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a r c h i v e s

New York Heritage
Documentation Project

A Guide to Documenting Environmental Affairs in New York State

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A Guide to Documenting Environmental Affairs in New York State

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE	4
THE GUIDE IN A NUTSHELL.....	5
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE.....	8
WHO IS THE GUIDE FOR?	8
CREATORS OF RECORDS — WHY DOCUMENTATION IS IMPORTANT	9
CUSTODIANS OF RECORDS — WHY ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS ARE IMPORTANT	10
WORKING TOGETHER.....	11
DEFINING OUR TERMS	13
WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS?	13
WHAT IS DOCUMENTATION?	14
WHAT TO DOCUMENT IN ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS	15
DECIDING WHAT TO DOCUMENT IN ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS	15
DOCUMENTATION PRIORITIES — SUMMARY TABLE	16
CRITERIA FOR STATEWIDE PRIORITIES	16
EXISTING DOCUMENTATION.....	18
HOW TO DOCUMENT ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS	19
NEXT STEPS FOR CREATORS OF ENVIRONMENTAL RECORDS	19
Managing Current Records	19
Finding a repository for archival records	19
NEXT STEPS FOR CUSTODIANS OF ENVIRONMENTAL RECORDS	20
Organizational context — matching mission and project.....	20
Where to look for environmental records.....	21
DOCUMENTATION AND ACCESS PROJECTS	22
Let this be your guide to successful documentation.....	22
SOURCES OF ASSISTANCE AND FUNDING.....	23
The New York State Archives	23
Other sources	23
Using this guide as a fund raising tool	23
CONCLUSION	24
APPENDIX A: PRIORITY SUBJECT AREAS FOR DOCUMENTATION	25
THEMES	25
Land Use	25
Lakes, Rivers, Coastal Zones, and Wetlands	25
Water — Quantity/Quality/Pollution	25
Air Quality/Pollution	26
Energy	26
Solid and Hazardous Waste Disposal.....	26
Toxics	27
Biodiversity.....	27

Outdoor Recreation	28
Public Health.....	28
Environmental Justice	28
Development and Implementation of Environmental Laws and Regulations	29
Science and Technology	29
Environmental Litigation	30
Citizen Action through Organizations and Government	30
Roles of Business and Corporations.....	31
Environmental Education and Technical Assistance.....	32
Funding, Public and Private, of Environmental Affairs	32
EVENTS/ISSUES.....	33
Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves and Adirondack Park (1885 —).....	33
New York City/Croton/Catskills/Delaware water supply system (1905 —).....	33
Robert Moses: Shaping New York's Landscape (1924-1968)	34
Hudson River (1900—).....	34
Pesticides (1962 —).....	35
Love Canal (1942 —)	35
ORGANIZATIONS/AGENCIES	36
APPENDIX B: REGIONAL AND LOCAL DOCUMENTATION PLANNING	37
APPENDIX C: HOW THE GUIDE WAS DEVELOPED — DOCUMENTATION PLANNING METHOD .39	
Documentation Planning Methodology — Table.....	40
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	41

Introduction

The past half century has seen human impact on the environment emerge as one of the most critical issues of our age, and citizens, scholars, organizations, and governments in New York have played enormously important roles in this history, often providing leadership for the nation and the world. Environmental issues are varied and complex, generating a wide range of passionately held opinions and agendas. Businesses and industries of every kind, communities, and individuals are being challenged to examine the ways they work and live and to balance environmental concerns with other areas of business practice and lifestyle. Environmental initiatives have often come into conflict with the interests, cultures, and values of property owners, businesses and industries, and communities. Organizations have sprung up on all sides of these issues, and all are part of the history of environmental affairs.

But much of the documentation essential to a full and accurate telling of this remarkable history in New York is being lost. Few organizations, large or small, that are concerned with environmental affairs have devoted serious attention to the care of their historically valuable records, and few repositories collect in this critical area. So extraordinary amounts of valuable documentation lie hidden, unavailable to history, in the homes of individuals, in the offices or storage spaces of scholars, organizations, businesses, and government legislatures and agencies.

The New York State Archives has developed *Documenting Environmental Affairs in New York State* for people and organizations who create or have in their possession historically valuable environmental documentation and for repositories that collect historical records. It is written as a tool to help save and make accessible this vital part of New York's history.

The New York State Archives, in cooperation with the New York State Historical Records Advisory Board, has prepared this guide as part of a statewide initiative called the New York Heritage Documentation Project, which is working to ensure the equitable and comprehensive documentation and accessibility of all of New York's history and peoples. Environmental affairs is one of the first topics to be addressed in this effort.

The purpose of this guide

The overriding purpose of this guide is to help create a balanced, equitable and publicly accessible historical record of environmental affairs in New York State, one that represents fairly the full spectrum of interests, points of view, and activities that have shaped and continue to shape the history of this field. More specifically, the guide aims:

- To raise awareness of the importance of environmental documentation among the creators, custodians, and users of environmental records.
- To identify the priority areas for documentation of environmental affairs in the next decade and guide records creators, repositories, and funding sources in their decisions about what is most important to preserve and make accessible;
- To provide guidance in how to approach documenting environmental affairs to people and organizations that in the course of their daily life and work either generate or collect environmental records that may have enduring historical value.

The Guide in a Nutshell

Welcome to this brief summary of *A Guide to Documenting Environmental Affairs in New York State*. We have tried to make the whole guide accessible and useful for people with different degrees of experience with environmental affairs and historical records. Environmental affairs is a large, varied topic, and the documentation of historical records is a complex undertaking. That size and complexity are reflected somewhat in the guide, so this brief nutshell version will give you an overview of the main points.

Why it is important to document environmental affairs

The environment has become one of the most critical issues of this epoch, permeating nearly every facet of human activity. Citizens, organizations, businesses, and government agencies engaged in environmental affairs in New York have had profound impacts on the state and the nation. But the historical record of environmental affairs is full of gaps, and vitally important records are being lost every day. It is up to the people who generate records and those in libraries, archives, and other repositories who collect them to do what they can to preserve the history of environmental affairs. This guide is designed to help you discover what role you might play in this process and offer guidance as to how to go about it.

Who this guide is for

The State Archives has prepared this guide mainly for three groups:

- **Creators of Records** People and organizations engaged with environmental affairs who create records in the course of their work, some of which may have long-term historical value. If you are affiliated with an organization, business, or government active in environmental issues, it may well be that you generate records that are of long-term historical value and should be saved in an accessible archives when your organization no longer needs them.
- **Custodians of Records** Organizations that collect historically valuable records and make them available to the public for research. If you are affiliated with an historical society, museum, library, or archives, it may make sense for you to begin collecting records related to environmental affairs. This collecting focus can be of great benefit to your organization and your community.
- **Users of Records** Individuals who use historical records in the course of their lives and work and have an interest in preserving and making accessible the documentation of environmental affairs. Scholars, teachers, students, policy-makers, and citizens active in this field are typical users of environmental documentation.

What we mean by Environmental Affairs and Documentation

- **Environmental Affairs** The subject of this Guide to Documenting Environmental Affairs in New York State is the relationship, past and present, of humankind to the natural environment in New York.
- **Documentation** consists of valuable information found in “records,” which may exist in a wide range of formats (paper, photographs and slides, motion picture film, audio- and videotape, computer disks and tape) typically collected by archival repositories. Records that have enduring value once they are no longer needed for their original purpose are known as

“archival.” For example, the 20-year-old board minutes of an organization or business are probably no longer needed to keep board members current, but they may document important decisions that affected the history of environmental affairs in New York. If so, they would be considered archival, and it may make sense for them to be in a publicly accessible archives

What to document in environmental affairs

It is impossible to document everything that might be interesting, and not everything is of equal historical importance. To help you determine what is most important to document, we offer here a set of **criteria** that a documentation topic should meet, a list of high priority **themes**, or topic areas, and six major **events/issues** that have been enormously important in the history of environmental affairs in New York. These criteria, themes, and events/issues are summarized in the Documentation Priorities table on page 16. You can use these sections together to help you decide whether a particular topic would be a priority for documentation in a statewide, regional, or local context.

How to document environmental affairs

Documentation is a cooperative effort between the creators and custodians of records, each of whom has different roles to play.

Records Creators may want to take the following steps:

- **Improve the management of your current records**, so that you can operate more efficiently, locate files you need more quickly, get rid of records you no longer need, and save office space;
- **Identify records likely to be of enduring historical value**, probably with the assistance of a qualified archivist;
- **Identify and develop a partnership with a repository** to care for the historically valuable records you no longer needed in your office.

Records Custodians may want to take the following steps:

- **Organizational context — mission, collecting policy, resources** Determine whether collecting environmental affairs fits your organization’s existing mission and collecting policy and what kinds of resources are needed and available. Change the collecting policy, even expand the mission, if necessary.
- **Finding the creators of important records** Identify the organizations, agencies, and governments in your field or service area that have made important contributions to environmental affairs and whose records would enrich the historical record.
- **Design, obtain the resources for, and carry out a documentation project**

In this section, you will find examples of various kinds of documentation projects and potential sources of assistance and funding, including the State Archives.

