
Stakeholder Council 2024 Membership

The Ashokan Stakeholder Council is comprised of:

The Executive Council:

2 representatives from each of the active AWSMP working groups.

Both representatives of a working group should not come from the same organization or agency.

Representatives should be chosen annually by the working group.

No person can represent more than one working group on the Stakeholder Council.

Staff: (CCE Ulster County, Ulster County SWCD, DEP Stream Management Program, Ulster County Env. Planner)

Regular Members: Membership in the Stakeholder Council is open to any interested and knowledgeable stakeholder.



ASHOKAN WATERSHED STREAM MANAGEMENT PROGRAM STAKEHOLDER COUNCIL MEETING NOTES

Hybrid In-person/Online Meeting
April 25, 2024 from 1:30 pm - 4:00 pm

In Attendance at office: Leslie Zucker, Heidi Emrich, Adam Trescott, Jake Wedemeyer, Burt Samuelson*, Jim Sofranko*, Brian Burns*, Bobby Taylor

Via Webinar: Scott George*, Tim Koch, Mike Flaherty*, Melanie Forstrom, Andrew Emrich

*Executive Council member

Next scheduled meeting: November 21, 2024

Announcements

The Town of Olive will hold a series of public Comprehensive Plan development meetings in hamlet areas. A meeting on Saturday, May 11 from 10am-12nn. For more on the public workshop series: <https://townofolivecomprehensiveplan.com>.

AWSMP Updates

Tim Koch (Sr. Team Leader with CCE Ulster County) announced two large educational programs coming in 2024. The first is a technical training called "How to Read a River." To be held June 4-

5, 2024 at the Menla retreat center at the end of Panther Kill Rd in Phoenicia. A free, two-day training with meals included. Training is geared for municipal officials and highway department staff, natural resources professionals, and stream program staff. First day will cover fundamentals of river form and function and include a stream features walk. The second day will include field sessions designed to build observational skills. The training includes only a few hours of classroom learning and the remainder of time will be spent learning from models and in the field. There will be at least 40 spaces, so there is room for interested town and highway department staff to attend. Tim will distribute registration links soon.

The second big event is the 2024 Ashokan Watershed Conference. This year's theme is "Conservation Through Connection." The conference is a series of public events that speak a little more to the heart than the brain. The idea is to build a bond with streams so that people will be inspired to stream stewardship. The kick-off event is "Blue Space, Healing Spaces" with retired Cornell University Professor Dr. Don Rakow who will talk about research on "Blue Spaces" (rivers, lakes, oceans, etc.) at the Phoenicia Playhouse. Earlier that day will feature several Forest Bathing sessions. Later conference events will include guided fly fishing, snorkeling, and a paddle & portage for immersive or more traditional events. Less common type events are River Yoga, Streamside Qi Gong, Streamside Mindfulness Meditation, and a Medicinal Plant Walk. The conference website will be updated soon with more information at:

<https://ashokanstreams.org/ashokan-watershed-conference/>

Bobby Taylor (Catskill Streams Buffer Initiative Coordinator with Ulster County SWCD) gave an update on progress of a native plant riparian buffer demonstration located on the grounds of Emerson Resort in Mt. Tremper. The project began in 2019 with conversion of a mowed lawn around a tributary to the Esopus Creek, to a native riparian buffer with a trail that runs through it. The project demonstrates the importance of Catskill native plants in stream buffers. Watershed residents and visitors can access the buffer location. Staff at the Emerson and AWSMP will use the demonstration to educate on the importance of native ecosystems. Interpretative panels and a kiosk are soon to be installed. Bobby shared images of a colorful series of eight panels with photos of riparian buffer elements and information on how buffers protect water quality. One small area of the buffer includes a managed patch of invasive plants and one educational panel helps landowners learn to recognize invasive plants. Opposite the demonstration buffer is an outdoor living classroom. The cost to reprint and install the panels was in-expensive and the panels are appropriate for use anywhere in the NYC Watershed or Hudson Valley.

