NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY™ | **Climate Smart Communities**

PE6 Action: Natural Resources Inventory

8 Points **10 Points** 🏅 BRONZE PRIORITY 🏅 SILVER PRIORITY

A. Why is this action important?

A natural resources inventory (NRI) is a document that inventories the natural resources of an area, both physical (e.g., geology) and biological (e.g., forests), and provides a foundation for municipal land-use and conservation planning. Communities can use their NRIs to identify priorities and determine appropriate strategies for protecting important natural features and the vital services they provide. A complete and up-to-date inventory can be helpful for communities updating municipal plans, developing ordinances or overlay zones, and reviewing development projects, as well as a tool for county or regional planning and project assessment. Maintaining the integrity and ecological health of natural areas is a key part of preventing the release of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that is associated with development. In addition, certain natural, undeveloped areas serve as a buffer against some types of extreme weather that are increasing with climate change; for example, wetlands often have the capacity to absorb floodwaters and, as a result, they help prevent flood damage to infrastructure in developed areas.

B. How to implement this action

Developing an NRI can be part of an existing effort, such as the development of a comprehensive or open space plan, or it can be a standalone project. Project leaders should work with the public and stakeholders to collect input and feedback.

When implementing this action, local governments should closely follow the process and report components described in the DEC's comprehensive guide: _Creating a Natural Resources Inventory: A Guide for Communities in the Hudson River Estuary Watershed_. This guide focuses on the Hudson River watershed but the process it describes is applicable to any region. Although the guide includes information on doing on detailed inventory studies, it is not necessary to complete a highly detailed inventory in order to be eligible for points under this Climate Smart Communities (CSC) action, although communities are encouraged to do so. It is required, however, that the NRI cover the entire community. In other words, a local government cannot earn points for an NRI that, for example, only covers one watershed within the physical boundaries of its community. Applicants are encouraged to collaborate with neighboring communities to develop NRIs that cross political boundaries and that are consistent with the overlapping and interconnected characteristics of most natural resources. For collaborative, regional NRIs, each local government that was involved is eligible for CSC points, as long as each applicant demonstrates that it had a substantial role in creating the NRI.

At minimum, for CSC points, the NRI report should include a descriptive summary of each map that is created as part of the NRI process. The narrative should describe each of the resources shown, discuss relevant aspects of resource distribution throughout the study area, draw attention to significant areas of resource concentration or concern, and discuss any major or emerging threats to the resource. The NRI report must also include a short summary of the process that was used to create the inventory (e.g., information on stakeholder outreach and public input, how information was obtained, etc.); this information should show that the process was consistent with the DEC guide. In addition, the NRI report must have been completed within 10 years of the application date to be eligible for CSC points.

C. Timeframe, project costs, and resource needs

It should take 12-18 months to develop a basic NRI that pulls together key information. Hiring a consultant to develop maps and text for a basic natural resources inventory typically costs under $25,000, though it depends on the scope of the NRI. Local governments that want to collect new information to fill data gaps should expect to pay more. A geographic information system (GIS) is vital to creating a good inventory; as a result, some local governments may need to factor in the cost of a GIS as well.

D. Which local governments implement this action? Which departments within the local government are most likely to have responsibility for this?

Any local government can create an NRI. However, due to the overlapping and interconnected nature of many natural resources, local governments may wish to develop the inventory at a regional or county level so as to leverage each other's efforts. A local government committee, such as a conservation advisory council would typically lead the development of the inventory. It may be supported by planning staff or, more typically, a consultant.

E. How to obtain points for this action

Local governments can earn eight points for this action by completing an NRI that covers the entire community. The inventory process and report content must be substantially consistent with those described by the DEC publication, *Creating a Natural Resources Inventory: A Guide for Communities in the Hudson River Estuary Watershed* . An additional two points may be earned for adoption of the NRI through a local law, substantially similar to the model local law in Appendix G of the guide.

	POSSIBLE POINTS
Create a natural resources inventory for the entire community	8
Adopt the natural resources inventory through a local law	2

F. What to submit

Submit a copy of a natural resources inventory (NRI) report completed within the last 10 years that covers the entire community and meets the minimum requirements described above. In addition, provide a description of the process followed for the development of the NRI, if the process is not described in the report. For full points, also submit a clerk-certified copy of the local law adopting the inventory, if applicable.

All CSC action documentation is available for public viewing after an action is approved. Action submittals should not include any information or documents that are not intended to be viewed by the public.

G. Links to additional resources or best practices

- Westchester County, NY, Natural Resource Inventory Maps
- Town of Rosendale, NY, Natural Resource Inventory
- DEC Natural Resources Inventory Factsheet
- DEC Hudson River Estuary Program CSC Video: Conserving Nature in Your Community: Critical Environmental Areas

H. Recertification requirements

The recertification requirements are the same as the initial certification requirements.