



Community Foundation  
for Greater Buffalo

# Enhancing and Leveraging Significant Natural Resources

Community Impact Report

## FOCUS AREAS

Increasing Self-sufficiency

Reducing Racial & Ethnic  
Disparities

**Environment & Architecture**

Arts & Culture



Darleen Strzy

## Leading Community Change Through Collaboration

The health and enhancement of our region's natural assets is crucial to the revitalization of this area and to the wellbeing of its residents. Our region, like many others, faces a wide range of challenges in protecting and restoring its natural environment—and historically, few philanthropic resources have been devoted to address these needs.

To fill this void and provide leadership and targeted resources to the region's environmental movement, the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo (CFGB) created the Western New York Environmental Alliance (WNYEA). A collaborative umbrella group, its goal is to help organize and rally those working toward a greener WNY.

During the past 24 months, representatives from 150 organizations helped identify and prioritize the challenges facing all facets of our region's natural surroundings. The sum of these efforts is ***Our Shared Agenda for Action***—a blueprint for restoring and preserving WNY's natural environment.

### WHY IT MATTERS

- Although home to an Olmsted-designed park system, **Buffalo has less parkland than cities with similar population densities.**
- **Toxic contamination and a lack of greenspace has resulted in increased rates of health problems,** including asthma, obesity and heart disease.
- The **Great Lakes contain 20% of the world's total fresh water supply** and is vital to the quality of life of 10% of all Americans.
- **Buffalo recycles just 6.5% of its solid waste**—well below the national average of 27%. A 1% increase would generate \$72,000 for the city.

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Fall 2009

# Creating a Blueprint for Action



The planning process for *Our Shared Agenda for Action* began in January 2008 when the WNYEA Steering Committee representing more than twenty-five organizations, agencies, and businesses met for the first time.

**The group established three objectives:**

- *Increase collaboration among organizations working on environmental issues*
- *Develop a consensus around a shared agenda for action*
- *Attract resources to support the Agenda*



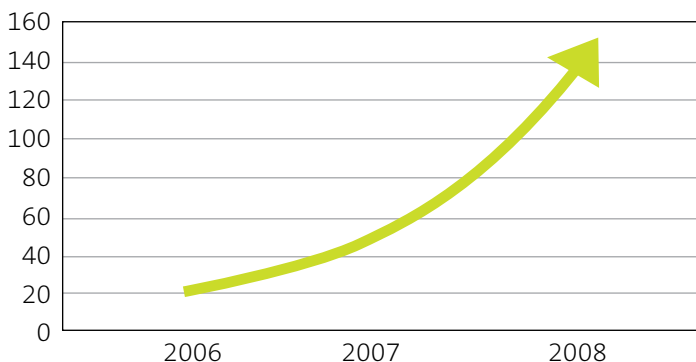
To design and facilitate the WNYEA's planning process, CFGB partnered with the Urban Design Project at the University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning and brought in a consultant from the

Institute for Conservation Leadership, an organization specializing in building environmental coalitions. In addition to organizing discussions, these partners provided the WNYEA with research and recommendations for best practices to take action and sustain a large-scale environmental collaborative.

The Foundation also recruited the Buffalo News and WBFO as media partners. They donated print and radio ads inviting the participation of interested individuals and organizations from throughout the WNY area.

From there, three large public congresses were convened attracting more than **300 attendees representing 150 environmental organizations and individuals** interested in working together to improve WNY's natural environment.

## Groups Participating in CFGB Environmental Work



## Congress 1: October, 2008

**Task groups formed** around the following topics to develop the issues, actions, and quantifiable measures for the *Agenda*:

- Energy and Climate Change
- Urban Regeneration and Land Use
- Waste, Water and Pollution Prevention
- Parks and Recreation
- Habitat and Natural Resources
- Environmental Organizations' Capabilities

## Congress 2: February, 2009

**Participants reviewed best practices for**

**collaboration** on environmental issues and prioritized key issues for action based on work done in the individual task groups. An *Environmental Declaration of Action* was drafted to provide a vision for the WNYEA and set the stage for the development of the *Agenda*.

