



Just a little over a decade ago, scenes like this one were somewhat rare on the Hudson River. Now, kayakers can be found on any given weekend in the River's waters from New York City to Albany. Photo by Rudy Schuster



## EXPLORING THE HUDSON

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Throughout a large part of the year, especially in the summer and fall months, Hudson River Valley (HRV) residents and tourists are, as a new New York Sea Grant publication confirms, out kayaking, windsurfing, motor boating, fishing and even swimming along New York's most famous river. People are launching kayaks in Kingston or "antiquing" in Cold Spring, or gallery hopping in Beacon. Or is it hiking in Constitution Marsh near Cold Spring, shopping for antiques on Beacon's Main Street or enjoying a Riverfront festival in Kingston?

"I believe the results produced from NYSG's research study will become increasingly important to decision makers," says NYSG's Hudson Estuary Specialist Nordica Holochuck. "For many years, creating increased public access to the Hudson waterway has been a priority. As we move forward, Valley residents and visitors alike may also shift emphasis of that focus to include examining the connections between Hudson River communities via hiking or bike trails, water trails, River crossing via passenger ferry or, for example, the new Walkway Over the Hudson pedestrian bridge in Poughkeepsie, NY."

The year 2009 marks the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's exploration of the river that bears his name. This year is also the 200th anniversary of Robert Fulton's pioneering efforts to establish commercial steamboat ferry service up and down the Hudson. So, for centuries, the Hudson Valley has been a place of exploration.

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As part of this year's 'Explore NY 400 Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadracentennial Celebration,' many communities along the Hudson River have hosted waterfront festivals, art exhibits and special environmental and estuarine education programs," says Holochuck. "The depth and breadth of events really emphasizes the great cultural and environmental history that characterizes this special region of New York State."

"With nature-based and heritage tourism both increasing in popularity in the Hudson Valley, coastal communities like Kingston, Cold Spring and Beacon can benefit, as can their local economies," says **Dr. Rudy Schuster**, formerly of the State University of New York's College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY CESF). That's why Schuster, along with ESF's **Diane Kuehn**, led a team in a recently-completed NYSG-funded project to help find the best ways to promote River-related tourism in the HRV. This team, assisted by Penn State University's **Duarte Morais**, released a 42-page publication this past summer that summarizes their analyses of the attributes that residents and visitors have identified as markers for each community.

"Our aim with this research was to help characterize for these communities the distinct image that represents their unique social, cultural and environmental qualities in sustainable tourism development," says Schuster. This 'destination image' will provide usable information about the attributes of the natural environment and tourism opportunities that identify the community as similar or unique in relation to other HRV destinations.

"Understanding which attributes of the nature and heritage tourism experience are attractive and valued by tourists will facilitate marketing efforts, increase visitation and enable market positioning among these communities," says Morais. Complementing Morais' comment, Schuster states that "understanding

**Cold Spring offers visitors plenty of dining and shopping choices, including antique stores.** Photo by Barbara A. Branca



Laura Sullivan (far right), a SUNY CESF graduate student on this project, helped visitors in Kingston and the other towns to fill out the survey. She says, "Resident and visitor survey responses emphasized the attraction of scenic vistas and public access to the Hudson and its tributaries." Of the overall experience, she adds, "Working on this project was my first real exposure to this unique region. I enjoyed learning about the natural, social, and historic attributes of the HRV from dynamic residents who are working towards a vibrant, sustainable future for their communities."

Photo courtesy of Laura Sullivan

and planning around the attributes contributing to residents' sense of place will foster community stability." Kuehn adds, "as detailed in the report, we found that both visitors and residents have positive images of the communities. The majority of visitors are either likely or very likely to return within two years and to recommend the communities to others; the majority of residents have a desire to stay in their home community."

According to study findings, while many visitors (both in- and out-of-state) are drawn to the HRV for nature-based activities and water recreation opportunities, on average, cultural activities are most frequently participated in by visitors. Visitors clearly link the unique natural setting of the HRV with cultural activities, as exhibited by responses to image questions, where River viewing and access received high scores.

Residents' images of their communities were also positive. Residents engage in cultural activities more often than nature-based activities or water recreation activities. Increased participation in cultural activities leads to a more positive image of both cultural and nature offerings, suggesting that local natural resources are important to residents, regardless of whether they engage in outdoor recreation activities. A higher percentage of residents than tourists report receiving information about local activities and events from a range of sources. Participation in cultural activities and length of residency contribute to a stronger place identity among residents.

"As Hudson River communities are revitalized through increased public access and recreation opportunities," says Holochuck, "these cities, towns and villages need information that can guide tourism planning and also preserve the scenic beauty, open spaces and relative tranquility valued by residents and visitors alike. And, the findings in this research project will help." Schuster adds, "A strength of this project was that we went from social science theory all the way down to application in one project; one of the most exciting aspects is that the Village of Cold Spring's Comprehensive Plan Special Board and Waterfront and Open Space Working Group is using the report while planning future renovations for their Riverfront sites."

— Paul C. Focazio and Barbara A. Branca



... to download the Hudson Valley tourism report and for more pictures from each of the study's participating communities.