SKWC

SAW KILL WATERSHED COMMUNITY

NEWSLETTER

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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

Happy New Year! As we celebrate the beginning of this new year we recognize that we are all still facing many challenges and stressors that were present in 2020. As we grapple with these issues, whether they be personal or at the community scale, it can also provide us the opportunity to reflect and refocus. The SKWC Leadership Team is trying to accomplish just that. We are in the process of renovating our website, reprioritizing projects to meet current needs, and evaluating ways we can stay connected and grow our community.

In this issue of our newsletter, you will find ways you can help support your local environment and the critters that live there, learn about the indigenous peoples that historically lived in this region, and their connection to the Saw Kill and Hudson River.

We hope you enjoy it!

THE AMPHIBIAN MIGRATION PROJECT IN THE SAW KILL WATERSHED

Karen Schneller-McDonald, Saw Kill Watershed Community Chair

As the snow falls and temperatures plummet this week, it seems incredible that the annual spring amphibian migration season is just around the corner.

Migration happens in late March and early April when night temperatures reach at least 40 and there's a drizzle of rain. Spotted salamanders, spring peepers, and other amphibians leave their woodland burrows and travel to seasonal woodland pools and other wetlands to mate and lay their eggs. Volunteers leave their snug living rooms looking for frogs and salamanders on the move across roads, and move them to safety on the other side.

New York DEC's Amphibian Migration Project trains volunteers throughout the Hudson Valley to move salamanders and frogs off the roads--and to collect data about them in the process. For several years, Red Hook has had a team of volunteers who participate in this program.

Big Night Plans

This year, the SKWC has obtained funding that will help us enhance the local Amphibian Migration Project and develop a prototype over the next two years that can be shared with other watershed and community groups. We also plan to make a more deliberate search of the watershed's roads, checking for new crossing locations as well as monitoring our list of known crossings. Our maps will identify key wetlands as well as critical wooded habitat where these amphibians spend their lives outside the breeding season. Many of them use the same migration pathway, returning to the same breeding pool year after year. We'd like to use this information to locate more of the key breeding areas and give them some local protection.

What Amphibians Tell Us about Watersheds

Amphibians breed in wetlands of all sizes, including small wetlands like oxbows and depressions in floodplains. They also breed in small woodland pools (also called vernal pools) that dry up in the warmer weather. Identifying and protecting amphibian breeding areas helps us understand where they are in our watershed. The salamanders and frogs that depend on these habitats are sensitive to changes in water quality and seasonal water supply. They're a good indicator of overall watershed health. Protecting these areas contributes to the larger goal of protecting the Saw Kill watershed.

Along with Laurie Husted, who has long led the Red Hook volunteers on migration nights, we now have a new coordinator, Amy Shein. In the next few weeks she'll be contacting previous volunteers and inviting others to join. She'll match the volunteers with the sites that need to be monitored, coordinate the migration night forays into the rain, and make sure we collect the data we need for future protection of key areas. If you haven't already signed up but are interested, please contact Amy Shein at amyshein@gmail.com.

You'll need some training to be an effective volunteer. Check out the DEC's Amphibian Migrations and Road Crossings Project Handbook and online training, and contact Amy for additional volunteer instructions.

Then start watching your calendar and the weather until the right conditions converge sometime between early March and early April.

A PATH FORWARD: INDIGENOUS LAND RECOGNITION IN THE SAW KILL WATERSHED

Karen Raskin, Saw Kill Watershed Community Leadership Team

The SKWC formally acknowledges that the waters and lands we seek to protect are the ancestral homelands of the Muh-he-con-neok, or Mohican, and the Munsee Lenape, who are now sovereignly recognized as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community in Wisconsin. Their Hudson Valley homeland retains tangible and intangible heritage, including sacred places, burials, ritual objects, artifacts, ecofacts, placenames and traditional knowledge, despite the concerted and continued efforts to destroy or diminish their culture.

