

PERSPECTIVE

Barriers on the Hudson: A Wake-up Call to Action

Editor's Note: The Army Corps of Engineers is evaluating proposals for storm surge barriers and other measures to mitigate flooding such as that caused by Hurricane Sandy. Environmental groups, including Riverkeeper, believe the barriers could permanently change the Hudson River as we know it, possibly even endanger its very aquatic vitality. The writer attended the public comment session in Poughkeepsie last Wednesday, among some 150 people to do so, almost all with grave concerns about the plan.

In 2012, Hurricane Sandy was a wake-up call for New York. We saw the "financial capital of the world" brought to its knees by the moods of weather and sea. In response, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is now proposing structures in and around New York Harbor to keep threaten-

Tributaries Feasibility Study

The Army Corps has proposed five (5) alternatives for addressing storm surge in New York Harbor. One is a massive barrier, 5 miles long, that would sit at the entrance to the harbor. It would close to block the sea when storm surge threatens. Other options include in-water barriers further inside the harbor (e.g. at Verrazano-Narrows) and on-shore levees and walls.

The 2018 Accelerated Timeline: Comments due by August; Short-list of Options by October

Under the timeline required by the WRRDA, the Army Corps aims to produce a report narrowing down the 5 alternatives to about 2 by Fall 2018. The selection criteria to create this "shortlist" is focused on economic measures, an approach that does not properly quantify environmental impacts.

Environmental impacts will be properly studied in the environmental review after the shortlist is created. Not before! This is the scary prospect in front of us right now. What if the shortlist choices are the most damaging to the full spectrum of life in the estuary? What will that mean for quality of life in the Hudson River Valley in the future?

Public Input on the Fast-Track Process is Needed Now!

As part of the NEPA "Scoping Process", the Army Corp recently held 5 meetings in 3 locations, attended by a few hundred people, for a project impacting 16 million people. The Scoping Process solicits public review and comment on the 5 alternatives (before they get narrowed to the shortlist) and the studies that should be considered.

The Army Corps is constrained by the WRRDA requirements for full feasibility studies to be completed in 3 years for \$3 million. This appears to be driving the limited, lightly advertised public meetings, the very short scoping comment period (by August 20) and a rush to create a shortlist of storm surge solutions within 3 months.

Given the number of people impacted (16 million), and the wide-ranging area (25 counties), more public education is needed, with more time for comments. Since we are

constrained by the current timeline, with scoping comments due by August 20, immediate action is needed!

This is a complex issue impacting both a major economic engine of America, and a region incredibly rich in natural resources. Flood mitigation is important, but so is our environment. It will take time to make the right decision as the optimal balance of all interests.

Now is the time to write the Army Corps before August 20, 2018 and demand:

- An exception to the WRRDA 3 year, \$3 million limit for the feasibility study, allowing the necessary time for a full assessment of alternatives and environmental review

- Many more public meetings across the region as part of the Scoping Process

- Extension of the comment period for the Scoping Process to at least 90 days.

Comments can be submitted by email: NYNJHarbor.TribStudy@usace.army.mil or through

<http://www.nan.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Projects-in-New-York/New-York-New-Jersey-Harbor-Tributaries-Focus-Area-Feasibility-Study/> [click "Contact" button at top of page].

Preserving Our Legacy

We should not overlook the irony of trying to fast-track the NEPA process in the very place of the landmark judicial decision that paved the way for the law, the 1965 Scenic Hudson Decision. That case granted citizens legal standing in the challenge to Con Edison's attempt to build a hydroelectric plant on Storm King Mountain. This set the stage for laws requiring comprehensive environmental review and public input into construction projects.

Given our environmental legacy in the Hudson Valley, now is the time to activate that spirit again. We must ensure the rights claimed fifty years ago to save our river are not undermined in a rush to address the very complex problems of storm surge.

Michelle Smith is executive director of the Hudson Highlands Land Trust. She closely follows water issues and has been instrumental in prompting greater study of local water supplies and how to keep them safe.

Up, Up, and Away! Costumes and Comics At Fourth Annual Garri*Con

By MARY-MARGARET DWYER

It's a bird, it's a plane, it's the 4th annual Garri*Con at the Desmond Fish Library! Cartoons came to life in a celebration of the visual and literary art of comics on Saturday, July 14.

Four years ago, in the midst of the growing popularity of Comic Con and other events centered around the art, the Desmond Fish Library decided to host their own Garri*Con.

Kids of all ages arrived to the event in costume. Superheroes, sand-people, and even princesses arrived, excited to immerse in the fantasy world of comics.

A costume contest and parade highlighted the most creative ensembles. Winner of the contest, Nitian Hu, 12 years-old, was dressed as a Tusken Raider from Star Wars, fully equipped with goggles and a wooden staff, ready to attack. The best part of the event for Hu? "Just celebrating comics."

And celebrate comics they did. Button making, coloring, face painting, and even a Cosplay photo booth brought the magic of cartoons to life. The library also hosted various



PHOTO PROVIDED
Charlie Crothers and Audrey Keller show off their best superhero poses.

cartoonists and illustrators, with a special illustration of Bob Sikoryak and Kriota Willberg in which guests were able to listen to tips and tricks of the comic industry.

The Solar Sound Band, a local band of four kids, ended the event with live music just outside of the library on the

front lawn. With another Garri*Con under its belt, the Desmond Fish Library can only begin plans for the next year's comic event, coming up its fifth year, bringing the imagination and wonder of comics to Garrison once again.

