



# The Riverkeeper Sweep: Lessons Learned

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**Riverkeeper's mission** is to protect the environmental, recreational, and commercial integrity of the Hudson River and its tributaries, and safeguard the drinking water of millions of New York City and Hudson Valley residents.



# An Annual Day of service for the Hudson River and its tributaries

- 8-year old program
- Volunteer led program - 150+ Sweep Leaders
- Projects including shoreline cleanups, invasive species removal, shoreline restoration, tree and native grass planting
- Projects in 17 counties bordering the Hudson River and/or in the watershed
- 



# Host a service event to:

- To address a need
  - Restore a neglected public space
  - Stabilize and restore a stream bank
  - Remove invasive species
  - Cleanup trash





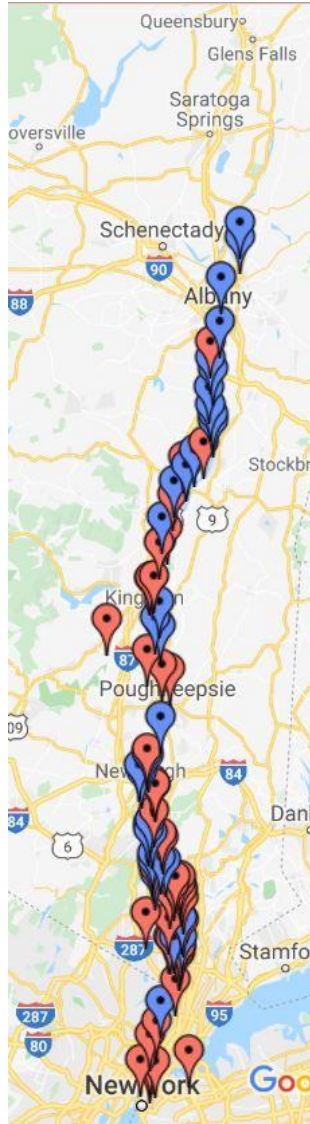
# Benefits of service projects

- More hands make light work
- Opportunity to engage community members
- Bring individuals down to their local tributary or Hudson River shoreline
- Accessible entry point to more complex issues



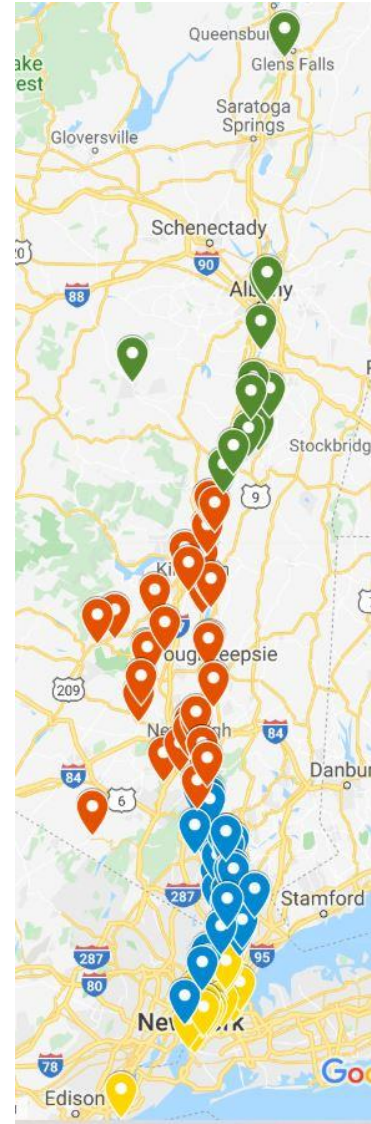
# Sweep Year One

- Date: June 2, 2012
- Locations: 30
- Volunteers: 450
- 500 bags of trash
- 7 tons of debris



# Sweep Year Eight

- Date: May 2, 2020
- Locations: 122
- Volunteers: 2,405
- 1,644 bags of trash
- 31 tons of debris





# Noteworthy over 8 Years

- Sustained partnerships
  - Multi-year Sweep Leaders
- Volunteers become Sweep Leaders
- At some sites, after several years projects are no longer needed
  - Other project sites not seeing notable improvement over time





# The Sweep Community

- Sweep Leaders
- Partners
- Sponsors
- Volunteers





# In their own words: Sweep Leaders



“ So why do I Sweep? Because it connects us to our humanity – to our responsibility to care for our environment; to be in touch with our shared surroundings; to see our commonness.”

