Hello friends and partners of the Saw Mill River Coalition! As the cold temperatures and news about the Covid-19 pandemic are setting us up for a cozy winter at home, we would like to share with you some of the work we’ve been busy with in 2020.

**STEWARDSHIP**

Formed in 2001, the Saw Mill River Coalition, a program by Groundwork Hudson Valley, has been working hard to improve the state of the Saw Mill River all throughout the watershed. As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to ravage the nation, access to open space has become more important than ever. For many Saw Mill River watershed towns, open space became overcrowded during the summer months. Since the beginning of the year, members of our stewardship program worked hard to open up more access points to the river, giving people the chance to get out, relax and enjoy the sound of the flowing water.

Our Dobbs Ferry stewards continued promoting the development of Chauncey Park on a hillside along the Saw Mill River. Group members led several site tours throughout 2020 for civic leaders and local residents, introducing them to the Chauncey Park vision. In September the stewardship work began with invasive removal and riparian habitat planting events through the NYS Trees–for–Tribs program. Sue Galloway, who led the work, remarked on how inspiring and fun the events were and how great it was to see so many residents join the effort.
In November, Coalition staff and stewards hosted our Fall Stewardship Walk-through, inviting the public to get inspired by some of our favorite restoration sites. The Coalition’s most dedicated steward, Steve Pucillo of Hastings-on-Hudson, and his group presented 3 different “Signature Locations” they recently developed along the South County Trail, including a mysterious cave the river runs through! Steve’s group has been rapidly expanding as more and more people get inspired by his homemade birdhouses and signs, his habitat restoration and trail work.

Meanwhile, group member Chet Kerr submitted a request for transfer of the main parcel from NYS Department of Transportation to the village. Once approved, it will create a new, continuous village park for passive recreation and community stewardship along Dobbs Ferry eastern communities where access to open space is much needed.

Check out this article in The Rivertowns Enterprise about Steve Pucillo and his work along the Saw Mill River!
In North Yonkers, work continued on our Riparian Forest Restoration site, where invasives were removed and replaced with native willow trees and other riparian shrubs along the streambank. Originally, an exciting new project was to begin at the site in the spring with our new partner, the Yonkers Police Youth Court Program. The program offers Yonkers youth who got stopped by the police for minor misdemeanors, to avoid criminal charges and instead get sentenced by a peer to community service. Through this partnership, they would participate in river restoration work as their community service. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the project got delayed, and instead Groundwork Hudson Valley’s Green Team, Coalition staff and the Yonkers Police Department’s Community Affairs Staff continued to maintain the site throughout the summer. A special thanks to Westchester County Legislator Ruth Walter for her amazing support of this site.

In the late summer, Yonkers Police Commissioner and Pleasantville resident John Mueller worked with Groundwork Hudson Valley to identify stewardship and maintenance activities for the fall/winter season along the Saw Mill River in Pleasantville. Under John’s leadership, volunteers in Pleasantville have been working on two riparian sites adjacent to the Saw Mill River Parkway.
In July, Groundwork Hudson Valley launched its new and refreshed website and with it also a new website for the Saw Mill River Coalition! On it you could find information about the watershed, the Coalition and its focus areas, the daylighting of the Saw Mill River in Yonkers and plans and reports prepared by the Coalition.

Click here to visit the Saw Mill River Coalition website!

This past summer, the Saw Mill River Coalition completed its 5-Year Action Plan. The plan is comprised of 6 sections, reviewing strategies and specific tasks for the following areas of work – stakeholder coordination, community engagement and stewardship, water quality, stormwater management, access and recreation and habitat restoration. Developed in collaboration with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Hudson River Estuary Program, Westchester County Planning Department and the Saw Mill Watershed Advisory Board, the plan is an important step in the work towards restoration projects.

Through our strong collaboration with County Legislator Mary Jane Shimsky, we meet on a regular basis with the Saw Mill Watershed Advisory board (SWAB), comprised of representatives of the 12 watershed municipalities and Westchester County. During our meetings we get updates from around the watershed, learn about river restoration practices and promote a watershed-wide strategy for solving the many challenges the watershed is facing, such as flooding, invasive species, water quality and climate change.

Over the past few months the Coalition worked with SWAB members to promote a letter of renewed municipal commitment to the Memorandum of Agreement which was signed by the 12 watershed municipalities in the early 2000’s. Through this letter the municipalities also commit to three short term local actions that will benefit their section of the river.

Check out The Rivertowns Enterprise article about the renewed commitment to the Memorandum of Agreement!

To find out more about the The Saw Mill River Coalition, visit our website or email us at oded@groundworkhv.org. See you by the river!