



INFORMATIONAL WEBINAR: WATERSHED GROUP CAPACITY-BUILDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Hudson River
Watershed Alliance



EMILY VAIL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
HUDSON RIVER WATERSHED ALLIANCE

Zoom Webinar | January 9, 2025

OUTLINE

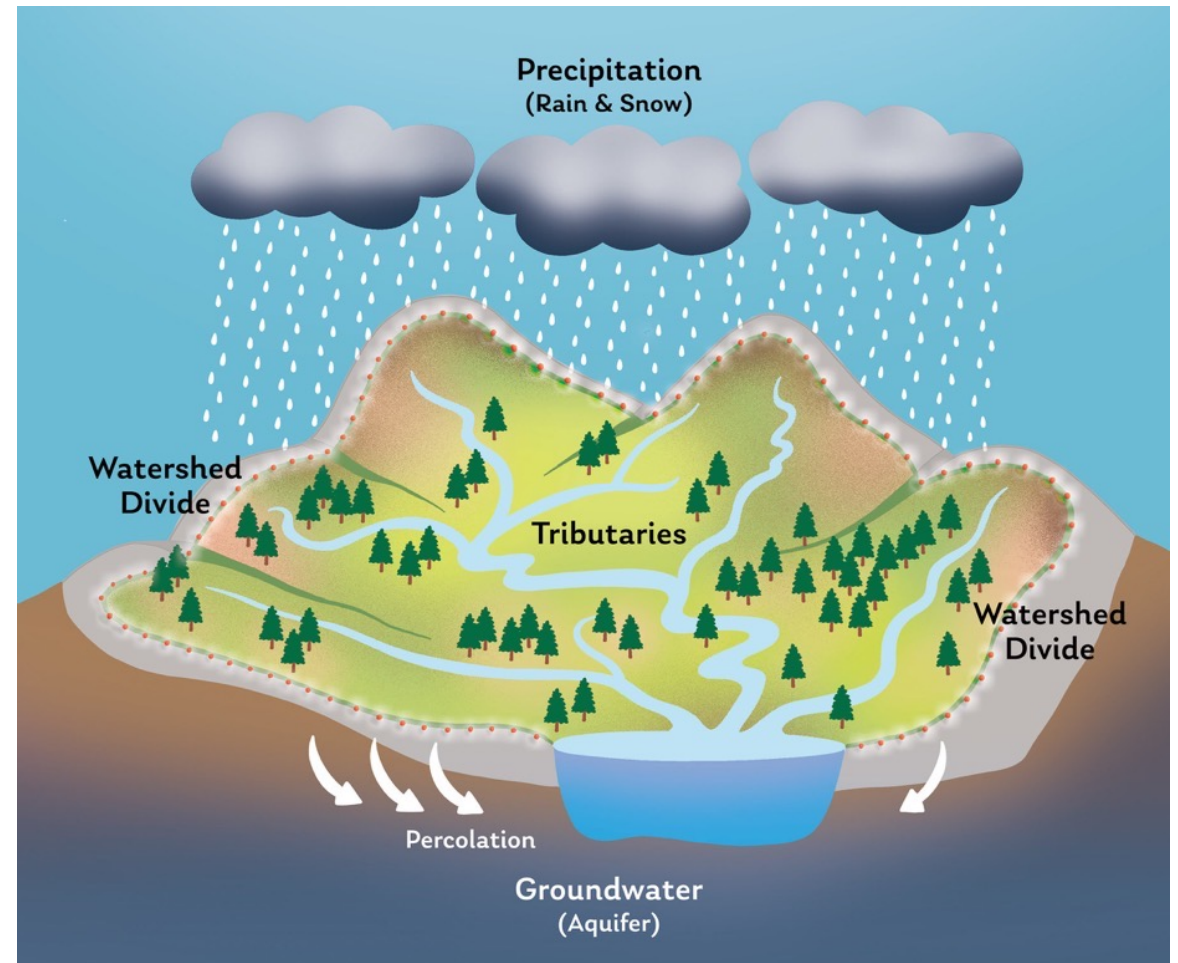
- Project background
 - Why watershed group capacity-building?
- Technical assistance opportunity details
- Application process
- Q & A



Ulster County Watershed Roundtable

WHY WATERSHEDS?

