

## **Stream Access and Rec Working Group Meeting Notes**

June 22, 2016

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

10:00am-12:00pm

*In attendance,*

Maxanne Resnick, Woodstock Land Conservancy

Harry Jameson, Town Tinker Tubes

Tony Coccozza, A/P Trout Unlimited

Adam Doan, UCSWCD

Aaron Bennet, Ulster County DoE

Kathy Nolan, Catskill Mountain Keeper

Leslie Zucker, CCEUC

Brent Gotsch, CCEUC

Mark Loete, Working Group Co-Chair, Trout Unlimited

Chris Tran, NYC DEP

Marc Hollander, Working Group Co-Chair, KCCNY, ACA

Mike Flaherty, NYSDEC

Mary McNamara, Lower Esopus Watershed Partnership

Caroline Stupple, CCEUC

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Caroline Stupple was introduced as a new part-time Watershed Educator with the AWSMP working for Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ulster County. Working Group members introduced themselves.

### **Member Updates**

Mark L. with Trout Unlimited expressed concern about construction of a stream access site near the “Honey Hole” (fishing hole) on the Esopus. The area is regarded as the wildest, most beautiful section of the Esopus and an ideal spot for angling. He expressed frustration from the angling community that the area will now have construction around it taking away from its natural beauty. Mark L. noted the deprivation of the “Blue Hole” swimming hole (on the Rondout Creek) and voiced fears the Esopus access site could become similarly degraded from overuse.

Kathy N. explained that construction of a new access and recreation location at the Catskill Interpretive Center will create trails that connect a picnic area with an access point on the Esopus.

The CIC access site is owned by NYSDEC and managed to provide additional fishing access. NYSDEC will encourage angling in that area, but plans to prevent overuse.

### **Large Wood Management Protocol**

Leslie Z. opened discussion by announcing the Catskill Environmental Research and Monitoring (CERM) conference to be held October 27<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> at the Belleayre Ski Resort. The conference features research on Catskill environmental topics and provides an opportunity for researchers and students interested in doing environmental research to network. Drs. Ellen Wohl and Kurt Fausch, both of Colorado State University (CSU), will be attending the conference. Ellen Wohl and collaborating researchers from CSU are working on large

wood (LW) management in Colorado Mountain stream reaches. The conditions there are similar to conditions in the Catskills that the Working Group is concerned about.

Leslie Z. gave a presentation on a protocol for classifying hazardous LW that Wohl and coauthors developed. Large Wood has been studied from the 1970s onward and research indicates there are less wood deposits now than prior to European settlement. The general public is inclined to believe that LW is not natural and a detriment to stream health and human safety. However, it is important to recognize that LW is natural and there needs to be a realistic balance between safety and the ecological benefits of LW.

The benefits of LW are detailed throughout the research paper, including ecological, stream stability, and recreational benefits of LW, as well as how LW accumulations can threaten human safety and infrastructure stability.

The protocol includes components of a checklist for initial assessment, followed by more detailed quantitative and qualitative assessments of LW deposits. The quantitative approach is a multi-criterion decisionmaking analysis tool that incorporates habitat and flow models and HEC-RAS computer modeling. The qualitative assessment is informed by data collection, but ultimately is backed by the best judgement of managers and researchers.

The protocol emphasizes a site-by-site approach with qualitative assessments made by an inter-disciplinary team. The strategy takes into account short- and long-term effects. The Working Group could undertake the assessment itself; and may be well equipped to carry out assessments since members represent a range of expertise and interests. Alternatively, Stream Management Implementation Program (SMIP) funds available from the AWSMP could be used to hire a consultant to implement the assessment protocol.

The Working Group discussed the idea of adopting this or a similar protocol. Mark L. asked about the timeline for such assessments and subsequent actions. How quickly could a hazardous site be dealt with? Timely decisions are of the essence. When potential hazards develop into acute in-stream hazards action is needed and sending a team out to work quickly is the best way to handle the situation.

Kathy N. suggested the initial assessment team should be trained in using the protocol and consist of people with various backgrounds including hydrology, biology, stream management, public works personnel and a member with Rosgen (applied fluvial geomorphology) training.

