

Our Water, Our Future

Croton Watershed Clean Water Coalition Newsletter



Issue #3, May/June 2001

Our Water, Our Future is the newsletter that keeps you, our valuable members, on the leading edge of watershed protection activities. Through the generosity of the Noyes Foundation, both this newsletter and our website, { **HYPERLINK** "<http://www.newyorkwater.org>" }, have been made possible.

BROOKIE, COME HOME

*Alley Creek in Queens, N.Y., the Focus
of Study Funded by
Trout Unlimited and EPA*

By Jerry Hoffnagel, Trout Unlimited-NYC chapter

A biologic survey team studying Alley Creek, a tiny, spring-fed stream system contained within the Alley Pond Park near Douglaston in northeast Queens, N.Y., resumed its historic research this spring, as it attempts to quantify essential stream-restoration data in a deeply urbanized area and possibly make the diminutive creek a flagship undertaking for all those interested in urban-stream restoration. Seasonal data collection resumed on April 27. If the feasibility study confirms test results from last year, it is hoped that Alley Creek could move forward to become a "teaching stream" for the city's schoolchildren and perhaps a model for urban stream restoration. It might even become the city address for *Salvo fontinalis*, the brook trout. The NYC chapter of Trout Unlimited (TU) has put grant money from the EPA's Long Island Sound Study (LISS), with additional money coming from its own parent organization and from private donations, to work in the wetlands to record such vital statistics as volume, temperature, and water quality of two little creeks that flow through the park into Great Neck Bay.

The Alley Creek system is very small — about a thousand feet of running water and wetlands — but it is an example of a common feature of Long Island geology, and a small reminder of the area's watershed past that has (cont., page 2)

The Riverdale Press Publishes CWC's Alternatives to Filtration

*The following are excerpts from a
Letter to the Editor, written by
CWCWC president, Marian Rose,
and published April 14, 2001:*

**"Filtration Fight Isn't
Over"**

The Croton Watershed Clean Water Coalition, Inc., would like to clarify its position on the filtration issue described in your fair and comprehensive editorial comment in your March 29, 2001, issue. Our Coalition comprises 48 groups in all boroughs of NYC, and also Westchester and Putnam Counties. The largest portion of our membership is in New York City.

Our mission, since our inception four years ago, (cont., page 3)

ALLEY CREEK BREAKS GROUND, cont.

been mostly paved over. These studies are being performed in hopes of discovering that this last coldwater stream might be suited to be a home and habitat for the "brookie," the beautiful orange-, purple- and brown-flecked native trout and for it to make a return to the state's largest urban area. The brook trout — New York's official state fish — is considered by fishermen to be one of the area's most beautiful fish and is known to be a bellwether of a stream's ecological health.

Since last year, volunteers and scientists have been carefully recording acidity, flow rate, conductivity, nitrates and phosphates content, observing the outflow and water quality, and identifying plants and in-stream invertebrate life. So far, results have appeared to be favorable: an abundance of eel larvae and some aquatic insects that are core trout diet have been present in the waters.

A final recommendation on Alley Creek's potential for stream restoration to sustainable brook-trout habitat will be presented this fall to TU and to LISS. Should data from the 2001 season support last year's findings, the TU conservation committee plans to make recommendations for steps the group could take to upgrade the stream habitat to support a viable trout population and also to serve as a teaching stream for coldwater ecology.

The volunteers' field study was launched early in 2000. Funding for equipment and training materials came from the same EPA Long Island Sound Study grant, and from the national Trout Unlimited's "Embrace-A-Stream" program, which funds coldwater stream restorations nationwide. Conservation committee chair Wayne Tusa, who drafted the EPA Quality Assurance Program as part of the grant-application process, and project director Fred Thorner are emphasizing a careful approach for the New York City chapter's first local conservation project. Thorner, who grew up near Alley Creek, says, "Alley Pond Creek is exactly the kind of place that gave my big-city childhood a window into nature's bigger world, and I want to keep the window open."

"Alley Creek is likely to be very sensitive to environmental factors. Consequently, rather than immediately proposing a restoration program, we wanted to see if the Creek is suitable

Use a Pen, not a Pencil

and mark down **Wednesday, May 23** for the next CWCWC membership meeting !