- Land area where water flows to a specific waterbody
- Defined by topography
- Geographic unit best-suited to understanding conditions and managing our waters
- Connect upstream and downstream communities



HUDSON RIVER WATERSHED

- Hudson River watershed = 13,400 square miles
- Upper Hudson, Mohawk River, Hudson River Estuary
- Each tributary has its own unique set of conditions
- Each tributary is connected to the larger watershed ecosystem



HUDSON RIVER WATERSHED ALLIANCE

- Unite and empower communities to protect our shared waters
 - Support watershed groups
 - Help municipalities work together
 - Communicate as a collective voice



WHAT IS A WATERSHED GROUP?

- Collective of people that are working together locally to protect a specific watershed
- Groups can take a variety of forms: ad hoc community groups, 501(c)(3)s, intermunicipal councils, fiscal sponsor, led by agencies or non-profits
- Watershed work is complex, collaboration is key



Fall Kill Watershed Coalition

WATERSHED GROUP ROLES

- Convene stakeholders
- Coordinate projects
- Educate residents
- Promote stewardship
- Monitor water quality
- Partner on research
- Create and implement watershed plans



Minisceongo Creek Watershed Alliance cleanup

WATERSHED GROUP ROLES

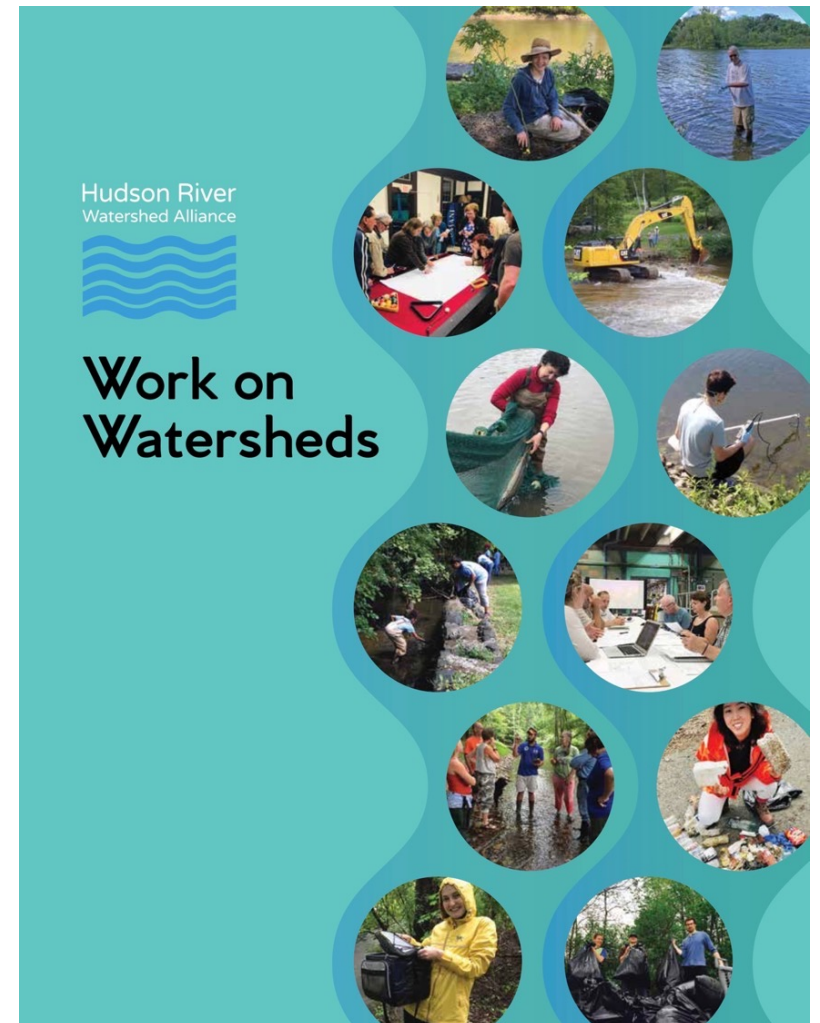
- Focus on diverse issues:
 - water quality,
 - flooding,
 - stream habitat,
 - drinking water protection,
 - climate resilience,
 - education,
 - and more



