Our Water, Our Future

Croton Watershed Clean Water Coalition Newsletter

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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*

R E T R O S P E C T I V E 2 0 0 2

2002 covered a gamut of important drinking-water issues, and all helped form the picture that is the work of CWCWC. Our second retrospective issue of *Our Water, Our Future* brings back the important challenges that, through the strength of individuals, were wrought into victories for the matrix of land and water that provide the future of our civilization. We hope you enjoy the reading!

AN EVER-WIDENING CIRCLE
By Fay Muir – Norwood Community Action

The main thrust of my activities this past year has been to forward the CWCWC vision of watershed protection and alternatives to chemical treatment/filtration. It was exhausting but rewarding; thousands more people are becoming interested in our cause. Many miles were covered between the city, Albany, Washington D.C., and even the Midwest. We received calls of support from as far away as California. Here is a sampling of some of the areas covered:

For a city borough that will feel heavily the impact of a filtration plant, the Bronx, we strategically placed educational posters and distributed the *Monster from the De(e)p*, the comic book developed by Board member David Ferguson as a fun way to disseminate serious information. We held numerous meetings with local groups and with our elected officials, keeping in front of them the updated information about the status of chemical treatment/filtration as well as the chlorine dioxide alternative proposed by CWCWC. Along with other members, I testified in February at the DEP scoping session for the proposed plant siting along the Harlem River and then helped plan a successful protest meeting addressing this.

Our extensive outreach to the public continued. CWCWC general membership meetings were held in the Bronx; several area civic groups attended and have continued to express their support of affordable and clean water. We also had a kickoff of stream monitoring with Putnam County to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Clean Water Act.

In Manhattan, I participated in City Council hearings, elected officials meetings, press conferences, NRDC meeting series, a rally in Central Park, and, during the mayoral race, Sierra Club Sunday brunches. One of our recent efforts focused on forming the recent protest rally at WCBS because of its inflammatory news broadcast that promoted the inaccurate perception of the need for filtration of the Croton.

In Westchester and Putnam counties, I participated in meetings and hearings on the topics of diversion, stormwater, the Westchester airport, filtration, the proposed Trump golf courses, the forums held by the Watershed Inspector, and the Westchester Environment Management Council, the Catskill WPPC meetings and its river monitoring training. I also took part in the toxics panel of National Peoples Action, a nationwide association of grass roots groups.

My odyssey continued. I visited Albany and Washington, meeting with elected officials and continuing our educational efforts. Then it was on to the National Conference of Educators at the University of Cincinnati, at which Miralee Goldberg, a student at Columbia University, and I made a presentation that included a video on the fight against filtration and grassroots organizations. The organizers were so interested that we were requested to make a second, unscheduled, presentation.

In addition, I have written articles and letters that appeared in the Journal News, Green Light, Riverdale Press, and Norwood News. I've served as a guest for several interviews for radio and television, and have been a frequent speaker on the WBAI-FM's programs, "Eco-Logic" and "Wake-Up Call."

These activities have raised awareness and interest far and wide in our vision, as well as serve to educate the public and our elected officials. I will continue to build support for alternatives and opposition to the wasteful spending of $1.4 billion for a filtration project that is unnecessary on every level.

EAST-OF-HUDSON MONEY WELL SPENT… FINALLY
By Sue Glidden – Hands Across the Border

Much of Hands Across the Border's [HAB] focus and energy this past year have gone into alerting Westchester County officials that a study of Peach Lake would be a fitting and appropriate use of the Westchester County East of Hudson Water Quality Investment Funds. And our efforts have paid off! HAB and CWCWC began at the beginning, by attending the meetings of the Northern Westchester Watershed Committee of Supervisors [NWWC], a committee that came to our attention through North Salem Supervisor, Sy Globerman. Each month, we sat in and heard recommended allocations for the Funds, an account that was now near $50 million. HAB consistently advocated for spending $75,000 of the funds for a long-needed study of the southern end of Peach Lake, a water body that straddles two counties and is now home to numerous year-round residents. As is, Putnam County, identically funded, had already allocated $75,000 for such a study a year ago, in clear support of the undertaking. We also took our message to Westchester County Executive, Andrew Spano; to Westchester County Planning Commissioner, Joyce Lannert; and to local politicians. County Legislator George Latimer was especially helpful, advising HAB on how officially to proceed with the Board of Legislators. Finally, in quick succession, NWWC agreed to the study, Spano submitted an Act, and the Westchester County Board of Legislators unanimously approved it.

The study's scope and submission to engineers are now under the two counties' control. HAB is eager to be at the table, since discussions presently are taking place behind closed doors of the two County Executives' representatives and the county planning departments. We know from past experience that residents, who consider this lake near and dear to their hearts, have interesting, viable ideas to contribute. Fortunately, the Westchester County Board of Legislators has been asked to establish a monitoring review subcommittee to guarantee that all residents and concerned citizen and environmental groups are involved and part of the Peach Lake/Croton Watershed process. HAB wishes to thank CWCWC and its board members for their insight and generous expertise. With this study now under way, we relish the other important and necessary victories to come!

