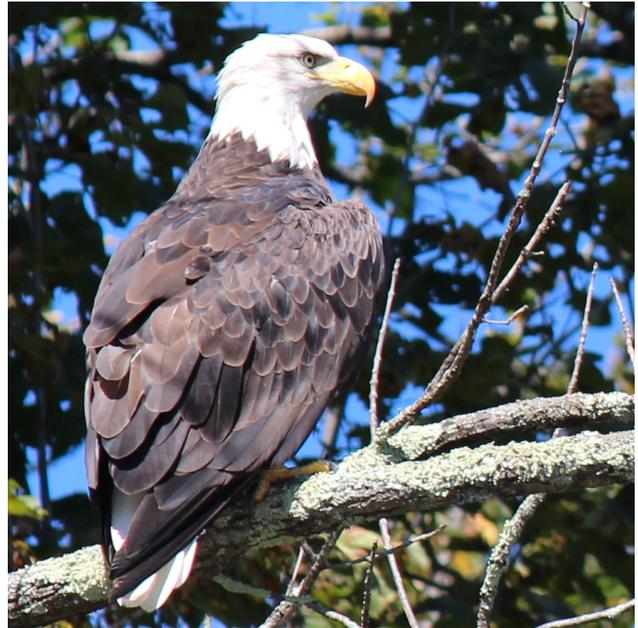


Rondout Creek Watershed

Submitted by Laura Finestone and Dan Shapley

Geography

The Rondout Valley has pastoral agricultural landscapes, scenic viewsheds and watershed corridors. Nestled in between the Shawangunk and Catskill Mountain Ranges, the Rondout Creek Watershed is part of the third largest tributary of the Hudson River. Out of its headwaters in the Catskill Mountains, the Rondout Creek fills the Rondout Reservoir, part of the drinking water supply for New York City, and runs through the valley. It joins the Walkill River and meets the Hudson River Estuary at Kingston, NY. The Rondout Creek offers a myriad of opportunities for fishing, boating, and swimming, and provides habitat for water-related flora and fauna.



Bald eagle on Rondout Creek (Credit: Leah Rae)

The creek and its tributaries provide recreational and economic opportunities, but also face challenges such as flooding, significant issues with stormwater drainage and agricultural run-off.

There is a growing interest in the health of the creek, its riparian buffers and pollution sources, thanks to the concerted efforts of the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, Riverkeeper, and the Environmental Conservation Commissions of the municipalities in the Rondout Valley. The Commissions are tasked with protecting and preserving the area's natural heritage as well as filling the role of advisors and advocates.

History

In 2008, the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater formed the intermunicipal Rondout Creek Watershed Council, which was tasked with the mission of protecting water resources, increasing community awareness through education, and improving conservation efforts throughout the Rondout Creek Watershed. The Council developed a Comprehensive

Watershed Management Plan, which characterizes the watershed and identifies best management practices for the four municipalities of the lower non-tidal portion of the Rondout Creek.

(Watershed plans have also been written and to various degrees implemented in the Upper Rondout, which is the source of water for New York City's Rondout Reservoir; and the Wallkill River, a major tributary. A management plan for the Tidal Rondout Creek Watershed has also been drafted.)



Rondout Creek kayak paddle, part of the boat brigade (Credit: Laura Finestone)

The Environmental Conservation Commissions of the four townships in the lower non-tidal portion of the creek have pursued various projects consistent with the management plan's recommendations. Recent projects include intermunicipal Natural Heritage inventories and plans in Rochester and Wawarsing; an intermunicipal Ulster County Creek Week event featuring a WAVE (Water Assessment by Volunteer Evaluators) assessment of macro-invertebrates; a "boat brigade" kayak paddle with local high school students; a culvert assessment on the Rochester Creek; and ongoing collaboration with Riverkeeper on community science monitoring for *Enterococcus*, a fecal indicator bacteria. In 2016 and 2017, Riverkeeper will be bringing together partners and, with Hudson River Estuary Program funding, update the Rondout and Wallkill watershed management plans with information on fecal contamination.

On March 29, 2016, the Rondout Creek Watershed communities will come together to update one another on recent projects that have an intermunicipal or watershed scope. The event is from 5:30 to 9 p.m. at the Rondout Valley Municipal Center in Cottekill, NY.

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