Hudson 7 Intermunicipal Council

WATERSHED NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- 2019-2021: Watershed Needs Assessment
(Hudson River Estuary Program grant)
- Interviews and focus groups with 56 local and regional partners
- Goal: better understand strengths and needs of watershed groups
 - ➔ Watershed Needs Assessment Report
 - ➔ Watershed Needs Assessment Appendix
 - ➔ Work on Watersheds – success stories



WATERSHED GROUP STRENGTHS

- Passionate, knowledgeable, and committed people
- Diverse accomplishments
- Build relationships and share unique local knowledge
- Engage communities in meaningful ways
- Utilize significant scientific expertise and resources



Quassaick Creek Watershed Alliance

WATERSHED GROUPS NEED: CAPACITY

- Most critical need: more capacity
 - Ability of an organization to get work done, be effective, and/or fulfill their mission
- Ways to build capacity:
 - Refining group structures and defining roles to work efficiently
 - Building/sharing leadership
 - Involving more people & partners



Walkill River Watershed Alliance
(Hudson Valley One)

WATERSHED GROUPS NEED: CAPACITY

- Journal article summarizing findings published in *Environmental Management*, September 2024
- “The Importance of Capacity-Building in Watershed Groups: Lessons from the Hudson River Watershed, USA” by Michael Finewood, Pace University, et al.

Environmental Management
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00267-024-02045-6>



The Importance of Capacity-Building in Watershed Groups: Lessons from the Hudson River Watershed, USA

Michael Howard Finewood¹ · Emily Vail² · Katherine L. Meierdiercks³ · Christianna Bennett⁴ · Larissa Read⁵

Received: 15 August 2023 / Accepted: 3 September 2024

© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2024

Abstract

Municipalities face challenges meeting environmental protection and conservation goals due to a lack of resources, capacity, and political will. As a result, grassroots environmental organizations often emerge to help meet these challenges by filling gaps in governmental operation and structure. At the watershed scale, environmental organizations and groups are critical for effective watershed governance, often helping with collaboration as well as providing municipalities with additional support and resources. Despite the vital role environmental organizations and groups can play, they continue to face challenges such as insufficient resources, inconsistent leadership, and lack of organizational structure, thus limiting the contributions they can deliver. In this manuscript, we present case study research on watershed groups exploring their capacity to meet their mission and goals. Drawing from a needs assessment study conducted in the Hudson River watershed in 2019–2021, we found that while watershed groups are generally in need of technical resources, participation, and funding, our research suggests capacity (such as internal structure, strategic planning, and leadership) is most important for successful and sustainable groups. Therefore, we argue that support for capacity is more likely to help sustain groups and their long-term beneficial impact. To make this argument we present qualitative interview and focus group data to articulate watershed group goals, challenges, and needs, with an emphasis on capacity-related themes that emerged around expertise, leadership, structure, and planning. We then conclude with recommendations that can be applied to other watershed groups in the United States, and likely beyond.

Keywords Environmental governance · Watershed groups · Needs assessment · Hudson River

WATERSHED GROUPS NEED: CAPACITY

“At the watershed scale, environmental organizations and groups are critical for effective watershed governance, often helping with collaboration as well as providing municipalities with additional support and resources. Despite the vital role environmental organizations and groups can play, they continue to face challenges... [W]e found that while watershed groups are generally in need of technical resources, participation, and funding, our research suggests capacity (such as internal structure, strategic planning, and leadership) is most important for successful and sustainable groups. Therefore, we argue that support for capacity is more likely to help sustain groups and their long-term beneficial impact.”

WATERSHED GROUPS NEED: CAPACITY

- Ongoing feedback and conversations with watershed groups on capacity-building needs:
 - May 2024 Watershed Roundtable
 - Summer 2024 Organizational Assessment survey



HRWA 2024 Roundtable: Capacity Building!



