

WNY Environmental Alliance

[Final Report]

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Community Foundation
for Greater Buffalo



INSTITUTE
FOR CONSERVATION
LEADERSHIP

UB The Urban Design Project
University at Buffalo *The State University of New York*

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Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
OUR SHARED AGENDA FOR ACTION	4
Declaration of Action.....	4
Goal and Objectives of the Agenda.....	5
Proposal to Formalize the WNYEA	7
The Proposal.....	7
The Structure of the Alliance.....	8
BACKGROUND	9
Introduction to the Process.....	9
Public Processes	9
The Steering Committee.....	9
The Congresses.....	13
Task Groups	18
<i>Energy and Climate Change</i>	25
<i>Habitat and Natural Resources</i>	28
<i>Parks and Recreation</i>	31
<i>Urban Regeneration and Land Use</i>	34
<i>Waste, Pollution Prevention, and Water</i>	37
<i>Strengthening Environmental Organizations - Capacity</i>	42
Research	43
Profile of Western New York Environmental Organizations	43
Profile of Western New York Environmental Public Agencies	46
Profile of Western New York Environmental Plans.....	47
Case Studies on Collaboration.....	48
Key Findings from the Research	50
SUMMARY OF NEXT STEPS	52
Work Started	52
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	53

APPENDIX A: COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT	A-1
--------------------------------------------------	------------

APPENDIX B: PROGRESS REPORTS

Progress Report #1: November 2008.....	B-1
Progress Report #2: February 2009	B-63
Progress Report #3: April 2009	B-99

APPENDIX C: MEETING SUMMARIES

Steering Committee Meeting Minutes	C-1
Task Group Meeting Minutes	C-52

APPENDIX D: CASE STUDIES ON COLLABORATION	D-1
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APPENDIX E: BACKGROUND REPORTS

Organization Inventory	E-1
Agency Inventory	E-83
Plan Inventory	E-133
Maps	E-183

Executive Summary

Our Purpose

In 2006, the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo (CFGB) established a new priority: to enhance and leverage significant natural resources. As a result, CFGB launched a new leadership initiative **to establish a shared agenda, to identify priorities for action, and to strengthen the capacity of the region's environmental community.**

Taking place from January 2008 through June 2009, this work convened over 150 organizations to strategically engage community-wide resources to improve the region's environment and thus its economy and quality of life. The process gave birth to a new coalition, the Western New York Environmental Alliance, which is expected to:

- Deepen commitment to a shared agenda for action
- Increase collaboration among organizations working on environmental issues
- Attract resources to support the agenda

The year-long work is embodied in the WNYEA **Declaration for Action**, a preamble that articulates the purposes of the work, and **Our Shared Agenda for Action**, that outlines the next steps for collaborative action. The geographic focus of this effort is Erie and Niagara Counties, although there are implications for the rest of Western New York as well as parts of the Niagara Peninsula in Ontario.

The Planning Process

A grant by the NYS Department of State, Division of Coastal Resources enabled the CFGB to contract with The Urban Design Project, a research center in the School of Architecture and Planning at UB, and the Institute for Conservation Leadership, in order to help design and facilitate this process. The initiative built on several community-wide efforts including the CFGB "Green and Growing" Summit; the New York Power Authority relicensing; Daemen College Environmental Summits; Green Gold business meetings; and the Niagara River Roundtable and municipal planning efforts.

The planning process began in early 2008 with the formation of the Steering Committee, representing more than twenty-five organizations, agencies, and businesses. This entity provided oversight and assisted in convening three large public Congresses attended by over 300 people who represented over 150 environmental organizations in Western New York. The first Congress was held at Crosby Hall on UB's South Campus in October 2008. The second Congress was held at the New York Power Authority's Power Vista in Lewiston in February 2009, and the third Congress was held at the Buffalo Museum of Science in April 2009.



Dedicated members of the environmental community guided the creation of Our Shared Agenda for Action.

The discussions held at the first Congress established *Task Groups*, self-selected groups of people organized around discrete topics that developed the issues, actions, and quantifiable measures of the Agenda. The Task Groups were open to the participation of anyone interested in working together on specific issues; they met between the Congresses, presented at the Congresses, and helped to form the Agenda presented in June 2009.

The results of this collaborative process are a “Declaration of Action” and “Our Shared Agenda for Action.” The goal and objectives developed and discussed during this time reflect a long-term vision for the well-being of Western New York, including the education and policy needed to improve the quality of the world around us.

Western New York Environmental Alliance

Shared Agenda for Action

Goal: To Preserve and Restore Our Regional Environment

- Objective One: Demonstrate the Preservation and Restoration of the Region's Natural Heritage through Collaborative Projects
- Objective Two: Mobilize the Public and Policymakers to Improve the Environment
- Objective Three: Strengthen Environmental Organizations

Implementation of this Agenda will be ongoing and supported by the WNY Environmental Alliance, the Task Groups, the CFGB, and individual organizations. The Agenda is an evolving

document, and will be monitored and sharpened to include critical issues as needed by collaborating participants.

WNYEA Final Report

This final report is a complete record of the work and covers both the content and processes engaged. A summary of the work of 2008-2009 of the Western New York Environmental Alliance is published in the CFGB Community Impact Report and is available in Appendix A.

This report begins with the formal work of the Alliance: the **Declaration of Action**, the **Goal and Objectives of the Agenda** as established by the WNYEA and the public through the year long collaborative process, and an approved proposal to **formalize the Alliance**.

The second section covers the background information of the year-long process. There were several types of collaborative meetings: eight separate Steering Committee meetings, sixteen Task Group meetings, and three Congresses. Summaries of these meetings and overviews of the Task Group work are provided. The report includes a description of the background process of collecting data: surveys of Western New York Environmental organizations and agencies and summaries of environmental planning work in the region. The consultants provided case studies on lessons learned from other regional collaborative environmental efforts, and a summary of this work is included. Detailed progress reports, Steering Committee and Task Group meeting minutes, background data research, and case studies on collaboration are included as appendices.

The last section contains a brief overview of **Next Steps** that outlines what the ad hoc group has already accomplished this year, what commitments are being made, and how this effort will move forward. The Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, the Steering Committee, Task Groups, and participants at the Congresses have all committed to implementing the Agenda in various ways. All will help convene annual Congresses for the next five years to celebrate successes, discuss opportunities for improvements, and determine next steps.

Our Shared Agenda for Action

Declaration of Action

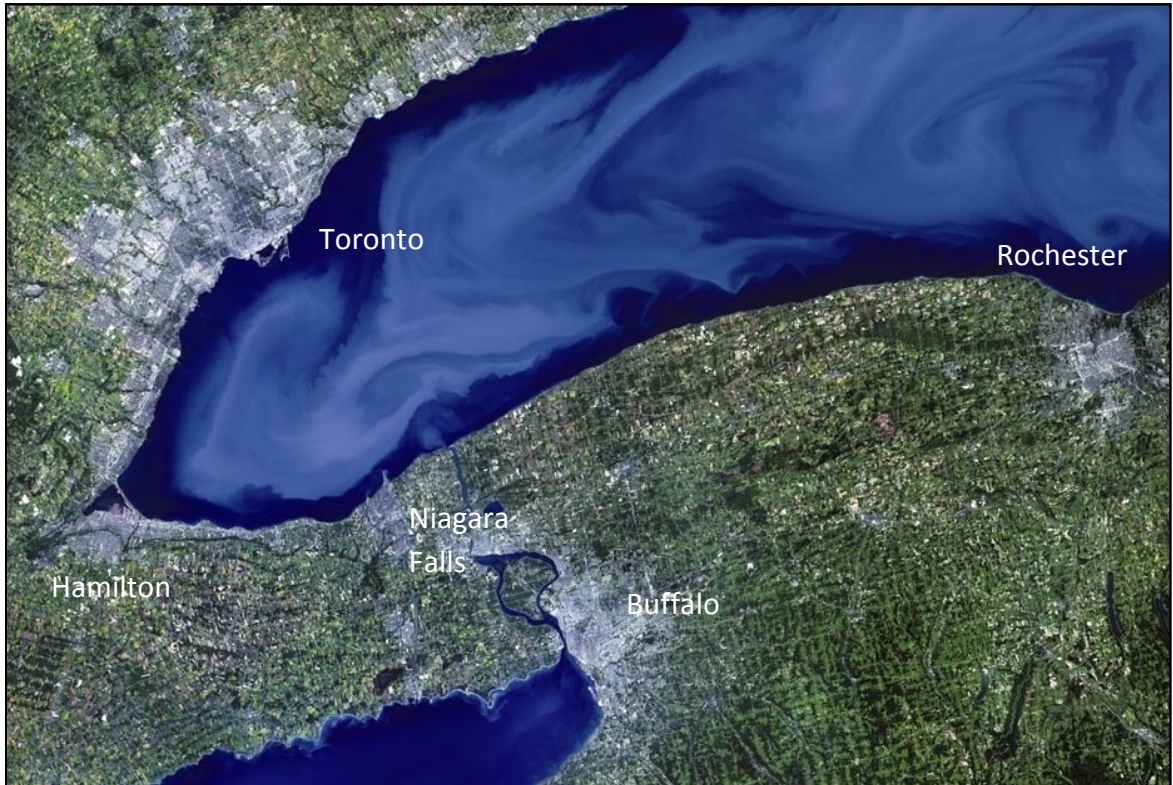
We, the people of Western New York, are resolved to work collaboratively to improve our environment and our regional, international community. We are a Great Lakes region and stewards of the world's largest supply of fresh water, vast forests, rich agricultural land, abundant wildlife, an incredible built heritage, historic park systems, the magnificent Niagara Falls and hundreds of wonderful communities. Unfortunately, much of our natural heritage has been lost and what remains is threatened. And, like the rest of the world, we face the prospects of climate change. We therefore establish this agenda to protect and restore our globally significant environment.

We know that our environmental resources are immeasurable assets; they have direct impacts on our quality of life and our economy. Healthy ecosystems provide habitat for wildlife; they provide clean air, clean water and other ecological services such as stormwater control and carbon sequestration; and they provide recreational and business opportunities. The environment is a source of wealth for all of us.

Like our natural heritage, our environmental community is strong. We are the birthplace of the environmental justice movement, a product of both our legacy of contamination and our determination to seek action through justice. We are home to thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations aiming to improve our region.

Although our assets are plentiful and our voices numerous, our region and its people have suffered through the despoiling of our environment and the fragmentation of our collective efforts. Our dwindling population, declining health, vacant and contaminated land, and faltering economy are proof of this. Although some progress has been made, much more is needed. At this time, we make a commitment to collaboratively increase our region's environmental literacy, preserve its biodiversity, and ensure that our energy is sustainable, our air is clean, our water drinkable, our fish edible, and our forests, farms, and gardens plentiful.

With “Our Shared Agenda for Action,” we have a vision for our future. Together, we are committed to strengthening the work of our environmental community through collaboration and implementation. This includes long term, overarching goals as well as specific measurable actions that can be accomplished soon. We are determined to leave those who follow us a sustainable, thriving community where they can live healthfully, work productively, learn, teach, grow old, and choose their own path. This is the aim of the Western New York Environmental Alliance – the purpose of Our Shared Agenda for Action.



Western New York is part of a much larger Great Lakes ecosystem, formed by receding glaciers at the end of the last ice age.

Goal and Objectives of the Agenda

The **Western New York Environmental Alliance** through its collaborative work, “Our Shared Agenda for Action,” proposes one goal and three objectives to guide joint efforts among the region’s environmental community.