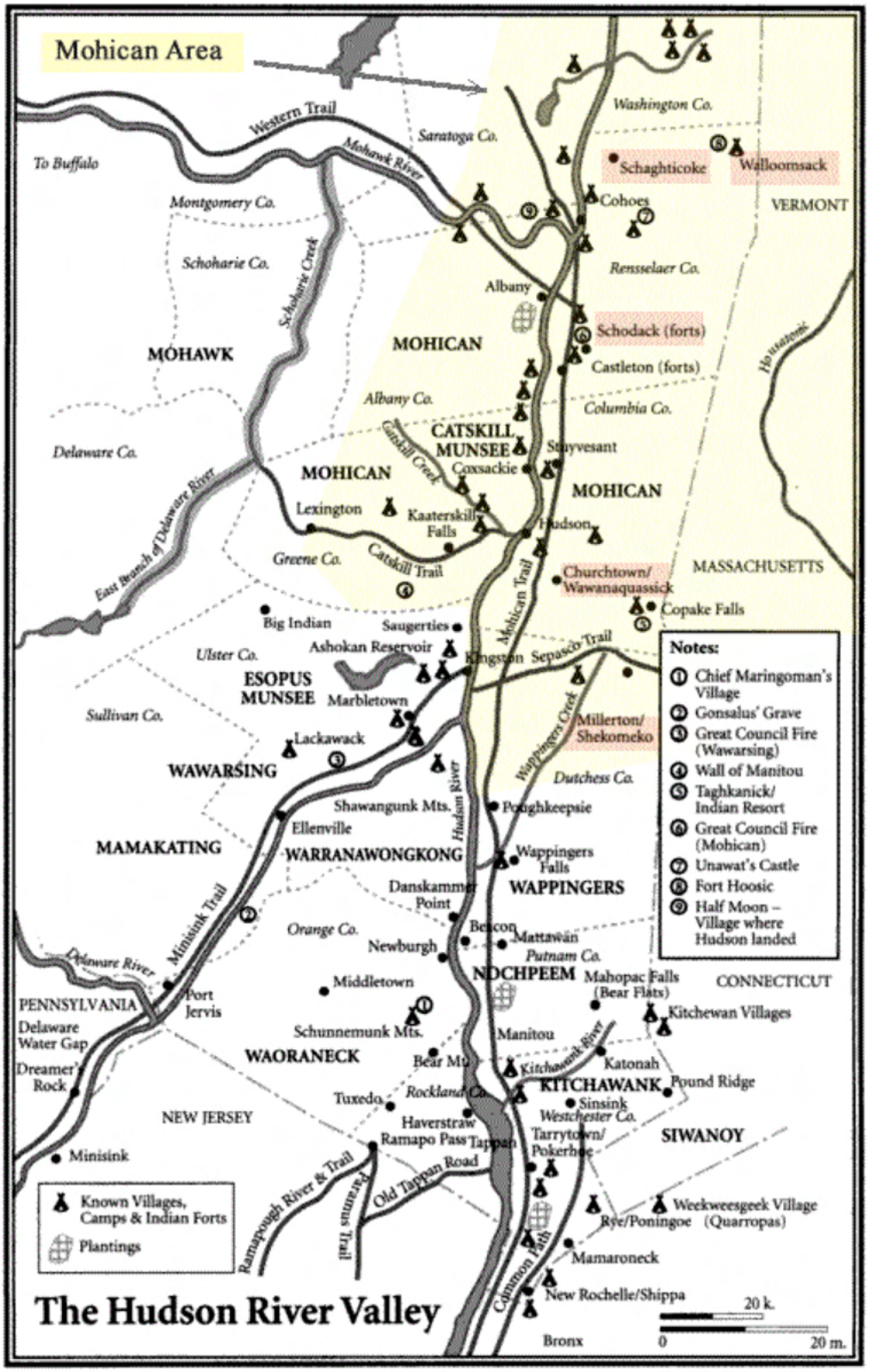
Today, we are all grappling with environmental problems that require education, political engagement, and most importantly resilience. In doing so, we are following in the footsteps of Indigenous people from here, who have continued to show up, and refuse to give up when advocating for their people (https://youtu.be/peWBzVs6RlQ). The SKWC commits to creating a more equitable and inclusive space for all, respecting the past, present and future of the people, plants, animals, and waters of this beautiful place.

A comprehensive archaeological, ethnographic, and historic background for our watershed would fill volumes. In this article I'll provide some very basic information, along with links for further exploration. As an anthropologist, I have found that one of the best ways to learn about Native People is to ask them--they're still here! Your own research can begin in a library to learn about which bands or groups were associated with your town, and follow up with some reading on tribal websites. Most Tribal Nations have pages on their websites that tell their history on their terms. It's important to recognize that many of the historical accounts, ethnographic literature, and images relating to Indigenous People (including those memorable American Museum of Natural History dioramas) were created to advance racist and colonialist agendas.

The Stockbridge-Munsee Community has a website with a brief historical background overview, as well as deeper dives into details about illegitimate land acquisitions, missionization, expulsions, and diaspora from the Hudson Valley. I used this excellent source, along with current archaeological research conducted at Bard in collaboration from the Stockbridge-Munsee Band, to put together this overview. Bonney Hartley, Historic Preservation Manager of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community Massachusetts extension office, also recommended the works of Shirley Dunn, Mohicans and Their Land and The Mohican World.

Archaeologists have dated sites around Tivoli Bay as old as 7,000 years BP (before present), but even earlier sites, from 13,000 years BP, have been found in the region. Evidence from these sites show that earlier inhabitants were smaller family units, who followed seasonal rounds to procure resources throughout the year. Shellfish and migratory fish and birds, as well as game, nuts, and other plant resources spread intensive use over wide areas, smaller populations, and long periods. Oral traditions, along with archaeological and linguistic evidence, point to the arrival of Algonquian-speaking people in the Hudson Valley area from points west, thousands of years ago. These people kept close relations with their kin, the Lenape (who white settlers called the Delaware). As groups slowly and gradually began to rely more on cultivated food resources, settlements grew and became more permanent. The Woodland Period, as this time is called, began around 2700 BP. Evidence shows that the floodplains in what is now the Tivoli area were planted with corn, squash, beans, sunflowers, and other crops that could be stored and traded. We also have evidence of long, continuous use of migratory fish resources along the mouth of the Metabesem (the Saw Kill) and the large river that flows both ways, Mahicantuck (the Hudson).