PLANNING TO BUILD CAPACITY

- Planning improves capacity by identifying and building consensus around goals and roles
- Watershed Planning (external)
- Watershed Group Planning (internal)



Wappinger Creek Watershed Community Resilience Building Workshop

PLANNING TO BUILD CAPACITY

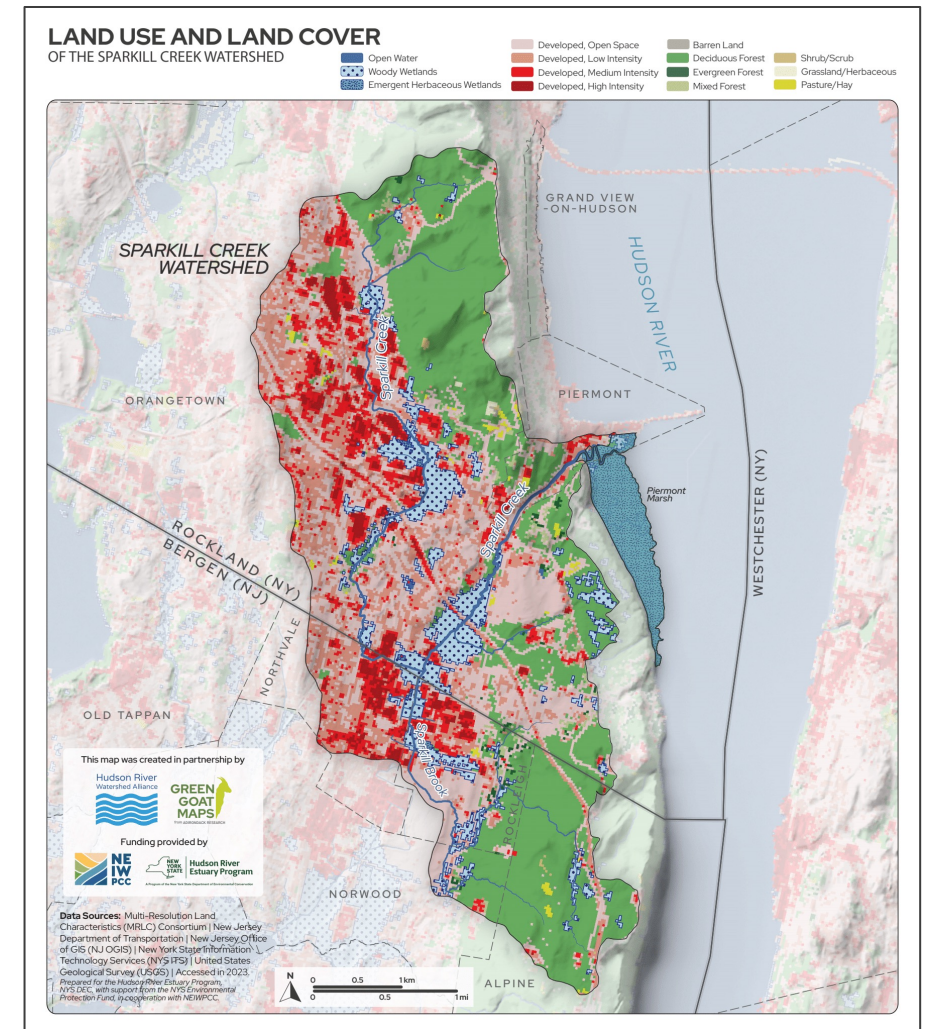
- **Watershed Planning:** process that brings people together from across boundaries, sectors to understand *what the watershed needs*
 - Understand current watershed conditions
 - Set goals for future conditions
 - Identify strategic actions to get from present to future



