



Department of Health

Hudson River Fish Advisory Outreach Project

Project Update 2019

2019 HRFA Accomplishments

The Hudson River Fish Advisory Outreach Project was established to provide advisory information to anyone who eats fish from the Hudson River. The goal is for anglers and their families to know and follow the New York State fish advisories. The Hudson River is an EPA Superfund site that extends from Hudson Falls to the New York City Battery.

With over 200 miles of river, we rely on the support of our mini-grant partners to help reach a significant number of communities and organizations in the Hudson Valley region. These partners include the Cornell Cooperative Extensions (CCE) of Albany, Saratoga, Dutchess, and Rockland counties, Hudson Sloop Clearwater, and Rensselaer Land Trust.

In 2019, we reached many people and families by participating at community events and distributing a wide variety of materials to promote fish advisories.



Audrey Van Genechten, Alana Gerus, and Regina Keenan



Some of the Hudson River Fish Advisory Outreach partners on a visit to the Saugerties Lighthouse. From left to right Regina Keenan (NYSDOH), Erik Fyfe (Sloop Clearwater), Alana Gerus (NYSDOH), Karen Mort (Albany CCE), Fran Martino (River Haggie/Rensselaer Land Trust), Audrey Van Genechten (NYSDOH).

The program also saw the retirement of Regina Keenan, Program Manager – Public Health Specialist III, who spent 12 years dedicated to fish advisory outreach. Audrey Van Genechten, Public Health Specialist II, who has worked with the program since 2010, assumed the role of Program Manager and we welcomed Alana Gerus, Public Health Specialist I, as a new, full-time member of the team.

The partnership between New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), CCE Albany, and Albany Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) continues to grow. In 2019, staff presented at a combined total of 19 BOCES high school equivalency and English Language Learners classes bringing important Hudson River fish advisory information to inner-city residents and recent immigrants. Staff provided critical information about the fish advisory, health risks associated with PCBs, and presented alternative, healthy waters to eat fish from in Albany and Rensselaer Counties.

Other notable outreach events for 2019 included:

- Tabled at the World Fishing and Outdoors Expo in Rockland County, which is one of the largest events attended by program staff.
- Attended the annual Hudson River Fisherman's Association family fishing derby and awards event. The Hudson River Fisherman's Association is a NY/ NJ based association that sponsors fishing clinics and events up and down the Hudson River and has been a great partner for us over the years.
- Attended Newburgh Illuminated, a full day cultural and music event in Newburgh, NY. The program continues to prioritize outreach in Newburgh as we know from consumption surveys that a higher percentage of Hudson River anglers in Newburgh are eating their catch.
- Met with Chris Girgenti of Randall's Island Park Alliance in NYC. Randall's Island Park Alliance is a valuable partner to the program as we rely on in-kind disseminating of Hudson River and NYC fish advisories in the NYC area. His team interacts with hundreds of people during tours and fishing clinics and the partnership helps us reach many New York City anglers, families, and school children.
- Tabled at the Saratoga County Fair, Dutchess County Fair, and assisted Saratoga CCE partner at the Washington County Fair. Fairs are often a 4-6 day commitment from staff but provide a good setting to be able to answer questions and bring information to a wide range of outdoor-minded people and families.
- Staff made connections with new local organizations through networking events and were invited to table at an open house at the Albany Community Charter School and a block party held by the Moreau Community Center. Both events were successful and reached families that had not previously known about the Hudson River fish advisory.



Alana Gerus answering questions about the fish advisory to a group of survey takers at the Northeast Outdoor Expo held in Rockland county.



Regina Keenan (left) and Audrey Van Genechten (right) with Dr. David Secor (middle) at the American Fisheries Society conference held in Poughkeepsie. Dr. David Secor from the University of Maryland studies migration habits of Hudson River striped bass and has been a valuable resource to NYSDOH on several projects related to striped bass angler awareness.

