



Long Island South Shore Estuary Learning Facilitator (sSELF) Project

The New York State Marine Education Association (NYSMEA)
 In cooperation with the Long Island South Shore Estuary Reserve Office
 Supported by the ERM Foundation

December 2009

The sSELF project was designed to encourage school and/or community groups to be active stewards of their local estuarine environment through education and monitoring. The Long Island South Shore Estuary encompasses 325 square miles of shallow bays and tidal tributaries located along the south shore of Nassau and Suffolk Counties in New York.

The South Shore Estuary Reserve watershed includes a variety of land uses from urban to suburban to rural. Increased scientific monitoring of the estuary's water quality and fostering citizen appreciation, education and stewardship of its resources are important objectives of the Reserve Comprehensive Management Plan adopted by New York State and the South Shore Estuary Reserve Council in 2001. As proposed, an Estuary Learning Facilitator (ELF) would visit the schools and community groups, and then work with them to facilitate a monitoring/action project at a particular site of interest to the group. The sSELF program would supply the materials and equipment necessary and train the group members. \$8,000 was awarded by the ERM Foundation for 2007. Although there were no funds allotted for 2008 the program continued. \$7,000 was allotted by the Foundation for calendar year 2009, the third year of the program. We have just been informed that an additional \$5,000 has been awarded by ERM for calendar year 2010.



We are pleased to report that during 2009, six additional kits have been purchased and some older groups have had their expendable supplies replenished using these funds. In addition to several of the older school groups still monitoring and two new school groups, a new relationship has been developed with the Long Island chapter of Sierra Club. With our cooperation they have developed a parallel program called the [Water Sentinels](http://www.liwatersentinels.org/) (http://www.liwatersentinels.org/), modeled after the sSELF program. At present there are 8 teams of Sentinels monitoring and submitting data to the sSELF database.



Field demonstrations for monitors at the Long Island Maritime Museum

On the basis of the original work and a training session and September tour of the South Shore Estuary conducted by sSELF, the Sierra national organization has pledged to support future efforts of the Long Island Sentinel group. Several classroom and field training sessions were run with the cooperation of the Long Island Maritime Museum and Dowling College for sSELF monitors and Sierra Club volunteers. A display table was set up and a presentation was made at the annual NYSMEA Conference at S.U.N.Y. Southampton campus of Stony Brook University in June. A presentation was made to the Noyce Scholars program participants at Dowling College (which resulted in two new groups doing monitoring.) The sSELF Program in cooperation with several groups participated in a beach cleanup on National Estuary Day, September 26th. Over 75 people assisted in cleaning more than 650 pounds of debris from a beach used for horseshoe crab and seal observations at Jones Beach State Park.

Participating groups were solicited using the NYSMEA (www.NYSMEA.org) and Reserve (www.estuary.cog.ny.us) websites. Handouts were distributed at events at which the two organizations set up informational tables. The program was announced in several mailings of the NYSMEA Announcements listserve. In addition the handouts were distributed at NYSMEA meetings and annual conference. Reports on the progress of the program and assistance in recruiting participants were made at NYSMEA board and member meetings, Reserve Council and Reserve Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings. Donna Edgar of Bayport Bluepoint High School, one of the original sSELF participating teachers gave a presentation on the progress of the program at the annual South Shore Estuary Reserve boat tour in September. The program was also identified during the June National Marine Education Association annual conference in Monterey California when Lou Siegel, the sSELF estuary learning facilitator, received the organization's 2009 Marine Education Award.

In addition to the several schools in the program we have developed direct relationships with other groups.

Most notably amongst these is Sierra Club mentioned previously which has expanded the sSELF monitoring program throughout Long Island waters.



National Estuaries Day Beach Clean up

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Operation SPLASH, an estuary advocacy group based in Freeport that has been primarily focused on education and restoration activities joined the sSELF monitoring program in cooperation with the Nassau County Soil and Water Conservation District. They continue to collect data.

In addition, a group of interested (then high school freshman,) students, organized as *the Great South Bay Buddies* and supervised by one of the parents has continually gathered data since the beginning of the program three years ago. One student Rachel Haberstroh conducted a separate research project on heavy metal pollution this year. She was assisted in this project by members of the Long Island ERM office. Elizabeth Mikucky-Fleury and Ernie Rossano of the Long Island office have been apprised of the projects progress though out the year. They have attended several related events including the beach cleanup. and have graciously agreed to identify ERM speakers who will give appropriate presentations to the groups. In all distributed materials and at presentations, the sSELF project was presented as being supported by the ERM Foundation.



Choosing sampling locations

Several Boy and Girl Scout troops have become active in the monitoring effort. Two teachers from the Dowling College Noyce Scholars program joined sSELF using funds from the College to purchase their own kits.



Training sessions at Dowling College

Over 400 separate data entries have been recorded on the sSELF database which is available online at www.NYSMEA.org. Each represents a trip to the shoreline by a group of estuary stewards interested in the environment. Both the project group leaders and participants have expressed that this program affords the participants with the opportunity to engage in a meaningful activity while learning more about the estuary. These efforts are consistent with several of the objectives in the Reserve Comprehensive Management Plan and the actions of other implementation partners. The sSELF Program has provided NYSMEA with the opportunity to codify several aspects of its programs that had been carried out on an informal basis in the past. Significant project hours were also contributed by the ELF and NYSMEA members and Reserve program staff in addition to those compensated by the grant. We look forward to continuing and expanding the activities of the sSELF program in the future.



www.NYSMEA.org

www.estuary.cog.ny.us

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