Regional and Local Documentation Planning

This guide is statewide in scope, and the criteria, themes, and events/issues it lays out are based on statewide significance and impact. But it is also intended to stimulate and guide documentation planning at the regional and local levels. Some topics, events, or organizations that have not had a statewide impact may be very significant in a region or locality and should be represented in the documentary record. **The State Archives and the State Historical Records Advisory Board are interested in encouraging and supporting the development of regional and local documentation plans for environmental affairs.** We also encourage local documentation projects that draw on the priorities set forth in this guide or in regional plans that may be developed in the future.

The methodology used to develop this guide (discussed below and in Appendix C) is also adaptable to regional documentation planning.

Documentation Planning Methodology

A central principle of the method used to develop this guide was the understanding that we would need input from throughout the state and from all facets of environmental affairs, particularly in determining the most important themes and topics for documentation. This principle of community involvement should be applied in regional and local planning as well.

The methodology is summarized in the table in Appendix C, page 40.

Where you can get help

This guide offers an introduction to the documentation of environmental affairs, but it cannot answer every question you might have or lead you step by step through the process, partly because the steps won't be the same in every situation. The staff at the State Archives is available and eager to help you make sense of this guide, think through documentation issues, plan documentation projects, and seek support for documentation efforts. At several places below we urge you to contact us, and Sources of Assistance and Funding describes other resources as well. Please do get in touch with us anytime.

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How to Use This Guide

People will bring to this guide different degrees of knowledge and experience, different perspectives, and different needs for information and guidance. Therefore, we invite you to look through the Table of Contents and go to the places that most interest you. Read the guide straight through if you want the full picture in the order we conceived it, or jump around, following your own logic, questions, and trains of thought.

Who is the guide for?

If you are engaged with environmental affairs or you represent an organization that collects historical records, this guide is for you. We hope *Documenting Environmental Affairs* will alert you to the importance of preserving this part of New York's history and show you ways that you can become part of the effort. The following table lists the kinds of people and groups for whom this guide is written.

Records creators such as:	Records custodians such as:	Records users such as:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental organizations and other organizations related to environmental affairs - Activists on all sides of environmental issues - Legislators and legislative committees and their staffs - Lawyers on all sides of environmental issues - State and local government agencies and other entities that address environmental issues - Environmental businesses and businesses that deal with environmental issues - Environmental scientists, historians and other scholars - Entities, public and private, that fund environmental affairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Records managers and archivists in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - State government - Local government - Colleges and universities - Private and non-profit environmental organizations - Corporations and businesses - Public and university librarians - Museums and historical societies - County and Town Historians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People engaged in environmental affairs in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - State government - Local government - Private and non-profit organizations - Lawyers on all sides of environmental issues - Environmental policy researchers and analysts - Environmental action and advocacy groups - Environmental scientists, historians and other scholars - Artists and Writers - Students and Teachers - Regional and local historians

Most people who use this guide will be or represent either:

Creators of records— People and organizations who are involved with environmental affairs from all points of view and all facets of this vast and complex subject and who generate records in the course of their daily activities, some of which may be of historical value; or

Custodians of records— Archivists, librarians, and other information specialists who work with organizations such as archives, libraries, historical societies and museums, and colleges and universities that collect historically valuable records and make them accessible to the public for research.

Some readers will be **users of records** who need environmental documentation for their research and want to ensure the survival of critical information.

Because the creators and custodians of records have different roles to play in the documentation process, some sections of the guide are addressed especially to one group or the other.

Creators of records — Why documentation is important

Most people and organizations that generate historically important records in their work are unaware of their enduring value and may feel they don't have the time or resources to deal adequately with even their current files, much less archival records they don't use regularly. As a result, all across the state jewels of our environmental heritage are at risk.

- The founder of an organization that has been working to maintain the human and ecological health, safety, and beauty of her part of Western New York in the face of a high concentration of landfills, some of them toxic, has 30 years worth of the organization's records boxed in her attic. She wonders whether they would be of interest to anyone besides her — are they worth saving at all?
- An organization that has pioneered environmental action and litigation in New York since the 1960s has a new director and board and wonders what to do with the boxes of records from its early years that it no longer uses. It doesn't have room for them anymore, and they are of no use to anyone stacked in a back office.
- At the end of a long and distinguished career working on environmental affairs with non-profit organizations and numerous state government agencies and programs, one man has recently pared the collection 150 boxes of documents in his garage down to 40. This distilled legacy of a life's work contains information and perspectives that would help illuminate the history of environmental affairs in New York. But what is he to do with these records? How can they be made an accessible, useful resource for New York's citizens and researchers?
- A former staff member for a legislative environmental committee remembers her frustration as she stood before boxes containing administrative files, testimony, and analysis from public hearings on vital environmental issues held a decade earlier. The office was moving, more space was needed, and she was concerned that historically important documents might be slated for recycling.
- An environmental consulting firm that has advised businesses, governments, and non-profits on a wide range of sometimes precedent-setting environmental issues is moving to a new facility. Some of their records from earlier decades contain important scientific data or document perspectives and positions on issues that cannot be found elsewhere. Unless

someone identifies the historically valuable records and finds a new home for them, they will be recycled and lost for good.

- Many organizations and businesses, large and small, find that amidst the mass of files in their offices, it is difficult to locate a particular document when it is needed, and old files no longer used, some of which may be historically valuable, are taking up too much valuable space. The temptation to throw them out is strong.

If these conditions persist and large sectors of the environmental record are lost to the recycling bins and the dumpsters, the history that survives will be skewed and misleading. Will your organization and its contributions be remembered? Will your side of the controversies be fairly represented? Will people in the future be able to base their decisions and actions on an accurate, balanced picture of what happened in their past?

In How to Document Environmental Affairs below (page 15) you will see that devoting even a modest amount of time and resources to dealing with your records can bring significant benefits to your organization and help preserve your contributions to the history of environmental affairs in New York.

Custodians of records — Why environmental affairs are important

Collecting records pertaining to environmental affairs can make sense and be good policy for many kinds of repositories, from the smallest county historical society to the largest institutional libraries and archives. As you will see below in What to Document in Environmental Affairs, this topic is vast and varied, and the need for improved documentation is enormous. Because environmental concerns permeate a vast range of organizations and fields (education, business, recreation, economic development, land use planning, and health, to name a few), documentation in this area allows a repository to develop relationships with many kinds of constituents, selecting those that are most appropriate to its mission (see Organizational context — matching mission and project, page 20). Finally, the generally high public profile of environmental issues and the State Archives emphasis on this area may facilitate raising funds, gaining organizational commitments, and generating public support for documentation. Here are a few ways different kinds of repositories might approach documenting environmental affairs:

- **A county historical society or museum** might decide to document and present an exhibition and related public programs on an environmental issue in the county. If the controversy were a recent or current one, they could draw on historical trends or events leading up to it, and gain the cooperation and participation of parts of the community that were involved in the issue. The documentation component would contribute to the historical record, complement the public programming, and draw new people into the organization to use the records for research.
- **A public library system** could pick an environmental theme, such as land use, or one of the major events/issues described in the guide (for example, the New York City/Croton/Catskill/Delaware water system) that is pertinent in the system's region and document the topic in one or more of the libraries in the system. Related lectures, exhibits, or other public

programs would draw attention to the collection and strengthen relationships with the surrounding communities.

- **A repository might build on an existing collection** by documenting an environmental component not yet represented in the collection. For example, an organization with a collecting policy that focuses on business could decide to document environmental businesses and the impact of environmental issues on businesses in the area.
- **A university or other institutional archives** that collects primarily the records of the institution itself may find that the institution has launched important environmental innovations through research, a commitment to “green” buildings, new technologies for waste management, or cooperative projects with the surrounding community. The environmental focus of a documentation project would further the archives’ collecting mission, bring credit to the university for its innovations, and help remedy the statewide gap in documentation of environmental affairs.

The possibilities for documentation projects in environmental affairs are innumerable. Many organizations that are custodians of archival records will be able find ways to both further their own collecting policies and missions and contribute to the historical record of environmental affairs through documentation projects.

Working together

The State Archives believes that preserving a more complete and balanced historical record of environmental affairs is extremely important, and we invite you to join us in this effort.

If you are interested in environmental affairs and want its history to be preserved in the documentary record, then this guide is for you. As you will see, the challenge is enormous. No one organization or group can do it all, and it will take a long time, but everyone can do his or her part.

- **The State Archives** collects government records of environmental affairs and can help people in local government and the non-profit world through advice, technical assistance, and grant programs.
- **Repositories**, such as libraries, historical societies, museums, and other large organizations with archives, can integrate environmental affairs into their collecting policies, seek out partnerships with records creators, both organizations and individuals, who have important documentation, and preserve and make accessible the records they collect.
- **People and organizations who generate or hold environmental records** can pay attention to caring for them and seeking appropriate, publicly accessible repositories for them.
- **People who use records** can make their concerns known to repositories, records creators, funders, and government officials and encourage greater support for this effort.

Ultimately, it comes down to individual people — to your taking the initiative in whatever ways make sense to you in the context of your work and your life. We urge you to read through this guide and think about what it might mean for you.

Then be sure to ask for help or clarification. The staff in Archival Services at the State Archives are ready and eager to assist you as you think about how this guide might apply to your work. We can answer questions about the guide itself, and we can offer information and advice all along the way as you contemplate and undertake efforts to improve documentation of environmental affairs as part of your regular work. We are also eager for your comments and suggestions as to how we can improve this guide and make it more useful to you and others. So please feel free to contact us any time.

