

AWSMP Stream Access & Recreation Working Group Meeting Notes

June 21, 2017

AWSMP Offices, 3130 State Route 28, Shokan, NY 12481

Attendees: *Marc Hollander, Matthew Hollander, Mark Loete, Harry Jameson, Tony Coccozza, Ed Ostapczuk, Dave Burns, Maxanne Resnick, Sarah McGinnis, Adam Doan, Brent Gotsch, Leslie Zucker, Aaron Bennett*

Welcome and Introductions – Those present at the meeting introduced themselves for the benefit of guest Sarah McGinnis.

Member Updates – In response to a pre-meeting email question from Ed O, Dave B gave a quick update on the status of two NYCDEP projects. The work on the Dividing Weir bridge (Reservoir Rd) that has been going on for some time, is on track to be completed this summer. Additionally, the 5-Arch Bridge replacement project is currently at 30% design. That project (which is coupled with the nearby railroad bridge replacement and Route 28A road realignment) is scheduled to start construction in the spring of 2020.

Brent G reported that the annual Family Fun and Fish Day, held on May 20, at Wilson State Campground was a success and thanked members of Trout Unlimited for their support. Leslie Z mentioned that this summer the AWSMP education program will be conducting two different stream-related educational opportunities for youth. Kids that attend the Town of Olive's summer recreation camp at Davis Park in West Shokan will have the opportunity to learn about the Bushkill and students enrolled in Onteora's summer school program will get to learn about and frequent the Esopus Creek in Boiceville.

Marc H reported whitewater enthusiasts that experienced the recreational release from the Shandaken Tunnel (Portal) the first weekend in June. Several reports indicated that it "was the best ever." Ed O complimented NYSDEC and NYCDEP for their effort to hit and maintain a target flow of 1030cfs at the Coldbrook gage during the weekend release as opposed to a full-bore release which has been done historically.

Mark L reported on a meeting that he and some other members of Trout Unlimited (TU) and the Federated Sportsman of Ulster County had yesterday with NYCDEP and Ulster County staff regarding the future improvements and expansion of the Route 28A parking area near NYCDEP land on the west side of the 5-Arch bridge (near Coldbrook Rd intersection). TU has expressed its concerns over the potential degradation of the area, including the Chimney Hole on the Esopus Creek (located downstream near confluence with the Ashokan Reservoir). Mark L. indicated the designs call for a 50-car parking area so as to allow the public to access the planned Ashokan Rail Trail, which will extend east from this location along the northern shore of the reservoir. Mark L indicated that the meeting was positive and felt as though NYCDEP and Ulster County heard and understood their concerns of over-use. One outcome from the meeting was that an additional, much smaller angler-only parking area, will be constructed below

(closer to the stream) the 50-car trailhead parking area. Additionally, there was a commitment to continuous monitoring of the site for over-use, littering, and non-compliant behavior, particularly by NYCDEP law enforcement officers. All parties at the meeting also seemed to agree that this location (as well as the other planned trailheads) will be incredible opportunities to educate the public about the importance of water quality, leave no trace ethics, and more.

Harry J noted how politics have changed in the recent years with respect to the Ulster & Delaware railroad corridor, where now a portion of formal plans have been developed to convert to a rail trail. He noted that in 2002 Ulster County encouraged the Catskill Mountain Railroad (CMRR) to submit a full plan for the restoration and rehabilitation of the entire corridor.

Presentation – “Managing for Sustainable Ecotourism” - Jeff Senterman, CCCD

Unfortunately, Jeff Senterman was unable to attend due to a last minute conflict; however the group decided to look at a number of his slides from a presentation that Jeff S gave at the Ashokan Watershed Conference back in April. Leslie Z facilitated some discussion while scrolling through the slides (which have been attached). The bulk of the discussion centered on how to best manage our resources in the Catskill Region so as to offer a wonderful user experience without degrading sensitive, publicly-accessible locations that are part of the natural environment. The example of what happened at “Blue Hole”, and the outcomes and subsequent management strategy now in place as a result, were discussed. One of the messages from the meeting was the need for partnerships (public/private/non-profits, etc.) to continue to educate the public, continue to and invest and re-invest in services to better manage our resources, and to better direct the public to areas that have been developed/managed so as to withstand a higher, more intense use.

The ecotourism discussion led into the future plans for the Catskill Interpretive Center (CIC) and site. Sarah McGinnis, who started in May as the Director at the CIC, introduced herself to the group and then spoke about some of the planned changes at the location. She stated that there will be some new additions to the interior exhibit space, as well as an expanded network of public trails on the property. She envisions the location as not only a center for visitors but a community space as well. They will continue to expand upon their education of visitors through exhibits and offering educational programming, including topics such as over-use.