The committee discussed updating Ulster County Legislator John Parete and Town of Shandaken Supervisor Rob Stanley, who sit on the Ulster County Waterways Advisory Committee, about this discussion. A formal protocol may be of interest to the Waterways Committee that is tasked with identifying hazards.

Adam D. emphasized in some cases it may be beneficial to leave the removed material on the floodplain.

Kath N. commented on assessment and pointed out that Checklist item 1b. "Does the wood accumulation have crevices that can trap recreation users (i.e. is it porous) **and** completely span the active river channel in a location and season known for high recreational use?" is not a perfect fit for conditions that the Working Group finds in local areas. River hydrology is such that obstructions that do not span the full channel during high flow events do become impossible to navigate around.

Adam D. observed that blockage of the thalweg, the deepest fastest moving part of the channel where the most water flows, might be a better indication of hazard because that is the route typically followed by boaters or floating materials. The determination would be the same under high and low flows.

Marc H. stated that during the last recreational release LW was identified near the Emerson Resort spanning about 2/3 of the river. The recommended navigation for such an obstruction is a Class 2 skill set. The protocol

would be interesting to use there to determine what should be done. Near this site, a cable is spanning the stream and a tree is down river left.

Mary M. asked for clarification about the recreational areas that Harry J. monitors and who monitors recreational areas used by boaters upstream and downstream of the reaches that he monitors.

Harry J. indicated that the Kayak and Canoe Club of New York (KCCNY) once removed strainers, or boaters would actively remove them. KCCNY, however, is much less active than it once was. To remove a strainer Harry J. communicates with landowners directly, and they typically allow him to remove materials. Most LW accumulations are removed with hand tools. This approach does not require a stream disturbance permit. In the past, NYSDEC had issued permits for larger LW removals when necessary. Harry J. typically leaves the pieced wood in place and it's cleared by higher stream flows.

Kathy N. said the main goal of assembling a team would be to gather and compile the knowledge base already available from Harry J. and people who have done this type of work for years. Perhaps partnering with Town flood committees may help in assessing big projects.

Mike F. discussed that LW can't always be removed immediately (within days) and that such actions take time. Adam D. agreed and emphasized the importance of closing access until removal of hazards can be accomplished.

Committee members asked about the status of the Local Flood Analysis (LFA) in the Town of Olive and suggested a recommendation be added to the final LFA report to develop recreational stream access in Boiceville to maintain and bolster tourism. AWSMP staff reported the Olive Flood Advisory Committee has considered potential recreational benefits of flood mitigation actions.

#### Other discussion points included:

Climate change as a consideration, as it alters the frequency and severity of high velocity events that could challenge even experienced boaters trying to navigate streams.

Raising public awareness and education about hazards posed by LW.

Note that the term "debris" has negative connotations that prevents public acceptance and understanding of the benefits of LW. Distinguish that there is actual debris in the river (garbage, construction material, etc.).

Management approaches may include leaving some LW untouched. If debris or LW are not in the thalweg, then avoiding use of the area may be the best approach.

The protocol is useful because it will take the emotions out of decisions about stream management.

It is important to formalize all protocols and make them accessible to the public.

Areas where deposits are deeply embedded that need a higher amount of manipulation with heavy machinery will require extra analysis. While the use of heavy equipment isn't necessarily damaging, removal of deeply embedded materials is a concern for riparian habitat and a clear protocol and criteria for removal is needed.

It is important to formalize the monitoring process so that people who notice a hazard have a clear point of contact to report them.

Encourage formalizing use of the protocol so that the position in the assessment group is what is vital, and not the individual. This will allow for the program to continue beyond the immediate future and possibly outside of the Working Group as well.

Committee asked if a workshop with the research article authors could be arranged, possibly in a public forum setting. Leslie Z. said she would pursue this idea.

### **Other Recreational Issues**

Chris T. reported that DEP design of a low-level outlet (from the Schoharie Reservoir to Schoharie Creek) is still in the analysis and modeling phase. The potential for ice blockage is being analyzed. The report is planned for release in winter 2016.

Aaron B. updated on development of the Ashokan Rail Trail and associated access points along the Esopus. Access points concentrate users in controlled areas and don't promote access across the entire bank. This will hopefully limit negative effects on the ecology of the area.

### **Next Meeting**

TBA October 2016, potentially with special guest Dr. Ellen Wohl