities?

Since architecture is the most public of art forms and the most visible expression of local history, preserving historic districts and making new structures fit in with local traditions often generates a renewed sense of community pride. Escalating overall property values and economic revitalization are almost always by-products of historic recognition, restoration, and compatibility in new construction. **Greenway policies recommend that communities appreciate their history, build on what is locally unique when constructing their future, then reap the rewards in terms of a higher quality of life, economic development, and tourist potential.** Above and beyond classes, educational publications, and cultural sites, natural Greenways and historically sensitive places provide their own continuous learning environments.