

~ I. Introduction ~

“The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and feed our children. You must give to the rivers the kindness you would give to any brother.” — Chief Seattle (1854)

BACKGROUND

The waterways of upstate New York have always been vital to society. Historically, rivers and streams have provided food, drinking water, transportation, and power, so it is no coincidence that most villages and cities are located on or near a body of water. Over time, many of these waterways have become threatened by the very development they have enabled; yet, the importance of rivers and streams has not lessened. This is especially true in the East Branch Delaware River watershed. Drinking water, aesthetics, and countless recreational opportunities are provided to local citizens, tourists, and the residents of New York City over 120 miles away. The East Branch watershed is a key gem in the Catskill Mountain region that warrants protection. In order to preserve and improve water quality while protecting private property and public infrastructure, the need for a guiding document for watershed management in the East Branch has become apparent. Henceforth, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (NYCDEP) has contracted with the Delaware County Soil & Water District (DCSWCD) to develop this Stream Corridor Management Plan (SCMP).

The DCSWCD, the Delaware County Planning Department (DCPD), and the NYCDEP recognize that local input and leadership is essential to developing and implementing the management plan. These agencies have worked with local town and village planning boards to develop a vision for each community — a critical step in the formulating stream management recommendations. It is important that the implementation of the Plan be integrated with local laws such as zoning and subdivision regulations, local floodplain laws, community comprehensive plans, town Highway Management Plans, the county-wide Delaware County Action Plan (DCAP), and the Delaware County Multi-jurisdictional All-Hazards Mitigation Plan. The purposes of the Plan were presented to each town planning board within the watershed, promoting discussion about local concerns and specific problematic areas. In addition, a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) was formed of local stakeholders, municipal representatives and businesses to help develop, guide, and implement the Plan’s objectives. The PAC met numerous times during the course of developing this Plan and their input is reflected in its recommendations. A PAC sub-committee was formed to review potential project sites and recommend the demonstration project site.

Since 1993, New York City’s water supply system has met the criteria for filtration avoidance as determined by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). With every Filtration Avoidance Determination (FAD) renewal, ideas and techniques evolve that have the potential to enhance watershed protection. In support of the 2002 FAD, the NYCDEP and the DCSWCD agreed to partner to write this management plan. Since effective watershed management requires community and land use planning components in addition to technical research and implementation, the DCSWCD subcontracted with the DCPD to help bring these components to the Plan. Targeted at communities and agencies within the watershed, this Plan is focused on education as well as stream management recommendations and practices.

The final framework that the SCMP needs to dovetail with is the Delaware County Action Plan (DCAP). Created in 1999 to address water quality issues in the New York City watershed, DCAP was originally written in response to the designation of the Cannonsville Reservoir watershed as a phosphorus-restricted basin. DCAP coordinates public and private agencies to develop water quality initiatives and seek funding for implementation. Current components of the Action Plan include management programs for stormwater and flooding, highway runoff, on-site septic systems, precision livestock feeding, forage management, the Stream Corridor Management Program, and the assessment of phosphorus reduction by monitoring best management practices (BMPs).

This Stream Corridor Management Plan (SCMP) has been developed to achieve the following goals for the East Branch Delaware River above the Pepacton Reservoir Dam, the reservoir itself, and their contributing tributaries.

GOALS OF THE PLAN

- ◆ Offer the public opportunities for involvement in visioning and taking ownership of future watershed management
- ◆ Create a better understanding of stream processes and promote a stream stewardship ethic among watershed stakeholders
- ◆ Study and evaluate streams and their effects on local stakeholders, and ensure continued protection and preservation of East Branch watershed while maintaining economic sustainability
- ◆ On a watershed-wide scale, create a multi-objective, community-based approach for stream management in the East Branch by promoting and applying the principles of fluvial geomorphology as the scientific basis of the approach
- ◆ Implement a community-based restoration project demonstrating entrepreneurial approaches for stream and floodplain protection
- ◆ Develop a comprehensive “living” Stream Corridor Management Plan with recommendations to guide future stream stewardship

PLAN OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Develop a Project Advisory Committee to guide the process
- ◆ Identify the issues and needs in the basin
- ◆ Perform assessments to obtain necessary data
- ◆ Provide educational opportunities for watershed stakeholders
- ◆ Promote the importance of the creation, enhancement, and protection streamside buffers
- ◆ Explain the importance of biodiversity and habitat protection
- ◆ Review stream-related regulations – implementation, enforcement, and funding
- ◆ Promote the importance of floodplains and their function
- ◆ Review planning options to manage floodplain development
- ◆ Prioritize areas in need of restoration
- ◆ Develop a set of stewardship recommendations