## Congress 3: April, 2009

The **Declaration of Action and the framework for the Agenda were finalized**. Following this meeting Steering Group members developed *Our Shared Agenda for Action on the Environment*.

## WNYEA Steering Group Members

- Buffalo Audubon Society • Buffalo Museum of Science/ Tift Nature Preserve • Buffalo Niagara Partnership • Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper • Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy • Buffalo Urban Development Corporation • Community Action Organization/WNY Environmental Justice Center • Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo • Cornell School of Industrial & Labor Relations • Daemen College, Center for Sustainable Communities and Civic Engagement • Ecology & Environment • Erie County Industrial Development Agency (ECIDA) • Great Lakes Program, SUNY Buffalo • Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) • New York Sea Grant, Cornell University • New York State Department of State, Division of Coastal Resources • Niagara County Department of Economic Development • Niagara Greenspace Consortium • Niagara University Environmental Leadership Institute • Sierra Club • Upstate Green Business Network • Urban Design Project • US Army Corps of Engineers • US Fish and Wildlife Services • US Natural Resources Conservation Service • Wind Action Group • WNY Apollo Alliance • WNY Land Conservancy

# Environmental Declaration of Action

To ensure that the WNYEA would be consistent in its activities toward developing and implementing a plan for action on the environment, the group developed an *Environmental Declaration of Action*. Now, this piece also serves as the preamble to *Our Shared Agenda for Action*.

**We, the people** of Western New York, are resolved to work collaboratively to improve our environment and our regional, international community. We are a Great Lakes region and stewards of the world's largest supply of fresh water, vast forests, rich agricultural land, abundant wildlife, an incredible built heritage, historic park systems, the magnificent Niagara Falls and hundreds of wonderful communities. Unfortunately, much of our natural heritage has been lost and what remains is threatened. And, like the rest of the world, we face the prospects of climate change. We therefore establish this agenda to protect and restore our globally significant environment. ↪

We know that our environmental resources are immeasurable assets; they have direct impacts on our quality of life and our economy. Healthy ecosystems provide habitat for wildlife; they provide clean air, clean water and other ecological services such as stormwater control and carbon sequestration; and they provide recreational and business opportunities. The environment is a source of wealth for all of us. ↪

Like our natural heritage, our environmental community is strong. **We are the birthplace of the environmental justice movement**, a product of both our legacy of contamination and our determination to seek action through justice. We are home to thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations aiming to improve our region. ↪

Although our assets are plentiful and our voices numerous, our region and its people have suffered through the despoiling of our environment and the fragmentation of our collective efforts. Our dwindling population, declining health, vacant and contaminated land, and faltering economy are proof of this. Although some progress has been made, much more is needed. At this time, we make a commitment to collaboratively increase our region's environmental literacy, preserve its biodiversity, and ensure that our energy is sustainable, our air is clean, our water drinkable, our fish edible, and our forests, farms, and gardens plentiful. ↪

With *Our Shared Agenda for Action*, we have a vision for our future. Together, we are committed to strengthening the work of our environmental community through collaboration and implementation. This includes long term, overarching goals as well as specific measurable actions that can be accomplished soon. We are determined to leave those who follow us a sustainable, thriving community where they can live healthfully, work productively, learn, teach, grow old, and choose their own path. This is the aim of the Western New York Environmental Alliance – the purpose of *Our Shared Agenda for Action*. ↪

# Our Shared Agenda for Action



**CHALLENGE:** A large number of groups are working on environmental issues but there are a lack of opportunities for them to collaborate.

**ACTION:** Preserve and restore the region's natural assets through collaborative projects.



- Build demand for alternative energy with a **one-stop-shop for consumers** to see demonstrations of renewable energy and energy efficiency methods.
- **Reclaim and re-purpose vacant commercial, industrial, and residential property** in two distressed pilot communities.
- **Enhance environmental education** for children and adults on the region's environmental assets and threats by linking them to a **comprehensive information source**.
- **Reduce the threat of invasive species** to the region by effectively **accessing state funding** through the Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) program.
- **Access federal and state resources for shovel-ready projects** to protect our unique natural habitats.