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Defining Our Terms

What do we mean by Environmental Affairs?

The subject of this Guide to Documenting Environmental Affairs in New York State is the relationship, past and present, of humankind to the natural environment in New York. This vast subject includes the utilization of natural resources (air, energy, plants, animals, minerals, land, and water), their conservation and related environmental issues, the effect of environmental hazards on human populations and other life forms, and the development and implementation of public policy and planning related to the environment. Important stakeholders may include institutions doing research in environmental sciences and public health; organizations established to promote environmental conservation, preservation, and increased awareness of environmental affairs through education, advocacy, or public action; industries, businesses, and organizations that make direct use of natural resources or respond actively to environmental issues; legislators and administrators engaged in regulation, enforcement, education, and programs of federal, state, and local governments and government agencies that address environmental affairs; also individuals prominent in environmental affairs. Also important to document are the people and organizations engaged in issues, such as environmental justice, that involve environmental impacts upon or actions by population groups, by economic class, cultural background, or region.

In many cases, determining whether the activities of a particular organization or individual fall within the framework of this guide will require judgment. Here are some guidelines:

- Focus on New York. There are a number of national environmental organizations based in New York that began by addressing environmental issues here. Their activities related to New York issues would be relevant, including New York components of national programs. Documentation of their national or international activities would not be included. Similarly, only the environment-related activities in New York of national or multinational corporations would fall within the scope of this framework.
- Focus on environmental affairs. Numerous businesses, educational and activist organizations, outdoor recreation clubs, and research groups conduct activities that address subjects such as wildlife, energy, historic preservation and so on but do not explicitly address environmental issues. Such organizations and activities would fall outside the scope of the guide. For example, the Bronx Zoo, whose public programming and exhibit interpretation focuses extensively on environmental issues, would be included; another zoo that explores animal life cycles and habitats, with only minor emphasis on environmental affairs, would not. Similarly, basic research in animal behavior or microbiology would not be included unless its findings entered the public or scholarly discourse about environmental issues. Research that explicitly addresses environmental issues such as pollution would be included.
- Focus on humans' interaction with the natural environment — a two-way street. While much of environmental affairs concentrates on human impacts on the natural environment, the effects of a degraded natural environment on humans also falls within the scope of this

definition of environmental affairs. Thus, environmental impacts upon public health, aesthetic sensibilities, cultural resources, and economic wellbeing may be appropriate subjects of documentation — these concerns are often reflected in environmental law and action. These subject areas are only relevant, however, to the extent that they are related to the state of the natural environment.

What is Documentation?

For the purposes of this guide, documentation consists of valuable information about environmental affairs in New York that may be found in a wide range of formats (paper, photographs and slides, motion picture film, audio- and videotape, computer disks and tape) typically collected by archival repositories. Many kinds of documentation may have important historical value, for example:

- Minutes, summaries, or transcripts of meetings, hearings, or conferences
- Correspondence, including email files, of people in responsible positions or people who have had an important impact
- Reports, grant proposals, position papers, academic papers, and other unpublished documents that present what an organization does and why or that discuss environmental issues
- Program announcements, broadsides, flyers, and other publicity materials related to events, programs, or services
- Legal briefs and other supporting documentation related to litigation
- Summaries, analyses, and raw data related to scientific studies
- Records from the print and broadcast media, especially old or rare publications and film or text documentation that may not have been published
- Maps, photographs, slides, tapes and other sound or graphic records that document the people or activities of a group or organization, scientific data, or environmental features, events, or changes

Three-dimensional artifacts also tell important parts of the story, and much of the information in this guide will be useful to those collecting such objects. The focus of this guide, however, is on archival documentation. Organizations that are committed to collecting material culture may want to consult with the New York State Museum or other museum professionals for guidance.

What to Document in Environmental Affairs

This guide has been created to help in identifying, preserving, and making accessible historically important records created by organizations, government entities, or individuals. Realistically, not everything that is important can be documented. The available resources — funding, trained staff, and space within archival repositories — are simply inadequate and are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. The decisions about what to document will be made one at a time by archives that collect records, organizations that produce records, or funding sources that support documentation projects.

Deciding what to document in environmental affairs

This part of the guide includes four sections that can be used together to help you determine whether a particular topic should be a priority for documentation:

- **Criteria** To qualify as statewide priorities, documentation topics should meet one or more of the criteria.
- **Themes** (e.g., document water quality, environmental justice, or citizen advocacy) Priority topics should fall under one of the listed themes.
- **Events/Issues & Organizations** (e.g., document the formation of Adirondack Park or the Love Canal crisis) The guide names six specific events or issues as priorities for documentation because they meet all or nearly all the criteria, most involve several themes, and they were considered vitally important by most of our informants.
- **Existing Documentation** Some aspects of environmental affairs are reasonably well documented and therefore would not be high priority for new documentation efforts.

Documentation Priorities — Summary Table

The table below summarizes the criteria and themes that can be used to identify priority topics, and it lists the six topics specifically designated as priorities in this guide. The *criteria* are described in detail in the sections following the table. Descriptions and examples for each *theme* and for each *event/issue & organization* are in Appendix A, pages 25 - 35.

Summary — Determining Priority Topics for Statewide Documentation of Environmental Affairs (for detailed descriptions, see Appendix A)			
Criteria for Statewide Significance Topic should meet one or more of these criteria.	Themes		Events, Issues, Organizations These are designated statewide priorities for documentation.
	Proposed documentation topics should address one or more of these themes AND meet one or more of the Criteria for Statewide Significance.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Distinctive to New York, seminal, or precedent-setting- Major impact over large geographical area- Significant impact in several facets of environmental affairs- Illustrative of common experience statewide- Significant over a long time- Contribute significantly to the database of scientific and technical information- Not already well documented	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Land Use- Water — Quantity/Quality/Pollution- Protection of lakes, rivers, coastal zones, and wetlands- Air Quality/Pollution- Energy- Solid and Hazardous Waste Disposal- Toxics- Biodiversity- Outdoor Recreation- Public Health- Environmental Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Development and implementation of environmental laws and regulations- Environmental litigation- Citizen action through organizations and government- Roles of business and corporations- Environmental education and technical assistance- Science and Technology- Funding of environmental affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves and Adirondack Park- New York City/Catskills/Hudson Valley water supply system- Robert Moses: State Park System, State Power Authority- Hudson River: pollution, power plants, fisheries, etc.- Pesticides- Love Canal- Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)

Criteria for Statewide Priorities

To be considered a statewide priority for documentation, a topic should meet at least one and probably more of these criteria.

- **They represent a contribution by New York that is distinctive, seminal, or precedent-setting** to the field of environmental affairs overall;

- **Examples:** *The initial suit to prohibit the use of the pesticide DDT on Long Island led to the formation of the Environmental Defense Fund (now a major national organization called Environmental Defense), whose subsequent legal action led to the national ban on DDT. By contrast, while global warming and climate change are major issues that affect everyone in New York, the nation, and the world, and many New Yorkers are engaged with these issues and consider them vitally important, New York's contributions in this area have not been particularly critical or distinctive to date.*
- **They have had major impact or influence statewide or over vast areas on the environment itself or on environmental affairs;**
- **Examples:** *The establishment of the Adirondack Forest Preserve and Adirondack Park affected an enormous area of the North Country and set important precedents for land use and protection statewide. Similarly, the protection of land through private acquisition by non-profit organizations such as land trusts and the Nature Conservancy has affected all parts of the state. The controversy surrounding a particular Superfund site, on the other hand, which might be extremely important regionally for its effects on public health and water quality, among other impacts, may not have affected a large area or stimulated statewide activity. The issue could be a high priority, however, in a regional documentation plan.*
- **For events or issues: They have engaged and had significant impact in several facets of environmental affairs.**
- **Example:** *Love Canal engaged issues of toxic waste, public health, and water quality; it stimulated citizen action statewide and nationally and influenced the development of legislation and public policy.*
- **They are illustrative of common experience statewide.**
- **Examples:** *Many potential topics under the themes listed below would meet this criterion: the development of sewage treatment plants, land use planning controversies such as battles over zoning or mall development, the coming and going of single-issue organizations, etc. From a statewide perspective, it is important that representative examples of these topics be documented.*
- **They have been significant over a considerable period of time.**
- **Example:** *An organization that meets some of the other criteria in this list and has been in existence since the beginning of the modern environmental movement in the late 1960s or earlier will be a higher priority for documentation than an organization doing similar work that was founded ten years ago or lasted only ten years.*
- **They contribute significantly to the database of scientific and technical information** necessary for longitudinal studies of environmental changes and other research. This criterion may involve data generated statewide or at regional or local levels, because local or regional data may be important to research on statewide patterns, trends, or impacts.
- **Examples:** *Test results or other data generated for environmental impact statements. Data generated as part of university-, government-, non-profit-, or corporate-sponsored studies. Summary reports based on data gathered in the field may not contain enough detail to serve as the basis for future research, so preserving the raw data may be necessary.*

- **They are not already well documented.** Within environmental affairs, there are some topics that are already documented and for which systems of continuing documentation are in place. Some such topics would meet other criteria for statewide priority, meaning that their documentation is important enough to be part of the historical record, but since considerable documentation already exists compared to other important topics, they would not be considered priorities for new documentation projects.
- **Example:** *A repository seeking to document pollution in a river might discover that extensive records exist that document government regulation and monitoring of industry and scientific data on the condition of the river, but that the actions of citizen and business groups representing environmental, recreational, and commercial interests are not represented in the historical record. The repository would then define its topic around collecting in the areas where the important gaps exist.*

Existing Documentation

The extent of existing documentation varies widely among the themes and events/issues discussed in this guide. There are probably none that would be considered well documented overall, despite the vast amount of documentation of environmental affairs that does exist. Some components or aspects of a particular theme, however, may be quite well documented and not require new efforts. For example, some aspects of toxic pollution of the land and water are heavily documented; the State Archives holds voluminous DEC records, and a recent documentation project at the University at Buffalo has surveyed extensive records about Love Canal. But as a rule, citizen action groups' activities in this and other areas are not adequately represented, nor are some regions of the state. It is therefore not possible to identify an entire theme as well documented; nor is it possible to list here all the sub-themes that might be well documented in particular areas.

