News from around the Ashokan Watershed

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WINTER 2026

ASHOKAN WATERSHED STREAM MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

THE Trib

Esopus Creek News Briefs

Published by Cornell Cooperative Extension Ulster County

Esopus • Birch Creek • Bushnellsville • Fox Hollow • Peck Hollow • Broadstreet Hollow • Woodland Valley • Stony Clove • Beaver Kill • Little Beaver Kill • Bush Kill

Welcome to **The Trib** — a shorter version of the full-length Esopus Creek News. A "trib" (short for "tributary") is a smaller creek that flows into the main river. We hope you enjoy this edition of the Trib!

Dr. Colin Beier, SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) delivers the keynote address during the CERM 2025 Conference.

Conference Explores the Catskills Environment

In case you missed it, environmental researchers, managers, and students gathered in the Catskills in late October for the Catskill Environmental Research and Monitoring (CERM) Conference. CERM is a three-day conference with a dedicated focus on environmental research and management in the Catskills region. It was organized by a multi-organization planning committee led by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ulster County (CCE) staff with the Ashokan Watershed Stream Management Program. The conference was a display of the breadth of work underway to better understand and protect the Catskills' forests, streams, and water resources in a changing climate.

The conference opened with remarks from Leslie Zucker (CCE Ulster), Fiona Watt (New York State Department of Environmental Conservation), and Paul Rush (New York City Department of Environmental Protection), who emphasized the importance of collaboration and long-term research for source water protection. The keynote address by Dr. Colin Beier, SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF), set the tone for the event, exploring how Catskill forests contribute to New York State's path toward carbon neutrality and highlighting the role of mapping and monitoring to create forest-based climate benefits. A video of Colin's Beier's keynote is available on the AWSMP Youtube Channel.

Day 1 focused heavily on forests, climate, carbon, and hydrology. Sessions examined old-growth forest mapping, forest regeneration in the wake of beech leaf disease, and interactions between climate change and carbon sequestration. Paleoclimate research featured prominently, with multiple presentations drawing on sediment cores, macrofossils, pollen records, and tree rings to reconstruct thousands of years of environmental history in the Catskills. These long-term perspectives provided critical context for understanding current and future water supply reliability, forest dynamics, and climate variability. The day concluded with a lively poster session and mixer, offering opportunities for informal discussion and networking.

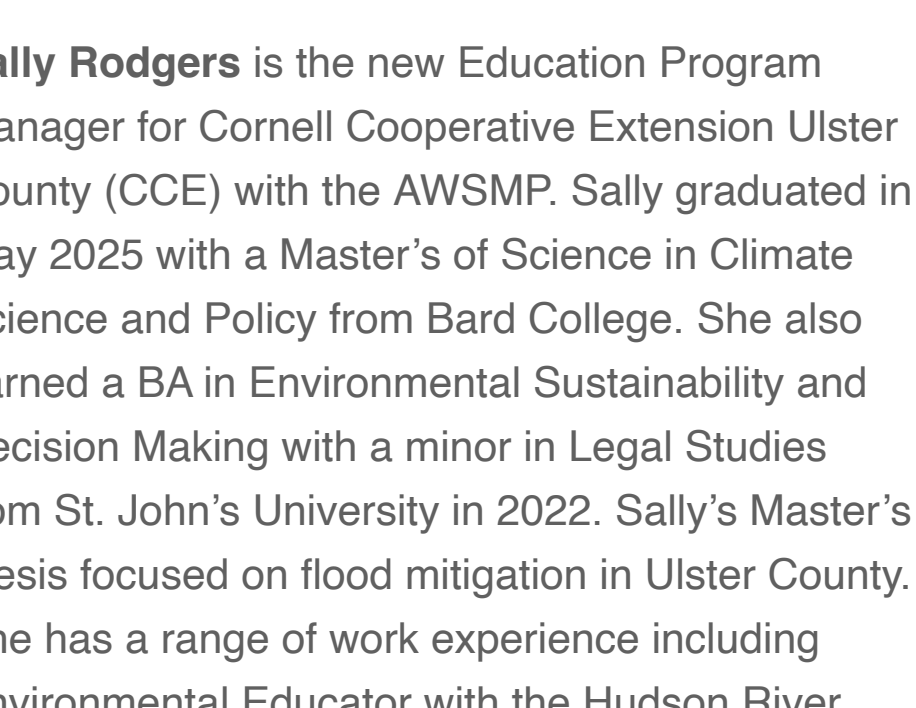
Day 2 shifted attention toward streams, water quality, and applied management challenges. Presentations explored turbidity dynamics in the upper Esopus Creek, advances in machine learning and deep learning for streamflow and turbidity forecasting, and strategies for prioritizing riparian buffer placement. Speakers also addressed emerging water quality concerns, including disinfection byproducts and the implications of climate change for drinking water reservoirs. Afternoon sessions highlighted new technologies, human-induced impacts on managed lands, and environmental management success stories. These ranged from invasive species and wildlife habitat to updates on New York State wetlands regulations. The day concluded with a networking event and a speaker dinner featuring Dr. Uldis Roze, who captivated the audience with shared insights from his decades of research on porcupines and other Catskills wildlife.

