
**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
November 21, 2024 from 1:30 pm - 4:00 pm

In Attendance at office: Max Kelly, Aaron Bennett, Andrew Emrich, Jim Sofranko*, Mike Flaherty*, Bobby Taylor, Allison Lent, Burt Samuelson*, Brian Burns*, Chet Karwatowski*, Jake Wedemeyer

Via Webinar: Scott George*, Tim Koch, Bobby Adams*, Adam Trescott

*Executive Council member

Next scheduled meeting: April, 2025

Announcements

The Town of Olive will hold a public meeting on December 11 at the Onteora High School to obtain input on three design plans for Boiceville buyout properties. Stakeholder Council members discussed recent forest fires in the region. The county has identified fire as the second highest risk behind flooding. There is need to understand the effects of fire on streams and water quality.

AWSMP Updates

Leslie Z. and Jake W. updated on the transition timeline to new parent agreements with DEP that fund the Ashokan Watershed Stream Management Program (AWSMP). The new agreements funding Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ulster County (CCE) and the Ulster County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) are scheduled to begin April 1, 2025. District funding will move from a \$12.2 million contract to \$17 million, plus an additional \$8 million to be added through amendment. Increased funding is provided to cover inflation and rising costs of stream restoration projects.

Leslie Z. reported the last SMIP funding round under the current five-year funding agreement was held in October 2024. Projects that can't be final invoiced by March 31, 2024 will be amended to move under the new parent agreement.

The SWCD is designing a stream restoration project on Hollow Tree Brook that is using engineered log jams to stabilize the stream. This will be a new use of engineered wood within the Ashokan watershed. Construction costs may reach \$3.5 million to treat one of the highest contributors of turbidity in the watershed.

CCE announced the anticipated departure of staff member Tim Koch in early 2025. Tim plans to accept a stream restoration and education position with Cornell University's Water Resources Institute working in collaboration with NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. Leslie Z. reviewed some of Tim's major accomplishments during his eight years with the stream program. This includes developing a multi-objective road crossing assessment protocol and survey

of over 600 road-stream crossings in the Ashokan watershed. Tim then produced fully illustrated, multi-volume field guidebooks and offered field and classroom trainings on how to implement the protocol. The AWSMP Stakeholder Council thanked Tim for his excellent work.

The SWCD announced it plans to work with DEP funding to fill an engineer position this winter. The position was previously posted with little success in a highly competitive job market. The position was modified to broaden the candidate pool. Eventually the SWCD will try to fill the AWSMP stream project manager position formerly held by Adam Doan and Bobby Taylor. Bobby T. has resumed the CSBI Coordination position, but will continue providing the SMIP program with technical assistance.

Revised Local Flood Analysis Program Rules

Leslie Z. presented updated Local Flood Analysis (LFA) Program Rules released on October 24, 2024 by the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the NYC Watershed partner organizations. The LFA Program Rules were first published in July 2014. Through the LFA program, the AWSMP funds eligible parties to carry out analyses of flood conditions and identify mitigation project that result in community-scale benefits. Projects are to reduce flood hazards and impacts, protect water quality and public safety, and promote community resilience.

Initially 11 population centers were eligible for LFA funding in the Ashokan watershed. Watershed towns completed LFAs for 7 communities since 2014. Over two dozen LFAs have been completed in the entire NYC Watershed. There are two major updates to rules: 1) Expansion of eligible areas; and 2) Clarification of types of projects eligible for LFA Implementation funding. Newly eligible population centers in the watershed include Lanesville, Willow, Woodland Valley, and Oliveria. A new category of eligibility called "Subsequent Areas" identifies damage clusters and risk clusters of properties or infrastructure. See attached slides and the revised [LFA Program Rules](#) for detailed criteria determining Subsequent Area eligibility. The AWSMP will work to determine how many Subsequent Areas exist in the watershed and report to municipalities. The rules also clarify that public infrastructure projects must have an off-site flood reduction benefit to residential and/or commercial structures, or critical facilities to be eligible for LFA Implementation funding. Projects not meeting LFA criteria can be considered for Stream Management Implementation Program (SMIP) grants. Finally, the program rules allow for recommended LOMRs to be funded through LFA. Past LFAs may be revised and updated.

Working Group Reports

Flood Hazard Mitigation (FHM) Working Group

Jim S. reported for the working group. The Town of Olive has acquired the Maverick family health property and Catskill Watershed Corporation (CWC) will develop a demo plan. The IGA in Boiceville has anchored propane and oil tanks located in the floodplain. Shandaken is before the CWC this month for a stormwater feasibility study for the Pine Hill Community Center. The AWSMP offered a substantial damage training at recent FHM Working Group meeting that was attended by building staff and staff found it very helpful. Real estate pressure to buy and sell substantially damaged properties is high. Jim thanked Heidi E. for organizing this training. The FHM Working Group also learned about FEMA Map Center products and a use tutorial at recent meetings. The working group reviewed the 2023 elevation certificate to help Floodplain Administrators know what to ask for, when, and how to review accuracy of certificates. Stormwater has been a topic of discussion.

