

WORKING TOWARD A FISHABLE, SWIMMABLE MOHAWK RIVER



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Not everyone lives next to a river, pond, or stream, but we all live in a watershed. Like many waterways, the Mohawk River suffers from sediment, bacteria, and excess nutrients that wash into it from the surrounding watershed. Although nutrients sound like things that belong in a healthy environment, too much can cause big problems, from harmful algae to excessive weed growth.

Current and Future Threats to the Health of the Watershed

- Sediment resulting from soil erosion from agriculture, construction sites, eroding stream banks, and dirt washed from pavement and roofs can degrade the quality of drinking water. Sediment also suffocates fish by clogging their gills, makes them vulnerable to disease, and reduces their ability to reproduce.
- Impervious surfaces and other changes to the landscape can alter the way rainfall and snowmelt run off the land into waterbodies. This can lead to both low stream levels and to flooding, depending on the flow pattern.
- Nutrients and bacteria from crop and livestock production, lawn fertilization, and faulty septic and wastewater treatment systems can cause overgrowths of aquatic weeds and algae. These can be health risks to humans and pets and may hinder boating and swimming.



The Schoharie Creek at Burtonsville, looking upstream into the Catskill Mountains. By volume, the Schoharie is the largest tributary to the Mohawk. Photo courtesy John Garver, Union College

Protecting the Mohawk River Watershed

To reduce pollution and keep the Mohawk and its watershed healthy for fish and people, DEC's Division of Water and Mohawk River Basin Program are working on a plan to restore the Mohawk River and the tributaries that flow into it. Part of this plan involves calculating a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for the Mohawk River that:

- In order to reduce nutrients, outlines the maximum of a pollutant such as phosphorus or nitrogen that a waterbody can receive and still maintain the water quality standards set for it.
- Identifies the sources of pollutants in the watershed.
- Determines how much the pollutant must be reduced to meet water quality standards.
- Using this information, a plan is developed with input from the community that identifies and describes the actions needed to improve water quality.



DEC Research Scientist Dr. A.J. Smith prepares to collect a water sample from Cayadutta Creek in Fulton County.

About the Mohawk River Watershed

A watershed is the land that water flows across or under on its way to a river, lake, stream, or bay.

The Mohawk River watershed:

- Is located in central New York State.
- Covers approximately 3,460 square miles.
- Encompasses 14 counties, 172 municipalities.
- Begins at the eastern edge of the Tug Hill Plateau, flowing 140 miles to the east to join the Hudson River.
- Includes more than 6,600 miles of rivers, canals, and streams and 135 lakes, reservoirs, and ponds.
- Major tributaries include the Schoharie Creek, West and East Canada Creeks.
- Serves as a drinking water source for hundreds of thousands of people.



CONTACT INFORMATION

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