

IV-J: Population and Demographics

The Batavia Kill watershed is very rural in nature, with development and population limited by the landscape as well as the economics of the watershed. The watershed is characterized by a number of hamlet areas, older large farmsteads, and a mixture of new residential developments including both condominiums and single family homes.



During the time since the September 11, 2001 attack, the watershed has seen significant increases in new home construction. While no direct evidence links this construction phase to the events in NYC, local Realtors report that home buyers from downstate are on the increase.

1. WATERSHED POPULATION TRENDS

In a comparison of US Census data from 1850 to 2000, **Table IV-7**, it is interesting to note the significant decline of full-time residents in the Batavia Kill watershed (Greene County Planning, 1993) (Empire State Development, 2001). The watershed population declined from a population of 3,938 residents in 1850 to a population of 2,545 in 1990. Between 1850 and 1940 the populations of all three towns were rapidly declining. Populations did not increase again until 1950 in Prattsville, 1960 in Ashland, and 1980 in Windham. The recently released 2000 census data indicates another decrease in population in all three towns. Ashland declined by 6.4%, Prattsville declined by 1.4%, and Windham declined by 1.3%.

Table IV-7 Batavia Kill Watershed Population 1980 to 2000 ^[15] ^[16]

Town	1850	1900	1950	1990	2000	% Change 1850-2000
Ashland	1,290	692	542	803	752	-42%
Windham	2,048	1,387	1,360	1,682	166	-19%
Prattsville	600	397	170	155	133	-78%
Total	3,938	2,476	2,072	2,640	2,545	-35%

To account for the fact that only a small section of the Town of Prattsville is located in the Batavia Kill watershed, the GCSWCD adjusted the town's census numbers to minimize the impact of Prattsville's population data on the watershed population. It was assumed that 30% of the population of Prattsville was in the watershed in 1950, 25% in 1900 and 20% in 1950, 1990, and 2000.

With the data available, it is impossible to determine the exact percentage of Prattsville's total population that resides in the Batavia Kill watershed, but it is known that in the early 1900's there was a sizable community located in the Town of Prattsville at the location of Red Falls. Known as Federal City, the community was located directly on the banks of the Batavia Kill. Based on knowledge of the watershed, the current population of Prattsville in the Batavia Kill watershed is clearly less than the population present at the time of the indicated census counts. While earlier estimates of growth for the period from 1990 to 1999 developed by the Census Bureau projected that watershed towns would experience increases in population ranging from 9.09% in Ashland to 2.9% in Windham and Prattsville, this growth did not occur.

2. SECOND HOME POPULATIONS

One demographic feature of the Catskills which has the potential to play a significant role in implementation of this SMP involves the non-resident population of the watershed. While the Catskill Mountains have hosted a part-time residency for well over 100 years, this phenomena has increased in occurrence dramatically in the past 20-30 years. In 1990, the Greene County Planning Department conducted a study to try and determine the extent of the part-time population (Envision Communications, 1990). It was shown that between 1970 and 1990 residential properties owned by part-time residents increased from 4,203 units to 7,240 units. Thus, during this 20-year period, while the full-time population grew by 47.7%, the part-time population increased by an astounding 72%.

The study involved a survey of 1,000 randomly selected non-resident landowners selected from tax records for non-Greene County addresses on the tax bill. With over 550 completed survey forms (56% return rate) the county had a good representation of the non-resident population to provide a summary of this component of the population.

Based on information from the surveys, the study determined that the average part-time household consists of 5.87 people. By multiplying this number by the number of non-

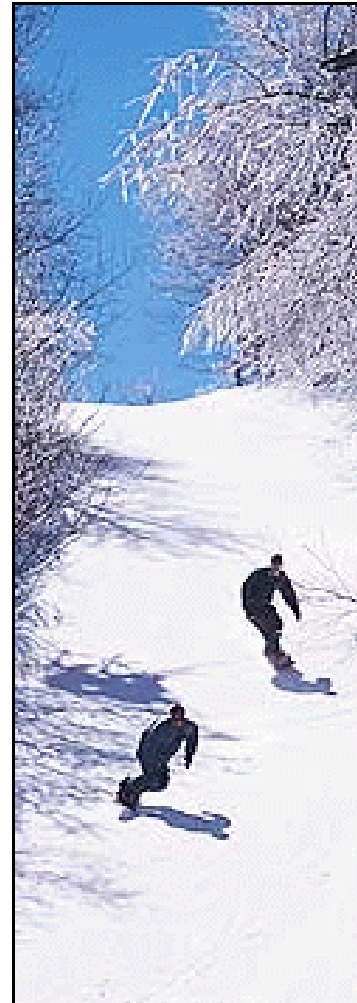


Figure IV-42: Winter related sports are a primary reason for second home ownership in the watershed. Ski Windham

resident housing units, it was estimated that the part-time population was approximately 42,499 persons. When compared to the 1990 resident population of 44,739, it is obvious that part-time landowners play a significant role in land use decisions in the watershed. While the study divided the sample group into “mountaintop” and “other” communities for the purpose of examining demographic factors such as age, income, and interests, the study did not determine the number of part-time landowners based on this breakdown.

The extent of part-time residences can be observed in the area of the Big Hollow demonstration project. In the project area (one mile of stream), there are ten riparian landowners involved in the proposed restoration. Of these landowners, none use the property as a primary residence. The ten parcels include six homes and one hunting camp; only two of the six residences are used on a full-time basis by non-owners (family) while the rest are used only on weekends, or for short time periods during certain seasons. The primary residences of these landowners include California, Florida, Virginia, New York City, and New Jersey.