Jim S. shared a recent example of issues the towns are facing - a house in the 100-year floodplain went on the market for \$200K. The house was substantially damaged and abandoned but someone eventually purchased for \$90K and made

upgrades without a building permit. The town issued a stop order and learned the owner was unaware of floodplains and regulations. The property is back on the market. The working group discussed the need for a “Welcome to the Neighborhood” campaign with educational materials to help new residents understand the watershed and floodplain areas. AWSMP is considering creation of a postcard or other template materials for towns to use.

Heidi E. announced that AWSMP is planning a Floodplain Administrators Basic Training in early April 2025 to be offered anyone working in the West of Hudson NYC Watershed. The two-day training will be a “bootcamp” with real-world scenarios and exercises using local maps. The goal is to teach Floodplain Administrators what they need to know on a day-to-day basis.

Stream Access & Recreation Working Group

Bobby A. reported for the working group. The working group met in October and heard member updates, including from TU a citizen science survey looking for redds (trout spawning) sites in local streams; survey is supported by an app. The Ashokan-Pepacton TU held their first fundraiser banquet since pandemic and it was well attended. Olive reported on continuation of flood buyouts in Boiceville. There is ongoing discussion with DEP about connecting town-owned and DEP parcels. The town is involving DEC in plans for fishing access parking in Boiceville. The Town of Shandaken is evaluating recreational uses of flood buyout properties in Mt. Tremper. However, high flood flows and velocities at the site may limit uses. Whitewater recreational groups expressed deep frustration that DEC approved no recreational releases in 2024. Bobby A. explained that NY Code Regulation 670 covers approvals of up to four releases for recreational events that must be presented to DEC in writing by April 15 each year. Regional staff assess safety threats or natural resources concerns related to releases and DEP is contacted about release impacts on water supply. Approval continues to be made on a case-by-case basis and this can be frustrating.

Laura Davis was newly hired by NYC DEP as recreational coordinator and was asked to present DEP recreation updates at a future meeting. The group discussed the high-level intake on Schoharie Reservoir completed in 2023 and successfully deployed in 2024. Use of the intake can hopefully preserve cold water reserves for summer release to Esopus Creek. The Catskill Center’s CRSIP program reported the [fishhook water flea](#) was recently found in Pepacton and Rondout Reservoirs. This is a zooplankton with a long appendage and spikes. It’s a recreational issue and can foul up fishing gear and easily spread. Best practices are needed for anglers and others. The ecological implications are unpalatable to large fish and can change food webs, but there is limited research on impacts in US lakes and reservoirs.

Some good news - at least three quarter an acre was cleared of invasive plants on the Ashokan Rail Trail and 180 native plants installed with volunteer labor. Ongoing monitoring of remaining ash trees in parks and woodlots is underway to study ash tree adaptations and characteristics that allow survival. The working group is planning to invite regional speakers on recreational development of flood buyout properties to explore ideas for our region. Actions that improve or restore access to streams are potentially fundable through SMIP grants. The group also discussed inviting speakers who are working on citizen science programs.

Highway Managers Working Group

Brian B. reported that Olive had a busy construction season and the lack of rain helped in getting projects done. The town is looking to advance crossing enlargements in Shokan at Bostock Road currently advancing through 100% design. The town recently began preparing a Local Flood Analysis for the Shokan area. Flash flooding events in areas with mountainous roads have changed watercourses with an impact on residents, highways and the town in general. Andrew

E. reported that Ulster County is progressing the Phoenicia Bridge Street Bridge replacement design and hopes to present flood mitigation alternatives developed for the Phoenicia LFA with the bridge design at a spring meeting to obtain public input.

Aaron B. offered that FEMA has changed its policy on public assistance funding available to municipalities for infrastructure, schools, etc. after a presidential disaster declaration. FEMA has started a mitigation cost-share incentive to reduce long-term costs by having communities take proactive steps to reduce damages. Communities can take actions to improve protection of infrastructure and depending on the ratio of total cost-share born by communities, FEMA may fund a higher percentage of total project costs, from 75% to 80%. This can only happen if the community adopts the most recent building codes. Communities in the NYC Watershed could potentially use NYC funds, e.g., SMIP grants, to take these mitigation steps and leverage more FEMA disaster funds. To look into this and learn more at: <https://www.fema.gov/event/public-assistance-mitigation-cost-share-incentives-pamcsi-policy>. Municipalities will need to document what they are doing. In response to the above, Heidi E. announced that CCEUC and Ulster County are organizing a disaster assistance training with NYS DSHES and other agency presentations on public assistance. She will see if this new incentive program can be included. Date for the training is January 23rd in New Paltz. The training will be open to all county municipalities.

