



**SAW KILL WATERSHED  
COMMUNITY**

# NEWSLETTER

**Issue 8: June 12th, 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

As watershed stewards we often need to remind ourselves why we do this work: whether we want to reduce flooding, protect habitat, enhance recreational opportunities--or just have a deep connection to the scenic and environmental benefits of water in our community.

For the SKWC, all of these aspects come into play. But the one thing we all share is the desire to ensure safe drinking water for all. Everyone is entitled to clean water and a safe, healthy environment. We're both privileged and lucky that the Saw Kill watershed is in relatively good condition. While there will always be room for improvement, we can focus our energy on protecting what we have, rather than mitigating damage once it has occurred.

Unfortunately, many watershed communities in the Hudson Valley cannot say the same.

As we have seen time and time again, shedding light on a water crisis and holding polluters accountable is incredibly difficult. These crises disproportionately affect low-income communities of color, exemplified by the ongoing water crises in places such as Flint and Newburgh. We acknowledge the corrosive impact of systemic racism on many aspects of society, including infrastructure planning and urban development where the gaps in regulation and lax enforcement have denied certain communities access to clean drinking water. We need to do everything within our power to push for change. This starts with a statement of solidarity with everyone, but particularly people of color, who are rightly demanding serious change to the status quo. We hear you, and we stand with you.

We are committed to sharing our knowledge and resources with neighboring communities, particularly those that are struggling with contaminated drinking water. We are in the process of learning how we can best support communities in need and we invite those facing challenges around local water issues to reach out. We will more actively address these issues as we move forward.

As the Saw Kill Watershed Community we strive to do better, and indeed, must do better. As individuals we are dedicated to supporting our community and we invite you to join us. The links below can be a starting point in this journey. This isn't an exhaustive list, and we'd love to hear about other resources. We do not have all the answers, but our goal is to build community, and that means sharing and learning from each other. We all must keep listening and learning.

[8 Ways Environmental Organizations Can Support the Movement for Environmental Justice](#)  
[Environmental Advocacy Webinar Series](#)  
[Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Racial Justice Resources for Nonprofits](#)  
[Organizations to Donate To and Get Involved In](#)  
[Write to Your Local Leaders](#)  
[Black Owned Businesses to Support in the Hudson Valley](#)



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# A CONTINUING BATTLE FOR CLEAN WATER

Karen Schneller-McDonald, Chair Saw Kill Watershed Community Leadership Team

While we enjoy a glass of cold clear water on a hot day, the federal government is busy rolling back regulations that keep our water safe to drink. These actions put water quality and our health at risk no matter where we live, whether we get our drinking water from a private well or a municipal source. The weakening of environmental standards over the years has affected rural communities in Pennsylvania beset by water problems due to fracking, Appalachian communities with water poisoned by unregulated mine waste, Native American communities threatened by unregulated fracking and pipelines in South Dakota; residents of Flint Michigan where lead pipe replacement has been delayed, and Newburgh, NY's loss of drinking water due to PFOS contamination. The pace of this neglect is accelerating; as of May 2020, the Trump administration has rolled back 66 environmental rules and regulations, and an additional 34 rollbacks are in progress.

## How Does This Affect Us?

The Clean Water Act of 1972, which provides critical federal protection for our waters, is being substantially weakened by recent federal actions. The Environmental Protection Agency is finalizing a rule, scheduled to go into effect on June 23rd, that significantly alters the Clean Water Act and eliminates protection for most small streams and wetlands. We all live downstream; this will affect individual wells, municipal water supply, flood mitigation, and fish and wildlife habitat.

On May 18th, Riverkeeper hosted a panel discussion ("Trump's Dirty Water Rule: New York's Waterways and Wetlands in Peril") to explain the details of this action, featuring representatives from Riverkeeper, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and Sierra Club's Atlantic Chapter.

As the panelists pointed out, the proposed rule change goes against the EPA's own recent findings in favor of *increased* protection. A major EPA study in 2015 provided evidence for *increasing* protection of small wetlands and streams because of their significant role in contributing to drinking water supply, habitat, reducing flooding (including downstream areas), and building our natural defenses against the future effects of climate change.

The current "dirty water" changes seek to undo that protection by narrowing the definition of the "waters of the United States" that are to be protected by the Clean Water Act. The new rule drastically reduces the number of wetlands and streams that will be protected from dredging and filling. This means that toxic chemicals and sewage could be legally dumped directly into unprotected waterways, affecting downstream areas because connected waters flow into each other. In addition, the proposed rules will leave significant gaps in other federal water protections and restrict the ability of states and tribes to protect water resources.

## New York's Wetlands and Streams Under Threat

New York State protects some wetlands and streams, but has relied on federal regulations to protect most of them. Because the federal government has become an unreliable source of water resources protection, New York must expand efforts to take up the slack.

Here's why:

- New York only protects large wetlands (12.4 acres or more) that appear on the state's official protected wetland maps. New York has relied on federal protections to fill in the gaps and protect the remaining smaller wetlands, which make up two-thirds of the wetlands in the state. The maps for wetlands in New York are out of date and don't include all wetlands, 12.4 acres or larger. Over 50,000 acres of large wetlands are currently prevented from inclusion on these maps due to opposition from land developers.

- About 11.2 million New Yorkers rely on small streams for drinking water. Many of these are not protected; this includes 41,000 miles of NYS Class “C” streams, and ephemeral and intermittent streams. Of New York’s 100,000 miles of streams, 29 percent are intermittent. In addition, one mile of ephemeral stream exists for every mile of mapped stream. These streams are critical for drinking water, habitat, and flood mitigation.

## What You Can Do

It would be great to bask in the local abundance of clean water here in the Hudson Valley, assured that it’s being protected. Unfortunately, that’s not the case. Most of our communities can’t afford lawsuits or expensive remediation, so we must support and encourage state and local entities who can improve protection of our health and safety.

New Yorkers need to respond strongly to this federal rollback of Clean Water Act protection. Here’s how you can help:

1. Contact your representative in Congress to cosponsor and support the Clean Water For All Act (HR6745). This bill was recently introduced to prohibit implementation of the proposed changes to weaken the Clean Water Act. (You can use [this Riverkeeper form](#) or write directly.)
2. Contact your NY state representatives and ask them to protect NY stream and wetlands. (You can use [this Riverkeeper form](#) or write directly.)
3. Support New York’s \$3 Billion Restore Mother Nature Bond Act when you vote in November. The money will be used to restore waterways and habitat across the state.
4. Report any suspicious filling of wetlands or alteration of streams to either DEC at 1-844-332-3267 or [online here](#); or to Riverkeeper at 1-800-21-74837 ext. 231 or [online here](#).

For more information, see Riverkeeper’s blog: [New York's waterways and wetlands are in peril](#).