Roe Jan Watershed Community

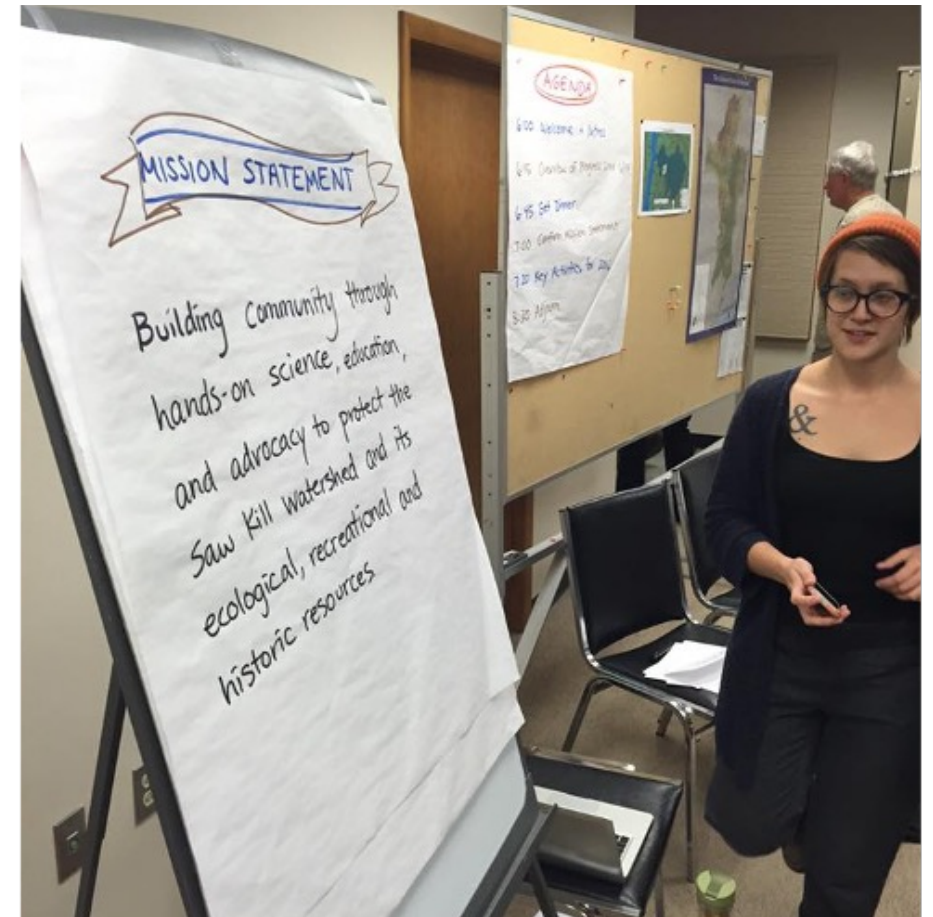
WATERSHED CHARACTERIZATION

- **Understand current conditions:** focus of the watershed characterization process
- Compile information from different sources together in one report, tells the watershed's story, foundation for planning
- Watershed characterization pilot project:
 - Punch Brook-Roeliff Jansen Kill watershed (rural)
 - Sparkill Creek watershed (urban)



PLANNING TO BUILD CAPACITY

- **Watershed Group Planning:** process that brings together watershed group members and partners to understand *what the watershed group needs*
 - Understand current conditions
 - Set goals for future conditions
 - Identify strategic actions to get from present to future



Saw Kill Watershed Community

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **Watershed Group Capacity-Building Technical Assistance**
- Offered by the Hudson River Watershed Alliance, in partnership with the NYS DEC Hudson River Estuary Program and NEIWPCCC



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Hudson River
Estuary Program

