

SAW KILL WATERSHED COMMUNITY

Issue 3: April 15th, 2020

Protecting the Saw Kill watershed and its ecological, recreational, and historic resources through hands-on science, education, and advocacy.



A NOTE FROM: SKWC LEADERSHIP TEAM

Earth Day Issue Part 1

Earth Day was first celebrated on April 22, 1970. Monumental changes in policy, attitudes, and lifestyles have contributed to a vastly different landscape here in the Saw Kill and Hudson River watersheds. For an impressive account of the long list of environmental milestones of the past fifty years, please see the [DEC timeline](#).

The SKWC is fortunate to have a long record of water quality data collection, beginning in the mid-1970s. While testing was not consistent throughout all the ensuing years, the SKWC, Red Hook Conservation Advisory Council, and Riverkeeper have successfully rebooted the water quality data collection project with the community-science based [Saw Kill Monitoring Program](#). This collection of quantitative data is vital for the advocacy and protection of our watershed, and can be used in conjunction with other data, such as land use mapping, resource mapping, and biological surveys.

In addition to quantitative data, the SKWC is interested in your own observations and local ecological knowledge. The Leadership Team is interested in hearing from YOU about changes in the watershed you may have witnessed over the years. This is by no means an exhaustive list of questions to engage with, but perhaps a good jumping off point. We'd love to hear from long-time residents, or folks who have frequent reasons to be in close proximity to our waterways and can share their observations.

- Are there more or less of a certain plant or animal than you recall from childhood?
- Do you feel confident drinking from, swimming in, or otherwise utilizing water from the Saw Kill more now than in the past? Why or why not?
- How do you utilize the Saw Kill and its tributaries?
- Are you noticing erosion, invasive plants, or other issues along the spots you frequent?

We look forward to hearing from our community members, and hope that once the COVID-19 threat passes, we can have a discussion about observational/qualitative data at one of our regular monthly meetings. It will be interesting to see how far our community feels it has come in the past fifty years, and where our attention should be concentrated for the next fifty.

Please feel free to [contact us](#) if you'd like to answer any of the questions or have other observations you'd be willing to share.

EARTH DAY 50

Karen Schneller-McDonald, Chair of the Saw Kill Watershed Community

Coronavirus. Climate change. Toxic pollution. Earth Day 2020 finds us acutely aware of our connections with each other and with our environment.

The first Earth Day, in 1970, was a response to warnings like the exposure of toxic pesticides in *Silent Spring* and attention-getting events like the heavily polluted Cuyahoga river in Ohio, which caught fire in 1969. This response was part of a larger movement that recognized the effect we can have on our environment and the value of protecting clean air and water. In January 1970, the Environmental Protection Agency was created. By April, 1970, the first Earth Day received so much support that the next day the *Washington Post* described the celebration as "a great outpouring of Americans-several million in all likelihood-demonstrated yesterday their practical concern for a livable environment on this earth... So many politicians, in fact, took part in yesterday's Earth Day activities that the US Congress shut down. Scores of senators and congressmen fanned out across the country to appear at rallies, teach-ins and street demonstrations." By 1973 Congress had adopted the National Environmental Policy Act, Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act.

Since the 1970s big corporations and the politicians they support have fought relentlessly to weaken or eliminate these protections, even as our need to strengthen environmental protection has become more urgent (e.g., climate change). Keeping our environmental protections appropriately strong is a challenge that will test our ability to work together for the health and safety of all. Today we're overwhelmed by the coronavirus pandemic. But as tough as this is, we need to remember that our other environmental crises are not going away.



Environmental and health crises challenge us to focus our view of our place on this planet. In this time of social distancing we are paradoxically made more aware of how our actions affect those around us—how we are interconnected in communities, in our country, and throughout the world. We tend to be unaware of the connections we can't see—in a pandemic this includes our dependence on the people who stock grocery shelves and deliver goods and services. Similarly, we don't commonly recognize the hidden components of ecosystems—for example, soil microorganisms or insects that supply food webs—that keep air, land, and water healthy.

People spread a virus, but can collectively contain it.
People contaminate air and water, but can collectively clean it.

Just as the pandemic connects us, so does our dependence on the health of planet Earth. Our interconnections extend far beyond this virus: Earth Day 2020 is a good time to recognize what we all share.

When we look at the world through the lens of science we see interconnections differently—whether we're looking at a virus or a water contamination source. Our survival depends on our understanding of science, and our ability to use it as a guide to protecting our health, and the health of our planet. To do this we are invited to work together for the common good, and affirm what we know is true:

We are all connected. We are interdependent. We have one home: Earth.

In celebrating connections with each other and with our world this Earth Day, even as we practice social distancing, let's also recognize how we affect our environment. We're in this together.

QUARANTINE READING LIST

Julia Gloninger, Bard College '21, Saw Kill Watershed Community Intern

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, we have curated a short reading list of online articles, poems, and stories related to the environment, and you guessed it, water! We hope you enjoy them during these strange and distant times.