Several discussions took place on what type of information it articulated to the people that stop in to the CIC and what types of brochures are available for taking. Members were curious where CIC visitors are being directed to visit - areas that can sustain high public use, or other locations? Does better information on these more developed/managed locations need to be developed? The idea of developing an informational / educational brochure for the Esopus Creek (with access locations, information on the resource, etc.) was also discussed.

Shandaken Tunnel (Portal), Schoharie Reservoir, Gilboa Dam

- 2017 “Cold Water Plan” - There was no update on this as Mike F was not able to attend the meeting.
- 2017 Recreational Releases – As indicated earlier, the first requested release was granted in June. Three additional have been requested (July, September, and October) and their approval is pending.

- Part 670 Revisions vs. “Operational Agreements” – Aaron B recapped the lengthy discussion from last month about if, when, and how to go about making modifications to the regulations or developing an agreement concerning the operation of the Shandaken Tunnel. Ed O and Tony C indicated that they have a sense that NYSDEC is hesitant to change Part 670, and that coming to an agreement with the parties, similar to what was done on the Lower Esopus, would be easier to accomplish. A decision was made to table this discussion until the next meeting.

Recreational Safety Subcommittee

- Updates on Ulster County Waterways Advisory Committee – no update
- Large Wood protocol pilot - Harry J indicated that he was not able to identify any potential sites to pilot the protocol within his tubing area this spring. Adam D reported that in lieu of that, he and Ulster County Soil and Water Conservation District (UCSWCD) staff visited a previously-mentioned location near Uncle Pete’s Campground yesterday. They took pictures and began to work through the protocol on site before being interrupted by inclement weather. Adam D indicated that of the four tools in the protocol, two are pretty accessible to use in the field, while the other two are pretty technical. Therefore, aspects of the tool would likely require technical support/staff in order to determine what is the recommended actions (leave or remove) for the large wood, which could become an issue for communities or community groups. Given the fact that this analysis for the pilot location was just started and it is not yet complete, the committee decided to make this a focus of the next meeting. Leading up to that meeting, Adam and his staff will produce some slides of data/images collected, and the committee will then run through the protocol as a group, conducting a more in-depth analysis to determine if the large wood should be left alone, or removed. Adam D is also keeping track of staff time and effort spent on this as well.

Habitat

Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) – Aaron B noted that at the last meeting, the working group felt strongly enough about the HWA infestation and its potential impact on our waterways to continue to discuss at future Stream Access & Recreation Committee meetings. Dave B indicated that the Mountain Top Arboretum (Greene Co) had recently held a workshop on treating for HWA, as they have done on their property. He mentioned that both Dan Snider (Catskill Region Invasive Species Partnership) and Mark Whitmore (Cornell University) were presenters at the workshop. A brief discussion ensued on how it would be nice to get Mark Whitmore to come to our next meeting to give us an update on HWA in the Catskills. This meeting could possibly a joint meeting with members from the AWSMP Stream Ecosystem Working Group.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:45am.

Next Meeting TBD

Ecotourism in the Catskills



Jeff Senterman, Executive Director
Catskill Center
845-586-2611
jsenterman@catskillcenter.org

Who is the Catskill Center?



CATSKILLCENTER
conservation creates opportunity

Established in 1969, the mission of the Catskill Center is to protect and foster the environmental, economic and cultural well-being of the Catskill region.

There are 3 main program areas that support the Mission:

- ❖ Collaboration
- ❖ Stewardship
- ❖ Inspiration

We manage and operate the Catskill Interpretive Center



CATSKILLCENTER
conservation creates opportunity

What is Ecotourism?

Ecotourism has been defined as:

“responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of local people, and involves interpretation and education” (International Ecotourism Society)

Ecotourism must have a positive impact on both natural areas and the local community. This means that those who implement and participate in ecotourism activities should do so in accordance with the following principles:

- ❖ Minimize impact
- ❖ Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- ❖ Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- ❖ Provide direct financial benefits for conservation; and
- ❖ Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people



How are we doing in the Catskills?



Green = Good, Yellow = Needs Work
Red = Not at all

- ❖ Minimize impacts
- ❖ Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- ❖ Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- ❖ Provide direct financial benefits for conservation; and
- ❖ Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people

No Green!



