

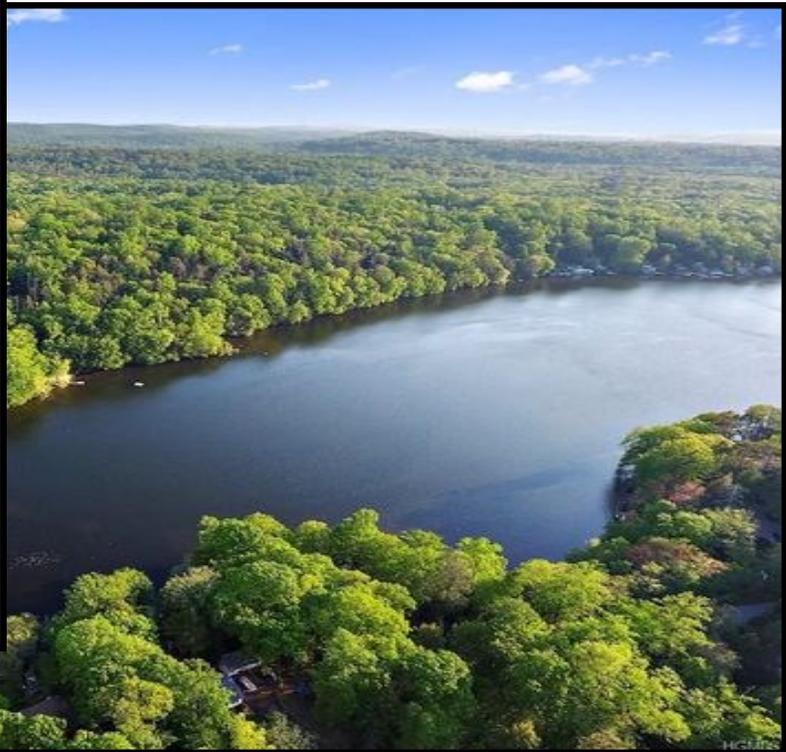
Westchester County Soil and Water Conservation District

2017

Annual Report

Celebrating 50 Years of Service to Westchester County

1967-2017



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George Latimer, Westchester County Executive
Norma Drummond, Acting Commissioner,
Department of Planning

Westchester County
Soil and Water
Conservation District



**Westchester County
Soil and Water Conservation District**

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

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www.westchestergov.com/soilwater

or

<http://planning.westchestergov.com/soil-water-conservation>



Aquatic Restoration Program (*Stormwater Management and Natural Resources Restoration*)

On behalf of the District, the Planning Department continued to advance the Aquatic Restoration Program (Stormwater Management and Natural Resources Restoration Program) which helps the County address its water quality and stormwater management obligations under State and federal requirements. Through the District and its relationships with State, federal and non-governmental entities, the County has had more opportunities to seek and receive non-County funding for its priority projects and activities related to stormwater management and natural resources restoration.

Since 1998, more than 40 individual projects have been completed or are being planned, designed or constructed to more efficiently manage stormwater runoff to improve water quality and, where possible, lessen the risks associated with flooding. Secondary objectives include improved fish and wildlife habitats, passive recreation, and public outreach and education.

The Aquatic Restoration Program's webpage, with summaries and photographs of completed projects, is at: <http://planning.westchestergov.com/aquaticrestoration>.

The projects focus on: (1) natural resources restoration, especially to streams and rivers, freshwater and tidal wetlands, ponds, lakes and meadows; and (2) retrofitting existing and installing new stormwater management facilities. The latter includes innovative technologies to improve water quality by using processes that mimic natural systems and use natural materials.

The following are the most significant projects that were begun or completed in 2017:

1. ***Croton Point Park Grasslands Restoration Project***: A project funding agreement between the County Planning Department, on behalf of the District, and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation was executed in 2017. The restoration of a 125-acre grassland covering the former Croton Landfill at Croton Point Park in Croton-on-Hudson will be designed in 2018 with construction anticipated to begin in 2019. The grassland, or meadow, is currently characterized as a mosaic of plant patches with most dominated by ecologically undesirable vegetation, such as non-native cool season grasses and invasive and non-native mugwort. The goal is to transform the meadow into an ecologically diverse community of plants, which will encourage overall biological diversity, especially of beneficial insects and birds.

