Seeking Urban River Enthusiasts

Interested in forming a

Lower Schuylkill River Guide Corps

A Visioning Meeting for the Creation of Public Collaborative Tours of and on the Lower Schuylkill River

April 14, 2016, 10a-12p,

at Bartram's Garden, with the Penn Program in Environmental Humanities

RSVP to Bethany Wiggin, director@ppehlab.org

Project Overview

Participants are sought in a collaborative project initiated by the Penn Program in Environmental Humanities (PPEH) to explore development of public tours of and on the Lower Schuylkill River (LSR), in southwest Philadelphia. A first phase of this project develops a corps of LS River Guides to lead kayak, bicycle, and/or walking tours of the river and its banks, with Bartram's Garden (BG) as a central hub. Tour content will be collaboratively developed by the River Guides and affiliated organizations and maintained and updated in a shared database. A second phase envisions the creation of a website to open the project to a wider swath of collaborators and thereby expand content and narrative perspectives of the River's history, present, and future. A third phase anticipates the development of a LS River Guide as a mobile app, allowing for self-guided tours.

The LS River Guides Project is in dialogue with exciting ongoing work on the LSR, adding energy to the vital riverfront programs and projects now underway, especially at Bartram's Garden. These include a community boathouse, public kayaking programs, youth float- and boat-building projects, fishing derbies, and planned row-boat tours for neighborhood youth. Also at the Bartram's waterfront, PPEH and BG are piloting a second phase of the PPEHLab at WetLand, a place for experiments in sustainability.

The LS River Guides Project will lend further support to these important initiatives to assist Philadelphians, especially those who live along its banks, to explore the River and the watershed. The LSR is sometimes called a "sacrificial landscape" (Brian Black), with limited public access and poor environmental quality. In recent years--especially since the development of the Schuylkill River Trail and with the nearing completion of Bartram's Mile--public access to the River's banks has increased dramatically. Water-based tours via kayak promote still further public access, and allow access downriver from Bartram's toward the confluence with the Delaware. Getting people onto our rivers is critical to promote more sustainable outcomes for

our rivers--and their flora and fauna, including humans!--especially as we experience hotter, wetter conditions.

Inspired by urban river projects in Los Angeles, in Brooklyn and on New York's #7 Train, the LS River Guides project kicks off with an introductory meeting at BG on April 14th from 10-12. At this first meeting, we will discuss possible collaborations and forms that the River Guides project will take. The meeting will be facilitated by Professor Bethany Wiggin (Director, PPEH). Each participant will be asked to present two ideas s/he sees vital to the River Guides project. These might include: existing local organizations, programs, and events that intersect with the River Guides project; examples of successful tours of urban waterways; sources for the primary research which will be done to develop shared content for the tours. Meeting participants will also have the opportunity to explore the PPEHLab at WetLand at BG, a public space, like the River itself, open to the public.

After the meeting, between late April and early June, River Guide Corps collaborators will develop content independently and via shared documents. In early June, collaborators will return to the PPEHLab at WetLand to share and coordinate future research and to develop an *esprit de corps*. A one-day certification workshop for River Guides will take place during the week of August 22nd. Schuylkill tours led by members of the River Guides corps will begin in beta after September 5 (Labor Day), 2016. Created via robust and inclusive collaborations, the tours and the corps will evolve over time so as to generate audiences across months and years.