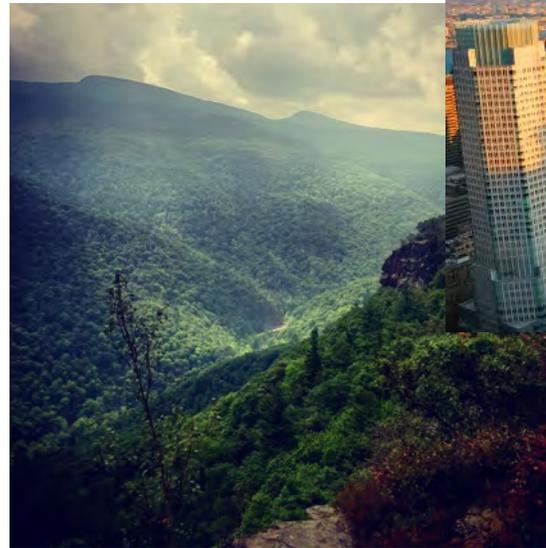
Why should Ecotourism work for the Catskills?



The Catskill region and the Catskill Park are a unique Natural Area that is only three hours from the New York City Metropolitan Area

- ❖ 300,000+ acres of Forever Wild Forest Preserve
- ❖ 150,000+ acres of Watershed Lands
- ❖ Millions of acres of private lands
- ❖ Quiltlike public and private lands
- ❖ Important ecological considerations

Strong desire to reconnect with nature and rise of travel close to home



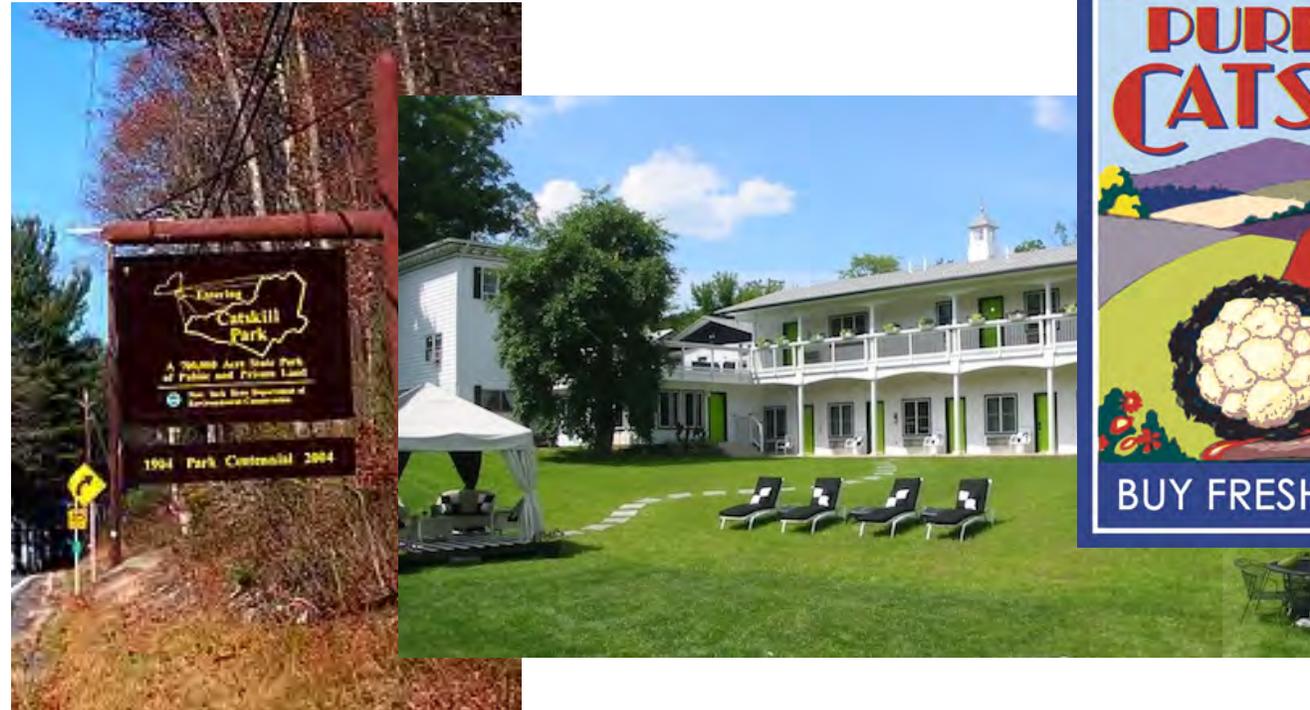
What are the economic opportunities available?



