



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Jonathan Phillips, 908-289-0262, extension 203

## **2008 Union County Bio-Blitz Attracts 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Groundwork Elizabeth Students**

**Elizabeth, N.J., June 14, 2008**—24 hours can change your life.

During the period from 5 p.m. June 13<sup>th</sup>, until 5 p.m. June 14<sup>th</sup>, expert scientific teams coordinated by the Union County Division of Parks and Community Renewal, Kean University, and a myriad of environmentalists and nature lovers, counted plants, mammals, birds, reptiles, fungi, and other living organisms along the Elizabeth River in the Annual Union County BioBlitz Program. This was Union County's 4th year for its Bio-Blitz, which is also open to the public.

Attracted to the program were more than 50 High School Students and faculty from Elizabeth's Lower Academy, brought there in a concerted effort by English Teacher Mary Jankowski, and the 501c3 profit organization, Groundwork Elizabeth. Eager students joined activities with professional and recreational Scientists such as an "owl-prowl" after dark on Friday, a Nature Walk, an Estuary Session, an exciting electric fishing session (no fish were harmed) on Saturday, and other events. They also participated in making and distributing "focus scopes", which children visiting could decorate as they walked the area near the event.

The headquarters for BioBlitz 2008 was located in a series of tents at Kean University's East Campus on Irvington Road, in a location known to many formerly as Pingry School, adjacent to the Elizabeth River Parkway. Besides serving as the coordination center for statistics and counting, the headquarter tents featured demonstration and viewing areas for each type of plant and animal life, and offered a great learning experience for the public.

The Elizabeth River Parkway is a passive park which was acquired by the County in the 1930's, consisting of 312 series of wooded acres dissected by the Elizabeth River, from Hillside in the North, as it ventures southward into the City of Elizabeth's into Mattano Park and the Arthur Kill.

Angel Estrada, Chairman of Union County's Board of Chosen Freeholders, addressed the gathering at noon. "....." Dan Bernier of the Union County Division of Parks and Community Development emceed the public presentation part of the program, and John Watson



Jr., Deputy Commissioner for Natural Resources of the NJ DEP, Jeff Grob, Landscape Architect, and Betty Ann Kelly, Environmental Specialist for Union County, also spoke on the significance of BioBlitz.

Bob Varady, President of the Board of Directors of Groundwork Elizabeth feels it important that Groundwork involve youth in its non-profit programming. “As part of our mission of improving lives, engaging our young population motivates them to become an active part of their physical environment”. Executive Director of Groundwork, Jonathan Phillips, noted “BioBlitz introduced a feeling of being on vacation in your own neighborhood, seeing things from a different point of view. One of the students was at first afraid of going too close to the Elizabeth River because of her fear of fish. She later entered the river and scouted the area for fish and invertebrates. She left the day with a new found understanding and respect for her natural environment.”

Mary Jankowski was truly impressed with the program and committed her efforts towards participation in the 5<sup>th</sup> BioBlitz, in June of 2009. The entire Kean University team helped Betty Ann Kelly, Union County’s Environmental Specialist, Linda Brazaitas, and Kristin Beebe, Union County Watershed Ambassador in preparing and participating in the event.

Sponsors of the Union County BioBlitz included the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders, the Union County Division of Parks and Community Renewal, Kean University, the Institute of Urban Ecosystem Studies, and the Schering-Plough Corporation.

Results will be shared with the public shortly. For more on Union County bioblitzes, go to [www.Kean.edu/~bioblitz](http://www.Kean.edu/~bioblitz), and to learn more about Groundwork Elizabeth, log onto [www.groundworkelizabeth.com](http://www.groundworkelizabeth.com).