

## Connecting New York's Waters With It's Residents

Julia Dunn 2009-08-04 13:22

**This article is about the Estuary Education Series presented by the Lower East Side Ecology Center.**

Though over 8 million people live in the concrete jungle of New York City, only a fraction of residents come into contact with the city's extensive network of estuaries, rivers and canals.

Tara DePorte, program director of The Lower East Side Ecology Center, is working to increase New Yorkers' awareness of, and connection to, these nearby waterways—especially when it comes to the possible impact of global warming.

"An interesting thing about doing estuary education here is even though we're surrounded by water in New York City, a lot of people don't experience the water first hand very often," DePorte said.

The Ecology Center, which offers an array of recycling and composting services as well as educational programs, is currently working to educate the public about the local impact of global warming on the city's estuaries through a four-part "Estuary Education Series."

An estuary is a semi-enclosed coastal body of water, usually located at the bottom of a river, which comes into contact with the sea and features a unique blend of salt and fresh water.

On July 28 about 20 people gathered at the Ottendorfer Public Library to participate in the series' third installment, which focused on the changes New York's estuaries would face as the climate changes.

DePorte has received an overwhelmingly positive response from New Yorkers who not only care about the environment but also want to help by volunteering and even interning and teaching workshops.

"New Yorkers are real doers," DePorte said, "particularly if you can relate it to their lives, they're ready to go."

In addition to lectures, the Ecology Center also hosts hands-on programs aimed at expanding residents' familiarity with local estuaries and rivers, including workshops on water quality testing and mapping pollution and sewage overflow.

Laurel Stanko, a volunteer and intern with the Ecology Center, and De Porte emphasize the importance of discussing these broader environmental issues in a way that encourages locals to relate to global warming and get involved.

"I think the local part is important," Stanko said. "It's the people that are going to ask for change in the end."

Stanko, who is currently a master's student at Columbia University's Climate and Society program, led the Tuesday night presentation, which featured information on how the city will be affected if climate change continues at its current rate of warming.

New Yorkers could be faced with saltwater leeching into drinking water, as well as rising water levels that could result in the flooding of New York City subway tunnels, Stanko said.

Over the last 30 years New York State's average temperature has increased two degrees in the summer and warmed up five degrees in winter, according to Stanko. These fluctuating temperatures mean that the state could face more rain, along with rising sea levels, as land ice in Greenland continues to melt. Sea levels in New York have risen 15 inches since 1850.

Stanko explained that these changes could also cause more sudden and violent storms, which could alter water cycles by ruining reservoirs that contain drinking water. Scientists are also concerned that climate change will lead to increased levels of pollution-induced asthma, as well as more instances of kidney stones due to dehydration.

Despite the potentially disastrous consequences of global warming, DePorte still remains hopeful that New Yorkers will continue to work towards protecting New York's waterways from these environmental threats.

"It's heartwarming and I've seen that at all ages people want to get out and get dirty," Deporte said. "They want to get involved."

The fourth, and final, lecture session will focus on the development of and access to the city's waterfronts, and will take place August 25. For more information, see: [lesecologycenter.org](http://lesecologycenter.org). The center also holds weekly Friday fishing trips on the water to educate about the ecosystems that exist there.

<http://nyc.indymedia.org/en/2009/08/106783.shtml>

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