

How a Rochester, New York, tour boat organization is helping youth become environmental stewards of the Genesee River



Awardee: Corn Hill Waterfront and Navigation Foundation

Outcome: A new riverway pollution-prevention curriculum for students and families taught, in part, from aboard river boats.

Why: Expand fifth graders' knowledge of local riverway ecosystems and water pollution causes, effects, and prevention measures so they can become stewards of a local waterway within an environmental justice (EJ) community.

Where: Rochester, New York

Award Amount: \$20,000

Project Highlights at a Glance

1

new environmental-science curriculum developed for fifth-grade students.

5

lessons delivered through classroom learning and activities aboard river vessels.

7

RCSD fifth-grade classes participated in the program.

15

additional classes participated, thanks to private funding.

Corn Hill Navigation



In 2023, Corn Hill Waterfront and Navigation Foundation (Corn Hill Navigation) was awarded \$20,000 through the **New York State Pollution Prevention Institute (NYSP2I) Community Grants Program** to develop and implement a new riverway pollution-prevention curriculum, "Environmental Education on the Genesee River (E2G)." The goal of the project was to provide Rochester City School District (RCSD) students the opportunity to learn more about the Genesee River, its uses and impact on local communities, its status as an ecosystem habitat, and how its watershed is affected by pollution.

The project aimed to provide access to environmental science education in underserved communities by disseminating educational materials in [environmental justice \(EJ\)](#) area schools within Rochester. Corn Hill Navigation developed a curriculum and teaching materials. The organization also conducted fieldwork aboard its fleet to expose students, families, and teachers from RCSD to citizen science, connecting classroom learning to real-world experience.



RCSD students received hands-on environmental science learning onboard the Riverie.

As part of the curriculum, students received two environmental science lessons in the classroom prior to the cruise, one onboard lesson during the cruise, and two additional lessons following the cruise. Students built vocabulary, knowledge of environmental science subject matter, skills in performing scientific tests and measurements, and an understanding of the connections between human behavior and environmental impacts. Learning activities included using scientific tools for water-quality testing and understanding environmental advocacy and stewardship concepts.

“The lessons Corn Hill Navigation created give valuable access to effective hands-on learning to Rochester youth and families,” observed Ambika Walker, who leads NYSP2I’s community grants program. “The lessons provide students with a better understanding of the environmental issues facing their own community. Teaching them how to prevent pollution in ‘their river’ encourages students to be better stewards and caretakers of it.”

As a result of the initial grant funding, the E2G program has since grown beyond the original scope of the project and now serves every fifth-grade student in RCSD. “Thanks to additional funding from a private donor, the program experienced an incredible expansion,” says Lisa Wing, chair of Corn Hill Navigation’s executive committee. “It was clear during the E2G lessons and cruises that the experience made a significant mark on the students we served. So many of them had never been on a boat and didn’t even know that the river was there.”

“We connected students to their environment in ways that typical in-class instruction never could.”

Lisa Wing, chair of Corn Hill Navigation’s executive committee

Founded in 1991, Corn Hill Navigation operates two tour vessels out of Pittsford, New York, with cruises along the Erie Canal and the Genesee River providing unique insight into the region’s history, culture, and biodiversity. The mission of the nonprofit is to engage people of all ages and backgrounds in experiential learning on the water, and to foster the preservation and improvement of the Erie Canal and Genesee River for future generations.

For more information about Corn Hill Navigation, visit cornhillnav.org.

Partners



For more information please contact us:

📞 585-475-2512

@ nysp2i@rit.edu

🌐 rit.edu/nysp2i

🏠 111 Lomb Memorial Drive, Bldg 78
Rochester, NY 14623