

WORKING TOWARD A WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN: A PROGRESS REPORT FROM THE MOHAWK RIVER WATERSHED COALITION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

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Formed by memorandum of understanding in April 2009, the Mohawk River Watershed Coalition of Conservation Districts (MRWCCD) consists of the fourteen Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) whose jurisdictions lie wholly or partially within the Mohawk River Basin: Albany, Delaware, Fulton, Greene, Hamilton, Herkimer, Lewis, Madison, Montgomery, Oneida, Otsego, Saratoga, Schoharie, and Schenectady. Because of the work traditionally completed by SWCDs and in the spirit of collaboration, the Coalition quickly adopted the mission, “to implement conservation initiatives that protect, promote, and enhance the natural resources of the Mohawk River Watershed in partnership with local, state and federal stakeholders.”

By enacting the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor Act in 2000, US Congress created opportunities for the Mohawk Valley by initiating new work through several agencies within the region, including the NY Canal Corporation, the Hudson Mohawk Land Conservancy, and the Mohawk Valley Heritage Corridor Commission. The Oceans and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Act of 2006 created a council of state agencies and charged the council with preparation of a report to the Governor to identifying actions to advance the principles of ecosystem-based management. This created the opportunity for the Coalition to address the watershed based needs of the region through the development of a **Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan**.

In 2009, the Coalition partnered with Montgomery County, which applied to the NYS Department of State, and was awarded a grant via the “Waterfront Revitalization Program” to do just that.

Since receiving the Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program grant, the Coalition has begun preliminary work on creating a repository of GIS data layers for each county to inventory features of the natural basin, land uses, and pollution sources. The coalition has contracted with a consultant to evaluate and analyze local governmental roles, laws, programs and practices, related to the river and watershed. In the past few months the coalition has created a Watershed Advisory Committee (WAC), with the intent to involve stakeholders in the development of the watershed management plan. Several sub-committees have been formed, comprised of individuals that may specialize in a specific subject area. Recently the WAC created an education and outreach sub-committee to develop the framework for presenting the goals of the watershed management plan to the municipalities and the general public. This outreach committee has divided the Mohawk River Watershed into three distinct sub-regions for the purpose of bringing the message of the goals of the coalition to the watershed stakeholders. This will allow the districts the ability to deliver this message to different areas using a regionalized approach, as well as, solicit input from the communities as to local needs and concerns. Additional sub-committees will be formed to focus on agriculture, storm water, and other watershed issues including; invasive species, biodiversity, stream bank erosion, forestry, and wetlands.

The objective of writing this watershed management plan is to create an effective framework for future conservation focused work within the Mohawk Watershed, and to engage the public in the identification of actions to protect and restore the watershed. Members of the Coalition will use management strategies identified in the plan to support conservation initiatives within the region. The plan will be a spring board for implementation and program growth in the Basin, appealing to local, state and federal interests. The Coalition, along with the individuals, NGO’S and state and federal agencies that make up the WAC will look to incorporate experience, knowledge and previously successful program methods to develop a sensible, workable plan for the Mohawk River Watershed.

For more information about the MRWCCD or its LWRP award, please contact the Coalition Chairman, David Mosher at SSWCD@nycap.rr.com.