

Sandy Creeks

Ecosystem-based Management Initiative

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What is the Sandy Creeks Ecosystem-based Management Demonstration Project?

Ecosystem-based Management (EBM) is a term used to describe a new approach to managing the natural resources and people that thrive together in our communities. It is a way in which we look at how we can keep the economy of our watersheds healthy by ensuring that the natural resources (scenic views, agricultural lands, forests, lakes, rivers, etc.) we depend on for our livelihoods can continue to provide for future use.

Think, for example, of all the resources provided and utilized in the Sandy Creeks watershed. We have working farms that provide dairy and crops for consumption and open

space in our communities. Forests provide essential habitat to animals, recreational opportunities, as well as valuable wood resources for paper, lumber and firewood. Wetlands, rivers and swamps provide protection from floods, and habitat for fish and other wildlife. EBM considers these and all the components of the ecosystem, including humans, rather than focusing on one issue or resource.

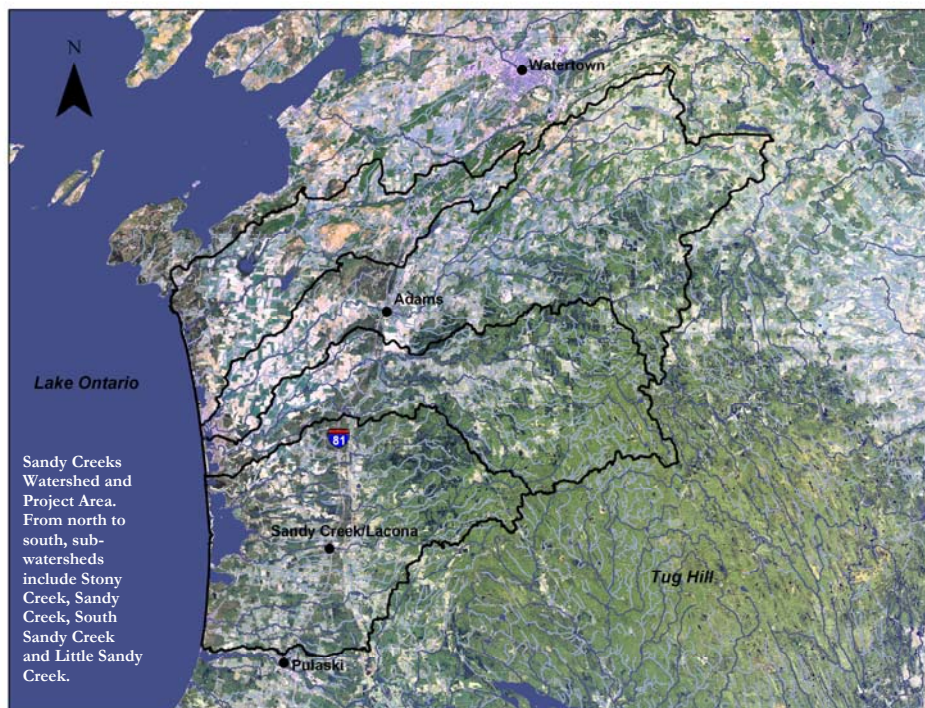
EBM initiatives in NYS were adopted by legislation. In August of 2006, the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Act (Act) was signed into law. The intent of the act, which authorized the EBM

approach, is to look at ecosystems or watersheds, not just in terms of their natural resources, but also for their importance to the community in social and economic terms.

The NYS Tug Hill Commission (THC) was asked by the NYS Department of State and The Nature Conservancy to partner with them on the Sandy Creeks demonstration project, in the Eastern Lake Ontario Basin, in support of the Act and EBM. The THC then approached the watershed communities about this initiative, seeing it as an opportunity to

(Continued on page 4)

The Sandy Creeks Watershed and EBM



The EBM legislation identified two demonstration areas where EBM principles are being applied as models for the rest of the state. One of those demonstration areas is the Sandy Creeks watershed, which comprises four stream corridors, the eastern Lake Ontario dune and bays complex, the nearshore areas of the Lake and the escarpment and Tug Hill Plateau.

Located in Jefferson, Lewis and Oswego Counties, the project area includes all or portions of the following towns: Henderson, Hounsfield, Adams, Watertown, Champion, Rodman, Rutland, Denmark, Pinckney, Montague, Worth, Lorraine, Boylston, Redfield, Richland, Sandy

(Continued on page 4)

Project Partners: Who Are They and What Are Their Roles?