AN IMPORTANT STEP FORWARD IN PROTECTING THE EAST OF HUDSON WATERSHED
By Marian H. Rose, PhD – Croton Watershed Clean Water Coalition

Following Governor Pataki's initiative last December in designating the East of Hudson (EOH) portion of the New York City Watershed as Critical Resource Waters (CRW), the NY District of the Army Corps of Engineers, in May 2002, issued the same designation. This means that many projects and activities that affect waterbodies in the EOH watershed will be subject to a comprehensive review under the Army Corps' Individual Permit Program which provides for an analysis of alternatives and public review and comment. Prior to the designation as a CRW, many of these projects, depending on their size and scope, were reviewed under the Nationwide Permit Program - a more general review process. Activities within the EOH Watershed that will now be subject to the Individual Permit Program review include: residential, institutional and commercial development; outfall structures and maintenance; stormwater management facilities; utility line projects; hydropower projects; linear transportation projects; mining; recreational facilities; the maintenance of flood control facilities; and maintenance dredging of existing basins.

But regulations without enforcement are worse than no regulations. Both the Corps and the DEC are short of staff with which to do the job. Therefore, CWCWC approached DEC with the suggestion that volunteers help monitor streams and wetlands. The stream program has already started and has proven to be extremely successful. We thank DEC for having provided us with two experts who initially trained our eager group; the first session attracted more than 25 volunteers who spent a happy day, in perfect Fall weather monitoring a stream in Westchester. Having "wet our feet," we then monitored a stream in Putnam County that runs through a state wetland on property that is proposed to be developed. Per our findings, the stream is "non-impacted," an excellent rating, and the developer must now keep development far from the stream. With this success, we plan additional monitoring, and invite all to join us.

TARGET: PUTNAM COUNTY
By Ann Fanizzi -- Putnam County Coalition to Preserve Open Space

Residential and commercial developers in 2002 targeted Putnam County land, north to south, east to west, and our invaluable reservoirs for their projects. But County residents will have none of them! Anyone who travels through or spends any time in beautiful Putnam County will know of the head-spinning onslaught of development that has been taking hold within our small county. In addition to the numerous lesser building projects, insidious in their cumulative effect on the character of the county, four extremely large developments – Brewster Highlands; Campus at Fields Corners; Meadows at Deans Corners; and Terravest, all of which are located in the town of Southeast -- have been recently proposed, all of which have required and will require a considerable input of Putnam residents' time and energy so that their wishes take precedence over a handful of businessmen who have no stake in the communities. As well, these projects appear to violate the Town of Southeast's Master Plan, which has placed clear emphasis on protecting scenic landscape, protect ridges and slopes and avoiding destruction of wildlife habitat and corridors. Public opinion, however, has shifted – who among us cannot believe his or her eyes when the careless development of the Kohls/Home Depot site, built at the senseless cost of a graceful and picturesque rolling hill, rises into abrupt view along I-84 and Rte. #312? – and town planning committees have become sensitized to the real anger of area citizens.

Through the efforts of Putnam County Coalition to Preserve Open Space and CWCWC, as well as many new organizations, such as Putnam Valley Residents Coalition, and re-invigorated existing citizen organizations, such as Concerned Residents of Carmel/Mahopac and Concerned Residents of Southeast, we have had some great successes in 2002. The Tilly Foster Thoroughbred Farm, located along Rte. #312, has been preserved and is now called the Tilly Foster Conservation Area. Additional land acquisition surrounding the farm is presently in negotiation, which, when completed, will swell the Conservation area to a total of more than 650 acres. The long-ignored issue of zoning along the Middle Branch reservoir was brought to resolution; this year, in a process set in motion by fierce resident opposition to a proposed (but ultimately defeated) self-storage unit to be located within its watershed, town officials are re-assessing the "EDI" permit standards and have extended the building moratorium from the original six months to one year. As well, PCCPOS had pushed repeatedly for re-assessment of building activities along the Route #6 corridor, and town officials have responded positively. We are very pleased with these results.

There is no resting on laurels, however. Each of the massive projects will impact regulated wetlands, streams, and reservoirs. This potential health danger goes to the heart of CWCWC's mission, and our efforts here are extremely important. We realize we need to keep up the pressures on town officials. This also means keeping area residents informed of development activity and showing them that they really do have a say in the future of their towns. Hundreds more people are now participating in this process, compared to last year. This is a heartening trend, and a needed one. There is more to fight, especially the very large and environmentally corrupting Terravest development proposal, twice the size of Brewster Highlands, that would strip the pristine 139 wooded and open-field acreage adjacent to the Home Depot. We are keeping up the fight! Please join us in these battles—the rewards are worth it!

