

**Ashokan Watershed Stream Management Program**  
**Stream Access and Recreation Committee Meeting Minutes**

**July 11, 2012**

*In attendance:*

Brent Gotsch, CCE Ulster County  
Gretchen Rae, CCE Ulster County  
Liz Higgins, CCE Ulster/Sullivan  
Russell Yess, Trout Unlimited Catskill Mountain Chapter  
Bill Colagrande, Phoenicia resident/fisherman  
Kathy Nolan, Catskill Mountainkeeper  
Dave Gilmour, Gilmour Planning  
Mary McNamara, Lower Esopus Working Group

Aaron Bennett (UC Department of the Environment), Harry Jameson (Town Tinker Tube Rentals) and David King (KCCNY) were unable to attend but submitted comments.

**Purpose of Stream Access and Recreation Committee**

The purpose of the AWSMP Stream Access and Recreation Committee is to help improve and enhance access and recreational activities in the Ashokan Watershed. Committee members help develop ideas and implement those ideas. When funds are available committee advises Stakeholder Council on how to spend the money. The committee's main intent is to support volunteer programming in the Ashokan Watershed. When funding and money are available the committee will pursue projects that provide the most benefit to local community members.

**Requirements to be on Stream Access and Recreation Committee**

1. Need to attend at least one committee meeting
2. Need to fill out Cornell Cooperative Extension volunteer form

**Role in Stakeholder's Council**

The Stream Access and Recreation Committee needs representatives to be on the AWSMP Stakeholder's Council. So far, Aaron Bennett is slated to be this representative, however, we would like to have another person on as well.

**Funding**

Monies were budgeted with the expectation that the current CCE contract with DEP would be extended to May 2014 to be in parity with the DEP contract with the Ulster County Soil & Water Conservation District. However, the contract (which expires in May 2013) will be renegotiated

as previously committed. Unspent money will be made available to the various committees and working groups, the sums of which will be determined. This means that there will be some extra money available that can be used for the various committees and working groups. This includes the Stream Access and Recreation Committee. It is unclear how much funding will be available though there will be a better idea in the coming months. It is expected to be in the ballpark of \$50,000.

## **Potential Projects**

### **Rail Trail:**

There is a lot of interest in a Rail Trail from Phoenicia west to Pine Hill (along the railroad grade). This has been a project that has a lot of community support but in the past was complicated by conflicts between Ulster County (who owns the railroad grade) and the railroad company itself (which leases it). The lease does not expire until 2016 and the railroad company has been reluctant to give up part of its tracks for trail development. However, the area of track from Phoenicia up to Pine Hill has been so damaged by floods the past few years there may now be an opportunity to reinvestigate the possibility of a rail trail. There are currently two potential scenarios of development. Either the entire 11-mile stretch of track could be developed for trail use or a smaller 3-mile stretch closer to Pine Hill could be developed alone. The railroad has unofficially stated that they may be interested in allowing the development of a rail trail in this area on the condition that the tracks themselves are not removed. It was recommended that a committee point person contact March Gallagher from the county to work with railroad to negotiate usage.

### **Warner Creek Trail on DEP Land:**

NYC DEP owns land along the upper portion of Warner Creek. It has been proposed that there may be an opportunity to develop a trail from this DEP property to a larger NYS DEC trail adjacent to DEP lands. DEP has tentatively stated their permission for this project. What are currently needed are volunteers to plan out a new trail and to construct the trails. A committee point person will contact Charlie Liang at DEP about this project.

### **Mount Tremper Pedestrian Bridge:**

There is a bridge in Mount Tremper that crosses the Beaverkill that has been closed to vehicular traffic for years. However, barring any serious safety concerns, there does not appear to be a reason why this could not become a pedestrian foot bridge which would allow greater access to the stream. It is believed that this bridge is county-owned, however, more investigation needs to be done. A committee point person will contact Ulster County (either DOT or March Gallagher) regarding this possibility.

### **Proposed Consultant/Study of Recreational Releases from the Shandaken Tunnel:**

The July recreational releases for this year have been canceled which has upset whitewater recreational proprietors and enthusiasts (e.g. tubing, kayaking etc.). This is done to allow for cold

water releases later in the summer to help protect the health of the fisheries in the Esopus. This has been a long simmering and contentious issue.

Anglers and fisheries scientists state that the fisheries require cold water releases from the Shandaken Tunnel in order to help with thermal control of the waters during hot late-summer days. If the water gets too warm it could create serious fish-kill which would have long-lasting impacts on the fisheries and ultimately the local economy which is heavily based on fishing and tourism related to fishing.

The whitewater recreationalists counterclaim that the Esopus Creek from the Tunnel to the reservoir is an artificially controlled river because the Shandaken Tunnel (which takes water from the Schoharie Reservoir to the Esopus Creek and then ultimately to the Ashokan Reservoir) is man-made and historically fish populations have done well there long before the construction of the reservoirs. In which case, any releases that are made beyond what is needed for water supply are mostly arbitrary. They also state cases where recreational releases in Pennsylvania and others have been made which have benefited all parties. Furthermore, they contest that whitewater recreation has just as great if not a greater impact on the local economy as fishing does.

Taking all these considerations into effect it was proposed that the Stream Access and Recreation Committee use its funds to hire an objective third party (such as an academic institution) to do a study to see the impacts that recreational releases have both environmentally and economically. The final product would be the creation of a document which gives clear quantitative data on the benefits of recreational releases and not subjective observation which is what has historically been made. Specifically quantify dollars versus days to see the impact of recreational releases. A committee point person will also check to see if DEP and DEC have done similar studies to that which we are proposing.

### **Future Actions**

AWSMP will contact March Gallagher (Deputy Director of Economic Development-UC Planning Department) to inquire about the possibility of a rail trail from Phoenicia to Pine Hill. AWSMP would be willing to partner with other organizations and to add seed money to begin process of developing a trail and adding stream access to key points.

AWSMP will contact DEP to determine if any studies have been done to find out the environmental and economic benefits of recreational releases from the Shandaken Tunnel. If they approve of the idea, AWSMP will also begin the process of convening a working group which will scope out what the study would include.

AWSMP will contact Charlie Liang of DEP to determine the possibility of developing a trail on DEP lands near Warner Creek.

### **Next Meeting**

The group believes that we should meet more than quarterly but are currently undecided on how often meetings should take place.

The next meeting will be in September. Time and date will be announced.