- Staff organized a share-the-knowledge event between NYSDOH Bureau of Toxic Substance Assessment, Outreach and Education, NYS DEC Central office fisheries staff, and NYSDEC Region 3 Hudson River Fisheries Unit. Each group presented on recent work, including how advisories are set, recent science on PCB levels in striped bass, and fish population studies of Hudson River species. This presented an opportunity for staff from both agencies to interact, ask questions, and learn more about what each group does.
- Staff presented and submitted a poster at the NY Chapter's American Fisheries Society (AFS) Conference in Poughkeepsie. It was the first Hudson River focused AFS conference and brought together many of the top East Coast scientists involved in the tracking and study of Hudson River fish. Most presentations were fisheries science based, so NYSDOH's presentation about chemicals in fish and health advisories drew a large crowd and the poster session encouraged good discussion.

Program achievements:

- Collected over 190 surveys at various outreach events.
- Arm of the Sea created an interactive striped bass model to show how to skin/trim Hudson River fish and reduce the amount of PCBs in a fish meal. The model, "Phil," debuted at the Saratoga County Fair.
- Expanded available languages for brochures and coloring book:
- Submitted twelve fish advisory brochures for translation; most were updates but three are new translations: the Finger Lakes Region brochure is now available in Karen based on public requests, the New York City-Long Island brochure is available in Korean and Haitian Creole, also based on public requests.
- Coloring book has been translated into Spanish and Chinese.



Marlena Marallo and Patrick Wadden (founders of Arm-of-the-Sea Theater) created a hands-on model of a striped bass to illustrate how to skin and trim the fat to reduce PCBs.



Karen Roberts-Mort of CCE Albany and Diane Whitten of CCE Saratoga accepting their award from Karen Munden at the national Extension of Family and Consumer Science awards ceremony held in Hershey, Pennsylvania. The Hudson Fish advisory project won first place for an Environmental Education award.

- Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) educators Karen Roberts Mort (Albany) and Diane Whitten (Saratoga) applied to and won first place for the National Environmental Education award given by the National Extension Association of Family & Consumer Sciences (NEAFCS). The application was submitted on behalf of the four CCE mini grant subcontractors, Albany, Dutchess, Rockland, and Saratoga Counties highlighting the combined effort to educate the public along the 90-mile section of the Hudson River they represent. Karen and Diane were present at the NEAFCS Annual Session in Hershey, PA to receive the award on behalf of all CCE partners whose efforts reached the public through a variety of educational efforts in several different languages. The NYSDOH Fish Advisory Outreach project staff, Regina Keenan and Audrey Van Genechten, were included in the award application to highlight the community effort made to reach a wide audience across a large geographic area with diverse demographics.

“Diane and I are both very proud to be a part of the HRFA and thought that it deserved recognition as an outstanding Environmental Education program, conducted for families and/or communities on this regional environmental concern.”

-Karen Roberts Mort

Outreach Events



Audrey Van Genechten giving a presentation about risk communication and use of angler feedback to target Hudson River outreach to the Great Lakes Consortium.



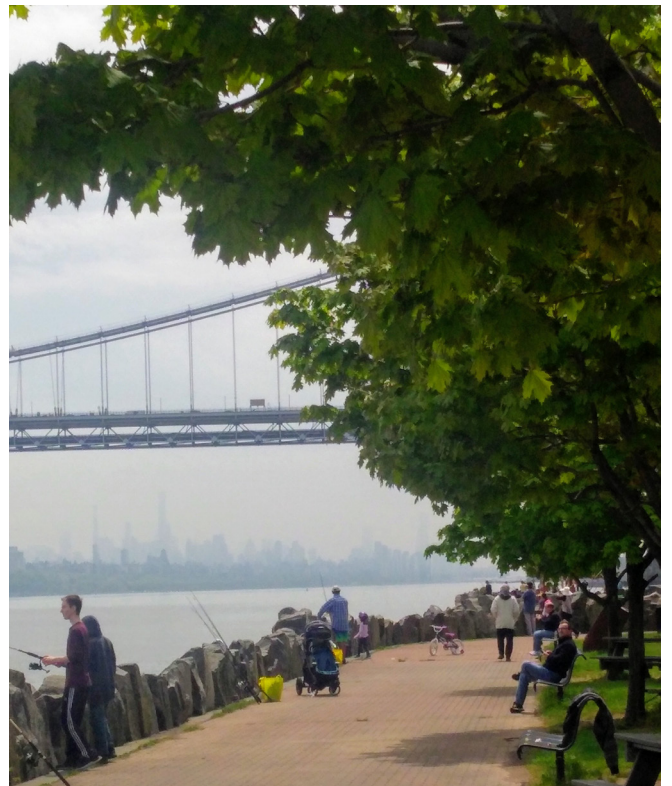
Alana Gerus demonstrating how to skin and trim the fat to reduce PCBs to a couple of captivated participants at the Saratoga County Fair.



