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## **Union College hosts conference on Mohawk Watershed**

SCHENECTADY, N.Y. – The Mohawk Watershed Group at Union College will host the first conference on the physical aspects of the Mohawk River Watershed on Friday, March 27, in the College's Olin Center.

The watershed is a unique and distinctive drainage basin that has major tributaries that empty part of the Adirondacks to the north and part of the Catskill Mountains to the south. As cities and commerce have grown along the river, so has pressure on the waterways, the flow of the river, and the ecosystems that thrive in the watershed.

The conference follows the recent release of a flood study by the Army Corps of Engineers designed to develop recommendations to reduce the frequency and severity of flooding in the watershed. The conference also dovetails with efforts by the New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation aimed at their Mohawk River Basin Program. The mission of the program is to coordinate basin-wide activities related to conserving, preserving and restoring the environmental quality of the Mohawk River and its watershed, while helping to manage the resource for a sustainable future.

The conference features about 30 presentations, including flooding, ecosystem analysis, water quality, sediment yield, watershed management and the future of the watershed in a changing and dynamic climate. More than 100 participants are expected, including registered scientists, engineers and other professionals and students.

The conference comes at a time when severe flooding and an aging infrastructure, such as the Gilboa Dam, have become critical issues. A number of papers to be presented address recent flooding and advances in monitoring and understanding flood processes including an overview of the dynamics of ice jamming in the lower Mohawk River and the impact on the Stockade section of Schenectady.

Other studies address the large-scale aspects of ecosystems and also specific parts of the living system. These studies focus on understanding the distribution of wetlands, fisheries, and aquatic ecosystems.

In addition, representatives from the Dam Concerned Citizens, the West Canada Creek Riverkeepers and the Schoharie River Center (three non-profit advocacy groups) will discuss their ongoing activities. Also represented is the Mohawk Valley Heritage Corridor Commission, which is focused on preserving, promoting, and celebration our natural, cultural, and historic assets to enhance the quality of life and stimulate economic vitality throughout the corridor which is occupied by the main trunk of the Mohawk River.

Science allows us to understand the system around us, but also to make predictions about the future. So, a key question is how climate change has already affected the basin and what can we

expect in the future. The future of this watershed might involve more water, and if this is correct, there are important implications for watershed management, and this is specifically addressed by a talk by J.M.H. Cockburn.

The conference concludes with a keynote address, “*Drums and Bums Along the Mohawk*,” by Robert H. Boyle of Cooperstown, founder of Riverkeeper and the Hudson River Foundation for Science and Environmental Research. Boyle, named by *Audubon Magazine* as one of the 100 Champions of Conservation for the 20<sup>th</sup> century, will discuss using science and the law to protect the natural resources of the watershed from predatory interests.

Extended abstracts, which will provide key details of the conference’s presentations, will be available at noon on March 24 at the conference’s Web site (see below) and are embargoed until March 27.

The conference is organized by J.H.M. Cockburn, Ph.D. and J.I. Garver, Ph.D., from the College’s Geology Department.

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High-resolution photos available upon request.

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