Place: Purchase Friends Meeting House, Purchase, N.Y.
(directions found on www.newyorkwater.org)

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Both refreshments and an interesting, worthwhile time will be served. We look forward to seeing you!

trout habitat," says Tusa, the science committee chair. "This is a unique project, not only because trout might be restored to New York City, but also because the methods and procedures developed in this study phase could serve as models for similarly 'challenged' urban watersheds."

Work in the water will continue throughout the summer, and donations and volunteers are still being recruited. Technical assistance to the volunteers is being provided by the Cold Springs Hatchery and Aquarium, the oldest hatchery in the country, the NYC Department of Environmental Protection, and a project advisory committee that includes the Alley Pond Park Corporation and conservation groups based in the city and on Long Island.

As part of this season's work in the water, some "test trout" fingerlings from the Cold Spring hatchery's native Long Island brook trout stock will be released into the waters; they will be the first free-swimming trout living in a New York City waterway in more than half a century. This summer could be "Welcome back, Fontinalis." CWC

For further information: contact Jerry Hoffnagle at jh_bison@hotmail.com or (718) 643-4709, or visit the website nyctu.org / "Newsletters"/articles on Alley Creek

RIVERDALE PRESS – “FILTRATION FIGHT...” cont.

has been “to maintain, protect and improve the waters of the Croton system through regional action in order to avoid filtration.” Croton waters still fulfill all federal EPA health standards and are improving, according to NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Joel Miele. Given good source water quality, it is not too late to find more effective and less costly means of protecting our drinking water than through the construction of an unneeded, hugely expensive chemical treatment/filtration plant that would severely impact the neighboring community and the environment. We have worked assiduously at protecting open space in the watershed from careless development, at strengthening laws governing wetlands which are vital to purifying polluted water before it reaches the reservoirs, and in convincing the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to upgrade the tributaries that feed into the reservoirs.

However, with the Consent Decree in place, the EPA document which forces New York City to filter the Croton, there is little incentive for the regulatory agencies to spend money and manpower on protecting the watershed. As you state in your editorial: “...building a plant will encourage relaxed controls in the watershed.” Even the mere prospect of a plant has encouraged relaxed controls!

There is talk of siting the plant in Westchester County, in Greenburgh, rather than in the Bronx. But even this selection would cause hardship in the Bronx. According to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) the so-called “appurtenances,” i.e., the Treated Water Reservoir and the Finished Water Pumping Station would go either in Jerome Park Reservoir or in Harris Park, unless the DEP decides to abandon the Croton aqueduct and pump the water straight into the Catskill and Delaware aqueducts.

Regardless of where the plant is located, the cost will be borne by the ratepayers, many of whom have seen their rates soar by 300% over the last fifteen years. And sadly, in spite of all the expenditures, water quality will deteriorate as the watershed, with its unique combination of soils and wetlands that filter out pollutants to our drinking water, gets sealed over by development.

Since the EPA is adamant on enforcing filtration, there is no likelihood that it will be willing to re-negotiate the Consent Decree unless it is presented with a viable legal option known as a Variance, which allows “an alternative treatment technique...at least as efficient in lowering the level of the contaminant with respect to which such requirement was prescribed.” Furthermore, the Consent Decree itself, under Article XXI, allows for Modifications.

CWCWC has sent a letter, dated March 15, 2001, to EPA Administrator Whitman in which an alternative has been

proposed under the Variance clause. The letter had been circulated for two months prior to being sent to the Administrator. More than 25 groups have signed on. To our knowledge, no other viable alternative has been presented to the EPA at the same level of detail.

The NYS Department of Health (DOH) has used the non-health-related questions of color and odor as reasons to filter the Croton. All drinking-water supply systems are required to use a disinfectant such as chlorine. The suggestion in the Whitman letter is to replace chlorine at the Croton Gate House, with another primary disinfectant, namely, chlorine dioxide, which effectively removes color, taste and odor-causing materials, iron, manganese, algae, and is more effective than chlorine in killing bacteria, viruses, Giardia and Cryptosporidium. This could be accomplished at a fraction of the cost of a filtration plant. Of course, a pilot-plant study and a full EIS should be carried out before any such alternative were approved.

The Croton Watershed Clean Water Coalition will continue its fight to protect the Croton watershed and avoid filtration. With the help of the many groups both within and outside our coalition, we are confident that we can prevail. cwc

Did you know that NYC's watersheds encompass 2,000 square miles ?