The **Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Council** is charged with coordinating programs and activities that help to protect and restore New York State's coastal ecosystems. The nine-member Council will work with various stakeholders to develop policies and principles to govern these coastal resources and implement effective management strategies. The Council includes the heads of nine New York State agencies including:

- Department of Environmental Conservation (Council Chair)
- Department of Agriculture and Markets
- Department of Transportation
- Empire State Development
- Office of General Services
- Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
- Department of State
- State University of New York
- Energy Research and Development Authority.

The Council's Executive Director is the Deputy Secretary of State for Coastal Resources. The Division of Coastal Resources acts as staff to the Council and is spearheading the EBM Initiatives in both the Sandy Creeks watershed and on Long Island. The Sandy Creeks EBM Initiative is being closely guided in accordance with the Council's oversight and with involvement from the NYS Tug Hill Commission and the Nature Conservancy. Their roles are as follows:

The NYS Tug Hill Commission: The purpose of the Commission is to enable local governments, private organizations, and individuals to shape the future of the Tug Hill region, and to demonstrate and communicate ways that this can be done by other rural areas. The Commission accomplishes this by providing technical assistance to local governments, economic development



organizations, and other local groups in the areas of land use planning, community economic development, and natural resource management. It is the job of the Commission, in this, and all its projects, to ensure that the local voice is considered and brought to the table as a stakeholder. (www.tughill.org)

The Nature Conservancy: TNC is a major land holder and land steward in the region and is a partner on many of the demonstration projects already occurring in the watershed. (See article on page 3.) TNC has a great deal of experience with conservation planning and a long history of working with partners to accomplish community based conservation projects.



They play a vital role in stakeholder outreach and will continue to partner with local agencies to conserve open space. (www.nature.org)

Stakeholder Outreach: Your Input Is Important!

A major component of this EBM project is garnering input from those who live, work, enjoy and otherwise depend on the region's natural resources for their livelihoods. To ensure that the local voice is heard in this process, *EcoLogic*, a consulting firm from Cazenovia, NY, has been hired to facilitate a number of stakeholder meetings to be scheduled and held throughout the watershed area. **The first stakeholder outreach meeting will be held from 7:00 - 9:00 pm on June 27 at the Sandy Island Beach State Park Pavilion.** These meetings will continue to take place throughout the summer. Stakeholder groups will include local government, agriculture, forestry, recreation and more.

Additionally, the THC has just finished attending a round of town and village board meetings to introduce the project to elected officials and begin getting feedback and ideas from those communities. All residents in the towns and villages in the Sandy Creeks project area are **invited** and **encouraged** to participate in this endeavor.

If YOU would like to partici-

pate, please contact us or your Town Supervisor or Village Mayor.



Implementation Activities in the Sandy Creeks Watershed

Along with the development of a strategic plan for EBM, funds were made available to implement a number of on-the-ground efforts to improve the conditions of natural resources in the watershed. Each implementation project also shows the link between healthy communities and healthy ecosystems.

Invasive Species Control

Swallowwort and purple loosestrife are invasive species in the Sandy Creeks demonstration area that are modifying the habitat of both near-shore wetlands and upland areas.

Swallowwort is an aggressive non-native plant that interferes with forest regeneration and changes the habitat structure used by wildlife.



Swallowwort

Given these characteristics, swallowwort can decrease property values. During the 2006 summer season over

400 acres of swallowwort were treated and 25 landowners were contacted to build awareness of swallowwort issues, including its identification and control.

Purple loosestrife, native to Eurasia, out-competes and replaces native grasses and sedges that provide a higher quality source of nutrition for wildlife. During the 2006 summer 45,000 *Galerucella* beetles were released in nine wetlands with 1,800 root weevils (*Hylobius transversovittatus*) planned for release in spring 2007 to initiate effective bio-control of this invasive species.



Purple loosestrife

Forestry Best Management Practices Workshops

In July of 2006 foresters, loggers and forest landowners attended a workshop to learn, through classroom and field activities, about the identification, importance, regulations, and forestry best management practices for wetlands and

streams. In October of 2006 a second workshop was held which gave loggers the tools to implement some of those best management practices. Foresters, loggers and private landowners built five portable wooden skidder bridges that area loggers are now using to cross streams during harvesting operations.