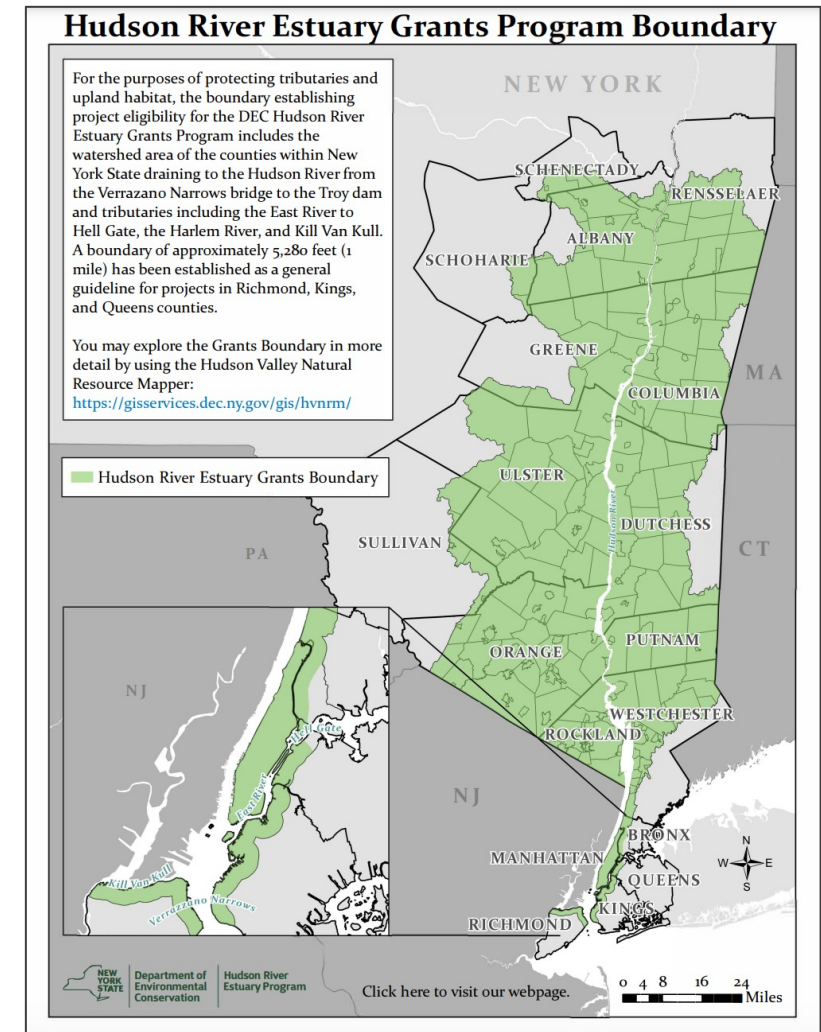


TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **What is the opportunity?**
 - We will select four watershed groups to work one-on-one with a facilitator from February-July 2025
 - Each group will review elements of organizational development and plan for priority actions over the next 1-2 years by developing a strategic workplan
 - With support from Hudson River Watershed Alliance staff, groups will implement one priority organizational development action

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **Who is eligible?** Watershed groups working in the Hudson River estuary watershed
 - Watershed group: collective of people working together locally to protect a specific watershed
 - Groups can be any form (ad hoc, nonprofit, intermunicipal council, fiscal sponsor, etc.)
 - Must have a team of 5-6 people identified to participate in the process
 - Priority: have met regularly in the last year



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **What is an application for technical assistance?**
 - Groups will apply to receive direct technical assistance from a facilitator and Hudson River Watershed Alliance staff (like DWSP2)
 - We are not granting funds to the watershed group
 - No fiscal sponsor is needed
 - Goal: reduce administrative burden on groups by providing services directly
 - No cost to the group to apply or participate
 - Participants will commit their time to support the process

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **What is the technical assistance process?**
 - February-July 2025, four groups will work one-on-one with a facilitator
 - A team of 5-6 people from the group will participate in the strategic workplan facilitation process.
 - This team can include group leaders, members, volunteers, partners, etc.
 - Each person should plan to spend a total of at least 6-8 hours in meetings and 3-5 hours to work outside of meetings from February-July
 - Separate from/in addition to participating in regular watershed group meetings

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **What is the technical assistance process?**
 - The team will review the Organizational Development Checklist, developed specifically for Hudson River watershed groups by River Network
 - Develop 1-2 year **strategic workplan** to document priority actions to support both programmatic and capacity-building goals
 - With support from Hudson River Watershed Alliance staff, implement one **priority capacity-building action**

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **What is a strategic workplan?**
 - Product: document of priority actions to take over the next 1-2 years, to support both programmatic and capacity-building goals
 - Process: articulate goals, consider strategies, build consensus on next actions
 - Anticipated outcomes: cohesion, sense of direction, efficacy/efficiency
 - Not a full strategic plan – more narrow scope and timeline, focusing on short-term next steps

walkkill river
watershed alliance
we fight dirty

4.2 Public Access and Engagement

Increasing public access and engagement is our second priority, and is defined as fostering a public individually and personally invested in the wellbeing of the river and its watershed, as well as involved in its restoration. Recreation in the watershed ranges widely, from kayaking, canoeing, and fishing the river and its tributaries, to hiking, biking, hunting and camping in the broader watershed. Recreation (and the potential tourism it generates) is critically important to addressing this Public Access and Engagement. Efforts to expand and promote recreational opportunities are therefore a key focus of the Alliance.

