

# Remembering The Flood Of 1996

## CATSKILL REGION -

This month, stream managers throughout the Catskills are recalling the flood of Jan. 19, 1996. On that date 15 years ago, up to five inches of rain fell on snowpack which, even after a week of warm weather, was still four to five feet deep in many places. The result was that numerous communities experienced record-breaking floods that caused extensive damage. In the weeks that followed, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) initiated a Stream Management Program, which celebrates its 15th anniversary this year. Since that time, this program has developed partnerships with soil and water districts, cooperative extensions, municipalities and community groups in each of the major basins in the NYC water supply watersheds west of the Hudson River. These partnerships created the Delaware, Schoharie, Ashokan and Rondout-Neversink Stream Management Programs, which together with the DEP Stream Management Program, have invested \$55M since 1996 in developing and implementing stream management plans and projects with Catskills communities. These programs and their demonstration projects promote best management practices to improve the natural stability of the region's stream systems and their ecological integrity while pursuing the common objectives of flood hazard mitigation, water quality protection and fish habitat improvement. To date, more than 100 projects have been completed addressing problems over 14 miles of stream corridor.

"The 1996 flood caused over \$100 million in damages throughout the state, and \$20 million of that was in Delaware County alone," said Rick Weidenbach, executive director of the Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District. "Ten lives were lost during the flood. These memories return every time we have a flood, and flooding in the past decade has actually seen water levels even higher than the 1996 flood."

Weidenbach credits the relationship with DEP with providing resources to reduce the risks since that time. "Over the past 15 years, the partnership between the county soil and water districts and the DEP Stream Management Program has allowed us to provide significant assistance to our towns to protect public health and safety, and to reduce both flood threats and long-term maintenance costs for roads, bridges and stream culverts. Those partnerships have since been extended to include the county planning departments, Cornell Cooperative Extension, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, county emergency management offices, and the town and county highway departments. The benefits of these partnerships are real, and the water quality benefits for the City of New York and the local communities are there as well."

Gary Capella, director of the Ulster County SWCD is especially proud this year to have completed a high priority streambank stabilization project in the town of Shandaken just before the flood of Oct. 1, 2010. "The Woodland Creek bank stabilization below Fawn Hill Road is a great example of how a coordinated collaborative preventative effort was a very timely success. The site was deemed by the town and FEMA as an imminent threat to the integrity of the road servicing about half the Woodland Valley population. It was completed just prior to the Oct. 1 storm and withstood that one and the December storm. Both floods caused extensive damage to other locations on Woodland Road and it is assumed by most involved that the road would have been lost if the project was not installed. If that had happened, not only would there have been a major nightmare associated with the lost road and access for so many people but the cost for replacing the road would have far exceeded the cost of the project." This project was funded by FEMA and the Ashokan

Watershed Stream Management Program, and partners included the Town of Shandaken, NRCS, UCSWCD, NYC DEP and CCE Ulster County.

Elizabeth Higgins, Project Coordinator at the Ashokan Watershed Stream Management Program of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ulster County, Ulster County SWCD and DEP, says that public events are being planned for the coming year by each of the four stream management programs that will recognize the 15 years of partnership between the city and the upstate communities around stream management. We invite the public to visit [www.CatskillStreams.org](http://www.CatskillStreams.org) to view the accomplishments of this partnership and to find workshops, stewardship activities, and training opportunities to join throughout the year."

For more information on projects that have been completed locally and on the region's stream management efforts, visit [www.CatskillStreams.org](http://www.CatskillStreams.org), or one of the stream management program teams: NYC DEP SMP (845) 340-7838; Delaware SMP (607) 865-5223; Schoharie SMP (518) 622-3620; Rondout-Neversink SMP (845) 985-2581 or Ashokan SMP (845) 688-3047.

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