*Our Shared Agenda for Action* represents the culmination of the first phase of the Foundation's work creating the Western New York Environmental Alliance (WNYEA). Each action item is based on a specific need identified through the work done by the WNYEA Task Groups and at the environmental congresses.

This Agenda is designed to be an inclusive, but focused plan of action for working together to accomplish environmental change in our region.

**CHALLENGE:** *The general public and policymakers are often unaware of the importance of environmental work and the specific implications of inaction for Western New York.*

**ACTION:** *Mobilize the public and policymakers to improve the environment.*

**CHALLENGE:** *Many environmental organizations are understaffed, underfunded and disconnected from other groups with similar goals.*

**ACTION:** *Strengthen environmental organizations.*

- **Change opinions** through a multi-faceted awareness campaign on key environmental issues.
- **Provide tools and incentives for recycling, water conservation and reuse** to influence public behavior.
- **Quantify the economic impact** of parks and green spaces, toxic and hazardous waste, habitat loss, and urban regeneration to **make a compelling case for environmental quality.**
- **Create a WNY energy policy center** to engage the public in a productive dialogue about energy.
- Advocate for regional planning boards to implement **smart growth** policies.
- Increase stewardship and connectivity of parks through a **regional plan** to restore and maintain our parks.
- Develop a regional strategy to **protect our water quality and quantity** from pollution, climate change, and economic pressures.
- Act as the **environmental watchdog**: monitor the environmental behavior of citizens and policy-makers.
- **Establish a network** to quickly alert citizens, organizations, and policymakers to legislative opportunities or threats.

- **Maximize the collective impact of 150+ environmental organizations** through WNYEA.
- **Create an online community** to improve communication and coordination between environmental organizations and the public.
- **Provide training, technical assistance, networking opportunities and access to funds** for local environmental leaders.
- **Improve funding** for environmental programs by honing fundraising skills and through **joint grantwriting.**
- **Secure shared office space and resources** for environmental organizations, businesses and others.



# Next Steps



With the *Agenda* in place, CFGB is now focused on providing support for the implementation phase.

For this phase CFGB will:

- **Regularly convene WNYEA members** to measure progress and trouble-shoot any challenges that arise;
- **Organize a fourth Environmental Congress** in 2010 and establish the meeting as an annual gathering;
- **Seek additional outside funding sources** at the local, state and national levels to support and expand implementation efforts;
- **Provide leadership development and training resources;**
- **Begin development of the WNY GreenTable**, an online interactive entity that will help sustain the WNYEA, encourage ongoing collaboration among its members and engage consumers to become a part of its work.



## Environmental Community Support for the *Agenda*

### The right issues?

**91%** agreed that issues addressed in the *Agenda* were relevant and important

### Will the community participate in implementing the *Agenda*?

**86%** said they will participate in the implementation of the agenda, **14%** said maybe, no one said no

## WNYEA Work Already Underway!

Work has already begun on specific action items outlined in the *Agenda*. Current projects include:

- **Launch of the CFGB Green 'Zine** an online magazine featuring news, videos, polls and more about environmental issues in your backyard. **Visit [www.cfgb.org](http://www.cfgb.org) to sign up.**
- **Compilation of comprehensive environmental education resources** to serve educators and individuals of all ages.
- **Completion of a feasibility study for Groundwork Buffalo** to maintain and improve vacant land in the City of Buffalo.
- Preparation of a **collaborative proposal to receive federal stimulus dollars** to support WNYEA work.
- **Phase I development of WNY GreenTable**, a new web resource to organize and engage environmental organizations and the general public in WNYEA activities.

