

THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE REPORT

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: FIFTH STREET FARM

What better way to learn about the outdoors than being outdoors? A University of Illinois study found that third graders who attended classes in a natural setting were more engaged and less distracted than students in traditional classroom settings.

The study also showed that students didn't need to take nature hikes or explore forests to reap the educational benefits. Simply holding class in a green outdoor location improved their grades and problem-solving skills.

In 2012, DEC awarded Fifth Street Farm, a collaborative educational project, a \$10,000 Community Impact Grant to establish a Green Roof Project that will enhance environmental learning for students from three New York City schools. The 2,400-square-foot rooftop school garden serves as a living, outdoor classroom, with 65 raised beds, a timed irrigation system, cedar benches, a rain barrel, and an open two-bin compost system.

The Green Roof Project has a robust curriculum for students from pre-K through fifth grade, providing hands-on learning in the areas of math, natural science, and ecology. This experiment in urban agriculture has been integrated into existing school courses in science and nutrition, offering



Fifth Street Farm Rooftop Garden education in food awareness and environmental sustainability.

Learn more about the Green Roof Project and other Fifth Street Farm initiatives: <http://www.5thstreetfarm.org/>

Learn more about outdoor classrooms and their benefits:

<https://outdoorclassroomproject.org/about/the-outdoor-classroom/>

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_surprising_benefits_of_teaching_a_class_outside



HOW DOES YOUR LAUNDRY ROUTINE AFFECT THE ENVIRONMENT?

There is nothing wrong with cleanliness, especially when it comes to hygiene, but there are things that we can do to help to protect our environment while washing our clothes.

In the United States, more than 660 million loads of laundry are washed per week, with each household responsible for 50 pounds of laundry (<https://www.cleaninginstitute.org/sustainable-cleaning/saving-energy>). The average residential washing machine uses 41 gallons of water per load. Even high-efficiency washers use 15–30 gallons. Combine that with scented laundry detergents, fabric softeners, and scent boosters, and you're adding at least 15 gallons of water mixed with chemicals being washed down your pipes.

If you're looking for ways to green your laundry day experience, you might be surprised to know that commercial washers and dryers found in typical coin-operated laundromats tend to be more efficient than residential versions. Consider using your neighborhood laundromat for larger loads rather than doing several smaller loads at home. If the laundromat in your neighborhood uses energy-efficient machines, you might be saving energy. If you tend to use drop-off services, ask about the laundromat's green options.

If you prefer to do your laundry at home, consider some of these environmentally friendly alternatives:

- Handwashing and hanging may be something you can do at home occasionally to reduce household expenses and help protect the environment.
- Use cold water – more energy is used to heat water, and hot water really isn't necessary to clean your clothes.
- Use less detergent – avoid overuse and save money by checking the cap to see how much you really need to use to get your clothes clean.
- Clean lint screens regularly – a clogged lint screen will force your dryer to work harder and it will dry less efficiently.
- Wear items more than once/wash clothes less often – Based on your job and/or daily routine, you may be able to wear clothes more than once before washing them.
- Refresh lightly worn clothing – use homemade fabric refresher made from equal parts distilled water and alcohol (isopropyl or vodka), one tablespoon of baking soda, and an essential oil for fragrance.





ON THE FRONT LINES: THE HUDSON RIVER ESTUARY PROGRAM

In the past, we have highlighted the more than 7,600 freshwater lakes, ponds, and reservoirs, including portions of two of the five Great Lakes, and more than 70,000 miles of rivers and streams in New York State, and their importance to our environment and our economy. New York is also home to estuaries, or partially enclosed coastal bodies of water, where freshwater from rivers or streams mix with salt water.

Estuaries are among the most productive ecosystems on the planet and provide a host of ecological and economic benefits. Estuaries are natural filters for runoff, sediments, and pollutants from rivers and streams before they flow into the oceans, providing cleaner waters for marine life. These waters also provide vital nesting and feeding habitats for many aquatic plants, birds, fish, and other animals.

The Hudson River Estuary Program helps people enjoy, protect, and revitalize the Hudson River and its valley. The estuary encompasses the Hudson River, stretching from the Verrazano Narrows in New York City to the head of tide at Troy, and includes the surrounding valley and watershed. Funded through New York's Environmental Protection Fund, the program's mission is to use science and public outreach to help people enjoy, protect, and revitalize the Hudson River estuary. The program is built on six key benefits:

- Clean Water
- Resilient Communities
- A Vital Estuary Ecosystem
- Estuary Fish, Wildlife & Habitats
- Natural Scenery
- Education, River Access, Recreation & Inspiration

Established in 1987, the Hudson River Estuary Program utilizes knowledgeable estuary stewards, with a strong understanding of ecology, as a foundation for its work. It is guided by an Action Agenda that includes approaches such as helping shoreline communities clean up contaminated areas and improve environmental justice areas.

Chris Bowser, the Education Coordinator for the estuary program and National Estuarine Research Reserve, works to engage and educate watershed residents about resource management. Chris works with students of all ages, from children to adults, teaching them about the estuary and encouraging them to help conserve the valuable habitats found in them.

For Chris, who earned a biology degree from Rutgers University and a master's degree from Clark University, people are the experts of their own environments, even if they are not fully aware of all the benefits those environments offer. His basis for this sentiment came from his experience as a Peace Corp volunteer in the Sahara Desert.