There is, however, a general pattern worth noting: Scientific research, legislation, and regulatory processes are among the better documented functions, because the responsible entities are usually required by law or policy to manage their records and schedule the permanently valuable ones for permanent retention or transfer to an archives. The activities of non-profit organizations, unincorporated groups, individuals, and businesses, on the other hand, are usually poorly documented in the historical record, partly because these creators of records usually lack adequate resources, time, and/or understanding of the importance of documentation, or they may not want to make records available.

The State Archives conducted an online search of environmental documentation that resulted in the production of its *Preliminary Guide to Environmental Documentary Sources in New York State*, which is available on the State Archives web site (see Appendix C: How the Guide Was Developed, page 39). When considering a particular topic for documentation, one of the first things to do is search this *Preliminary Guide* to determine the extent to which the topic is already documented.

How To Document Environmental Affairs

Note on statewide, regional, and local documentation This guide is written from the perspective of documenting topics considered to be of statewide significance. Most of this section, however, applies to documentation of environmental affairs at the local and regional levels as well. (See Appendix B, page 37.)

Documentation involves a partnership between those who generate historically valuable records and those who collect them and make them accessible for use. These functions may be carried out by different parts of a single organization (for example, a university that maintains its own archives) or by different organizations (for example, an environmental organization that donates to a county historical society's archives the historically valuable records it no longer needs in its day-to-day work). Each party has responsibility for parts of the documentation process.

Next Steps for Creators of Environmental Records

Managing Current Records

A logical first step toward good documentation for an organization that generates records in the course of its work is to manage its current records efficiently. This principle applies to organizations of all types and sizes, from tiny non-profits and businesses to huge institutions and corporations. A relatively small investment in setting up a records management system pays off quickly in the benefits to the organization:

- An efficient and logical filing system saves time by making it easier to locate documents quickly.
- A records management program describes which kinds of files should be kept in the office for how long and when they can be scheduled for recycling, removal to a storage area, or transfer to a permanent, accessible archives. This means that:
- Precious office space is not taken up with storage of records that are never used.
- Less expensive, more densely packed storage space can be used for records that must be kept for legal or policy reasons but that are rarely needed.
- Records that have no long-term value and are no longer needed can be destroyed or recycled in a timely manner.
- Records that may be "archival," meaning they have permanent historical value, can be stored separately, once they are no longer current, until they can be transferred to an archives.

Finding a repository for archival records

Creating and maintaining a publicly accessible archives requires space, equipment, ongoing professional staff, and funding that may be beyond the capabilities or missions of most businesses and organizations. However, independent archives and many libraries, museums, colleges and universities have archival programs and may already collect or be willing to collect in the area of environmental affairs. (This guide is intended in part as a tool to help persuade

repositories that documenting environmental affairs is critically important and beneficial to the repositories and the communities they serve.)

A word of reassurance Two questions often come to mind when people contemplate transferring records to an archives:

- Do we have to reorganize all our old records and get them in perfect order before they go to the archives?
- Will we have access to them in the archives? Do we have any control over who else has access to them?

When you get ready to donate records to an archives, you will meet with the archivist, who will look at your records and discuss with you which kinds are likely to be of historical value. Archives generally keep records in the order in which they were kept by the donor, because the way you organized them reveals important information about your interests and methods of work. Once the records are in the archives, an archivist will describe them and produce a “finding aid” that will allow a researcher to get to the documents he or she is looking for. So generally speaking, you will not need to reorganize your records before donating them.

When you donate records to an archives, you will negotiate and sign an agreement, part of which can stipulate what kinds of access you and others will have to the collection. You will probably want unlimited access for your organization, but there may be parts of a collection that you would want to restrict others from using for a period of time to protect the privacy of living individuals or to prevent early dissemination of time-sensitive materials. You will also have the opportunity to negotiate ownership of the intellectual property, the informational content, of the materials.

Developing partnerships As an organization begins to think about and plan for the care and accessibility of its historically valuable records, it may make sense to talk both with potential repositories and with other organizations and businesses in the area that are engaged in environmental affairs. A repository, for example, might be more interested in beginning a collecting program in environmental affairs if there were a group of organizations prepared to contribute to the collection.

The State Archives can offer advice and publications to help guide you through this process and identify possible funding sources. (see page 23).

Next Steps for Custodians of Environmental Records

Organizational context — matching mission and project

A repository contemplating collecting in environmental affairs for the first time or increasing its commitment in this area must evaluate this proposed direction in the context of its organizational mission, its current collecting policy, its existing programs, and its available resources — space, personnel, and finances. Does environmental affairs fall within the repository’s mission and collecting policy? If it meets the mission test but is not within the collecting policy, should the policy be changed? Will an environmental collection complement or strengthen the repository’s

current programs, or would it represent a new programming direction? Are some aspects of environmental affairs more relevant to the mission than others?

Such considerations, examined in conjunction with the priorities and other information found in this guide, will help a repository shape an environmental documentation effort that both strengthens its own work and helps fill the gaps in the state's historical record of environmental affairs.

Where to look for environmental records

Organizations: Nearly all documentation topics, whether defined geographically, thematically, or by event or issue, will involve working with the records created by organizations or government entities. In some cases, when a specific organization devoted entirely to environmental affairs has had a particularly significant impact, it may make sense to document the organization as a whole. In other situations, only certain facets of an organization's work and records will be relevant to the documentation project. For example, a land trust whose entire mission and work is focused on protecting undeveloped landscapes, or an organization that concentrates entirely on protecting the rights of property owners against environmental regulations of the use of their land, might merit documentation of its overall activities. A law firm, on the other hand, that practices environmental law as just one of several areas of emphasis would have a sub-set of its records relevant to the environmental affairs project.

Very rarely would it make sense for an organization to send some of its records to one archives and the rest to another — it is important to keep together the records of an organization. In the case of the law firm, the environmental documentation project might stimulate the firm to address the documentation issues for all its work. Their environmental records would stay with the rest of the firm's records, but they would be preserved and accessible, which is the goal of the effort.

Organizations that might themselves be worthy of documentation or that may hold important environmental records are likely to be of the following kinds:

- State government environmental agencies or the environmental activities or programs of state or federal agencies in New York
- The early history and New York-focused programs of major national environmental organizations founded and based in New York
- Statewide environmental organizations with strong impact, including organizations with multiple chapters or affiliates in New York
- Local or regional organizations that have had statewide impact or significance
- Local government entities and programs related to the environment, such as environmental management councils (EMC) or zoning and planning boards, that are representative of similar entities found throughout the state
- Local or regional organizations that are representative of similar organizations found throughout the state (e.g., small, single-issue organizations that come and go; individually they may not have a large impact, but taken together, they represent a significant contribution to environmental affairs, and at least some should be included in the documentary record)

Individuals who have important collections, unique perspectives, or vital information that is not recorded elsewhere, or who have made particularly significant contributions to environmental affairs, are likely to come up in the course of documentation projects. Some may be appropriate to list by name as priorities for documentation in regional or local documentation plans. Others will be important to document in the course of documenting themes or issues.

Documentation and access projects

Documentation and access projects may be undertaken by records creating organizations, archival repositories, or partnerships involving both entities. They may take several approaches to documentation:

- Identify organizations and individuals that have been important players in environmental affairs and may have archival environmental records; conduct a survey of the records.
- Match repositories with records holders and arrange for the transfer of records to the repository.
- Arrange and describe environmental collections, making them accessible in house and online. This may apply to collections already in the possession of an archives but not yet made accessible, or it may refer to newly acquired collections as part of a larger documentation project.
- Improve existing archival programs or establish new ones. This might mean creating an environmental affairs collection within a larger archives, establishing an archives for the first time within an environmental organization, or improving the capabilities or processes within an existing archives that collects environmental affairs.

Let this be your guide to successful documentation

Documentation projects should follow this statewide guide or a regional environmental documentation plan, if one exists.

- Identify the records or the kinds of records that you are considering for documentation. If your organization generates records, this means selecting the records likely to have historical value (See “What Is Documentation?”) If your organization collects records, this could mean conducting a survey of environmental records in your area.
- Compare the topics, events, and issues addressed by the records — or by the organizations or individuals generating the records — with the themes outlined in this guide. If there is a strong match:
- Evaluate the records and topics according to the Criteria for Statewide Priorities (page 16) to determine whether the collection and accessibility of the proposed records is likely to be a statewide priority.

