



HEP Action Agenda 2025-2035

Community Engagement Session Requisites Notes

June 11 2024 9:00-12:00 Session

Participant Feedback Summary Form

Host Name & Date: Heather Fenyk, Executive Director of the Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership		
Total Number of Meeting Participants: 31 Participants		
Discussion Question	Participant Feedback/Summary of Answers	Additional comments & potential ties to Host's mission/work
What's your favorite way or place to access nature within our Estuary? What else do you value about your local waterways?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "Lately, I've really enjoyed watching the bald eagles over the watershed" ● "Canoeing (beginner), Manasquan Reservoir, Howell, Monmouth County Parks" ● "Walk along Raritan River at Donaldson and Johnson Parks (Highland Park)" ● "Boat Basin Under RTE 1 Bridge, White Rock First Landing of the Early Settlers From Massachusetts, All In Edison" ● "Kayaking and walking along Matchaponix Brook" ● "Tow Path biking from New Brunswick to Trenton" ● "Boyd Park, walking along the Raritan River" ● "Kayaking long stretches of the Raritan River. For example, Duke Island Park to Riverside Park." ● "Walking and Biking the D&R towpath" ● "Colonial Park" ● "Golf at Quail Brook and Spooky Brook" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participants' responses underscore an interest in connectivity of parks and trails and speak to an interest in a clearly articulated network of blueways/greenways (water trails, paths, etc.) not only within the watershed but connecting to larger regional trail networks e.g. the Delaware & Raritan Canal, the Appalachian Trail, etc. ● Participants repeatedly requested integration of environmental and cultural interpretation in the landscape (natural/ecological and cultural history)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Volunteering with the LRWP” ● “Paddling the D&R and tripping Millstone to Johnson Park in a canoe or kayak” ● “Edison Boat Basin watching the water and birds, and at white rock hiking the trails” ● “Kayaking and birding in the Perth Amboy area” ● “I value how the Raritan river and watershed provide a wildlife habitat” ● “Ecological preserve, my favorite quick nature walk” 	
<p>Do you wish you had more and/or different opportunities to experience the natural environment? What kind of opportunities come to mind?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant #21: I wish there were more and different opportunities to experience nature along our waterways. The current situation is frustrating because the towpath ends by the spillway, which limits safe access to the greenspace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant #21: This lack of connectivity contributes to a feeling of being out of sight and out of mind, leading to a sense of disconnect. This issue has its roots in historical slum clearing projects that disrupted natural spaces and access routes.
<p>Are there challenges/obstacles that may get in the way of realizing those opportunities from happening in your community?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant #27: Infrastructure like Route 18 poses a significant barrier, making it challenging to access many natural areas. These obstacles limit our ability to fully enjoy and experience nature along our waterways. ● Participant #07: When Route 18 was reengineered by the state, it resulted in lost opportunities for access to natural spaces. The rebuilding of the Landing Lane Bridge has also created issues, and Boyd Park, which used to have a marina, is now completely different. Advocating for this area to become a state park could benefit the public, considering the historical significance of the canal and its locks. Additionally, transportation in general poses a challenge. High vehicle miles traveled and a lack of mass transit development limit blue and green space access. Developing mass transit to promote 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant #18: On July 1, the state planning office is submitting the state plan, which includes a process of cross-acceptance. This allows for negotiations about the larger picture of regional plans, aiming to improve the balance between development and natural space preservation. ● Participant #12: To address these issues, superregional coordination is needed to improve waterway connections and establish casual access points. Ensuring the safety and visibility of these access points is crucial for those using the river.

access to these natural areas could help overcome these obstacles.

- **Participant #18:** We often overlook the potential for connecting parks via river access and linking open space parcels. There's a notable lack of open space, exacerbated by county advertisements promoting development rather than conservation. Addressing this requires larger regional coordination with a vision focused on habitat connectivity and supporting ecosystem services. This shift from development to natural resource enjoyment is crucial.
- **Participant #5:** In the Green Brook area, it is particularly difficult to establish a connection between Green Brook and the Raritan River, as well as to the larger connection to the ocean. This hinders the ability to create a cohesive network of waterways and green spaces.
- **Participant #12:** There is a lack of boat launches, which poses significant obstacles to water-based recreation. Additionally, there is insufficient conversation and knowledge about existing boat launches. While the Landing Lane spillway has been fixed, it still presents challenges. Unlike other bodies of water that have dedicated commissions, such as the DNR Commission and the Pinelands Commission, there is no Raritan River Commission. Consequently, the canal receives more attention and care than the river.
- **Participant #16:** A key issue is the lack of marked launch and takeout points along the river, which stems from a general lack of knowledge about these access points.
- **Participant #26:** Communities often do not want to be liable for recreational activities. This hesitancy from municipalities can be addressed by using appropriate signage to mitigate liability concerns.

- **Participant #07** comments on **Participant #16** Response: Interest in the river often stops at the turnpike, with insufficient public pressure to extend it further. Although lists of access points exist, there is a lack of public demand to push for better accessibility. For example, the launch site at Queens Bridge in South Bound Brook was developed by the municipality, but many existing launch sites suffer from poor maintenance despite promises of improvement. Additionally, there is nothing along the roads to draw people to these spaces. Prioritizing these areas by adding amenities could enhance their appeal and encourage more people to use and appreciate the river.
- **Participant #14:** Creating a map similar to the Delaware River Bicycle Map could be beneficial.
- **Participant #25:** Establishing a greenway from Bound Brook to South Amboy, akin to the Middlesex Greenway in Metuchen, would be advantageous. It should offer more than just a trail through the woods by incorporating playgrounds and various activities for people to enjoy. Additionally, it should honor the legacy of human impact and history along the route, providing interpretive information for visitors.