HUDSON (Cont'd from pg. 1)

under consideration as part of the New York - New Jersey Harbor and Tributaries (NYNJHAT) Coastal Storm Risk Management Feasibility Study (online here <http://www.nan.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Projects-in-New-York/New-York-New-Jersey-Harbor-Tributaries-Focus-Area-Feasibility-Study/>). All told, the affected area covers more than 2,150 square miles. The Army Corps has stated that it intends to "winnow down" the handful of alternatives to "one to two alternatives" by mid-2018.

Attendees, including Michelle Smith, executive director of the Hudson Highlands Land Trust, were especially concerned the public comment period is due to end Aug. 20, and then the options are to be winnowed down. They fear that the unduly quick selection of one or two options will put those on a fast track, likely without sufficient environmental review. She urged that residents demand the public comment time be lengthened, and that the Corps hold many



PHOTO BY DOUGLAS CUNNINGHAM
John Lipscomb discusses the proposed barriers in the Hudson River.

more public sessions in different areas on the matter.

Local state lawmakers are also concerned, and State Sen. Sue Serino attended the session; she and state Sen. Terrence Murphy both urged that members of the public attend last week's meeting.

The plan comes on the heels of a different plan by the Coast

Guard to expand ship anchorages in the river. After considerable opposition, that was shelved.

Editor's Note: In a story on this topic last week, we incorrectly identified the organization that was the first to raise significant concerns about the project. It was Riverkeeper.

GLYNWOOD (Cont'd from pg. 1)

munity to its farm on Saturday, July 14, to enjoy locally grown food, music, courtesy of Et Toi, Ashes of Love, and The Bo Peeps, take a tour of the farm, or even hop on a hayride, tooling around the property throughout the entire event.

The event's food selection offered many local options, starring ingredients taken from farms in Putnam and bordering counties. A fan favorite was a slice of margherita pizza, a simple, yet delicious combination of tomato, basil, and mozzarella. Made in a stone oven right in front of your eyes, this homemade pizza was crafted by Amuzae, a restaurant in Campbell Hall, across the river

in Orange County. Even the ingredients of the pizza were from "all local farms based out of Orange County," said Shawn Hubbell, Executive Chef and Owner of Amuzae.

Farm based events packed the afternoon, including beekeeping demonstrations, buttermaking, and countless other events leaving guests endlessly entertained. A marketplace gave visitors an opportunity to purchase farm grown produce and other homemade goods. Topfield Equestrian Center also made an appearance, showing off three of their

miniature horses.

Leslie Lewis, one of Glynwood's vegetable production apprentices, said they were happy about the event's turnout. "It's really fulfilling for us, seeing people coming to the farm," said Lewis.

After an afternoon of farm appreciation, guests developed a deeper love for agriculture. Teddy Nagel, a local farmer at Two Boys Farm in Garrison, agreed that events like Food and Farm day were important. "It gets the community to fall back in love with farm and agriculture," said Nagel.

by
MICHELLE SMITH

ing ocean waters away.

By 2014, Congress passed the Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA), accelerating the timeline of such projects. That law expedites feasibility studies for flood risk management projects. Of major concern is the implied "fast track" through the environmental review process, as defined by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The problem with this "fast-tracking" is that the project area includes an aquatic goldmine - the Hudson River Estuary - arguably, the most beloved estuary in the world. Rich in aquatic species that split their time between river and sea, and provide food for our iconic wildlife (like America's bald eagle), the estuary is integral to the vitality of the entire Hudson Valley.

Exceptions to the expedited timeline may be granted by the Secretary of the Army, but this has not happened yet. WRRDA does provide for "significant public dispute as to [...] environmental costs" to be considered in extending the study period for a project.

With a public comment period ending on August 20, 2018, we must act quickly!

The Project: New York / New Jersey Harbor and

Lake Oscawana Septic System Replacement Initiative Underway

By ERIC GROSS

By year's end, residents with failing septic systems bordering Lake Oscawana in Putnam Valley may be eligible for grants allowing them to recoup 50 percent of the cost for replacement.

Putnam Health Department Director of Engineering Mike Budzienski brought the encouraging news to last week's meeting of the legislature's Health, Social, Educational and Environmental Committee.

Budzienski reported that \$75 million had been set aside by the state for septic repairs with

Putnam's share set at \$75,000 for the initial year.

Budzienski said once approved, property owners will be eligible to receive a 50 percent reimbursement up to a maximum of \$10,000. "If a homeowner spends \$20,000 to have his septic replaced, the state will reimburse the individual with \$10,000," said Budzienski.

Contracts have yet to be signed. Once the legislature approves the program and the Law Department authorizes Putnam's involvement in the plan, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation will forward

forms and templates to the county which will directly contact homeowners around Lake Oscawana advising them of the grant.

Budzienski was hopeful that by year's end the project will be underway.

PARADE (Cont'd from front pg.)

in New York State.

The youngest Medal of Honor recipient earned his award at age 11. Willie Johnson enlisted in the Union Army alongside his father serving as a drummer boy. In 1862, his unit was overpowered by the Confederate Army and retreated. While the men discarded their equipment to hasten their escape, Willie clung to his drum and was later asked to play for the entire division on July 4. When President Abraham Lincoln

heard about the drummer's bravery, he recommended him for the Medal of Honor and Willie received the award the following year.

Since established in the mid-19th century, the Medal of Honor has been awarded to 3,491 heroes almost half of them Civil War soldiers, while from the beginning of World War II to the present, only 895 Medals of Honor have been awarded.



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