

Rondout Creek Watershed Alliance: Strategic Session

Wednesday, July 20, 2022, 6-8 PM
Rondout Municipal Center, 1915 Lucas Avenue, Cottekill, NY

Meeting Notes

Assets (shared in presentation):

Existing planning documents:

- Rondout Creek Watershed Alliance Guiding Document (2019)
- Rondout Neversink Stream Program 2022-2024 Action Plan (2022)
- Interim Watershed Management Plan for the lower, non-tidal portion of the Rondout Creek (2010)
- Tidal Rondout Creek Watershed Management Plan (2015)

Monitoring data with Riverkeeper:

- *Enterococcus* bacteria – 19 sites since 2012
- Microbial Source Tracking to identify potential sources of bacteria
- Presentations, reports, raw data

Rondout Creek Watershed Alliance and members:

- Rondout Creek Watershed Council formed 2007
- Rondout Creek Watershed Alliance re-formed 2014

Education: brochure, website

Stewardship: tree planting, stream clean ups

Other Assets:

Natural Heritage Plan and NRI in Rochester, Open Space plans in Wawarsing/Rochester

NRIs and open space plans for Towns that have them

Marbletown – biodiversity training (old but useful)

Rondout Neversink Program

Riverkeeper detailed study of tributaries that lead into Rondout – nutrients

2011 – water quality study post-Irene, Rosendale, Jen Metzger/Laura Heady involved

RCWA: GIS maps of watershed, prime ag soils, moving towards creating regional master plan, where to place food crops so watershed could go food independent. FoodSolutions.org approach to Rondout Watershed. Year-round food source. Series of articles in Shawangunk Journal by Andrew. Center for Bioregional Living. Education at Ellenville Farmers Market. Series of talks, watershed education park behind solar array in Rochester, on Mill Brook. Examples of multifunctional riparian buffer reforestation. Ben & Andrew did project on Esopus, similar approach in T of Rochester not in riparian area because already forested. Trees for Tribs proposal.

Resolution for park funding around Ulster County. ARPA funding!

High school – walking trails through HUB, outdoor education
Wild Earth

Chapter 10 of DEP water for our future – hundreds of pages on the Rondout Creek watershed.
Reach by reach, watershed below dam.

Current Watershed Challenges:

Construction happening or going to happen, need for adopting codes, Rochester hasn't adopted NRI yet. Codes that exist and buildings/manufacturing going in that reflect those, not going above and beyond.

Crestco – Fonteynkill, filling in 4 acres of wetlands, not sharing good water budget, cannabis facility, water use in Rondout/industry, approved bc met codes, sent letter asking for above and beyond, planning board chair passed away (!)

Lack of alignment on Rondout Creek Watershed Alliance team

Aging sewer infrastructure – across the HV, especially private septic and wells

Lack of protections for small unmapped wetlands/streams (new legislation passed is opportunity, wetlands protections bill for NYS. Ingrid Haeckel speaking about this to Ulster EMC.)

Size of watershed is challenge, challenge to have all munis represented, able to support initiatives.

Upper, Lower, Tidal, Non-Tidal components

Challenging to see whole rather than just segments

Rondout Creek main stem is down-dam system, regulated by NYC drinking water

Different municipalities, legislative districts, difficult to coordinate between these different jurisdictions. Could try to set up meeting with ECC chairs, town supervisors? Every muni trying to work on own, but not a lot of coordinated projects. Hard to focus on events outside of muni boundaries.

Lack of adopted overall watershed plan. Need for funding to do complete watershed plan, currently there are elements. Wanted to do this during NY Rising, but funding didn't come through. Julie from Stone Environmental (VT) - \$250,000 for this study.

Sewage – CSOs in Rondout in Kingston

Napanoch sewage treatment plant – chronic noncompliance with Clean Water Act. Presented by Dan and Jen.

Wawarsing – one of largest munis in land area, upstream of other munis, will impact other munis downstream. Mostly Rondout watershed. Potential to be a good steward to the waterway.

Explosion of population, codes to protect creeks/wetlands are behind. Summer camps.

Rebecca's role – has been handling all admin to keep group running, lack of bandwidth for administration. Need someone to keep things organized, with those skills.

Need more social media presence, someone with skills (the youth). Get people involved and get their interest. Need to reflect media that people use.

Warm bodies.