Sources of Assistance and Funding

The New York State Archives

The State Archives staff are available to help you think through each of the steps in the documentation process, whether or not you intend to apply to the State Archives for funding. We strongly urge you to take advantage of these resources!

Records Management The New York State Archives offers a range of resources and assistance to governments that would like to establish or improve records management programs, including publications, workshops, and grants from the Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund. The Archives also has a Regional Advisory Officer in each of the state's nine regions who can provide advice and consultation to local governments. See the State Archives web site (www.archives.nysed.gov, click on Records Management) or the contact information at the end of this guide.

Documentation The State Archives offers a range of programs and services to non-profit organizations for projects that will result in making archival records secure and accessible to the public for research. These include publications, documentation workshops, and grants from the Documentary Heritage Program (DHP). There are also DHP archivists in several regions who can provide free advice and consultation to non-profit organizations interested in documentation. The DHP also awards grants up to \$25,000 for:

- Projects to identify, survey, and plan for the systematic collection of records relating to under-documented subjects, institutions, or activities.
- Projects to arrange and describe historical records
- Projects to evaluate and plan for archival program development

Environmental affairs is one of the priority subject areas for funding in the 2000-2003 funding cycles. These resources are described in detail on the State Archives web site (www.archives.nysed.gov) or see the contact information for the State Archives at the end of this guide.

Other sources

For large statewide documentation projects, two federal government sources to consider are the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (www.nara.gov/nhprc/) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (www.neh.gov). The State Archives publishes a guide to funding sources for archives.

Using this guide as a fund raising tool

This guide makes a case for the importance of documenting environmental affairs, and it presents a researched approach to determining priorities for documentation that is based on extensive input from people very knowledgeable and experienced in the field statewide. It is designed to stimulate and educate funders, as well as repositories and records creators, as to the importance of documentation in this critical area. The guide may help convince funding sources

to apply some of their resources to environmental affairs documentation, and to particular projects that meet the criteria for statewide priority set forth below.

Conclusion

This guide identifies some of the most critical priorities that must be addressed to ensure a more complete and balanced documentation of environmental affairs in New York, and it offers a method for determining whether potential topics should be considered priorities for documentation. Some of the responsibilities for accomplishing this work fall to the New York State Archives. Many, however, are the responsibility of others. These include statewide and regional archives, historical societies, museums, and libraries whose missions and service areas encompass environmental issues and organizations engaged in environmental affairs. They also include organizations that create records themselves in the process of their work in environmental affairs.

We encourage organizations, individuals, and groups to become involved in this effort to redress a serious gap in New York's historical record. The need is great, the benefits are substantial, and the issues are compelling.

We welcome your comments, suggestions, or proposals for how to accomplish the goals in this guide. For further information on how you can assist in this effort, or if you have questions about the guide, please contact:

The New York State Historical Records Advisory Board

Or

The New York State Archives

Suite 9D46 Cultural Education Center
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Appendix A: Priority Subject Areas for Documentation

Themes

To be considered priorities for documentation, topics should fall within one or more of these themes AND meet criteria for statewide impact and significance (see page 16). Possible subtopics recommended for documentation include—but are not limited to—those listed under each theme.

Land Use

This broad category covers all the ways land is used and the related policies and practices that govern land use. Many land use decisions do not necessarily have important environmental dimensions (for example, set-back requirements for urban buildings), and most are based on a range of considerations, such as economic development, infrastructure requirements, and so on. However, the environmental implications of land use decisions are often significant, and since 1975 most have been subject to environmental regulation or review. While land use questions are inherently local, the aggregate effects of thousands of local decisions are often profound — farmland preservation or loss, reforestation or deforestation, urban-suburban sprawl, pollution of soil, water, and air. Land use was considered a top priority for documentation by every group consulted on this project. Some land use issues, such as the establishment of the state park system, are statewide in their impact and should be documented. Some local issues or events may have been precedent-setting or otherwise have statewide significance. Finally, for broad issues such as the examples listed below, it is important from a statewide perspective to document representative cases from different regions or that raise distinctive issues.

- Parks, open space, greenways
- Forest and farmland preservation
- Brownfield reclamation
- Mined land permitting and reclamation
- Urban and suburban development/sprawl

Lakes, Rivers, Coastal Zones, and Wetlands

This category overlaps significantly with land use, and the same principles apply, but it focuses on use issues in the areas where land and water meet.

- Wild and scenic rivers and lakes
- Public navigation of rivers
- Fisheries
- Coastal zone/waterfront reclamation and management

Water — Quantity/Quality/Pollution

Water is ubiquitous in New York, in its lakes, reservoirs, ponds, rivers, streams, and wetlands; in the lakes, harbors, and oceans of its coastlines; and in the ground. Human use of water for drinking, irrigation, transportation, recreation, power, cooling, the transport of waste, and other functions in ways that preserve its quality, quantity, beauty, and the ecosystems it supports and of which it is a part has proven a formidable challenge. Important topics for documentation

include but aren't limited to: the development of regional and statewide systems or approaches to water supply, waste water treatment, pollution prevention or amelioration, and the like; and particular water-related issues or events that have statewide significance.

- Drinking water quantity and quality
- Pollution of ground and surface water
- Agricultural pollutants — fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, animal waste
- Watershed management
- Sewage treatment
- Infrastructure: dams, canals, tunnels

Air Quality/Pollution

Wind and the circulation of air make air quality and pollution an interstate and international as well as a statewide issue for New York. It can also be an important local and regional issue in metropolitan areas. Much of the activity in New York in recent years has been centered around obtaining passage or battling over enforcement of clean air laws, statewide and in metropolitan areas, beginning with the Federal Clean Air Act of 1970. While the laws and regulations themselves are documented, the citizen activism, responses to it, pro and con, and the background to litigation are potential areas for important documentation.

- Point-source pollution (power plants, etc)
- Non-point-source (automotive emissions, etc.)
- Acid precipitation

Energy

Most of the energy-related environmental activity in New York has been centered around opposition to nuclear power plants at Indian Point and elsewhere on the Hudson River, Shoreham on Long Island, Milliken Station on Cayuga Lake, and on Lake Ontario, and the siting and environmental impacts of conventional power plants, particularly along the Hudson River. In 2001, in response to the threat of electric power shortages in the New York metropolitan region, new power plants are being proposed for the first time in decades. Most of these proposals are the subject of ongoing political and legal controversy. Meanwhile, renewable and alternative energy development research and business are growing in New York and are largely undocumented.

- Nuclear power
- Power plant, transmission line, gas line sitings
- Renewable energy development

Solid and Hazardous Waste Disposal

Landfill and incinerator controversies are inherently local or regional, but they have been significant statewide. The low level radioactive waste storage and disposal siting issue in the mid-1990s provoked controversy throughout Upstate New York, especially in the five communities that were being considered as sites. The growth of recycling in New York has involved local government curbside pick-up and transfer facilities, implementation of the still-controversial bottle bill, establishment of recycling businesses and business associations, and the engagement of non-profit organizations throughout the state. Closing in 2002 of the Fresh Kills Landfill in Staten Island, the largest landfill in the world, is an especially significant event,

forcing New York City to export all its solid waste. The City is now in the midst of controversies over the siting of transfer stations to process the waste for export. In upstate New York battles continue over the siting of new landfills to receive this waste, particularly in the western region, which already has by far the highest concentration of landfills in the state.

- Land fill siting, battles, closures
- Incinerator controversies
- Low level radioactive waste disposal
- Recycling

Toxics

Toxic chemical wastes have been a byproduct of industry throughout the twentieth century, and until the 1970s, they were usually discharged indiscriminately into the air, water, and soil, particularly before their dangers to the environment and public health were known. As deindustrialization spread across New York, the state was left with a multi-billion-dollar cleanup problem. The current efforts to stimulate and regulate the reclamation of “brownfields,” often located in poor, waterfront neighborhoods or former industrial sites, for economic and community development is the most recent chapter of this ongoing story. Assessing the degree of danger and damage to the environment and public health from toxic and persistent pollution, assigning responsibility for the costs and work of cleanup, raising the money, and getting the work done have been contentious processes. They have engaged state and local legislatures, state agencies (especially the DEC and the Department of Health), citizen groups from ad hoc grassroots organizations to statewide and national ones, industrial companies, and myriad environmental businesses that have developed the technologies for pollution control, containment and cleanup and have been responsible for carrying out the work. While significant parts of the history are documented in the relevant state agencies, the work of citizen and non-profit groups, corporations, and environmental businesses is severely underdocumented.

- Pesticides, Love Canal, PCBs (see Events/Issues, page 33)
- Lead in fuels and paint
- Phosphorus in detergents
- Industrial pollutants, brownfields, Superfund

Biodiversity

This topic area covers the full range of human impact on the ecosystems of New York and the plants and animals that inhabit them. Fish and wildlife management has been the responsibility of state government (currently the DEC) for most of the twentieth century. Biodiversity in particular regions is adversely affected by habitat loss or destruction, invasive species, and by pollutants such as acid precipitation and PCBs (covered under other thematic headings). Bioengineering as a potential environmental and public health threat is an emerging issue in New York and nationwide; it may come to merit statewide documentation in the near future, depending on developments in New York.