-Jeff Scales, JSA Financial

“The annual Sweep has become a day of connectivity and a celebration of our collective ability to be active participants in the fate of our waterfronts, a fate building over the recent decades due in large part to the advocacy and activism of community members.”

-Lisa Bloodgood, Newtown Creek Alliance & Neighbors for Good Growth



Sweep has become more than a fun community cleanup day, it's grown into an opportunity for education, and to inspire advocacy and lifestyle changes. Participating in Sweep can become a starting point for individuals to think more deeply about their impacts on their community and waterways.

-Suzie Ross, Green Ossining



“What matters to me is that cleaning up a section of the creek does make a difference: visually, in the health of the creek, and in my heart.”

-Sarah Underhill, Rondout Creek Watershed Alliance

Queens is such a diverse borough, and it's wonderful to see such a mixture of communities, cultures and ages at the Sweep. We welcome the Scouts proudly earning their badges and students who are doing services hours with us! We are happy to be able to offer rides in dragon boats for those over 12 years old as part of the Sweep.

Hillary “Scout” Exter, Empire Dragon Boat Team, Guardians of Flushing Bay



“The experiences have changed him, or more accurately, helped to make him who he is. We can't get an ice cream cone without him picking up trash in the parking lot. He won't leave any shoreline without picking up everything he can reach.”

That's why I Sweep.

-Dan Shapley



# Power in partnerships



North Brooklyn Boat Club, Friends of +Pool, Friends of Inwood Hill Park, Ferry Sloops, Hudson River Expeditions, Ossining Cub Scouts Pack 83, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Hudson Valley, Newburgh Rowing Club, Cold Spring Lion's Club Capital District Volunteers, River Haggie Outdoors, New York State Water Resources Institute, Rensselaer Residents Against Toxic Dumping, Girl Scouts (Inwood), Friends of Manhattan Avenue Street End Park, Peekskill High School Environmental Club, Bronxville High School, Haverstraw Center, The Mount Academy, Town of Esopus, Village of High Falls, NY, Cornwall Girl Scouts, Phi Theta Kappa of Orange County Community College, Climate Smart Gardiner, Mid-Hudson Chapter of Adirondack Mountain Club, Rondout Creek Watershed Alliance, Friends of Mine Dock Park, Quassaick Creek Watershed Alliance, Girl Scout Troop 2032, Little Stony Point Citizen's Association, Town of Rochester ECC, Town of Blooming Grove Conservancy Advisory Commission, Beacon Sloop Club, Stuyvesant Pathways, Cossackie Earth Day

# Organizing Service Projects

- Organizing a cleanup program is a long game
  - Evaluate need
  - Create a plan working backward from the date of your project
  - Things to consider: access permission, supplies, promotion, volunteer recruitment, etc
- Select a date well in advance
- Find local partners





# Service project organizing timeline



## 3-4 Months Before

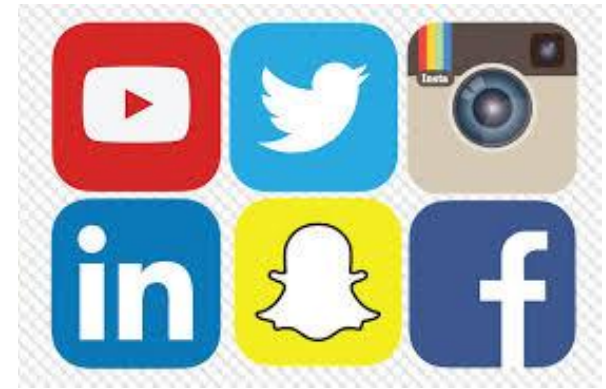
- Visit your potential project site and evaluate needs
- Select a date, time, and meeting location for your project
- Determine landowner and request permission
- Evaluate needed supplies