Climate Smart Communities – drain. Marbletown focused on climate smart communities. Only so many people that can work on these issues, lots of focus on CSC but not on watershed. How can munis support watershed groups? Water-based committee? Municipal support for water from supervisors valuable. CSC and MS4 – opportunities for collaboration with municipalities 501(c)(3) organization? consider organizational structure, fiscal sponsorship Need core group of people in alignment to move forward – need plan for group to implement together (action plan) If goal is to be 501(c)(3), can fill in actions to get there, could hire ED to manage Why 501(c)(3)? How would that change current actions? Heavy administrative work. Need to engage people with a vision, grow membership. This is critical need to move forward. Food independence, energy independence, climate smart. Need to distinguish RCWA from other organizations. Too few people trying to do too much work. To build capacity, we need more people at table with capacity. Media savvy, data savvy, etc. Need to have compelling vision first, let people know we exist, gets people excited. RK has provided certificates of insurance in past. May have been too dependent on the ECCs. Have good relationships. Young people – pros and cons. Not focused on the environment. Identifying specific structure. Asking people what they love to do, what they are interested, have framework/clarity to allow them to do that thing and benefit the group. Freedom/boundary. Diversity of ideas. As Rosendale Town Councilman – had no idea RCWA existed until started Googling. Need to grow presence. Would have been in room sooner if he knew about RCWA! Everyone shows up for a different reason – learn their story. Invasive species Emerging contaminants – PFAS in WWTP, the unknowns Requirements on inspecting septics – challenging politically for local officials Some septics are required to have federal permit on top of Ulster County permit. Some businesses may not have septic systems and discharge directly into Rondout Creek?? Call to Board of Health!

Goal-Setting: What do we want to accomplish?

Working on specific projects – getting out and doing stuff outdoors on the creek, Coxingkill, great for outreach, getting ECCs involved, etc. 1-2 events/projects, outside doing something. Mapping Trees for Tribes projects – completed, ongoing research project. Andrew met with Beth Roessler, Coxingkill site to study. Andrew more focused on new tree plantings. Membership – Anna has new job, wants to be part of this; Jen Benson; Beth Roessler; Tom – some key people. Next meeting, have them be here. Leadership – who does what? Replace Rebecca's role

Evaluate structure that will meet goals

Summit to bring in ideas, key players – evolution of RCWA.

Need admin support and direction.

Action or watershed planning? Preliminary steps to get this going. Consider Ulster County applying on behalf of a municipality on the Rondout Creek, because is designated inland waterbody. Will need to have someone guide through this grant application process.

Trees for Tribes – Andrew talking to clients about potential for Trees for Tribes in Accord, Ben helping with application. Also looking for other sites. Could be one of RCWA's fall events. Aug 1 deadline, need to find property to do planting.

Need to have big plan, rather than incremental things.

Outreach to Rondout Valley High School – just restarted environmental club. Could reach out for Trees for Tribes. Get them involved. Kathleen McPeak? Anne Belmont has been in contact.

Who uses the creek? Fishing, etc. Other groups that exist in Rondout watershed, but might not be engaged in RCWA yet. Trout Unlimited, etc. How are people using the creek?

Cornell Cooperative Extension Ulster County fishing education – DOH connection

*Year-end report, track record of how we're doing. Communication and education tool. Email to Town Supervisors on projects. Take pictures of Trees for Tribes.

Get Manna Jo Greene here if possible.

Next meeting – get people in the room who can help do things.

Starting meeting August 2018 monthly in current iteration

Rochester – moratorium on building

Farms, food, fun – more momentum

Goals for solar may be in conflict with protection farmland

Geology and zoning – to see what types of projects might be well-suited for specific areas, land ownership, are zoning codes out of context with what should be done there?

BMP handbook for development in specific areas for municipalities

Next Steps for 2022: What do we need to do to set up those goals?

Start with LULA nominations to help drive conversation, policy.

Prep for DOS LWRP grant (lay groundwork).

Eric interested in attending LULA. EV will send letter to Laura, Eric, John.

Outreach to Town supervisors to get nominations for LULA training program

Rondout Neversink Program

Eventual goal for watershed plan (food, energy, waste, water), strategic/action plan for RCWA.

Fall event/Trees for Tribes

Find property-owner/apply for Trees for Tribes.

If accepted, reach out to Rondout Valley High School for volunteers

Keep energy going

Year-end report

Summarize activities with photos, communication and education

Focus on RCWA activities – LULA, Trees for Tribes, next year's goals (rather than state of watershed). Past 2-3 years of activities.

Share with Town Supervisors

Send copy of HRWA report

Goal: publicize RCWA, increase membership, accountability, education

Notes recorded by Emily Vail, Hudson River Watershed Alliance, on July 20, 2022