The Greene County study of the part-time population also examined several factors that could be seen as having relevance to the purpose of this plan ^[16]. First, non-resident landowners were surveyed on the importance of various factors that influenced their decision to purchase property in this area. In the mountaintop communities, 86% of the respondents place the highest importance on recreation, both summer (37%) and winter (49%). When questioned on the importance of specific steps county government should take to address various issues, there was a strong emphasis on management of natural resources. Based on a ranking system of one to five, with one designated as “not important” and five designated as “essential”, mountaintop respondents gave the highest score to protecting air and water quality (4.6) as well as conserving the waterfront, protecting wetlands and planning for the 21st century, which all received a score of 3.9. In consideration of these scores, it is reasonable to assume that this segment of the watershed population will be receptive to the natural resource management concepts set forth in this plan.

The influence of non-resident landowners on the implementation of this SMP can be very significant. Based on the experience of the GCSWCD, as well as available data, the following factors have been identified and considered during the development of the recommendations as presented in this SMP.

- Part-time residents come from extremely urbanized areas such as NYC and upper NJ, and may have limited experience with property ownership. The GCSWCD frequently consults with part-time residents who are not experienced with problems such as runoff, streams, soils, erosion and other natural resource issues. This segment of the population generally requires increased levels of technical assistance and education.
- In their very nature as part-time residents, these landowners present challenges to implementing specific recommendations as presented in this

plan. Coordination of restoration projects with absentee landowners requires significantly more planning time. These landowners are often not present during flood events and may have limited knowledge of problems related to the stream. Generally, any outreach or public events must be scheduled on weekends in order to maximize participation.

It should also be noted that in the experience of the GCSWCD, the majority of the resident population in the watershed is very aware, and equally concerned, about these same issues. In many cases, these residents represent families with a long history in the watershed, and their institutional knowledge of the stream, flood events, and other activities in the valley are vital to successful implementation of this plan.

3. POPULATION DENSITY

Development in the Batavia Kill watershed is characteristic of many rural mountainous areas. For the most part, higher density development is located in either one of the small hamlet areas on the main valley floor, or along one of the primary roadways which generally run longitudinally through the watershed or the tributary watersheds.

It is known from photographs as well as observations of building remains that the population density in the immediate stream corridor in the early days of the watershed's settlement was much more significant than at the present time. A good example of the older community base being clustered near the stream corridor is evident in the area above Red Falls. As shown in **Figure IV-43**, at one time this section of the stream was the site of many large buildings such as tanneries and mills. The remains of these structures, as well as evidence of an old mill race, is still evident along this section of the stream. It is also known that in earlier years the Big Hollow section of the watershed was very similar, with a greater percentage of the population living in very close proximity to the stream [1].

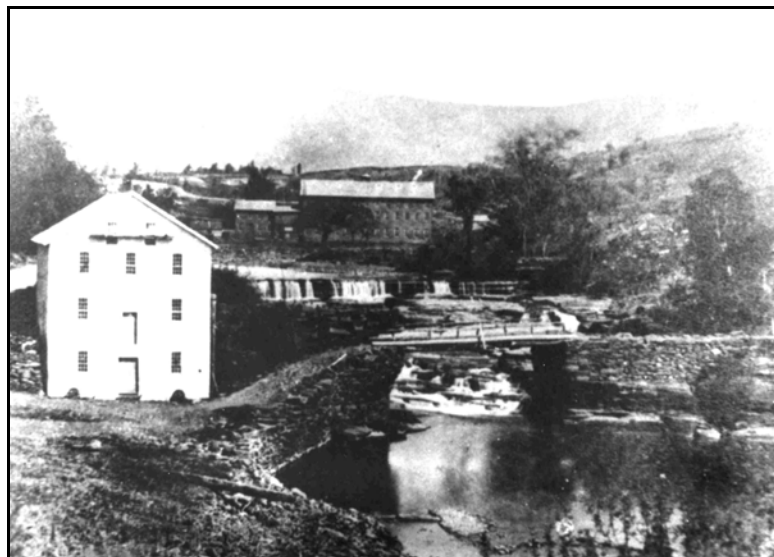


Figure IV-43: Photo of Federal City at the Red Falls area. The falls are located behind the bridge in the center of the photo while the road from Ashland to Prattsville (now Rt 23) can be seen behind the white building on the left. Date unknown (Photo by Everett Arnold Conine)

While available population data does not provide for distinguishing between hamlet residents and those in the remainder of the watershed,

observations would suggest that residential properties outside the hamlets are predominant, with commercial and retail land-uses located primarily in the hamlets and the immediate road corridors. The hamlets of Hensonville, Windham, and Ashland are characterized by a mixture of older residential, commercial, or combined residential/commercial properties. Maplecrest, on the other hand, is primarily residential, with the old Sugar Maples resort currently vacant. Hensonville and Windham are characterized by a mix of residential and commercial properties while Ashland appears to have a slightly higher proportion of residences to commercial properties. In general, development in the Ashland hamlet is immediately adjacent to the Batavia Kill and is concentrated along sections of main state and county roadways.

Observations of recent development activities in the watershed indicate that the occurrence of single family residences dispersed throughout the watershed has been more common than increased development in the hamlets. While the mid and late 1980's saw the introduction of condominium development (there have been some expansions of these units in recent years), the current trend appears to be toward more single family homes located on larger parcels of land. Development pressures on the Batavia Kill thus can be assumed to be minimal at this time.