The map below shows important village sites, monuments, and territories of the Indigenous people of the Hudson Valley. This map, like all political maps, is just a snapshot of pre-colonial time, and cannot begin to illustrate the social, ecological, and political calculations that led to the arrangements depicted.



Source: **Native New Yorkers: The Legacy of the Algonquin People of New York**
By Evan T. Pritchard

Prior to European contact, the People of the Waters That Are Never Still, the Muh-he-con-ne-ok, spanned from the north starting just below Lake Champlain, and included areas on both sides of the Hudson river, west to Schoharie Creek and east into Massachusetts, Vermont, and Connecticut. Close alliances with the Munsee Lenape and Wappinger people were maintained by proximity, kinship, and cultural and linguistic similarities before, during, and after European influence. Villages along the Mahicantuck were dispersed alongside bluffs, near floodplains, tributaries, bays, and islands. A village usually consisted of one or more longhouses, where several families may live, small round houses called wik-wams, sweat lodges, and council houses. Other settlements were in the Taconic (Taghkanic or Taughannock) area, which means "the woods." In these forested areas, resources such as game, fruit, nuts, and other materials were procured. Indigenous people of the area used the rivers and waterways for food, water, and transportation. They actively managed the landscapes to enhance hunting and gathering activities in conjunction with farming the Three Sisters: corn, squash, and beans. The family structure was matrilineal. The villages and settlements were led by appointed leaders called Sachems, who held councils at Schodack Island. Lighting the council fires on the island, the village sachems from all over the vast territory would meet to discuss matters of political, spiritual, and personal importance.

Indigenous populations were decimated by European introduced diseases, destruction of resources, displacement, and war. Prior to Henry Hudson's first trip up the Hudson in 1609, diseases and political upheaval were already rippling through the Northeast. The Stockbridge-Munsee Community's website sums up many years of Dutch and Colonial history in a succinct paragraph:

> As the fur trade expanded and furs became more difficult to find, tensions developed between the Mohicans and the Mohawks, Haudenosaunee people to the west. Each group wanted to maintain its share of the fur trade business, as well as retain friendly relations with their European allies. Not only did conflicts occur between the Mohicans and the Mohawks, but the Native people were also caught in wars among the Dutch, English and French. The Mohicans were eventually driven from their territory west of the Mahicannituck. In the early 1700s, indebtedness, questionable land purchases and cultural conflicts caused them to move farther east near the Housatonic River in what were to become Massachusetts and Connecticut.

European Christian missionaries such as the Puritans of Stockbridge and the Moravians of Shekomeko (near Pine Plains) put forth an adaptive survival option for the small and dispossessed groups of Mohican and Munsee people. Many converted to Christianity, became settled and fought in American wars. Even so, they were continually displaced over the decades, pushed westward to Oneida territory, Ohio, and Indiana, and Wisconsin. The Treaty of 1856 established the current reservation in Bowler, Wisconsin 1856. Each upheaval tested the patience, resolve, and resilience of the remaining tribal members, as every new location was met with a need to begin building again.

Former tribal President Kimberly Vele explains; "We have always been a very politically active people . . . never afraid to stand for what we think is right. Everywhere we have travelled, one of the first things we would do is establish a school for the children. And I think that has helped us to be the kind of diplomats that our ancestors proved to be." (https://youtu.be/peWBzVs6RlQ). Today, cultural excursions from Wisconsin to New York and Massachusetts help the Stockbridge-Munsee people retain and strengthen ancestral ties to

their homeland. Mohican history conferences in New York and Wisconsin have helped to uncover written and oral stories that strengthen historical understanding. When Kimberly Vele asked what tribal members wish to impress upon people learning about their tribe, it is that they are still here! *The Last of the Mohicans* is fiction!

Today, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community engages in cultural resource identification and protection on their reservation lands in Wisconsin and six other states where the tribe has ancestral ties. Government-to-government consultation occurs when local, state, and federal projects have the potential to harm significant cultural resources.

Recently, Bard archaeology professor Christopher Lindner and his students have been collaborating with the tribe while excavating sites on campus. It is heartening to see more academics recognize the need to include tribal members in their research undertakings. The Arvid E. Miller Library Museum, the official repository for the archives of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, offers a "Homeland History" video series that features presentations of recent archaeological work done in the area.

Water and environmental issues are inextricably linked with cultural and historical resources. The SKWC hopes that we will soon be able to offer community information meetings to give a Native American perspective on these issues. With this event on the horizon, I hope people will follow the links in this article to take a deeper dive into the historical background. Our goal is for our discussions to stay focused on the contemporary issues tribal representatives bring to the table. As Northwestern University writes about their Native American and Indigenous initiative,

> To recognize the land is an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose territory you reside on, and a way of honoring the Indigenous people who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial. It is important to understand the long standing history that has brought you to reside on the land, and to seek to understand your place within that history. Land acknowledgements do not exist in a past tense, or historical context: colonialism is a current ongoing process, and we need to build our mindfulness of our present participation.