



# Director's Highlights



## Connecting Channel Partnerships Connect at an Information Exchange in Lewiston, NY

July 2011



Lewiston, NY - Connecting channels are the Great Rivers that link the Great Lakes and are some of the most ecologically dynamic and important drivers of biological processes in the Great Lakes basin. These areas are also hubs for navigation and other human uses which, overtime, have resulted in environmental change and the need for restoration.

Four primary international connecting channels occur in the Great Lakes Basin – the Huron-Erie Corridor, the Niagara River, the St. Marys River, and the St. Lawrence River.

The importance of connecting channels to Great Lakes ecology has been highlighted recently during special sessions at the International Association of Great Lakes Research annual meeting and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission spring Lake Committee meetings.

Approximately 40 representatives from 17 agencies/entities gathered in Lewiston, NY last month to learn from one another about what it takes to build a successful connecting channel restoration partnership.

The New York Department of Environmental Conservation (NY DEC) and the U.S. Geological Survey's Great Lakes Science Center (USGS GLSC) co-hosted the June 21-22 meeting at the Niagara Power Authority's Power Vista Museum.

Participants included US and Canadian Federal and state/provincial government representatives, members of Tuscarora/Seneca Nation, university and college affiliates, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.

The purpose of the information exchange was to bring together under one roof key players from the Niagara River area and Huron-Erie Corridor Initiative to learn from one another and maximize potential for mutual benefit of the ecosystem.

The HECl serves as a model for the development of partnerships to re-establish degraded habitat within connecting-habitat environments.

For example, building on the success of HECl, the NY DEC is taking the lead to determine the degree to which each agency/entity is willing to commit to the formation of a formalized partnership in the Niagara River Corridor to ensure a more coordinated approach to Niagara River restoration efforts.

The information exchange between the NY DEC and the USGS GLSC was a first step toward that goal.

### Day 1

- Getting to know the commonalities and differences between the two parties – Who are the key players? What are their primary areas of foci? What are their visions?
- Discussion about capabilities and unique strengths of the players and the value of locally applicable AND regional significance.

### Day 2

- Overview of possible restoration tools and strategies, such as Conservation Assessment Planning Workbooks, Miradi, and Aquatic GAP Analysis.
- Importance of considering wide-ranging species, such as lake sturgeon and Coregonids, when conceiving restoration plans for connecting channels.

### What Next?

Unique and substantial funding opportunities exist for Niagara River restoration work and a formalized partnership would leverage these opportunities and reduce chances of redundancies in effort.

The Great Lakes Fishery Commission offers an efficient bi-national coordination structure for the Niagara River.

Participants expressed intent in better understanding the Fish Community Objectives to help add focus to their efforts.

Both groups viewed the exchange as being very beneficial. NY DEC will lead a subgroup of volunteers to develop a prospectus for the formation of a coordinated Niagara River Partnership. NY DEC will also host a similar meeting again next year.

The HECl representatives went home with a broadened perspective and some new potential restoration tools in their kit for consideration. The stage is also set for a continued learning relationship between the two partnerships as they move forward together.

### Want to Know More?

For meeting minutes and copies of presentations, please visit:

<http://www.huron-erie.org/2011Niagara.html>

Persons interested in joining the Niagara River Partnership mailing list should contact Tim DePriest (NY DEC) at:

[ttdeprie@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:ttdeprie@gw.dec.state.ny.us)



Russell Strach, Director  
USGS Great Lakes Science Center

Tim DePriest, Niagara River Habitat Specialist  
New York DEC/Natural Heritage Trust