- Fish and wildlife management
- Endangered species protection
- Habitat loss and protection
- Invasive species
- Bioengineering in food and agriculture

Outdoor Recreation

Since the nineteenth century outdoor recreation has been one of the forces that has brought people into the wild and scenic areas of the state and stimulated interest in their conservation and preservation; it has also been an important source of impact on the environment in these areas. Recreation groups and other environmental groups have sometimes been on the same side of environmental issues, sometimes on different sides, as policy makers seek to balance access and use of natural areas against the need to protect them from overuse. Providing access to wild and scenic areas for people with disabilities is another dimension of this issue. While the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation develop and administer the regulations in this area and maintain a documentary record of its activities, the many sporting clubs, environmental organizations and businesses related to these issues are generally not well documented.

Hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, birding, skiing, snowmobiling, boating, and the use of other motorized vehicles, etc.

Related land acquisition, trail and water access development

Public Health

Concerns about the impacts of pollution and other environmental factors on human health, both proven and unproven, are profound and have stimulated much of the urgency and activity in environmental affairs in recent years. Sources of contamination have included pollution of the air, water, and soil, and toxic materials in schools, workplaces, and residences. Scientific research, legislation and regulation, amelioration, public education, citizen action through organizations, and the development and implementation of technologies for prevention and remediation have been significant aspects of the public health dimension of environmental affairs. Below is a partial list of public health issues related to environmental factors.

Asthma and other respiratory disease

Neurological disorders

Lead and mercury poisoning

Asbestos

Carcinogenic chemicals

Radon

Genetically engineered foods

Environmental Justice

Environmental justice refers to efforts to redress the disproportionate impact of environmental issues and policies on communities of color and low-income communities. Organized efforts to promote environmental justice under this rubric are concentrated in urban areas, but efforts by low-income rural communities to oppose the siting of solid and hazardous waste facilities in their communities are also relevant to this topic area.

Solid waste, hazardous waste: siting of landfills, transfer stations, and other facilities, urban and rural

Air and water pollution: concentration of polluting industries and transportation in low-income communities

Concentrations of lead, pesticides, other pollutants, and brownfields in low-income communities

Development and Implementation of Environmental Laws and Regulations

Environmental affairs in New York since the 1970s have been shaped in large part by the federal, state, and local laws and regulations designed to prevent further environmental damage and ameliorate the effects of existing damage. New York environmental law has in many cases set national and international precedents. New York State enacted the first "forever wild" wilderness area designation for protected lands in the world, with Article 14 of the NYS Constitution (1894). It inspired the federal Wilderness Act (1965) and such legislation in other nations. New York was the first state to codify the conservation law and the first to set up a sustained law enforcement system (original fish & wildlife officers and forest rangers). New York set up the first state park system in the nation and enacted the first statutory greenway law.

While the laws and regulations themselves are generally well documented, the processes that led to their passage are usually not. The work of citizen and corporate advocacy and action groups, the background to litigation, records of public hearings and other data-gathering mechanisms leading to policy decisions are often absent from the historical record. Similarly, non-governmental organizations involved with the sometimes controversial implementation of policy and regulation are usually poorly represented in the historical record.

- Phosphorus Detergent Ban 1971
- Environmental Quality Bond Act 1972, 1986, and subsequent bond acts
- State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR) 1975
- Tidal Wetlands Act and Fresh Water Wetlands Act 1973, 1975
- State Superfund law 1982
- Conservation Easement Act 1983
- Returnable Container Law (bottle bill) 1983
- State Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (SPDES) 1972
- Establishment of authorities
- Local laws and regulations
- Relationship between federal and state legislation and regulation
- Legislative and executive environmental committees, commissions
- Permitting, enforcement

Science and Technology

Scientific research and the development of new technologies have been part of the foundation for both the understanding of environmental issues (e.g., development of the ability to measure chemicals in water, air, and soil in ever smaller concentrations) and the implementation of policies and regulations (e.g., development of the PCV valve that regulates auto emissions, a joint project of DEC and a private company). Scientific studies have often provided important data for environmental impact statements, data that may be permanently valuable independent of its use in the EIS. Competing interpretations of scientific research and technology are often at the heart of environmental controversies, as is the case with genetically engineered food. Where research data have been summarized in a report, in some cases the summary may include adequate detail, and the original data may be destroyed; in others, the raw data or a more detailed summary should be kept permanently.

- Research that establishes environmental baselines, measures environmental change, or assesses environmental conditions

Research and development of technologies for environmental amelioration (pollution control, waste treatment or containment, etc.)

Environmental Litigation

Beginning with the 1965 Storm King Mountain lawsuit, which established the right of citizens to sue on environmental grounds, litigation has been an extremely important force in environmental affairs in New York, and environmental law has become a major branch of the legal profession. Some lawsuits have formed the legal basis for subsequent law, and litigation has been a central mechanism for enforcement of existing environmental law. Several non-profit organizations formed to take legal action on issues in New York went on to become national and international organizations with hundreds of thousands of members. Environmental Defense and the Natural Resources Defense Council are two of the most prominent.

Although official court documents are kept and most are in the public domain, many of the files and documents that reveal the thinking, arguments, and strategies behind litigation are in the offices (or warehouses) of the parties or their lawyers. Many are subject to attorney-client privilege, but others could be collected and become part of the documentary record. Below is a list of some of the most significant lawsuits that have set legal precedents, clarified important issues, or had major and lasting impact on environmental affairs.

Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks v. McDonald (Enforced "forever wild" provisions of the NYS Constitution, enjoining the construction of a bobsled run on state land that had been proposed for the 1932 Winter Olympics, 1930.)

Scenic Hudson Preservation Conference v. Federal Power Commission. (Storm King Mountain case, which established the right of citizens to sue on environmental grounds, 1965-1980.)

Hudson River Fishermen's Association v. various polluters (First cases to systematically use federal courts to stop polluters, first under the 1899 Refuse Act, later under the Clean Water Act; some cases were filed by HRFA, some by the U.S. Attorney's Office based on evidence provided by the HRFA., 1970-1972.)

The Westway Highway litigation (Manhattan, long-standing fight to protect access to the Hudson, 1972-1985.)

Friends of the Earth v Carey (Three early cases enforcing the State Air Quality Implementation Plan, 1974-1977.)

Mohonk Trust v. Board of Assessors of the Town of Gardiner (The State Court of Appeals ruled that the maintenance by private not-for-profit organizations of conservation and wilderness areas open for public use qualified as a charitable use and thus are entitled to exemption from local real estate taxation, 1979.)

Love Canal cases (1979-1992)

Long Island Pine Barrens Society v. Town of Brookhaven (Concerning cumulative impact review under SEQRA, 1992.)

Citizen Action through Organizations and Government

The environmental laws of the 1970s grew out of the efforts of determined groups of citizens — lawyers; advocacy, protest, and lobbying groups; and fund-raisers, and in subsequent decades, these same kinds of organizations pushed for enforcement of the laws locally, regionally, and

statewide. Other groups and organizations have delivered environmental education to children and adults in schools, parks, and nature centers. Land trusts, New York chapters of national organizations, and other New York State organizations have protected or restored thousands of acres of land, wetlands, and rivers. Ad hoc groups have formed to address a single issue, such as the building of a nuclear power plant, then disbanded once the issue was resolved; some such groups have shed their ad hoc status, embracing other issues and becoming established organizations locally, statewide, or even nationally. Outdoor sports and recreation organizations have done everything from activism and advocacy around policy issues to maintaining wilderness trails to educating their members in environmental stewardship. In the face of environmental initiatives that appear to threaten the property rights, economic wellbeing, cultural values, or ways of life of people or communities, organizations have arisen to oppose environmental regulations or policies, and existing organizations with broader missions have added these issues to their agendas.

It is not possible or necessary to document all the organizations that have engaged in environmental affairs over the years, but the historical record should include documentation of the organizations that meet the criteria for statewide priority (page 16) and representative organizations with local or regional significance that in the aggregate will give a picture of the history of environmental affairs as a whole in New York. Currently, with some notable exceptions, the documentation of organizations (groups and non-profits) is very weak.

- Growth of the citizen environmental movement
- New York roots and activities of national environmental organizations
- Environmental organizations that operate statewide or whose activities have had statewide impact or influence
- Exemplary organizations of local or regional significance that are representative of local organizations with similar interests statewide
- Environmental Management Councils, Conservation Advisory Committees, and related statewide umbrella organizations
- Citizen groups and organizations opposed to environmental organizations, proposals, policies

Roles of Business and Corporations

Businesses and corporations have played varied and important roles in environmental affairs over the years. They have helped shape environmental policy. Large and small, they have been among the principal focal points of environmental laws and regulations governing pollution, energy production and use, and land use. They have also been parties to key litigation in these same areas, often regarding regulatory interpretation and compliance. Business has often been in partnership with government to research and develop the methods and technologies for implementing environmental regulations (e.g., toxic waste clean-up and toxic emissions control), and an entire branch of industry has sprouted to provide environmental research, design, engineering, manufacturing, waste removal, recycling, and so on. The manufacture, marketing, distribution, and retailing of “environmentally friendly” or “green” products has grown rapidly; New York is leading in the development of “green” building, and organic farming practices are increasing in New York State.