The restoration of each patch of vegetation will have to be handled differently in order to achieve the best overall results. For example, some patches will need to be frequently mowed on a temporary basis while others will need to be treated with herbicide to eradicate dominant plants. Most patches will need to be re-seeded with mixes of desirable grasses and forbs. The grassland is viewed by naturalists as critically



important to many species of birds using the Atlantic Flyway, the migratory route for birds traveling up and down the East Coast. Many other birds, including the bald eagle, also use Croton Point Park, the largest peninsula in the Hudson River.

The project is funded by a \$500,000 state grant and \$130,000 in federal funding received by the Westchester County Soil and Water Conservation District. A Planning Department staff person will manage the project on behalf of the District and Westchester County.

2. ***Fulton Brook Streambank Stabilization and Restoration Project:*** A project funding agreement between the County Planning Department, on behalf of the District, and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation was executed in 2017. Fulton Brook, a small tributary to the Bronx River, flows in a west-to-east direction and emerges from a large pipe immediately north of the Westchester County Center in White Plains. The pipe carries the stream under a commercial and light industrial area. The stream is above-ground or “daylighted” from County Center Road to its discharge point in the Bronx River. This section is adjacent to the County Center and within the Bronx River Parkway Reservation. Project components will include the removal of sediment from the stream channel and establishment of a vegetated buffer alongside the stream. Stabilization will include hard (e.g., rock revetment) and soft (e.g., live plant stakes) practices. The project was awarded a state grant by the NYS DEC in 2012, to be matched with county funding. Design is anticipated to be complete in 2018 with construction completed in 2019.
3. ***Conservation Project Financial Assistance Program:*** Using annual state funding to the District, a stormwater management project was completed in 2017. The state Department of Agriculture and Markets-Soil and Water Conservation Committee funded another project for completion in 2018.

The District received a \$6,000 grant in 2016 through the New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee to restore an upland meadow alongside a tidal wetland next to Sarah Lawrence College’s Center for the Urban River at Beczak (CURB) in Yonkers. The project site is on County-owned parkland. The funding, supplemented with additional non-county revenue received by the District, was used to restore the 150-foot-long by 25-foot-wide meadow in 2017. The meadow had been dominated by mugwort, a highly invasive and non-native plant. The total project cost was \$19,500. The restored meadow will buffer the wetland from urban stormwater runoff and pollutants the runoff carries.

The District received another \$6,000 under the state’s conservation project financial assistance program in 2017 to eradicate the quick-growing European alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) from a 2.5-acre freshwater wetland adjacent to the Bronx River and its Fisher Lane Pond in the County-owned Bronx River Parkway Reservation. This project will be completed in 2018.



European alder is a highly invasive, non-native tree that can grow on a wide range of soils and can form monotypic stands. Although it can tolerate droughts, it prefers moist, damp conditions, especially near water sources such as those found next to the Bronx River. It commonly grows in riparian zones, wetlands, and along ponds and lakes. It also grows in forests, forest wetlands and in urban areas.

The freshwater wetland was restored in 2013 and 2014. Prior to its restoration, a monoculture of common reeds (*Phragmites* sp.) dominated the wetland. The common reeds were eradicated but nearby European alders provided the source for the alder invasion. Today, alder has spread over and dominates about a third of the wetland. If left unchecked, it will overwhelm and dominate the entire wetland within five years. Under this project, a contractor will be hired to cut down all of the mature alder trees as well as many saplings and, to the fullest practicable extent, hand-“paint” the freshly cut stumps with systemic herbicide to prevent re-growth.

Professional Development and Public Educational Workshop

A District-sponsored educational workshop for professionals and the general public on December 7, 2017 drew 248 people. The District partnered with Cornell University's Cooperative Extension of Westchester and The Native Plant Center at Westchester Community College to develop and promote its “Pond and Lake Management Workshop.” The workshop focused on pond and lake ecosystems, problems impacting them and monitoring and management techniques that have been successfully employed in Westchester County and elsewhere in New York State.

