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Flood program aims to improve planning

Cornell Cooperative Extension and Cornell University, in partnership with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Hudson River Estuary Program and New York State Water Resources Institute, are launching a new educational initiative to help municipal officials and stream-side landowners prepare for floods and climate change in the Hudson River Valley. During 2013, staff from Cornell Cooperative Extension associations in Columbia, Greene, Dutchess, Orange and Putnam counties will be training municipal personnel and landowners in target areas about flood preparedness.

The goal of the Hudson Estuary Watershed Resiliency Project is to provide assistance to communities in developing effective flood readiness and flood response plans. After a severe storm and flooding event, landowners and municipal officials have many decisions to make. There are immediate responses to protect human safety and to repair infrastructure. Once the initial crisis period has passed, there is the opportunity to develop strategies to minimize future flooding impacts. The Hudson Estuary Watershed Resiliency Project will provide communities with information that can enhance flood planning and preparedness in advance of the next big storm.

"This Cornell Cooperative Extension project will provide communities with tools to increase their understanding of how streams and floodplains work, and how local officials can plan to reduce their communities' vulnerability to floods in an era of increasing heavy precipitation events," said Cornell Cooperative Extension educator, Liz LoGiudice. "The goals of the project are to help communities reduce future risk to infrastructure and human life, to minimize harmful stream practices that can actually lead to increased flooding, and to keep people out of harm's way."

Staff members from the regional Cornell Cooperative Extension offices will be training municipal officials and landowners in several watershed locations in the Hudson River Valley. CCE staff will first be meeting with local officials across the region through a process led by Cornell University to identify local knowledge of how streams work and needs for further information and training. Results from these interviews will help guide the development of the program so that it meets the needs of municipal officials and stream-side landowners. CCE staff will also be utilizing Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping and analysis to determine critical target areas for the program.