Alana Gerus discussing the fish advisory to a family at the Newburgh Illuminated street fair.



Staff on a tour of Randall's Island to meet with and discuss fish advisory outreach around NYC with Chris Girgenti.



Participants at the annual Hudson River Fisherman's Association family fishing derby and awards event held at Ross Dock - Palisades Interstate Park.

Outreach Events



Audrey Van Genechten discussing the fish advisory at the Dutchess County Fair.



Diane Whitten (CCE Saratoga) and Karen Roberts-Mort (CCE Albany) with their Hudson River fish advisory display at the national Extension of Family and Consumer Science awards ceremony held in Hershey, Pennsylvania.



Audrey Van Genechten using a model of a crab to teach a family about where PCBs are concentrated in Hudson River blue crabs at Newburgh Illuminated.



Jennifer Zunino-Smith of CCE Rockland helping ID a fish in the "Go Fish" game at a Stem Fair in Rockland County.

Signs

NYSDOH works with local municipalities and other landowners along the Hudson River to post signs (at the discretion of the land owner) along 200 miles of shoreline. Signs are one method of a multi-pronged approach to inform anglers about contaminants in the fish they catch.

In 2019, Project staff inspected 42 public access locations in 5 counties to assess sign presence and condition. Due to the large amount of shoreline, staff aim to visit each sign location roughly every other year. We thank our mini-grant partners for providing updates on sign status throughout their project areas along the Hudson River.

The data we collect through sign inspections is put into a database where information on sign locations and contact information for municipalities and landowners can be stored. Project staff have been working on creating an interactive Google map for the public to show where signs are posted along the Hudson River. Each posting location includes information about when the location was last visited, whether a sign was present, and if not, includes the date that the landowner or municipality was contacted. Outreach to municipalities includes letters with information on how to order new (free) signs, and follow-up phone calls if no response is received.

Interested landowners can order free signs here:

www.health.ny.gov/environmental/outdoors/fish/hudson_river/docs/hudson_river_sign.pdf



Maya Agliodoro and Ryan Sedwick, Rockland County Americorp Interns, posting the multilingual Rockland County sign at popular fishing locations.

Survey Results Update

Hudson fish consumption surveys continue to provide valuable insight into what people are catching and eating, and inform new program directions and messages, see Appendix A:

www.health.ny.gov/environmental/outdoors/fish/udson_river/docs/hrfaappendix.pdf.

With the addition of our mini grant partners, the Hudson River Fish Advisory team has expanded contact with anglers and their families over a 200 mile span of the Hudson River (New York City Battery to Baker's Falls in Hudson Falls). Surveys are collected at a wide variety of public events such as county fairs, outdoor expos, street fairs, food banks, WIC clinics, and health fairs.

Survey results can be found here: www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-BKL29WGPV/#

Surveys are convenient samples, and not a statistical representation of all people in a specific community who eat Hudson River fish. We use these results to understand more about consumption choices, knowledge of fish advisories, and to target program resources.

More Information:

Hudson River Fish Advisory Outreach Program

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