By their very nature, the presence of the watershed and the presence of park lands, the potential economic activities in the Catskills are limited

Major Drivers:

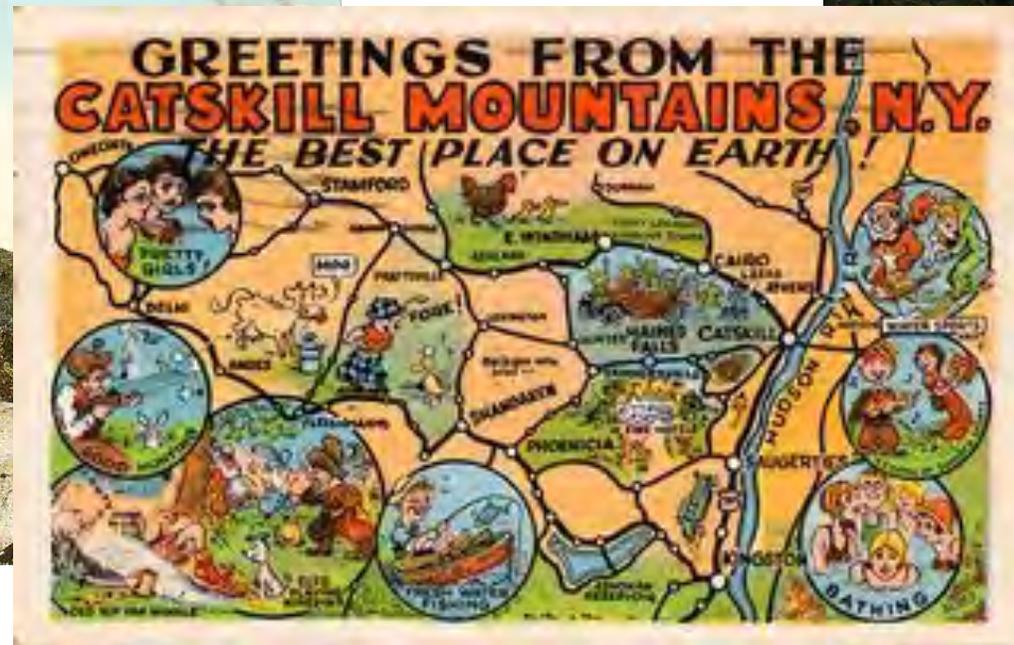
- ❖ Agriculture
- ❖ Service Industry
- ❖ Outdoor Recreation
- ❖ Forestry



The Catskills have always attracted tourists



The Catskills have been experiencing tourism for many years – Late 1800s, 1950s, Current Day– The Hudson River Scholl to the Present!



Growth of Catskill Tourism Today



Growing recognition by NYS about the economic importance of Tourism in general to the state's economy

Focus on increasing tourism to upstate areas

Governor's interest in NYS outdoor areas and enjoyment of the outdoors

Adirondack and Catskill Challenges by the Governor

I Love NY Campaigns for the Catskills

Visit The Catskills / Regional Promotion Efforts



Growth of Catskill Tourism Today



Changing visitor demographics and interests

“Escape” to the mountains / Experience life hands on

Visitors are coming to experience the “naturalness” of the Catskills



Challenges from successful tourism marketing

Tourist promotion of the Catskill region is working...too well in places



- ❖ Overuse and overcrowding
- ❖ Trash
- ❖ Resource degradation
- ❖ Parking problems
- ❖ Access
- ❖ Lack of connection to main streets and communities
- ❖ Incomplete visitor services & hospitality

Existing and Developing Opportunities



Hundreds of miles of hiking, biking, horse and snowmobile trails

Growth of multi-use/accessible trails

Catskill Interpretive Center

4-Season Recreation Growth at Ski Resorts

Growing sense of regionalism

Mountain Biking Destinations

Scenic Byways

What are the values of open space and outdoor recreation?

- ❖ Outdoor recreation in the Catskills brought in **2.4 million visitors**, with economic impact of **\$114 million**, supporting more than **2400 jobs**.
- ❖ Outdoor recreation in the United States contributes \$646 billion annually
- ❖ More than 47% of the Mid-Atlantic population engages in outdoor recreation activities
- ❖ About 15% of the Catskills workforce is generated by tourism
- ❖ Total tourism \$ in Catskills = \$1B +



How can communities benefit?



Connect Main Street to the Trails

Create opportunities to drive visitors to businesses

New transportation solutions

New businesses catering to growing activities

Thinking both locally and regionally

Strong virtual and physical presences

Taking advantage of regional networks and organizations

Creating regenerative systems that feed back into community/park

How do we get closer to the goals of Ecotourism?



Minimize impact

- ❖ Educate visitors before they arrive / Leave No Trace / Hike Safe

Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect

- ❖ Utilize existing resources and integrate education about region

Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts

- ❖ Adjusting to visitor needs – expanded hours, more flexibility, hospitality, etc

Provide direct financial benefits for conservation; and

- ❖ Create mechanisms to direct funds to benefit conservation projects, especially related to access improvements, resource restoration and trash removal

Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people

- ❖ Establish support for locally owned businesses

How can the Catskill Center help?



CIC and Visitor Education

Advocacy / Increasing State Resources

Coalition Building

Collaboration and Regional Conversations

Partnerships and Connections