“That experience taught me the best way to protect the environment, or really deal with harsh environments, was to listen to people. I also feel that it’s my responsibility to make sure that as a teacher, as an educator, that I can give as many people as possible that same experience of being somewhere that is special.”

The Estuary Program has offered grants since 1999 to municipalities and non-profits located within its Estuary Watershed Boundaries. As of 2017, more than \$19.4 million had been distributed to 495 applicants. To see view the Estuary boundaries or to see a list of grant recipients and projects, visit <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/5091.html>. To learn more about the Hudson River Estuary Program, visit <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4920.html>.

Want to learn more about DEC and what we do? Visit our website www.dec.ny.gov



RETHINKING OUR TRAVEL HABITS: PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM & PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Tourism across New York State generated an estimated \$108.7 billion in revenue in 2017, with a record 243.8 million visitors spending time in the state, according to a State Tourism Economic report. These numbers reflect the many spectacular sites and attractions in New York, from the Hamptons on Long Island to the Adirondacks' High Peaks. People love New York and want to experience all there is to see and do.

However, the increased number of visitors, can put a strain on the environment. There are steps that we can take to ensure that a boost in tourism does not lead to more pollution, wastewater system overloads, destruction of natural habitats, and overcrowding.

Many of our state facilities and resources are designed to encourage visitors, while ensuring public safety and protecting natural resources. Permitting systems, designated parking, and trail-heads with designated capacity limits are some of the ways DEC promotes sustainable use of these unique areas.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO VISIT NEW YORK'S NATURAL TREASURES SUSTAINABLY:

- Always abide by DEC posted rules and regulations
 - Make reservations and/or obtain permits when possible
 - Avoid restricted areas
 - Check out underused places
- If you want to avoid crowds or connect with nature in a more sedate environment, consider visiting a less populated area. You may just find a hidden gem you can enjoy without distractions.
- Practice Responsible or Green Tourism
- Regardless of where you go, how you get there, or where you stay, try to ensure your visit has minimal impact on the environment and local communities. Choose to be environmentally friendly, sustainable, or benign when you travel.
- Practice Leave No Trace Principles (<https://Int.org/why/7-principles/>) wherever you go
- You can control your environmental footprint.

Whether you are traveling around the state or around the world, it is critical that you consider the impacts of your exploration, and enjoy New York's incredible resources safely and responsibly, helping to protect them for generations to come.



DEC'S PILOT PHARMACEUTICAL TAKE BACK PROGRAM

By Laura Kipper

New York is home to abundant fresh water sources in the form of rivers, lakes, and streams. From fishing and agriculture to recreation and tourism, our waters are a vital part of our economy and our daily lives. As water users, we also need to be aware that contaminants and pollutants, including pharmaceutical waste, threaten these valuable resources.

Pharmaceutical contamination, such as from expired or thrown-away medications, that enter our surface and groundwater is a growing problem. Unfortunately, flushing of unwanted or unused drugs is a common practice and was the standard method for disposing pharmaceutical waste in the past. As a result, we are seeing low levels of drugs in our surface waters, which is adversely affecting the behavioral activities and physical attributes of fish and other aquatic wildlife due to continuous exposure.

Wastewater from our homes, businesses, and other sources flow to wastewater treatment facilities. However, these systems may not be equipped to filter all medications, leading to an increase in the presence of antibiotics in our water supplies and the development of drug-resistant bacteria.

DEC's Commissioner's Policy 66 provides guidance on the disposal of controlled substances, and established an agency program that promotes and facilitates the proper disposal of unused, unwanted, or expired pharmaceuticals to protect the waters of New York State.

One way DEC promotes proper disposal is through a statewide Pilot Pharmaceutical Program that makes it easy for households to safely dispose of unused and expired medications in any one of 262 Prescription (Rx) collection boxes located in participating retail pharmacies, hospitals, and select police stations. DEC is also partnering with school districts across New York State, with support from their superintendents, principals and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), to get the word out to parents about this program and disposal options.

These Rx collection boxes provide a safe, convenient, and easy way of getting rid of unwanted medications from your home, while also taking proactive steps to fight the opioid epidemic plaguing communities across the state. This disposal option also helps to protect public health, public safety, and the environment. To date, these Rx collection boxes have kept more than 12 tons of unwanted medications out of medicine cabinets, our kids' hands, and our waterways.

To find a Rx collection box near you, check out the DEC Rx Drop Box Map at <https://on.ny.gov/rxdropbox>.

Need more information? Go to: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/67720.html>



Got Leftover Medications?



APPLY FOR FUNDING

Are you a community-based organization looking to fund a project? OEJ offers grants to not-for-profit organizations to address environmental harms in low income and environmental justice communities. For additional information on OEJ grants and a complete list of previous project awardees, please visit our web-site: www.dec.ny.gov/public/31226.html.

WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU

Do you have concerns about the environment where you live? Do you want to make your voice heard? Do you want to stay informed about the different environmental issues affecting the state of New York?

JOIN OUR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE LISTSERV

Go to: www.dec.ny.gov/public/65855.html and sign up to receive regular updates from the Office of Environmental Justice. Stay current on the issues that are important to you. As always, you can contact the Office of Environmental Justice with any concerns by sending an e-mail to: justice@dec.ny.gov.

Please include:

- Your location/address
- City, town, village or borough
- The environmental concerns you wish to address
- List the potential source if you know
- How or whether you wish to be contacted

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Contact us:

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