<p>Are you concerned about water quality or other pollutants?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● NOTE: Many heads nodding in the affirmative when this question was posed. ● Participant #3: Pathogens and industrial pollutants have led people to shun the waters due to historical health concerns. However, efforts have been made to monitor and report on the health of the river. The Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership (LRWP) provides weekly reports on river health, drawing from six years of data to inform the community. ● Participant #19: Littering!!! ● Participant #07: Floatables. ● Participant #12: In Somerville, certain areas along the river were declared unsuitable for use, resulting in the complete clearance of the site. There's a need to consider the nexus of interests and what activities are permitted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant #12: Municipalities must acknowledge the community's interests and be willing to adapt, possibly exploring revenue generation through concessions.
<p>What are other concerns or stressors that your community is currently facing?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant #13: In our community, we're grappling with concerns about flood forecasting for the Raritan River. It's essential to ensure sufficient monitoring of flood stages to provide timely warnings and preparedness measures. Additionally, there's a pressing need to understand the potential risks associated with recreational activities in these spaces. Are we providing enough information and resources to ensure the safety of those who use our waterways for recreation? ● Participant #12: Zoning regulations in South Bound Brook lack impervious surface monitoring, prompting questions about state requirements in this regard. It's crucial for municipalities to manage stormwater on-site. Some municipalities have already developed impervious cover reduction action plans for the lower Raritan watershed, indicating proactive steps. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant #12: To tackle these issues, there's a suggestion to enforce stronger ordinances and encourage towns to take stricter actions. It's emphasized that all new developments should adhere to expectations of impervious cover reduction. ● Participant #27: Some areas have implemented a Stormwater Management Utility. This utility imposes fees when stormwater isn't properly managed. Recently, New Brunswick has adopted this approach, where properties with more impervious cover generally face higher rates. ● Participant #28: New Brunswick stormwater utility will be operational in July. Residents will be required to pay for the stormwater they generate.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant #07: In densely populated areas like Perth Amboy, there's a concerning trend where residents are paving their backyards to create parking spaces for sale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant #14: Half of New Brunswick properties are tax-exempt due to hospitals and universities. Stormwater utilities levy fees rather than taxes, which makes them more acceptable to residents.
<p>How has climate change impacted your community?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant #18: The new Edison masterplan illustrates the projected sea level rise at high tide, indicating areas that will be underwater. This rise threatens to eliminate access points due to submerged areas. ● Participant #26: As temperatures rise, underserved communities seek relief by accessing water, regardless of its quality. Ensuring safe water quality is crucial, especially during hot weather. We need to be supporting municipalities in effectively communicating potential risks is essential in addressing this concern. ● Participant #07: The train bridge along the river restricts access, but with the new bridge design, the Coast Guard will provide 15 feet of clearance at high tide, potentially opening up access. The mayor of Perth Amboy has taken an interest in improving beaches, with about 80% of the time deemed swimmable. Leveraging the natural flushing mechanisms of the river is crucial for water quality improvement, necessitating enhanced monitoring by health departments. Additionally, recognizing the Lower Raritan as a Federal Maritime Highway could attract more attention and care to the waterways, especially if shipping activity increases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant #30: Enhancing the multiuse of flood storage in Donaldson and Johnson Park could mitigate flooding issues in these areas. ● Participant #07: Consider taking the river floodplain into account by allowing it to flood, planning for it, and mitigating potential damage. Embracing concepts like "Room for the River" involves designing with these risks in mind.

<p>Are there places/sites in your community where these concerns are more prevalent?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant #30: Donaldson and Johnson Park could mitigate flooding issues in these areas. ● Participant #18: Edison Boat Launches and Flood Plain Areas ● Participant #26: Areas with underserved communities that will use the water as a way to cool off during the summer despite water quality warnings because they have no option not to. ● Participant #07: Perth Amboy beaches, with CSO overflow. ● Participant #12: Somerville and South Bound Brook 	
<p>If you could pick one change that's necessary to have a greener, healthier and more resilient community – what would that be?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant #13: Emphasize the importance of habitat connectivity, particularly in inspiring youth and fostering an interest in habitat and sciences. ● Participant #09: Have less habitat for human use. ● Participant #27: Enhancing habitat connectivity for campuses could involve creating trails that allow students to commute to class while enjoying nature. ● Participant #14: More education in a variety of communities. ● Participant #18: Younger and more enlightened leadership in our communities. ● Participant #19: More bike paths and signage in our communities. ● Participant #28: We need to create a Sustainable Raritan River Corridor. It may be a hidden gem but it should aim to connect people within the community. Our goal should be to rejuvenate the river and encourage community members to rediscover its beauty and benefits. ● Participant #22: We need to invest in elementary education programs surrounding the environment. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Participant #21: Advocating for personhood for natural features involves treating the river as having rights, allowing for legal action to be taken against damages inflicted upon it. This concept recognizes the inherent rights of the river itself.● Participant #17: Enhancing community engagement through school curriculums with a focus on youth.● Participant #26: Fully funding the Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership to ensure staffing levels are on par with similar organizations like Raritan Headwaters.● Participant #07: Implementing regional intermunicipal planning to establish public commissions independent of political processes, focusing on effective planning strategies.● Participant #03: The "7 generation principle" looks ahead to our youth and our landscape seven generations from now, emphasizing the importance of pushing partnerships for sustainable planning.	
<p>Questions/follow-ups for HEP?</p>		