This broad array of business involvement with environmental affairs is poorly represented in the documentary record. In addition to the issues of time, resources, and interest, which business shares with the non-profit sector, two additional factors limit the willingness of many businesses to make records publicly accessible: fear of aiding competition or incurring litigation.

Nevertheless, many businesses have an interest — often not yet recognized — in leaving a documentary legacy that represents their case and their roles in environmental affairs as they would like to see them recorded. This may be particularly true for businesses that have successfully and profitably incorporated environmentally friendly policies and programs into their business practices. Successful documentation of the business sector has occurred in other states (Minnesota is a particularly good example), and it should be part of a comprehensive approach to documentation of environmental affairs in New York.

- Regulatory compliance or non-compliance
- Corporate opposition to environmental regulation or policy
- “Green” business practices, environmental initiatives
- Business organizations or associations that address environmental issues
- Environmental businesses
 - Organic farming
 - Consulting, engineering, manufacturing, waste removal, retail, etc.
 - Partnerships with government

Environmental Education and Technical Assistance

Public understanding of environmental affairs has been furthered over the years by programs and activities in environmental education offered in many formats and organizational settings and for audiences of all ages and backgrounds. Individuals who have become leaders in environmental affairs may trace their initial interest and knowledge to such programs. Once commonly known as “nature studies,” the topic has broadened enormously. For the purposes of this guide, environmental education focuses on those topics that deal with humans’ relationship with and impact upon the environment, not on the study of biology, zoology, or natural history independent of the human connection. (See What do we mean by Environmental Affairs, page 13). A related function has been technical assistance provided by state government agencies to local governments addressing environmental issues. This theme encompasses, but is not limited to, the following:

- Environmental education organizations such as nature centers
- Environmental education programs of museums, zoos, and other organizations
- Environmental education programs in state parks, environmental centers and other government sites
- Environmental education programs and courses in primary and secondary schools
- Environmental education programs, centers, and courses in higher education
- Technical assistance programs in environmental affairs

Funding, Public and Private, of Environmental Affairs

The engine of environmental affairs is fueled by the commitment, energy and action of people and by money. How, from whom, and why money has been allocated to support or oppose environmental activities constitutes an important part of the history of environmental affairs in New York.

Documentation of government funding as revealed in approved budgets is publicly available, and the grant guidelines and lists of projects funded by government agencies are usually published. Similarly the guidelines and grants lists from major corporations and foundations are usually published. However, the record of how and why allocation decisions were made is largely absent.

State and local government funding of environmental agencies and programs
Foundation and corporate support of non-profit organizations
Individual support, both large contributions and small to organizations engaged in environmental affairs.

Events/Issues

The following six events and issues are given top priority because of their enormous statewide impact, their engagement of multiple facets of environmental affairs, their long duration, and/or their national significance. Other events and issues that meet the thematic and statewide-significance criteria can also be considered priorities for documentation.

Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves and Adirondack Park (1885 —)

The creation of the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves in 1885 was the first big milestone in a long and contentious struggle over the fate of New York's forests that had begun about thirty years earlier and continues to this day. Should the forests be a short term resource to be exploited at will until they are used up, "factories of wood" conserved and scientifically managed for maximum sustainable yield, or lands preserved and kept "forever wild" for recreation and their intrinsic value as wilderness? What impacts would forest policies have on the state's and regions' economies, on the state's watersheds, on the lives and wellbeing and rights of people living and working there? The issues broadened to include concern about impacts on rivers and lakes and the full range of ecosystems in the forest regions. The changing understandings of and answers to these and related questions over the years have shaped the history of vast tracts of New York lands, public and private, both within the preserves and throughout the state; they have both created solutions unique to New York State and set precedents for national policy and emulation by other states.

Creation of the preserves and parks, "forever wild" clause in NYS Constitution 1885-94
Panther Mt./Moose River dams battle 1945-55
Creation of Adirondack Park Agency 1971
Ongoing controversies over land use

New York City/Croton/Catskills/Delaware water supply system (1905 —)

In 1905, New York City needed more drinking water than its Croton reservoirs in Westchester County could hold. It spent massive sums to create a huge system of reservoirs and tunnels beginning in the Catskills, and in the process forced hundreds of residents off their land, submerging entire villages. When the tunnels were filled in 1927, the City had a permanent reason to further restrict growth in the huge region that gave it pure water. That region expanded enormously upon completion of the Delaware watershed system in 1967. The new Tunnel #3

from Croton to NYC, the largest engineering project in the City's history, is still under construction. In an effort to avoid building expensive filtration plants for New York City water following new EPA regulations in 1989, the City negotiated with Catskills towns, villages, and organizations for six years before reaching a voluntary agreement to adopt measures that would protect the reservoirs from agricultural runoff and other pollutants while preserving the agricultural economy and ways of life in the region. The implementation of these agreements has led to ongoing controversies over land development proposals. Throughout the 20th century, the complex and far-reaching environmental, social, political, economic, scientific, and engineering issues inherent in this massive system have engaged government at all levels and hundreds of citizen groups and non-profit organizations.

Construction of the Catskills-NYC system of reservoirs and tunnels, 1905-27

Construction of the Delaware-NYC system of reservoirs and tunnels, 1936-67

Construction of the Croton-NYC Tunnel #3 1970 —

EPA drinking water rules requiring filtration or watershed protection, 1989

Watershed Memorandum of Agreement 1996

Robert Moses: Shaping New York's Landscape (1924-1968)

Robert Moses probably did more than any other single person to change the landscape of New York in the twentieth century. Between 1924 and 1968, he headed dozens of appointed commissions and authorities that built power plants, dams, bridges, and highways; changed the courses of the St. Lawrence and Niagara Rivers; filled in thousands of acres of marshland around New York City and filled the new lands with houses and roads; created 27,000 acres of parks in New York City and Long Island alone. As executive director of the State Council of Parks he greatly expanded and rebuilt the state park system and built parkways to provide easy access to them.

State and New York City Park Systems

State Power Authority and other authorities

NYC transportation infrastructure (bridges, parkways, tunnels)

Hudson River (1900—)

The Hudson River has been the locus for some of the most important environmental issues of the 20th century in New York, spawning landmark laws, lawsuits, and organizations large and small. The effort to save the Palisades from limestone quarrying led to the creation of Palisades Interstate Park System in 1900. In 1947 General Electric began dumping PCBs and other chemicals into the river, joining a host of other factories and municipalities that discharged all manner of chemicals and sewage there. Over the years, the river grew increasingly polluted, its fisheries destroyed, its scenic majesty threatened, its waters a danger to humans and other living things. In 1965, a group of citizens and lawyers brought suit against the Federal Power Commission to stop the proposed Storm King Mountain pumped water storage project. The group won the suit, establishing for the first time anywhere the right of citizens to sue a utility on environmental grounds. The suit was argued and won mainly on the basis of threats to the scenic beauty of the area, but the focus soon shifted to the deleterious impact of such projects on the river itself. Lawyers from that case went on to found the Natural Resources Defense Council; three major local environmental organizations, Scenic Hudson, Riverkeeper, and Clearwater, emerged and continue to thrive thirty years later. Construction of the Indian Point nuclear power

plant and proposals for numerous other power facilities along the river generated intense citizen opposition, both to nuclear power in general and to the building of more power plants along the river. The current controversy about whether to dredge the PCBs from the river bottom is but the latest chapter in the saga of the Hudson River and the environment.

- Army Corps of Engineers dredging
- Industrial pollution (including PCBs)
- Storm King Mountain pumped water storage project,
- Power plant sitings
- Wastewater treatment plants, making the river safe for swimming

Pesticides (1962 —)

The dangers of pesticides to beings other than pests was first brought to national attention by Rachel Carson in the *New Yorker* and later in her book, *Silent Spring*. In 1966, a small group on Long Island brought suit to stop the use of DDT to control mosquitoes in Suffolk County, aided by a handful of lawyers and scientists. Their small victory attracted national attention and requests for help, leading them to form the Environmental Defense Fund. Its efforts led to the statewide ban of DDT in 1971 and a federal ban in 1972. Other pesticides came under state control in subsequent years. Meanwhile researchers at Cornell University and elsewhere began looking for less toxic ways to control pests and for ways to restore wildlife populations that had been damaged by DDT. One result was the beginning of organic farming in New York. Pesticides remain a potent and ubiquitous environmental and public health issue, their use contested in agriculture, on suburban lawns, and in urban apartment buildings.

- National Audubon Society opposition to DDT, support of wildlife population restoration
- Long Island case against DDT leads to founding of Environmental Defense Fund
- Banning of DDT and 29 other toxic and persistent pesticides in NYS in 1971, federal ban in 1972.

Love Canal (1942 —)

On August 10, 1977, *Niagara Falls Gazette* reporter Michael Brown published the first front-page story about Love Canal, a working-class neighborhood where slimy black ooze of toxic chemicals from an abandoned industrial dump was coming back to the surface and seeping through basement walls. Benzene and other toxic chemicals from a Hooker Chemical plant, which had been deposited there beginning in 1942, seemed to be causing a high incidence of miscarriages, leukemia, and childhood diseases. Citizens organizations formed in response to the crisis. They helped shape the debate and pressured government to act. The DEC and the State Department of Health became deeply involved in and tested by the controversy, as did the federal Environmental Protection Agency. The issue drew national attention, and Lois Gibbs, a determined young woman in the neighborhood, rose to national prominence as a leader and symbol of the power of citizen action. The issue played out over the next decade in the state, national, and international news, attracting journalists from around the world and becoming a leading story in many countries. It has had a broad and lasting statewide and national impact. It led to the first statewide survey of toxic waste sites and to the establishment of the State Superfund hazardous waste cleanup program, which became a model for the federal Superfund. It gave rise to a revolution in the chemical industry, most of whose companies undertook major changes in the ways they bought, stored, used, and disposed of chemicals. It stimulated citizen

action in New York and elsewhere, and it dramatically raised public awareness of hazardous waste issues. Clean-up and remediation agreements, controversies, and other ramifications from the issue continue to this day.