Specific public access and engagement goals and tasks identified include:

- **Host public meetings to engage the public and promote a community of watershed advocates**

- Host monthly membership meetings
- Host monthly Working Group meetings as needed
- Host an Annual Walkkill River Summit
- Host Issue-based events (ie. Harmful Algal Blooms)

- **Promote public use, enjoyment, awareness of, and action to support the river**

- Support Boat Brigades. Continue reporting. Organize more Boat Brigades in Orange County.
- Participate in the New Paltz Regatta as a signature Walkkill River event
- Organize a Riverkeeper Sweep service project as a signature Walkkill River event
- Map and promote public access points. Promote the creation of new access points, creating a "blue trail" where possible
- Attend public events to promote the Walkkill and the Alliance
- Create events and opportunities for access to the river and watershed

- **Support Water Quality Goals**

- Promote community science
- Build coalitions with Town/Village Boards, CAC's, agencies, businesses and relevant organizations Offer technical assistance where appropriate
- Issue Advocacy: Engage local citizens to bring watershed issues to local elected officials, and educate the public about the watershed
- Define and build membership; Promote Working Group volunteerism

4.3 Capacity Building

Capacity building means increasing the time, funding, and people dedicated to restoring the watershed, for both the Alliance and our allied organizations, agencies, and governments.

Specific capacity building goals and tasks identified include:

- **Fundraising**

- Membership donations
- Business donations
- Institutional donations



2nd Annual Walkkill River Summit, Montgomery, 2016.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **What's a priority capacity-building action?**
 - This project will be selected by the group through the facilitation process
 - Factors: what can best achieve watershed group goals, time/capacity of Hudson River Watershed Alliance staff and the watershed group to implement it
 - May include: financial systems, grant capacity, external communications systems, organizational structure/defining roles, outreach event support, etc.
 - Examples: develop financial policies & procedures; create a budget or financial tracking system; prepare required paperwork to be eligible for state grants; document organizational/leadership structure; etc.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **What's a priority capacity-building action?**
 - Regardless of the project specifics, time on this will include:
 - Identifying the priority type of project, based on the facilitated workplan
 - Scoping the project details
 - Implementing the project
 - Training for watershed group member(s)
 - Manual or protocol for ongoing use/maintenance/reference
 - Debriefing to understand how the project went, for future work

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **Who would my group be working with?**
 - Facilitators:
 - Karen Strong, Strong Outcomes
 - Julia Solomon, Shadbush Consulting
 - Selected for this project: relevant local and regional experience
 - Strengths: facilitation, visioning, planning, engagement, communications



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **Who would my group be working with?**
 - Hudson River Watershed Alliance staff:
 - Jennifer Cohen, Operations Manager
 - Emily Vail, Executive Director
 - Bringing extensive capacity-building experience
 - Hudson River Estuary Program/NEIWPCC staff:
 - Anna Palmer, Source Watershed Specialist
 - Contract manager and technical oversight



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **Who would my group be working with?**
 - We will assign each participating group to work one-on-one with either Karen Strong (Strong Outcomes) or Julia Solomon (Shadbush Consulting)
 - Based on geographic location, watershed group mission or programmatic focus, capacity-building priorities, etc.
 - All four groups will work with Jennifer and Emily
 - Support the facilitation process from February-July, work one-on-one to implement the priority capacity-building action project

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **What is the application process?**
 - Online application through Google Forms
 - **Due Thursday, January 30 by close of business**
 - Application questions in Word and PDF for groups to work on before submitting through the form, scoring sheet / criteria on the project webpage
 - Each application will be scored by Emily Vail & Jennifer Cohen, Hudson River Watershed Alliance, and Anna Palmer, Hudson River Estuary Program / NEIWPC.
 - The four groups that score the highest will be selected for this opportunity.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **What is the application process?**
 - Application questions focus on:
 - Establishing eligibility
 - Scored answers: timing/readiness to work on organizational development and capacity-building
 - Additional context: to give us a better understanding of the watershed group's current structure

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **What is the timeline of next steps?**
 - Thursday, January 30, close of business – application deadline
 - Early February – groups notified whether or not they were selected
 - Mid to late February – project kick-off meeting
 - March-July – facilitation to develop strategic workplan, implementation of the priority capacity-building action (can begin as soon as identified)

