



**SAW KILL WATERSHED  
COMMUNITY**

# NEWSLETTER

**Issue 13: Dec 16th, 2020**

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



## SKWC MEMBER OUTREACH: YEAR IN REVIEW

Our community meetings have long been a monthly highlight for the Saw Kill Watershed Community. We looked forward to gathering at the historic Elmendorph Inn for informative presentations about the Saw Kill and local projects, including water quality monitoring, water contamination impacts, plants and animals, land use, and recreation. Each meeting included a community conversations forum where anyone could voice their questions and concerns.

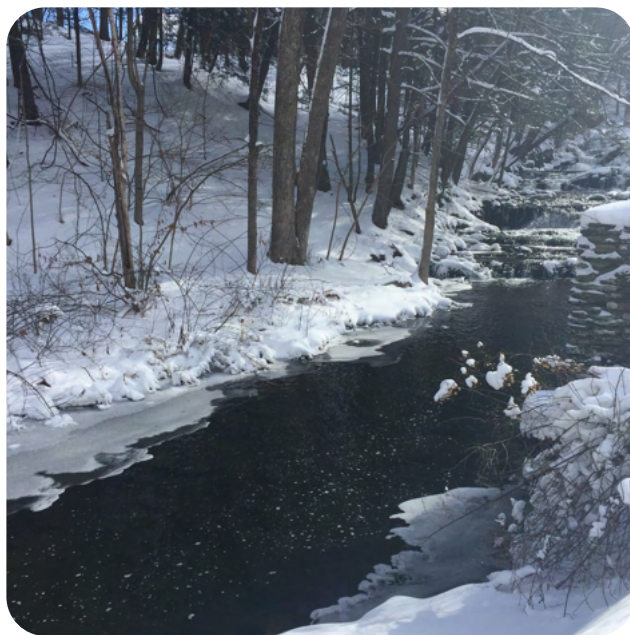
With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March it was no longer possible to meet in person. We then pivoted to newsletters as our primary vehicle to stay in touch with our community. The newsletters are sent to everyone on our mailing list and are also [available on our website](#). We hope you have found the newsletters interesting and useful. We wanted to close out the year by sharing some of our favorite articles with you. We also invite you to contact us if you have any comments about our articles or if you are interested in writing a piece for publication.

We wish you and your families a healthy and happy new year and we look forward to resuming our monthly meetings again sometime in 2021.



## Some Suggestions for Your Holiday Reading

- Endocrine Disruptors are an emerging class of contaminant that may lead to serious health issues including cancer, pregnancy complications, and delayed brain development. At present these chemicals are typically found only in trace amounts, but reading this article will tell you more about this emerging threat as well as how its risks may be mitigated.
- Tributaries need names... did you know that there are 17 on the Saw Kill? There are many reasons to name streams, but the fact that unnamed streams are unprotected streams is near the top of the list. Learn more about how you can work with the SKWC to name some of our local unnamed tributaries.
- Nature's best hope might just be in your backyard. Healthy watersheds depend on healthy ecosystems and a diversity of species, but recent studies reveal an alarming loss of that diversity. We can all take action in our own yards to increase their habitat value and support wildlife diversity.
- Earth Day 50 as seen through the eyes of local students. The future belongs to the young, so it was meaningful and appropriate to get the perspective of local middle school students on their concerns and hopes for our environment.
- Hummingbirds are small beautiful birds mainly found in warmer climates, but there is one member of the family, the ruby-throated hummingbird, that calls our area home. The cold winter months are a great time to plan for a garden that will attract these lovely creatures to your property.
- Renewable energy can have watershed impacts unless regulated properly. New York State is fast tracking large-scale renewable energy projects such as wind and solar farms to meet ambitious and commendable state goals. At the same time there needs to be appropriate regulations requiring adequate protection of land, water, and wildlife, through responsible siting of turbines, roads, and infrastructure. Learn more about this important issue in this article.



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# PROTECTING OUR WATERS: UPDATES

Karen Schneller-McDonald, Saw Kill Watershed Community Chair

Small streams supply clean drinking water, provide critical habitat, and along with wetlands play a crucial role in mitigating floods. The updates below, on regulations and legislation, are not encouraging for increased protection of these waters in New York. However, watershed groups like SKWC can play an important role in advocating for increased local protection. We can also petition the DEC to classify or reclassify streams; the SKWC's petition for an upgrade in the Saw Kill's classification is under consideration by DEC. Next, we can turn our attention to our watershed's small streams and wetlands in need of additional protection.

## NYS Renewable Energy Regulations

In April 2020, New York State enacted the Accelerated Renewable Energy Growth and Community Benefit Act, with the goal of expediting the siting and construction of large-scale renewable energy projects. The Act establishes the Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES) within the Department of State, which will consolidate the environmental review of major renewable energy facilities. All large-scale, renewable energy projects 25 megawatts or larger will be required to obtain a siting permit from \ ORES for new construction or expansion.

The proposed project review regulations and standards were released for public comment in September; the comment period ended on December 7. Along with other concerned groups in the Hudson Valley and across NYS, the Saw Kill Watershed Community submitted comments expressing our concerns about water resource protection. We also published the comments in our November newsletter. The gist of our concerns: the proposed regulations reduce protection of wetlands, streams, habitat, and at-risk species in order to expedite the review process. With these reduced protections come greater risks for water quality degradation and reduced ability to mitigate flooding. We hope that as public comments are processed by ORES, changes will be made to the regulations so they will adequately protect our streams and wetlands and wildlife habitat. The small streams and wetlands that power watersheds are crucial for addressing local resiliency to climate change.

## NYS Stream Protection Legislation

NYS currently protects streams with specific water quality classification designations. Many streams, however, remain unclassified and unprotected. In addition, the weakening of federal Clean Water Act protection for water resources has further removed or reduced protection for small streams.

This year, the New York State Legislature passed a bill that would protect 41,000 additional miles of small streams in New York. Although the bill received strong bipartisan support, it was vetoed by Governor Cuomo in late November. We will be monitoring the next steps for water protection laws in NYS and will join other groups in advocating for passage of this bill in the next legislative session.



# SKWC RECEIVES GRANT FROM OPEN SOCIETY UNIVERSITY NETWORK THROUGH BARD COLLEGE

Marco Spodek, Saw Kill Watershed Leadership Team

Earlier this fall, the SKWC was fortunate to receive some funding as a result of our partnership with the Center for the Study of Land, Air, and Water at Bard College. The new Community Science Coalition at Bard is centered on establishing local, domestic, and international partnerships with institutions and organizations to facilitate monitoring projects of shared resources that involve community members at each locale. An important part of this work is allocating resources here in the Hudson Valley as a model for how this can be done at some of the new partner institutions. Given SKWC's long standing partnership with Bard, we are happy to be able to put some of these resources toward a few long-awaited projects!

The \$30,000 grant, leveraged over the next three years, will create an opportunity to hone our mission with funds for year one allocated to rebuilding our website, creating comprehensive maps of the adjacent Mudder Kill and Stony Creek watersheds, establishing a local well-testing protocol, and providing honoraria to speakers for some exciting events we are planning for 2021. We look forward to sharing progress on these projects as we move forward into the new year!

## THANK YOU TO ALL OUR SAMPLERS!

