

Our Water, Our Future

Croton Watershed Clean Water Coalition Newsletter



Issue #9, May/June 2002

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, www.newyorkwater.org, have been made possible.

THE GREAT SWAMP

Thousands of Years of Service, Abundance, and Beauty

By Liz Hoskinson
CWCWC staff member

The Great Swamp, where fieldodder, vireos, brown trout, bog turtles, and the Great Blue Heron, among hundreds of species, come calling, and human visitors number in the thousands to enjoy its remarkable sights. Yet those happy activities only touch the surface of what the freshwater Great Swamp provides in this exurban region.

So, just what exactly is this watery, beautiful, and unorderly acreage?

The Great Swamp's power to sustain life has been recognizable from the earliest days, when humans (8,000 years earlier) settled in and their archeological remnants revealed canoes, hearth fires & flint tools. The more recent blip on the time-scale screen, the European settlers, also recognized the needs the Great Swamp met, with its fresh water, its massive trees for housing, and its surfeit of hunting game that replenished itself with the seasons. (cont., page 2)

CWCWC News and Notes

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Expansions; Developments; DEP Findings; and Other Actions Mean Extra Vigilance

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But, first, the good news: ...

Marvel Comics, Move Over

and make room for the CWCWC comic books, *The Monster From the DE(e)P*, and the young person's version, *Maria's Tale: The Monster from the DE(e)P*.

Crafted by poet and board member David Ferguson and illustrated by award-winning artist Alice Meyer Wallace, *The Monster From the DE(e)P* is a cogent and factual portrayal of the circumstances of filtration and the Croton. Ferguson's fast-paced illustrated narrative reveals the political machinations and the potential social consequences brought on by such a massive project, as well as its permanent, degrading results to one of our irreplaceable natural resources.

CWCWC is looking for suitable outlets for this colorful comic book—your suggestions are very welcome. Please contact the CWCWC office at 914-234-6470. Thank you!

Now, On a More Urgent Note ...

Following are several activities in the watershed that need our attention and activism:



Public scoping session - Watchtower Amended Site Plan-Patterson

Please consider attending this meeting and providing written and/or oral comments concerning this enormous development: The Town of Patterson, as lead agency, has (cont., page 2)

THE GREAT SWAMP, (cont.)

The Great Swamp, then and now, affects more than 63,000 acres in the region, an area reaching through the municipalities of Dover Furnace,

Pawling, Patterson, and Southeast (N.Y.). It is a thin, 20-mile long wetland, at times stretching into neighboring Connecticut. It is one of the largest freshwater wetlands in the state (with the Montezuma wetland, located between Rochester and Syracuse being the largest). Its shape is a long bowl, in an "erosional valley," formed then forgotten by a receding glacier. It is the headwaters for two active rivers in the area, the north-flowing Swamp River, and the south-flowing East Branch Croton River, which makes its way to the East Branch reservoir. Both emanate from the center of the swamp, generating considerable water flow through the region. As well, most of the 40,000 area residents depend on wells from the Great Swamp's groundwater aquifer, the largest in this area.

As readers may be guessing, the Great Swamp, as a wetland, provides amply because of its unique ability to provide water even in drought conditions. Studies have shown that the Great Swamp has an unusually 'fractured' floor, and combined with the glacial sediments, it takes in and holds groundwater at a higher rate than other wetlands. Its limestone bedrock, unusual for wetlands in the Northeast, provides for sweet water with a high pH. With its nearly 7,000 acres, the swamp is also capable of coping successfully with excess water capacity by acting as a highly effective sponge and mitigating the potential destructiveness of storm-driven flooding.

The Great Swamp provides home grounds for nearly 40 species, plants and communities declared as rare by New York State; in fact, it holds at least 20 individual and different wetland communities. Each is a different class of wetlands, from rare fens, and wet meadows to shrub swamps and floodplain forests. The wood duck, now a regular resident in the Great Swamp, with its need for nesting in capacious tree cavities two to three stories above shallow water, has been a case study in rejuvenating species made endangered through destruction of the natural world and human overpopulation. More than 90 species of bird also nest in the swamp, and migrants double the avian population throughout the year.

