

Niagara River Riparian Restoration Program
Annual Progress Report to the Ecological Standing Committee
Prepared by: Kerri Bentkowski Li and Zeb Strickland
Date: January 17, 2010

I. Summary of Activities

We are pleased to submit to the members of the Ecological Standing Committee and the Niagara River Greenway Commission the Annual Progress report for the grant activities from March 2009-January 2010. The progress towards the goals of the Niagara River Riparian Restoration program has been significant in the first phase. The first allocation of the grant funds has included activities such as: recruiting and hiring 2 new staff members, researching preferred habitat restoration methods, performing initial site evaluations in all targeted watersheds, new partner outreach and development, creating new outreach materials and website, initial landowner outreach, and thing beginnings of the content of the landowner stewardship trainings. A highlight this year for the program was the installation of 125 trees and shrubs with 50 volunteers in the Greenway area at Seneca Bluffs Natural Habitat area in South Buffalo along the Buffalo River. All grant funded activities are outlined below.

II. Summary of Accomplishments

Highlights

- Watershed Restoration Coordinator and Americorp candidate were selected
- Partners have been contacted (Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Erie and Niagara County, USFWS) and are on board and up to date on program



- Direct Mailing flier has been created and mailing will be sent out in January 2010
- Pilot project at Seneca Bluffs was a success! 50 volunteers helped to plant 145 Trees and Shrubs.
- Media and public relations about the program have been established

Research

- Researched various other buffer programs to gather input on development of program
- Contacted local organizations to get expertise on developing the program such as direct mailing, brochures, landowner applications, site assessment etc.
- Researched various literature on buffer installation to disseminate to the public
- Site visits to all watersheds and sub-watersheds (Upper and Lower Niagara River, Buffalo River, Two-Mile Creek, Scjacuada Creek, Tonawanda Creek, Cayuga Creek, Gill Creek) throughout the Greenway
- Site visits with internal staff of past restoration projects in Cattaragus Area
- Three training PowerPoint programs are being developed and include: (1) Forest Buffers and Implementation (2) Native plants for wildlife (3) Invasive Plants
- Americorp researched various habitat restoration methods ex. Native plants, riparian buffers etc

Outreach and Recruitment

- Presentations of habitat restoration timeline to local municipalities to inform them of program
- Targeted direct mailing to landowners that incorporated waterfront areas with lack of forested buffers on property by the use of Google Maps, FLOWPA, and ArcGIS to specifically target waterfront owners on the Niagara and Buffalo Rivers and tributaries throughout the Greenway
- Radio interview on Vantage Points that aired January 16th 2010 on WFBF
- RIVERKEEPER press release about habitat restoration program to external organizations.
- 2 person-to-person visits with landowners in response to restoration consultation on their property
- Wrote thank you letters to partners and volunteers that donated equipment and time
- Coordinated with Americorps to recruit volunteers for planting project
- Recruited, interviewed and hired Habitat Restoration Americorp to assist with program
- Americorp created graphic design of fliers
- Americorp obtained estimates on fliers for direct mailing, edited database, labeled and stuffed envelopes
- Americorp initiated development of RestoreCorp website drafting pages

- Americorp trained in Word Press and Raiser's Edge

Partners

- Met with Erie County and Niagara County Soil and Water Conservation Districts to begin process of site assessment and how to go about the initial landowner contacts
- Met with Ducks Unlimited for potential future wetland/restoration projects
- Met with USFWS for potential in-stream restoration projects in Niagara County
- Met with Tifft Nature Preserve for potential collaboration on future herbicide applications and permitting
- In contact with DEC permitting for when site are selected
- Partnered with Erie County DEP and USFWS for Seneca Bluffs project

Restoration



Seneca Bluffs Fall Restoration Planting 2009

- RIVERKEEPER staff and partners helped coordinate a restoration project at Seneca Bluffs to plant 145 Trees and Shrubs with 50 volunteers
- RIVERKEEPER staff maintained Seneca Bluffs area by removing old tree wraps and plastic grid lock to retain health of trees. Partners from Erie County DEP installed beaver fencing to protect valuable wildlife trees from being felled
- Site planting plan of Seneca Bluffs was created and flagged so volunteers could distribute trees and shrubs in an orderly fashion. This kept volunteers engaged in learning the species and where they should plant them according to soil type
- Americorp managed volunteer recruitment for Seneca Bluffs Fall 2009 Restoration