Jim Sorfranko commented that the Town of Olive has seen and appreciates the buffer panels and hopes to install similar type interpretive panels at town restoration sites.

Working Group Reports

Stream Ecosystem Working Group

Scott George is the new working group co-lead (along with Mike Flaherty) replacing Barry Baldigo who is phasing into retirement from the USGS. Barry will remain involved in the working group. Scott G. reported the group had one of the most active periods in recent memory. The group has been working to complete a five-year update to the Ashokan Watershed Research Assessment & Monitoring Strategy (RAMS). The document is in draft form after a detailed review of past recommendations to determine their current status and relevance, as well as to identify newly emerging science information needs and recommendations.

The USGS is working with Ulster SWCD to look at the biology, temperature, and habitat implications of reach-scale, stream restoration projects (SRPs). The layout of the study is to get three years of data collection pre- project construction and three years of data post-construction. USGS surveys fish community and monitors water temperature and SWCD collects data on habitat quality and geomorphic condition. The Elk Bushkill SRP was constructed last summer and this will be first year of post-construction data collection. Several new project sites will be identified for monitoring.

Mike F. reported that he and Bobby Adams at NYSDEC worked together on a fish assessment strategy for DEC. Regarding the RAMS update, committee members completed a survey to identify the top ten RAMS recommendations that should be implemented in the next 2-3 years. When the RAMS is fully reported this survey ranking will be included.

Flood Hazard Mitigation Working Group

New working group co-lead Jim Sofranko reported for the group. Several local municipal officials recently attended a FEMA training on 'Managing Floodplain Development through the National Flood Insurance Program.' AWSMP provided a training scholarship for their attendance. Heidi Emrich of Ulster County Dept. of Environemtn has been working with towns on Substantial Damage/Substantial Improvement (SD/SI) education for floodplain properties. Jim S. reported the pressure on development is at an all-time high in the Catskills. The towns are seeing properties considered for development that never would have been. Towns provide information to potential buyers on floodplain location and potential problems, related costs and possibility of having to elevate depending on condition of building. People still buy the properties and start work without doing the right process. The Town of Olive will undergo a CAV next month and is

working to tighten up administration of SD/SI process. Heidi E. is working with CCEUC to finish an educational landowner handout on SD/SI that the towns can use.

The working group heard from NYSDEC that the state wetlands law ([Environmental Conservation Law Article 24](#)) was amended by the Legislature and DEC will expand wetlands jurisdiction. The default size wetland will decrease from 12.4 acres to 7.4 acres effective January 1, 2028. Small wetlands of “unusual importance” will continue to be regulated if they meet criteria in the legislation. Also, NYS Freshwater Wetlands Maps will no longer limit DEC regulatory jurisdiction to wetlands depicted on maps and this action will take effect January 1, 2025. DEC issued an advance notice of proposed rulemaking for potential revisions to freshwater wetlands regulations. The public comment period for the advance notice ended in February. For additional amendments and information, see the NYCDEC website <https://dec.ny.gov/nature/waterbodies/wetlands/freshwater-wetlands-program>. Cornell University is mapping wetlands down to 1 acre in size. DEC plans to present to the working group again with more information.

Another NYS law requires realtors to reveal whether a property is located in a flood zone or has received flood damage. This will be addressed in a future realtor training offered by AWSMP (for more information, contact Heidi E.). Realtors may not be prepared to provide this information to buyers. The FEMA website is complicated and hard for regular consumers to navigate. Buyers may just think buying flood insurance resolves the issue. Some anecdotal evidence suggests watershed properties in unsafe portions of floodplains are being bought and remodeled. Buyers are a group to reach out to with education as well as realtors, such as a training or educational event for perspective buyers.

Ulster County towns are going through Community Assistance Visits (CAVs) during which town implementation of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) is audited for enforcement. A CAV is repeated every five years. Heidi E. has been working closely with towns to help them prepare for CAVs. Heidi E. intends to collectively debrief with towns after CAVs are complete to identify best practices and educational needs.