Day 3 rounded out the conference with a student research symposium and optional field trips. Participants could choose between exploring Indigenous relationships with Catskill ecosystems or visiting sites used to reconstruct environmental histories, reinforcing the conference's emphasis on place-based learning and interdisciplinary research.
Over all three days, CERM 2025 focused on the value of coordinated research, cross-agency collaboration, and knowledge-sharing to inform environmental management in the Catskills. For those who couldn't attend or those looking to revisit key themes the conference offered a clear message: understanding the past and present of Catskill ecosystems is essential to stewarding their future.

Some of the presentations at CERM will be available at the conference website, visit https://cermconference.org/conference-program/.

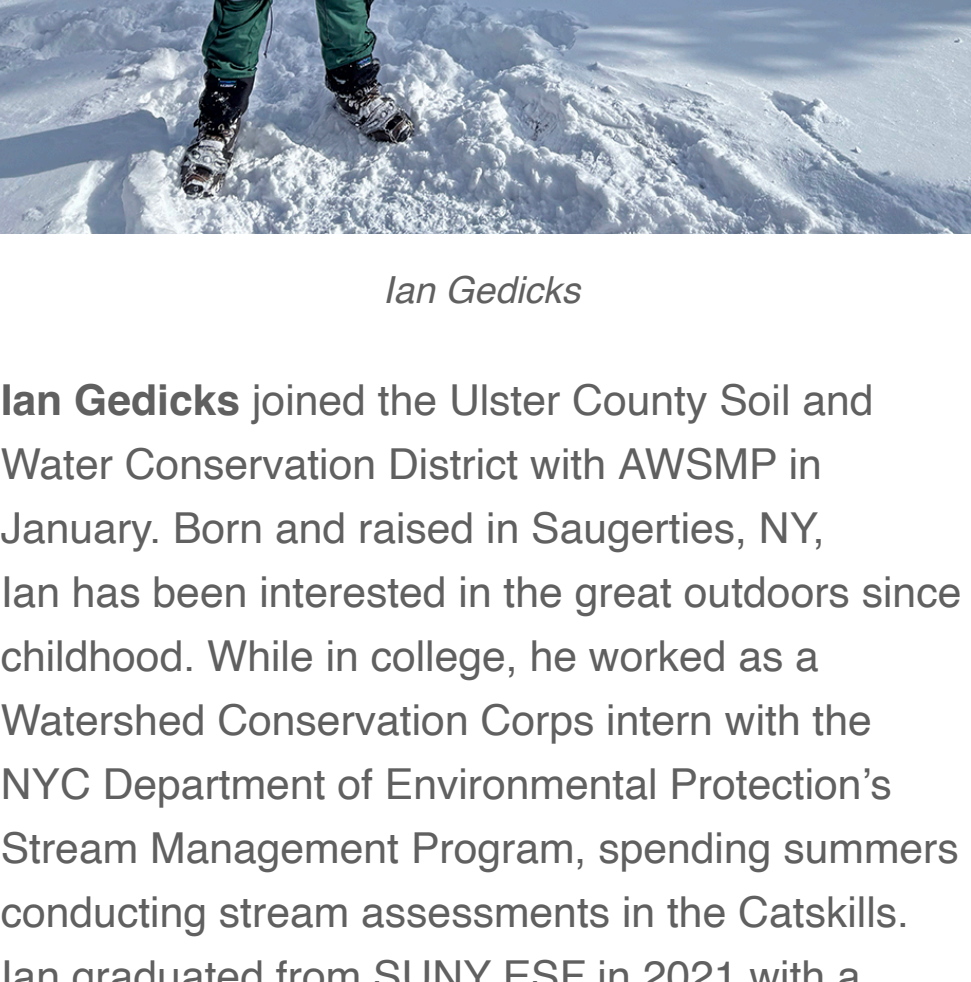
Welcoming New Staff

The Ashokan Watershed Stream Management Program welcomes three new staff members who joined in late 2025 and early 2026.



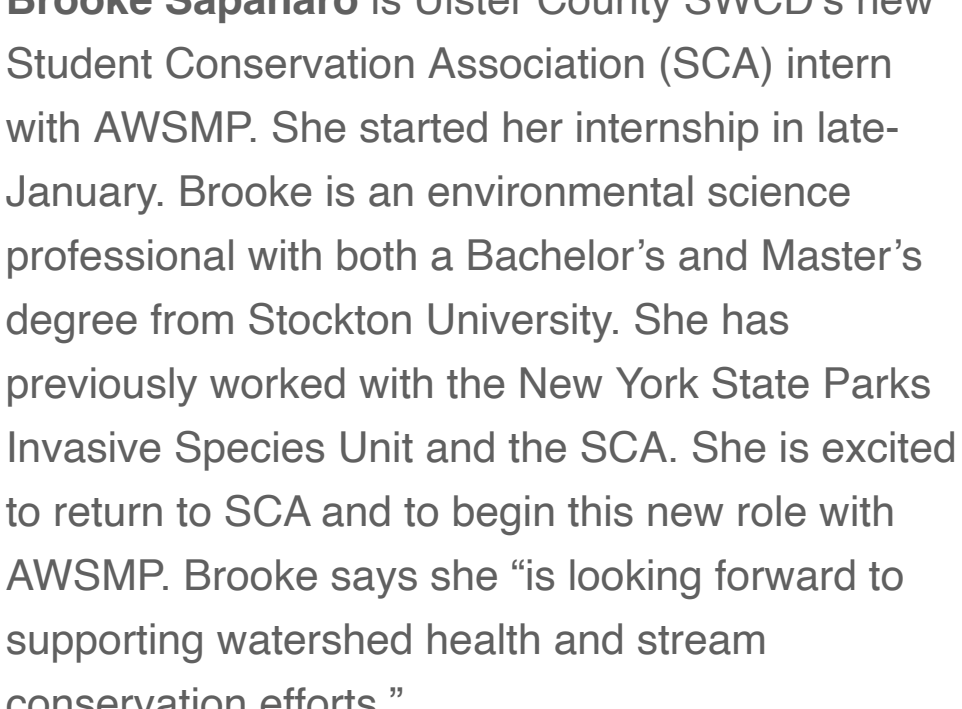
Sally Rodgers

Sally Rodgers is the new Education Program Manager for Cornell Cooperative Extension Ulster County (CCE) with the AWSMP. Sally graduated in May 2025 with a Master's of Science in Climate Science and Policy from Bard College. She also earned a BA in Environmental Sustainability and Decision Making with a minor in Legal Studies from St. John's University in 2022. Sally's Master's thesis focused on flood mitigation in Ulster County. She has a range of work experience including Environmental Educator with the Hudson River Park, field data collection, and municipal technical assistance for policy review and analysis. She came to CCE from Ulster County government, where she was an Emergency Management Fellow and centered her work on building resilience to the effects of climate change within the county. Sally is an avid hiker and rock climber and has been working toward joining the Catskill 3500 Club. She is committed to stewardship of our bioregion, which is one reason she's so excited about her new role. She is also a proud plant-mom and has a proven green thumb with a background in horticulture.



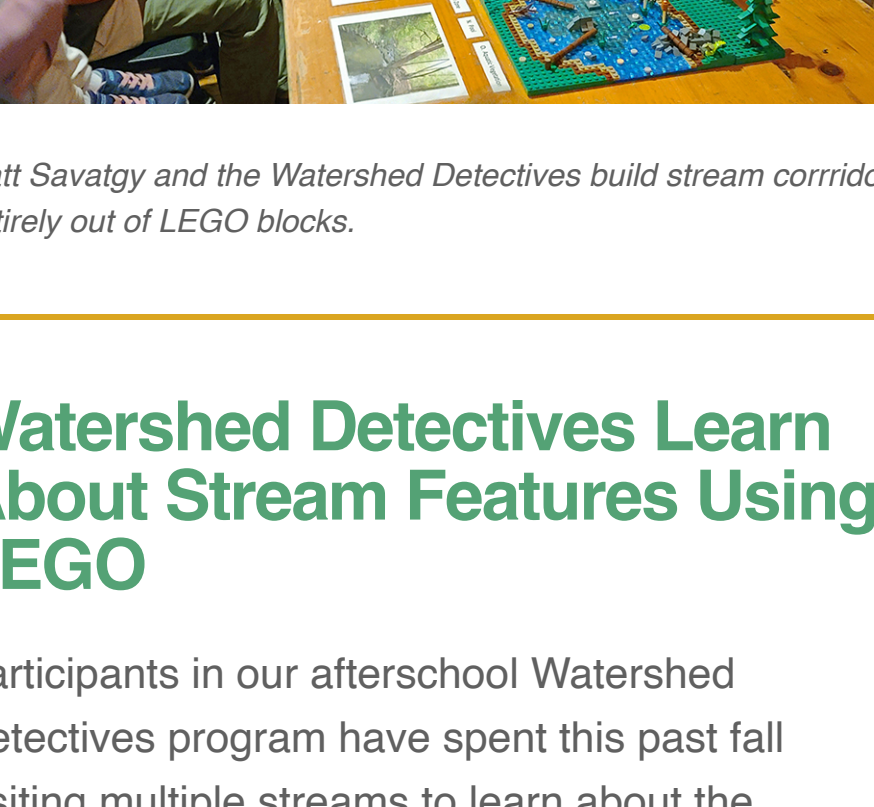
Ian Gedicks

Ian Gedicks joined the Ulster County Soil and Water Conservation District with AWSMP in January. Born and raised in Saugerties, NY, Ian has been interested in the great outdoors since childhood. While in college, he worked as a Watershed Conservation Corps intern with the NYC Department of Environmental Protection's Stream Management Program, spending summers conducting stream assessments in the Catskills. Ian graduated from SUNY ESF in 2021 with a Bachelor's in Environmental Science, with a focus in Watershed Science. Previously, he worked at the Delaware County for three and a half years, conducting stream assessments and supporting other conservation initiatives. In his free time, Ian enjoys hiking, hunting, and fishing—any day spent outside in a stream is time well spent.



Brooke Sapanaro

Brooke Sapanaro is Ulster County SWCD's new Student Conservation Association (SCA) intern with AWSMP. She started her internship in late-January. Brooke is an environmental science professional with both a Bachelor's and Master's degree from Stockton University. She has previously worked with the New York State Parks Invasive Species Unit and the SCA. She is excited to return to SCA and to begin this new role with AWSMP. Brooke says she "is looking forward to supporting watershed health and stream conservation efforts."



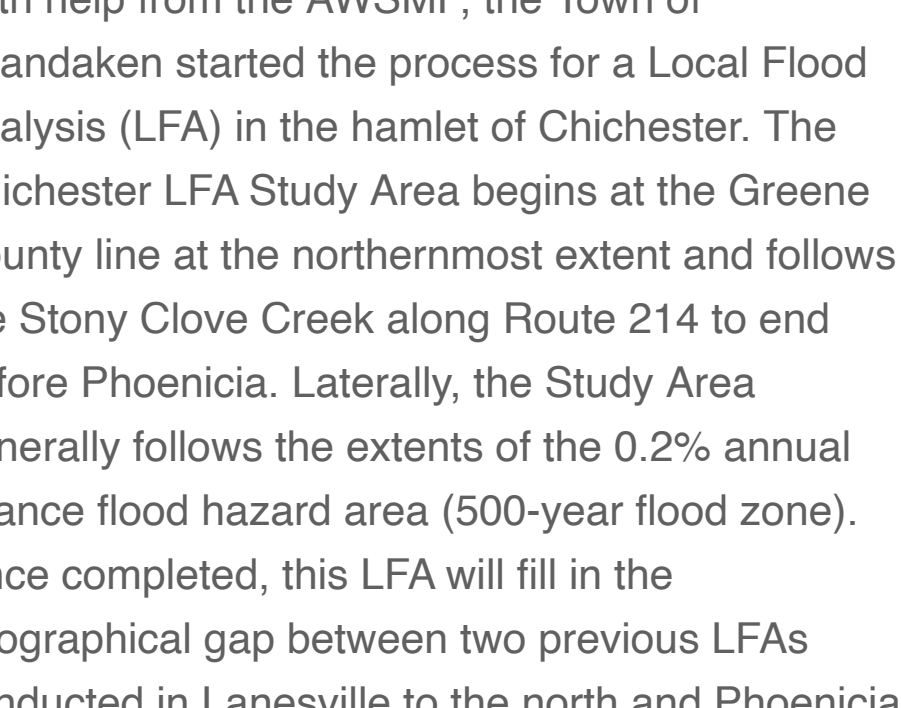
Matt Savatgy and the Watershed Detectives build stream corrridors entirely out of LEGO blocks.

Watershed Detectives Learn About Stream Features Using LEGO

Participants in our afterschool Watershed Detectives program have spent this past fall visiting multiple streams to learn about the different features that make up a typical stream reach. As the students met weekly they became very familiar with the basic parts of a stream while making observations and documenting what they were seeing in their field journals.

With the season turning colder and darker, they moved inside but were able to continue their work using a unique learning tool made from something they love, LEGO. Started during the pandemic, different groups of students have helped program educator, Matt Savatgy create stream corridors made completely out of LEGO bricks. The detailed model shows all the typical features of a stream. According to Savatgy, "Using a toy that most kids get excited about as an educational activity is a great way to connect and reinforce their knowledge of streams."

This year's Detectives learned about the important relationships between streams and nearby forests by creating streamside trees and vegetation to place next to the stream model to produce a riparian zone. To complete the forested buffer, students added various common LEGO woodland creatures.



Chichester LFA Kick-Off

With help from the AWSMP, the Town of Shandaken started the process for a Local Flood Analysis (LFA) in the hamlet of Chichester. The Chichester LFA Study Area begins at the Greene County line at the northernmost extent and follows the Stony Clove Creek along Route 214 to end before Phoenicia. Laterally, the Study Area generally follows the extents of the 0.2% annual chance flood hazard area (500-year flood zone). Once completed, this LFA will fill in the geographical gap between two previous LFAs conducted in Lanesville to the north and Phoenicia to the south.

NEWS STREAM

Temperature Data Available from USGS Gage Sites

The United States Geological Survey (USGS) collects water quality and quantity data at over 30 locations in the Ashokan Watershed. Near-real time temperature data is now available at the Esopus Creek at Allaben gage. Previously, the temperature data for the Esopus Creek was only available at Big Indian and downstream of Boiceville.

Stream and Floodplain Training Scholarships Available

Each year the AWSMP provides a limited number of scholarships to stream and floodplain managers in the Ashokan Reservoir Watershed to attend training courses. Training opportunities include the New York State Floodplain and Stormwater Managers Association Annual Conference, FEMA trainings, and more. For more information contact Max Kelly: mk2397@cornell.edu or 845-688-3047x117.

Plank Road Culvert Replacement

In December, the AWSMP released an Instagram Reel highlighting a culvert replacement by Ulster County on Plank Road. If you wondered about Plank Road's closure over the summer, check out this video that explains why the culvert was replaced.

EVENTS

Save the Date for Stream Explorers

The Stream Explorers Youth Adventure is an annual environmental stream-based conference for students held at the Ashokan Center, located in Olivebridge, New York. The conference is free and open to children in grades 3-7 in the Onteora Central School District, and private or home-schooled students residing within the Ashokan Watershed. The next conference is scheduled for **April 18, 2026**. Registration will open in late March, and space fills quickly.

Why We Need Oaks, and How to Save Them with Doug Tallamy

The Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies hosted Doug Tallamy, ecologist and New York Times bestselling author to deliver a talk using the months of the year as a backdrop to showcase the myriad of life that depends on oaks, from caterpillars and other insects — and the birds that feed them to a cast of acorn-eaters. He also details the many ecosystem services that oaks provide. These long-lived trees are champions at storing carbon, and their enormous root systems help stabilize soils and buffer floods. The recording can be found here.

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Women in Science Webinar

DEC is hosting a Women in Science webinar series, to meet and learn from scientists, community leaders, and environmental educators who work at the intersection of research, education, and environmental and social justice. Rewa Phansalkar from NYS Water Resources Institute at Cornell University will be presenting a talk "Making Flood Risk Visible: Communicating the Science of Resilience in New York State" on **February 11**. Sign up to watch.

Check our webpage for more information about streams in the Ashokan Reservoir watershed. Follow us on Instagram @ashokanstreams and on Facebook, Ashokan Watershed Stream Management Program to learn about upcoming events.

Visit us on the web at
www.ashokanstreams.org

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The Trib

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