SHARED AGENDA FOR ACTION

Goal – To Preserve and Restore Our Regional Environment

I. Demonstrate the Preservation and Restoration of the Region's Natural Assets through Collaborative projects

- *Build area demand for alternative energy with a One-Stop-Shop to demonstrate renewable energy and energy efficiency methods for residences and businesses.*
- *Reclaim and re-purpose vacant commercial, industrial, and residential property in two distressed pilot communities.*
- *Educate children and adults on the region's environmental assets and threats by enhancing environmental education and linking the community to the vast array of opportunities across WNY.*
- *Reduce the threat of invasive species to the region by effectively accessing state funding through the PRISM program.*
- *Protect our unique natural habitats by accessing federal and state resources for urgent shovel-ready projects.*

II. Mobilize the Public and Policymakers to Improve the Environment

- *Change opinions through a multi-faceted awareness campaign on key Environmental Issues. Issues include: Recycling, Parks, Toxic & Hazardous Waste, Water Quality and Quantity, Smart Growth Principles*
- *Influence change in public behavior through tools and incentives for recycling, water conservation and reuse*
- *Make a clear and compelling case for environmental quality by quantifying the economic impact of parks and green spaces, toxic and hazardous waste, habitat loss, and urban regeneration.*
- *Create a WNY energy policy center to engage the public in a productive dialogue about energy.*
- *Advocate for Regional Planning Boards to implement Smart Growth policies.*
- *Increase stewardship and connectivity of parks through a regional plan to restore and maintain our parks.*

- *Develop a regional strategy to protect our water quality and quantity from the many threats posed by pollution, climate change, and economic pressures.*
- *Act as the environmental watchdog by monitoring the environmental behavior of citizens and policy makers.*
- *Establish an active network for change to alert citizens, organizations, and policymakers to legislative opportunities or threats; mobilize stakeholders to act effectively; and to thoughtfully support policy that protects our environmental assets.*

III. Strengthen Environmental Organizations

- *Maximize the collective impact of the 150+ environmental organizations under the umbrella of the WNY Environmental Alliance.*
- *Improve communication and coordination between environmental organizations and the public with an online community called the WNY GreenTable.*
- *Provide much needed support to local environmental leaders with training, technical assistance, networking opportunities, and access to funds dedicated to growing their organizations.*
- *Improve funding for environmental programs and initiatives with opportunities to hone fundraising skills and engage in joint grant writing ventures.*
- *Further strengthen networking and coordination of efforts by securing shared office space and resources for environmental organizations, businesses and others.*

Proposal to Formalize the WNYEA

The Proposal

At its March 2009 meeting, the Steering Committee framed a proposal to be presented and discussed at Congress Three. Concerned that the current funded project is complete in June 2009, members of the committee discussed and decided on a way to continue the effort through an agreement to formalize the Western New York Environmental Alliance. The proposal was received enthusiastically by Congress Three participants in April of 2009 and individuals agreed to work in a committee to design a structure to facilitate this work.

Proposal Submitted by Steering Committee to Congress Three

The WNY Environmental Alliance has emerged as an ad hoc alliance of over 100 organizations interested in the protection and enhancement of the environment of Western New York. These organizations chose to participate in the year long project managed by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo referred to as the Western New York Environmental Alliance. Although this year long project on behalf of the region's environment is complete with the preparation of Our Shared Agenda for Action by the Steering Committee, Task Groups, and Congresses, it is a living document and will continue to evolve.

Given the commitment of hundreds of individuals and many organizations, the Steering Committee has made the commitment to oversee the process to formalize the Alliance so that the work we have done will have a mechanism for continuation. To that end, the Steering Committee recommended that the Western New York Environmental Alliance be formalized to act as a coordinating mechanism for the environmental community of our Niagara region. This body would coordinate the work outlined in Our Shared Agenda for Action and requests that the Community Foundation reconvene a Congress each year for the next five years to assess our progress.

*Preserving and restoring our regional heritage builds on a long tradition of activism in Western New York by many groups and individuals. But the Alliance offers a substantial advancement by its focus on raising the profile of WNY environmental concerns through **collaborative action**; through **demonstration projects**; and through the **strengthening of existing environmental organizations**.*

The Structure of the Alliance

There are many factors to consider for the creation of a structure for the Western New York Environmental Alliance. A sub-group of the Steering Committee will be responsible for establishing the Alliance. The group will consider several factors, including:

- Purpose and goals – what the Alliance is trying to accomplish. This Agenda outlines the aims of the WNYEA.
- The preferred type of organization – this can range from an incorporated non-profit, to a loosely governed group of participating people and organizations.
- Membership – who is involved and at what level. The group will have to consider the roles of environmental organizations, government agencies and representatives, and the general public.
- Governance and processes – what is the leadership structure, how are they selected, and how are decisions made.

Background

Introduction to the Process

This report includes a summary and the findings of each part of the project. The year-long planning process that led to Our Shared Agenda for Action has been collaborative, community-driven, continuously shaped, reshaped, and modified by the participations at various meetings.

The structure of this process included:

- Coalition building to include regular Western New York Environmental Alliance Steering Committee meetings, three large, public, environmental Congresses, and Task Group meetings between the Congresses.
- Developing “Our Shared Agenda for Action” through the facilitated process.
- Collecting background information on regional environmental organizations and agencies, environmental planning, and environmental conditions through research, interviews and a survey.
- Lessons from precedents and best practices of regional environmental collaboration.

The adjacent table shows the number of each type of coalition building meeting held between January 2008 and May 2009. The other collaborative meetings include a joint Task Group leader meeting in February 2009, and a joint Task Group participant meeting in May 2009.

Coalition Building Meetings	Total
WNYEA Steering Committee	9
Task Groups	16
Congresses	3
Other Collaborative Meetings	2

Public Processes

The Steering Committee

The CFGB has been convening a group of environmental organizations and governmental agencies known as the Western New York Environmental Alliance (WNYEA) since May of 2008. This group, working as the Steering Committee for the project, has grown to 30 individuals, representing diverse organizations and government agencies (see Appendix C – Meeting

Summaries). The committee was charged with guiding the process, increasing collaboration and organizing support for it from the broader community, and shaping “Our Shared Agenda for Action.”

To guide the process, the Steering Committee met nine times between January 2008 and May 2009. At each meeting, project consultants and representatives of the CFGB presented background information collected and proposed next steps in the process. The Steering Committee offered feedback on this information, aimed the consultants towards needed information, and proposed alternative strategies for next steps. This process of interrogation and confirmation ensured that the Agenda would reflect the needs of the environmental community.

The Steering Committee felt that in order for the Agenda to be successful, it must be broadly accepted by the community. They knew that increased collaboration would help organize community support for the Agenda. The Steering Committee invited appropriate stakeholders to be part of the process and invited additional people and organizations to the meetings.

An important part of increasing collaboration was the three Congresses. The Steering Committee helped plan the Congresses, invite attendees, and some members led discussions at the Congresses. Many of the Steering Committee members also participated in Task Group discussions between the Congresses, another avenue for increasing collaboration and tying the Agenda more directly to community needs. This group was instrumental in shaping “Our Shared Agenda for Action.” Through regular Steering Committee meetings and additional correspondence, members provided insight on how the Agenda would be most effective, its goals and objectives, its audience, and who needs to be involved.

The Steering Committee has continuing responsibilities. They are charged with helping to implement the Agenda, and specifically formalizing the WNY Environmental Alliance. The Agenda is an evolving strategy and the members of the Steering Committee will be charged with continuing the collaborative process by convening annual Congresses to celebrate successes, make modifications, and propose next steps.

Steering Committee Meeting Summaries Since January, 2008

The Beginning: January 28, 2008 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

A Steering Committee meeting of the Western New York Environmental Alliance was held on January 28, 2008 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The agenda and discussion included an overview of the purpose of the steering committee, beginning the dialogue about an environmental plan and a collaborative grant opportunity with the EPA CARE program.

The Steering Committee shared additional organizations that should be added to the committee as the plan developed as well as resources to help develop the planning process moving forward. Members of the committee agreed to help with the EPA CARE grant by giving CFGB letters of support and helping to coordinate the contents for the grant application. CFGB hoped to announce the consultant team for the plan at the next Steering Committee meeting.

May 12, 2008 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

The first Steering Committee meeting of the Western New York Environmental Alliance with project consultants was on May 12, 2008 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The CFGB and the project consultants at the Urban Design Project introduced the project's scope of work, the role of the Steering Committee, and the time-line for the project. The purpose of the project was described as an attempt to achieve improved environmental quality through increasing organizational capacity and to leverage natural resources to make the region more sustainable. The geographic focus of the project was determined to be Erie and Niagara Counties.

The group described several assumptions important to the framing of the project. First, environmental organizations will be more effective together with collaboration rather than as disconnected organizations. Second, there are different types of local funders that are interested in supporting these organizations but need some direction in terms of whom and what they should fund. And lastly, celebrating successes will make the project and the environment visible, drawing national attention.

June 23, 2008 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

A Steering Committee meeting of the Western New York Environmental Alliance was held on June 23, 2008 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The agenda included the communication strategy, developing an organization survey, analyzing environmental plans, creating maps, and researching best practices for regional collaboration.

The communication strategy described included postings about the project to the CFGB website, the UDP website, and the Daemen College Center for Sustainable Communities and Civic Engagement website. A survey for environmental organizations was discussed as a good way to collect background data on the role, capacity, and opportunities for the WNY environmental community. A collection of environment plans would be analyzed, and maps would be created to show important environmental assets and challenges. The work product, precedents and best practices for regional collaboration, was briefly discussed. The precedents should be focused on collaboration models and should be as interactive as possible.

August 11, 2008 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

A Steering Committee meeting of the Western New York Environmental Alliance was held on August 11, 2008 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The agenda included updates on work in progress, discussion of the format of the first Congress, proposals for developing working Task Groups, and a discussion about organizational capacity.

A series of maps were presented to the Steering Committee. These maps included Erie and Niagara County assets, challenges, planning work, and organization locations. Approximately 40 plans that encompass environmental related issues were reviewed and summarized. These plans have varying geographic scopes, from international to local, and varying environmental focus areas. A survey was sent out to the list of over 100 local environmental organizations and agencies in order to determine each agencies role, capacity, and partnerships.

Task groups were proposed as a way to gather information and build collaboration amongst organizations. Several possibilities for organizing Task Groups were discussed. The Institute for Conservation Leadership led a discussion about organizational capacity. The Steering Committee suggested that challenges to increased capacity included a lack of time and resources, insufficient staffing, internal and external communications gaps, and knowledge about what other organizations are doing.

September 29, 2008 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

A Steering Committee meeting of the Western New York Environmental Alliance was held on September 29, 2008 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The agenda was primarily focused on the upcoming first Congress. The CFGB also discussed a proposal for a virtual meeting place for the environmental community.

The Urban Design Project presented the general format of the three environmental Congresses. The first Congress would focus on organizations and their work, the second on structures and processes for collaboration and the third on implementation. An agenda for the first Congress was reviewed and discussed.

At the time of the meeting, the CFGB was preparing to send a proposal to the Knight Foundation to create a "Virtual Meeting Place." This would be an online forum for environmental issues. The CFGB asked the steering committee what they would want a virtual meeting place to be able to do. Responses included web site basics, various listings, information and resources, and tools.

November 13, 2008 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

A Steering Committee meeting of the Western New York Environmental Alliance was held on November 13, 2008 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The agenda included a summary and lessons learned from the October Congress, and strategies for the Task Groups.

The Steering Committee felt that the first Congress was successful. However, minority and youth populations were not well represented by the demographic composition of the participants. Most of the participants were from Buffalo and Erie County as opposed to Niagara County. The Steering Committee recommended making efforts to address this issue at future Congresses. Several key points came up in many of the Task Group discussions at the first Congress: capacity, environmental education / public awareness, green jobs and environmental justice.

Between Congress One and Two, the Task Groups would be charged to develop some clear direction for the community on their issue based on the slate of programs, projects and/or capacity needs identified in Congress One. At their meetings, the Task Groups would be asked:

- What do you think needs to be done to make progress?
- Who is working on it now and what are they doing (not-for-profits, government, citizens, others)?
- What resources are necessary to accomplish this goal?
- What is the impact and effort involved in making this work?
- How would we know if we were accomplishing this goal (milestones)?

