

ADVANCING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE:

Clearwater receives grant to develop a Comprehensive Environmental Justice Inventory for Peekskill and surrounding communities

by Manna Jo Greene, Environmental Director, Hudson River Sloop Clearwater

This spring Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, Inc. and the Citizens for Equal Environmental Protection (CEEP) were awarded \$21,000 in funding by the NYS DEC Office of Environmental Justice as part of the Environmental Justice Community Impact Grant Program.

Environmental Justice is the concept that every person is entitled to equal environmental protection under the law: **ECO-EQUITY -- which includes the right to be free from ecological destruction and assurance that environmental burdens are fairly distributed, as well as equal access to environmental goods.**



In 2002 CEEP stopped the proposed Westchester County Sewage Diversion Plan based on Environmental Justice considerations. Under this proposal CEEP will partner with Clearwater to create a Comprehensive Environmental Justice Inventory (CEJI) by objectively researching and documenting multiple points of pollution in the environmental justice communities in the City of Peekskill. Together they will review existing health data, evaluate any disproportionate impacts on communities of color, ethnicity and low-income populations, and prepare and circulate a report with recommendations for future action. CEEP has already documented that Peekskill has higher than average asthma rates thought to be caused, at least in part, from the steady flow of traffic through its downtown business and residential areas.

The CEJI project will invite a wide range of stakeholders to participate on the project's Community Advisory Committee to help make recommendations to protect existing assets, mitigate harms and identify further research needed. A final CEJI Report with key findings and recommendations will provide valuable information that will help Peekskill in future planning to protect impacted communities from further pollution burdens.



Readnex Poetry Squad: Freeflowin, H2O, Cuttz, Latin & Decora; photo by [aishachristian](#)

The grant will also include a **Youth Empowerment Project**, through which Peekskill youth will come to understand the principles of Environmental Justice ("EJ") and will create and implement an EJ project of their own design in their community. Working with the Valerie Swan of the Peekskill Youth Center, Decora Lloyd Sandiford of Readnex Poetry Squad will oversee the youth component. Under the direction of Dr. Joanna Burger of Rutgers, they will also implement a revised Angler Survey to assess the understanding and consumption practices of local fisherman regarding possible pollutants in their catch.

Key Principles of the CEJI and related project components:

- The inquiry will be science-based
- Inclusive process: key stakeholder representing many sectors and demographics
- Collaborative approach (values are additive, rather than canceling each other out)

During the year-long project, Clearwater will serve as fiscal sponsor for CEEP, and CEEP will incorporate as 501(C)3. CEEP will also develop a brochure and website and engage in community outreach to expand their membership and to increase community awareness of the need to assure our collective rights as citizens of the Earth.