

Estuary LIVE! 2005:

Students across the country visit New York Harbor during a live virtual field trip

Rich and full of life, estuaries are vital connections between the land and the ocean. Students often learn about these fertile and productive habitats, but many do not have the opportunity to explore an estuary firsthand. Although these mixing zones for fresh and salt water share certain features, each estuary's ecosystem has a unique set of characteristics.

With these factors in mind, Sea Grant programs in New York and New Jersey teamed up to design and host a live Web-based field trip in New York – New Jersey Harbor, one of the nation's most densely populated urban estuaries. On September 22, 2005, classrooms across the country connected to the Internet for an hour-long virtual excursion to Caven Point Beach in Jersey City, NJ. A stretch of un-hardened shoreline in the heart of the metropolitan region, the beach provided direct access to the water and a panoramic view of the lower Manhattan skyline, Statue of Liberty and Upper New York Bay.

This interactive Webcast was part of Estuary Live, a national tour of five estuaries sponsored by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency. The goal of the broadcast from the Harbor Estuary was to increase students' awareness and understanding of urban estuaries, giving them the knowledge they need to become good stewards of estuarine resources. At least 20 scientists, educators and managers contributed to the program by leading field stations, answering questions and providing behind-the-scenes logistical support.



After finding a 6-pack ring on the beach, this student from Manhattan's Humanities Preparatory Academy explained to EstuaryLive viewers the potential negative impact that floatable debris can have in our coastal waters.

Two classes from NY and NJ participated onsite during the program: 8th grade students from Explore 2000, a Hudson County School of Technology in Jersey City, and 9th-12th grade students from Humanities Preparatory Academy in Manhattan. These students conducted hands-on investigations by dragging a seine net to collect aquatic organisms; tested water samples for salinity, temperature and dissolved oxygen levels; built models to demonstrate the functions of coastal marshes; and combed the beach for natural and man-made objects.

As the local students described their field studies, internet viewers e-mailed questions directly to the experts on the beach. Although there was not time to answer the hundreds of questions submitted, many long-distance viewers received on-air responses within minutes. In total, more than 500 classrooms registered to view Estuary Live—58 of these from New York City—representing approximately 11,000 students nationwide.

Additional resources for teachers and students, including answers to many of the questions asked during the broadcast, will be made available on www.harborestuary.org this spring. The full broadcast can now be viewed at www.estuaries.gov.

**— Laura Bartovics
Outreach Coordinator,
NY/NJ Harbor Estuary Program**

NYSG's HEP Outreach Coordinator Laura Bartovics hosted the Estuary Live broadcast, beginning with an introduction to the hour-long virtual tour.

Photos courtesy of the NY-NJ HEP

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