Organizations/Agencies

Two government agencies are singled out here as priorities for documentation. The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is a priority because of its extraordinary impact statewide, the range of its activities, and because it holds voluminous records, such as environmental impact statements, that contain valuable scientific data and public policy information from every part of the state. The range of predecessor agencies that carried out many of DEC's functions before its creation in 1970 are also a significant part of this topic area, as are entities such as the State Department of Health and the Environmental Protection Bureau of the Office of the Attorney General.

The State Archives works closely with the DEC to appraise and schedule its records, transferring to the Archives those deemed permanently valuable. (This means that in most cases, communications received by other organizations and businesses from the DEC are unlikely to be historically valuable, unless they document important aspects of the organization's relationship with DEC.)

The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) performs similar functions for the city. Because it addresses environmental issues that directly affect nearly half the state's population, and parts of the infrastructure it controls (principally the water supply system) extend across broad areas of the state, it is an important priority for statewide documentation. The DEP has its own archives and is in the process of appraising its records agency-wide to determine which have permanent historical value and should be transferred to the archives.

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and predecessors
New York City Department of Environmental Protection

Appendix B: Regional and Local Documentation Planning

This guide is statewide in scope, and the criteria it establishes for high priority documentation are based on statewide significance (see “Setting Statewide Priorities” and “Criteria for Statewide Priorities” later in this guide). Furthermore, this is not a statewide “plan” that would attempt to say exactly what topics to document in what order; rather, it is a tool to enable people to make informed decisions about what is important to document and how to go about it, based on the statewide significance of the topic.

The limitations imposed by the criteria of a statewide approach draw attention to the critical importance of environmental documentation planning at the regional level. There are numerous topics that may not merit inclusion in a statewide approach to planning but are of great importance regionally or locally and belong in the historical record of environmental affairs of New York State. For example, a county in the Finger Lakes region is home to an internationally known co-housing community that does pioneering work in developing ecologically sustainable community and environmental education. It would probably not meet the criteria for statewide priority at this stage of its development, but it is very significant in the region and locally, and it could well figure prominently in a local or regional plan.

The regional meetings that provided much of the data for the statewide guide revealed distinctive interests and concerns for documentation shaped by regional geography, history, issues, and organizations. For example, at the North Country meeting, there was strong emphasis on land use and biodiversity issues, while the Western New York meeting concentrated more on toxics, soil and water pollution, and solid waste management.

It is the intent and hope of the State Archives that the statewide guide and its methodology will be used in each region of the state to generate more explicit and detailed regional documentation plans with priorities and topics selected for documentation that reflect the specific needs and interests of the region. Therefore, this guide does not establish regional priorities. Summaries of the issues raised in each of the regional meetings are available from the State Archives.

Adapting this statewide guide for regional or local documentation planning

The approach we have used in developing this statewide guide is designed to work also for regional or local planning. A major research library or cultural institution that serves a large region could use it as a guide both to *method* and to *content* in developing a regional plan. Similarly, a county historical society or science museum, for example, could adapt this guide’s approach to documenting environmental affairs in its county.

- **Method** (Described and summarized in a table in **Appendix A: How this guide was developed**. The numbered steps described below are listed in the table, page 40.) The heart of the method is participation in the planning process by a wide range of people active in environmental affairs. It should not be necessary to go through steps 1 and 2 of the method completely (defining environmental affairs and its boundaries and determining the documentary universe), because those have been done in this guide (see Content below); however, it may be necessary to review and perhaps add to the this guide’s list of themes based on the history of a particular region. It will be important to prioritize topics for documentation (step 3), assess existing documentation in relation to the priorities (step 4),

identify and prioritize actions to be taken (step 5), and prepare and distribute the plan (step 6). The criteria used in this guide for determining statewide priorities (page 16) can be used in two ways to guide prioritization at the regional or local level:

1. Local or regional topics or events/issues that meet the criteria for statewide documentation should become local or regional priorities as well, for they will be contributing to filling statewide documentation gaps;
 2. Potential topics for documentation can also be evaluated using the criteria as applied to the region or locality. For example, has the topic “had major impact or influence” *region-wide or locally?*
- **Content** This statewide guide provides a framework for thinking about the range of topics in environmental affairs in New York. The list of *Themes* and *Events/Issues* below should be used for regional/local documentation planning in conjunction with the criteria. (See “What To Document in Environmental Affairs” later in the guide.)

The Archival Services staff at the New York State Archives can help people who are contemplating a regional or local environmental affairs documentation project to think through the project and its relationship to the statewide guide. They can also provide guidance in seeking grant funding for documentation through the Documentary Heritage Program. (See Sources of Funding and Assistance below and the contact information on the last page.)

Appendix C: How the guide was developed — Documentation planning method

The subject of environmental affairs is vast and multi-faceted, and potential topics for documentation are numerous and could be organized in many different ways.

At the heart of the guide is the understanding that different organizations and groups—governments, businesses, non-profit and community organizations, ethnic groups, and individuals— and different regions of the state have very different perspectives on environmental issues and different ways of thinking about and documenting their activities. No single group of archivists, scholars, or other experts could be expected to fairly represent the diversity of the state in establishing statewide priorities for documentation.

Therefore, the State Archives worked with people from many regions and many sectors of the community concerned with the environment—the people who create, care for, use, and are the subjects of historical records—to identify the issues, topics, events, organizations, and people that are most important to document in New York.

The method used to create the guide included the following steps:

- **Conducting background research** to identify critical developments, trends, events, functions, legislation, individuals, and organizations in New York’s history of environmental affairs. The results of the research are summarized in the sixty-page report, “Environmental Affairs in New York State: A Historical Outline.”
- **Defining topics/subtopics** for potential documentation emphasis within the area of environmental affairs through dialogue with subject experts and individuals active in different facets of the field.
- **Identifying existing documentation** to determine what historical records already exist for New York’s environmental affairs in archives, libraries, and other repositories. A summary of the documentation assessment is provided in the "Preliminary Guide to Environmental Documentary Sources in New York State."
- **Consulting with the field** for advice on identifying the major environmental issues, establishing priorities for documentation, and locating important collections that might be in danger of being lost or destroyed. The process included numerous meetings and telephone conversations with individuals and a series of eight regional meetings of eight to twelve people each, with representation from state and local government, non-profit organizations and activists, business, higher education and journalism, and repositories such as libraries and historical societies.
- **Determining priority documentation needs** by comparing existing documentation with the topic areas considered most important by people in the field and identifying the critical gaps in the historical record.

Documentation Planning Methodology — Table

The following table summarizes the method used to develop this guide. Although the steps outlined below follow a logical sequence, they do not take place in strict chronological order. Several run concurrently, and the results of “earlier” steps are often revised on the basis of information gathered in “later” ones. This methodology is intended to be applicable to documentation planning in any topic area.

Documentation Planning Methodology
<p>Step 1. Define documentation topic and determine its parameters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Draft definition of the documentation topic and its parameters — the boundaries of the topic. - Consult with subject experts, researchers, and records creators to develop and validate definition.
<p>Step 2. Conduct background research to determine documentary universe.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify significant developments, trends, events, functions, legislation, individuals, and organizations within defined parameters. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepare historical overview of topic from secondary sources - Conduct preliminary online search of existing documentation - Consult with subject experts, researchers, and records creators for additional information and validation and on how to organize and subdivide the topic. (Use individual meetings, focus groups, email and phone as appropriate.) - Develop a list of topics and subtopics that need to be documented.
<p>Step 3. Prioritize topics/subtopics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish a project advisory group to provide formal advice on project progress. - Define criteria and method for prioritizing topics and subtopics. - Define documentation levels from minimal to extensive collecting - Prioritize topics/subtopics according to criteria. Identify documentation levels for the topics/subtopics. - Consult with subject experts, researchers, and records creators to refine and validate priorities.
<p>Step 4. Assess existing documentation in relation to priorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compare existing documentation with priority topics and subtopics to identify documentation needs - Define and identify documentation gaps and the levels of documentation needed to address them. - Publish initial findings and solicit additions and corrections from readers
<p>Step 5. Identify and prioritize actions needed to address documentation needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify the most important steps to be taken, who should be involved, and how to begin implementation. - Identify records creators and repositories as potential partners in action. - Plan short- and long-term actions to address gaps in the documentary record. - Take immediate action to save selected important and endangered records.
<p>Step 6. Prepare and distribute documentation plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Draft plan identifying priority areas for documentation, extent of documentation, key individuals/groups to be documented, potential partners, and actions needed to achieve documentation goals. - Review plan with key contacts, including records creators, repositories, and users, to validate conclusions. - Distribute and publicize the plan widely, particularly among constituent groups.

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