III. Accounting of Expenditures

Niagara River Riparian Restoration Program Budget - 3 Year Project Budget January 2009 - March 2012 Actuals as of 1/14/2010

Budget Category	Amount	Actuals
<u>Salaries and Benefits</u>		
Executive Director and/or Citizen Outreach Coordinator	\$24,192	\$9,429
Watershed Restoration Coordinator	\$124,800	\$14,653
Fringe Benefits	\$22,796	\$1,884
<u>Technical Assistance and Labor</u>		
Site assessment, site design, and assistance in implementation	\$10,800	
Americorps Volunteer Member	\$15,000	
Additional technical and legal assistance, construction equipment rental	\$58,440	\$2,908
<u>Expenses</u>		
Training costs, Printing and graphic design	\$8,000	\$72
Plant material		
<u>Travel</u>		
Mileage/Fuel	\$760	\$106
<u>Overhead</u>		
Administrative cost related to management of project	\$66,197	\$20,843
<u>TOTALS</u>	\$330,985	\$49,895

IV. Next Steps and Request for Grant Extension

In 2010, the Niagara River Riparian Restoration Program will begin the exciting phase of implementation. The next steps include: continued recruitment of landowners, recruitment and training of Restore Corps volunteers in partnership with Western New York Americorps, selection of first 10 restoration projects, initiation of landowner agreements, purchasing and coordination of restoration projects, final drafting of the Landowner Stewardship handbook, and the implementation of the first Landowner Stewardship trainings.

An unfortunate delay in the program implementation occurred in the first year due to receiving grant funds in Spring 2009 and the September start date for the Habitat Restoration Coordinator. Therefore, Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper requests a one-time extension of the grant until September 31, 2012. This will give us an additional planting season to complete all 25 projects. Thank you for considering this request.

V. Summary of Attachments

Attachment A.....Direct Mailing Flyer

Attachment B.....Landowner Application

Attachment C.....Article in Buffalo News

Attachment D.....Press Release

Attachment E.....Habitat Restoration Program Timeline

Attachment A. Direct Mailing Flyer

ATTENTION WATERFRONT OWNERS!

HELP TO BETTER BUFFALO BY RESTORING YOUR WATERFRONT PROPERTY



JOIN US TO RESTORE THE HABITAT IN YOUR BACKYARD

Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER will provide free consultation, design and installation to homeowners interested in planting native vegetation or meadows along the water's edge of their property. The benefits are endless, including property value increase, erosion control and an increase amount of wildlife.

Call today and schedule a free assessment of your property!

Learn more about the Restoration Program at a Workshop:
Thursday February 18th 6pm-8pm
1250 Niagara St. Buffalo NY 14213

1250 Niagara St. Buffalo NY 14213 | 716-852-7483 | www.bnrkeeper.org

ABOUT OUR PROGRAM

Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER has a new Landowner Habitat Restoration Program, developed to assist landowners in maintaining, enhancing and restoring habitat by implementing restoration projects on their property. The program targets landowners in the established Greenway throughout Erie County and Niagara County, particularly on the waterfront who have eroding shorelines and have mowed to the edge of their property. Maintaining a forest buffer along rivers, streams and creeks reconnects the lost forest corridor and improves the water quality for the health of the waterways.

BENEFITS OF HABITAT RESTORATION

Stabilize Banks: By holding soil in place with their root systems and adding nutrients each fall with their leaves, trees are crucial to sustaining and replenishing our soil. The root systems also act to control erosion by keeping your banks from washing away.

Increase Wildlife: Vegetation provides food and habitat that will attract many kinds of species.

Increase Economic Value: Real estate values increase when a property and neighborhood are beautified with trees and native vegetation. Trees can increase residential property values by 15 percent or more. In winter, trees break the force of winds by acting as a windbreak that can lower heating bills up to 30 percent. In the summer, trees will shade your property, keeping it cooler.

Absorb Toxins: From air pollutants to pesticides and fertilizers, trees absorb harmful pollutants and keep them from entering our

CONTACT US

Call and apply today for your very own restoration project! Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER is looking for 10 sites to restore in Spring 2010. To see if you qualify for a project or to learn of other ways to get involved contact:

Zeb Strickland: Watershed Restoration Coordinator

852-7483 ex. 23

Zstrickland@bnriverkeeper.org

www.bnriverkeeper.org

1250 Niagara St. Buffalo NY 14213 | 716-852-7483

ELIGIBLE GREENWAY TOWNS

Youngstown
Town of Porter
Village of Lewiston
City of Niagara Falls
Town of Niagara
Town of Wheatfield
Grand Island
City of North Tonawanda
City of Tonawanda
Tonawanda
Kenmore
City of Buffalo



A stream bank with only lawn grasses is unstable and will wash away!

Funded by:



BUFFALO NIAGARA RIVERKEEPER®



WATERKEEPER ALLIANCE

Management practices proposed in this application must improve and restore habitat along the waterfront area:

Contact Information:	
Landowner's Name	Cooperator's Name
Address:	Address:
Home Phone:	Home Phone:
Work Phone:	Work Phone
Email:	Email:
Property Information:	
Estimated Waterfront Land Acreage/Area:	
If applicable Township and Range or GPS coordinates:	
Pertinent Information:	
Have you ever performed any habitat restoration or enhancement projects on your property?	
Do you mow up to the edge of waterfront on your property? And if so would you be willing to host a restoration project?	
Describe any erosion control issues on your property?	
Are there any invasive plant infestations (knotweed, phragmites etc.)?	

Have there ever been any rare or threatened species observed on your property?	
List of goals you want for your property:	
Any other comment or suggestions that might qualify you for a habitat restoration project?	
<u>Landowner Signature:</u>	<u>Date:</u>

Application Instructions:

Landowner’s Name: This is the legal landowner of the property. If more than one person owns the property, or the application encompasses multiple properties, indicate the primary contact person.

Cooperator’s Name: In some cases, someone other than the landowner is requesting RIVERKEEPER assistance for the property. For example, a family member or renter may be responsible for managing the property. If so, list the name of that person here. With the permission of the landowner, RIVERKEEPER will work directly with that cooperator.

Address, Phone, Email: Complete this information for both the landowner and cooperator (if applicable). Add an email address if available. Your email address will not be shared, but it will help us keep Program participants up to date with information and provide a means for quicker response to questions.

***Property Information:** This is only a rough estimate of the potential acreage or area along the shoreline between property borders that could be used for restoration. In an ideal situation a forested buffer* measures 50'-100' on the property from the waterway and across the length of the shoreline. Further determinations will be made if property is selected based on these qualifications. Please provide location if applicable.

Pertinent Information: Please answer all questions with the best of your knowledge and abilities. This will help determine if your property qualifies and help us get a general sense of the property itself.

***If applicable please send us any pictures you may have of the property, preferably taken during the spring and summer months, via snail mail or email.**

A forested buffer may not be a requirement on your property due to site limitability. Other restoration efforts such as shoreline stabilization, rain gardens, and meadows could be implemented. However, **forested buffers are a high priority for the program.*

Send application via snail mail or email: Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER 1250
Niagara St. Buffalo, NY 14222 Attn: Zeb Strickland
Email: zstrickland@bnriverkeeper.org

Habitat Restoration Program Review and Award Process:

All applications will be reviewed to determine if the proposed site meets the eligibility criteria for restoration. Eligible applications are those that meet all of the eligibility criteria listed on the front of the application.

Proposed projects will be prioritized based on the feasibility of the site in general. Applications will be evaluated based on factors such as: erosion and invasive plant feasibility, rare and threatened resident species, suitability for habitat improvement, visibility to the community, and other factors not specified.

Priority sites will be given to those landowners that are visible to the community and are able to reconnect lost riparian corridors.

Applicants selected for assistance will be contacted by RIVERKEEPER staff to discuss their project, develop a management plan, and arrange an agreement with terms and conditions between the landowner and RIVERKEEPER.

There will be 20-25 projects in 3 years. Eligible applicants that were not selected the first year will be kept on file and may be selected the following years.



Attachment C. *Article in Buffalo News:*

Keeping river habitats

Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER has begun a habitat restoration program for properties along the Niagara River in Erie and Niagara counties.

Using funds from New York Power Authority's relicensing as part of the Niagara River Greenway Commission, BNR officials will inspect properties adjacent to the waterway for possible installation of "riparian buffers," erosion-control involving native tree and shrub planting, meadows, "soft" engineering for bank stabilization (biologs), rain gardens, wetlands and other restoration techniques that help improve habitat and filter toxins from run-off water.

Zeb Strickland, coordinator for the program, accepts and reviews applications from landowners who might qualify for habitat restoration work performed on their properties. To find out more, visit the BNR web site: bnriverkeeper.org/programs/habitat/habitat-restoration/ or call Strickland at 852-7483, ext. 23.

e-mail: willodrs@gmail.com

Attachment D. Press Release



1250 Niagara Street | Buffalo, NY 14213 | tel: 716.852.RIVER | fax: 716.885.0765 | e-mail: info@BNRiverkeeper.org | www.BNRiverkeeper.org

For Immediate Release

December 4, 2009

Media Contact:

Zeb Strickland
Watershed Restoration Coordinator
Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER
(Work) 716-852-7483 ext.23
(Cell) (585) 704-4907
zstrickland@bnriverkeeper.org

Do you own waterfront property and want an eco-friendly backyard?

Who/What: Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER is starting a new habitat restoration program to work with qualified landowners of waterfront property along the Niagara River Greenway in Erie and Niagara Counties. On-the-ground restoration will be performed on the property, involving native tree and shrub planting, meadows, “soft” engineering for bank stabilization (bio-logs), rain gardens, wetlands and other restoration techniques that help improve habitat and filter toxins from run-off water. The Niagara River Greenway Commission is funding this program with monies from the New York Power Authority Relicensing settlement. With expertise from our partners Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District and Niagara County Soil and Water Conservation District, projects will implement sound restoration principles.

Why: Forest buffers or “riparian buffers” along waterways are an ecologically important feature in providing habitat for fish and wildlife, improving water quality and stabilizing banks. Landowners restoring their shoreline will receive benefits such as: erosion control, an eco-friendly backyard, an increase in property value, habitat for rare and endangered species and improved health of our rivers and streams.

When: The selection process is now open and projects will begin as early as next summer.

Where: Along the Buffalo and Niagara Rivers, streams, and creeks throughout the Greenway from Erie County to Niagara County. This includes: Cities of: Buffalo, North Tonawanda and Niagara Falls; Towns of: Porter, Tonawanda, Grand Island, Lewiston, Wheatfield, and Niagara; and Villages of: Youngstown, Kenmore and Lewiston.

How: For information on which landowners qualify and how to apply, visit our website <http://bnriverkeeper.org/programs/habitat/habitat-restoration/> or call Zeb Strickland, (716) 852-7483, ext. 23.

About Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER - Since 1989, Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER has worked towards the protection and restoration of the Buffalo and Niagara Rivers and their tributaries. RIVERKEEPER’s new Citizen Action Program focuses on providing residents of the region with opportunities to increase their awareness about water pollution issues and actively participate in the restoration of the rivers.