But human encroachment means pressures on the Great Swamp. These conditions (cont., page 3)

CWCWC NEWS & NOTES (cont.)

determined that the proposed Watchtower Amended Site Plan may have a significant adverse environmental impact and a Draft EIS must be prepared. **A public scoping session will be held on May 30, 2002, at 7:30 p.m. at the Patterson Town Hall, PO**

Box 470, 1142 Route 311, Patterson, NY 12563. Written comments will be accepted until June 13, 2002. The action involves expansion of the existing Watchtower Educational Center with the construction of two new residence buildings, an office building, additions to the audio/video building and a new maintenance building which total 172,500 square feet. The parcel on which the new buildings will be constructed is approximately 362.5+ acres. The project is located on the east side of NYS Route 22, approximately 7/10 of a mile north of the intersection of Haviland Hollow Road, Patterson. Contact: Richard Williams, Patterson Town Hall, PO Box 470, 1142 Route 311, Patterson, NY 12563, phone: (845) 878-6500, e-mail: rdw@bestweb.net

◆ ◆ ◆ **MBIA - Yet Another Threat to the Kensico Reservoir**

Please stay posted for developments on this project: The Kensico Reservoir, the terminal reservoir of the Catskill and Delaware systems, which supply over half the New York State population (9 million people) with its drinking water, is under a new threat.

Already threatened by the close proximity of Westchester County Airport, the reconfiguration of the intersections of Routes 120 and 22, and exit 2 from I-684, the reservoir faces the new threat of the proposed expansion of office space by MBIA, the insurance conglomerate, right on its very banks.

MBIA's existing 261,000 square feet of office space will be expanded by 238,000 square feet (165,000 of office space plus 73,000 square feet of amenity space) for a total of 499,000 square feet. An additional 1,155 parking spaces will be installed. The extra space will be provided by the acquisition by MBIA of another 33 acres (in addition to the company's existing 14 acres) on Cooney Hill. The company already owns 14 of the 17 homes now located on Cooney Hill. The area will have to be rezoned from R-1A to commercial.

The project is undergoing a full SEQRA review. The first step in the review, the period for comments on the draft scope, is now closed. Excellent comments were submitted by James W. Tierney, the Watershed Inspector General. We would be happy to forward copies to those of you who are interested in becoming involved in protecting the irreplaceable Kensico reservoir.

◆ ◆ ◆ **Galley Systems - The Insidious Undermining of Water Quality**

Please write to the DEP in support of its proposed ban on this inappropriate effluent treatment system: Galley systems are used for large flow, commercial or industrial establishments to allow development on sites that would not otherwise be suitable for a conventional subsurface waste-disposal system. They are composed of cement chambers, typically four feet by four feet, open on the bottom and placed in series in the subsurface, sometimes up to 40 feet long, with several of them placed side by side. A slotted PVC pipe runs down the center top of the galley series to distribute the effluent through the chambers.

Galley failure rate is high in the Croton watershed because the usually high water table causes groundwater mounding and insufficient treatment of the (cont., page 3)

THE GREAT SWAMP. (cont.)

need to be stewarded today, so that one of the nation's greatest wetlands will continue to sustain all its living creatures in the years to come and serve as an important source of water in the

reservoir system. Some of these pressures include the human population of the area, which may double in 45 years; habitat fragmentation; invasive species; illegal species collection; illegal dumping; and stormwater runoff from development. It is understood that loss of suitable habitat is the greatest cause for the decline of species worldwide, with aquatic species bearing the brunt. For the human side of the equation, the loss of species can be compared to a canary in a coal mine.

