

Preface

The Mohawk Watershed is a unique and distinctive drainage basin that has major tributaries that empty the Adirondacks to the north and the Catskill Mountains to the south. The main trunk of the river occupies a natural topographic gap in the Appalachian mountain chain, which provides a unique and distinctive link between Atlantic and the interior of the continent. This aspect of the geography of the river played a crucial role in the westward expansion by early settlers and eventually was the primary reason the Erie Canal was positioned, in part, along the spine of this key waterway.

As cities and commerce grew along the river, so did pressure on the waterways, the flow of the river, and the ecosystems that thrive in the watershed. In the past decade we have seen some important advances and setbacks in the watershed. An aging infrastructure, much of which is over 50 years old, is starting to show signs of decay and is in need of repair. The 1996 mid-winter flood was the worst in decades and the ice jams that resulted caused considerable damage in the lower parts of the basin. Likewise the 2006 flood that resulted from an incredible series of early summer rains provided residents in the upper part of the drainage a reminder of the power of water and the serious nature of regional flooding. In 2005 the Gilboa Dam on the upper reaches of the Schoharie River was diagnosed with conditions related to its advanced age, and there was soon a swarm of activity related to fixing this dam and mitigating consequences of its potential failure.. Some recent activity on the West Canada Creek has highlighted the delicate balance between riparian rights, and water use for consumption or canal use.

Are watershed dynamics changing right in front of us? One key question surrounds the changes we might expect given a dynamic and changing climate that so far appears to be delivering more water to the system, but is also making it much more variable in nature. How do we plan for this? And how do we manage all of the complex needs in a watershed? The first thing we need to do is to understand the system. These are some of the central questions that have framed this conference. As a first step, we are attempting to bring together interested parties to first explore some of the crucial scientific and engineering issues within the basin. From this, we hope that conference participants will have a better appreciation of the complexity and unique qualities of this watershed.

John I. Garver

Jaclyn Cockburn