1. [Removing the novel coronavirus from the water cycle](#)

With the knowledge that Covid-19 can be spread through untreated sewage water, scientists are exploring solutions for removing the virus from the water cycle. In addition, they are considering adjustments to our water infrastructure that can help to prevent the spread of future epidemics.

2. [The History of Earth Day](#)

This year, we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. This article reflects back on the history of this holiday.

3. [The River](#)

This poem by Kathleen Raine takes the reader on a journey through encounters with a luminous river that takes place in two dreams.

4. [How 'Silent Spring' Ignited the Environmental Movement](#)

This article celebrates the impact that Rachel Carson's Silent Spring had on the urgency of the environmental movement. Her seminal work guided the attention of citizens across the nation to the impact that chemicals have on our health and our environment.

5. [Down to a Sunless Sea](#)

This short story by Neil Gaiman depicts a rainy encounter in London on the banks of the Thames that unlocks a tale of loss and grief.

6. [Oxbow Lake](#)

Learn about the amazing natural phenomenon of the "oxbow lake". An oxbow lake starts out as a curve, or meander, in a river. A lake forms as the river finds a different, shorter course.

7. [River](#)

Maybe we are a little biased, but this encyclopedia entry about rivers from National Geographic contains a lot of interesting information and some very beautiful photos!

8. [The First People of the River](#)

Provides a succinct overview of the history of the indigenous peoples of the Hudson Valley. For further reading on the indigenous people of Red Hook, check out [The People's History of Red Hook](#).

9. [The History of the Saw Kill](#)

Finally, we invite you to learn about the history of the Saw Kill, the river that continues to connect our community in powerful ways.

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF REPAIR CAFÉS

Steven Appenzeller, Saw Kill Watershed Leadership Team Member

Red Hook has kept nearly 200 broken items out of the landfill in the past year. Better yet, the owners of these beloved items are again able to use and enjoy them. All this is due to the arrival of the Repair Café in our community.

The Repair Café concept was developed in 2007 by Martine Postma, a Dutch journalist who was looking for a way to enhance sustainability in her hometown of Amsterdam. The concept was simple: create a meeting place where people could come and find the tools, materials and experts to repair things rather than dispose of them as trash. When the first café launched in 2009, it was an instant success, spurring Martine to establish the not for profit Repair Café Foundation to spread the concept worldwide. There are now over 2,000 Repair Cafés across the globe with about 100 of those locations in the US. The Hudson Valley is the Repair Café hub of New York State with more than 20 locations. And one year ago a group of Red Hook community volunteers brought the Repair Café to our community.

As we commemorate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day and reflect on the progress made over the past half century, as well as the challenges ahead to combat climate change, it's clear that the Repair Café movement has an important role to play. Globally we are being overrun with waste. In the US, 268 million tons of solid waste are generated each year. Waste in landfill contributes to the leaching of toxic chemicals into the soil and the water, and burning waste degrades the air quality of those living near such facilities, as well as far away, as the exhaust plume mixes with the atmosphere. Astoundingly, 79% of plastic ever produced has accumulated in landfills and in the environment.

The Red Hook Repair Café is hosted at the Red Hook Community Center and visitors have brought an astounding range of goods in for repair. Lamps are the most commonly repaired items in Red Hook, and in Repair Cafés worldwide. Small electrical items, computers, and appliances including vacuum cleaners, toasters, stereos are also common. Clothing, textiles, knit items, dolls and stuffed animals are popular. Other items repaired include clocks and other mechanical items, jewelry including necklaces, earrings and bracelets, chairs, picture frames, small tables and other small decorative items, and bicycles.

Reduce, reuse, recycle are the primary ways we can all manage our impact on the environment. The Repair Café helps reduce the demand for raw materials and energy to produce new goods and reduces landfill waste by allowing people to reuse what they already have. Our consumption of goods accounts for over one-third of global greenhouse emissions.

The Repair Cafés around the world operate with a few simple ground rules. The work carried out in the Repair Café is performed free of charge on a voluntary basis by the repair experts at hand. Visitors are encouraged to help carry out the repairs themselves whenever possible; knowledge transfer and demystifying how things work is an important benefit. Since the repairs are being performed by unpaid volunteers, they are not liable for any loss that may result from advice or instructions concerning repairs. But in fact, people are incredibly grateful for the effort expended, even when repairs cannot be made.

But what really makes the Repair Café special is the culture of kindness surrounding the event. Highly skilled professionals, engineers, and hobbyists volunteer as repair coaches and share themselves and their tools to unreservedly help strangers. The coaches talk through what they are doing and a relationship is established. Neighbors meet old friends and start conversations with others. People share stories while sipping coffee and eating a light bite. The Repair Cafés is the essence of community and help in a small way to tackle isolation while contributing to transforming our throw-away economy, one beloved item at a time. We hear time and time again from our volunteer repair coaches and the people bringing items for repair how much fun they had at the Repair Café and how special the event makes them feel.