The quantity of water found in the Great Swamp, which is made available via precipitation and inflow from the many tributaries to the southern flow, *supplies 20 percent of the water to the Croton reservoir system*. However, in order to maintain the health of the swamp, it has been considered important that its baseflows be determined as well as assessing the number of gallons used in human consumption, and that ecological assessments be made to ensure the needed balance of potentially competing demands on the swamp.

In addition to quantity, the quality of the waters is of supreme importance. Protection of the Great Swamp's wide-ranging biological diversity from contaminants, most notably chronic non-point source contaminants or any upland pollution, is central to preservation of the water's health. Noted as principle contaminants are: human and animal waste (nitrogen, phosphorus and bacteria); synthetic chemicals, such as pesticides, solvents, and petroleum products; and inorganics, such as road salts and heavy metals discharged from combusted gasoline and diesel fuels. Monitoring of the water, and true enforcement -- often the most ignored aspect -- of existing federal, state, and local programs and regulations will factor greatly in the success of maintaining quality.

To help support these important projects, and to stay up to date on the activities surrounding the Great Swamp, please log onto the web site www.frogs-ny.com. If you would like to assist in preserving the Great Swamp, please consider joining Friends of the Great Swamp (FrOGS), either through the web site or phoning 845-855-1917. We welcome your support! [CWC](#)

CWCWC NEWS & NOTES (cont.)

wastewater by the intervening soils. Furthermore, the assumption of an even flow distribution within a galley system, and the effect of such uneven flow on groundwater flow paths, is open to question.

Because galley systems do not treat subsurface wastewater adequately and, therefore, threaten to pollute groundwater, the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) proposes to prohibit construction of new galley systems in the New York City watershed. CWCWC wholeheartedly endorses DEP's position.

If galley systems were permitted, it would allow a flood of developments in the watershed. This is why the Builder's Institute, which represents the interests of developers, is so adamantly in favor of allowing galley systems in the watershed.

By and large, the public is unaware of the impending battle that will occur between the Builders' Institute and the DEP. Admittedly, galleys are not the most appealing subject, yet allowing them in the watershed could mean unmitigated development. Please express your support of the DEP's stance by writing to: NYC Department of Environmental Protection--Bureau of Legal Affairs, 59-17 Junction Boulevard - 19th Floor, Elmhurst, NY 11373; Attn: Ms. Julia Bourdier.

◆ ◆ ◆ **Eagle River - Somers**

A group of Rego Park businessmen is continuing with its plans to promote Eagle River, the largest subdivision in Westchester County. The 628-acre site is situated in Somers. The Angle Fly and Primrose Brooks run through the property. Extensive wetlands are located throughout the site, as well as steep slopes, abundant forested areas, and 16 miles of rock walls remaining from the period when the land was extensively farmed. Both the Muscoot and Amawalk reservoirs are within the site's watershed and could be impacted.

Plans for development go back to 1975 when a proposal for 1,260 units was made and subsequently abandoned. The next proposal for 278 single-family units fell victim to the early 1990s recession.

The present proposal calls for 108 single-family homes - apparently, a cluster development in an area currently upzoned to 3 acres. The original 1997 proposal called for 175 homes on 1 or 2-acre plots.

The property is located south and southwest of Reis Park, on both sides of SR 139, and adjacent to Rtes. 100 and 35 to the south.

Henry Hocherman, the Mount Kisco attorney for the project, states that "it's going to be a beautiful project." Others sharply disagree. Besides the clearcutting of trees, increased traffic and air pollution (Westchester is rated in a severe non-attainment area for ozone), and significant increases in population and school enrollment, there is also concern regarding the destruction of historic buildings and a farmhouse dating back to 1776.

A public hearing will be set after the Planning Board has reviewed the Environmental Impact Statement for completeness. Back in 1998, CWCWC commented on the scoping document. We will be posting updates on our web-site. Please stay tuned for developments on this project, or call on us at (914) 234-3179 for further information. [CWC](#)