Stream Access & Recreation Working Group

The working group co-leads were unable to attend and report. Leslie Z. shared the group has been meeting with assistance from staff member Max Kelly with CCE Ulster County and the co-leads. Bobby Adams, NYSDEC is the new working group co-lead, along with Mark Loete. The group is talking about auditing watershed stream access sites to identify gaps in the range of access opportunities (e.g., viewpoints as one category) and accessibility features. Jim S. suggested that land use regulations also be audited. For example, defining what activities are allowed at DEC fishing easements. Towns want to explore what kind of access and prohibitions on access are in place, and how best to maintain properties over time, to provide use but prevent over-use. Towns may have different perspectives. Olive has received ownership of set of contiguous flood buyout properties in Boiceville that it hopes will become a model for how to manage riparian areas and stream access. Jim S. says he wants this area to be a model for how towns can work with DEP and local and regional interests. There may be national interest in this model. Environmental groups have contacted Jim S. about how Boiceville redevelopment is being handled and if there are funding needs. Members of the Stakeholder Council complimented Jim S. on his leadership in this effort.

Highway Managers Working Group

Working group co-lead Brian Burns reported for the group. Highway managers have received calls from new residents to area about managing stream-related stormwater issues on property. Education for new residents would be helpful. Stormwater management from neighbor to neighbor is another topic. People are looking for information on legal

responsibilities and best management practices. For example, during the Christmas Eve flood several years ago the town saw four inches of water across a road caused by leaves and trees blocking water on private property. Shorter storms with higher velocities are causing additional issues.

In addition, ash tree die off is contributing to stormwater issues. Ulster SWCD is increasingly suggesting use of tree canopies to absorb intense rain impacts over exposed soil. What can landowners do to replace the role that ash trees played? With deer over-browse, invasives are replacing ash and tree regeneration is low. Bobby T. said the stream program is looking at how invasives are moving through the watershed landscape and focused on managing upstream occurrences. Spot management of invasives to replace with native plant communities can mute the density of invasives at key or highly visible locations. CSBI completed a large invasive removal project at the Catskill Visitors Center and successfully removed bittersweet. Trying to prevent the disturbance of intact native plant communities is another important action to limit the spread of invasives.

Tim K. reported the working group heard a presentation from Doug DeKoskie, NYC DEP about a new programmatic general permit for regulated waters of the U.S. for use during storm response. The joint permit between NYS and Army Corps of Engineers is meant to streamline post- major storm permitting so work can be done easier and faster (must be a declared disaster). The Permit went into effect December 2023, so it's only a few months old. The permit was years in the making. Tim is looking for upcoming training opportunities and will reach out to highway managers with opportunities. A presentation to the FHM Working Group would also be helpful.

Stream Management Implementation Program (SMIP) Update and Vote

The AWSMP just implemented the spring funding round. Two more funding rounds are planned in 2024, or until all funds are distributed if earlier. The parent funding agreement between CCEUC and NYCDEP that includes the SMIP has been extended through March 31, 2025.

Funds remaining to distribute headed into this funding round:

Regular Expense: \$22,993
 Regular Capital: \$326,212
 LFA Expense: \$500,000
 LFA Capital: \$215,484

The AWSMP received three grant applications during the first funding round of 2024:

Project Name	ID	Applicant	Request
<i>Shandaken Flood Mitigation Plan: Required Five-Year Update with RLAA Update</i>	185	Town of Shandaken	\$65,000
<i>Janssen and MeadowBrook Road Culvert Enlargements</i>	186	Town of Hunter	\$123,490
<i>Catskill Fishery Heritage Brook Trout Genomic Mapping 2024</i>	187	APW-TU	\$7,806

Previously awarded in 2024:

<i>Phoenicia LFA Implementation: Additional Modeling for Flood Mitigation</i>	184	Town of Shandaken	\$65,340
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SMIP Grant Review Committee Recommendations and Executive Council Vote

Burt S. reported the grant review committee's recommendations. Funding was recommended for grant applications 185 and 187. Funding was not recommended for grant application 186. The committee recommended that AWSMP provide additional technical support and grant program information to the Town of Hunter.

