Hudson Estuary Accessibility Project

In cooperation with the New York State Water Resources Institute and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York Sea Grant and the Yang-Tan Institute have been providing accessibility information to Hudson Estuary region’s outdoor recreation stakeholders beginning with an inventory/assessment of boat launch sites in 2014 and 2015. The project progress in 2016 focused on addressing the “knowing-doing” gap.

Our 2016 efforts focused on helping Hudson Estuary sites to better understand their obligation to accessibility improvements and developing a best practice guide for developing a guide for kayak and canoe (paddlesport) launches along the Hudson Estuary. During 2016, NYSG and YTI gathered relevant information from stakeholders and action plan partners who have actively participated in Hudson Estuary Access Goal meetings. We compiled existing learning resources regarding launch guidelines for these small vessels via our professional networks, drafted text and collected relevant shoreline and dock images.

In November 2016 Jennifer Perry and LaWanda Cook of YTI’s Northeast ADA Center, presented training on the rights and responsibilities of Title II (state and local government programs), under the ADA. This event, held at the FDR Center in Hyde Park, NY, was targeted to site managers who were involved in Phase I of the Hudson Estuary Accessibility Project (2014-2015) and other site managers and invitees as determined by the HREP. The session emphasized the "low hanging fruit" that managers can address to improve access in the immediate future. Legal responsibility for the development of a transition plan for ongoing improvements was also covered. There were 23 attendees, in addition to the project partners.
Following the event, the Northeast ADA Center received requests for information about service animals, a request for additional training on disability etiquette, and an inquiry from an independent living center that is hoping to encourage collaboration from town personnel in accessing our project. We also reached out to attendees, as well as the other sites assessed during phase 1, offering the opportunity to participate in intensive technical assistance services during 2017. We received an application from the City of Albany as well as the City of Kingston.

**Intensive TA Services to date:**

- Jennifer Perry has completed a site visit and provided a summary of recommendations to both the City of Albany and Kingston Point.
- One of the challenges encountered related to this work relates to applicable standards for accessibility in the outdoors, i.e. that in fact there is no clear-cut path to achieving access outdoors under the 2010 ADA Standards, as there is for typical sites and facilities. For Tivoli especially, as well as the beach area in Kingston, we had to share the ABA Outdoor Developed Areas information to help them achieve accessibility, because the ADA does not specifically address beaches or trails. Once people know where these resources are, they are happy to apply them as best as they can, but our role was almost to “connect the dots” between people in local government agencies and the best available guidance on unique outdoor recreation accessibility sites/elements.
- The physical terrain of each site is also challenging.
- Both sites were and are committed to including the disability community in their planning as they move forward.
- Jennifer will follow up with each site to review the recommendations and address questions to aid each site in implementing changes.

**Best Practices Guide for Hudson Accessibility:**

NYSG and YTI gathered relevant information from stakeholders, including Action Plan partners who have actively participated in Hudson Estuary Access Goal meetings. We collected existing learning resources via our professional networks (regional and national) to create a scope/outline for a proposed handbook on utilizing the principals of universal design at launch areas for non-motorized boats along urban estuaries. This handbook will cover best practices for designing resilient access and shoreline facilities related to sea level rise and coastal storms. Significant input to the guide scope was provided via discussions with Karl Beard, National Park Service; Carole Fraser, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation; Scott Keller, Hudson River Valley Greenway, and David White, Coastal Tourism Specialist, New York Sea Grant. Full development of the guide (2017) will include advisors who work with recreational boating audiences along the lower Hudson River Estuary.

The Hudson River is a popular kayaking and canoeing destination for Hudson Valley residents and visitors. There are no federal ADA design guidelines for launches serving these non-motorized boats. A tidal-freshwater estuary, the Hudson’s unique characteristics pose challenges for recreational boat users of all abilities. We have found accessibility resources that offer general approaches and guidelines for creating user friendly launches, though they are focused on inland waters. There are also several good guides for improving access
at terrestrial recreational areas. (See attached list). Developing a Hudson focused guidebook should provide the most useful information for local stakeholders and prove to be a guide for additional coastal waterways in New York and beyond. Based on these resources and the unique characteristics of the Hudson Estuary, we proposed the following outline for this guidebook.

Hudson River Access Guide Proposed Content

1. **Accessibility Guidelines:**
   - Universal Design Principles
   - Transition Planning

2. **Site Considerations**
   - Shoreline/estuarine ecology/resilience

3. **Launch Considerations**
   - Location/characteristics of water body at the shore (Hudson varies from quiet areas to strong currents.)
   - Type of users (canoes are not nearly as maneuverable as kayaks when winds and currents are significant)
   - A clear path to the launch
   - Stepwise check-in; can user get from parking area to launch?

4. **Facilities and Docking**
   - What amenities are available?

5. **Clear Marketing/Communication**
   - How will people learn about your launch (tips for businesses?)

6. **Disability Etiquette 101: Interacting with Individuals with Disabilities**

7. **Boating Safety and Stewardship Information**

YTI staff David Filiberto completed sections of the guide focused on coastal resilience. Currently the guide remains in draft form but will be completed during 2017. One of the challenges posed is selecting the best most user-friendly format for this outreach piece. The Sea Grant Institute has offered to post the guide when completed on a program website.

**Project Contacts:**

Nordica Holochuck  
New York Sea Grant  
Nch8@cornell.edu  
LaWanda Cook  
Yang -Tan Institute on Employment and Disability  
Lhc62@cornell.edu