

# Catskill Creek

## A Hudson River Tributary

### Background

The Catskill Creek is a beautiful and vibrant stream that runs through the mostly rural landscape of the Catskill Mountains' northern foothills. Approximately 46 miles in length, the creek begins in the Franklinton Vlaie in Schoharie County and meets the Hudson River at the Historic Catskill Point in the Village of Catskill.



Catskill Creek – “our Grand Canyon.” (Credit: L. Federman)

The Franklinton Vlaie is a 365-acre wetland that is the source of creeks in two watersheds. The Little Schoharie Creek flows from the north end of the Vlaie and meanders through Middleburgh before it empties into the Schoharie Creek. The Catskill Creek flows from the south end of the Vlaie, which is a NYS DEC Wildlife Management area.

Upstream reaches of the Catskill Creek are considered prime trout habitat; portions of the stream are classed as supporting trout spawning by NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. The lower 1.5 miles of the creek are influenced by the Hudson River's tides and provide spawning grounds for many species of fish, including herring.

The five miles of the Catskill Creek that extend from its mouth at the Hudson River Estuary to the waterfalls just downstream from the NYS Route 23 bridge has been designated a NYS DOS Division of Coastal Resources Significant Habitat. The habitat designation is based on the importance of the creek as a nursery for fish, including anadromous fish, and for its contribution of freshwater inflows that help to maintain water quality in the Hudson River.

The Catskill Creek watershed is 416 square miles in size and encompasses all or part of 13 towns in four counties. The Catskill Creek watershed comprises 927 miles of tributary streams, making it the third largest contributor of water to the Hudson River Estuary, after Rondout/Walkill and Kinderhook/Stockport watersheds, the first and second largest contributors, respectively.

The land cover of the Catskill Creek watershed is predominantly forested, with nearly 419,700 acres of forest, comprising 68% of the watershed. Wetlands and open water comprises 31,846 acres, or nearly 12% of the watershed. Cultivated crops, pasture and hayfields employ 32,763 acres, covering over 12% of the watershed. High, medium and low intensity human development constitutes 3,427 acres or 1.28% of the watershed.



Frozen Catskill Creek. (Credit: L. Federman)

## **Watershed Group**

The Catskill Creek Watershed Awareness Project (CCWAP) was started by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Columbia and Greene Counties in 2008 with support from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Hudson River Estuary Program. CCWAP has a mission "to foster appreciation and understanding of the Catskill Creek Watershed through outreach to regional stakeholders to promote protection, conservation and stewardship of our natural environment for the benefit of all."

The CCWAP has offered a wide range of indoor and outdoor educational programs for the general public, including stream studies, site explorations and stream-related presentations.

Although the CCWAP advisory committee is a small group, they have worked with partners to expand their ability to learn about impacts and assets in the watershed. The group is indebted to Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District for producing maps to help characterize the watershed. The CCWAP advisory committee worked



Liz LoGiudice of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Columbia and Greene Counties in the creek collecting water samples to test for the presence of *Enterococcus*, an indicator of fecal contamination.

with Hudson Basin River Watch to produce a “report card” on water quality at sites on the creek and its tributaries in 2007 and 2010. More recently, the CCWAP has been working with the Riverkeeper Water Quality Program to collect data on the presence of Enterococcus bacteria in the creek.

The CCWAP worked with Hudsonia on a stream corridor habitat assessment for most of the length of the Catskill Creek, conducting field verification of predicted habitat types. They have collaborated with Hudsonia and the Hudson River Estuary Program to bring the results of this study to municipal leaders. The CCWAP has worked with the Trees for Tribs program to plant riparian areas on the Catskill Creek and its tributaries, often working with teachers and students from the Cairo Durham Middle/High School. The group has also worked with USGS to inform the public about the importance of the stream gage located just upstream from the Village of Catskill, which collects important data on flow, temperature and turbidity.

Portions of the Catskill Creek and its tributary streams are flood-prone and sustained major damage from Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee in 2011. Since that time, Cornell Cooperative Extension has been working directly with municipalities in the watershed to increase understanding of stream science, watershed planning and post-flood response in waterways.

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