## COMING SOON!

### New Web Resource: *WNY GreenTable*

The Community Foundation is now developing a **new web resource** to help WNYEA members organize and share ideas as well as to engage and inform the public on environmental issues.

Made possible by a matching grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, this new site, *WNY GreenTable*, will be a virtual forum for information exchange among interested citizens and the local

environmental community. With the help of WNYEA Steering Group members as well as members of the general public it will be designed as a convenient and dynamic tool for rapid dissemination of information, active communication, networking and collective problem solving.

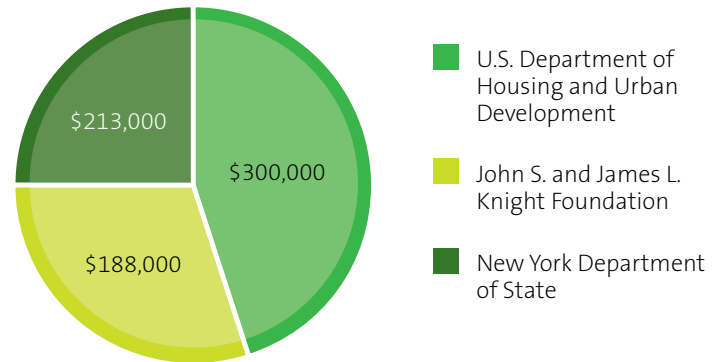
Planning for the site is currently underway and it is expected to launch in early 2010. Stay tuned!

# CFGB's Impact By The Numbers

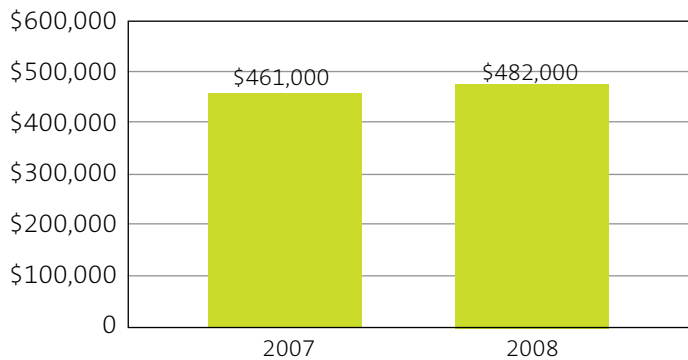


**Grants made by and through the Community Foundation** to organizations working to preserve and enhance our region's natural resources increased from 2007 – 2008 and **total nearly \$950,000**. To increase the impact of these investments, **CFGB has worked diligently to seek additional outside sources** for financial and in-kind support. These efforts have paid off, **bringing \$700,000 into our region** to support WNYEA work including a \$188,000 grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, \$300,000 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and \$213,000 from the New York Department of State. **Combined, these resources add up to more than \$1.6 million.**

## Outside Dollars CFGB Attracted for Environmental Programs

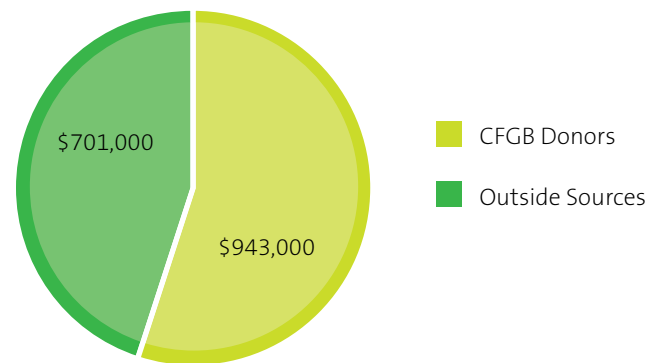


## CFGB Donors' Support for Environmental Programs



Includes all donor advised, field of interest and unrestricted dollars given through the Foundation to environmental work

## 2007 – 2009 CFGB Investment in WNY Environmental Work Tops \$1.6 Million



# 150 groups. 3 congresses. 1 agenda: *Improve the Environment.*

Look inside to see how you can take part in creating a greener WNY!

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