# 4 Weeks Before

- Recruit volunteers locally
- Reach out to local media and submit event to community calendars
- Identify special needs and seek donations
- Secure trash hauling and develop a recycling strategy
- Recruit any additional volunteers
- Reach out to volunteers



# On trash hauling and recycling

- Communicate with landowner about trash hauling procedures
  - If your site is a park, the park may be able to help you contact the local Department of Public Works about trash/recycling disposal or may be willing dispose of refuse for you
  - Non-park projects: Contact the local Department of Public Works about trash/recycling disposal
- Recycle! Recycle! Recycle!
  - Sorting your trash & recycling properly is **KEY** to ensure as little as possible ends up in the landfill
  - You may want to encourage volunteers to work in pairs with one trash and one recycling bag





# 1-2 Weeks Ahead: Recruit & Contact Volunteers

## 2 Weeks Before

- Recruit any additional volunteers
  - Scout troops, religious organizations, schools, etc.

## 1 Week Before

- Reach out to your volunteers
  - Share any final reminders: dress for the weather, appropriate footwear, supplies to bring, etc



# Day of: safety first, and then fun!

- **Before your volunteers arrive**
  - Place signage if necessary to help volunteers find the meeting place.
  - Check for any hazards to communicate to your volunteers
    - EX:slippery conditions, poison ivy, ticks, and “sharps” such as glass or needles.
  - Arrange your materials for ease of distribution
- **As volunteers arrive**
  - Check-in registered volunteers
  - Welcome the group and make them aware of any hazards
- **During the Cleanup**
  - Take photos! Aim for action shots, and a group photo of all volunteers with the debris from the project. Try to capture smiling faces!
- **After the Cleanup**
  - Collect the results, get any interesting anecdotes from your volunteers
  - Thank your volunteers! Let them know you value their hard work and that their efforts made a difference.
- **Next Week**
  - Share you success! Use social media to share your hard work with your network





# Tracking Results: How and Why

I LOVE  
DATA

SO COOL!

# Basic cleanup metrics

- # of volunteers
- Length of project
- start/end location
- # of bags of trash
  - Estimated weight/bag
- # bags of recycling
  - Estimated weight per bag
- # of tires
- Noteworthy items



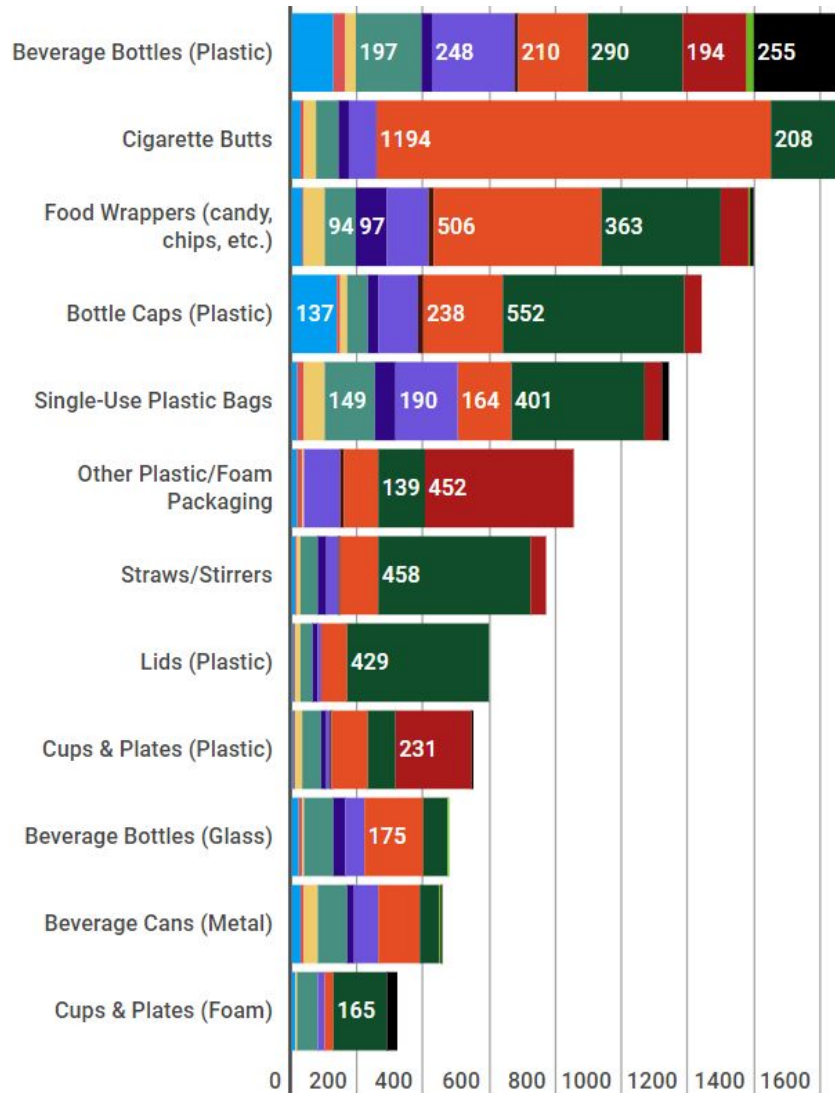


# Expanded cleanup metrics

- Collect Comprehensive data
  - Ocean Conservancy data collection form
  - Conduct a brand audit - [storyofstuff.org](https://storyofstuff.org)
    - Identify type of product, type of packaging



# Riverkeeper's comprehensive Sweep Data



## Comprehensive Data Collected at 12 sites:

1. Esopus: Lighthouse Park and Esopus Meadows Preserve Cleanup
2. Kingston: Rondout Creek/A Day Away Kayak Rental
3. Nyack Memorial Park
4. Tuckahoe: Parkway Oval Park
5. Bronxville: Scout Field
6. Irvington: Scenic Hudson Park
7. Hastings on Hudson (Three Sites)
8. Kingston Point Beach
9. Queens: Flushing Bay
10. Manhattan: Hudson River Park
11. Esopus: Mount Community Riverfront
12. Manhattan: John V. Lindsay East River Park

## How:

- Each piece of trash categorized on an Ocean Conservancy tally sheet



# Sweep Results vs. Ocean Conservancy Report

- Plastic bottles
- Styrofoam
- Assorted other plastic
- Cigarette butts



# Planting and Stewardship Project Metrics

- # volunteers
- # of volunteer hours
- # trees and native grasses planted
  - Track species names
- # trees and shrubs maintained
- Acres of invasive species removed
  - Track species names





# Multi-location projects

- Recruit local site captains
  - Create way for them to share logistics of their projects
- Create promotional materials highlighting all projects
  - Posters, quarter sheets, etc.
  - Facebook event
- Create way for volunteers to sign up
  - Example platforms:
    - EventBrite
    - Volunteer signup



# Incorporating advocacy into service

- Solutions to plastic pollution beyond cleanups
- Legislation needed to reduce single-use plastics from entering waterways
- In 2018 began circulating petitions at Sweep projects focusing on single-use plastics
  - 2018 - petition in support of NYS ban on single-use plastic bags w/ fee on paper
  - 2019 - petition in support of expanding NYS bottle redemption policy
  - Generated an additional 400-500 petition signatures
- Statistics from Sweep incorporated into state and local advocacy materials supporting bans and fees on single use plastics





# Resources

- DEC's Hudson Estuary Trees for Tributaries Program
- Riverkeeper's Trash Free Hudson
- Beyond Plastics
- Ocean Conservancy
- Story of Stuff
- American Rivers (free trash bags!)

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# Top tips for organizing service projects

- Start planning early (3-4 months ahead)
- Build local partnerships
- Registration mechanisms are key
- Promote, promote, promote!
- Track metrics
- Practice gratitude
- Celebrate success and partnerships
- Collect contact information from volunteers
- Sharps protocol





# Join us for Sweep 2020!

- **Saturday, May 2, 2020**
- **Ways to participate:**
  - Volunteer
  - Organize a Sweep project
  - Sponsor Sweep

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# 2019 Sweep Sponsors:

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