Attachment E. Habitat Restoration Program Timeline

Forest Buffer Program Timeline



“There can be no purpose more inspiring
than to begin the age of restoration,
reweaving the wondrous diversity of life
that still surrounds us.” –**E.O Wilson**

Executive Summary

- Funded for 3 years
- 25 landowner riparian restoration projects along Niagara River and its tributaries with easements and/or long term maintenance agreement
- Landowner stewardship training program-5 trainings
- 5 grant proposals to leverage funding
- Develop Landowner Stewardship Guide
- Create Restore Corps for volunteer efforts



OCTOBER 2009

- Website drafting pages
- Target Landowner Sites/Selection criteria (GIS)
- Research with partners on landowner opportunities/Landowner stewardship
- Develop Work Plan for Americorp
- Develop database: Partners/Match



Target Landowner Sites

- GIS-Using maps and data to zoom in on potential buffer zone/erosion
- Partners help
- Public Meetings
- General observations/word of mouth



Scajaquada Creek



10/23/09-ZS

Two-Mile Creek



10/23/09-ZS

Two-Mile Creek



10/23/09-ZS

Ellicott Creek



10/23/09-ZS

Develop Website

- Buffer program
- Benefits of buffer
- Buffers in Niagara
- Get Involved
 - Landowners
 - Restore Corps-Volunteer based group that assists with restoration efforts



AMERICORPS

- Hire Americorp
- Develop work plan
 - Recruit volunteers
 - Website updates/event newsletters
 - Volunteer recognitions t-shirts/etc.
 - Develop brochures/homeowners guide
 - Assist in planning and implementation of restoration projects



NOVEMBER 2009

- Get the Word Out
- Continue visiting properties for restoration potential
- Presentation to the public/towns of Buffer Program



“Get The Word Out”

- Presentations
- Letters to politicians
- Send out press release
- Letters to Landowners of potential restoration sites



Review Responses

- Check out feasibility
 - Is it beyond capacity?
 - Nutrient loads
 - Erodibility
 - Restoration potential
(invasives)



DECEMBER 2009

- Visit landowners
- Send out Press Release and review responses
- Mailings to targeted sub-watershed areas
- Short List of Potentials
- Continue creating Landowner Stewardship Trainings



Short List of Potentials

- Create potential list
 - Sites visited
 - Responses from landowners



Visit Landowners

- Landowners goals vs RIVERKEEPER goals
- Discuss program
- Overlay agreement
- Set up future meetings



JANUARY 2010

- **Select Final Projects with Stakeholder Committee**
- **Meet with landowners to discuss site design plan/partners?**
- **Negotiate agreement**
- **Permitting**



FEBRUARY 2010

- Begin nursery selection process/contractors if needed
- Present Landowner Workshop Series
- Develop landowner stewardship guide
- Workshop that discusses program from results of flyer outreach



Landowner workshop series

- Native plantings for attracting wildlife
- Forest health/management
- Invasive species management and eradication
- Maintenance of forest buffers
- Erosion control measures



Nursery Selection process

- Research nursery availability for Native Plants only
- Gather estimates
- Visit nurseries to inspect material
- Select nurseries for planting



Contractor selection

- Research contractors
- Build estimates
- Bid out contracts for bank stabilization if needed
- Plan for equipment rental



MARCH 2010

- Site design layout with Erie County/Niagara County SWCD
- Develop supply list
- Create schedule for restoration days
- Recruiting volunteers/RestoreCorp (Americorps)
- Finalize project plan and agreements



APRIL 2010

- Purchasing and delivery
- Landowner Guide publishing
- Workshops
- Site Map Creation/GIS



MAY 2010

- Site Prep
 - Invasive plant management
 - Excavation if needed
 - Owner agreement signatures



JUNE-JULY 2010

- 2 Restore days per month
- Training/meeting night before project
- Case studies
- Update of project on websites



September-November 2010

- 2 Restore days per month
- Training/meeting night before project
- Case studies
- Update of project on websites



DECEMBER 2010

- Report preparation for NYPA and others
- Begin site selection process for 2011
- Project evaluation
- Update of project on websites
- Consider opportunities for expansion (e.g. head starting plants)
- Case Studies





Clear Benefits



Reduce erosion that degrades water quality for fish and wildlife

Improve forest canopy and improve near stream aquatic habitats

Fulfill an unmet need for residential waterfront owners

Provide a vegetative alternative to hard shorelines (when appropriate)

Invasive Species control/management

Maintenance

Increasing capacity of local group to serve as a technical resource to community

Zeb Strickland
Watershed Restoration Coordinator

zstrickland@bnriverkeeper.org

(716) 852-7483ext23

Cell 585-704-4907