A quorum of Executive Council members was present and included: Scott George, Mike Flaherty, Jim Sofranko, Brian Burns, and Burt Samuelson. Chet Karwatowski voted by proxy. Following discussion, the Executive Council voted to adopt the grant review committee's recommendations on funding as follows:

185 - Shandaken Flood Mitigation Plan: Required Five-Year Update with RLAA Update

Jim. S. moved to adopt the grant review committee recommendation. Brian B. seconded. All Executive Council members present voted in favor (Scott G. not present). None opposed. No abstentions. Motion passed.

186 - Janssen and MeadowBrook Road Culvert Enlargements

Burt S. moved to adopt the grant review committee recommendation. Mike F. seconded. All Executive Council members present voted in favor. None opposed. No abstentions. Motion passed.

187 - Catskill Fishery Heritage Brook Trout Genomic Mapping 2024

Jim S. moved to adopt the grant review committee recommendation. Mike F. seconded. All Executive Council members present voted in favor. None opposed. No abstentions. Motion passed.

Action Plan Updates and Vote

Leslie Z. distributed the draft 2024-2026 AWSMP Action Plan with markup to the full AWSMP Stakeholder Council prior to the meeting with a request to review. Markup included updates and comments made by staff and working groups who reviewed and updated sections at recent meetings. An updated AWSMP Action Plan is due to NYC DEP and the FAD Regulators every year by May 1.

Leslie Z. summarized key changes and explained that Adam Doan was unable to attend and co-present due to a family emergency. Key updates included:

- Ulster SWCD will begin incorporating the use of lidar-equipped drone into their stream assessment and monitoring program.
- Ulster SWCD will finish plantings at last year's Elk Bushkill Stream Restoration Project this spring. No reach-scale stream restoration project with a primary water quality goal is planned for construction in 2024.
- A reach-scale stream restoration project for water quality and stream stability on Hollow Tree Brook tributary to Stony Clove Creek is in design for likely construction in 2025.
- The 2025 construction season promises to be a busy one, given plans for FAD-deliverable water quality and SMIP-funded stream projects.
- AWSMP staff continue to meet with regional NYC Watershed partners and towns to advance discussion and development of a future Collaborative Streamside Acquisition Program that would operate in the watershed. A full presentation of the program is planned for a future Stakeholder Council meeting. Towns will have approval authority as part of the acquisition process.
- The NYC Watershed partners are also meeting to revise Local Flood Analysis (LFA) Program rules to make additional population centers eligible for the program. In the Ashokan watershed, the addition of Shokan (T/Olive) and Oliveria (T/Shandaken) hamlets are under consideration. Additional centers, including in

Woodstock, may be considered. Over the next five-year funding cycle, the AWSMP will have enough SMIP funding to advance about one LFA per year in the Ashokan watershed.

- Staff (including UC Dept. of Env.) are currently assisting the Town of Hunter with an LFA for Lanesville on the Stony Clove Creek, in collaboration with the Upper Schoharie Creek stream program.
- Population centers on the original LFA program list without completed LFAs to-date, include Chichester and Big Indian. Shandaken has discussed plans to advance both LFAs.
- Shandaken is currently updating information and advancing LFA implementation projects for Phoenicia and Pine Hill.
- CSBI implementation and landowner assistance visits are in high demand. CSBI also assists with replanting stream restoration project sites implemented by Ulster SWCD or municipalities.
- The Stream Access & Recreation section of the Action Plan looks entirely rewritten, but in fact only received a major edit to reduce redundancy and enhance readability. The recommendations have not substantially changed.

Executive Council Vote

Following discussion, the Executive Council was asked to vote on whether to adopt the Action Plan updates as presented. Jim S. moved to adopt the Action Plan as edited. Burt S. seconded. All those present voted in favor. None opposed. No abstentions. Motion passed.

Next AWSMP Stakeholder Council Meeting

The AWSMP Stakeholder Council will meet again November 21 from 1:30-4:00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned.