

News from around the Ashokan Watershed

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Early Spring 2025



Esopus Creek News Briefs

Published by Cornell Cooperative Extension Ulster County

Esopus • Birch Creek • Bushkillville • Fox Hollow • Peak Hollow • Broadstreet Hollow • Woodland Valley • Stony Clove • Beaver Kill • Little Beaver Kill • Bush Kill

Welcome to the Esopus Creek News 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. Look for the full-length Esopus Creek News to return this fall. We hope you enjoy this edition of the Trib!



A family of mallard ducks take advantage of a public riparian buffer demonstration called Brookside Wander on grounds of the Emerson Resort & Spa in Mt. Tremper. Photo: Emerson Resort

Spring Planting for Streams

As property owners develop landscaping plans for the year, it's a good time to consider the condition of streamside areas. Vegetation growing on stream banks can prevent property loss from erosion. The strong roots of trees and shrubs give soils more strength and the roots resist erosion. Over time, overhanging vegetation creates shaded habitats in streams for fish, aquatic insects, and other wildlife. Look for stream banks with sparse vegetation and seek to fill any open spaces with native shrubs and trees.

Focus on planting water-loving plants. Native willows (a shrub) are an easy solution that landowners can plant themselves at low cost. See our [Landowner's Guide to Live Staking](#) willow plants. Many attractive flowering native perennials can brighten the space between a wooded stream and other landscaping. A good place to view options for flowering native plants is the [Brookside Wander](#) trail open to the public at the Emerson Resort and Spa. Decorative plants for wet and shaded or semi-shaded areas include sedges, ferns (Christmas, New York, marginal wood), white wood aster, jewelweed, and goldenrod.



Aster flowers. Photo: Laura Gust

Be on the lookout for invasive plants that easily colonize open and disturbed areas. This [fact sheet](#) helps to identify frequent nuisance plants along streams. The Catskill Regional Invasive Species Partnership has a [webpage](#) with information on the invasive [Japanese Knotweed](#).

Landowners who prefer assistance with restoring a streamside area can request help from the free Catskill Streams Buffer Initiative (CSBI) operating in the [Ashokan Reservoir watershed](#). The program run by the Ulster County Soil and Water Conservation District gives free planting plans, plant material, and stream buffer installation to landowners with accepted applications. Small accommodations can be made to meet landowner needs. For more information or to request a site visit, contact Bobby Taylor at the stream program office (845) 688-3047, ext. 106 or bobby.taylor@ashokanstreams.org.

For landowners outside the NYC Watershed, New York State offers native plants through a program called [Trees for Tribs](#). And the [Colonel William F. Fox Memorial Saratoga Tree Nursery's](#) annual spring seedling sale is **now open through May 14, 2025**. Visit the [Spring Seedling Sale webpage](#) on NYSDEC's website.

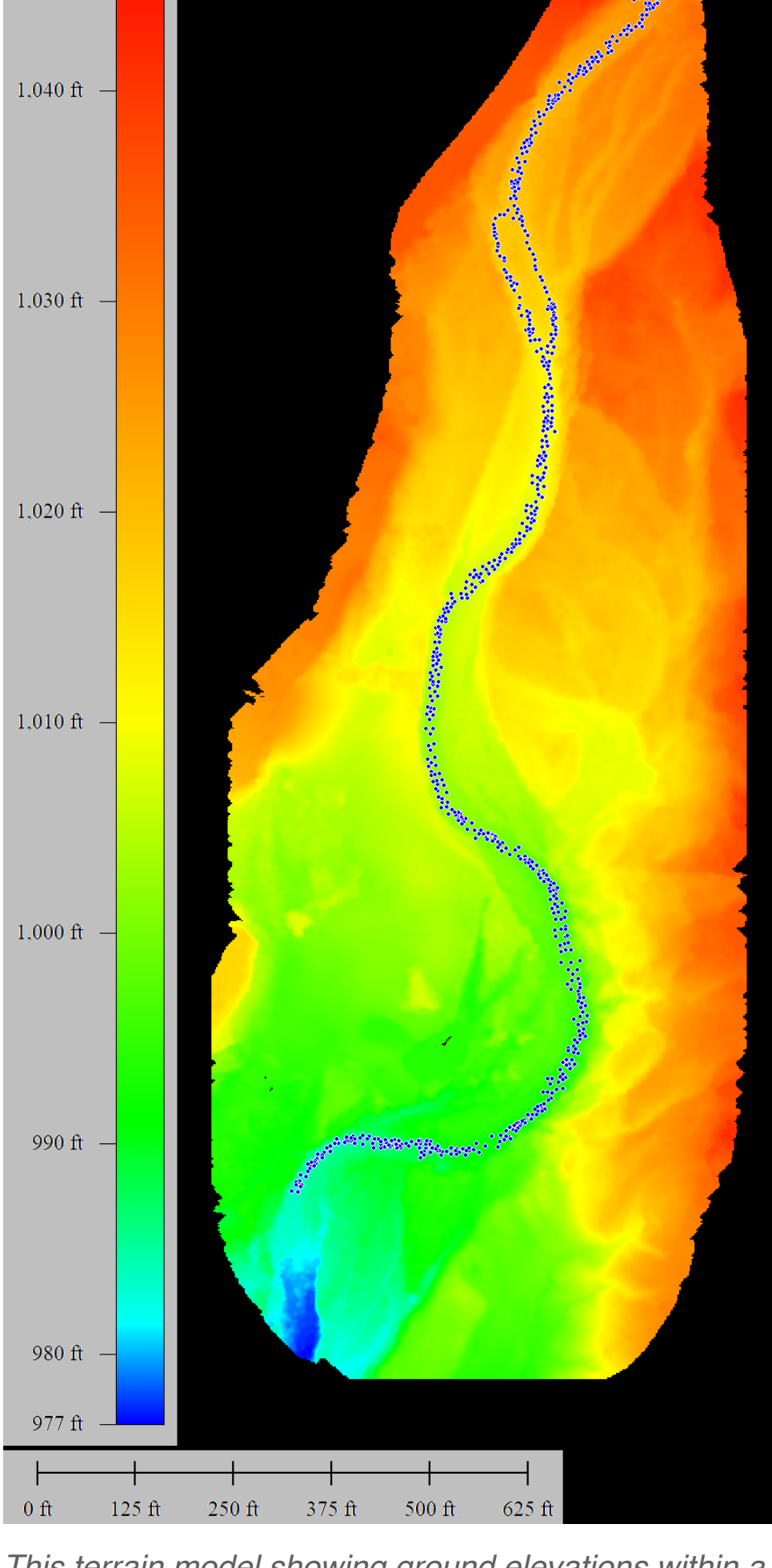
Finally, both the Ulster County Soil and Water Conservation District and Cornell Cooperative Extension's Master Gardener program offer seedling and plant sales each spring. See the District's Tree and Shrub program: <https://www.ucswcd.org/copy-of-tree-shrub-sale> with ample inventory of species and other offerings. The 2025 Master Gardener Seedling Sale in Ulster County has [pickup dates in May](#). Contact the stream program office at info@ashokanstreams.org or (845) 688-3047 for help with picking plants that are best suited to a stream site.

AWSMP Gets Busy in the Field

Stream program staff are gearing up for field work this spring, getting busy as the rivers and soils thaw and before new growth obscures aerial views of rivers. AWSMP's stream assessment crew includes several staff from the Ulster County Soil and Water Conservation District and student interns with the Watershed Conservation Corps at SUNY Ulster.

This year the crew will use a survey grade drone ([featured](#) in a recent Esopus Creek News) to capture aerial imagery and take measurements of the ground's surface. Ground surface measurements are used to create computer models of rivers. Stream program staff, partner researchers, and engineers use the computer models to detect changes since the last survey such as new areas of bank erosion. The models are also used to develop and compare construction designs for restoring rivers to better function.

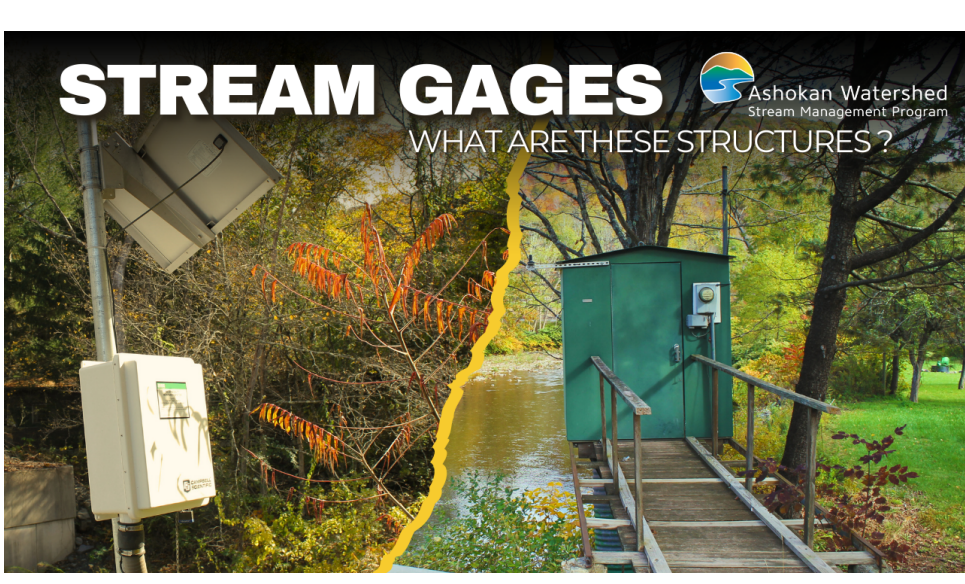
This spring the stream assessment crew will use the drone to survey a recently constructed stream restoration project in Oliverea. The drone survey will help to monitor the stream restoration over time and combined with other data to better understand how stream restoration methods affect fish populations, fish habitat, and stream temperatures.



This terrain model showing ground elevations within a stream corridor was produced from 33 million ground points collected by a drone and 731 points by hand.

Two future project sites will be surveyed this spring to create a baseline for performance monitoring. One stream restoration site is located on Broadstreet Hollow near Allaben and another in Woodland Creek outside of Phoenicia.

While there are many advantages to capturing a bird's-eye view of streams using drones, having boots on the ground is still needed for taking measurements. After the aerial surveys are done in spring, our stream assessment crew will conduct ground-based surveys in June and July.



New Video Explores the Technology of Stream Gaging

This spring you may see individuals climbing in and out of non-descript brown and green sheds near streams. This is not the latest trend in streamside tiny homes. These are scientists who maintain and operate equipment called stream gages ([note the spelling of "gage" instead of "gauge" is correct](#)).

Gages monitor water quality and the physical properties of streams. We recently released a video on the [AWSMP YouTube page](#) that discusses why there are over 30 stream gages in the Ashokan Reservoir Watershed, what data are collected at stream gages and how these data are useful for local governments and the public.

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ulster County produced the [video](#) for AWSMP in collaboration with a water scientist from the United States Geological Survey ([USGS](#)). The USGS operates and maintains over 12,000 stream gages in a nationwide network. Most gages are funded in partnership with federal, state, local, or Tribal agencies or organizations. The nationwide network includes local gages that closely monitor streams that supply New York City's drinking water and are operated with financial support from the NYC Department of Environmental Protection.

Thirty-six stream gages currently collect data in the Ashokan Reservoir watershed. Nearly all gage data are publicly available [online](#) in near real-time. The public can view stream gage data to know a stream's water temperature, clarity, and depth without leaving the house if gages are set up to collect the information. Anglers can check water temperature in the summer to ensure fishing will not overly stress temperature-sensitive fish such as trout. Canoers and kayakers can check stream flow before leaving home to determine if stretches of stream can be safely paddled.

Gage data can also be used to observe long-term trends in stream conditions and make predictions about future stream behavior. For example, one local gage on the Esopus Creek at Coldbrook, NY has been in continuous operation since 1931. Historic data are used by the National Weather Service to predict how the Esopus Creek will respond to precipitation events.

The National Weather Service uses stream gage data to inform [an online interactive river forecast](#) that predicts how high Esopus Creek flows will reach in the next 48 hours. The river forecast is a useful and potentially life-saving tool for residents and governments to use in understanding local flood risk. The up-to-date predictions can improve flood warnings and help emergency officials direct resources and response efforts ahead of a potential flood. Climate change is predicted to result in more frequent and intense flooding in the Catskills and flooding is the most common natural disaster in Ulster County.

Visit us on the web at www.ashokanstreams.org



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