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

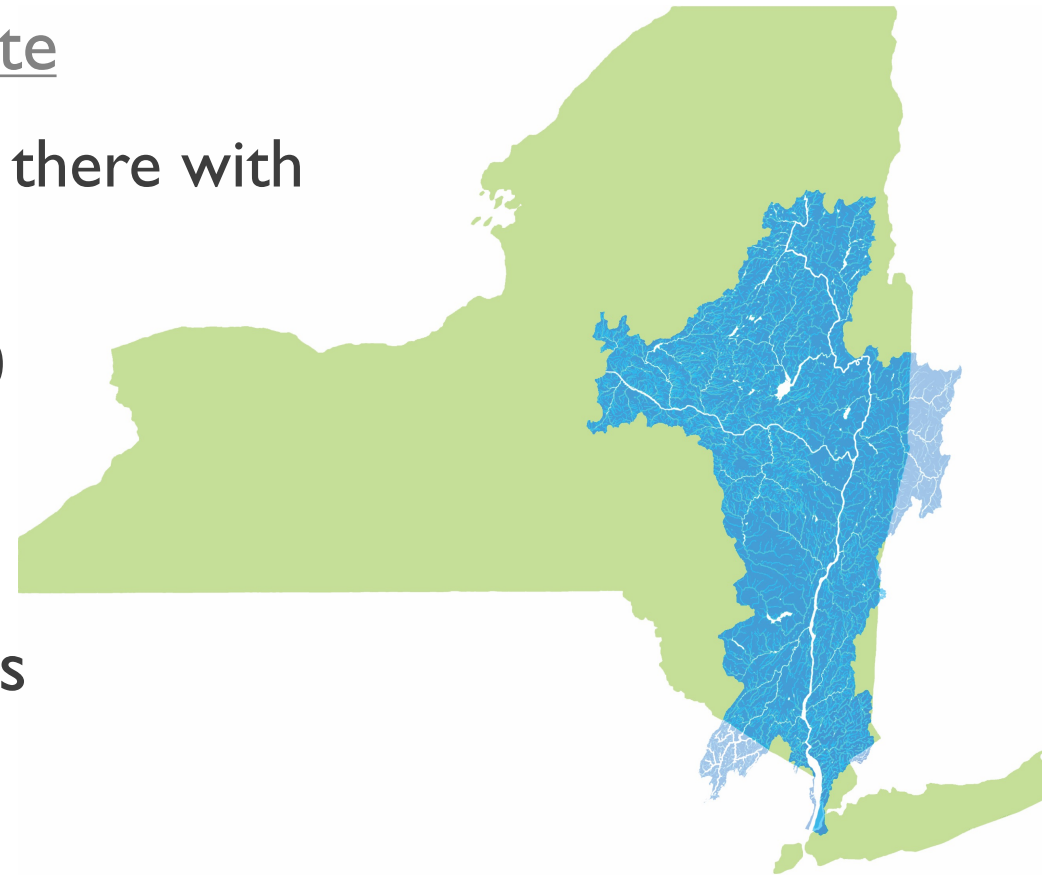
- **What if this project isn't a good fit, my watershed group is not eligible, or my group is not selected?**
 - We want your feedback, especially if it's not a good fit.
 - Our mission is to support watershed groups – help us provide or connect you with what you need.
 - This is a pilot, and with enough interest, we hope to replicate it in the future.
 - New resources coming in 2025: with River Network, releasing a series of self-guided materials with peer-learning opportunities on organizational development for all watershed groups (*Hudson River Estuary Program grant*)

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY

- **Our goal for this project:**
 - Support stronger, more sustainable watershed groups, to help focus limited time and resources on achieving local goals for healthy watersheds
 - Research: watershed groups play critical roles and need capacity support
 - Project outcomes: consensus, cohesion, clear sense of direction to confidently move forward
 - Provide groups with a boost to get to the “next level”
 - Examples could be: apply for a grant, manage a leadership transition, shift to a new organizational or leadership structure, develop new partnerships, grow membership, start exciting new programs...

NEXT STEPS

- Review all materials on the [project website](#)
 - Webinar is being recorded, will be posted there with a PDF copy of these slides
- Application deadline: Thursday, January 30
- We are available to answer any questions watershed groups have about the application or technical assistance process
 - Comments and feedback welcome



THANK YOU!

Emily Vail

Executive Director

Hudson River Watershed Alliance

emily@hudsonwatershed.org

hudsonwatershed.org

@HudsonRiverWatershedAlliance

Hudson River
Watershed Alliance



*Uniting & empowering communities
to protect our shared waters*