January 26, 2009 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

A Steering Committee meeting of the Western New York Environmental Alliance was held on January 26, 2009 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The agenda was primarily focused on preparing for the second Congress in February 2009. The CFGB told the Steering Committee that they received funding from the Knight Foundation for the Western New York Green Table project, described in previous Steering Committee meetings as the virtual meeting space. The WNY Green Table will provide virtual space for communication and collaboration amongst environmental organizations and the broader community. Its function and content are still being developed. The efforts of the WNY Environmental

Alliance and Task Groups will likely be part of the Green Table effort.

The proposed agenda for the second Congress included Task Group presentations of their two priority issues, group interviews, Task Group discussions, Task Group reports back to the entire audience, and a presentation on case studies and best practices regarding collaborative efforts. At the Steering Committee meeting, Task Group leaders gave brief overviews of their Congress Two presentations.

March 23, 2009 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

A Steering Committee meeting of the Western New York Environmental Alliance was held on March 23, 2009 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The agenda was primarily focused on preparing for the third Congress in April 2009. The consultants presented a proposed structure for Our Shared Agenda for Action, discussed the draft Declaration of Action, and reviewed the Task group work. The Steering Committee discussed the advantages and disadvantages of formalizing the WNYEA.

The proposed agenda for the Congress included readings of the Declaration of Action, a presentation of the proposal to formalize the Alliance, a presentation on case studies and best practices regarding collaborative efforts, brief Task Group presentations of their proposed actions, and Task Group discussions.

May 18, 2009 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

A Steering Committee meeting of the Western New York Environmental Alliance was held on May 18, 2009 at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The agenda included reviews of Congress Three and a joint Task Group meeting on May 6, 2009. The primary focus of the meeting was to discuss the goal and objectives of Our Shared Agenda for Action and the proposal to formalize the WNYEA.

The Steering Committee felt the goal and objectives were aligned with and inclusive of the Task Group work. The Steering Committee discussed the potential role of the WNYEA, how governance and membership should be structured, and what steps need to be taken to move forward. A collaborative meeting of interested individuals was proposed as a way to continue the conversation about formalizing the Alliance.

The Congresses

The CFGB, the WNYEA, and the consultants helped convene three large Congresses as a part of the coalition building process. They included presentations of useful background research, group discussions, and audience feedback opportunities. The first was held at Crosby Hall in the School of Architecture and Planning at UB on October 25, 2008. The second was held at the Power Vista in Lewiston on February 7, 2009. The third was held on April 4, 2009 at the Museum of Science in Buffalo. The public at large was invited and WBFO Radio and The Buffalo News provided media support to encourage attendance. In total, well over 300 people attended these Congresses and participated in the discussions, representing close to 150 different organizations, agencies, businesses, and citizens groups. Summaries of these Congresses are below. See Appendix B – Progress Reports for detailed reports on each Congress.

The 1st Congress of the Western New York Environmental Alliance: October 2008

Organizations and their Work: Who are we and what are we doing?

The first of three large, public Congresses was held the morning of Saturday October 25th in Crosby Hall at UB's School of Architecture and Planning. The agenda for the Congress included an overview of the findings regarding the Western New York environmental community, principles for collaboration, Task Group break-out discussions, and prioritizing the issues raised during these discussions.

The discussions held at the first Congress confirmed the structure of having *Task Groups*; self-selected groups of people organized around discrete topics that developed the issues, actions, and quantifiable measures of the Agenda. The Task Groups were open to the participation of anyone interested in working together on specific issues. The Task Groups represented issues identified by the Steering Committee. Nearly 100 people participated in these Task Group discussions at Congress One representing over 80 environmental organizations and government agencies. Polling devices and evaluation forms were used to gather data about attendees. More than half came to increase collaboration (65%) and close to half were affiliated with a non-profit organization (43%). Over 80% were from Buffalo and Erie County, suggesting that Niagara County was not well represented. In terms of racial composition, the vast majority of attendees were white (90%).

The Task Groups met individually during the Congress to discuss issues, capacity, potential projects, and initial priorities for collaboration. There are several issues that were common to each Task Group discussion. These include environmental education, environmental justice, green economy, and organizational capacity. Each Task Group reported a summary of their discussion to the entire audience at the end of the first Congress. The audience was asked to prioritize the Task Groups self identified priorities, and discuss the results. The audience discussed policy related issues such as economic development and land use policies; stewardship of natural resources such as the Great Lakes, air, and water; and connections between greenspaces, urban and rural communities, and within the binational region. Many of the comments suggested that individual organizations and agencies lacked necessary capacity.



The presentations and discussions at the three Congresses created opportunities for collaboration on shared issues.

The lack of capacity comes from the lack of funding but can be increased by collaboration, sharing resources, and environmental education and advocacy. Audience members were asked to propose projects that could improve the Western New York environment. A one-stop information shop for environmental organizations was described as a way to increase access to information, improve collaboration, and reduce redundant work. Task Group discussions and audience feedback were used to start discussions at individual Task Group meetings held between the first and second Congresses.

The 2nd Congress of the Western New York Environmental Alliance: February 2009

Structures and processes for collaboration: How do we work together?

The second of three Congresses was held the morning of Saturday February 7th at the New York Power Authority's Power Vista in Lewiston, Niagara County, New York. The agenda for the Congress included brief presentations of each of the Task Groups' two key issues, group interviews and discussions regarding strengths and needed improvements of those key issues, a report to the whole group on the results of these group discussions, a presentation on case studies and best practices of regional collaborations, and a question and answer session.



Each participant at the second Congress provided feedback on Task Group work.

Over 120 people participated in these Task Group discussions representing over 90 environmental organizations and government agencies. Nearly two-thirds of the attendees had not been at the first Congress. Seventy-six percent of the audience was from either Buffalo or another community in Erie County. Approximately 17% of the audience was from Niagara Falls or Niagara County, up from only 8% at the first Congress. Audience demographic polls showed that 40% of attendees were between the ages of 50-65, 56% were male, and 88% were white.

Charlotte Young from the Institute for Conservation Leadership gave a presentation of case studies and best practices for regional collaboration. The three case studies were:

1. Centre for Social Innovation – Toronto, Ontario
2. Hamilton ECO-net – Hamilton, Ontario
3. Philadelphia Green Space Alliance – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The second Congress was designed to allow the entire audience to review and comment on the issues presented by each Task Group and then allow the Task Groups to discuss and modify their issues. After brief presentations from each Task Group, participants around each table interviewed and were interviewed by members of other Task Groups seated at their table. Task groups then got back together to discuss the results of these interviews, and presented back to the entire audience a summary of these discussions.

Task groups modified their issues based upon Task Group discussions and feedback from the audience. In general, the entire audience felt that each Task Group was representing the issues related to that Task Group well. Major suggestions for modifications included recommendations to develop more concrete and achievable actions, to be more inclusive of under-represented populations, and to find commonalities amongst the various Task Groups in order to better work together. The audience realized that several overarching themes were emerging from the Task Group work, including environmental preservation, restoration, advocacy, education, and regional capacity.

The 3rd Congress of the Western New York Environmental Alliance: April 2009

Implementation and Beginning Projects: How do we move forward on a Shared Agenda for Action?

The third Congress was held the morning of Saturday April 4th at the Buffalo Museum of Science. The agenda for the Congress included presentations of the Declaration of Action, a proposal from the Steering Committee to formalize the WNY Environmental Alliance, a presentation on case studies on organizing collaboratives, Task Group presentations of their issues, actions and quantifiable measures, Task Group discussions, and a question and answer session.

Over 80 people participated in these Task Group discussions. Most of these participants represented non-profits (33%), government agencies (28%), or concerned citizens (19%). Half (51%) of the attendees had been at the first Congress, while over half had been at the second Congress (55%). Ninety percent of the audience was from either Buffalo or another community

in Erie County. Audience demographic polls showed that 38% of attendees were between the ages of 50-65, 51% were male, and 91% were white.

David Hahn Baker from the Community Action Organization of Erie County and a member of the Steering Committee of the WNY Environmental Alliance presented the Declaration of Action; the “Preamble” to the WNYEA final Agenda. This preamble was developed at the suggestion of various Task Group members to remind everyone involved about the purpose of our work. Participants were asked to comment on the Declaration of Action, and the Declaration was subsequently revised based upon those comments. Almost everyone that completed an evaluation form was supportive of the Declaration of Action; with 83% in agreement that it is representative of their effort. The final version is included in the WNYEA Agenda.

Robert Knoer of the Steering Committee of the WNY Environmental Alliance presented a proposal to formalize the Alliance “so that the work we have done will have a mechanism for continuation.” Participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire regarding their interest in formalizing the WNYEA. There were 56 total responses. First, the questionnaire asked what individual organizations could hope to gain from the WNY Environmental Alliance. Most responded that the Alliance would help them find new partnerships. Some respondents thought that the Alliance could help with specific projects, education, and increased capacity and resources. Second, the questionnaire asked what individual organizations could hope to gain from the WNY Environmental Alliance. Many respondents thought they could offer different types of knowledge, including technical knowledge, institutional knowledge, and educational programs. Some respondents can offer shared resources and shared people including staff and volunteers.

Charlotte Young from the Institute for Conservation Leadership gave a presentation on case studies on organizing collaboratives. Each of these case studies demonstrated different membership structures, goals and purposes, and structure and operations. Two case studies were the Schuylkill Learning Community and the Highlands Coalition.

Congress Three was designed to facilitate discussions about specific proposed actions and ways to measure those actions. After brief presentations by a representative from each Task Group, participants gathered in Task Groups to discuss proposed actions and measurable outcomes. There was also a youth education discussion group. The discussions focused on action items, though not all action items were discussed. This report includes a summary of the presentations and the Task Group discussions.

Congress Three organizers provided participants with several different means to evaluate the Congress and offer suggestions for improvements. These included audience polling devices, a question and answer session, and evaluation cards. From polling device responses, most participants felt the Task Group work was important, relevant, and that most of the proposed actions were feasible. The participants were committed to continued involvement in the process by helping to implement the Agenda and attend subsequent annual Congresses.

Task Groups

Task Group	1 ST Meeting	2 nd Meeting	3 rd Meeting
Energy and Climate Change	12/18/08	01/20/09	03/12/09
Habitat and Natural Resources	01/14/09	03/11/09	-
Urban Regeneration and Land Use	12/17/08	01/21/09	03/16/09
Parks and Recreation	12/15/09	01/19/09	03/12/09
Waste, Pollution Prevention and Water	12/11/08	01/22/09	03/12/09
Strengthening Environmental Organizations	01/06/09	02/22/09	-
All Task Group Meeting	05/06/09	-	-

The Task Groups were formed as a way to select specific topics, to gather information on issues, and to begin collaboration across various groups. This form of working was devised early in the process, approved by the Steering Committee, and presented at Congress One through the structure of that workshop. These groups met between the Congresses, presented at the Congresses, and with the Steering Committee, helped form the Declaration of Action and initial efforts of the Agenda.



Discussion groups at the first Congress developed into the Task Groups that helped shape this Agenda.

The Task Groups developed key issues and potential collaborative projects that were presented at the second Congress on February 6, 2009. They refined those issues and developed action items and quantifiable measures for Congress Three. Members of the Task Groups attended a joint Task Group meeting in May 2009 to further refine the issues, actions, and measures, and to seek ways for future integration.

Over the course of the year, the groups shifted and restructured to accommodate shared issues and overall concerns. The result of this collaborative process is *Our Shared Agenda for Action*. Implementation of this Agenda will be ongoing and supported by the WNYEA, the Steering Committee, the Task Groups, and the CFGB. The Agenda is an evolving document, and will be monitored and sharpened to include critical issues as needed by collaborating participants.

The Task Groups initiated at the first Congress were:

- Energy and climate change
- Waste, pollution prevention, and water
- Urban regeneration and land use

- Habitat and natural resources
- Parks and recreation

Also at the first Congress was a breakout group on food and agriculture, which did not continue to meeting due to limited participation. However, during the year, two other groups took form: Strengthening Environmental Organizations – Capacity¹ and Youth Education.²

This section of the report is a summary of Task Group work (see Appendix C – Meeting Summaries, for a complete compilation of Task Group meeting minutes). The information for each Task Group was guided by public discussions at the Congresses, the WNY Environmental Alliance Steering Committee, and the Task Group members. It includes the issues, actions, and quantifiable measures of those actions for each Task Group. It also includes brief summaries of Task Group discussion regarding each of the following questions:

- What needs to be done to make progress?
- What resources are necessary?
- Who is working on it and what are they doing?
- How will we know if we are accomplishing this goal?