The workshop was held from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Westchester County Center in White Plains. The workshop attracted professionals and others, including representatives from nearly three-quarters of the county's municipalities as well as municipalities outside of Westchester County, private and public sector landscape architects, landscape designers and contractors. It also attracted representatives from local and regional lake associations and attendees from as far away as the Lake George area of New York, Long Island, Connecticut and New Jersey.

Workshop participants learned from these presentations, which have been posted on the District's webpage:

1. Introduction To The Ecology Of Ponds, Lakes, and Reservoirs by Stephen J. Souza, Ph.D, Founder, Princeton Hydro, LLC, and Instructor at Temple, Rutgers and Montclair State Universities
2. Pond and Lake Stewardship:What You Can Do About Aquatic Invasive Plants by Catherine McGlynn, Ph.D., Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
3. The Lakes Of Westchester County: What We Know And What You Can Do To Help by Scott Kishbaugh, P.E., Chief, Lake Monitoring and Assessment Section, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
4. Dealing With Stormwater: A Practical Approach by Jeremy Farrell, Ph.D., Water



Quality Specialist, Lake George Association, and Post-Doctoral Research Associate,
DFWI

5. Design And Implementation Of A Lake Management Plan by Dr. Souza.

Agricultural Education

The District and Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) maintained their working relationship in 2017 and began developing educational programming concerning agriculture in Westchester County, especially as it relates to the county's soil and water resources. WAC's East of Hudson Office is housed at County-owned Hilltop Hanover Farm in Yorktown. Forming a partnership to cooperatively address the mutual goal of public education concerning soil and water resources is a natural fit for the District and WAC. A WAC staff member attended most of the District's Board of Directors meetings in 2017. The Board appointed him as a non-voting associate board member in June 2017.

General Public Education and Outreach

The Planning Department, on behalf of the District, assisted the following other educational activities in 2017.

1. 2017 Hudson Valley Regional Envirothon and New York State Envirothon

A team from Fox Lane High School in Bedford was Westchester County's highest scoring team in the 2017 Hudson Valley Regional Envirothon. Of the 26 high school teams participating in the April 26 competition at The Fresh Air Fund's Sharpe Reservation in Fishkill, Fox Lane's Team 12 ranked fourth overall. It ranked first among the 10 Westchester teams that participated in the regional event. Ossining High School's Team 14 came in second among Westchester schools and Yorktown High School's Team 19 placed third. As it has for more than a decade, Westchester had more teams competing at this year's regional Envirothon than any other county. Each competing high school may enter up to two teams.

On May 24-25, the highest scoring team from each county, including that from Fox Lane High School, competed in the New York State Envirothon at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, N.Y. The District co-sponsored the Hudson Valley regional competition and Fox Lane High School's participation in the New York State competition.

Ten teams from seven Westchester high schools participated:

- John Jay High School, Katonah-Lewisboro School District, Cross River (two teams)
- Ossining High School, Village/Town of Ossining (two teams)
- Yorktown High School, Town of Yorktown (two teams)
- Woodlands High School, Town of Greenburgh



- Rye High School, City of Rye
- Hastings High School, Village of Hastings-on-Hudson.
- Fox Lane High School, Bedford Central School District

The primary goal of the Envirothon is to encourage students to learn about the natural environment and become good stewards of the land. The teams, each made up of five students, are tested on their knowledge of five environmental topics: soils, aquatics, forestry, wildlife and current environmental issues. In preparation for the events, students develop research skills, practice team building, and gain an appreciation for consensus decision making.

1. **Westchester County Soil and Water Conservation District Webpage:** The District’s webpage is accessible via the County of Westchester website. The District’s webpage offers visitors a substantial amount of information, through links to various county, state, federal and other publications related to soil and water conservation and management.

The webpage address can be accessed from the following websites:

- www.westchestergov.com/soilwater
- <http://planning.westchestergov.com>
then click “Environment” from top menu bar and then “Soil & Water Conservation.”

The webpage continues to be updated to expand or refresh the information it contains.

2. **Provide Technical Information to the Public and Municipal and County Staffs on Soil and Water Conservation Issues:** Planning Department staff, on behalf of the District, continued to assist county residents and others, including municipal representatives, with soil and water conservation, natural resources and stormwater management, and general environmental issues. This assistance included the dissemination of mapping, publications, guidance documents, and other information obtained from county, state and federal sources, including soil surveys, model ordinances, and environmental educational materials.

Much of this information is digitally available through the District’s webpage, accessed directly via www.westchestergov.com/soilwater or through the County’s website at www.westchestergov.com.



OTHER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Soil Group Worksheets

Fourteen property owners asked the District to prepare “soil group worksheets” in 2017. Nineteen worksheets for the same number of parcels, covering 492.6 acres, were prepared for 12 property owners. Two owners did not provide requested additional information and/or clarifications so their worksheets could not be completed. Most of the properties are in the northern part of the county.

The Planning Department, on behalf of the District, continues to offer this assistance to residents seeking tax relief for properties used for agriculture by completing “soil group worksheets,” or soil identification forms, for agricultural land. A worksheet is required by municipal tax assessors from landowners applying to them for reduced property taxes under municipal agricultural tax assessments, which allows qualifying agricultural land to be taxed at an agricultural value rather than a market (non-farm development) value.

The worksheet, per state requirements, must be completed by the District. The Planning Department, whose staff completes the worksheets on behalf of the District, uses the County’s Geographic Information System (GIS) and the USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service’s *Soil Survey for Putnam and Westchester Counties, NY* to identify and characterize soil types on selected parcels.

Hydrilla Control Program in Westchester County

Based on discussions over the course of the year with representatives of the New York State departments of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) and Agriculture and Markets (NYS DAM), as well as those representing the County departments of Law and Planning, the District Board of Directors in November 2017 unanimously voted to enter into an agreement with the NYS DAM to assist the state’s efforts to eradicate hydrilla from Croton Bay, Croton River and New Croton Reservoir beginning in 2018. Using funding from the NYS DEC, the District will enter into an agreement with the NYS DAM so that the District can contract with a specialist to provide public education and outreach and manage the NYS DEC’s herbicide treatment program to eradicate hydrilla in Westchester County. The specialist will be provided office space by the County Department of Planning in White Plains but will be directly supervised on a daily basis by the NYS DEC.

Regional Programs

The District was represented in the following regional efforts that support and complement its goals and objectives:

1. **Lower Hudson Coalition of Conservation Districts (LHCCD):** The District continued to participate in the LHCCD, comprised of Albany, Columbia, Dutchess, Greene, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Ulster and Westchester counties and New York



City. Board Chair Jan Blaire attended LHCCD meetings and acted as a liaison between the District and the LHCCD

The LHCCD was formed by a Memorandum of Agreement, signed by member counties, including Westchester County, to promote and facilitate regional projects in the Hudson River valley. The LHCCD focuses on three “target areas”: agriculture, farmland conversion and protection, and stormwater management. In 2011, the LHCCD hired a coordinator to assist member districts, develop the programming for the annual stormwater management workshop, and apply for grants to support the LHCCD goals and objectives. The LHCCD website, at www.lhccd.net, contains the coalition’s “Strategic Plan.”

2. **Westchester County Stormwater Advisory Board:** The District’s Board of Directors expressed interest in renewing its representation on the County’s 12-member Stormwater Advisory Board (SAB) in 2017. The District’s Board chair had been appointed to the SAB, but that term has expired. The current Board chair is willing and able to serve on the SAB. The advisory board was created under the 2011 Westchester County Stormwater Management Law. The SAB includes two ex-officio, non-voting members - a County legislator and the County’s commissioner of planning. The latter serves as the SAB chair. It consists of 10 voting members; five appointed by the County Executive and five by the County Board of Legislators.

