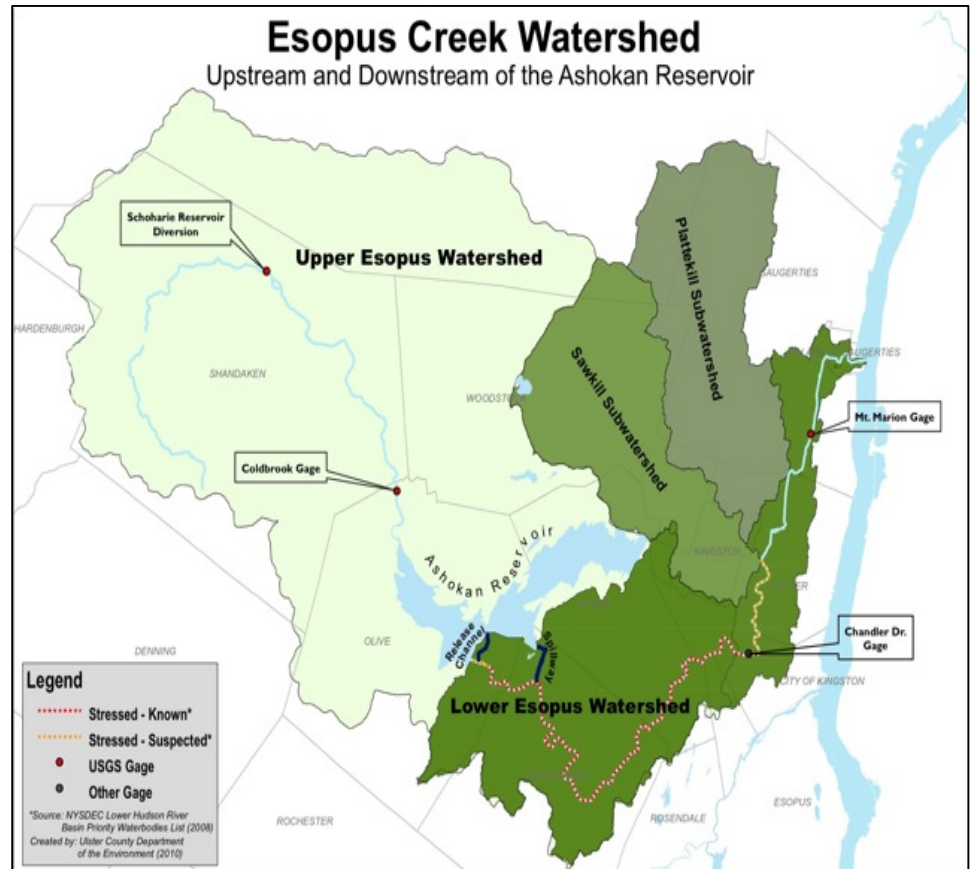


Esopus Creek

A Hudson River Tributary

Background

The Esopus Creek is one of the most important Catskill rivers,ⁱ as well as a critical tributary to the Hudson River Estuary. On early Dutch maps, it was called “Clyne Esopus” or small water, but the original Lenape name for the creek was “Atharhacton” meaning great field.ⁱⁱ Its headwaters are at Winnisook Lake, on the western slopes of Slide Mountain in the Catskill Mountains.ⁱⁱⁱ The watershed is a high quality source of water for New York City and West of Hudson communities.



Credit: Ulster County Department of the Environment, 2011.

The Esopus Creek is a watershed divided into two parts by the Ashokan Reservoir. The area above the reservoir is also referred to as the Ashokan Basin. The steep upper basin has 21 peaks over 3,000 feet, receiving 50–60 inches of precipitation per year, which is wetter than surrounding regions. The first New York City drinking water supply was located here. Most of the 256 square mile area is forest, some of which was logged in the 1800s. Leather tanning, which required the bark of hemlock trees, was also a common forest practice.^{iv}

Below the reservoir is referred to as the Lower Esopus Watershed. The Lower Esopus is cut off from the upper watershed except for reservoir releases and spillway overflow. The lower creek extends from the Ashokan Reservoir to the Hudson River, with a length of approximately 30