Jim S. raised that in post-flood emergency situations the CWC receives many applications for debris removal. CWC is looking to changing its rules to make the application process quicker. Leslie Z. suggested that an attempt be made to consult with the local stream management program or a qualified engineer as part of eligibility for funding. This is to help make sure that wood removals don't further destabilize stream channels or cause off-site changes. Could CWC consider requiring that applicants reach out to stream programs for a consult? This is how the program was implemented following Tropical Storm Irene. Bobby T. mentioned that woody debris (not trash) can help to stabilize floodplains and rivers in certain situations. DEP has expressed interest in this approach as well.

Stream Ecosystem Working Group

Mike F. and Scott G. reported for the working group. Meetings in early 2024 were to develop a five-year update to the Ashokan Watershed Research, Assessment & Monitoring Strategy (RAMS). The group reassessed research goals, kept goals from 10-15 years ago that are still relevant, took away old goals and added new, and reorganized goals for relevance to the current committee. It's hoped the goals will go into a guidance document that is provided to people looking for a grant from AWSMP or who can tailor their funding to meet some of our goals and address areas where we need answers. The group worked on multiple renditions and a survey to develop a good set of strategies. More work is needed to finish the RAMS document before the next SMIP funding round to guide the Grant Review Committee in making funding decisions.

Scott G. talked about the ongoing drought and shared USGS stream gauge records showing very low flows despite rain over the last 24 hrs. At Esopus Creek at Allaben, the hydrograph indicates flows departing from a typical increase in streamflow after leaf off in October. A less successful spawning season is expected for Brook Trout and Brown Trout. On the other hand, past data suggest these conditions could open the door to better spring spawning for Rainbow Trout. USGS continued work in 2024 looking at current stream restoration projects in the watershed. USGS collected the first year of post-restoration data on the Elk Bushkill, and data at Hollow Tree Brook and Broadstreet Hollow for planned restorations. All work done in collaboration with Allison L. at the SWCD and her team collecting geomorphic and salmonid habitat data.

Bobby A. reported 2024 was the last year of DEC’s Young of Year surveys in the Esopus Creek watershed. DEC is considering extending the surveys into next spring due to the drought.

Stream Management Implementation Program (SMIP) Update and Vote

The final SMIP funding round in 2024 completed in October. The Grant Review Committee met in early November. The next funding round will occur in March 2025. A SMIP grant of \$120,000 awarded in spring 2024 to Ulster County DPW for *Engineering Design of Ulster County Rail Embankment Repairs* was discontinued at the request of Ulster due to lack of matching capital funds.

Remaining SMIP funds available for distribution leading into the fall 2024 funding round:

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

The AWSMP received three grant applications:

Project Name	ID	Applicant	Request
<i>Design and Engineering Bostock Road and Red Maple Road Culverts - Additional Funding</i>	189	Town of Olive	\$30,260
<i>Shandaken CRS Technical Assistance, 2025 Cycle Verification and Annual Certification</i>	190	Town of Shandaken	\$25,500
<i>Response of Fish Assemblages, Habitat, and Water Quality to Stream Restoration in the Ashokan Watershed 2025-2029</i>	191	USGS	\$396,386

The bulk of work for Grant 190 would occur under a pending five-year funding agreement “SWP-100” between CCEUC and NYC DEP that includes the SMIP, with anticipated start date of April 1, 2025. Grant 191 for continuation of an on-going 10-year research and monitoring study would be fully funded under SWP-100.

SMIP Grant Review Committee Recommendations and Executive Council Vote

Leslie Z. summarized the project proposals. Burt S. reported the grant review committee’s funding recommendations. The committee recommended funding all requests. The committee noted the Town of Olive’s consultant for design of the Bostock Road crossing enlargement must complete all tasks within the proposed timeline with no additional funding.

A quorum of Executive Council members were present: Jim Sofranko, Mike Flaherty, Burt Samuelson, Brian Burns, Chet Karwatowski, Scott George, and Bobby Adams. The Executive Council voted as follows:

189 - Design and Engineering Bostock Road and Red Maple Road Culverts - Additional Funding

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

190 - Shandaken CRS Technical Assistance, 2025 Cycle Verification and Annual Certification

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

191 - *Response of Fish Assemblages, Habitat, and Water Quality to Stream Restoration in the Ashokan Watershed*
Mike F. moved to adopt the grant review committee recommendation. Brian B. seconded. Scott George recused himself. All other Executive Council members present voted in favor. None opposed. No abstentions. Motion passed.

Next AWSMP Stakeholder Council Meeting

The AWSMP Stakeholder Council will meet again in April 2025.

The meeting was adjourned.