The resulting summaries of responses reflect discussions held by the Task Groups. The information in these summaries will continue to be updated as groups continue to convene to help implement the actions in the Agenda.

Other Issues Not Addressed by the Task Groups

The Task Group work was thorough and in depth, but did not cover all issues related to the environment in Western New York.

Although part of the discussion at Congress One, some groups did not meet after the first Congress. One example is the Food and Agriculture group. Many of the food and agriculture related issues were discussed in the Urban Regeneration and Land Use Task Group, especially those related to urban agriculture and urban sprawl.

Transportation was another such issue. It was discussed at several Energy and Climate Change Task Group meetings. Transportation issues were not the group’s priorities, but transportation is clearly an important environmental issue that relates to energy consumption, air quality, health, recreation, and urban sprawl.

¹ **Strengthening Environmental Organizations - Capacity** - The capacity Task Group met once between Congress One and Congress Two on January 6, 2009, and once between Congress Two and Three on February 24, 2009. The meetings were facilitated by Charlotte Young of the Institute for Conservation Leadership and were structured differently from the other Task Group meetings. The purpose of the meetings was to clarify capacity needs and to identify steps moving forward.

² **Youth Education** – A discussion group worked on issues related to youth education at Congress Three. The group discussed the best ways to involve youth in regional environmental work and implementing Our Shared Agenda for Action.

The WNYEA will continue to help modify Our Shared Agenda for Action; the Agenda is a living document that will evolve to include critical issues as actions are needed. These issues and others can be addressed by the WNYEA in the future.

Task Group Matrix

The table that follows is a summary matrix of the Task Group issues, actions, and quantifiable measures.

Task Groups	Issues	Actions	Quantifiable Measures
<i>Energy / Climate Change</i>	Increase public knowledge and use of sustainable energy resources and energy efficiency measures	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Secure coordinator / establish collaborative. 2. Create a one-stop shop to demonstrate and instruct on renewable energy and energy efficiency – virtual, physical and mobile sites. 	<p>*Number of organizations involved in collaborative.</p> <p>*Number of people using the one-stop shop.</p>
	Improve energy policy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish a credible organization to be the voice for energy policy advocacy and/or education in the region. 2. Advocate for locating the proposed energy policy center in WNY. 3. Develop an informational presentation to be shared with other organizations to help advocacy/education efforts. 4. Develop one-page policy briefs on energy policy. 	<p>*Number of policies advocated for and influenced.</p> <p>*Number of organizations using the informational presentation.</p> <p>*Number of policy briefs developed.</p>
<i>Habitat / Natural Resources</i>	Increase public understanding of the importance of habitat that supports native species	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inventory all current environmental education offerings, including those that are part of school curriculums. 2. Create a collaborative education project with organizations. 3. Promote and increase access to programs, especially K-12, through coordination and access to increased funding for program delivery. 	<p>*Number of people of all ages participating in educational programs.</p> <p>*Amount of funding available for educational programs.</p> <p>* Number of organizations involved in collaborative project.</p>

	Control invasive species and restore regional habitat	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Submit proposals to fund projects already identified (shovel ready sites). 2. Secure money for funding an organization / coordinator for PRISM to access state funds and fill the position. 3. Advocate for invasive species prevention policies/legislation. 	<p>*Number and acreage of habitat preservation / restoration and invasive species removal projects.</p> <p>*Number of policies advocated for and influenced.</p>
<i>Parks and Recreation</i>	Create a Regional Plan for stewardship and maintenance of parks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Form a coordinating group to outline the proposal. 2. Seek funding to do the plan. 3. Hire a consultant and complete the plan. 	<p>*Number of park management organizations / municipalities participating in the plan.</p> <p>*Number and acreage of park spaces maintained and improved.</p> <p>*Number and size of new park spaces and connections.</p>
	Increase advocacy for parks and green spaces	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop an argument for economic impacts. 2. Educate and motivate the public and policy makers. 3. Create a report card for parks support. 	<p>*Amount of funding for parks maintained or increased.</p> <p>*Amount of park volunteers increased.</p>
<i>Waste / Pollution Prevention, and Water</i>	Clean up toxic / hazardous waste	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish a network of concerned organizations and citizens. 2. Connect them with each other and the public through the Green Table, events, and advertising. 3. Educate, inform & mobilize them on policy changes; create a 'Minute Man' group. 4. Communicate the impact of waste on economy to policy makers. 5. Increase the awareness of the importance of the work of smaller groups. 	<p>*Number of organization and citizens in the network and 'Minute Man' group.</p> <p>*Number of groups advocating against hazardous waste.</p> <p>*Number of groups from outside of the network reached and collaborating.</p>

	Improve recycling	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mount an awareness campaign on recycling and gather recycling pledges. 2. Provide the public with tools and incentives to change behavior. 3. Track behavior and develop report cards for area efforts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Number of recycling pledges gathered. *Number of people reached by awareness campaign.
	Protect water quality and quantity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mount an awareness campaign on water usage and track progress through a community opinion survey. 2. Provide the public with tools and incentives to change behavior. 3. Track behavior and develop report cards for area efforts. 4. Convene a round table discussion on water. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Number of people reached by awareness campaign and progress as measured by the survey. *Number of individual water quality / conservation projects (green roofs, rain barrels, etc) and gallons of water conserved. *Decrease in number of CSO overflows. *Number of people attending the round table discussion.
<i>Urban Regeneration / Land Use</i>	Vacant property reclamation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select two distressed pilot communities in both Buffalo and Niagara Falls to reclaim and re-purpose vacant land; one commercial / industrial vacant property, and one residential property in each city. 2. Adopt a policy designating permanent / temporary green spaces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Number of permanent and temporary green spaces designated. *Percent of vacant land reclaimed. *Number of parallel policies implemented in other communities. *Number of parallel projects in other parts of the city and region.
	Advance public policy on building / zoning Codes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Update zoning and building codes with smart codes. 2. Develop regional planning boards - Erie County and restore Erie and Niagara County Regional Planning Board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Number of municipal codes updated with smart code strategies. *Number of planning decisions made with regional consideration.

<p><i>Strengthening environmental organizations</i></p>	<p>Strengthen environmental organizations individually and collectively</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Executive leadership – Executive forums to help improve management and communications skills 2. Fundraising – Training sessions on grant writing and fundraising; hire a grant writer to coordinate collaborative grants and access outside funding. 3. Technical skills, communications, and advocacy – Various training sessions requested by the WNYEA or determined through a needs assessment; develop the WNY Green Table. 4. Develop a space to be shared by organizations similar to Toronto’s Center for Social Innovation; the shared space can be a green retrofit project and its location should help revitalize a distressed community. 5. Coordinate and strengthen environmental education efforts; inventory existing offerings; assist organizations to stabilize, promote, and increase accessibility to educational offerings. 6. Establish funding pool to support organizational needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Commitment of organizational leaders to monthly Forums *Number of training sessions held and total participation. *Number of collaborative grants written and received; total outside funding accessed; number of new funding sources accessed. *Total organizations participating in the development of shared space. *Number educational programs sustained or developed.
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Energy and Climate Change

The Task Group recognizes that there is a general lack of understanding and many misconceptions regarding sustainable energy and climate change amongst the general public and most elected officials. The Task Group developed actions that address two main issues:

- Increase public knowledge and use of sustainable energy resources and energy efficiency measures
- Improve energy policy

The Task Group hopes their efforts help reduce energy use and increase sustainable energy use, resulting in a reduced regional carbon footprint. Each issue, action item, and quantifiable measure can be seen in the table below.

Issues	Actions	Quantifiable Measures
Increase public knowledge and use of sustainable energy resources and energy efficiency measures	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Secure coordinator / establish collaborative. 2. Create a one-stop shop to demonstrate and instruct on renewable energy and energy efficiency – virtual, physical and mobile sites. 	<p>*Number of organizations involved in collaborative.</p> <p>*Number of people using the one-stop shop.</p>
Improve energy policy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish a credible organization to be the voice for energy policy advocacy and/or education in the region. 2. Advocate for locating the proposed energy policy center in WNY. 3. Develop an informational presentation to be shared with other organizations to help advocacy/education efforts. 4. Develop one-page policy briefs on energy policy. 	<p>*Number of policies advocated for and influenced.</p> <p>*Number of organizations using the informational presentation.</p> <p>*Number of policy briefs developed.</p>

Issue 1: Increase public knowledge and use of sustainable energy resources and energy efficiency measures.

There is a need for educational resources regarding energy and climate change. The links between energy, climate, and the economy can be made through these educational programs, increasing the potential to create new “green jobs.” Knowledge can empower people to change their own behaviors, and the collective behaviors of a society.



The history of hydroelectric power production is rooted in Niagara Falls. Today, the Falls provide renewable energy to much of the eastern U.S. and Canada. (Image source: Ana Hernández-Balzac)

The group determined that there is a need for improved, broader outreach in the community; that there is a need to integrate all aspects of the community, including academia, business and neighborhoods in order to effectively broaden the environmental constituency. The creation of a physical location for information sharing is important for the region because it will allow for collaboration among organizations and the public on important energy use and conservation issues. This site will allow representatives from various environmental organizations to work together to share information with the public.

What needs to be done to make progress?

- The Task Group aims to address the first issue by developing a central point of information or a One-Stop-Shop for energy education and information sharing. This effort can be spearheaded by a collaborative of interested organizations and individuals. The One-Stop-Shop should be virtual, physical, and may also include mobile components for the dissemination of information regarding practical, sustainable energy use and conservation strategies, including traveling exhibits and programs, to help expand its reach. The information shared at the site will be focused towards homeowners and business owners alike, and it will focus on practical sustainable energy use, energy conservation methods and the benefits associated with both.
- In order to make progress, there must be improved collaboration among groups and increased citizen participation.

What resources are necessary?

- This project will require a virtual location to start, and then a physical location for demonstration projects at a later date
- There will need to be a site coordinator for the proposed One-Stop-Shop, as well as funding for the entire project.

Who is working on it and what are they doing?

- The Apollo Alliance has proposals to create a sustainability center in South Buffalo BOA.
- The Wellness Institute in Buffalo is developing concepts for a shared space facility for non-profits, similar to the proposals from the Strengthening Environment Organizations Task Group that may be an appropriate match with the energy One-Stop-Shop.

How will we know if we are accomplishing this goal?

- The Task Group can measure the impact of their effort by measuring the number of individuals or organizations involved in the collaborative, and by measuring the number

of people using the One-Stop-Shop, including hits to a website, visitor to the physical site, and people reached by a mobile component and traveling exhibits and programs.

Issue 2: Improve energy policy.

Local municipalities can impact energy policy through land use regulations and building codes. Many energy policies are set at the state and federal levels, and a strong advocacy effort will be needed to have positive impacts on policy changes.

What needs to be done to make progress?

- The Task Group envisions the creation of a “credible voice”, a group that can provide unbiased facts regarding energy and climate change to help policy makers make better decisions. Informational presentations and policy briefs can be disseminated by this organization.
- New York State has proposed a new energy policy center, and the Task Group feels the center should be located in Western New York because the region has the economic development need, it produces renewable energy for much of the East Coast at Niagara Falls, and has the collaborative support of many research institutions and energy advocacy organizations.

What resources are necessary?

- These advocacy efforts will require time of a dedicated group to help coordinate organizations and individuals, and compile existing or complete new research to aid arguments.

Who is working on it and what are they doing?

- Other organizations currently working on energy policy advocacy issues include NYSERDA and the New York State energy use task force, and UB Green.
- Various nonprofit organizations and individual advocates in the Western New York are also committed to this issue.

How will we know if we are accomplishing this goal?

- The Task Group will know if it has been successful by determining how many policies they have successfully influenced. They can also gauge their level of success by measuring the number of organizations using the informational presentations, and the number of policy briefs produced.

Other Issues

The Task Group discussed several other issues. Members of the group felt strongly that the creation of “green jobs” can be one of the more significant results of work related to energy and climate change. People can be trained in new sources of energy production and techniques for energy conservation. The Task Group felt that another important issue related to energy is transportation, and that it should also be addressed.

Habitat and Natural Resources

The Task Group believes that the lack of awareness of regional natural history and general environmental literacy lead to decisions that continue to degrade habitat, both on land and in the water. The Task Group developed actions that address two main issues:

- Increase public understanding of the importance of habitat that supports native species
- Control invasive species and restore regional habitat

The Task Group hopes their efforts help improve decisions regarding habitat preservation to ensure our regional ecosystems and biodiversity are preserved and restored. Each issue, action, and quantifiable measure can be seen in the table below.

Issues	Actions	Quantifiable Measures
Increase public understanding of the importance of habitat that supports native species	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inventory all current environmental education offerings, including those that are part of school curriculums. 2. Create a collaborative education project with organizations. 3. Promote and increase access to educational programs related to habitat and invasive species, especially K-12, through coordination and access to increased funding for program delivery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Number of people of all ages participating in educational programs. *Amount of funding available for educational programs. * Number of organizations involved in collaborative project.
Control invasive species and restore regional habitat	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Submit proposals to fund projects already identified (shovel ready sites). 2. Secure money for funding an organization / coordinator for PRISM to access state funds and fill the position. 3. Advocate for invasive species prevention policies/legislation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Number and acreage of habitat preservation / restoration and invasive species removal projects. *Number of policies advocated for and influenced.

Issue 1: Increase public understanding of the importance of habitat that supports native species

Many people lack the understanding of the importance of habitat and native species. Our regional natural heritage is often overshadowed by our industrial heritage, and arguments for economic development often come at the expense of habitat. Without an understanding of regional habitat, decisions are often made that continue the degradation of habitat and loss of native species.

What needs to be done to make progress?

- The Task Group will need to emphasize environmental literacy through education and awareness; specifically, programs should highlight the significance of the Niagara River corridor and other important regional habitats.

- There are many existing environmental education offerings and an inventory of these offerings can be created to determine gaps. A survey can be conducted to help create this inventory.
- Coordination of these programs can help increase access to funding, allowing the programs to reach more people, especially students in local schools. A new collaborative education project can help demonstrate success and increase opportunities for additional funding.
- The Task Group wishes to increase environmental education within local school curriculums, but recognizes that to do this environmental education must be built into existing programs.

What resources are necessary?

- To accomplish these goals, the group will need sustainable funding for programs. Many municipal budget cuts are forcing these programs to be self-sustaining, difficult when schools are major participants and face severe budget cuts as well.
- The group will also need dedicated people, including strong leadership, professional capacity and academic involvement at all levels of education.

Who is working on it and what are they doing?

- Local schools also offer environmental education programs although it is unclear how much of the programs are devoted to local habitat and invasive species.
- There are many local organizations offering environmental education programs. They are often associated with nature preserves in the region.

How will we know if we are accomplishing this goal?

- One way to measure progress is to measure the number of people of all ages being reached by these programs, whether they are reached in schools or through other organization’s programs.
- Increased funding for environmental education programs will signal a shift in the public and policymakers’ understanding of their importance.
- A new collaborative educational project related to habitat and invasive species will be most successful if several organizations are involved.

Issue 2: Control invasive species and restore regional habitat.

Regional habitats, both aquatic and terrestrial, continue to be lost by degradation and lack of awareness. Invasive species continue to destroy native habitat on land and in the water. The Task Group feels that there is a need for demonstration projects related to habitat preservation, restoration, and invasive species control.



Habitats, like this marsh at the source of Cazenovia Creek, provide ecological services that save money and improve quality of life.

What needs to be done to make progress?

- There are several projects ready to be initiated that would help preserve or restore habitat.

The group will submit proposals for funding for these shovel-ready projects. Some of the funding for shovel-ready projects may come from the recent federal economic stimulus package.

- The Western New York region lacks a coordinating organization for Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) that will allow the region to access state funds for invasive species management. The Task Group would like to find a coordinator and host organization for the WNY PRISM. The PRISM “will coordinate invasive species management functions including coordinating partner efforts, recruiting and training citizen volunteers, identifying and delivering education and outreach, establishing early detection monitoring networks and implementing direct eradication and control efforts.”
- Advocacy is an important component of a comprehensive invasive species management strategy. Many invasive species, especially those that are aquatic, have been introduced by international cargo shipping on the Great Lakes. Enforcement of existing regulations and the development of new regulations to prevent new invasive species must come from federal and state agencies, and will require bi-national cooperation.

What resources are necessary?

- Funding at national and state levels is necessary for shovel-ready projects.
- A host coordinator/organization will be necessary to establish a WNY PRISM.
- People are an essential resource for all of these proposals; the group will require strong leadership, committed people and professional capacity.

Who is working on it and what are they doing?

- PRISM is a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation program.
- There are several established PRISMs across New York State.
- The Lower Great Lakes Fisheries Resources Office of the US Fish and Wildlife Service is a potential host organization for the Western New York PRISM.
- Several organizations are working on habitat restoration projects locally; they include the Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper and several nature preserves.
- The Niagara River Greenway plan was an important step towards restoring habitat; it offers funding to municipalities and projects within the Greenway.

How will we know if we are accomplishing this goal?

- Progress towards the goal can be measured by total acres / projects of habitat preservation, restoration, and invasive species removal.
- The advocacy efforts can be measured by the total number of invasive species policies advocated for and influenced by the group.

Other Issues

The Task Group discussed several other issues important to habitat and natural resources. A potential educational initiative can include a “calendar of learning moments,” highlighting important times of the year and locations of unique natural phenomena in the region. The WNY environmental community must work collaboratively with Canada on habitat issues, especially those related to the Niagara River and Great Lakes.

Parks and Recreation

The Task Group recognizes that there is a need to increase the level of stewardship and physical connectivity for parks and green spaces across the region. Increased park advocacy can help efforts to improve stewardship. The Task Group developed actions that address two main issues:

- Create a regional plan for stewardship and maintenance of parks
- Increase advocacy for parks and green spaces

The Task Group hopes their efforts will help mobilize policy makers to allocate needed resources to existing parks, create new parks, and help people recognize the regional importance of parks.

Issues	Actions	Quantifiable Measures
Create a Regional Plan for stewardship and maintenance of parks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Form a coordinating group to outline the proposal. 2. Seek funding to create the plan. 3. Hire a consultant and complete the plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Number of park management organizations / municipalities participating in the plan. *Number and acreage of park spaces maintained and improved. *Number and size of new park spaces and connections.
Increase advocacy for parks and green spaces	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop an argument for economic impacts. 2. Educate and motivate the public and policy makers. 3. Create a report card for parks support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Amount of funding for parks maintained or increased. *Amount of park volunteers increased.

Issue 1: Create a regional plan for stewardship and maintenance of parks.

There is no comprehensive plan for all of the region’s parks. The development of a regional plan will guide decisions about investment in parks and recreation. The plan will highlight opportunities for connectivity, both physically and programmatically, across all of these parks.

What needs to be done to make progress?

- The Task Group will require regional political support and a structure to manage and prepare the plan, including a “champion” to initiate and guide the process. The Task Group can initiate the process but will need additional stakeholders to be involved.
- The Task Group envisions that planning for parks will be done at the regional level with a coordinating group, or leadership body overseeing the planning process. The group will have to identify what the boundaries of the region are, whether they be natural (watersheds for example) or political.
- Funding for the plan will need to be secured and a consultant hired to complete it.

- Once a structure to complete the plan is in place, an inventory of existing parks and park connections, as well as potential park spaces will be conducted.
- Precedent regional park plans from across the country will help inform the local planning process.
- The plan will also need an argument for investing in the parks, including the positive economic impacts of parks. Recommendations will suggest stewardship strategies and ways to increase connectivity.

What resources are necessary?

- In order to prepare a regional plan for parks, the Task Group requires funding for the planning process to hire a consultant. Funding can come from local government sources, local foundations and national foundations.
- This process will also require a coordinating and oversight body.

Who is working on it and what are they doing?

- The Task Group indicated that there are other agencies currently working on plans that pertain to our region's park system. Specifically, all comprehensive plans contain a parks and recreation component. Erie County has a plan for its parks, and the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy recently completed a plan for the Olmsted park system in Buffalo.
- The Niagara River Greenway Plan includes recommendations for parks and recreation.
- Additionally, there are various levels of park management in the region, including federal, state, county, local municipality and non-profit.

How will we know if we are accomplishing this goal?

- Progress on the regional park plan can be measured by various indicators. The regional collaborative nature of the plan can be measured by examining the number of participants involved in the planning process.
- The results of the plan can be measured through the number or acreage of parks being improved because of the plan, and the number and size of new park connections.

Issue 2: Increase advocacy for parks and green spaces

A park advocacy strategy will increase the community's awareness of the value that parks add to our region's well being, with particular focus on the beneficial economic impacts of parks on a region. Parks have shaped our cultural heritage, and continue to improve our health, our environment, and our region's quality of life.

What needs to be done to make progress?

- In order to make progress the group will address a number of issues. The argument for investing increased public resources, including time and money, will require an economic argument demonstrating parks regional benefits. The group will need to hold a campaign supported by this economic argument to motivate the public and policymakers.
- Report cards that are publically distributed rating support for parks by local officials and agencies can help influence their constituents and ultimately their decisions.

- The group would like to see the Buffalo Environmental Management Commission revived.
- The group will also form a coalition of advocates from across the region. At the heart of the movement, there will need to be regional collaboration in order to move the issue forward.



What resources are necessary?

- The Task Group noted that in order to make progress there must be a champion for the parks system; there must be political will, political resources and increased funding, and corporate sponsorship in order to develop an advocacy strategy for the parks.

Western New York has a great legacy of historic parks. The Niagara Reservation, seen in the postcard above, was the nation’s first state park, and like Buffalo’s park and parkway system, was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. and Calvert Vaux. (Image source: Preservation Buffalo Niagara - <http://preserve.bfn.org/bam/kowsky/nf/index.html>)

Who is working on it and what are they doing?

- Locally, there are nonprofit organizations, including the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, community groups and concerned citizens working on this or similar issues.
- Nationally, the Trust for Public Land continues to develop research that supports park advocacy.

How will we know if we are accomplishing this goal?

- The group will be accomplishing its goal if there is increased funding for park maintenance, restoration, and new connections.
- An increase in the number of park volunteers will also reflect progress towards the group’s goal of influencing the public.

Other Issues

The Task Group discussed several other issues before selecting the two important issues, including environmental justice and access to parks, and the relationship between recreation and park space. There is a need to address water-based recreation as well.

Urban Regeneration and Land Use

The region's central cities continue to be abandoned while new development consumes forests and farmlands on the urban fringe. The region sprawls and the costs of services increase while population and economic activity decline. The Task Group developed actions that address two main issues:

- Vacant property reclamation
- Advance public policy on building / zoning codes

The Task Group hopes their efforts will help promote the implementation of smart growth policies throughout Western New York.

Issues	Actions	Quantifiable Measures
Vacant property reclamation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select two distressed pilot communities in both Buffalo and Niagara Falls to reclaim and re-purpose vacant / underused land or buildings. 2. Adopt a policy designating permanent / temporary green spaces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Number of permanent and temporary green spaces designated. *Percent of vacant land reclaimed. *Number of parallel policies implemented in other communities. *Number of parallel projects in other parts of the city and region.
Advance public policy on building / zoning codes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Update zoning and building codes with smart codes. 2. Develop regional planning boards - Erie County and restore Erie and Niagara County Regional Planning Board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Number of municipal codes updated with smart code strategies.

Issue 1: Vacant property reclamation

Throughout our urban areas, depopulation and the loss of industry have left vacant land in neighborhoods and former industrial areas. The Task Group identified the reclamation of vacant land as a tool to reverse neighborhood decline and improve the quality of life, health, environment and economy in a neighborhood. Vacant and underutilized structures are also considered part of this work.

What needs to be done to make progress?

- The Task Group will work in two distressed pilot communities in Buffalo and Niagara Falls, on vacant property reclamation projects.
- There must be a regional commitment to comprehensive management of vacant property.

- The group will guide the region in the adoption of a policy that will designate permanent and temporary green spaces on vacant land in Western New York. Without this policy, work on greening vacant land may be lost to development at any time.

What resources are necessary?

- These property reclamation efforts will require access to publically-owned vacant land and resources for acquisition, remediation, transformation and maintenance of the properties.

Who is working on it and what are they doing?

- There are some organizations currently working on similar issues; specifically, there is an Erie County distressed properties task force, and there are local nonprofits, community organizations and block clubs working to address this issue.
- A feasibility study for Groundwork Buffalo was recently completed, and may launch in 2009, and will work to reclaim and maintain vacant properties on the east side of Buffalo.

How will we know if we are accomplishing this goal?

- Progress can be measured in the number of permanent and temporary green spaces designated and the percentage of vacant property reclaimed.
- Progress will also be evident in the number of parallel projects and policies implemented in communities across the region, outside of the pilot neighborhoods.



There are many grassroots initiatives in Western New York that aim to reclaim vacant urban land. In Buffalo, the Massachusetts Avenue Project runs the Growing Green program, a youth development and urban agriculture program. (Image source: Massachusetts Avenue Project - <http://www.mass-ave.org/>)

Issue 2: Advancing public policy on building/zoning codes

Planning efforts in Western New York are often disconnected from the surrounding regional context. Municipalities often consider themselves in competition with surrounding municipalities for population, jobs, and taxes. This, coupled with outdated land use regulations, has helped facilitate sprawl and automobile dependent development.

What needs to be done to make progress?

- In order to make progress towards these goals, the Task Group noted that municipalities should consider updating zoning codes with smart codes or form based codes, allowing more mixed-use and compact development. Consultants with knowledge of smart codes can help revise these zoning codes.
- Most importantly, a regional planning ethic must be revived in Western New York; nearly every other county in New York State has a planning board, and Erie and Niagara County once had a collaborative planning board. This planning board would not have the power to supersede home rule land use regulations, but would be able to facilitate a collaborative planning process and help develop best practices.
- The Task Group advocates for the establishment of an Erie County Planning Board and an Erie-Niagara planning board to promote smart growth.

What resources are necessary?

- The Task Group will require support from elected officials and municipalities, as well as a dedicated process that will engage meaningful public participation. This will require a strong and immediate advocacy effort, especially for the establishment of the Erie County planning board.

Who is working on it and what are they doing?

- Currently, the City of Buffalo is working to update its zoning codes. There is a push to replace the Euclidean zoning codes with form based or smart codes.
- There is an Erie County task force working to pass legislation establishing a county planning board.
- There are also numerous local advocacy organizations working on similar issues.

How will we know if we are accomplishing this goal?

- Progress towards this goal will be measured by the adoption of new, smart zoning codes.
- Additionally, the implementation of a county planning board will signify the beginning of more coordinated land use decisions at the regional level.

Other Issues

The Task Group also discussed several other important issues relating to urban regeneration and land use. The group felt that public education regarding environmental issues is important, youth can be involved in multiple ways, and improving green infrastructure can be a primary objective of their work.

Waste, Pollution Prevention, and Water

Western New York is home to environmental assets unlike any others on Earth and a population of over a million people. Unfortunately, our industrial heritage and antiquated sewer systems continue to contaminate our water. The region continues to be the dumping ground for toxic waste. The Task Group developed actions that address three main issues:

- Clean up toxic / hazardous waste
- Improve recycling
- Protect water quality and quantity

The Task Group hopes their efforts will help restore the quality of our environment. We have to become better stewards of our water and land resources and change the region's perception as the nation's dumping ground.

Issues	Actions	Quantifiable Measures
Clean up toxic / hazardous waste	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish a network of concerned organizations and citizens. 2. Connect them with each other and the public through the Green Table, events, and advertising. 3. Educate, inform & mobilize them on policy changes; create a 'Minute Man' group. 4. Communicate the impact of waste on economy to policy makers. 5. Increase the awareness of the importance of the work of smaller groups. 	<p>*Number of organization and citizens in the network and 'Minute Man' group.</p> <p>*Number of groups advocating against hazardous waste.</p> <p>*Number of groups from outside of the network reached and collaborating.</p>
Improve recycling	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mount an awareness campaign on recycling and gather recycling pledges. 2. Provide the public with tools and incentives to change behavior. 3. Track behavior and develop report cards for area efforts. 	<p>*Number of recycling pledges gathered.</p> <p>*Number of people reached by awareness campaign.</p>

Protect water quality and quantity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mount an awareness campaign on water usage and track progress through a community opinion survey. 2. Provide the public with tools and incentives to change behavior. 3. Track behavior and develop report cards for area efforts. 4. Convene a round table discussion on water. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Number of people reached by awareness campaign and progress as measured by the survey. *Number of individual water quality / conservation projects (green roofs, rain barrels, etc) and gallons of water conserved. *Decrease in number of CSO overflows. *Number of people attending the round table discussion.
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Issue 1: Cleanup of Toxic / Hazardous Waste Sites

The Task Group identified the need for remediation and cleanup of toxic and hazardous waste sites as one of its primary issues for immediate action. The Task Group noted that Western New York has a legacy of seriously contaminated sites, including West Valley Nuclear Demonstration Site, Lake Ontario Ordinance Works, Chemical Waste Management and numerous other active and inactive landfills. These sites have impacts on air, water, land, economy and health. The Task Group envisions a community-wide effort to prevent further disposal of waste and demand remediation and removal of existing waste.



The West Valley Nuclear Site is one of several hazardous waste dumps in Western New York. (Image source: The Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes - <http://www.highwayendfilms.com/digitup/index.html>)

What needs to be done to make progress?

- There are many groups advocating for the cleanup of toxic waste sites or preventing additional waste from being brought in. The Task Group will work to increase the awareness of smaller organizations and the work they do in the region. A major focus of this Task group’s work is connecting these groups together and connecting them with organizations with different missions around common goals. To do this, a network of concerned organizations and citizens can be established, and these individuals can be connected to each other through the Green Table, environmental events and advertising.
- The Task Group will educate, inform and mobilize these individuals on policy changes in order to create a ‘minute man’ group that can react quickly to timely issues.
- Policymakers often make decisions based upon economic arguments. Often, existing regulations are not enforced. Progress can be achieved by making the connection

between waste and the local economy; the negative impacts of local dumping, and the positive impacts of remediation that can include new job creation.

What resources are necessary?

- Individual organizations are small, and much of the impact comes from lawsuits that they are able to bring against regulatory agencies. These lawsuits are expensive, and require funding.
- The group will also need a means to keep the network of organizations and the public informed of issues; the Green Table will serve as a means to accomplish this.

Who is working on it and what are they doing?

- Most groups working on these issues are small, informal, and site specific.
- There is not one single group working on the issue as a whole, addressing numerous sites at a regional level.

How will we know if we are accomplishing this goal?

- A major focus of the group's work is coordinating a larger network of organizations and mobilizing a 'minute man' group, progress can be measured by the total number of organizations and individuals participating in the network.
- It is also important to know how many organizations not traditionally involved in toxic and hazardous waste advocacy efforts are collaborating with the network.
- Progress will be made when there is a measureable increase in the number of organizations and citizens advocating against hazardous waste.

Issue 2: Improve Recycling

The Task Group stressed the importance of preventing new waste from being brought into our region, but also the importance of reducing the amount of waste our own region is producing. The Task Group identified the need to improve recycling participation in the region as one of its primary issues for immediate action.

What needs to be done to make progress?

- Most municipalities have recycling programs, however, individual participation in these programs is lacking. The group recognizes that an awareness campaign on recycling is needed to improve individual recycling habits of people at home.
- School programs are often the best way to reach families, but advertising and events can also help promote recycling.
- Local neighborhood organizations such as block clubs, and churches can also be means to reach out to people.
- Part of this campaign can include gathering recycling pledges from the public.
- There is also a need to increase recycling at work places where adequate facilities may be lacking.
- To increase recycling, the public will need additional tools and incentives. Incentives can include reduced fees for increased recycling.
- The group will track changes in behaviors and develop report cards for specific areas to aid the advocacy effort.

What resources are necessary?

- A coordinated, regional awareness campaign will require people and organizations to dedicate their time.
- In some cases, municipal funding for recycling programs will need to be increased.
- Some funding will be required to monitor changes in regional recycling behavior.

Who is working on it and what are they doing?

- Governmental agencies manage their own recycling programs.

How will we know if we are accomplishing this goal?

- Progress can be measured in the number of recycling pledges gathered and the number of people reached by the awareness campaign.
- Regionally, these actions will be successful if there is an increase in recycling.

Issue 3: Protection of Water Quality

Western New Yorkers are stewards of one of the world's largest supplies of fresh water in the Great Lakes. Contamination of that water from legacy waste and pollution, and from continued pollution sources as combined sewer overflows and other runoff, threatens the quality of our fresh water as a drinking source, for recreation, and for habitat. As fresh water becomes more scarce worldwide, our efforts to maintain and improve water quality and quantity will increase in importance.

What needs to be done to make progress?

- There are many actions that individuals can do and that policymakers can do to help improve water quality and maintain quantity. Individuals can do small or large water quality projects on their own property, ranging from installing rain barrels to rain gardens and green roofs. Municipalities can adopt policies reinforcing water quality improvement projects, and can help catalyze efforts to replace CSOs.
- To help the public and policy makers understand the importance of these actions, the group suggests mounting an awareness campaign on water usage and tracking progress of the campaign through a community opinion survey.
- The public must be provided with the tools, education and incentives necessary to change water consumption behaviors. Incentives can be similar to those provided for energy conservation by NYSERDA.
- The group proposes developing report cards for area efforts to help influence municipal decisions.
- A round table discussion on water quality and quantity, with local organizations and elected officials, can help advocacy efforts by increasing understanding of the issues and promoting collaboration.

What resources are necessary?

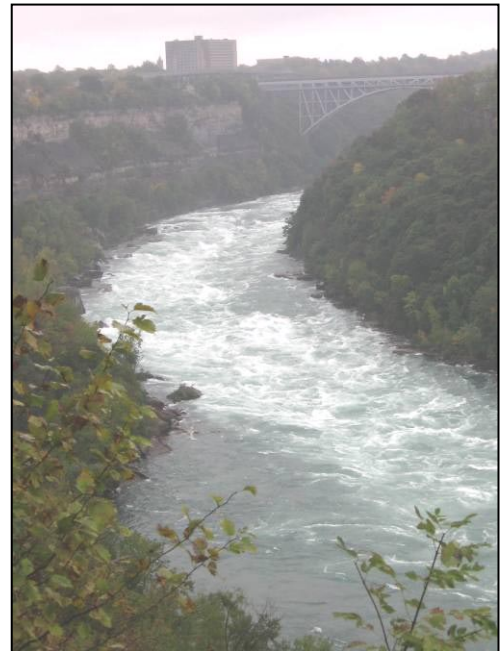
- An awareness campaign on water quality and quantity will require dedication from organizations, and funding to support efforts.
- A coordinating group will be needed to track behavior changes regionally.

Who is working on it and what are they doing?

- Currently, nonprofit agencies, government regulatory agencies and concerned citizens work on programs to protect our region’s water quality.
- Local sewer districts that rely on CSOs are currently trying to update their system to comply with federal clean water standards.
- The Western New York Stormwater Coalition is a collaborative effort of communities in Western New York to develop a stormwater management program to utilize regional collaboration to identify existing resources and develop programs to reduce the negative impacts of stormwater pollution.
- The Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper, a non-profit, working primarily on water quality issues in the region.
- Many individuals have initiated water quality projects of their own and some public buildings, including libraries and school have developed rain gardens.

How will we know if we are accomplishing this goal?

- The effectiveness of the awareness campaign can be based on how many people are reached, including progress as measured by the public survey on awareness.
- Progress can be measured in the number of new water conservation projects in the region, such as rain barrels and green roofs that are implemented, as well as the associated number of gallons of water conserved by these projects.
- The Task Group will also measure the number of people participating in the roundtable discussion.
- As CSOs contribute greatly to water quality impairments, a reduction in CSO events will also signify progress.



The Niagara River carries freshwater between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. (Image source: Ana Hernández-Balzac)

Other Issues

The Task Group identified numerous other important issues that also require attention from the environmental community and the region at large, specifically the need for a communication channel among groups to accommodate the ‘distributed experts’ we have in our region, to facilitate multi-sector issues, and to support other environmental groups at critical moments of advocacy. Our waters are an important source of recreation for boating, swimming, and fishing. They were once important economically viable fisheries, and we would like to see them thrive once again.

Strengthening Environmental Organizations - Capacity

The capacity Task Group met once between Congress One and Congress Two. The meeting was on January 6, 2009. The meeting was facilitated by Charlotte Young of the Institute for Conservation Leadership and was structured differently from the other Task Group meetings. The purpose of the meeting was to clarify capacity needs and to identify steps moving forward. Capacity needs discussed include funding, staff, communications, and benchmarking. Shared staff, educational workshops, and an “Environmental Day” were some of the ideas discussed.

The Task Group met for second time between Congress Two and Three on February 24, 2009 at the CFGB. This meeting was also facilitated by Charlotte Young of ICL and priority issues related to capacity were identified. These issues include the need for:

- A shared strategic vision for the region without exclusion of ideas.
- Shared resources, including technology and physical space.
- Increased collaboration among environmental organizations.
- Improved communication, both internal to organizations and external to the broader community.
- Demonstrable successes and evaluation methods.

The table below shows the actions that can be taken to strengthen environmental organizations individually and collectively, and the quantifiable measures gauging the effectiveness of those actions. The CFGB is committed to supporting these actions directly.

Issues	Actions	Quantifiable Measures
Strengthen environmental organizations individually and collectively	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Executive leadership – Executive forums to help improve management and communications skills 2. Fundraising – Training sessions on grant writing and fundraising; hire a grant writer to coordinate collaborative grants and access outside funding. 3. Technical skills, communications, and advocacy – Various training sessions requested by the WNYEA or determined through a needs assessment; develop the WNY Green Table. 4. Develop a space to be shared by organizations similar to Toronto’s Center for Social Innovation; the shared space can be a green retrofit project and its location should help revitalize a distressed community. 5. Coordinate and strengthen environmental education efforts; inventory existing offerings; assist organizations to stabilize, promote, and increase accessibility to educational offerings. 6. Establish funding pool to support organizational needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Commitment of organizational leaders to monthly Forums *Number of training sessions held and total participation. *Number of collaborative grants written and received; total outside funding accessed; number of new funding sources accessed. *Total organizations participating in the development of shared space. *Number educational programs sustained or developed.

Key Findings from Task Group Work

The Task Groups developed numerous different actions specific to their issues, but generally developed similar strategies for accomplishing those actions. These strategies included:

- Increase collaboration around shared goals to plan and implement environmental projects.
- Advance research that establishes accepted facts regarding environmental issues including making the link between economic development and environmental protection.
- Use that research to persuade the general public to act individually and collectively, and to improve advocacy efforts resulting in better environmental policies.

Some of the issues that emerged in the different Task Groups were similar, such as the need for better communication and coordination and the need for enhanced environmental education in the region. A few of the Task Groups suggested that there is a need for sharing resources, including a shared facility for multiple environmental organizations.

The Task Groups confirmed what we all knew to be true when the planning process began in 2008; there is an incredible amount of environmental work being done in Western New York but significantly more that needs to be addressed. Hundreds of devoted individuals and organizations are leading the environmental charge, but are in need of increased collaboration to sustain and improve their various efforts.

Research

The consultants gathered background information that would help inform discussions regarding the environmental community, its assets and needs, and important issues. The Task Groups and participants in discussion groups used the data collected from the research to aid their decision making. This included an analysis of environmental organizations and public agencies from an on-line survey and an analysis of environmental plans already created. The consultants also looked at precedents from other parts of the U.S. and Canada where groups or organizations have created successful collaboratives in an effort to learn from previous efforts.³

Profile of Western New York Environmental Organizations

Learning about our interests and capacities increases our effectiveness as a broad environmental constituency. To support this effort, the consultants designed an on-line organization survey that was distributed by the Urban Design Project. Approximately 170 WNY groups identified as interested in the environment were contacted via email. As of December

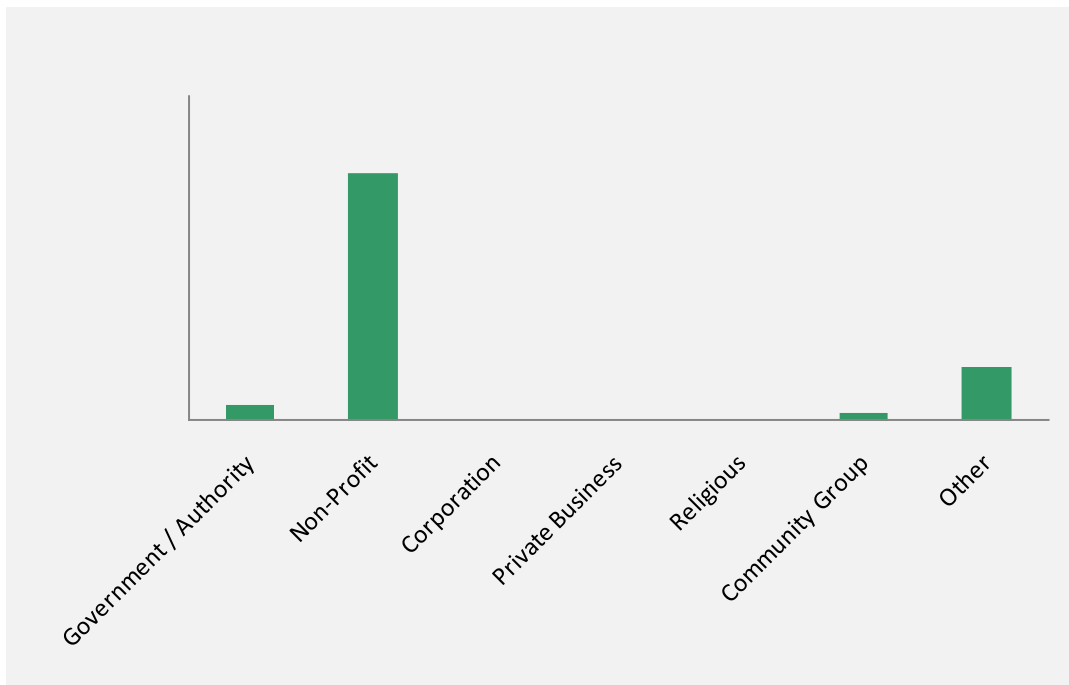
³The complete background research reports are available in Appendix E and can be downloaded on the CFGB website: <http://www.cfgb.org/index.php/affiliates-and-initiatives/wny-env-alliance/131-planning>.

31, 2008, fifty of these organizations responded to the online survey. Information from each organization was compiled and analyzed in order to summarize organizational roles, capacity and opportunities for the group as a whole.

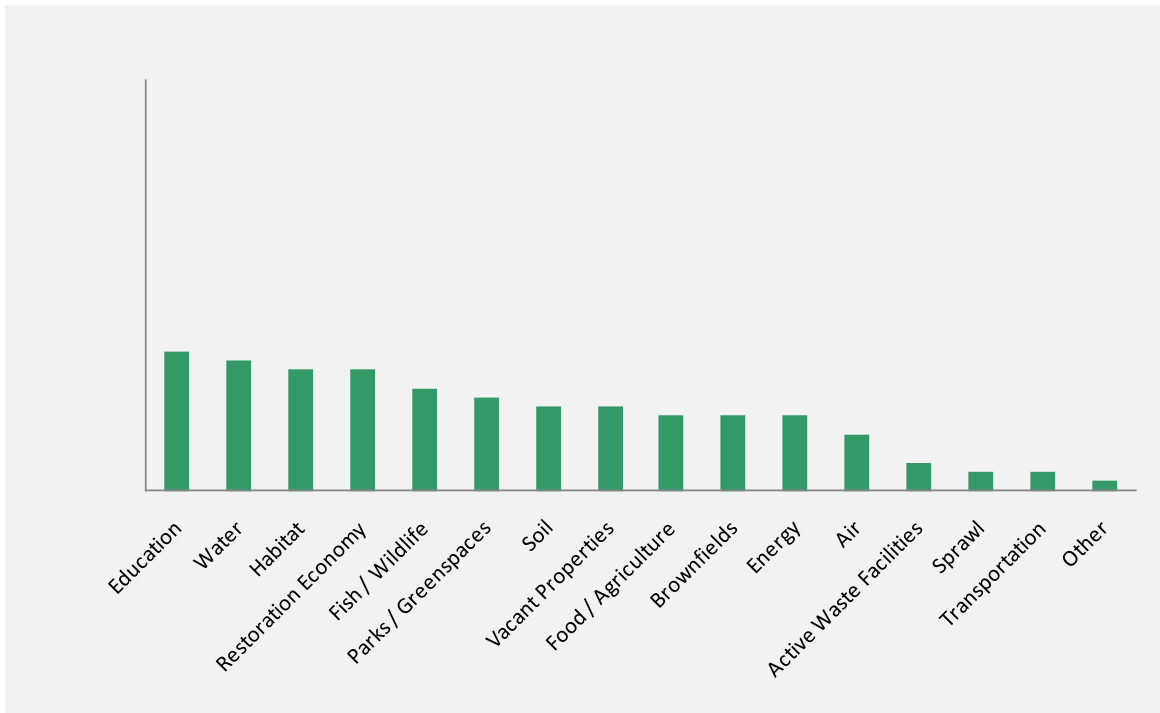
The return rate was very good but it could also indicate that the organizations that responded to the survey were the ones that had the capacity to do so – they had internet capability, the time to complete the survey and the willingness to participate. Efforts were made to contact organizations with incomplete responses but not all of these organizations were able to respond with additional information within the time available.

Organizational Role - The majority of organizations that responded to the survey were non-profits (69%). One third of the responding organizations have a regional geographic scope (33%), nearly a fifth work in Buffalo or Erie County (19%), while none work solely in Niagara County or the City of Niagara Falls. These organizations reported multiple focus areas related to the environment, but the most common was education (33%).

The following tables are based on 42 respondents.



Note: Some Organizations selected multiple focus areas



Organization Capacity - The capacities of the responding organizations varied greatly. Most (85%) responding organizations have partnerships with other non-profits, while only 3% have partnerships with religious organizations. More than half of the organizations have annual operating budgets of less than \$50,000 (53%), while 33% have budgets of over \$200,000. More than three quarters have volunteers (78%), while less than half have any paid staff. More than half of the responding organizations receive funding from private contributions (68%) and more than half receive government funding (56%). The data does not describe the amount of funding from each source.

Opportunities - Based on the data provided by survey respondents, some organizations are currently sharing the same resources: computing and printing, communication, and training and education. A question regarding the need for additional resources revealed a different set of priorities: fundraising, staff and grant writing.

Profile of Western New York Environmental Public Agencies

The consultants conducted a preliminary review of agencies and authorities with jurisdiction in our region that have environmental responsibilities; however, the list in this report is by no means comprehensive. The list and information were derived from three sources: a web search, interviews and an agency survey. Additional agencies are likely to be added as the WNY Environmental Alliance identifies key issues they wish to address, and therefore, which agencies and authorities will have to be involved in any plans for implementation.

Level of Government - Most of the agencies addressing environmental issues in Western New York are Federal and New York State agencies. Federal agencies account for 29 percent of all agencies and state agencies account for 18 percent, while regional agencies account for only 6 percent and local agencies (excluding Buffalo and Niagara Falls) account for 6 percent. This imbalance between higher level agencies and local agencies may indicate poor funding, technical assistance accessibility and/or scope of issues.

Authority - All the permitting and most of the regulation responsibilities that affect the environment in Western New York are held by New York State and federal agencies. All of the environmental permitting agencies are Federal and State agencies (6 Federal and 3 State). Additionally, all six of the Federal agencies have the power to regulate and perform inspections.

While lacking in permitting and regulatory authority, many of the local and regional agencies are instrumental in carrying out policy and are important as advisory bodies. Further, land use controls belong to local governments because of New York State's 'home rule' and many environmental decisions and consequences are directly linked to land use.

Agency Role - Water, fish and wildlife, and habitat are the most common focuses of the studied agencies. From the agencies studied, at least 18 agencies (62 percent of the total) address each of these focus issues in the Western New York area. While this establishes a fairly robust knowledge base, it also creates many difficulties. Local organizations may have trouble understanding overlapping responsibilities in the region when seeking assistance for their projects.

On the other hand, there are few agencies that deal with active waste facilities and energy, especially at the local level. Most of the responsibility for regulating these issues is held at the Federal and State levels, creating a gap between the local municipalities and the Federal government.

Grant Programs - Most of the grants that target environmental issues in the Western New York originate outside of the region. Most funding comes from Federal (9) and New York State (6) agencies. This shows that there is strong reliance on agencies that may not have a sense of local problems.

Profile of Western New York Environmental Plans

The consultants conducted an overview study of several planning documents related to the environment in Western New York. Plans were provided by the CFGB, the Steering Committee, and government agencies. In no way is this a comprehensive overview of all regional plans relating to the environment, nor does it include municipal level plans, most of which address land use and other local environmental issues including parks and recreation. Many other plans could be included in this study, especially if they are relevant to the key issues that emerge from the WNY Environmental Alliance Task Groups and the Agenda. This listing can be expanded and/or modified as key issues emerge that warrant a broader or more in depth resource.

Each of the 36 plans was analyzed for the following:

- Geographic focus
- Planning sponsor
- Focus issues - the content covered ranging from natural resources such as air and water, to issues of vacant properties and brownfields to transportations.

Geographic focus - There are many planning efforts in Western New York, although there seems to be an imbalance between the amount of planning in Erie County and Niagara County. Out of the 36 plans, 28 (78 percent) of them include Erie County and 26 (72 percent) include Buffalo. Only 14 (38 percent) include Niagara County and 9 (25 percent) include Niagara Falls. There are 10 plans that have a bi-national focus, but few include both Erie and Niagara counties. This situation reflects the lack of structure for regional planning and governance in Western New York.

Planning sponsor – Many of the plans studied had more than one sponsoring party. A large proportion of the planning in the region is done through local non-profit organizations; they were involved in sponsoring 13 (36 percent) of the plans. After non-profits, local municipalities, federal agencies and New York State agencies sponsored 7 (19 percent), 7 (19 percent) and 6 (17 percent), respectively. No plans were sponsored by international agencies, and only two plans were sponsored by regional agencies.

Plan Focus	Total Plans
Parks and Greenspace	23 (64%)
Water	20 (55%)
Habitat	19 (53%)
Transportation	18 (50%)
Fish and Wildlife	16 (44%)
Brownfields	14 (39%)
Restoration Economy	13 (36%)
Food and Agriculture	12 (33%)
Soil	10 (28%)
Vacant Properties	10 (28%)
Education	6 (17%)
Air	3 (8%)
Sprawl	3 (8%)
Active Waste Facilities	2 (6%)
Energy	0 (0%)

Focus issues – Most plans studied had several focus issues. The most common focus issue was parks and greenspaces, included in 23 (64 percent) of the plans. Only 3 (8 percent) of the plans discussed air or sprawl, 2 (6 percent) discussed active waste facilities, and none discussed energy.

Case Studies on Collaboration

Effectively protecting our natural resources and preventing pollution requires that we work well together – across organizations, jurisdictional boundaries and academic disciplines. Yet working together well is challenging for most of us. This chapter summarizes six case studies of cooperative efforts elsewhere and describes “lessons” from these cases, so that these principles can be applied in Western New York. The full report is included as Appendix D – Case Studies on Collaboration.

The six cases are:

Example of Collaboration	Name	Location
Shared Space	Centre for Social Innovation	Toronto, Ontario, Canada
	Thoreau Centers for Sustainability	Manhattan, NY; San Francisco, CA
Shared Information	Hamilton EONet	Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
	Schuylkill Learning Community	Philadelphia, PA
Shared Projects and Campaigns	Greenspace Alliance of Philadelphia	Philadelphia, PA
	Highlands Coalition	Bethlehem, PA

Research about these cases involved reviewing websites and organizational documents, as well as interviewing key stakeholders. The cases were chosen to represent a range of activity and commitment – from sharing space to sharing project work – and a range of organizational structures – from informal networks to coordinated campaigns.

Lessons Learned: Sharing Resources and Space

Sharing resources and/or space offers a way for environmental organizations to achieve economies of



The Centre for Social Innovation in Toronto provides shared space for organizations, fostering collaboration. (Image source: Centre for Social Innovation - <http://socialinnovation.ca/about>)

scale in their operations and is becoming increasingly popular. The following lessons were noted:

- Encourage diverse sectors to come together in a single, shared space
 - Diverse individuals and organizations (non profit, for profit and public sector organizations; individuals from various backgrounds)
 - Co-located synergy fosters interesting projects by looking at new ways of approaching problems
- Offer unstructured space that mixes utility with socialization
 - A place to build skills
 - Provides a place to network and socialize
- An opportunity to showcase green building practices on site

Lessons Learned: Sharing Information

Environmental groups routinely mention how important it is to know what other environmental groups are doing. Those involved in information sharing noted the following lessons:

- Hire a person to coordinate and oversee the sharing
 - Secure necessary on-going funding for the position
 - Be specific when defining roles and responsibilities of the coordinator
- Rotate the host organization
 - Host organization has fiscal responsibilities
- Offer non-structured events where people can simply get to know each other
- Encourage members of the leadership / steering committee to assess their personal and professional responsibilities
 - Ensures that these individuals can be highly committed over the duration of their term (recommend 3 years)
- Clarify core services versus peripheral services
 - For Hamilton ECO-net, these services consisted of a newsletter, web presence, professional development sessions for members)
 - Focus effort on the core services.
- In terms of projects, go where the energy and enthusiasm are
 - For the Schuylkill Learning Community, some projects percolate for 2 years or more; difficult to retain leadership and interest for longer projects
- Use technology (e.g., webinars) *after* relationships have been built
 - Stay informed and do projects together

Lessons Learned: Sharing Projects and Campaigns

Sharing projects and working cooperatively on campaigns are the most complex sharing arrangements examined. As cooperative efforts got underway, the groups of organizations consistently wrestled with who should be involved (membership), what should be the purpose of the cooperative effort (purpose), and how the cooperative effort might operate (operations). Lessons from each of these three elements include:

- Clearly define what it means to be a “member”
- Ask “what is our purpose?” of being together
 - Look at project or goals
 - Develop an action plan
 - Continually re-evaluate why you are together
- Develop rules of operating (e.g., how will you operate differently after membership changes)
 - Address process, feelings and relationships in addition to tasks
 - Carry out periodic debriefs in an effort to address process issues
- Establish group rituals
 - Start meetings with a moment of silence, or success

Moving Forward with the WNYEA

Given the complexity of environmental issues in Western New York, working cooperatively to protect natural resources and prevent pollution makes sense. Yet, despite all the reasons to work across organizations, working cooperatively is challenging and often time consuming. Groups that work cooperatively in regions other than Western New York – whether they are just getting started, or have worked cooperatively for some time – have found they are continually cycling through three questions:

1. Why are we together? / What are we trying to achieve?
2. Who or what organizations should be working together?
3. How should we arrange, organize ourselves? / How do we actually operate together?

As the WNYEA forwards the momentum of this project, asking these questions will provide a strong foundation for development and commitment on behalf of the collaborations participants.

Key Findings from the Research

The background research helped identify environmental organizations, agencies, and plans, all relevant to ongoing environmental work in Western New York. Our data suggests that much of the environmental work in Western New York is initiated by non-profit organizations and they focus on a broad range of issues. The results of the research also suggest that some issues are better coordinated than others and efforts on some very important issues are quite fragmented. All agreed that there is a need for improved collaboration, and further, expressed a willingness and desire to share resources.

Governmental support for environmental issues is important to making progress. Local governments have control over land use decisions. Although grant programs available to non-profit environmental groups may be limited, at times these groups are contracted to do work for municipalities. Many state and federal agencies have regulatory control over environmental issues; this sometimes makes it difficult for local organizations to have an impact on policy decisions in Western New York.

A review of environmental planning in the region reveals a few great examples of collaborative and successful planning work. However, a lack of regional planning structures has limited much planning by political boundaries rather than ecological boundaries. Most local governments have comprehensive plans for their communities, and frequently more non-profits initiate environmental planning work in the region with local governments.

The case studies on collaborative efforts showed that similar collaborative efforts have been successful in other areas. The lessons learned from these case studies are incredibly useful; the Western New York Environmental Alliance is beginning the process of formalizing and discussing who should be involved and how to structure such an organization, and the Task Groups are determining how best to implement Our Shared Agenda for Action collaboratively.

There are several challenges facing the Western New York Environmental Alliance. Many of the smaller organizations are little known and under-supported although their work is important. Efforts need to be made to include environmental justice groups and other groups related to poverty alleviation. Additionally, minorities were underrepresented by participants at the Congresses and the Task Groups.

Nevertheless, this year-long process has demonstrated the recognition by all sectors that it is time to be more collaborative, increase our effectiveness, and ensure that our issues are taken seriously.

Summary of Next Steps

The WNYEA developed Our Shared Agenda for Action as the result of a year-long collaborative process, and announced the Agenda on July 16, 2009. This process helped galvanize action amongst the Western New York environmental community by bringing together hundreds of people representing 150 organizations, agencies, and businesses. The “Agenda” is a beginning and can only be successful if it leads to visible and important actions in both the short and long terms.

Work Started

There has been an enormous amount of work already invested in this process by all participants and there is a commitment to continue. To that end, the CFGB will continue to serve as convener of the WNYEA and work groups that will work to achieve the objectives outlined in the agenda. This includes the convening of a Congress Four in 2010 to assess the progress of the Alliance, and working on actions to strengthen the capacity of environmental organizations. The work has been powerful and the collaboration exciting – no one is willing to let it drop. Therefore, in addition to continuing the work outlined in the Agenda, the Steering Committee will work with the CFGB to prepare a proposal for a structure and purposes for a shared organization. This begins with a discussion during 2009 by all interested parties about purposes, membership and structure. In the meantime, the current Steering Committee will continue to serve as the oversight body for the work as it proceeds.

Activity on implementing the Agenda has already begun with:

1. Launch of CFGB Green 'Zine an online magazine featuring news, videos, polls and more about environmental issues in Western New York.
2. Compilation of comprehensive environmental education resources to serve educators and individuals of all ages.
3. Completion of a feasibility study for Groundwork Buffalo to maintain and improve vacant land in the City of Buffalo.
4. Preparation of a collaborative proposal to received federal stimulus dollars to support WNYEA work.
5. Phase 1 development of WNY GreenTable, the new online forum to organize and engage environmental organizations and the general public in WNYEA activities.
6. Submission of a grant request to a collaborative of national funders to support WNYEA objectives for urban regeneration.

Acknowledgements

Our Shared Agenda for Action was possible because of the consistent efforts of a large number of people over the year-long process. The Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo initiated the process and has provided leadership throughout. The Steering Committee provided oversight and guidance while the detailed work was provided by the many members of the various Task Groups and participants at the Congresses.

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