Ashokan Reservoir (Credit: C. Balmer)

miles. The Lower Esopus includes two primary trout stream tributaries: the Plattekill and Sawkill (this tributary in Ulster County is not to be confused with the Saw Kill in Dutchess County).^v

Flow from the 256 square miles of the upper drainage area has been impacted by the Ashokan Reservoir since 1913. Additional water enters Esopus Creek about 12.2 miles upstream from Ashokan Reservoir through the Shandaken Tunnel, which has diverted water

from Schoharie Creek and Schoharie Reservoir since the 1920s. Diversions for water supply for the City of New York are made from the Ashokan Reservoir via the Catskill Aqueduct.^{vi}

The flow in the Lower Esopus Creek represents the drainage from 169 square miles of watershed combined with spillage or releases from the upstream reservoirs. Diversions from Plattekill Creek at the Blue Mountain Reservoir provide drinking water for the Village of Saugerties. Also, a slight diversion occurs at headwaters of the Saw Kill into Cooper Lake for water supply of Kingston. Water is diverted from the lower Esopus Creek for agricultural irrigation.^{vii}

Areas on the south side of Ashokan Reservoir and the Sawkill and Plattekill sub-watersheds contain extensive forests, as does the Flatbush Ridge (or Kalkberg) area near the Hudson River. The broad floodplain from Marbletown through Hurley and northeastward to NYS Route 28 is an important agricultural area and represents one of the few large-stream floodplains remaining minimally fragmented by land development.^{viii}

The tidal delta of the Esopus Creek and associated wetlands and shallows of the Hudson River estuary are important in supporting the estuary's biological diversity and environmental functions. The Esopus Estuary was listed as a Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat by New York State Department of State.^{ix} The Saugerties tidal wetlands (Esopus delta) are one of the larger and less well-known tidal wetlands of the middle Hudson River Estuary. They

constitute a complex of tide-affected marshes, swamps, and vegetated shallows, the bulkheaded tidal channel of Esopus Creek, and several causeways.^x

Watershed Group

Founded in 2007, the Lower Esopus Watershed Partnership began as an intermunicipal coalition in Ulster County in Upstate New York involving the Town of Saugerties, Town of Ulster, Town of Hurley, Town of Marbletown, Town of Olive, City of Kingston, and the Village of Saugerties. The mission of the Lower Esopus Watershed Partnership is to foster appreciation and stewardship of the Lower Esopus Watershed through a variety of partnerships^{xi} and affiliation with partners such as Esopus Creek Conservancy and Riverkeeper.

Resources and Contact:

For more information, including reports, maps, USGS stream gages and NYC DEP Ashokan Reservoir release channel flow information, please visit the Lower Esopus Watershed Partnership website at <http://www.loweresopus.org/> where you can also find a PDF copy of the publication, *A Journey through Lower Esopus Creek*. You can also contact Mary McNamara at marywaterbyrd@gmail.com or local municipal governments in the watershed for more information. Riverkeeper's Citizen-Based Water Quality Sampling data on the Lower Esopus Creek can be found at: <http://www.riverkeeper.org/water-quality/citizen-data/esopus-creek-watershed/>



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ⁱ Titus, Robert. *A Journey through Esopus Creek*. N.p.: n.p., 2011. 3. Print.

ⁱⁱ Woods, Lynn. *A Journey through Esopus Creek*. N.p.: n.p., 2011. 15. Print.

ⁱⁱⁱ Titus, p. 3.

^{iv} *A Journey through Esopus Creek*, p. 7.

^v Lower Esopus Watershed Partnership. N.p., n.d. Web. 2 May 2016. <<http://www.loweresopus.org/watershed/overview/>>.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Kiviat, Eric. *A Journey through Esopus Creek*. N.p.: n.p., 2011. 33. Print.

^{ix} Kiviat, p. 34.

^x Kiviat, p. 36.

^{xi} Lower Esopus Watershed Partnership. N.p., n.d. Web. 2 May 2016. <<http://www.loweresopus.org/about/>>.