Agricultural Riparian Corridor Restoration

Fencing and stream corridor plantings will be installed during the 2007 field season along priority stream corridors that have experienced loss of natural vegetative buffer. Materials and installation will be provided at no cost to farmers or other landowners.

Monitor Mills Dam

The Monitor Mills dam, located on South Sandy Creek in the Town of Ellisburg, is a barrier to fish migration from Lake Ontario. Work is underway to determine the environmental impact of modifying the dam spillway to allow fish passage to 21 stream miles of spawning habitat for migratory fish. Issues such as the Lamprey impact on Native brook trout populations, the

(Continued on page 4)

Biohabitats and Camoin Associates Hired to Complete the Sandy Creeks EBM Strategy

In an effort to balance the protection and management of a restored, sustainable ecosystem with economic, cultural and recreational vitality for local communities, the project partners selected the consulting firms *Biohabitats* (out of Maryland) and *Camoin Associates* (from Saratoga Springs, NY) to develop an Ecosystem-based Management (EBM) strategy for the watersheds.

The goal of the EBM strategy is to enable and empower the project partners and the watershed communities to pursue and secure funding to develop an

EBM plan and, ultimately, implement the plan's recommendations. Development of the strategic plan is underway and involves an extensive search, collection and analysis of documents and electronic data. The resulting ecological and socio-economic assessments will be used to support the identification of potentially important conservation areas, threats to natural resources and areas in need of restoration, as well as opportunities and constraints for the integration of sound, conservation-based ecosystem management and sus-

tainable economic policies for the watershed. An information needs assessment will identify information needs, gaps, and the framework for a Sandy Creeks watershed monitoring strategy, which will be incorporated into the Sandy Creeks watershed baseline conditions report. The baseline conditions report will contain such things as data collection methods and sources, assessment of ecological and socio-economic conditions, trend analysis and documentation on information

(Continued on page 4)

Implementation Activities

(Continued from page 3)

possible spread of VHS, possible sediment contamination, surface water quality and quantity, and PCB contamination upstream from lake species will be considered.



Big Stony Creek, Henderson

Your input and participation in the Sandy Creeks Watershed EBM demonstration project is strongly encouraged. If you would like more information about how to participate, to provide feedback or ask questions, please contact:

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Biohabitats and Camoin

(Continued from page 3)

needs.

The final task is the creation of the EBM planning strategy report, which will outline the key characteristics of an ecosystem-based approach to planning for the Sandy Creeks watershed. The report will include recommendations on how to proceed to complete a comprehensive EBM plan for the Sandy Creeks watershed.

“New York is unique in the Country in having extensive shoreline and major population centers along both its Great Lakes and Ocean coasts.” (Summary report to the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Council, 2006)



Little Stony Creek, Henderson

What is the Sandy Creeks Ecosystem-based Management Demonstration Project?

(Continued from page 1)

get them involved and represented in the process and to show those in Albany and others the importance of our grass-roots, locally-driven efforts in managing the landscape. The THC and watershed communities also saw how well this demonstration project fit into the many other projects underway in the region. They recognize this project as a potential resource for additional monies to fund locally identified projects.

The Sandy Creeks Watershed and EBM

(Continued from page 1)

Creek, and Ellisburg. It also includes the all or portions of the villages of Adams, Ellisburg, Mannsville, Sandy Creek, Lacona, and Pulaski. The project area is primarily rural. Forestry, agricultural, and recreational economies in this area are heavily dependent on its natural resource base ranging from the headwater forests to large lakeside wetland complexes and the adjacent watersheds.

Demonstrating the links between natural resources and the economy, and balancing the quality of human well-being with the protection of a restored, sustainable ecosystem is the goal of this project. The first step toward that goal will be development of a framework that characterizes the watershed both ecologically and economically. The framework will identify the steps necessary to do a comprehensive ecosystem-based management plan that would include collaborative planning with communities, identification of conservation and socioeconomic goals, and development of methods to maintain ecological integrity and economic sustainability.

Remember!!!!

First Stakeholder Outreach Meeting:

- Date:** June 27, 2007
- Time:** 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm
- Place:** Sandy Island Beach State Park Pavilion