BUZZING THE AIRPORT
By Karen Shultz – Audubon Bronx River/South Shore

We have good news to report, and that is we now have the full support of the new commissioner, Christopher Ward, of the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (NYC DEP), who has asked Westchester County to seek an FAA exemption from any expansion of the capacity and footprint of the Westchester County Airport. This includes no additional flights, gates, hangars, parking or heavier planes. This exemption is needed in order to protect the drinking water supply for 85% of the residents of Westchester and 90% of the residents of New York City. Our other good news is that we also had another major victory concerning the proposed de-icing facility at the airport. The facility, which would have expanded this airport enormously, has been withdrawn.

We all are grateful to Commissioner Ward for reminding us that since the first EPA Filtration Avoidance Determination in 1993, the Kensico Reservoir has assumed greater importance as the terminal holding reservoir for the two unfiltered water supply systems, the Delaware and Catskill, and that Westchester County Airport deserves special status because of its unique location to the Kensico. The quality of water in the Kensico is crucial to the City's ability to continue to operate the Delaware and Catskill as unfiltered systems. In the last decade, there has been extensive development in the Kensico basin, putting additional stress on it and reducing the reservoir's capacity to assimilate pollutants from the airport. Since there has been a growing recognition of the role pollutants carried in runoff play in water-quality degradation, it would be unconscionable to let this airport expand in size.

We know that the National Academy of Science says that the Westchester County Airport is a serious threat to drinking water quality, and that is at its present size. Any expansion will not only increase this threat but also increase the threat of accidents and spills into our irreplaceable drinking water supply. No modern technology can prevent accidents and spills. There were 35 accidents in one year alone in the 1990s. It could take only one major accident to compromise this currently safe and affordable drinking water supply, and compromise it in ways no filtration plant would be able to remedy.

Although the aviation industry might reap more profit from expansion, we feel it could be an economic disaster for the citizens of Westchester County. Our county already falls way below the national clean air standards. The cost to public health, to property values, and the increase of danger to our air quality and reservoir should far outweigh the FAA's agenda to expand. According to November, 2001, issue of *Westchester Spotlight* magazine, Westchester already has the highest asthma hospital rate in the country. Breast cancer also is notably high. Women, children, senior citizens, and those with weakened immune systems are most at risk because all environmental law is based on the average size male (except in the state of California). I will continue to make this issue a priority, since the FAA's clear agenda is to expand all airports nationally.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE TOWN OF YORKTOWN - EVENTS IN 2002
By Paul Moskowitz, PhD – Huntersville Association

During the latter part of 2001, the Yorktown N.Y. Town Board held public hearings regarding the French Hill golf course proposed by the Trump organization. The proposal was to turn a 155-acre, heavily forested area located less than a mile away from the New Croton Reservoir into a private-member 18-hole golf course, for approximately 300 users. This would necessitate the annihilation of thousands of trees, the filling in of a part of a Class II DEC wetland and the destruction of most of its buffer. Worst of all, this exclusive course would require the application of huge doses of herbicides, pesticides, fungicides and fertilizer.

Expressing concerns about the course were local residents, CWCWC and its member groups from New York City, Westchester and Putnam Counties, and included the representatives of the Federated Conservationists of Westchester Counter, NYPIRG, Trout Unlimited, the Riverkeeper, and Jim Tierney, the N.Y. Watershed Inspector General.

The French Hill site had numerous problems associated with the golf-course proposal. One of the most prominent was the proposed use of public-owned water, to be drawn from nearby Mohansic Lake in the FDR State Park, to fulfill the large requirements for the course. Such usage without approval from the N.Y. State Legislature would have violated N.Y. State law. Opposition groups made it clear that they would not allow public park water to be used in this manner.

To its credit, the Yorktown Town Board demanded answers to unresolved environmental questions. The Board repeatedly asked the golf course representives to answer technical questions posed in a lengthy report by the Watershed IG. Not only was the Town Board not willing to give the golf course its uncritical approval, but it appeared that the NY State DEC might also not approve the golf course. Seeing the writing on the wall, the Trump organization withdrew its application on February 12, 2002.

In addition, this past year, the Town Board has received an environmental impact statement on the upzoning of the Hunterbrook (Huntersville) Area of Yorktown. This area of 2,400 acres is now mostly zoned for 2-acre lots. This large area surrounds several miles of the Hunterbrook which provides about 10 percent of the stream flow into the Croton Reservoir. The area also accounts for many miles of the shoreline of the Reservoir. The study includes the alternatives of 4- and 5-acre zoning. 5-acre zoning would reduce the potential buildout from over 400 houses to fewer than 100. We will work to get upzoning approved by Yorktown in 2003. ***CWC***